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Mindsets of the Filipino: A Research Agenda for Filipino Communicative Behaviour

Mindsets may be considered as pre determinants to communicative behaviour. These predispositions stem from a people's traditions, values and belief systems and more importantly, the shared experience of a social and natural environment.

In communication, premium is set on shared meanings among entities, closely allied to its root word: communis or commonness (establishing). As a matter of reckoning, the highest form of relationship there is, is that of having a common experience and background with a person/s. Among Filipinos, the first thing to establish when meeting someone for the first time is determining common ground such as place of origin, roots and acquaintances. It is assumed that a common background means a similar kind of thinking and mindset. The new relationship takes off from there.

As a people, we communicate in ways which could be considered as unique and persevering to the Filipino way of doing things. It has been observed that we have multiple meanings for things and common meanings are arrived at in tacit agreement with the other, perhaps as a matter of convenience or accommodation to both parties.

We employ displays to call attention to ourselves and that which we want to call attention to. The displays may be unique such as pointing one's mouth towards the object of attention or employing a universal paralanguage such as "Pssst" to call the attention of a specific person in a crowd of many. Not doing anything can call attention upon oneself too, such as standing in a crowded area and looking up. In no time at all, other people would be looking up too in the same direction. In a number

of ways, displays are employed for both attraction and distraction purposes. We love to attract and be distracted. This is a mindset which is very prevalent among our people, especially during these times.

It is the contention of this researcher that mindsets play a big role in our communicative behaviour. Just like the concepts of core values and belief systems, mindsets are formed in one's mind on a cumulative basis, as experience does. One's mind here means an individual, group or collective mind.

Background

A number of books and papers on Filipino values, belief systems and cultural practices have been published, notably those of Dr. Virgilio Enriquez, Dr. F. Landa Jocano, Prof. Randolph David, Dr. Frank Lynch and Dr. Serafin Talisayon, among others. These published works assumed various social science perspectives in looking at the Filipino mindset and behavior, to include Sikolohiyang Pilipino, sociology, anthropology and even economics. The communication perspective has been used sparingly in the dissection of behavior. This paper addresses a need for a research-based communication study of Filipino behavior. This may serve as a reference material and basis for communication planning, the teaching of communication theory and providing a heuristic base for conducting communication research. A special section of this paper is directed at Philippine Media and the various idiosyncrasies associated with its "unique" cultural practices. Accordingly, this could be regarded as a seminal paper on Filipino Communicative Behavior, touching on the genres and contextual levels of communication and some theoretical insights at various contextual and genre-based perspectives.

The term "Filipino Communicative Behavior" is coined by the author for the purpose of this paper, to include the concepts of awareness, knowledge, attitude, values, beliefs, opinions, tendencies, predispositions, practices and perceptions relating to communication behavior of Filipinos.

The paper is based on present day observations made by the author and the collaborative efforts of a number of the UP CMC communication research faculty, staff and students serving as co-researchers on FCB. The observations were made primarily in the setting of Metro-Manila. Although some observations involved long-time practices, the present-day setting features behavior as affected by contemporary norms, values, and most importantly, technology. What is initially evident in the observations is that choices in life made by individuals are often premised on present life style and life stage and circumstances of the individual, rather than on some objective assessment of what is best for them in the short and long term. Viewed as tentative hypotheses on FCB, said observations can be used as platforms for posing communication postulates, and that these may lead to theoretical formulations and eventually communication theories. These present day observations which perplex and amuse us as to what FCB is all about, why it abounds and what are the possible implications of such at various levels of our country and community life are research agenda which merit attention, considering the images projected, whether conscious and unconscious, intended and unintended, verbal and non verbal, and functional and dysfunctional.

OBSERVATIONS ON FCB

There are some communicative habits which make Filipinos distinct from other people. One is the interpretation of signs and symbols, the assigning of meanings to things. An outstanding example is the interpretation of traffic light colors. The colors green, yellow and red are supposed to universally mean green for go, yellow for slow down and red for stop. A common interpretation of the colors as observed among Filipino drivers is green means go (the only similar meaning among the colors), yellow means go faster (to beat the red light) and red means proceed with caution (if there are no policemen and traffic around). Follow the leader (erring) in executing a counter flow in congested traffic conditions may be an example of “Don’t look at me-I did not start it” mentality. Quite amusing quirks are pointing with use of the mouth and laughing after a harrowing experience, i.e., crossing a busy highway; urinating in public is not exactly an enamoring public display for gentlemen.

A perplexing communication stance is that of adhering to certain convictions or positions in life. For instance, readily agreeing to another's opinion could be construed as being either submissive or agreeable. On the other hand, another stance displayed is that of stubborn and unobliging support for something or someone where no amount of logical persuasion can move the person to the other side. There seem to be no middle ground posturing here, only extreme swings of positioning, which may or may not even involve important or significant issues. Could this serve as the explanation for the presence and existence of "Loyalists", people who would die for their idols?

Mindsets relevant to FCB

A. The Deprivation-Deservation Syndrome.

A common observation of defiant behavior is people thinking that they deserve something because they are deprived (of something). I would term these twin mentalities as the Deservation-Deprivation Syndrome, wherein one condition or feeling leads to the other. The poor sector of society manifests this strongly by way of demanding for rights to squat in public and private property, defiance of many obligations/responsibilities demanded of regular citizens i.e., like paying taxes and worse of all, masking indolence as lack of opportunity. On the other hand, the better off Filipinos would squander off resources based on the assumption that these things are already paid for, i.e. extravagant use of water and light in hotel rooms, consuming or wanton abuse of things that are free such as napkins and give-aways. Bottomless drinks, buffet and Eat-all-you can items being consumed over normal limits.

The **Sayang** (Opportunity that could be a waste if not taken advantage of) **at Libre** (free things) mentality is yet another manifestation of this syndrome. People would not want to pass up opportunities which include things that are free, so they take advantage of the situation. This includes padala (sending something to someone thru another person), taking advantage of giveaways such as product samples, pakain (free food), among others.

Regardless of their station in life, Filipinos display this deprivation-deservation mentality when opportunity arises. In this sense, conservation concepts such as sustainable development efforts are put to task since people have a tendency to abuse things rather than conserve. On the opposite end (the extremist position), people take an almost obsessive position on recycling things, such as keeping old bottles, cans and newspapers for supposedly future use. Anything deemed useful is kept, making the house a virtual garbage dump.

The **Ready for Disappointment** mentality is a related concept to deprivation which is the Filipino's way of asking things by stating these in the negative so as to anticipate what is already an expected negative answer. *Ayaw mo?* (you don't like) and *Wala ba kayo nito?* (you don't have this) are examples of negatively stating things. The Filipino does not want to take no for an answer so he/she states things in the negative when anticipating No as an answer.

Tampo, Awa at Limot are related feelings.

B. The Kulang sa Pansin (deprivation of attention/understanding) Syndrome and The Quest for Ownership and Credit Seeking.

People apparently act in accordance to their need for recognition, attention and being or feeling understood. This is communicated in many ways, often times, with negative consequences. For instance, Filipinos abroad, are known for setting up associations to satisfy their need for recognition. When one fails to win a presidency of a Filipino association, he proceeds to set up another one. Later on, the landscape is riddled with many associations. No unity, just diversity. Another instance is when one is out of power or position, he/she does not help anymore. Commitment flies out the window.

Kulang sa Pansin Syndrome drives many to do things contrary to how they really feel. This is linked to wanting for Credit – being acknowledged for things done or even not done. The concept of ownership is also strongly linked to this phenomenon. This is related to the FIRO theory (Schultz) which deals with the needs for inclusion, affection and control. To the Filipino, these three needs are considered high in priority, in terms of interpersonal, group and organizational communication contexts.

Wanting to belong and be recognized are needs which are strong motivations for doing things. Soliciting praise and being patronizing are traits which are communication determinants of the former. It is common for people who have performed to seek verbal reinforcement (read praise or favorable review) from those who have witnessed the performance, be it an artistic one to a simple lecture, or even a finished work or output.

The been there-done that and wanting to see and be seen rituals are communication displays which form part of the attention and credit getting rituals. Examples of these are the annual summer treks to Baguio and other “prestigious” destinations of Metro Manila residents, done during the Holy Week, All Saints day, Christmas and New Year holidays celebrations. Social events such as weddings, anniversaries, launching of new entities are sought after events among those who relish the public eye or attention.

Using the KSP and ownership-credit model, one can study and analyze the prevalent and overwhelming practice of misuse of government resources. It is said that Government is the way it is because people in it cannot distinguish between their own self interests and that of their official position. The Filipino way is having the position and office as a personal fiefdom – one of ownership issue. Thus, being in position is not a position of trust but rather as a position of advantage, where one’s self interest is first and foremost. Credit and ownership are also highly cherished so projects or ideas of others are set aside in favor of their own. This may be good for the short term but not favorable to the common good because of problems of sustainability or continuity. Similarly, this attitude towards public office means that public officials feel they can do as they please with things that they are responsible for or assume. In a sense, they are being frugal of their own resources and wasteful of government’s. This is seen to be prevalent also among government employees who view government property and resources as fair game for public and private use.

The so-called “**Crab Mentality**” is another related concept to the KSP and ownership-credit syndrome. We are known to resent the success of others because it apparently reflects on us. We would rather wish the “Failure” of others. In being successful, we put down others. So the “others” would rather wish your failure or be at the level as they are, rather than being above them. One’s success is often regarded as another’s failure or inadequacy. So we would rather pull each other down than allow for one to progress over others. In effect, others who do good are resented for their accomplishments.

“**Pang-Lalamang**” or putting one over the other is another practice which is common among those in contention for something, i.e. market positioning, vying for honors or merit, etc. Nakaisa or having taken advantage of another is a “good” feeling. Naisahan or being taken advantage of, means a retaliatory move is in the offing. This leads to

feelings of resentment and antagonism among the parties concerned, especially if followed by gloating on the part of those who have taken advantage. Although the practice may lead to only temporary gain, it is often resorted to by those who are more concerned about their own self interest than that of the common good.

Another practice is soliciting or imposing on those who have come upon good fortune, by requiring them to share this with others. This is called "Balato" (sharing). Those who get rich, win in gambling, get a bonus or reward, are expected or required to share the bounty with significant others. It is considered as good form or being generous in times of bounty. The Balato practice is not concerned as to whether the bounty came from good or bad sources for as long as it is shared. This then is deodorized if it is of bad origin such as stolen wealth or gambling.

C. The Convenience Approach to Living

The Filipino Hierarchy of Needs may be different from what Maslow has proposed. Perhaps, one of the most important is convenience or comfort. The Convenience Approach to living leads to behaviour which is geared towards ease or expediency. When confronted with a situation, the Filipino looks for the most convenient way for achieving or doing things, with the least effort as much as possible. This could mean asking others to do things for them or using alternates. Fixers are a product of this practice. People come and go at their convenience, regardless of agreed upon times. Spaces are used per convenient purpose, just like the squatters and the illegal terminal users of jeepney and tricycle drivers. Doing shortcuts is another example, just like crossing the highway without using the provided overpass or refusing to fall in line. The Filipino's Comfort Zones are related to perceived convenience, no matter what the risk in the attendant behaviour.

D. The Sense of Humor and Rumor

The sense of humor of the Filipino makes him/her ready or prepared to tackle or face Life's adversities. Taking it easy augments or complements this attitude towards life. The sense of rumor, on the other hand, provides for relief in the everyday drudgery of life. With talking as a national pastime, rumors about many things and anything abound,

not really for lack of information but more on generating information which is entertainment laden and all about significant others and events.

Making fun of oneself, others and situations is a device of Filipinos to accept or at least try to make sense of things happening around them. Most times, humor and rumor are based on truths and half truths, properties which make these more believable and acceptable and also humorous. Also, being *mababaw ang kaligayahan* (easily placated or pleased) makes it easy for everyone inasmuch as it does not take much to please people. In this sense, people are realists or pragmatists, capable of dreaming a lot but are aware of limitations and are also realistic about what may or may not happen or occur.

E. The Concept of Accountability

Being responsible for one's action is a dichotomous belief. Not being responsible is one's defense against getting caught. One is responsible if an act or behaviour is beneficial or deemed satisfactory by society. If it is not, then one tries to disassociate oneself from the act or behaviour or acts as if he/she is not responsible.

This could be likened to the Childlike state or mentality where one is not yet responsible for one's actions. Like a child, people are seen to be trying boundaries and parameters, going or testing limits. This could be linked to the propensity to break rules or go around them without getting caught—the *baka makalusot* (getting away with things) thinking.

- Not being responsible for what they do or are not accountable for actions is the defense for people who break rules. – Being playful, always joking (child state in TA model), *walang gobyerno* – a wild swing – wants an iron fist to govern but at the same time is anarchaic – a balance between the social and individual needs (*ano ang sasabihin ng tao vs. ano ang gusto ko*).
- Unmindful of consequences (past, present and future), lays caution to the winds, so to speak, plans are paper only, not the real thing, short sighted, vs. providing for the future – the education gambit, the *padrino* system

F. Other observations

1. Extreme poles of behaviour are a manifestation of misunderstanding or understanding communication symbols and signs
2. Media effects are so strong and pervasive that media personalities run for public office based on their media images. Evidently, people equate image with promising performance or are just as fed up with those who do not deliver.
3. Social support is a strong facilitating factor for behavioral change and is directly linked to sustaining and maintaining desirable action or manifestations amongst target clientele.
4. For those who have access to Information/Communication Technology (ICT) in whatever form use as communication platforms either for symbols or actual communication is to the max. Examples of these are the telebabad and texting phenomena.
5. What media does to people is an interesting issue. What people do to media is another perplexing situation.
6. As a research problem, can one say that we are a very predictable people with respect to communication habits?
7. The opposite is expected in Media fare that is why happy endings are expected or are the norm. At least, in fantasy, dreams are fulfilled.
8. Display-Attention model is a powerful model for FCB – to see and be seen is a strong motivation for going places – the basis for the Cosmetic Industry and the Automotive/Car Detailing Sector

Observation One – the hardheadedness of the Filipino – wanting to have his way, unmindful of what others feel **vs.** being totally subservient to others over and above his comfort

Observation Two – the resiliency and/or flexibility of the Filipino **vs.** the unyielding stance on some issues

Observation Three – The Hospitality Trait and servitude mentality **vs.** the closed communication system where one can not access the system if he/she does not know anybody in it

Observation Four – on the Media – sensationalized, irresponsible, unmindful of consequences of actions, feel that they are above the law, have a special privilege in society, have a self image of their own making, deviated from social responsibility stance **vs.** the social responsibility image, the guardian of societal values

Observation Five - the Filipino as part of the Global village – Image projected - servitude at its finest – for money and adventure, to escape boredom and share the dreams and fruits of the Land of Milk and Honey. An enduring quality or trait or characteristic of the Filipino which ingratiates him/her to people all over is being forever loyal and enduring and subservient **vs.** wanting to be known in being innovative and being first in a number of things

In Retrospect

Filipino communicative behaviour is a matrix of contexts and perspectives, illustrating the multiple layers of thinking which precedes and determines communicative behavior. FCB is both unique and universal. It is both individual and social in perspective. It is predictable and yet illogical at times. It is traditional but very modern in outlook. It could be very rigid in tradition but is also accommodative in taking in what is new. It is rebellious but wants for more discipline and authority. FCB

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is in constant testing of parameters and going beyond boundaries set by rules and society.

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ferences

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