

Making and Selling the “Rock Star Pope”: The Celebritization of Pope Francis during His Five-Day Visit to the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to provide an analysis of the celebritization and celebrification of Pope Francis when he visited the Philippines from January 15 to 19, 2015. Employing the analytic concept of “culture industry” developed by the members of the Frankfurt School, and combining it with the current analyses in existing celebrity study under late capitalism, this paper will show how the local giant media corporations, namely, GMA and ABS-CBN, staged a grand “media event” that nationally mediatized and publicly magnified the celebrity status of the so-called “rock star Pope.” The current study contributes to the growing literature on celebrity study by focusing on the popular and charismatic religious leader of 1.2 billion Catholics worldwide. Toward the end of this paper, consistent with the critical slant of the Frankfurt School’s critique of mass deception, it is argued that the celebrity culture that created the “spectacle” of Pope Francis must be distinguished from his prophetic message. And this must be explored in future studies.

Keywords: Culture of Celebrity, Pope Francis, celebrity, spectacle, celebritization

We live in a celebrity society (Lawler, Driessens, Furedi, Marshall) or what some historians call as “fame-intensive culture” (Garland 484). Pramod Nayar is right when he claims, “We live in a culture of celebrity. From P3Ps to endorsements, from movie stars to television personalities, from comic book celebrities to notorious scamsters. Celebrities, one might say, are everywhere.” Interestingly, with what Graeme Turner (2006) dubs as the “demotic turn,” or the creation of celebrities out of ordinary individuals through reality TV and Internet, anyone can be a celebrity as long as there is a market and demand for them. And this celebritization of life does not exempt religious leaders. The short-list includes Dalai Lama, Mother Teresa, Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, Jimmy Swaggart, Billy Graham, Sun Myong Moon, and others. These religious personalities have achieved the status of global icons with religious cult followings. They have become household names. They are products of the culture industry.

Today, celebrity studies have dealt and mined the wealth of materials on TV celebrities, political celebrities, film stars, sports superstars, environment celebrities, celebrity chefs, and "celetoids" or instant celebrities (Boorstin, Dyer, Cassmore, Taylor, Nayar, Gamson, Driessens, Turner). In this paper, I will deal with the celebritization of Pope Francis through his apostolic visit to the Philippines from January 15 to 19, 2015. Of course Pope Francis already had a cult following, with "rock star" status, since he took the highest position in the Catholic Church on March 13, 2013, following the resignation of Pope Benedict.

What I will suggest and show in this paper is that Pope Francis's global celebrity status was further elevated and accentuated during his five-day visit in the Philippines. The massive mediatization of his itinerary and the corresponding labors of the "cultural intermediaries" rallied around his celebrity status by staging grand "media events." As Nayar points out, "celebrity culture cannot be separated from various technologies of representation, like the media, cinema, TV, websites, where the media seeks to disseminate the representation to the largest possible audience" (2). Moreover, this paper will contend, following the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, that the Pope's celebrification does not escape the process of commodification of fame. In fact, celebrity may be defined tersely as fame commodified (Driessens 90). Of course, the reception of the global celebrity status of Pope Francis among Filipinos cannot be reduced to the mediatization of his celebrity status. One also has to take into account the traditional religiosity of the Filipinos and the culture of stardom that permeates Filipino popular culture.

Today, celebrity status is big business, and the academic study of celebrity is itself a growing industry (Kurzman, Anderson, Key, Lee, Moloney, Silver, and Van Ryn 362). It goes without saying that having a celebrity status is a doubled-edged sword for religious leaders. On the one hand, it promotes the values of the religious institutions; yet on the other hand, it also creates a tension between these religious values and the commodifying logic of culture industry that manufactures celebrities. In line with this, the current study will address the following questions:

What are the major global media trends that created the rock star status of Pope Francis? How did the two media giants, ABS-CBN and GMA7, in their respective coverage of the five day visit accentuate the global celebrity status of the Pope?

The first research question will be dealt with in the discussion of the global rise of Pope Francis to the status of a "rock star." It will be shown that Pope Francis's celebritization is by and large a product of the global culture industry that is heavily dependent on computer-mediated technologies and new social media

platforms. The second question will be dealt with by focusing mainly on the coverage of giant networks of GMA and ABS-CBN of the papal visit. At the end of the paper, the tensions between the celebrity status of Pope Francis as manufactured by the culture industry and his religious vision will be discussed.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Currently, in spite of the rise of celebrity study among cultural theorists, there has not emerged a clear theoretical direction for studying celebrities, celebritization, and celebrification. Existing studies rely heavily on the classical culture industry paradigm of Adorno and Horkheimer (Cashmore and Parker, Dyer, Marshall), while at the same time criticizing the shortcomings of this critical theory. Some researchers go back to Max Weber's analysis of status to understand the modern status of celebrity (Milner, Ferris, Dyer, Kurzman, Anderson, Key, Lee, Moloney, Silver, & Van Ryn). Others employ Pierre Bourdieu's notion of capital (Driessens, Hunter, Burgers, & Davidsson). Still, others use the postmodern theory of Baudrillard to analyze the intertextuality of celebrity images and celebrity culture.

In this paper, I will attempt to employ the language of Critical Theory developed by the members of the Frankfurt School, especially the analytic concept of "culture industry" developed by Adorno and Horkheimer (1950), to explain the rise of celebrities. While originally applied to the rise of European fascism, the analysis of the Frankfurt School provides a judicious vocabulary on handling mass consumption and standardization of taste and lifestyle especially in advanced capitalism. More specifically, this study will illustrate how the culture industry surrounding the celebritization of Pope Francis has created a "saleable" icon that "makes use of the star system, borrowed from individualistic art and its commercial exploitation," thereby transferring "the profit motive naked onto cultural forms" (Adorno, 1950). Most of the recent studies on celebrity revisit the contributions of critical theory of Horkheimer and Adorno (1950) exemplified in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Adorno's (1950) *Culture Industry*, including Herbert Marcuse's (1964) *One-Dimensional Man*. In this paradigm, celebrity and stardom are seen as products of modern industrial capitalism, which manufacture images and sell them to large number of consumers while promising pseudo-individuality.

However, the limitations of critical theory cannot be underemphasized. Its tendency to downplay the resistance of consumers and its penchant to dismiss popular culture must be balanced by the current studies that accord relative autonomy to cultural production and consumption. Moreover, the radical shift from modern technologies

to postmodern computer-mediated technologies has significantly altered the convoluted process of celebrity production. Walter Benjamin’s (1977) modernist notion of “mechanical reproduction of art” has been replaced by hypersimulation of celebrity and media images in late capitalism (Perry, Castells). Thus, I will also draw heavily from eclectic sociological analyses which, in turn, draw freely from media studies that currently inform celebrity study in late capitalism (Rojek, Gamson, Dreissen, Cashmore, Dyer, etc.). These studies, while acknowledging the foundational significance of critical theory’s analysis of celebrity culture, advance further the analysis of celebritization by focusing on semiotic aspects of the culture industry under late capitalism.

WHO IS A CELEBRITY?

Celebrities like commodities are made. The birth of celebrity is a modern phenomenon (van Krieken, Schickel, Dyers). According to Sue Collins, “[c]elebrity, understood in modern terms, is a product of the nineteenth century ‘graphic revolution,’ in which image reproduction facilitated by advances in print technology enabled the ‘manufacture’ of fame” (90). Celebrity was a product of the proliferation of images, the mechanical reproduction of art and the ubiquitous production of symbolic images made possible by capitalist economy and modern technology (Marshall). Celebrity is a product of the viability of mass reproduction of commodified symbols and images consumed by audiences, who “subjectively participate in the discursive construction and maintenance of celebrity through their reception” (Collins 90). According to Nayar (4), a celebrity:

is an individual or event that the public watches: someone or something that is recognised by a large number of people. On an individual level, celebrity culture is the consequence of a public recognition of some qualities that a person possesses or is deemed to possess. Celebrity is thus closely aligned with public culture and public awareness of the work of the individual, which also means that celebrity culture is rooted in everyday, mass culture where the reception of icons enables further and greater circulation.

Others provide a critical definition of celebrities. Daniel Boorstin argues that celebrities are “human pseudo- events,” people who are “well- known for their well-knownness” (67), as opposed to heroes, who were famous for doing great things. In fact, heroes today are dressed and described in the metaphors of celebrities (Deshaye).

MANUFACTURING A CELEBRITY THROUGH THE CELEBRITY INDUSTRY

Following Gamson and Driessens (2013a), one has to distinguish between “celebrification” and “celebritization.” Olivier Dreissens (3) clarifies this distinction:

Here celebrification captures the transformation of ordinary people and public figures into celebrities, whereas celebritization is conceptualized as a meta-process that grasps the changing nature, as well as the societal and cultural embedding of celebrity, which can be observed through its democratization, diversification and migration. It is argued that these manifestations of celebritization are driven by three separate but interacting moulding forces: mediatization, personalization and commodification.

Celebrification is the process whereby an individual, ordinary or not, is transformed into a star. In contrast, celebritization is the process whereby the culture industry creates the celebrity as embodying abstract value that can be traded and consumed in the market. As Adorno explains, “The entire practice of the culture industry transfers the profit motive naked onto cultural forms. Ever since these cultural forms first began to earn a living for their creators as commodities in the marketplace they had already possessed something of this quality” (13). Celebritization has a global dimension insofar as the creation of a celebrity involves enormous marketing strategies that go beyond the person and his/her locale. Celebritization, just like globalization, has an inherent tendency to transcend geographical and cultural restrictions. It has a transnational dimension and is supported by conglomerates of media, PR, and publicity apparatuses. This is the unique character of the culture industry under late capitalism. Celebrification entails commodification: stars and, by extension, celebrities “are both labour and the thing that labour produces” (Dyers 5). They are manufactured by the celebrity industry to be consumed, and help to sell other commodities in the form of endorsement. In this sense, the celebrity presents and personifies “[t]he two faces of capitalism—that of defaced value and prized commodity value” (Marshall 4). Celebrities are not only products and producers of alienated labor; they also embody and personify the ideology of capitalism (Dyers, Marshall, Rojek). Or, as Barry King (12) explains, “The actor’s persona is the market driven selection of his or her professionally conditioned attributes to construct a self as exchange value.”

The marketing of celebrities creates a “celebrity culture” (Hackley and Hackley, Dyers). And in turn, celebrity culture sustains the fame and prestige of the celebrity. Gamson defines celebrity culture as “at once a commodity system, an industry, a set

of stories, and a participatory culture.” Gamson further adds, “The commodity at stake is embodied attention; the value of the celebrity inheres in his or her capacity to attract and mobilize attention, which is then typically attached to other products (a television show, a magazine cover, a record album) or sold for cash directly to people making those other products” (1062). The celebrity culture sells people a branded personality to consume, but it sells what people want to consume. It redirects people’s abstract desire toward the celebrity’s amplified qualities and attributes that are presented as “worth envying, striving for and fantasising about” (Nayar 10). The classic concept of culture industry as defined by Adorno (98) provides the context for the rise of “celebrity culture”:

The culture industry fuses the old and familiar into a new quality. In all its branches, products which are tailored for consumption by masses, and which to a great extent determine the nature of that consumption, are manufactured more or less according to plan. The individual branches are similar in structure or at least fit into each other, ordering themselves into a system almost without a gap. This is made possible by contemporary technical capabilities as well as by economic and administrative concentration. (12)

CONSUMING CELEBRITIES AS COMMODITIES

“Celebrity culture,” Nayar (11) explains, “therefore hinges upon both the voyeuristic consumption of a media image (celebrity reception) and the goal-setting production of the same (celebrity spectacle).” Douglas Kellner (27), a contemporary scholar on culture who writes from the tradition of Critical Theory, provides an excellent description of this “commodification” within the celebrity culture:

Celebrity too is manufactured and managed in the world of media spectacle. Celebrities are the icons of media culture, the gods and goddesses of everyday life.

To become a celebrity requires recognition as a star player in the field of media spectacle, be it sports, entertainment, business, or politics. Celebrities have their handlers and image managers to make sure that they continue to be seen and positively perceived by publics.”

Kellner is referring to “cultural intermediaries” or “the collective term for agents, publicists, marketing personnel, promoters, photographers, fitness trainers, wardrobe

staff, cosmetics experts and personal assistants,” whose task it “is to concoct the public presentation of celebrity personalities that will result in an enduring appeal for the audience of fans (Rojek 11; Goodman). This holds good even for the public presentation of notorious celebrities. The shelf life of a celebrity therefore “is dependent on strategies of capitalist production that try to predict the capriciousness of audiences’ preferences and tastes” (Collins 91). The cultural intermediaries must be mobilized to sustain the popularity of a celebrity. “In this sense,” argues, Collins, “celebrity should be seen as a kind of intertextually fluid ‘capital’ that gets ‘deployed with the intention of gaining advantage in the entertainment market and making profits’ for cultural producers and the celebrity him or herself” (Collins 92). Celebrities are worth emulating and are the icons or paragons for the masses that celebrate their desires. But these values that people admire in the celebrities are not inherent in the celebrities. They are products of valorisation of the media itself. The celebrity system has a powerful way to define and accentuate certain qualities, amplify character, and turning even the negative attributes as necessary for stardom (Meyers, King).

But celebrities are not just known. A celebrity must be celebrated. So celebrities need an audience to celebrate their fame. The celebrity connects the public and the private. The fans and followers tend to believe they are intimate with the stars and celebrities they worship and fantasize. The power of the celebrity rests on his/her ability to enchant the people to recognize and be fascinated by her personality (Meyers, Gabler).

As will be argued in this paper, “celebrities are products of promotional campaigns and the subject of promotional material like any other commodity. They are materials to be branded and sold. Fame is a manufactured product, manufactured in and by the mass media for public consumption” (Nayar 12). In contemporary culture, fame and celebrity as a process of media exposure coincide (Rockwell and Giles 108; King, Dyers). The media generates consumable celebrities and renders them as products to be bought and exchanged. A celebrity is a piece of property that is highly valuable, marketable, and visible (Hackley and Hackley). A celebrity generates income; he or she is an asset and an economic source. A celebrity is a commodity that is manufactured and marketed by culture industry (King). The media stages certain rituals that set the celebrity as the desirable object. “This mass of practices,” explains Nayar (35), “includes diverse things, such as setting, actions, conversations, viewing, camera movements, voiceovers, primetime viewing, telecast rights, advertisements, promos, endorsements, sponsorship, all of which contribute to the transformation of the site or person into a celebrity space.”

METHODOLOGY

For this study, I relied primarily on the news reporting and other media platforms that covered the itinerary of Pope Francis since his arrival. Personally, I watched and followed the live coverage of the Pope’s visit. I was fortunate to have guested in GMA-7’s coverage of the second day of Pope Francis’s visit. Being in the studio also allowed me to have a glimpse of how the people who were creating the “media event” for the Pope’s visit felt and reacted. However I will restrict my data to the coverage of two largest media networks in the country, ABS-CBN and GMA-7, although occasionally I will also cite newspapers and other sources. I will not compare the coverage of ABS-CBN with GMA-7. For all their differences, both networks operate on the same principle of celebritizing the Pope. They only differ in marketing strategies. As one scholar puts it, “concentration of economic and political capital and power within media entities continue to legitimize the duopolistic control of ABS-CBN and GMA-7 in local markets” (Brillon, cf. Rimban, Coronel).

The initial discussion of the rise of Pope Francis as a celebrity is based mainly on global media coverage and presentation of the Pope. Using the data from various websites that featured the “rock star” status of Pope Francis, blogsites that explained the rise of the “celebrity Pope,” the first part of the study will show that that way the dominant global mass media portrayed and covered the itinerary of Pope Francis contributed a lot to the celebrification of Pope Francis. It helped in the elevation of the status of Pope Francis to “rock star pope.” Indeed, as a celebrity Pope! This will serve as the backdrop for the analysis of the Filipino reception of the rock star Pope.

In this study, the analysis of news, images and blogs about Pope Francis followed the standard textual analysis suggested by Jorgensen and Phillips. It is assumed by we can never have a direct knowledge of Pope Francis except through the mediation of mass media images and categories. Consequently, these images and categories are products of social processes that are in constant change. And this change is dependent on the prevailing power relations and dominant views on a given a certain period of time. In interpreting the images, representations and texts about Pope Francis, this study does not purport to arrive at the “true” and “correct” understanding of the celebrity status of Pope Francis. For such a claim can always be contested by other equally valid claims using different frameworks. So, the analysis and interpretation of this study simply unravel the processes behind the social construction of the celebrity status of the Pope by the global culture industry

under late capitalism. The main objective is to provide a coherent narrative and convincing account of how the Pope achieved his current celebrity status given the ubiquity of the mass production of celebrities.

POPE FRANCIS AS A CELEBRITY CREATED BY THE CULTURE INDUSTRY

The “aura” of the Pope, as the religious shepherd of 1.2 billion Catholics worldwide, might be fated from the beginning. But once the Pope is celebritized, his status and fame are something to be celebrated. Catholics or not, people consume the images of Pope Francis in various ways—to enhance devotions, to plea for prayer requests, to connect with other people, to support certain political causes. As a celebrity, one cannot ignore the Pope. One can go as far as agree that Adorno’s claim that in the “Pope” people find a “primal Father” to which they can identify and idealize as a leader. But this psychoanalytic based analysis, originally applied to European fascist leaders, has to be modified when applied to the rock star status of the Pope (Adorno 136). Identification touches “vast numbers of people with similar characterological dispositions and libidinal leanings.” But Adorno (130) did not reduce this dependence to psychological explanation. As a materialist, he claimed:

Psychological dispositions do not actually cause fascism: rather, fascism defines a psychological area which can be successfully exploited by the forces which promote it for entirely non-psychological reasons of self-interest.

In short, following Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique of mass culture, the culture industry around Pope Francis, that markets his aura-dominated images, is exploited by image-makers and public relation officers to achieve an economy of scale that will churn out more popularity and more marketable images. But the role of the culture industry is not just to amass profits but to create a web of interlocking institutions that monopolize the production of images and their exchange-values. The ultimate result of course is the levelling process of mass culture and the production of pseudo-individuality. But this analysis must be tempered by the inherent subversive and politically ambiguous character of the culture industry.

As will be shown in this paper, inevitably, the Pope is now part of the “celebretariat as industrial products” (Brockington 4). What the celebrity industry requires from its celebritized individuals is that they live, whether glamorously or not, for the camera. From the point of view of celebrity culture, the Pope does not even have to

possess those qualities attributed to him or what people believe he possesses. What makes the celebrity a celebrity is not the extraordinary but that the celebrity is presented as very similar to ordinary people yet distant from them. This is the strategy of reality TV shows. Celebrities are created from the ordinariness of life. But the Pope is not just an ordinary individual (Gamson 1064). He heads the 1.2 billion Catholics worldwide. As such the Pope is under constant voyeuristic surveillance of the media intermediaries. Hence the Pope, having an “ascribed celebrity status” (Rojek 16), enjoys the advantage of amplifying this status a myriad number of times. Unlike the wannabe celebrities on the Internet who have to compete for media mileage, the Pope does not have to exert much effort. The Vatican has its own celebrity media intermediaries to do the trick. It has even put up mobile applications for iOS and Android (the so-called Pope Apps) for updates on the Pope’s activities. Of course the Pope’s popularity and renown are also amplified through new social media, especially through Twitter (PopeFrancis@Pontifex) and unofficial Facebook accounts. Yet the contradiction presents itself immediately: the very religious meaning of Papacy resists this commodification. To what extent the Pope is able to resist commodification is a moot question. The degree of autonomy the Pope has vis-à-vis the capitalist production and culture industry is an empirical question.

SETTING UP THE STAGE FOR A “ROCK STAR POPE”

Bill Clinton may be said to be the first popular figure to have been described as a rock star metaphorically (De Curtis ix). As early as 1967, Peter Wicke already observed, “rock music was now placed in a context in which it no longer defined itself merely in musical terms, but also in political terms” (in Shumway, xiv). In his study of rock stars, Shumway shows that “rock star” has replaced “movie star” as the standard designation for someone possessed of great charisma, glamour, and sex appeal. A rock star is different from a celebrity. To be a star, according to Shumway, (1) an individual has to *achieve success in a skilled field or profession*, one of five defining characteristics of stardom. The other four attributes that distinguish stardom, are: “(2) the star is the object of imagined personal relationships by fans; (3) the star has a persona that represents more than an individual personality but works as a widely understood culturally specific sign or icon; (4) the persona is consistent and well developed; and, finally and most subjectively, (5) a star has the degree of personal attractiveness that we call “star quality” (2). In this definition, a celebrity is not necessarily a rock star, but a rock star is necessarily a celebrity. This

study will show that Pope Francis is both a star and a celebrity. But this study will focus more on the process of celebritization of Pope Francis during his five-day visit to the Philippines.

But is Pope Francis a “rock star”? The rock star status of Pope Francis is recently amplified further by the release of a rock album with title *Wake Up* with eleven tracks. The “record features pop rock riffs mixed in with excerpts of Pope Francis’s speeches and hymns in several languages.”¹ “Wake Up” will be sold for over 15 euros, equivalent to more than P800. The album’s producer, Don Giulio Neroni is hoping that the album will spread the message of the Pope.²

When the Pope visited New York in September 2015, the Guardian had the following headline: “Pope Francis given rockstar welcome in New York to close historic day in US.”³ The leader of the Catholic Church will play himself in the new film *Beyond the Sun*, marking the first time in the history of the Church that any pope has made a film debut.⁴

Being a rock star Pope, however, is just part of the process of celebritization. Celebritization, according to Nayar (7), consists of two basic dimensions: (1) constructing an individual as an object of desire; and (2) constructing an individual for mass consumption. So how did Pope Francis achieve this status? The cardinals who elected Pope Francis had no inkling that he would turn out to be such a “rock star” pontiff. Cardinal Dolan, the outspoken and charismatic Archbishop of New York, remarked, “I thought of him as a very retiring, behind-the-scenes man. In no way did I think he would be the sort of man who would electrify the crowd as he has done.”⁵ A journalist who had covered Pope Francis’s media events concluded that the Pope had become “best salesman the Catholic Church has had since at least John Paul II.”⁶ Nick Squires of *The Telegraph* writes enthusiastically, “He [Cardinal Dolan] said the cardinals who elected the then Archbishop of Buenos Aires knew that they had chosen “a good manager,” but did not realise they would be “getting a rock star.”⁷ His cover in autobiographical book *The Church of Mercy*, shows the charisma of Pope Francis. “We wanted a beautiful cover, making it attractive for a U.S. audience to read,” said Steve Connor, the director of new product development at Loyola Press.

Kissing a man with neurofibromatosis, putting on a firefighter’s helmet, allowing a young boy to hug his leg during a mass, taking selfies with young people, visiting prisoners, wearing old shoes, and phoning up his followers for a chat are just a few of the ways Pope Francis has attracted headlines during the early months of his Pontificate. His popularity stirs public curiosity because he speaks Spanish, rides

the bus, and loves soccer. With his biographies already out in the market, the trivia about his life become the focus of inordinate media attention.

The trivia are basic elements of celebrification. As Meyers (895) points out, “Consuming stories and photographs in celebrity media fills in the gaps of the celebrity’s private life opened by the pursuit of the ‘real’ person behind the celebrity façade.” They show that the Pope is also an ordinary human being but still distant from the people because of his status. News sensationalize the humility and ordinary life of Pope Francis. He is reported to wear regular shoes and no cross made of gold. He is said to sleep in a modest apartment outside the dark walls of the Vatican Palace. He secretly and humbly sneaks out at night to feed the poor so that no one will know about it.⁸

These trivia, as well as the down-to-earth humility of the Pope, make the Pope a “best seller.” As one Hispanic marketing company says on its website, “So, if the Church was a business, it would not have been able to pick a better CEO. From the marketing and strategy point of view, the new Pope is exactly what the Church needed.”⁹ But unlike other celebrities who are invented to replace the diminishing role of God in modern society (Rojek 9), or fill in the role of heroes, Pope Francis is an icon to give a boost to Catholic faith in the postmodern world.

Celebrities are modern substitutes for traditional heroes (Boorstin 35). Yet, the celebrity status of Pope Francis is ascribed. Being the highest leader of the Roman Catholic Church already confers significant status to the person occupying the position. But not all Popes become successful celebrities. Many Popes were well-known but did not achieve the celebrity status. They simply lacked the powerful media intermediaries. Just imagine what would have happened when Pope John XXXIII opened Vatican II with global media coverage, coupled with streaming live news feed. And imagine further if the same Pope allowed selfies and live tweets during the sessions. The mass consumption of mobile phones, for instance, showed the difference between the installation of Pope Benedict and Pope Francis. The installation of Pope Francis saw many people using mobile phones and tablets to take pictures.¹⁰ With the advent of mass media and new social media, Pope Francis achieved the highest-ranking person of faith and a role model for the 1.2 billion Catholics around the world. According to Global Language Monitor’s 14th annual global survey of the English language, “Pope Francis” is the most discussed name on the 1.83 billion person English-language portion of the Internet. Among the most commonly used *words* in the English-language portion of the Internet,

“@Pontifex” (Pope Francis’s English username on Twitter) comes in at fourth, beating out terms like “drones,” “surveillance,” “deficit,” and “twerking,” and losing out only to “404,” “fail,” and “hashtag.”¹¹

With the Church shaken by sexual scandals, financial corruption, and the unforeseen resignation of Pope Benedict, the election of Pope Francis, whether the Pontiff likes it or not, is an opportunity for marketing and re-branding of the Catholic Church. Many observers think that the election of Pope Francis was the right move to regain the confidence of the fallen-away Catholics and revive the lukewarm faith of those who remained faithful to the Catholic Church.¹² The Roman Catholic Church’s 1.2 billion adherents are not customers or clients. But if the Pope is branded as a celebrity, then, the supreme leader of the 1.2 billion Catholics worldwide become the focal branded Pope to be sold in the market of religions.

WHERE ADORNO GOT IT WRONG: FRANCISM AS PR-GENERATED

Adorno (100) observes apropos the promotion of commodities under culture industry, “[b]rought to bear is a general uncritical consensus, advertisements produced for the world, so that each product of the culture industry becomes its own advertisement.” Today, this statement scarcely holds. The Pope enjoys good standing among the median of 60 percent of population across forty-three nations. According to Pew Research’s Global Attitudes Project, only 11 percent see the pope unfavorably, and 28 percent give no rating.¹³ One article reported that approximately 25 percent of Catholics increased their donations to the poor in 2013. Many said Pope Francis was the reason they did so.¹⁴ The rise of Francis as a celebrity is publicized through the rise of Church attendance in Italy, Great Britain, and United States. And this popularity and cult following has to do primarily with the Pope living a simple and humble life—refusing to live in Apostolic Palace and staying in the so-called *Domus Sanctae Marthae*, wearing unsophisticated liturgical clothing, lining up in a canteen with ordinary workers, and washing the feet of incarcerated women and non-Catholics.¹⁵ The popularity of the Pope was made even more stellar when in 2013 he was named *Time* magazine’s “Person of the Year.” In 2014 he was named one of the “100 Most Influential People” by the same magazine. Pope Francis appeared first on *Fortune* magazine’s list of the world’s greatest leaders. A fashion magazine even named him the “Best Dressed Man of 2013.” Some of the news about Pope Francis shows his playful side. He frequently poses for “selfies” with visitors to Vatican City (Woll).



Figure 1. A picture showing the installation of Pope Benedict in 2005 and Pope Francis in 2013. From: <http://petapixel.com/2013/03/14/a-starry-sea-of-cameras-at-the-unveiling-of-pope-francis/>

One therefore has to be sceptical of attributing the “Francis Effect” solely to Pope Francis, as the original analysis of Adorno claims. Certified Fascinate Advisor Cherry Pua-Africa was asked during the Papal visit if Pope Francis is a global figure created largely by the call of the times, the proper timing of his ascendancy to the throne, and his positive response to it, explained, “The credit is largely on him because he is winning the hearts of people from all over the world because of his very positive character. He is revolutionary. And people see great hope in him.” Similarly, Nanette Franco-Diyco, an advertiser herself, claimed that “Pope Francis, from day one of his papacy, never needed a public relations agent or an advertising agency or a sales promotions manager,” because “[h]is newsworthiness emanates from being the man he is, from the core of his being.”¹⁶ There might be a truth to this assertion, but without mass media platforms which are constantly monitoring and plugging what

the Pope is doing, he will be relegated to oblivion (Gehring).¹⁷ But even if the Pope took a selfie with the homeless or kissed a man with a disfigured face, if these pictures do not land on social media, then that would be uneventful.

Many observers believe that the “Francis effect” is due largely to the PR work of Greg Burke, a fifty-three year old senior media advisor to the Vatican, who worked for Fox News for about ten years. According to news, Pope Francis joined Twitter a few months after Burke took up the new role. When Burke was asked about promoting Pope Francis’s popularity through media public relations, he responded, “Give me a break!” Dismissing it as a total misrepresentation of reality, he insisted: “It’s him! It’s him!” He’s the one who’s done all this.” Then he confided: “Yes, we have a strategy: kick the ball to Francis and he scores the goals! He’s better than Maradona and Messi combined.”¹⁸ But Burke does not explain the other half of the story. The strategy does not only mean allowing the Pope to do anything. “Kicking the ball” to Pope Francis is not as simple as Burke claims. It means kicking the ball to Pope Francis at the right time, with the proper audience, with the right media coverage. Without the voyeuristic cooperation of the celebrity intermediaries, the strategy of “kicking ball” will be totally banal. Burke cited two high-profile initiatives that Francis decided to undertake at short notice and “scored goals”: his visit to Lampedusa to highlight the tragic plight of migrants from Africa and the Middle East who drowned at sea while fleeing poverty and war in search of a better life in Europe; and his peace initiative for Syria, involving a day of fasting and prayer just as the US was considering bombing the country. “The ideas were his; we just helped with the media,” Burke recalled.¹⁹ Even if one believes Burke, these events are newsworthy in themselves. And when the Pope addresses these issues, one cannot distinguish celebrityization from simple act of religious solidarity or even act of statesmanship. Following Driessens, one can conclude that Pope Francis’s “celebrity capital” or reputational capital was used by cultural intermediaries as a strategic asset to increase the Pope’s perceived trustworthiness, credibility, reliability, responsibility, and accountability (Driessens 549). Driessens argues that the religious authority of the Pope was converted effectively into other forms of capital to enhance the power and prestige of the Pope. The Pope’s capacity to play the roles or what Burke calls as scoring a goal depends largely on the Pope’s personal intervention. And these personal interventions are converted by the Pope to positive aura that generates worldwide curiosity, admiration, and wonder. Yet the general weight of Adorno’s critique holds water. The Pope as cultural product has been standardized and distributed by means of rationalized and strictly controlled organization. And this globally organized celebrity culture creates the illusion of a personalized aura of the Pope that caters to the needs of each individual “consumer.”

THE STARDOM OF FRANCIS AND THE ILLUSION OF SPONTANEITY

Pope Francis’s rise to stardom began with his definition of object of desire for many Catholics and non-Catholics alike. He was seen as someone who can transform and reform the church that is plagued by scandals and irrelevance in the postmodern world. The Pope is desired and desirable not so much because of his looks but because of his spiritual and religious values. This desirability rests not simply in the looks or achievements of the Pope, but the media’s validation, praise and reproduction of his achievements and looks (Nayar 31). Hence, the Pope, as a product of the global culture industry is not exclusively a spontaneous creation of the “fans” and spiritual consumers.

The more the Pope demonstrated unexpected and extraordinary behaviors, the more they were amplified to arouse the curiosity of the audience as well. For the conservatives, these behaviors are confirmation of how the Pope has become an apostate. For the liberals, it is an opportunity to say that the church is changing. Either way, the celebritized Pope creates and stirs controversies. He creates “gossip” that feed the press, the ordinary people, and even foment debates among those who dislike him. And this so-called spontaneous faux pas of the Pope fits perfectly well into the ideology of the culture industry. As Ross Wilson (32) commenting on Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique of mass culture explains, “The appearances of spontaneity and choice are actually functions of the way in which the culture industry makes sure it has everyone in its grip.”

If we define *celebrity* as “one whose looks, lifestyle, skills, success, behaviour or attitude become desirable qualities and set the norm for the rest of the society to emulate” (Nayar 26), then, Pope Francis easily passes as one. The Pope as a celebrity possesses both commercial as well as sociocultural values. The sociocultural value is rooted in the long tradition of the Catholic Church and the long line of succession of papacy. “Consuming” Pope Francis is not just about watching his masses; it means following the news of Vatican.com, following his Tweets, and reacting to his latest pronouncements.

THE “ROCK STAR POPE” GOES TO THE PHILIPPINES

Church leaders officially announced on July 7, 2014, the visit of Pope Francis to the Philippines. A few days later, Manila Archbishop Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle revealed

that the Vatican said Pope Francis will be visiting the Philippines from January 15 to 19. This announcement created a “media event” that led to electrifying anticipation among Filipino Catholics and non-Catholics alike. The visit of Pope Francis in the predominantly Catholic country was a major media event. It was the first pastoral and state visit of Pope Francis to the Philippines. He was the third Pope who visited the Philippines. Other Popes who visited the country include Pope Paul VI (1970) and Pope John Paul II (1981, 1995).²⁰ His final mass at the Luneta Grandstand on January 18, 2015, drew a crowd of 6 to 7 million, surpassing the crowd that attended the World Youth Day during the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1995 at the same venue.

The CBCP set the official theme of Papal visit. CBCP president and Lingayen-Dagupan Archbishop Socrates Villegas said, “The underlying spirit of the Papal visit is the theme of ‘mercy and compassion,’ the cherished ideals of Jesus. The most distinctive way to prepare spiritually for the coming of Pope Francis is for the country to become a people rich in mercy.”²¹ Malacañang, on the other hand, focused its preparations on security, as later intelligence revealed, there was a threat to the life of the Pope.²²

Yet in spite of the official declaration of the CBCP, the media-led celebritization of the Pope continued unabated. A website that highlights catholic events and news, The Crux, described the preparation: “Pope Francis to get rock star treatment in the Philippines.”²³ An article in *The Philippine Star* during the Papal visit even explained the rockstar status of the Pope by defining what a rock star is: “Rock stars are called as such because of their fame, infectious music, so to speak, and to some extent, their worldly image borne out of their grip on a life filled with sex, drugs and rock ‘n roll.” Then, citing the view of Cherry Pua-Africa, Certified Fascinate Advisor, the article explained, “Yes, the current leader of the Catholic Church falls under the category of ‘The Rock Star’ if we are to consider the Personality Archetypes chart as indicated by ‘Fascination Profiling’ (the Rock Star, described as being bold, artistic and unorthodox).”²⁴

Prior to the Pope’s arrival, the media wasted no time discussing all possible trivia about Pope Francis. ABS-CBN, two days before the arrival of the Pope, posted this news article on their website: “What you should know about Pope Francis’ PH visit.”²⁵ The news in radio, print, and television discussed the do’s and don’ts of the Papal visit. Several issues were highlighted by the media: the preparation of the Philippine government, crowd control, security, the personal life of the Pope, the question whether Pres. Aquino will kiss the ring of the Pope, and the Papal

Popemobile. Interviews of ordinary people and celebrities were shown and what they expected from the Pope. Timelines and comparison between Pope Francis and his predecessor who visited the Philippines were also made. All these rituals tended to reduce the psychic distance between the public and the Pope (Furedi 494). The Pope was drawn into the routine everyday experience of the Filipinos.

The model and type of Popemobile to be used by the Pope was itself a media event.²⁶ Of course the Pope already ditched the use of bullet proof Popemobile “as the glass ‘sardine can’ that keeps him away from the people.”²⁷ The weather forecast was also discussed because of the impending typhoon during his visit to Tacloban. Cheesy slam book-like trivia about the Pope proliferated about his love life, his seminary life, and family life.²⁸

THE MASS MARKETING OF THE POPE

Creating celebrities, then, is not as easy as it sounds. Sometimes the marketing strategy backfires especially if it goes against the innate attributes of the celebrity. Prior to Pope’s visit, the CBCP warned against the t-shirts being sold by ABS-CBN that express “misleading” and “erroneous” messages. Reports say that ABS-CBN pulled these out from its online shop and retail partners, and issued an apology for the shirts that carried the message: No race, no religion.²⁹



Figure 2. People taking selfies with the life-size cardboard standup of Pope Francis. From: <https://advocacine.wordpress.com/tag/pope-francis-in-manila/>



Figure 3. The t-shirts sold by ABS-CBN that drew controversial criticisms from the Catholic Church. From: <http://www.splendorofthechurch.com.ph/2014/12/28/abs-cbn-distorts-message-of-pope-francis-on-for-sale-t-shirts/>

The papal visit also sparked the creativity of many small-to-medium entrepreneurs who made their own designs to celebrate the Pope's coming. Many street vendors in Quiapo, Manila, started selling various Pope Francis-related merchandise such as calendars, T-shirts, and prayer booklets during the last quarter of 2014.³⁰ Pope Francis t-shirts sold like hotcakes on the streets even before the Pope arrived. A report from GMA News reads:

Lea Permejo, a vendor in Quiapo, decided to sell Pope-themed shirts early this year along with Nazareno-printed shirts.

"Noong sinabing darating si Pope, madami nang naglabasan, kaya kumuha na rin kami. Madami na ang bumibili ng T-shirt nung sa Pope, nagkakaubusan ng stock," she said.

Permejo noted a surged in demand for kids' shirts in tandem with the steady demand from adult shirts.

"Yung mga pambata, mabenta. Mabilis sa P100. P120 'yung sa mas malaki. Ang pang matanda namin, P200-250. Basta minimum kami sa P200. Maganda din naman kasi 'yung tela," she said.

Even the non-Catholics participated in this frenzy of welcome:

Diya Shewakramani, whose family business is T-shirt manufacturing, said that papal shirts make people aware and serves as a way of expressing warm welcome for the pope. "We generally don't do particular designs. Even if we're not Catholic, it's a way of welcoming the pope," she said.³¹



Figure 4. T-shirts and other souvenir items of Pope Francis being sold before the papal visit. From: <https://advocacine.wordpress.com/2015/01/15/pope-francis-a-la-super-typhoon-in-the-philippines/vendor1/>

Josie Rudavites, who runs a tiny stall outside one of Manila’s most popular churches, said daily sales had jumped tenfold to 3,000 pesos (\$67) since she started selling badges and calendars with the Pope’s image. “The pope is all the rage,” Rudavites, thirty-six years old, who normally sells candles for praying at the church, told AFP News.

A gift shop in Makati has also created miniature Pope Francis dolls, aside from the usual souvenir items. Philippine Precious Moments Collectors’ Community made a 12-inch Pope Francis doll that costs 1,000 pesos. It comes with a doll box and a certificate of authenticity.³²

A local business correspondent described the Pope’s trip as “a marketing frenzy for ‘Brand Pope.’” Gerald Bautista, a marketing strategist for twenty years who runs his own consulting firm in Manila, said putting the pope and a brand together has a hypnotic effect on consumers in the Philippines. Days before the Pope arrived, the GMA-7 website reported: “Images of a smiling Francis are splashed on towering billboards and full-page newspaper advertisements, stamped with logos of McDonald’s, Pepsi, Hyundai and myriad big local companies.”³³

Tourism was another sector that was ecstatic about the papal visit. "In the region, we're the only nation predominantly Catholic. We may not see so much foreign tourists since the pope also visited South Korea and is currently visiting Sri Lanka," Department of Tourism Secretary Ramon Jimenez told GMA News Online. But then he added, "We expect the visit of His Holiness to be a big boost to our country's image as an important destination, where a colorful and active society thrives."³⁴

While the visit was welcomed overwhelmingly by Filipinos, some business sectors were not happy. Michael Raeuber, President of the European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines (ECCP), worried that extended holidays so close to the Christmas vacation may be costly for the economy.³⁵ The economics of the papal visit was made obvious by website of GMA-7 that had a banner: "The pros and cons of the papal visit on business."³⁶ Ironically, it also carried the following banner: "Vatican wants PHL to spend less on Pope Francis' visit."³⁷ Here, the tension between the business interests arising from the culture industry of Francis effect against the vision of Pope Francis is obvious.

The tension is allayed by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines that was silent about profiteering from the pontiff's popularity. Bishop Mylo Vergara, CBCP spokesperson, said the decision to do so was "really up to" the businesses involved. Father Rufino Sescon, from the organizing committee, told AFP News, "If we regulate, it might look like we're the ones trying to make money off the pope."

The Vatican, of course, had a different view of this matter. Francis would frown upon the blatant usage of his likeness to sell products, according to Andrea Torielli, coordinator for the Vatican Insider website in Rome. "The reality is that the pope loves the poor so much, it would be much better that the money used for advertising be given to the poor," Torielli told AFP News.³⁸ Meanwhile, the Philippine Long Distance Telephone (PLDT), the nation's biggest telecommunications company, owned by business titan Manuel Pangilinan, which sponsored the Pope's trip, claimed that the sponsorship was to make the Filipinos become closer to Pope Francis. PLDT spokesman Ramon Isberto insisted, "This is not a money-making event for us ... our main effort is to help every Filipino experience the Pope," Isberto told AFP. Not making money out of sponsoring Pope's visit was altruistic, of course. But the sponsorship was a huge marketing strategy.³⁹

MEDIATIZED RELIGIOUS ICONS AND FILIPINO STARDOM CULTURE INDUSTRY

Adulation of celebrities of course is deeply embedded in Filipino culture (Celdran, Sajo, Centeno). In fact, the latest rise of celebrities in Philippine politics is a reflection of the power of celebrities and mass media in Philippine society (Centeno). Following Neferti Tadiar (708), this “social imaginary” of stars like that of Nora Aunor is a historical experience that is at the same time a collective constitution. Hence, “[t]o grope for an understanding of a social imaginary is, rather, to feel for a constellation of socio subjective practices that are at work in the cooperative production of a form of sociality and an economic assemblage.” Put simply, the search for explanation of the celebrity status of Pope Francis is the search for social and economic processes and structures that create this “Francis imaginary.”

Even religious personalities enjoy celebrity status. The treatment of local icons like the late Jaime Cardinal Sin, Mike Velarde of El Shaddai, Eduardo Manalo of the Iglesia ni Cristo (Church of Christ), Bro. Eddie Villanueva of Jesus Is Lord Movement, and Bro. Elly Soriano of Dating Daan (The Old Way) attest to the popular status of these religious leaders. This partly explains the receptive attitude of Filipino Catholics toward Pope Francis. But the welcoming attitude of the Filipinos does not fully explain the celebritization of Pope Francis.

The receptiveness of Filipinos to Pope Francis’s celebrity status has to do also with the religious attitudes of the Filipino Catholics (Bautista, Kessler and Ruland). In a predominantly Catholic country—the only Catholic country in Asia and visited by three Popes—Filipino religious culture contributes to the amplification of “Francis effect.” Prior to his visit, GMA 7 reported a survey done by Radio Veritas. According to Veritas survey Filipinos in Metro Manila and some nearby provinces believe Pope Francis’s visit to the Philippines would strengthen the faith of Catholics in the country. According to the Veritas Truth Survey, “35 percent of the 1,200 respondents said the main impact of the Pope’s visit would be a stronger Catholic faith in the Philippines.” Thirty-three percent saw the visit as a way to bring the Philippine Catholic community closer to the Catholic Church as a whole. The Veritas Truth Survey showed that 99 percent of respondents had positive feelings about the upcoming visit, with a majority of them saying they’re “Happy” (42 percent). Others said they were “feeling blessed” and “overwhelmed” (both at 20 percent), while the other 17 percent were “excited.”⁴⁰ Surveys like this, of course, amplify the newsworthiness of the issue. More importantly, the “media events” staged by

major local media conglomerates, in various platforms, largely explain the stepping up of Pope Francis's celebrity status as he visited the Philippines. The Catholic Church officials even formally launched in Pangasinan its official website for Pope Francis's visit weeks before the papal visit.⁴¹

MEDIATIZING THE MARKETABILITY OF THE POPE

Pope Francis's visit to the Philippines created a frenzy of media activities. GMA 7 official papal visit website reported the analytics of Topsy, a social search and analytics company. Twitter activity about the papal visit began to pick up on January 11, four days before his arrival in the country. Activity for the hashtags #PopeFrancisPH and #PapalVisitPH peaked on January 15 with tweets numbering at 136,473 and 39,154, respectively, while #BlessedByThePope peaked the day after, on January 16, with 28,830 tweets. By January 19, the most popular article on Facebook was about the father of Kristel Mae Padasas, the woman who died after the papal mass at Tacloban after the scaffolding of a speaker fell on her. It garnered 34,780 likes and 819 shares, with people offering their condolences and sympathies in the comments.⁴²

The media coverage included multiplatform coverage. Through up-to-date reports and special features, ABS-CBN delivered the latest developments on its news platforms on free and cable TV, radio, and online: ABS-CBN Channel 2, ABS-CBN News Channel (ANC), DZMM TeleRadyo, DZMM Radyo Patrol Sais Trenta, and their websites and social media accounts. The network's theme was *Kapit-kamay Tayo sa Pagsalubong sa Santo Papa* (Let's Join Hands in Welcoming the Pope). The GMA theme was: Ang People's Pope sa Pilipinas (The People's Pope in the Philippines). The marketing strategy of ABS-CBN was to accentuate unity and solidarity in welcoming the Pope, while GMA 7 emphasized the popularity of Pope Francis. Aside from radio and TV broadcast, GMA News also partnered with various malls and establishments nationwide to present the special coverage of Pope Francis' visit.⁴³ Even prior to the visit, the headlines hyped up the challenge of Marlene Aguilar to Pope Francis for a UFC match after she claimed that the Pope was in league with Satan.⁴⁴



Figure 5. The theme of ABS-CBN coverage: <http://www.thesummitexpress.com/2015/01/abs-cbn-gma-news-bring-multi-platform-coverage-for-pope-francis-visit-in-ph.html>.

The Pope arrived from Sri Lanka at 5:32 PM aboard Sri Lankan Airlines Flight 4111. Upon his arrival, the media already drew attention to the two abandoned children, Lanny Ortillo and Mark Angelo Balberos, who were among the first Filipinos to welcome Pope Francis upon his arrival in Manila.⁴⁵ Before and during the visit, the media kept feeding and accentuating the “signature spontaneity” of the Pope: staying out of his official course, stopping during his motorcade to bless people, hugging people in the crowd, and not following the official protocol.⁴⁶ This “signature spontaneity” became for media a confirmatory gesture that the Pope was indeed extraordinary by embracing and doing the ordinary!

Before his visit to Tacloban, the typhoon Amang was already entering the Philippine area of responsibility. The GMA News website had this news article: “Pope Francis chose regular raincoat instead of special one in Tacloban, says stage designer.”⁴⁷ The Pope arrived in Tacloban City earlier in the day despite Leyte being placed under Storm Signal Number 2. He officiated a Mass at the airport’s apron wearing a yellow raincoat similar to those worn by the crowd; this did not escape the prying eyes of the media.⁴⁸ The vacuum created by the Pope’s early departure from Tacloban due to severe weather condition created even a speculation in the media.

ESTIMATING THE CROWD: QUANTITY AS THE TOUCHSTONE OF SALABILITY

How many people turned out during the Pope's mass in Luneta? This was a big debate in the media after the Luneta mass. The Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA) estimated the crowd to be between 3 to 6 million. Six million people attended the ceremony or lined the Papal route to Rizal Park, city officials estimated. That would be a record for a papal event. About five million welcomed Pope John Paul II in Manila in 1995. But using the surface area of the Luneta and the streets, it was calculated at 5 to 6 million people. But Vatican spokesman Fr. Federico Lombardi told the Catholic News Agency (CNA) that the total may be even higher than six million. The six million of course would cover all people that flocked to the areas around Luneta.⁴⁹

But the mathematics of celebritization was eclipsed by the equally celebritization of local stars who attended the mass including Kris Aquino and her two sons Joshua and James "Bimby," and Bianca Gonzalez.

CULTURE INDUSTRY IN THE AGE OF FAME WAR AND NETWORK WARS

Weeks prior to the visit, ABS-CBN unveiled its "#PopeFrancisPH site" housed in abs-cbnnews.com, ABS-CBN News' main digital property. In its website papalvisit.ph, two things tackle the celebrity status of Pope Francis: The Life of Pope Francis, and Ten Things You Need to Know about Pope Francis. A random search at the ABS-CBN news website during the papal visit yields the following banners:

LOOK: Celebs attend Pope Francis' mass in Luneta
Pope Francis concerned over security threats in PH
WATCH: Pope Francis' surprise meeting with street children
PNoy: Pope Francis 'very happy' with Filipino hospitality
Pope Francis: Filipinos' joy is genuine
'Pope Francis worked as bouncer, had a girlfriend'
LOOK: Pope Francis opens car's door himself
LOOK: Pope Francis thanks Rita Avila in letter from Vatican
What does Pope Francis like to eat? Chef Jessie reveals
Vatican: Pope Francis inspired by Filipino people
WATCH: Pope Francis' funny moments
WATCH: Jamie sings for Pope Francis at UST
How you can order BSP's Pope Francis commemorative coins

These news articles highlight the “show business” side of the Pope’s visit. The issues covered by ABS-CBN reflected the voyeuristic character of celebrification of Pope Francis. As Alion observes, “[p]ublic figures are public property and so are their private lives. Our interest in well-known people is to a large extent of a voyeuristic nature” (222). Alphonso further notes, “[w]e study them in the hope of finding in their personal lives not only the secret of their success but also some answers to our problems.” But the way the media corporations portrayed the Pope, it was no different from the way it treated the local show business personalities like Kris Aquino of ABS-CBN. The official website of ABS-CBN contained the following show business sized news about the Pope:

The WATCH: 8 star performances at papal events.⁵⁰

What’s Inside the Pope’s Bag?⁵¹

Man falls into creek as papal convoy passes⁵²

Girl with Pope ‘selfie’ has kidney disease⁵³

In contrast, the official papal visit website of ABS-CBN minimized the show business news sidelights about the Pope and instead highlighted more serious issues like politicians’ views on the papal visit, the condition of the overseas Filipino workers, the petition to pardon prisoners, the ceasefire between the government forces and communist rebels, and the security concerns surrounding the visit.

GMA 7 had its own website, <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/popefrancis>. Like the ABS-CBN website, it also covered the visit of Pope Francis. What is interesting is that it also made a show business presentation of the Pope’s visit. A news article posted as early as October 20 read, “Ten cool facts about Pope Francis.”⁵⁴ Its show business side betrayed itself in this banner, “A portrait of Pope Francis as a sports fan.”

Meanwhile the GMA-7 news website included more presentations of the issues tackled during the Pope’s visit:⁵⁵

Ten cool facts about Pope Francis

Pope Francis to Filipino families: Dream together

Pope Francis to Yolanda survivors: God makes things new

PNoy criticizes Filipino clergy in front of Pope Francis

Pope Francis: Core of my message will be the poor

The apparent bond between Pope Francis and Cardinal Tagle

The differences between the two giant media conglomerates do not diminish the celebritization of Pope Francis. Not discounting the intentions of these giant media conglomerates to bring the religious message of Pope Francis closer to the people, the differences in news coverage are just matters of emphasis and media marketing strategy that ultimately contributed more to celebritization of Pope Francis. After the visit, ABS-CBN claims its ABS-CBNnews.com came out on top in its January 15 to 19 coverage of the Pope's visit. ABS-CBNnews.com got 24.3 million page views from January 15 to 19, or 10 million more page views than its closest competitor, GMA Network, which got 14.6 million page views.⁵⁶ Not to be outdone, GMA-7 and GMA News TV's joint special "Ang People's Pope sa Pilipinas" emerged as the most watched coverage of the said Papal visit nationwide.⁵⁷

THE "FRANCIS EFFECT" AND THE SPIRIT OF MARKETING

In his new book, *The Francis Effect*, John Gehring (2015) dissects the impact of Francis on American Catholicism. He explains how mobilization of resources within the Church contributed to the "Francis effect." Locally, the Philippine media did contribute to this "Francis effect." The papal visit coverage did not only report the frenzy of the crowd as the Pope passed through the throngs of ecstatic crowds. The reporters and anchors who covered the Pope's visit were also awe-struck themselves. A volunteer new reporter even claimed, "It's an honor."⁵⁸

Kara David, a reporter from GMA-7, who accompanied the Pope during the flight, narrated how she cried when the Pope approached her during the flight.⁵⁹ Jamie Rivera, who composed and sang the song "We Are All God's Children" for Pope Francis, was also awe-struck as she found herself speechless when face to face with the Pope. The "Francis effect" was even felt among policemen, the ABS-CBN news website reported.⁶⁰ The reports highlighted not only the frenzy of the crowd and the reporters themselves experienced inexplicable feelings. Daily, the media highlighted the wishes of the people who followed Pope Francis: the cancer patients, the children, the sick, the *balikbayan*, the poor, retired priests and religious, and those people who have gifts for the Pope. Chef Jessie Sincioco, the cook of the Pope at the Papal Nunciature, where the Pope stayed, the flight attendants, the pilot of Philippine Airlines, and the airplane cook all became "celetoids" (Rojek 32), or instant celebrities, as they were featured in media voyeuristic frenzy.⁶¹ Anybody and everybody who came into contact with the Pope possessed the celebrity contagion or the potential to be a celetoid.

The “signature spontaneity” of the Pope was amplified more when the Pope went to surprise visits to the street children across the Manila cathedral after his mass.⁶² The comments on these videos also express the endearing sentiments of the people even those who are only watching at home. As comments said on YouTube:

nakakaiyak naman ang tagpo na ito. we love u po pope francis.

sobrang nakaka iyak ang tagpong ito ...

Even until the departure of Pope Francis, the media highlighted the remarkable enthusiasm of the crowds. This was considered as the last chance and opportunity to see the Pope. In this coverage, the reporters themselves were carried away by the Francis effect as they reported live, just like in the earlier ones. The GMA-7 coverage of his departure mentioned the frenzy of the crowd, detailing the Francis effect, and how the Pope was energizing the Catholic Church which was losing many members. The commentaries of the reporters also emphasized the indescribable feelings that the people felt when the Pope passed through the crowd and the reporters.⁶³ It was even reported in the ABS-CBN website that the papal visit inspired priestly vocations, citing the case of Lance Torres of Claret School who attended the UST mass for the youth.⁶⁴ The Francis effect on the crew members of Philippine Airlines that brought the Pope to Tacloban did not escape media voyeurism either.⁶⁵

Much like the sociological concept of charisma, the Francis effect is also projected as not only felt by the Filipino Catholics, but also by the Pope himself. From a sociological point of view, charisma is not just a property of the “charismatic individual” but also an attribute created by the people (Potts 118). Fr. Jose Quilongquilong, the official translator for the papal spokesperson, said, “Even the Pope, sabi ng Santo Papa grabe din ang effect sa kanya ng Pinoy. So mutual ang effect. Merong ‘Francis effect’ sa atin; siya rin meron din siyang ‘Pinoy effect.’” He adds, “Every time he sees people, sabi niya kay Cardinal Tagle, ‘Wow, the Filipinos are energetic.’ At dahil doon, nagkakaroon siya ng energy, parang hindi mo makikita na napapagod siya.”⁶⁶

Amidst this frenzy, the controversial and radical message of the Pope against economic inequality was muted. The coverage publicized the trivial and personal news about the Pope that could stir more the audience’s curiosity. The Pope, of course, is not responsible for this “pseudo-events,” but he inevitably and unwittingly is part of this cultural production. Part of his celebrity status is the shooting up of

the Pope's "renown." For Rojec (12), *renown* "refers to the informal attribution of distinction on an individual within a given social network." As a result of mass media celebrification of certain personalities, they appear to the audience as magical and superhuman. This would explain the appeal of Pope Francis to the thousands of Catholics who avidly followed his five-day visit. Celebrities are commodities in the sense that consumers desire to possess them. Once the Pope is integrated into the commodifying logic of the culture industry, the image of the Pope becomes a new form of merchandise that consumers eagerly devour.

The Pope's mediatized image became part of papal spectacle. This "spectacularization" of Pope's image during his five-day visit is captured by Debord's (6) analysis of spectacle:

Understood in its totality, the spectacle is both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production. It is not something added to the real world – not a decorative element, so to speak. On the contrary, it is the very heart of society's real unreality. In all its specific manifestations – news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment -the spectacle epitomizes the prevailing model of social life.

This representation of media that turns the Pope into a religious icon downplays his more radical social and political message. The fact that the Pope recently issued his radical encyclical, *The Joy of the Gospel*, that condemns global inequality and market fundamentalism, was remarkably missing in the media commentaries. While commentaries mentioned the Pope as "Pope of the poor," the champion of a simple lifestyle, the deeper problems of structural inequality, global poverty, and unbridled market ideology that led to financial crisis were not mentioned. This merely confirms Debord's conclusion about spectacles: "In a world that really has been turned on its head, truth is a moment of falsehood."

The papal spectacle showed how the crowd were disciplined and were able to follow the protocols of crowd control. The media anchors and reporters repeatedly described how the crowd waved flags and handkerchiefs whenever they saw the Pope. News anchors wondered at the behavior of the crowd. Why do they remain even after the Pope long passed their place? A priest who served as a commentator to the coverage of Pope Francis's departure sighed, "It's the power of the spirit." A TV anchor said, "It's the charisma." For the priest it is the spiritual consolation—the joy that Francis gave to people when they see him.⁶⁷ The priest told Korina Sanchez, the main anchor for ABS-CBN news coverage, that this effect was "tears of joy"—

that gave the people hope in the midst of life’s difficulties. Then, they talked about the poor. But they never discussed the problem of structural poverty as condemned by the Pope, and how Pope Francis condemned global inequality. The discussion centered mainly on the personal charisma of the Pope. Ironically, they even talked about the Pope coming from a poor country, Argentina. There was also a mention of Pope Francis as the “Pope of the poor,” but the significance of this for the Church and for a country with millions who are poor was missed. The celebrityized spectacle of Pope Francis overshadowed the prophetic message of the “Pope of the poor.” He was merely the “people’s Pope” with a charismatic smile.

CONCLUSION

Can the people distinguish between the “real” Pope from the “spectacle” of the Pope presented in the media? Meyers, citing Dyers, argues that there is no “right” image of the celebrity because all aspects of his/her image are produced and constructed. The constructed nature of the celebrity sign allows the audience to derive pleasure from the ability to construct and reconstruct the star image from a variety of texts in complex and often contradictory ways (892).

Rather than debating this question, this paper has shown that the global celebrity status of Pope Francis is a product of the complex interaction between the personal “charisma” of the Pope, the historical situatedness of his audience and consumers, and the massive work of the cultural intermediaries that created the celebrity culture around the Pope’s popularity. The Pope has an advantage over other stars because his position itself carries a powerful status. Yet Pope Francis provides a value-added meaning to this status by his personal charisma: humility, simplicity, unpredictability, open-mindedness, and seriousness to reform the Catholic Church. But his charisma could have not been known if not for the massive media coverage, embellished or not, that immensely magnified the personal charisma of the Pope. Consequently, this mediatization of the Pope’s charisma suited an audience that was expecting to encounter a religious leader who, while being distant, was actually close to the personal lives of the people.

Yet it goes without saying that the celebrity status of Pope Francis, unlike other celebrityized personalities, is fraught with contradictions. On the one hand, the Pope stands for values that run counter to the prevailing ideological value-system of capitalism. On the other hand, the celebrity culture that created the “Francis effect” pulls the Pope toward the direction of fetishizing the Pope as spectacle. Within this celebrity culture, the celebrity status of the Pope is reduced to exchangeable and

consumable status amongst other celebrities in the celebrity market like Britney Spears, Justin Bieber, or Katy Perry.

Celebrities, like Pope Francis, are brands, and like every valuable brand they are not manufactured overnight. They need a large and dedicated team that invests in and is determined to develop, protect and polish them constantly. The Pope, of course, did not openly criticize the media coverage. The Pope as a celebrity did not rely on mass media to promote his message. The Pope and his entourage simply used the media to get across the religious message of the Pope. Did the media's celebrification of Pope Francis's visit derail and mishandle his original religious message? Yes, to a great extent. The Pope as a vicar of the church was controversial precisely because he showed his compassion for the poor. Ironically, the CBCP even proclaimed 2015 as the "Year of the Poor." Yet the way dominant media portrayed the Pope was far from highlighting his message and what he really stood for.

So what is presented in the media is a distraction from the real political and economic issues that Pope Francis stands for. Paul Taylor rightly points out, "[b]oth celebrity culture and the closely related personality-based politics, share the exposure of people's private lives as a distraction from more substantive structural issues—political, social and economic questions— emotional affect replaces political effect" (154). While it is true that media coverage included direct political discussion and mention of Pope Francis's radical political message, nevertheless, it was muted by shallow discussion of the Pope's critique of economic inequalities and his passion for solidarity with the poor. The dominant media did not even give sufficient reportage to the progressive groups who wanted the Pope to see the real economic and political situation of the nation.

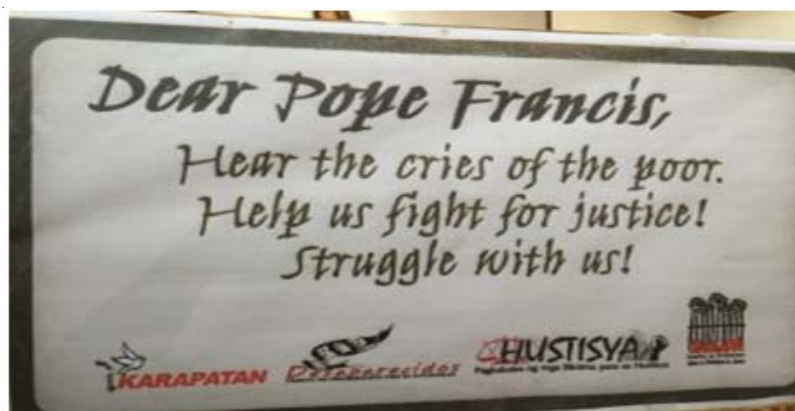


Figure 6. A placard of the progressive groups during papal visit.

Source: <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/tag/karapatan> (accessed June 5, 2015).

When the Pope left the country, followed by the unwavering ecstatic crowd, the faith of the 78 million Filipino Catholics, 37 percent of whom claim they are regular church-goers and 29 percent claim they are religious, were rekindled and fired up.⁶⁸ In the SWS survey, except for the Iglesia ni Kristo, all other non-Catholic religions had a high trust rating for Pope Francis. Almost nine out of ten Filipinos— or 87 percent— trusted the Pope, more than two months after his visit to the Philippines.⁶⁹ But the real encounter with Pope Francis really began on January 19, when his official plane flew him back to the Vatican (Lanuza). Did the people remember the Pope more as a celebrity or as a religious-political leader who rejected the theory of trickle-down effect of the neoliberal economic theory? Did Filipino Catholics really understand what the Pope said about learning “how to weep” during his mass at the University of Santo Tomas (UST)? Did the people realize that weeping is about solidarity with the poor and powerless of society and not just pure sentimentalism? Did the leaders of our nation who attended the “media events” of the Pope grasp that the Pope advocated social justice beyond mere charity? Sadly, the celebritization of Pope Francis drowned his prophetic message. The spectacle of Pope Francis became the message itself.

Fortuitously, celebrities are not completely copyrighted by the culture industry. Celebrities are not only created by the celebrity culture alone. They can also be appropriated and redefined by the people themselves, albeit as consumers they are also product of celebrity culture. The power of celebrities, from the ancient to the modern age, lies in their capacity to unify people in a society with fragmented beliefs and values (Garland, Choi and Rifon). The spectacles they spawn can be opportunities for critical consumer education. It must be remembered, however, that the media, and the culture industry they give birth to, have no complete monopoly in defining the meaning of a celebrity. As pointed out earlier, the audience have the power and ability to construct and reconstruct the star image from a variety of texts in complex and often contradictory ways. So just as Jesus Christ, the first celebritized religious leader, is turned into a Hollywood superstar while also being the icon of socialist revolution in the sixties, so the meanings and representation spawned by the celebritization of Pope Francis also provide ample opportunities to explore how these culturally-generated and commercialized images and meanings can be put effectively in the service of social transformation.

ENDNOTES

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- ² Pope Francis to spread message through first album 'Wake Up' (<http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/543409/news/world/pope-francis-to-spread-message-through-first-album-wake-up#sthash.QPRyIldh.dpuf>, retrieved 3 February 2016).
- ³ <http://www.today.com/video/why-pope-francis-is-the-rock-star-pontiff-530000451748> (retrieved February 2, 2016). (<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/24/pope-francis-new-york-st-patricks-mass>, retrieved 2 February 2016)
- ⁴ (<http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/entertainment/2016/02/02/pope-francis-already-rock-star-will-make-his-hollywood-debut/>, retrieved 2 February 2016).
- ⁵ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/the-pope/11151684/We-had-no-idea-Pope-Francis-would-be-such-a-rock-star-say-cardinals.html> (accessed 4 June 2015).
- ⁶ <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/04/how-to-sell-pope-francis/361012/> (accessed 4 June 2015).
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- ¹² <http://www.marketingmagazine.co.uk/article/1176002/new-pope-presents-rebranding-opportunity-catholic-church> (accessed 5 June 2015).
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- ¹⁴ <http://poy.time.com/contributor/howard-chua-eoan-and-elizabeth-dias/> (accessed 5 June 2015).

- ¹⁵ (<http://world.time.com/2013/11/11/francis-effect-boosts-attendance-at-italian-churches/>; http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/29/pope-francis-effect-data_n_6941824.html (accessed June 5, 2015); http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sebastien-maillard/a-day-in-the-life-of-pope-francis_b_5843976.html (accessed June 5, 2015); http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/pope-francis-keeping-it-real-simple/2013/04/05/c73d206a-9d35-11e2-9a79-eb5280c81c63_story.html (accessed 5 June 2015).
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- ³¹ <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/popefrancis/story/405185/pope-francis-t-shirts-thriving-on-papal-visit> (accessed 4 June 2015).
- ³² <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/401331/lifestyle/where-to-get-papal-visit-souvenir-items#sthash.cksw6B7i.dpuf> (retrieved 2 February 2016). GMA 7 official website for the papal visit even had the following banner: "Where to get papal visit souvenir items
- <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/401331/lifestyle/where-to-get-papal-visit-souvenir-items> (retrieved 3 February 2016). Souvenirs were also available on-line shopping such as OLX and AyoDito.ph also have a wide range of items that feature papal visit designs.
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