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Counter-Discourses in Political Economy in/through Media Literacy Education

ABSTRACT

For this critical inquiry, the overarching goal is framed along the pedagogical imperative of surfacing the counterpoints and countercurrents in the rendering and representation of development discourses in the textbook task section of media and information literacy instructional materials. In making perceptive sense of this type of didactic media, the researcher worked on the fundamental assumption that textbook tasks "provide the terrain where meaning is shaped" (Hall, 1973, as cited in Griffin, 1991, p. 312) and, more compellingly, where the discursive intentions of the text producers (i.e., textbook authors) are expressed, enacted, and even questioned. Along this line, the textbook task section serves as a critical and potentially a transformative component of the ideological and discursive landscape. Embodied in the authors' social mediation in the textbook tasks are converging and diverging discourses in apprehending the word (i.e., text) and the social world (i.e., context). By employing critical discourse analysis that interrogated the textual, processual and contextual dimensions, this study specifically sought to unravel and examine the counter-discourses about the material/nonmaterial realities of development/underdevelopment in various but interconnected realms of mainstream economy, politics, media, communication, and culture. Based on this research, among the alternative discourses that emerged from the thematic analysis are those that concern and revolve around (1) political values and ideologies, (2) ethical choices and practices, (3) development challenges and issues, and (4) strategic approaches and interventions which altogether complementarily contribute to the advancement of media freedom, pedagogical reform, and development justice.

KEY WORDS

Counter-Discourses. Critical Media Literacy. Critical Discourse Analysis. Media Literacy Education. Political Economy. Pedagogical Reform. Textbook Industry.

1 Introduction

In media and information literacy, student tasks and assessments are crucial in the process of academic training (i.e., functional literacy) as well as social justice education (i.e., critico-ideological literacy). Students learn and acquire knowledge, skills, and values from "what a task leads them to do" (Doyle, 1983, as cited in Bakken & Andersson-Bakken, 2021, p. 729). In the teaching-learning process, learners imbibe the socio-academic culture into which they are inducted and, essentially, this discursive experience encompasses the instructional materials that they utilize and the corresponding tasks that they carry out. Within this context, textbooks and the tasks contained therein must be perceived as value-laden discursive instruments. As such, textbook tasks cannot be conceived to be divorced from the politico-ideological and socio-educational situatedness of their discursive conception as well as potential discursive transformation. However, mainstream curriculum developers and implementers tend to underestimate the potential of textbook tasks in engendering critical pedagogy and alternative media education. As such, this paper argues about the need to concretize this counter-discursive potential of textbook tasks and the imperative to institutionalize and sustain this transformative, liberating, and enabling social practice. For instance, in the Norwegian natural science textbooks examined by Andersson-Bakken et al. (2020), it was revealed that the instantiation of socio-scientific issues in selected chapters of natural science textbooks contributed to the higher-order thinking skills of the learners, underscoring how a consciously designed textbook task can bring about a comparatively better pedagogical outcome.

As a learning device, the textbook task also offers the students the opportunity to (1) apply knowledge, (2) create new knowledge, and (3) even interrogate prevailing knowledge systems. This, however, depends mainly on how the academic authors discursively and alternatively ask questions, present issues, and require interventions to actual or hypothetical politico-economic challenges. Based on the foregoing assumptions, this research question was formulated: Consistent with critical media education, what inter-animating counter-discourses about media, education, and development are espoused and expounded by the academic authors in Media and Information Literacy textbook tasks?

Along this line, the central objective of this critical inquiry seeks to (2) foreground the counter-discourses in media and society that were embodied and interwoven in the textbook tasks and, correspondingly, (2) develop thematic and analytical categories based on these emerging counterpoints and countercurrents. Within the parameter of this qualitative research, counter-discourses are defined as *discursive countercurrents* about the political economy of media in relation to education and the broader development ecology that must coherently inform and influence the conceptualization and formulation of the substantive dimension of textbook tasks, and that must alternatively guide the students in representing and making sense of social realities.

There has been an increasing interest in studying textbooks as political and communication artifacts (Limage, 2005; Hickman & Porfilio, 2012; Fuchs & Bock, 2018); however, only very limited attention is being accorded to the systematic analysis of textbook tasks, and none thus far utilizing critical discourse analysis. Researches employing critical discourse analysis within the last decade or so cover English teaching (Alford, 2015), online media discourse on education-related problems in the pandemic context (Pendri et al., 2024), English language composition (Orr, 2007), citizenship education (Gonsalvez, 2013), media education (Molek-Kozakowska, 2010), Saudi English language blogs (Al Maghlouth, 2017), presidential campaign speeches (Post, 2009), African empowerment through speeches (Igbashangev, 2024), newspaper commentaries on terrorism (Wang, 2006), newspaper articles declaring the outbreak of war in Ukraine (Alyahya, 2023), melodramatic films (Santiago, 2007), social construction of disability identities (Sudajit-apa, 2017), place-based identities (Wiehe, 2013), and toy advertisements (Santikul, 2024), among others.

The textbook task as *paratext* is seldom given proper notice in the analysis and evaluation of academic materials despite its crucial role in enhancing and enriching the learning experience, as well as in contributing to the deepening and sharpening of the students' community consciousness, democratic commitment, and social justice orientation. Within this context, paratext is defined as a "separate textual element that surrounds the main text", serving as a "zone not only of transition but also of transaction" (Genette, 1997, p. 2).

This qualitative study, therefore, sought to fill a research gap in "focus" and in "analysis" by attempting to surface and examine the counter-discourses that are encoded and embedded in Media and Information Literacy textbook tasks as socio-instructional devices. By analyzing the counter-discourses, this study was able to reveal and explicate the meanings behind the textual instantiations and articulations as expressed in the textbook tasks by the authors as media creators.

1.1 Institutional and Discursive Controls

As a discursive practice in the education industry, textbook task design needs to be understood within the context of how "institutional controls are exerted" (Bonvillain, 2008, p. 385). Constituting the substantive and structural influences in this set of institutional mechanisms are the existing K to12 (Kinder to Grade 12) Senior High School (SHS) curriculum and the Media and Information Literacy (MIL) curriculum guide, as well as the prevailing academic practices and formatting standards in textbook writing and textbook task design. Conceivably, these social controls would encompass not only the coded/overt dimensions (e.g., alignment with the prescribed curriculum) but also the uncoded/covert social norms (e.g., ideological considerations).

Within this context, cultural theorist Angela McRobbie (2005) refers to *ideological work* as "requiring the gathering and selecting of items for inclusion and organizing while also implementing certain technical and professional code of practice" (p. 11). While this definition is situated within the confines of television programming, it however can also be applied to textbook as a form of didactic media. As such, textbook task writing can likewise be apprehended as ideological (and counter-ideological) work that involves the crucial decisions of what topics (and subtopics) are to be included or excluded, what issues (and sub-issues) needed priority and focus, and what discursive approaches (and sub-approaches) must be employed and deployed. This set of discursive practices is carried out and governed by certain conventions in textbook task design (e.g., in-house editorial policies, manual of style, table of test specifications, and UNESCO framework, among others) that form part of the "technical and professional code of practice" (McRobbie, 2005, p. 11).

1.2 Discursive Purpose of Questions

Linguist Angeliki Athanasiadou (1991) maintained that "at the outset of a question, contextual and/or pragmatic information is present in the speaker's mind" (p. 107). This, therefore, points to the fact that every question has an underlying intention that reflects the social position, ideological standpoint, and values orientation of its source. She added that question as a "speech act" also reveals the social relationship that is involved in the communicative event. In the case of questions that are contained in any textbook task, the norm that conventionally governs the socio-academic relations between the textbook writers and the student-learners is "authoritative". This norm-based interaction, she pointed out, renders the mode of questioning structured and predictable. Following Athanasiadou (1991), the authors' intention in the specific case of this qualitative inquiry is a crucial determinant of the speech act's formal and didactic

structure. Both the overt and covert meanings of the question, therefore, can be derived from the authors' positionality (i.e., achieved and/or ascribed status) and intentionality (i.e., motivation). Unequivocally, in the typology of modes of questioning that she developed, the questions in the textbook tasks fall under the *examination type*, i.e., assessment of the learners' knowledge, competencies, and values. Within this communication context and given the social relationship involved, textbook task by its very nature not only seeks to instruct but also to persuade, command, and, ultimately, control. This speech context presupposes that the author is in a dominant position and that the learners must only comply and supply the appropriate answer or response. However, this does not have to be always the case because the question in its *critico-political* form and rendering can, in fact, interrogate mainstream discourses as well as instantiate and articulate counter-discourses about media, education, and the broader development ecology. In a study by Dadakhonov (2024), he outlined a comprehensive set of key mechanisms where media and information literacy can be strategically optimized (and in the context of this study also critically interrogated) in the broader system of education. Conceivably, the following can be selectively integrated and applied in conceptualizing an alternative textbook task design: curriculum integration, teacher training, digital infrastructure, international collaboration, public awareness, media literacy projects, assessment and evaluation, research and data collection, cross-disciplinary approach, civic engagement, local content creation, partnership with tech companies, feedback mechanisms, policy development, inclusivity, measuring impact, and long-term commitment.

2 Framework and Methodology

Educator and anti-oppression advocate Connie North (2009), in her book *Teaching for Social Justice? Voices from the Front Lines* explored how "functional, critical, relational, democratic, and visionary literacies" (p. 5) can be strategically employed to teach and instill social justice praxes among the students. For North (2009), these 'multiple literacies' are requisite competencies essential "to excel at schooling and to effect positive change at the local and more global levels" (p. 5). Each competency brings about immense possibilities and potentialities, i.e., (1) gain "access to academic opportunities" (functional), (2) "confront unjust elements in the status quo" (critical), (3) "meet human beings' fundamental need to be cared for" (relational), (4) "promote mutual understanding and informed decision-making on issues impacting the common good" (democratic), and (5) "engender and sustain students' and teachers' commitment to engage the world as agents of change" (visionary) (North, 2009, pp. 5-7; Gutstein, 2002, as cited in North, 2009, pp. 5-7; Stoval, 2006, as cited in North, 2009, pp. 5-7). The complementary roles of these multiple literacies become even more impactful when applied and activated "in" and "through" media education. Accordingly, instructional materials in media and information literacy education must not only accomplish the purpose of improving the aptitude level of learners (i.e., functional literacy) but, more crucially, serve as empowering platforms and instruments to engender ethics of care (i.e., relational literacy), consciousness-raising (i.e., critical literacy), inclusive decision-making (i.e., democratic literacy), and thoroughgoing change (i.e., visionary literacy).

Deplorably, progressive communication researchers contend that mainstream media scholarship tends to raise questions that are "not really the important ones when it comes to understanding the role of mass media in society" (Turow, 2011, p. 137). This lamentable pattern foregoes the potential of communication and media inquiry in contributing to both areas of critical media scholarship and social justice communication. Development Communication scholar Higino Ables (2003) had a similar observation in many journal publications where "answers to questions have been found wanting" (p. 135), arguing further that cultural studies and critical media theories must be taken more seriously. In view of these postulations,

alternative communication research thus becomes even more compelling and transforming if situated within the interconnected domains of media, education, politics, ethics, and development. As such, the central role of the critical tradition in communication and media studies cannot be overemphasized in view of its all-embracing objectives of fostering "(1) reflexivity, (2) a capacity for fantasy, and (3) a new basis for praxis in an increasingly alienated world" (Bronner, 1994, p. 3). Correspondingly, these interanimating goals are critical in envisioning and bringing about a collectively determined future that is achievable, inclusive, and life-affirming.

2.1 Critical Theory: Making Sense of the In-betweens and Unseen Connections

This qualitative research falls under the critical tradition or the discourse of suspicion (Mumby, 1997). As a counter-paradigm, the critical theory exposes and opposes the deeply rooted structures of domination based on various social identities such as class, ethnicity, gender, age, ability, faith, heritage, geographical location, and ideology that may appear in overt and covert ways in social relationships and interactions.

In particular, this qualitative study adopts the three mutually reinforcing attributes of the critical theory forwarded by Max Horkheimer (1972), i.e., being explanatory (exposition), normative (opposition), and practical (proposition), aimed at (1) revealing contradictions among the social forces in media, education, and the broader development context, (2) providing a normative lens to examine and challenge the prevailing structures of social inequality and oppression, and (3) creating an alternative and liberating social order that will replace the old arrangement. Within the context of this social inquiry, this set of critical attributes can then be used as frameworks in conceptualizing and integrating counter-discourses in textbook tasks.

As cultural apparatus, hegemonic textbooks breed ideological colonization by immortalizing mainstream perspectives and functioning practically as an unchallenged "thought police" that bring about far-reaching consequences, not only to functional literacy but also to the political education of the community of learners. From the critical perspective, communication artifacts and knowledge products such as orthodox textbooks and the set of tasks contained therein function as "social texts", which can then be subjected to discursive inquiry, contestation, and, more crucially, transformation.

Discourses provide the social, communicational, and linguistic bases in critically apprehending and making sense of the "in-between areas of how overarching and long-lasting ideologies become part of daily practices" (Branston & Stafford, 2010, p. 172). The context-dependent, communicative, and purposive nature of discourses also allowed the researcher to reveal the ideologies that underpin the patterns of messages and meanings across the texts under review, thus enabling them to surface and examine the "transparent" as well as the "opaque" structural connections between the discursive orientations, pedagogical values, and task designs (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). In the incisive exposition of Čiderová and Belvončíková (2024), they foregrounded how the inter-animating skills of 'knowing where', 'knowing whether', 'knowing why', and 'knowing better' all contribute to media and information literacy and, as such, can therefore help reveal both the information source and the learners' respective positionalities and standpoints.

The corpus of texts covered by this critical qualitative inquiry is the set of commercially available Media and Information Literacy textbooks that are compliant with the existing Philippine K-12 (Kinder to Grade 12) Senior High School curriculum. This choice of instructional materials for critical discourse analysis allowed the researcher to cover a diverse but comparable textbook selection from various local academic publishing firms and those which are produced by Filipino authors (i.e., privately commissioned educators and writers from a range of disciplines

and subfields). As a constitutive element of the cultural and creative industry, the decision to focus on the commercially available instructional materials afforded this research to situate and explore the textbook tasks contained therein within the context of the prevailing market-oriented socio-economic order.

The instructional materials covered by this discursive inquiry include *From Cave to Cloud: Media and Information Literacy for Today* (Campos, 2016); *Media and Information Literacy* (Cantor, 2019); *Media and Information Literacy* (Liquigan, 2016); *Media and Information Literacy (Enhancing Education through Effective Communication)* (Magpile, 2016); *Media and Information Literacy: Being a B.E.S.T. Digital Citizen for Senior High School* (Yuvienco, 2017); and *Media and Information Literacy* (Zarate, 2016).

2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis: Revealing the 'Social Story behind the Story'

In conducting critical discourse analysis, it is crucial to begin the task by understanding that the term 'critical' emerged from the Greek word *krinein* which means to "separate", "discern", "judge" or "choose", strongly implying the need to pursue a "conscious, deliberate inquiry" and to take "a skeptical state of mind" (Barnet & Bedau, 2011, p. 3). To be critical, therefore, demands informed decision-making and active position-taking, especially on complex and contentious development and policy issues.

Considering its unmistakably dialectical stance, critical discourse analysis directs the focus of this research to the contradictions between the "dominant and subordinate discourses" as well as the various "notions of resistance and appropriation of discourse" that are at play (Williamson et al., 2018). Such notions of dominance and resistance are conceived to glaringly manifest in the discourses and counter-discourses in textbook tasks. The elucidation that follows best exemplifies the politico-ethical roles (i.e., reflective, investigative, normative, prescriptive, and transformative) that this discursive-analytic framework fosters, represents, and can potentially enact, to wit:

> In doing so, critical discourse analysis not only captures something important about the social world, but also play a key ethical and political role in showing how social phenomena are discursively constituted: it demonstrates how things come to be as they are, that they could be different, and thereby that they can be changed. (Hammersley, 2003, as cited in Williamson et al., 2018, p. 470)

Critical media discourse analysis which was adopted for this social inquiry rests on the fundamental premise that *language use* is a (1) culturally influenced, (2) historically determined, and, most certainly, (3) a politically contested social practice. Drawing on Stuart Hall's (1973) critical exposition, the power structure that governs the social relationships between groups when encoding and decoding texts may appear and manifest as reinforced (i.e., hegemonic), negotiated (i.e., both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic) or interrogated (i.e., counter-hegemonic), depending principally on how these texts were ideologically positioned and deployed. As such, in this critical research, textbook tasks were explored and evaluated as "socially constructed and socially contested cultural and material artifacts" (Zagumny & Richey, 2012, p. 195) that mediate the idea about the social world and the patterns of social relationships that characterize and constitute it.

3 Results

Based on the critico-analytic examination of Media and Information Literacy textbook tasks, the following counter-discourses emerged as embodiments and expressions of how the academic authors mediate to the learners the contemporary *development challenges* and the *discursive alternatives* of making critical sense of their structural roots, complex dimensions, and social implications.

3.1 Counter-discourse on Values

From the critical standpoint, media literacy education is essentially *value-laden*. Apprehending it in this light will allow the students to realize how their system of valuation shapes the media products they create (and co-create) as well as consume (and co-consume). It will also enable them to determine whether media contents conform with or deviate from their collective interests and aspirations. Likewise, it will guide them in critically identifying and analyzing what value systems and knowledge claims are privileged (or muted) in their media creation, contribution, circulation, and consumption.

In the following questions below, the textbook authors sought to surface the values and counter-values that are embodied in the advertisements and newscasts in terms of representation, framing, and the cultural logic behind the chronology:

- "Should global news be on ground level showing footages of death and destruction? What values are gained by the producer/consumer of graphic news that show death and destruction?" (Campos, 2016, p. 76).
- "After close examination and analysis, convey now the values implicitly underpinning the chronology of today's news telecast" (Zarate, 2016, p. 93).

Consistent with the discourse of suspicion (Mumby, 1997), the questions must ultimately reveal the social groups to whom media and technology are most beneficial or detrimental. Such inquiry can only be decidedly answered when the powerful social forces controlling media resources and technologies are identified, unmasked, and interrogated. The questions that follow underscore the fact that media resources and technologies are, in fact, *not* neutral devices and hence they serve a particular class interest and sectoral agenda:

- "Who benefited the most when the new invention became a social necessity? Which authority, institution or investment was magnified when the new invention became necessary?" (Campos, 2016, p. 33).
- "Who was on the losing end when it became a social necessity? Which authority, institution or investment was threatened when the new invention became necessary?" (Campos, 2016, p. 33).

As an issue of social justice, the crowding out phenomenon in news reporting that Campos (2016) foregrounded by instantiating the case of a controversial celebrity vis-à-vis the compelling issues of national significance will allow the students to reflect deeply if the set of news and information that they receive from mainstream media is indeed reflective and representative of the social and sectoral concerns in the Philippines in terms of impact, relevance, and criticality. Citing the issue of "imbalanced news", Campos (2016, p. 72) also expressed his deep concern about how media renders its reportage as too mainstreamed (and hence uncritical and undiscerning) and how it seeks to lamentably prioritize sensationalized news stories instead. Questions pertaining to this lopsided reporting allow the students, as critical media consumers, to understand that the news which end up being aired and disseminated are, in fact, products of a complex process of vetting and power play. It also affords them the opportunity to reflect

about the negative implications of the public developing greater interest in issues involving celebrities than in matters of more serious social and sectoral concerns.

3.2 Counter-discourse on Ideology

Social scientist Josefina Tayag (1995) defined ideology in two senses, i.e., minimal and maximal. Minimally speaking, Tayag referred to ideology as the "belief system or set of values and goals used to guide people's actions, often individually or personally held" (Tayag, 1995, p. 8). On the other hand, she characterized ideology in the maximal sense as "a set of shared fundamental values and beliefs, a theory of man and society all aimed at defining the vision of an alternative future together with a concomitant action component" (Tayag, 1995, p. 8). Ideology, in the maximal sense, therefore, involves the conscious, active, and collective commitment in achieving the desired alternative social condition and arrangement. In the discursive practice of formulating textbook tasks, the role of ideology both in the minimal and maximal sense is observed to be far-reaching and consequential. In the minimal sense, ideology played an important role in shaping the development of the textbook tasks by the individual author, especially if apprehended based on how ideology manifested in the instructional material's substantive (i.e., content/theme) and structural (i.e., format/style) dimensions. In the maximal sense, on the other hand, ideology can be potentially concretized and enacted when a critical group of textbook authors from a particular discourse community (or sub-community) mobilizes their ranks and develops a version of counter-textbook (or counter-curriculum) that will challenge the conventional template and archetype. Likewise, ideology in its maximal sense can be applied when the textbook tasks are carried out by the learners and their interlocutors and collaborators from the community in a manner that involves their shared vision and action (Tayag, 1995). Along this line, ideology in the maximal sense is strongly associated with the stage-by-stage process of accomplishing *critical praxis*, i.e., "self-reflection, reflective action, and collective reflective action" (McLaren & Crawford, 2010, pp. 615-616).

While the following questions pertaining to ideology are very relevant in interrogating popular culture, xenocentrism, and 'film as text', respectively, they are however purely self-reflective and hence do not involve collective action, thereby qualifying only as ideological in the minimal sense based on Tayag's conceptual framing. Nonetheless, it must also be recognized that invoking ideological analysis as part of media text analysis is already a crucial first step towards critical praxis given the prevailing depoliticized pedagogical culture in basic education.

- "How do the new elements purvey a different kind of ideology from other soap operas?" (Zarate, 2015, p. 105).
- "How can indigenous knowledge or media help balance the influx of foreign ideas and ideologies?" (Liquigan, 2016, p. 113).
- "How does a film become an ideological tool?" (Liquigan, 2016, p. 185).

3.3 Counter-discourse on Choice and Change

In the business context (and within the parameter of the business model), change is commonly conceived and applied in its incremental degree and not in the revolutionary or radical sense. In his reflection questions, Campos (2016) insinuated this critical insight and pointed out that businesses thrive in introducing "little innovations" and rely instead on the illusion of choice guilefully crafted and perpetuated by commercial marketers and advertisers. This explains why the pattern of rendering tends to orient more towards conservatism and the reactionary tradition. Questions of this nature will allow the learners to interrogate the orthodox notions of choice and change as observed in the corporate realm. From the critical vantage

point, this set of perceptive questions is also applicable when extended and articulated within the context of dysfunctional Philippine political and electoral system given its similar reactionary attribute and concomitant conception of the 'myth of choice'.

- "How is the success of a business dependent on the little innovations over time rather than on one-time big inventions?" (Campos, 2016, p. 34).
- "If two rival companies introduce little innovations that have practically the same function on the technology, what do you think would be the determiners for success of one company over the other?" (Campos, 2016, p. 34).

In his prelude, Campos (2016) foregrounded the prevailing prohibitive cost of "airtime and column space" in mainstream media and, in relation to this, he then asked if individuals and institutions "will tend to invest in messages that will be very different from dominant messages or more of the same" (p. 66). To problematize this pattern of cultural homogenization, Campos (2016) also inquired if the "risk of cost and investment predispose competing media companies to capitalize on difference or samenesss" (p. 66). This task lets the students critically ponder whether the risks involved in the act of investing leads to more heterogeneity or homogeneity of products and services. This then points to the illusion of choice that the willing but unsuspecting media consumers have long been exposed and accustomed to. His follow-up reflection question asking the learners about the implications of smaller business entities failing to afford the skyrocketing cost of advertisements underscores the grossly inequitable character of the commercial sector (i.e., cut-throat competition). The illusion of choice in the marketplace continues to obscure and dull the public consciousness and, accordingly, this marketing strategy is reinforced through the methodical use and placement of mind-conditioning commercial advertisements. Probing questions are, therefore, helpful in making learners understand the complex network and unholy alliance of business forces (i.e., commercial enterprises, media organizations, and marketing firms) that dominate the economy, influence the government, and manipulate the consuming public.

- "Can startup companies, perhaps with better products or services, compete with those that can buy prime airtime?" (Campos, 2016).

3.4 Counter-discourse on Business Model and Practice

The critical paradigm looks deeply into the structural dimensions of power, and when applied in media studies the emphasis centres on how the monopoly of media ownership impinges on media freedom and responsibility. Through the adoption of critical political economy, the learners will be able to grasp how the dialectical interplay of the substructure (i.e., economic) and the superstructure (i.e., political, cultural, legal, philosophical, and moral) influences media as a constitutive social institution. In the textbook tasks instantiated by the academic authors, the following issues pertaining to the political economy of media were foregrounded for critical exploration and analysis: "media monopoly" (Liquigan, 2016; Campos, 2016), "duopoly" (Campos, 2016), "network and ratings war" (Zarate, 2016), "conglomerates and interlocking directorates" (Zarate, 2016), "bureaucrat capitalism" (Zarate, 2016; Campos, 2016), "media as business" (Zarate, 2016; Campos, 2016), and "corporate sponsorships" (Campos, 2016).

To specifically illustrate how the market model operates, Zarate (2016) requires the learners to account the ratio of print advertisement space in relation to that of the news content in published newspapers. Through the exercises featured below, the students will be trained to (1) quantify the media organization's corporate revenue through commercial advertisements and (2) qualify the strength of its economic, business, and political influence. Through this set of well-thought-out questions, students will realize how ordinary folks are rendered voiceless

and invisible in the entire conversation (i.e., subalternity), making them passive recipients of media contents:

- "Try to count how many print advertisements are in the newspaper. Approximate the amount of space they occupy, probably using square inches. Express the ratio of the space occupied by news and other feature articles to the amount of space given to the print advertisements" (Zarate, 2016, pp. 111-112).
- "How much would you estimate do these networks earn on a given night corresponding to a hypothetical number of advertising placements? How about on a given week, month, or year?" (Campos, 2016, p. 67).

A useful approach in exposing the interlocking directorates of commercial media and non-media companies is the one below prescribed by Zarate (2016), that requires the students to do online research about a media organization and to produce an *ownership map* in identifying the wide range of products and services in the market where it has business interests and involvement. Through the ownership map (or sociogram), the learners will be able to identify the extent of business ownership and control (i.e., media and non-media holdings) and its negative implications for media independence and accountability. In the company profile that the students also need to research and write about, they are required to incorporate and apply the following concepts in political economy, namely "globalization, economies of scale, horizontal and vertical integration, and synergy", in their analysis and evaluation. The application of these key constructs in the critical apprehension of how the media companies operate and behave will reveal the range of business strategies (i.e., acquisition, merger, cut-throat competition) that they employ to (1) reduce cost, (2) strengthen their market position, (3) overwhelm the competition, and (4) broaden the consumer base – most of which have serious repercussions for smaller organizations, unsuspecting customers, underpaid workers, vulnerable communities, and fragile ecologies.

> Create an ownership map – list the companies and products owned by these two corporations. Write a company profile of these companies, drawing into your writeup the concepts we have discussed – globalization, economies of scale, horizontal and vertical integration, and synergy. (Zarate, 2016, p. 120)

In consonance with the discourse of suspicion (Mumby, 1997), Campos (2016) also required the students to examine and compare two local media giants (i.e., duopoly) and determine the full extent of their ownership and control in terms of existing media types. The students were also asked to evaluate if these media outfits produce consistent and mutually reinforcing messages that are promotive of their economic and non-economic interests. Typical also of critical discourse analysis-related inquiries, Campos asked the students to compare the two media entities based on their news items' "language, treatment, emphases, and sequence" as well as the practice of inclusion and omission in their media coverage. In his attempt to unmask the political economy of media business, the students were also asked if the media owners have established "political connections" with the power wielders in the government.

- "Find out if the owners of the leading media networks have political connections like relatives, allies, and patrons" (Campos, 2016, p. 69).

Media conglomerates dominate the local socio-cultural landscape through their interlocking control over many media formats. Notice how a particular set of campaigns and messages is carried across and sustained throughout all the media platforms whether legacy or new media. Aside from a repertoire of business schemes, private interest groups (whether media or non-media in nature) are also known to bank on their vast social and political networks to protect their vested economic agenda.

Through his critical textbook tasks, Campos (2016) also seeks to problematize gameshows by asking the students about the sources of prize and the motivation of the corporate advertisers and sponsors behind what others uncritically believe as an act of benevolence and goodwill. This will also allow the learners to perceptively apprehend the complex constructs, processes, and strategies involved in producing a gameshow such as 'hyperreality', captive viewership, cause-related marketing, and corporate communication, among others.

- "Where do the prizes of television contestants and televiewers come from? Is it accurate to assume that the star is the one who generously gives away these prizes? Or do these prizes come from advertisers and sponsors?" (Campos, 2016, p. 62).

Rightly so, there is also an insinuation in his question about the tendency of these game shows to promote poverty pornography. Campos then asked the students "why must be the recipients of the prizes be portrayed as needy and poor" and he queried further if there is "anything wrong with this typical portrayal". This contentious entertainment culture has been practiced and normalized for so long in the media and leisure industry, thereby putting into question the authenticity of goodwill which the gameshows and their corporate sponsors purport to project and establish.

In another set of reflective questions, Campos (2016) politicized the creation of love teams by interrogating the "huge amount of time, energy, and financial resources" that are poured in not only by the entertainment companies but also by the broad fan base. To deepen the level of analysis and insinuate how the poor and middle-class fans shell out funds from their already meagre income, Campos asked the students if "all supporters…have equal means to spend valuable resources" (p. 62). This perceptive question reveals that the social construction and financial viability of love teams involve the economic and emotional labour as well as temporal investment of the fan base, underscoring how valuable resources, especially monetary, unilaterally flow from the mesmerized fans to the television/movie stars, talent agencies, and media companies.

Do love teams become more popular when more time, energy, and financial resources are invested in their construction? How much time, energy, and financial resources are amassed from the fans by those who construct successful love teams? Do all supporters of successful love teams have equal means to spend valuable time, energy, and financial resources as fans? (Campos, 2016, p. 64)

A discussion about the economic and financial dimension of media production and consumption is never complete without covering the price as a crucial element. Price serves as an economic determinant of access to media products and services in the market. As such, the strategy to inquire about the price of the media product is notable. A case in point was when Cantor (2019) asked learners to comment on the price of media products (i.e., books, magazines, movies) – the only instance it was inquired about across all textbook titles. The question also serves as an opportunity to make students reflect further about the implication of the price on their media preference, use, and lifestyle, especially if it becomes too prohibitive for ordinary consumers.

By foregrounding the profit motive and exposing the elite conspiracy in the media business, critical political economy enables students to be cognizant of (1) how the people (social) and the planet (ecological) are conceived as peripheral and secondary when pitted against profit or the financial bottom line (economic) and (2) how the public resources are methodically employed for private gain and self-aggrandizement.

In one of her remarkable critical textbook tasks, Zarate (2016) asked the learners to analyze television programs from a government-owned station by citing the "limitations – and even dangers – that it can potentially pose to public interest" (p. 123). In exposing the students to the progressive application and embodiment of the public sphere model, Zarate (2016) proposed

evaluating media organizations based on how they consistently uphold (or hinder) public values and fulfill (or frustrate) the people's development agenda.

- "Tune in to at least NBN program featuring government events. Using the programs format and content of this government owned and controlled channel as specimen, cite the limitations – and even dangers – that it can potentially pose to public interest" (Zarate, 2016, p. 123).

Another noteworthy question posed by Zarate (2016) that promotes critical information literacy among the learners is asking them about the implications of public sector information being "very general and details are sparse" in relation to the need to observe "transparency in government transaction." This inquiry raises the same suspicion and skepticism reflected in the previous task pertaining to the government's commitment (or lack thereof) in practicing transparency, upholding integrity, and protecting the public interest through truthful reporting of information.

- "The report cites that the analysis of documents in data were made complicated and difficult because the information is very general and details are sparse. What do these observations imply on the drive toward transparency of government transactions" (Zarate, 2016, p. 50).

Johnson and McLean (2020) pointed out that critical discourse analysis concerns the investigation of the social and material consequences of discourse. From the Marxist standpoint, these social and material dimensions refer to the society's superstructure and substructure, which constitutively also include their dialectical interaction (i.e., political economy). Politico-economic forces shape discourse and, in turn, discourse also influences the social and economic realities of individuals, institutions, and industries. This socio-material emphasis (i.e., dialectics of economic and non-economic dimensions), therefore, points to the necessity to incorporate the political economy of media not just as a subject of interest but also as a frame of analysis in media and information literacy education.

3.5 Counter-discourse on Poverty and Inequality

By situating social and sectoral issues in the context of poverty and inequality, learners will understand how development and policy challenges such as bureaucratic corruption, civil strife, system-induced disaster, triple burden of disease, and unsustainable migration are inherently linked to the twin scourge of *resource deprivation* and *resource divide*. Towards this end, social and sectorial issues must be apprehended with poverty and inequality as default elements in the social equation and sociological analysis. As such, civil strife needs to be understood to have been caused by poverty and inequality in the same way that it must also be recognized that civil strife can, in turn, exacerbate the existing conditions of poverty and inequality in the society.

As a social justice issue, poverty is observed to be severe and persistent in the Philippines. Hence, it is expected that this social and sectoral concern figures prominently in textbook tasks as a recurring subject of deliberation and debate. Such is how poverty is instantiated and represented in the instructional materials through the following cases and contexts: (1) poverty and rurality, (2) poverty of the peasant class, (3) poverty pornography, (4) poverty and philanthropy, and (5) poverty in relation to lack of family planning. By and large, the questions are commendable in terms of (1) reflecting on the social condition of the rural inhabitants, (2) interrogating the tendency of romanticizing the poor and resorting to poverty pornography, (3) problematizing the 'culture of poverty', and (4) revealing the impact of structural violence on people's well-being and quality of life.:

- "Why must the recipient of the prizes be portrayed as needy and poor? Is there anything wrong with this typical portrayal?" (Campos, 2016, p. 62).
- "Do you agree with the premise of the main informant that poverty is largely due to breeding large families?" (Zarate, 2016, p. 91).

Considering its complexity as a development challenge, the poverty phenomenon needs to be understood within the broader social context through situated learning.

Within this parameter, poverty must be recognized as a structural failure rather than a mere issue of individual shortcoming. To avoid committing poverty pornography, poverty should not be conceived as natural, i.e., merely functioning as a backdrop, and hence politically and ideologically unproblematized. As such, creativity and criticality in media and information literacy need to be wielded in their strong politico-ideological sense if the consummate end-goal is structural and thoroughgoing change (i.e., 'change of conditions and circumstances').

3.6 Counter-discourse on Social Exclusion

In her prelude to one of the textbook tasks on cultural appropriation, Cantor (2019) described the passive stance of the local folks as a mere background element in the featured promotional photographs, pointing out their "blurred or half-cropped" rendering vis-à-vis the foregrounded celebrity models in their aristocratic posture. The articulated relationship of the models (i.e., Filipino mestizo artists Billy Crawford and Coleen Garcia) to the local inhabitants (i.e., Ethiopian masses) is represented as socially disproportionate in many levels and dimensions. The latter were *othered* by virtue of their skin colour, clothing, and class origin. In the subsequent case study by the same author about rendering artists in *brownface*, the contentious issues of ethnic and cultural discrimination remain as the central point of debate. Although not explicitly pointed out, the specific case study featuring the Ethiopian masses and the multidimensionality of their marginalization suggest the intersectionality of social exclusion (Crenshaw, 2017) that they experience and endure (i.e., subordination by virtue of their social class, skin colour, and cultural background,).

  - "With so many comparisons existing in a single frame (i.e., the rich-looking clothes vs. the not-so-affluent local clothing, the skin colour, etc.), what kind of messaging do these types of photos say?" (Cantor, 2019, p. 203).
  - "Do you think that covers their "artistic license" to use brownface, given its historically racist implications? In the first place, why are we not seeing more brown skinned actors on local TV?" (Cantor, 2019, p. 221).

In foregrounding intersectional social exclusion, Yuvienco (2017) cited anti-bias activist Clorama Dorvilias in relation to what constitute as "identity triggers", namely "weight, skin colour, accent, gender, clothing, sexual orientation, disability, body language, ethnicity, attractiveness, and height" (p. 26). To this existing list, the 'name of a person' which is usually associated with one's nationality, faith, or social class could also be added. Drawing from this list of "identity triggers", intersectionality of social exclusion refers to the predicament of being linked to two or more social variables and being discriminated on the bases of the person's association with what are subjectively perceived and believed to be socially undesirable/disadvantageous traits.

In the media text analysis by Campos (2016), for instance, his questions implied how geography is directly associated with poverty and the inefficient system of basic social service delivery (e.g., education, health, electricity) in the locality. This type of situated and empathic learning allows students to reflect on the transportation-related problems commonly identified with poor infrastructure, urban bias, and rural underdevelopment.

  - "The children who cannot afford to ride motorized boats to go to school have to walk on marsh and muddy paths along the riverside. What does this indicate about social services available to the people in the rural areas?" (Campos, 2016, p. 112).
  - "There is no electricity in the community. How does this fact play a quiet but crucial role in the state of literacy of the people in the community?" (Campos, 2016, p. 112).

3.7 Counter-discourse on Intervention and Accountability

By examining the limitations of individual responsibility in relation to the potentials of collective responsibility, students will be able to realize that personal effort (i.e., self-regulation and self-protection) is only a necessary but not a sufficient condition/element in tackling media-related social and sectoral pathologies. Beyond individual efforts, these information and communication disorders require coordinated structural interventions and sustainable solutions (i.e., synergy of critical media pedagogy, government regulation, communication activism, media policy reform, and corporate accountability).

By holding the powers-that-be responsible and accountable, learners will be able to apprehend that social and sectoral problems (e.g., 'information obesity') have deep structural origin which can be linked to the (1) excesses of big businesses, (2) negligence of public regulatory agencies, and (3) cover-ups by publicists – consistent with how critical journalist Michael Pollan (2008) perceived this same unholy alliance operates in the mainstream food-industrial complex.

In problematizing social responsibility, the set of questions below deals with one of the critical issues raised by Mihailidis (2018) about the tendency of "contemporary media literacy initiatives and interventions" to focus merely on "individual responsibility" (p. 156). From this set of textbook tasks, a pattern of increasing level of engagement and accountability can be observed, starting with the individual person then the community and even holding private corporations accountable to the public (Campos, 2016). This line of questioning subscribes to the idea that while individuals must possess personal efficacy to effect self-change, there is an even greater need to elevate the strategy in the collective level of influence and engagement. While behavioural change in the individual level is important, transformation must also manifest in the structural realm to ensure success, scalability, and sustainability. In the particular way the questions below were framed and formulated, the author clearly and deliberately articulated how confronting obesity in both its *nutritional* and *informational* senses also has individual and collective dimensions and repercussions, and that – as a social malaise – it must also be apprehended how and why large businesses are, in fact, guilty of the offense and hence should be answerable to the public (i.e., critical accountability):

- "What is the role and responsibility of an individual when it comes to overcoming (information) obesity?" (Campos, 2016, p. 147).
- "What is the role and responsibility of communities to help people stay clear of (information) obesity?" (Campos, 2016, p. 147).
- "What is the role and responsibility of corporations in regulating or perpetuating an unhealthy or healthy appetite?" (Campos, 2016, p. 147).

4 Discussion

Media and information literacy as a field of social inquiry and situated practice possesses a huge potential in discovering and developing sustainable solutions to multiple structural crises. However, when this subject area is *paradigmatically* and *programmatically* positioned as the ultimate solution for "all media-related social and psychological ills", then it (1) oversimplifies the problems it purports to address, (2) overstates the influence of media on young people, and (3) underestimates the complexity of media education (Buckingham, 2007, as cited in Mihailidis, 2018). This reservation of Buckingham is a legitimate concern because this assumption about media and information literacy as a panacea tends to unfairly pass to MIL educators (i.e., teachers and textbook authors alike) the heavy burden and responsibility of dealing with the broad array of complex development issues. While media and information literacy is indeed crucial in grappling with social and sectoral problems, it must be accompanied and complemented by

(1) politico-ideological education, (2) media policy reform, (3) government regulation, and (4) thoroughgoing structural change. These macro-level interventions and initiatives, therefore, must be strategically employed to create long-lasting and consequential effects in the individual, community, and policy levels. The collectivist stance and structural approach of confronting information pathologies challenge the individualist notion of narrowly looking at complex problems being resolved by mere efforts of "self-protection" or "self-regulation." This, therefore, points to the discursive and pedagogical weaknesses of orthodox textbook tasks that do not interpose collectivist and structuralist perspectives in unpacking intricate social justice issues, thereby failing also in proposing viable, sustainable, and impactful interventions.

Altogether, these mutually reinforcing counter-discourses contribute to the objective of harnessing not just the students' academic competencies but, more compellingly, their more-than-academic ethico-political commitments. In more specific terms, the counter-discourses on values and ideologies complementarily enable the learners to make critical sense of the standpoints that they privilege or subdue as well as how these perspectives shape the media texts that they create, circulate, and consume. The counter-discourses on corporate choices and practices correspondingly afford the students to unmask and problematize the commercial bias and capitalist logic that tend to homogenize media philosophies, pedagogies, and policies. The counter-discourses on poverty, inequality, and social exclusion allow the learners to understand the complexity and multidimensionality of resource deprivation and resource gap as well as challenge the depoliticized interpretation of poverty and underdevelopment. As concretization of the critical tradition's transformative agenda, counter-discourses on intervention and accountability ultimately empower the students to contend with the social justice issues on various levels of influence and engagement (i.e., personal, institutional, and collective). The table below summarizes these countercurrents in political economy into analytical categories and specific dimensions and issues.

Analytical Categories	Social Dimensions and Issues	Counter-Discourses in Political Economy
Political values and ideologies	Values	Apprehending media creation, circulation, and consumption as value-laden and interrogating the myth of value neutrality
	Ideology	Professing ideology in its maximal sense (Tayag, 1995)
Ethical choices and practices	Choice and change	Unmasking the market myth of choice and change
	Business model and practice	Problematizing corporate bias and capitalist logic
Development challenges and issues	Poverty and inequality	Politicizing poverty and inequality
	Social exclusion	Framing social exclusion as intersectional (Crenshaw, 2017)
Strategic approaches and interventions	Intervention and accountability	Asserting the critical and collectivist notion of responsibility and accountability

TABLE 1: *Counter-discourses in media and information literacy praxis*
Source: own processing, 2024

5 Conclusion

This critical qualitative study revealed that there are patterns in the textbook task design that sharply diverged from the conventional substantive and discursive focus, and among which are (1) Cantor's (2019) introduction of the 'intersectionality of social exclusion' in her case studies thereby exposing social injustice in its varied forms, (2) Campos' (2016) critico-philosophical inquiries on positionalities and intentionalities in his self-reflection tasks, thereby sharpening the

students' analytical and evaluative skills, and (3) Zarate's (2016) unmasking of the profit agenda and exploitable character of the market model in her incisive exercises, thereby revealing the moral depravity of capitalist logic.

Given the prevailing economic and academic order, the mainstream textbook industry retains its conservative appeal in instructional materials development. By keeping the generic content and format of textbooks, companies are then able to maintain their broad patronage across various market segments. However, as sites of struggle (Apple, 2000) and zones of transaction (Genette, 1997), it was revealed in this media and communication inquiry that textbooks also alternatively demonstrated and embodied critical praxis albeit in varying scopes and degrees. In particular, this study exhibited that such counter-stance in making critical sense of ideologies, industries, and institutions is in fact conceivable and practicable.

Despite the orthodoxies in the education system in general, the textbook task section as revealed by this research can also antithetically serve as a critical platform to articulate counter-consciousness and counter-discourses. When conceptualized and designed along this counter-tradition, the textbook task segment then becomes a venue for learners to critically apply media and information literacy in sharpening their scholarship, politics, and ethics. As such, critical media and information literacy becomes crucial in making possible what Campos (2016) pointed out as the propensity to "imagine a world other than the repressive present" (p. 27). Through his thought-provoking exposition, Campos allows the learners to question the tendency of mainstream media in restricting the public to "speak about and think only of limited options and possibilities". Correspondingly, this counter-discursive orientation is consistent with "ideology critique" which is central to critical media literacy as a transgressive media education framework and approach (Kellner & Share, 2007). Ultimately and in the broadest sense, the idea of envisioning an alternative social and pedagogical order is only possible by being politically aware, philosophically reflective, and discursively critical. Based on the foregoing exposition, the following recommendations are earnestly forwarded:

- Incorporate critico-ideological literacy in media and information literacy curricula to ensure its application in the conceptualization and development of instructional materials.
- Make the study of paratext a staple component of media and information literacy education (i.e., paratextual analysis).
- Conduct a full-blown study that will reveal how textbook authors navigate, tackle, and circumvent conservatively conceptualized and framed curricula and curriculum guides.
- Produce media and information literacy instructional material for high school that is decidedly and coherently critical in orientation.
- Make textbook task design a central consideration in instructional materials development and not a mere afterthought.
- Frame assessment as a critical and central dimension of learning.
- Expand the critical discourse analysis of textbook tasks to other disciplinary areas.

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