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**Understanding Advocacy Communication in Beauty Pageants through Social  
Marketing Framework**

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This paper prepared by **Reynaldo C. Santos Jr.** with the title: “**Understanding Advocacy Communication in Beauty Pageants through Social Marketing Framework**” is hereby accepted by the Faculty of Information and Communication Studies, U.P. Open University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Program.

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## Biographical Sketch

Reynaldo C. Santos Jr. has more than a decade of professional experience in the field of communications. He obtained a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of the Philippines - Diliman in 2007 and started working in media right after graduation. He has produced news articles and investigative stories published on *Newsbreak*, *ABS-CBN News Online*, *Philippine Star*, and *Rappler*.

In 2011, he wrote a chapter in the book *The Seven Deadly Deals: Can Aquino Fix Arroyo's Legacy of Costly and Messy Projects?*, and provided research assistance for the book *The Enemy Within: An Inside Story on Military Corruption*. Both were published by Public Trust Media Group.

In 2016, he shifted to a career in government. He rendered communication services to agencies such as the Bureau of Customs and the Department of Finance. He left government work in 2020 and moved to corporate communications.

At present, he works as the PR and Communications Manager of Araneta City. He offers public relations services to brands under the Araneta Group of Companies, including Binibining Pilipinas.

## **Acknowledgement**

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## **Dedication**

This research work is dedicated to the pageant community – the media, fans, and observers – in the country. May this study shed a good light on the community's so-called obsession with pageants. It is the researcher's aim to help the community create more valuable and purposeful discussions about pageantry through this study.

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## **Abstract**

Beauty pageant is a popular culture that most Filipinos – from the girls who join, to the audience who observe and follow every activity – are very passionate about. Through time, it has evolved from a competition where girls are judged solely based on their physical beauty, to an event where girls are provided a platform to promote advocacies. Given this transformation, this research looks at how modern-day pageants (particularly, Binibining Pilipinas) contribute to advocacy and development communication in the country through a social marketing perspective.

An autoethnography approach was employed to describe and analyze the personal experiences and insights of the researcher (as someone who works in the pageant) and of the select pageant candidates interviewed. By looking at pageantry through the lens of social marketing, pageant girls can be seen not just as models with beautiful looks, but as communicators with stories and messages to share. They are provided opportunities to discuss their advocacies which are narrated based on their personal backgrounds and experiences, and are relayed to the audience through traditional interviews and entertaining digital presentations.

By doing advocacy communication through relatable stories and delivering it via interesting means, pageantry as a popular culture is given a more meaningful role and purpose in society.

Keywords: advocacy communication, Binibining Pilipinas, beauty pageant, pageantry.

## **Chapter I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background of the Study**

Whenever Philippine popular culture is being discussed, I am always reminded of the common notion that Filipinos are very passionate when it comes to 3 B's: basketball, boxing, and beauty pageants. Most lifestyle/entertainment articles I see in the news focus on any of these topics. My social media feed is bombarded with pictures and images about these topics. My usual conversations with relatives and friends would most of the time circle around any of these topics.

Among these three, beauty pageants pique my interest the most due to the fact that the Philippines is considered a country that is obsessed with beauty pageants. Whether it is staged locally or internationally, the interest of Filipinos is highly visible. Pageant activities are constantly covered by media, and updates (even predictions) are always talked about on social media. With this, Filipinos have been regarded as among the best pageant fans in the world (Luciano, 2017).

Filipinos are also known to take pageants seriously (Gutierrez, 2018). Fans have been actively monitoring and following pageant activities and updates. For those who join pageants, they put so much effort into their preparations. Candidates subject themselves to rigorous training before participating in either local or international pageants. At the local level, some girls rejoin the same pageant or participate in a different one after losing until they get a crown. At the international level, Philippine representatives receive so much hype from fans. Due to the immense popularity of beauty pageants in the country, Filipina contestants are almost always elevated to celebrity status.

Pageantry is culturally embedded in the Philippines. Pageants are held anytime and anywhere in schools and communities, during fiestas and other local celebrations, and in established nationwide beauty competitions. Among the well-established and most anticipated national beauty pageants in the country is Binibining Pilipinas, which is headed by Stella Marquez-Araneta – a Colombian beauty queen who was crowned as the very first Miss International in 1960, and later on acquired Filipino citizenship after marrying businessman Jorge Araneta. She established in 1964 the Binibining Pilipinas pageant, which has since attracted many aspiring beauty queens and has sent representatives to various international beauty pageants.

Based on the Binibining Pilipinas website, the pageant is "a project of Binibining Pilipinas Charities, Incorporated (BPCI)" and serves as "a fund-raising activity for projects that would benefit orphans, indigent families and other less fortunate members of Philippine society." Activities participated in by candidates and winners during their time with the pageant include visits and donation drives for the benefit of several charitable institutions. It is also stated on the website that BPCI "tries to bring the message of hope and love across the nation" by providing Filipinas "the opportunity to be carriers of this message" through pageantry.

Apart from its competition and charity aspects, Binibining Pilipinas has, as of late, put emphasis on promoting various causes. Part of introducing the candidates, and later on the winners, to the public is highlighting their personal advocacies. It is a concept that "solidifies the idea of going beyond beauty, scratching far beneath the surface to unveil what makes a woman particularly worthy of a crown and a title" (Libero-Cruz, 2019).

Given this, I lean into the idea that the prominence of popular beauty pageants like the Binibining Pilipinas in a pageant-crazed third world country like the Philippines can be utilized and maximized for much better purposes – such as development communication (through advocacy communication).

### **Statement of the Problem**

In pursuing this autoethnography study, I aim to answer the question “How do beauty pageants contribute to advocacy and development communication in the Philippines?” through the lens of a social marketing perspective.

Specifically, I wish to answer the following questions:

1. What are the different advocacies being promoted by beauty pageant candidates?
2. Where do beauty pageant candidates get inspiration in determining the advocacies they promote?
3. What mechanisms are utilized to incorporate advocacy communication in pageantry?
4. How are the advocacy messages packaged and delivered in pageants?
5. What social marketing elements are present in advocacy communication in pageantry?

### **Objectives of the Study**

To help answer the main question in this study, I was guided by the following research objectives:

1. Identify the advocacies being promoted by the select Binibining Pilipinas candidates;

2. Find out the motivations behind the advocacies being promoted by Binibining Pilipinas participants;
3. Determine the mechanisms/strategies used to advance advocacy communication in Binibining Pilipinas;
4. Describe the social marketing elements present in advocacy communication in pageantry;
5. Unveil how advocacy messages are packaged and delivered in pageants; and
6. Establish recommendations for future advocacy communication studies and activities using observations from this study.

### **Significance of the Study**

Pageantry has been subject to a long debate on its purpose and relevance to society. While most pageants clearly highlight their role in humanitarian work and women empowerment, some observers still see them as a platform that defines a singular standard of beauty, enhances racial discrimination, and commodifies the human body. Others see them simply as a form of entertainment, or just another competition (Villano, 2018).

Through this study, it is my goal to contribute to discussions that look at pageants not as a beauty contest or as a charitable event, but rather as something bigger and more valuable – a platform for raising awareness and information dissemination. This study is an attempt to explore the beneficial contributions that the pageant can provide the country outside the context of mere entertainment.

This research sheds light on having aspects of popular culture in the Philippines – such as pageants – as a vehicle for development communication.

Given the quality of life in the Philippines, and the level of disinformation that controls society, this research aims to look into the communication platform provided by popular culture as a means to help improve lives in this country.

### **Scope and Limitations of the Study**

Simply based on monitoring and watching beauty pageants nowadays, we can see that most of them incorporate advocacy communication. The nature of advocacies and the manner on how they are relayed, however, differ per pageant.

While there are a lot of beauty pageants in the Philippines that this study can cover, I focused only on one particular pageant – Binibining Pilipinas – due to two reasons. First, my personal experience being a public relations person of the said pageant plays a major part in this research. As an autoethnography study, this research focuses on insiders' experiences and observations – from my perspective as someone who works in the pageant, and from the perspective of the candidates whom I personally worked with.

Second, compared to other national pageants, Binibining Pilipinas allows for the promotion and communication of a wider range of advocacies, which I see more fitting for this type of study. Looking at other pageants would deviate from the objectives of the study. For example, Miss Earth Philippines pageant is focused on environmental issues, while Miss World Philippines pageant puts emphasis on actual charity and social works through its “Beauty With A Cause” segment rather than advocacy communication.

## Chapter II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### Defining Advocacy

Several references have provided different definitions for and discussions on the term 'advocacy'. In the study *Theoretical Foundation of Advocacy in Communication: Kenyan Perspective*, author Michael Ndonge (2014) gathered and compressed all definitions from various scholars to come up with one holistic definition:

"[A]dvocacy is speaking, acting, writing with minimal conflict of interest on behalf of the sincerely perceived interests of a disadvantaged person or group to promote, protect and defend their welfare and justice by: being on their side and no-one else's, being primarily concerned with their fundamental needs, and remaining loyal and accountable to them in a way that is emphatic and vigorous and which is, or is likely to be, costly to the advocate or advocacy group."

Ndonge refers to it as a process that needs to have "systematic frameworks and fundamental strategic principles". Among the many advocacy-related activities mentioned in the study, though not exhaustive, are the following:

- Educating the Public about the Legislative Process;
- Public education;
- Nonpartisan voter education;
- Nonpartisan voter mobilization;
- Lobbying; and
- Organizing a rally.

Meanwhile, in her study *Role of Advocacy Communication in Countering Child Trafficking Among Selected Primary Schools in Mathare Constituency*, author Cyndi Wanjiku Kinuthia (2020) added that advocacy serves as an instrument for providing solutions to problems. She also emphasized the objective of every advocacy "to raise public's consciousness about a particular issue" by "speaking on behalf of others".

Kinuthia's study also debunks the common misconception that advocacy work is only for political lobbyists, and that it involves street demonstrations. Her study says advocacy encapsulates any action that promotes active participation or involvement in any social issue that affects public lives. After all, advocacy helps represent people's interests in times when public representation is not enough.

In classifying advocacy works, the study cited the following categories. Each category depends on who the target audience is/are, or the method in which the advocacy will be carried out:

- Case advocacy, which deals with small groups such as a family;
- Systematic or structured advocacy, which deals with organizations or larger groups;
- Professional advocacy, which involves a professional dealing with policymakers, governments, and the public to discuss specific development issues in a particular industry;
- Citizen advocacy, which involves defending and standing up for the rights of the most vulnerable people in society; and
- Media advocacy, which involves media defending and confronting injustices found in society.

Kinuthia considers advocacy work as mainly a communication process. She even considers communication as a very crucial element in advocacy since "operative advocacy is persuasive communication."

In defining advocacy communication, the study lifted the definition of Hilary Coulby (2010): "persuading precise audiences by using precise messages in order to deliver changes both in policy and practice." The study heavily relies on advocacy communication as a persuasive presentation, through "tactically-designed" communication, to prompt change to the target audience.

With advocacy being a process that needs to have "systematic frameworks and fundamental strategic principles", as discussed by Ndonye, Kinuthia looks at communication as the key to an effective advocacy campaign, "where concrete exploration backed up by research will make the process of plan development much easier thus leading to a more successful enactment."

## **Evolution of Beauty Pageants**

The history of pageantry presents a story of how the field has evolved from its original intent to the current purpose it portrays. Vianne Grace Delfinado (2015), in her study *Beyond the Sash and the Crown: A Cultural Examination of the Possible Impacts of Beauty Pageants in the Filipino Society*, discussed how beauty pageants originally came about -- something that intends to promote entertainment or businesses. Then later on, this characteristic would be redefined as "concepts of patriotism and respectability became visible in pageants".

In the study *Portrayal of Women in Televised Beauty Pageants*, Daniella Asare Adu (2021) looked back at history to trace the origins of pageantry. The modern type of beauty competitions, wherein a panel of judges choose a winner

from a set of female candidates, is attributed to American businessman and circus showman PT Barnum. Only, this served as an attraction of the "dime museum" he used to own in the United States (Adu, 2021).

Other establishments like beaches and resorts have also seen the potential of beauty pageants to attract visitors, hence following the model created by Barnum. In 1921, some New Jersey merchants staged the first Miss America pageant to make tourists stay. This is believed to be the model after which all succeeding pageants have been patterned (Adu, 2021).

In the Philippines, the American government established in 1908 the Manila Carnival "to attract foreign tourists and provide the various provinces that participated in it with a venue to promote their agricultural products, arts and crafts (Ocampo, 2017)." The winner was named Carnival Queen from 1908 to 1925, then later on changed to Miss Philippines from 1926 to 1939. With this development, the Manila Carnival is believed to be the precursor of current national pageants in the Philippines.

The evolution of pageantry is something that Jassir De Windt (2019) covered in the study *Will Beauty Save the World?*. In describing the beauty competition, the author made a distinction between a 'beauty contest' and a 'beauty pageant' -- the former being an event "in which women compete against one another while being judged by members of society on what is considered to be beauty parameters", and the latter serving as "legitimate platform in which culture and collective meaning are not only debated but also created".

Going by these descriptions of Delfinado and De Windt, it can be said that what used to be mere looks-based beauty contests have transformed into the more meaningful beauty pageants we have nowadays.

## Empowering Women in Pageants

In looking at beauty pageants as a platform that creates "culture and collective meaning", de Windt (2019) steers away from the common notion that pageantry promotes women objectification and commodification. He stated that, aside from the entertainment and production value of pageants, they become "public events where decisions about who the queen will be and what she will represent in cultural, racial, and gendered terms during her reign, provide a space for discourse and cultural action in ethnic and national communities" (de Windt, 2019).

In the study *Beauty in the Indigenous Pageant The Cultural and Social Relevance of Miss Samoa*, Mariko Hamashima (2012) argues against the idea that placing women only encourages "pleasure and desire for audience". In fact, she claims, pageants "reverse these negative images and empower Samoan women to be displayed in direct opposition to their over-sexualized stereotype." This can be seen as pageant contestants display "modesty, poise, and virginity" before the public (Hamashima, 2012).

As for the study *The Lucky One: A Constructivist Study on Pageant Women's Conceptualization of Empowerment*, Ma. Regina Janina Alzaga (2015) points out how pageantry aids in the process of self-affirmation among women. By joining pageants, women are urged to "prove their worth or the fact that they are more than how they are seen."

The study further claims that the mere act of joining the pageant is already empowering, as candidates are "able to set themselves free from any inhibition (i.e., economic status, insecurities, etc.)." Pageants also become an opportunity for women to achieve certain goals, and bring out traits such as determination to succeed and willingness to grow and learn.

With pageants now embracing diversity in physical attributes of women, Alzaga's study also affirms that women of various looks and backgrounds now become "an inspiration especially on beauty standards" and helps empower and give confidence to women of the same situation.

Interestingly, the notion of commodification of women through pageants is one of the focal points of the study *The Intersectionality of Commodification and Empowerment in the Encoding of Media Text: A Beauty Queen's Autoethnography* by Julieane Fernandez (2015). Written by a beauty pageant winner herself, the study describes how pageant girls are subjected to "justified commodification" by "serving the function of adding value and reinforcement to the relevant meaning of a particular event."

Through pageants, women are made to appear in events such as charities and other important public celebrations (such as World AIDS Day and promotion of local products, as enumerated by the author), and allowed them to speak on socially relevant issues. This, in turn, makes pageant girls "treated as individuals with substance, not exploited and objectified" (Fernandez, 2015).

### **Pageant Girls as Communicators**

In most of the studies included in this literature review, a certain degree of emphasis is given on the communication skills that pageant candidates showcase in the competition. This further solidifies the earlier discussion on the evolution of beauty pageants.

In the case of Delfinado (2015), a survey conducted for her study reveals that most pageant audience are in search for intelligence among candidates. The study states that Filipino audiences, in particular, see beauty pageants as an "exposition of

[the candidates'] talent, intelligence, beauty and confidence", and that they give "equal importance on the intelligence and beauty of a person" in judging who their desired winner is.

The same observation has been noted in studies about pageants in other parts of the world. In the study *Contesting Nationalisms: Gender, Globalization, and Cultural Representation in Nigerian Beauty Pageants*, Oluwakemi Monsurat Balogun (2012) said that contestants are considered as "national public figures" in her country. This is why pageant contestants are expected to "maintain a high intellectual standard" apart from "acting polite, pleasant, and elegant". This quality is not just concentrated to the contestant's ability to answer interview questions correctly, but also in her ability to "speak well" and show a high level of educational attainment through her communication (Balogun, 2012).

Hamashima (2012) touched on Samoa's culture which is "heavily influenced by oral tradition and the power of oratory". It is a tradition that is often dominated by or highly visible among men in the Pacific Island. Through pageantry, women in Samoa are given an opportunity and space to have an opinion and express their thoughts. With these, pageants produce not just physically attractive ladies but also empowered women (Hamashima, 2012).

The same case is found in Ghana. Adu (2012) noted in her study how the Miss Malaika pageant candidates are given the chance to speak out on several social phenomena specific to the African nation such as safety and security concerns, discrimination against female Muslim wearing hijab, and health issues.

The cases presented in these studies show the attempts in various parts of the world to break from the stereotypes and common standards on physical attributes set by pageants of the previous years. As further claimed by Delfinado

(2015), the audience now sees pageants as a platform that produces role models, and looks forward to a competition "where contestant's aspirations are brought to life, a platform where she can prove herself" through proper communication.

### **Messages Delivered in Pageants**

In the study *The Intersectionality of Commodification and Empowerment in the Encoding of Media Text: A Beauty Queen's Autoethnography*, author Juliane Fernandez (2019) – a beauty queen herself – claims that high value is imposed on beauty queens and contestants by making them appear on events and allowing them to speak on socially relevant issues. Her study mentioned how products of beauty pageants have the "capacity to normalize messages". Based on her personal experience, she was able to talk about topics that are not usually discussed publicly but are socially relevant (such as, as cited in the study, publicly discussing the use of condoms as a way to prevent the spread of HIV in the country). This way, the study says, beauty pageants become a vehicle for public service and for advocacy promotion.

There is, indeed, an opportunity for beauty pageants to advance advocacy communication. Delfinado (2015) shares her observation that the public is looking for girls who "represent a sector, country or advocacy." The study says audience would instantly root for a candidate who would establish relevance with them, and that they are looking for "someone who has the characteristic of a hero who can save them from the oppressions that they are suffering from."

Because of this, beauty pageant has now become an event that has a cultural and social impact. In the study *Perception of Beauty of the Filipinas as Revealed in Beauty Pageants*, Hannah Joy Pelonia (2019) cites as an example how beauty

pageants can help in terms of tourism. In national and international pageants, candidates participate as representatives of their respective localities or countries. Part of their packages in promoting their candidacy are photos or videos of them showing the culture in their hometowns.

The study also discussed that pageantry allows candidates to become the "hero" that the public is looking for. It mentions that pageants help girls "develop their self-esteem" and "learn how to stand in front of the public and become a good public speaker performing in front of a huge crowd."

## Chapter III

### FRAMEWORK

In understanding how *Binibining Pilipinas* carries out its message of advocacy, this study relies on Social Marketing Theory and Message Framing Theory as frameworks.

**Social Marketing Theory.** This provides an explanation behind the promotion and communication of ideas that are beneficial to society. The theory was proposed in 1971 by Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman, who defined 'social marketing' as "the design, implementation, and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and involving considerations of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution, and marketing research."

This theory lifts the idea of and principles in commercial marketing in promotions. But while the ultimate goal of commercial marketing is to improve sales of products and services, social marketing aims to achieve a positive behavior change in its target population (Odiase, 2020).

Both commercial and social marketing have four major elements known as 4Ps – product, price, place, and promotion. But due to the difference in the objective of these two marketing techniques, they possess different elements:

TABLE 1. Difference between commercial and social marketing

ELEMENT	COMMERCIAL MARKETING	SOCIAL MARKETING
Product	Goods and services	Behavior change
Price	Cost of the product or service	Cost of changing the behaviour
Place	Where, and the means through which the target audience can access the product/service.	Strategies that make adopting the new behavior as easy and convenient as possible.
Promotion	Includes the strategies used to inform the target audience about the product, its availability and desirable qualities such as TV, Radio, Internet Ads, etc.	Involves messaging strategies and platforms used in promoting and reinforcing behavior change.

SOURCE: Odiase, 2020

The theory describes social marketing to be using more creative and interesting means such as 'edutainment' (education plus entertainment) in packaging and distributing helpful information. This way, "the message is not forgotten for a long time easily" (Bajracharya, 2018).

**Message Framing Theory.** This theory deals with how an idea is presented to people (through 'frames') and how this influences message recipients in processing the idea. These frames are "organizing ideas or themes, ways of linking together stories historically, building up a narrative over time and across political space

(Arowolo, 2017). It was an idea that was discussed by Erving Goffman in his 1974 essay *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*.

The basis for this theory is that attention is given to certain events or ideas, which are placed within a field of meaning. The most common example would be seen in news reports, with media creating frames by "introducing news items with predefined and narrow contextualization (Arowolo, 2017)."

Arowolo identified five popular ways for framing messages:

- Conflict – messaging focuses on conflict between parties, rather than the actual decision made
- Human Interest/Personalization – messaging focuses on human face/personality as the most important aspect
- Consequence – messaging focuses on effects (whether good or bad)
- Morality – messaging focuses on lessons
- Responsibility – messaging attributes responsibility for either a cause or a solution.

References refer to message framing theory as an expanded version of the agenda setting theory, with the former "focusing on the essence of the issues at hand rather than on a particular topic (Arowoldo, 2017)."

In his 2015 paper *Framing theory in communication research. Origins, development and current situation in Spain*, author A Ardèvol-Abreu provided the following distinctions:

TABLE 2. Difference between Agenda Setting Theory and Message Framing Theory

	<b>Agenda Setting Theory</b>	<b>Message Framing Theory</b>
Focus of messaging	Repetition (in the media); accessibility (in the psyche of the receiver)	Applicability (ability to generate interpretative schemas that can be applied to many different situations)
Key aspect	The amount of attention given by media to a topic, and the time individuals have been exposed to the coverage of the event.	The way a topic is described; and the interpretative schema that has been activated to process it.

SOURCE: Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015

Framing, therefore, is focused on how "concepts connected in a message will also tend to connect with each other in the audience's mind (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015)."

## **Chapter IV**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Design**

For this qualitative study, an autoethnography approach was employed. This approach was defined by Carolyn Ellis, Tony Adams, and Arthur Bochner (2011) as an "approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience." They added that it combines the characteristics of autobiography (retroactively and selectively writing about past experiences) and ethnography (studying by becoming participant observers in a culture being studied).

In this autoethnography study, my first-hand experiences and personal observations/analyses as someone who works in the pageant were incorporated. And to fulfil the study's objectives, two methods of data gathering were employed: interviews with other cultural insiders (particularly, the pageant candidates), and self-reflection.

#### **Participants**

John Creswell (1998) recommended anywhere between 5 and 25 participants in a phenomenological study. Using this suggested range, I chose to have the minimal number of recommended participants to properly manage the data gathering and analysis.

To provide additional inputs for this autoethnography study, five Binibining Pilipinas girls were chosen to be interviewed. The chosen interviewees were from

different batches – two were already winners from past edition, while three were still competing during the time of the interviews.

The interviews were made casual and without recording (with me only jotting notes) due to the fast-paced schedules and ongoing activities of the pageant.

### **Research Instrument/Tool and Data Gathering**

For the most part of the data discussion and analysis, I tapped into my personal recollections and observations as an insider of the subject matter. Both my experiences as someone who handles the public relations of Binibining Pilipinas, and as someone who has been following and supporting the pageant for a long time were incorporated in the discussions of this study.

For the interviews with the select Binibining Pilipinas girls, every conversation constituted a semi-structured interview approach, with the researcher relying on the following guide questions:

- What advocacy do/did you promote in Binibining Pilipinas?
- Is this the same advocacy you promoted in other pageants?
- How did you come up with this advocacy?
- What were your preparations for your advocacy promotion in the pageant?
- What steps or actions did you take in promoting your advocacy in the pageant?
- How does the pageant help in promoting your advocacies? What specific platforms did the pageant provide or utilize in promoting your advocacy?
- Is this/Are these platform/s the same in other national pageants you have participated in?

## **Data Analysis**

The generated information were then grouped into themes which made the subheads in the discussion part of this study. Data were analyzed using narrative analysis. According to Robin Cooper and Bruce Lilyea (2022), narrative analysis puts focus on storytelling, and "recognizes that stories play a crucial role in meaning-making and will help interpret experiences." Through this method of analysis, the established themes were further confirmed, "marking significant life events and turning points in stories".

The narrative was then analyzed through the context of social marketing and message framing – being part of the theoretical framework used for this study. Observations and narratives revealed during the data gathering were inspected and discussed based on how they fit the elements of the theoretical framework.

## Chapter V

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### **Pageant Girls As Identified With Their Advocacies**

If there is anything that I remember the most about the recent Filipina beauty queens, beyond their physical beauty and stellar pageant performances, it is the personal causes that they have promoted. There is Miss Universe 2015 Pia Wurtzbach who expressed her desire to raise awareness on HIV and AIDS, Miss International 2016 Kylie Versoza who advocated for mental health, and Miss Universe 2018 Catriona Gray who repeatedly talked about providing access to quality education for the youth. All these advocacies were actively promoted by the ladies during their time both in local (Binibining Pilipinas) and international pageants.

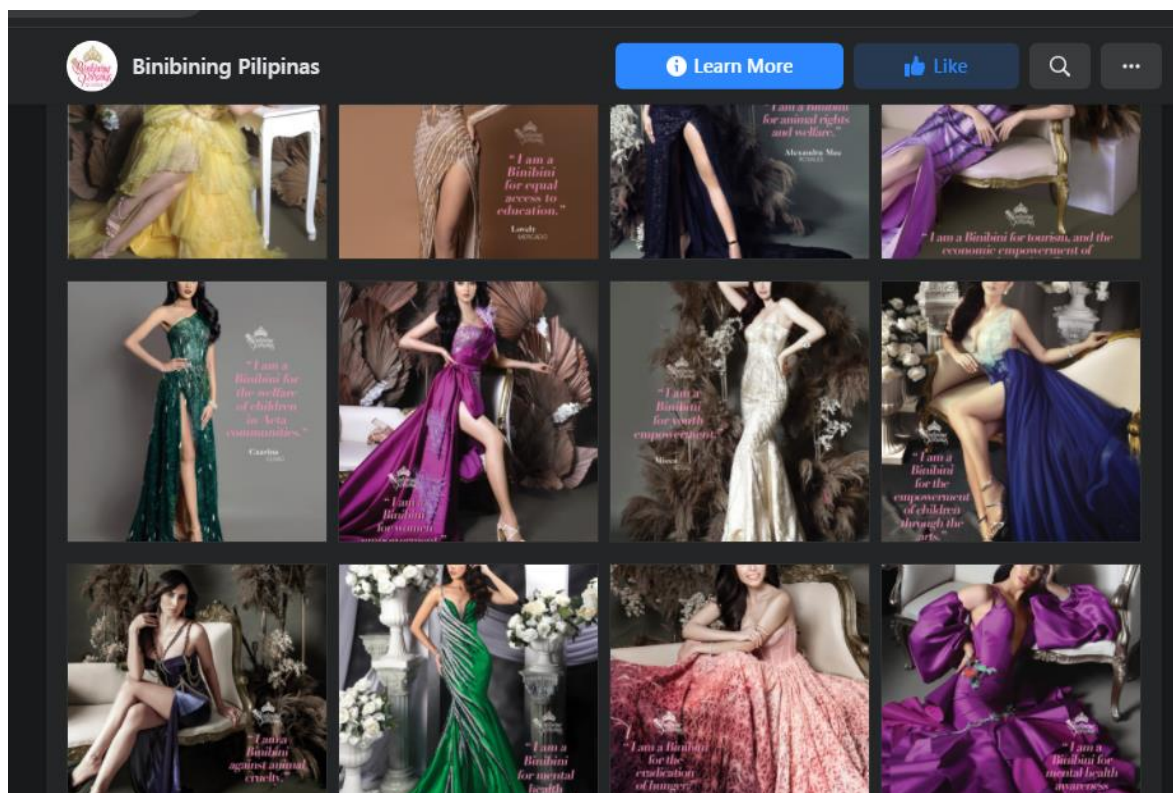
These are advocacies that were not just delivered through words, but were also shown through the girls' actions. Through social media, we saw how Wurtzbach actively participated in activities of LoveYourself (an NGO with volunteers who provide free HIV testing, counseling, treatment, and life coaching), and how Gray involved herself with Young Focus (an NGO that works with underprivileged children). And even after winning and passing on their crowns, these ladies have continued to mention and promote these advocacies in various interviews and on their personal social media pages.

Because of this, I have gotten used to the idea that nowadays, a beauty pageant girl needs to embody a certain advocacy – that the advocacy she carries becomes completely associated with her identity. Not having one seems to make the whole beauty pageant girl "package" incomplete. As Hamashima (2012) put it,

pageant girls nowadays are not just physically attractive ladies, but are also empowered women. And the advocacies they represent make them empowered.

This is what I have witnessed and verified personally when I started working with Binibining Pilipinas in 2020. Just as I expected, all the candidates were equipped with their chosen advocacies, and they were ready to talk about them whenever they were given the chance in the pageant. This experience has made me more curious about the idea of advocacy communication in pageantry.

FIGURE 1. Glam photos of Binibining Pilipinas 2020/2021 candidates, shown with their chosen advocacies.



SOURCE: Binibining Pilipinas Facebook page

## Variety in Advocacies Chosen and Promoted

Binibining Pilipinas aspirants are not asked to indicate in their application forms their chosen advocacy. Simply put, it is not a requirement for girls to have an advocacy in order for them to be admitted in the pageant.

Nevertheless, the organization's marketing team (which I am part of) asks this information from the girls once they start their pageant journey. We keep track of this information and include it in the candidates' biodata that we post on the pageant's online platforms (website and social media accounts).

For the Binibining Pilipinas 2020/2021 candidates, the first batch of Binibinis that I worked with, the following are their chosen advocacies:

TABLE 3. Advocacies of Binibining Pilipinas 2020/2021 candidates.

<b>CANDIDATE</b>	<b>ADVOCACY</b>
Binibini # 1 Samantha Alexandra Panlilio	I am a Binibini for sustainable communities in rural areas.
Binibini # 2 Lois Anne Badando	I am a Binibini for depression management and suicide prevention.
Binibini # 3 Patrizia Mariah Garcia	I am a Binibini for fostering the psychological well-being of children.
Binibini # 4 Arianne Deseree Viardo	I am a Binibini for poverty alleviation through educating the youth.
Binibini # 5 Princess Kien Guanzon	I am a Binibini for an inclusive society for persons with disabilities.
Binibini # 6 Shanon Jumaylh Tampon	I am a Binibini against animal cruelty.
Binibini # 7 Meiji Cruz	I am a Binibini for gender equality.
Binibini # 8 Patricia Denise Babista	I am a Binibini for affordable education.
Binibini # 9 Shaira	I am a Binibini for life programs for children with cancer.

Marie Rona	
Binibini # 10 Maureen Ann Montagne	I am a Binibini for HIV/AIDS awareness.
Binibini # 11 Vianca Louise Marcelo	I am a Binibini for the eradication of hunger.
Binibini # 12 Cinderella Faye Obeñita	I am a Binibini for cervical cancer awareness.
Binibini # 13 Alexandra Mae Rosales	I am a Binibini for animal rights and welfare.
Binibini # 14 Justine Beatrice Felizarta	I am a Binibini for the rights and welfare of overseas Filipino workers.
Binibini # 15 Karen Laurrie Mendoza	I am a Binibini for mental health awareness.
Binibini # 16 Kimberly Anne Tiquetiques	I am a Binibini for mental health awareness among the youth.
Binibini # 17 Hannah Arnold	I am a Binibini for accessible learning resources in far-flung communities.
Binibini # 18 Maria Ruth Erika Quin	I am a Binibini for animal welfare and rabies prevention.
Binibini # 19 Gabrielle Camille Basiano	I am a Binibini for mental healthcare.
Binibini # 20 Lovely Mercado	I am a Binibini for equal access to education.
Binibini # 21 Carina Cariño	I am a Binibini for tourism, and the economic empowerment of single mothers.
Binibini # 22 Czarina Joy Guiao	I am a Binibini for the welfare of children in Aeta communities.
Binibini # 23 Jashmin Lyn Dimaculangan	I am a Binibini for protective measures against acts of bullying.
Binibini # 24 Maria Francesca Taruc	I am a Binibini for women empowerment.
Binibini # 25 Honey Grace Cartasano	I am a Binibini for promoting the importance of education and support for out-of-school youth.

Binibini # 26 Noriza Mae Valerio	I am a Binibini for providing care and support to cancer patients.
Binibini # 27 Graciella Lehmann	I am a Binibini for breast health and cancer awareness.
Binibini # 28 Danica Joy Acuña	I am a Binibini for the empowerment of children through the arts.
Binibini # 29 Alexandra Faith Garcia	I am a Binibini for access to quality healthcare for indigent patients with kidney diseases.
Binibini # 30 Mercedes Pair	I am a Binibini for promoting holistic health.
Binibini # 31 Micca Rosal	I am a Binibini for youth empowerment.
Binibini # 32 Lesley Anne Ticaro	I am a Binibini for functional literacy for indigenous cultural communities.
Binibini # 33 Bellatrix Tan	I am a Binibini for the fight against cyberbullying.
Binibini # 34 Honey Be Parreñas	I am a Binibini for food security and sustainability.

SOURCE: Binibining Pilipinas website

From this list, we can see two common themes: health and education. The advocacies of most of the girls fall under any of these two themes, though there is an attempt from some girls to make their causes more specific.

For those who chose education-related advocacies, some provided more specific targets: functional literacy for indigenous cultural communities, education for out-of-school youth, accessible learning resources in far-flung communities, etc.

Other common themes in the list are anti-cyberbullying and mental health, both of which are very timely and prevalent issues nowadays (especially on social media).

The mere idea that these girls are promoting advocacies in their pageant journey suits the various definition of social marketing. Kotler and Zaltman (1971) refers to social marketing as influencing the acceptability of social ideas. Bajrachava (2018) mentioned social marketing as using interesting means in packaging and distributing helpful information. Both these definitions will be more apparent in the context of advocacy communication in beauty pageants (particularly in Binibining Pilipinas) in the succeeding paragraphs.

The first few elements of social marketing in this context can already be identified – the Product, and the Place. The Product in social marketing is not always a tangible item or service (as compared to commercial marketing). To identify the Product in social marketing, Nedra Kline Weinrich (2006) suggested that "people must first perceive that there is a genuine problem, and that the product offering is a good solution for that problem."

In this context, clearly, the Product of this particular social marketing strategy is the advocacy/cause being promoted by the girls. In promoting their chosen advocacies, the girls acknowledge that problems do exist in certain segments of society. They promote their chosen causes to shed light on issues, create education and awareness, and influence public perception on societal issues. As mentioned by Weinrich (2006), the audience are made aware that social problems are real, and that education and awareness can become initial steps in acting to help solve the issues.

As for the Place element, Weinrich describes it as "the way the product reaches the consumer" (2006). In this context, the pageant (specifically, Binibining Pilipinas) acts as the "marketplace" where the Product (personal advocacy/cause of

a pageant girl) is being offered to the target consumers (pageant fans and audiences).

### **Framing Advocacies Through Personalization**

Upon listening to how Binibining Pilipinas candidates discuss their personal advocacies in interviews and in various segments of the pageants, I am amazed at how convincing and passionate the candidates are in delivering their messages. They seem to know what they are saying. Some of them even give out details like statistics and anecdotes – details that make me think that they even do some research to back up their chosen advocacies.

It helps that the candidates do not have to look far in choosing their advocacies, as they tap into their personal experiences and backgrounds. This helps them create a narrative that they can easily, naturally, and compassionately relay to their audiences.

The candidates have a wide range of reasons on how and why they opted for their chosen advocacies. But all of them consider their choices as – as Binibining Pilipinas 2020/2021 candidate Bellatrix Tan said – "close to [their] heart".

Most candidates relate their advocacies to the situation in their hometowns – Binibining Pilipinas Grand International 2020 Samantha Bernardo claimed that her advocacy is a response to the high rate of malaria cases in her province Palawan; Binibining Pilipinas 2020/2021 candidate Lesley Ticaro mentioned that her advocacy recognized the indigenous people in her hometown Davao; Binibining Pilipinas Intercontinental 2019 Emma Tiglao stated that her advocacy focused on poor children in her province Pampanga. "We wear our provinces across our chest

[through our sashes], so *dala namin sya sa pageant at sa advocacy* (we represent them in the pageant and in our advocacy)," Ticaro explained.

Others draw from personal experiences and encounters from the past – Binibining Pilipinas 2019 candidate and 2020/2021 finalist Honey Cartasano revisited her being once an out-of-school youth through her advocacy; Tan drew inspiration from being a victim of cyberbullying herself; and Ticaro touched on her experience of being a school teacher in the province. For Cartasano, she claimed that this made it easier for candidates to come up with an advocacy to promote in the pageant. "The more personal [the advocacy is], *mas natural* (the more it is natural)," she quipped.

FIGURE 2. A Binibining Pilipinas 2020/2021 candidate, shown with an advocacy that was based on her hometown and profession.



SOURCE: <https://twitter.com/lesleyticaro/status/1401461088995069953>

Some even gave more detailed backgrounders or backstories to justify their choice of advocacy. For Bernardo, she works with the Kilusan Ligtas Malaria and was even a spokesperson of the Philippine Movement Against Malaria. For Tan, she shared that she launched the online page CyberBELLA and provided motivational talks about coping with cyberbullying. According to them, having these

backgrounders helped them "give a face" to advocacies, and "be more relatable [and be] more inspirational."

Given these justifications, it has clearly become easy for them to frame the advocacy message they wanted to convey in pageantry. Their personal backgrounds and stories have allowed them to make their advocacies more truthful, and allowed them to create true-to-life stories to give the advocacies they promote a clearer picture. As explained by Arowoldo (2017) in Message Framing Theory, this is one of the five popular ways of framing messages: human interest/personalization, where "messaging focuses on human face/personality as the most important aspect".

This leads to the identification of the third element of social marketing in this context – the Price. Weinreich refers to this element as "what the consumer must do in order to obtain the social marketing product" (2016). With the identified Product in this social marketing approach being the girls' chosen advocacies/causes, the audience must be interested or must feel inspired in order to further listen to what the pageant girl is saying. And the way that the pageant girls get the audience's interest is to personalize their advocacy messages.

As I see it, the girls frame their advocacies according to their personal stories to become more natural and convincing to the audience – thereby making the Price more "affordable" or relatable to the audience. The more natural and convincing the girls sound, the more they can make their audience want to listen to them and be inspired by their chosen advocacy, and the more they influence the acceptability of the idea. With this, the girls try to achieve the goal of social marketing – influencing the acceptability of social ideas (Kotler et al, 1971).

## **Incorporating Advocacies in Pageantry**

In most media interviews, Catriona Gray – herself a winner of Binibining Pilipinas prior to joining Miss Universe – actively refers to pageant girls as being advocates. She believes that beauty queens are "people with stories" and that they should be "voices to participate in the conversation that we should be having".

It is from this perspective that we can look at beauty pageants as a tool for social marketing of advocacies. As discussed in the Social Marketing Theory, social marketing has the aim of influencing "the acceptability of social ideas" (Kotler et al, 1971). It also works "to achieve a positive behavior change in the target population" (Odiase, 2020). These are the objectives that Gray and other Binibining Pilipinas participants see as they promote advocacies in pageantry.

As I have seen through the years, having an advocacy has become a 'tradition' in pageantry, especially in the Philippines. Advocacies play a big and very noticeable part in Binibining Pilipinas. Upon working with the candidates, I saw how a lot of candidates incorporate their advocacies in various aspects of their presentations in the pageant. Some candidates would incorporate it in their fashion, like wearing "statement outfits" that reflect their advocacies – clothes with colors of the LGBT flag, with quotes that has reference to mental health, etc. Others present their advocacies through the pageant's talent segment – drawing elderlies as a sign of fighting for the welfare of senior citizens, performing a monologue about press freedom to signify her advocacy to fight disinformation and misinformation, etc.

FIGURE 3. Binibining Pilipinas 2022 candidates participate in a question-and-answer activity days before the coronation night.



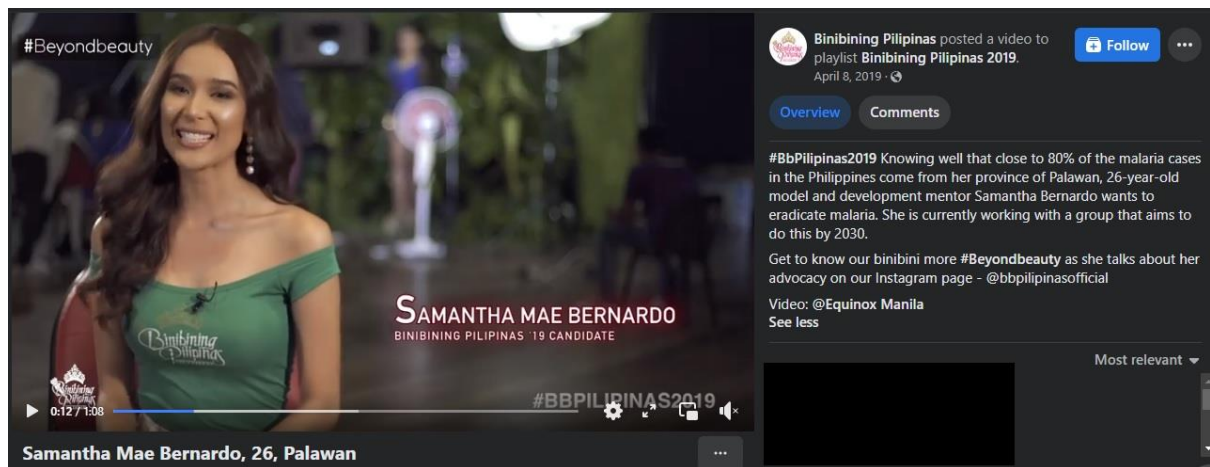
SOURCE: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbmeSvHE4tE>

As I have observed, having an advocacy has almost become a key to winning pageants. As earlier mentioned, I – and even a number of pageant observers – clearly remember recent Filipina international pageant winners (Wurtzbach, Versoza, and Gray) based on their advocacies more than their pageant performances.

Even the girls acknowledge this idea, with Tiglao saying: *“para siyang naging ingredient bigla sa pageant (it has suddenly become an ingredient in the pageant)”*.

Bannering an advocacy also helps the girls create a positive public image – one that allows them to be relatable to the audience. The advocacies they have, according to Cartasano, make them very human and "very concerned of not just beauty but also of issues in society". She added that this makes them appear very active in society *“dahil may ginagawa kami para sa iba (because we do something for others).”*

FIGURE 4. A Binibining Pilipinas 2019 candidate promoting her personal advocacy in one of the pageant activities.



SOURCE: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2150248058384807>

This relatability helps pageant girls “sell” the Product and makes the Price of their social marketing appear “worth-it” to the audience.

But of course, advocacies are simply “incidentals” in pageantry. Promoting an advocacy is obviously not the main motivation of the candidates for joining. Their primary reason for joining is still to win a crown. Advocacy promotion has become an integral part of the pageant process since, as I have observed, this helps the girls establish more connection with their audience.

But despite this, I do not see this “incidental” advocacy promotion as something superficial or fake. As earlier mentioned, the girls appear believable and authentic when they deliver their advocacy messages, and the audience sees the passion from the girls. They associate their causes with their backgrounds, hometowns, or their life experiences. The advocacies that the girls share are real, and the messages they promote are very personal to them.

## Advocacy Communication through Digital Presentations

This does not come easy for the girls, though. Even though “incidentals”, I can see how pageant candidates pour a huge amount of effort and resources in preparing for their advocacy communication.

Part of the preparations of girls who join beauty pageants (particularly Binibining Pilipinas) is crafting an advocacy communication plan that would guide them on how they will discuss their personal causes. This involves doing research about their chosen advocacies, digging relevant statistics, browsing current events related to the advocacies, etc. – anything that would help them justify and present their chosen causes.

Some girls with enough resources even go the extra mile of documenting their advocacies by making materials like video packages, photoshoots, or infographics about them. These materials would show them doing activities related to their advocacies like, in Ticaro’s case, reaching out to communities and teaching about her chosen cause. They then post these materials online by the time the pageant starts, to help them promote their advocacies.

FIGURE 5. A Binibining Pilipinas 2020/2021 candidate posed with children for her personal advocacy video shoot.



SOURCE: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Brl\\_INZ7dpM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Brl_INZ7dpM)

## **Advocacy Communication through Media Interviews**

As I have observed, advocacy promotions in pageants are all media-assisted. One way to do this promotion is through media interviews, where candidates get the chance to talk about our advocacies in full length. And based on my experience in handling pageant media for Binibining Pilipinas, most media interviews nowadays are conducted by online bloggers – a community that is expanding along with the advancement of modern technology – more than by mainstream media.

Pageant online bloggers are more active in getting in touch with the candidates because their content simply revolves around pageantry, unlike mainstream reporters who have to cover several lifestyle topics/events.

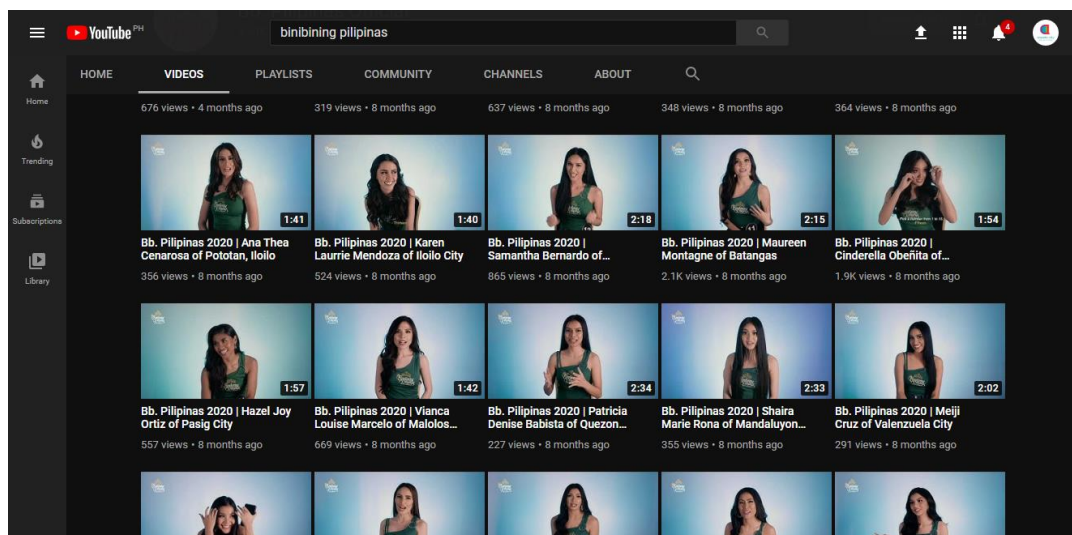
This is very crucial for the candidates, especially with the high rate of social media consumption in the country. According to the Digital 2022 report of social media management firm Hootsuite and creative agency We Are Social, the Philippines ranked second in the world (next to South Africa) in terms of most time spent on the internet and social media. Filipinos 16-64 years old are found to spend an average of 10 hours and 27 minutes connected to the internet each day. This figure is even higher than the global average, which is 6 hours and 58 minutes.

In instances when I accompany some candidates during interviews, the interviewers never fail to ask the candidates about advocacies. It appears that writing or reporting about the candidates' advocacies has already been part of the work process of the pageant press. And based on my observation, the girls always find a way to insert their advocacies in interviews even if they are not directly asked about them.

## Advocacy Communication through Social Media

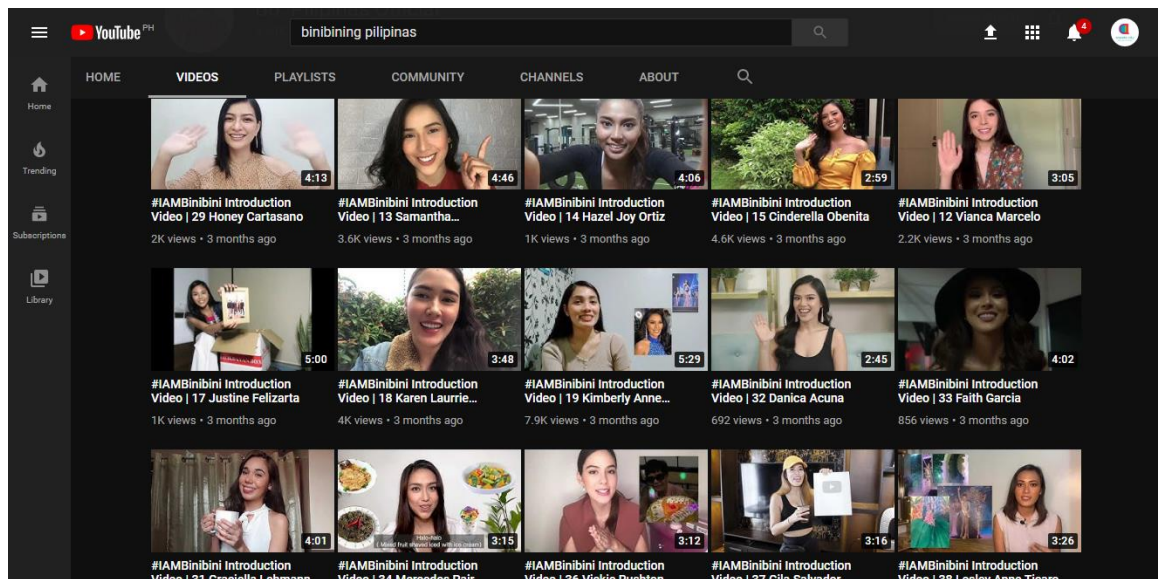
The people behind Binibining Pilipinas also take part in helping the girls promote their advocacies. The marketing team produces video packages and other digital materials that feature the girls, either in group or individual interviews. This allows the girls to discuss their advocacies in full detail and relay necessary information to the audience. These materials are then posted on the official digital platforms of Binibining Pilipinas.

FIGURE 6. Interview videos produced by the pageant's digital team for Binibining Pilipinas 2020/2021.



SOURCE: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0\\_SYKrjYZStvrpRhxdB-MQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0_SYKrjYZStvrpRhxdB-MQ)

FIGURE 7. Videos personally produced by Binibining Pilipinas 2021 candidates and posted on the pageant's YouTube channel.



SOURCE: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0\\_SYKjrYZStvrpRhxdB-MQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0_SYKjrYZStvrpRhxdB-MQ)

The girls' promotion of their personal advocacies creates a positive impression for Binibining Pilipinas Charities Inc. The way I see it, the advocacy communication of candidates creates a good public impression that BPCI allows the candidates to cultivate their personal causes and use the pageant as a platform to advance them. Through the candidates' advocacy promotion, BPCI is able to extend its mission "to bring the message of hope and love across the nation". We take advantage of this opportunity to utilize the girls as spokespersons in advancing some advocacy messages that the organization wishes to convey.

This was practiced by our team especially during the height of the pandemic. With the traditional events and activities of Binibining Pilipinas cancelled due to COVID, our team shifted to social media in order to provide more exposure for the pageant's queens and candidates. And this exposure includes presenting the girls as

ambassadors of various advocacies that the organization wishes to relay to the public.

At the start of the pandemic, our team produced a video where the reigning beauty queens took turns in providing helpful tips that would keep the public safe from COVID-19.

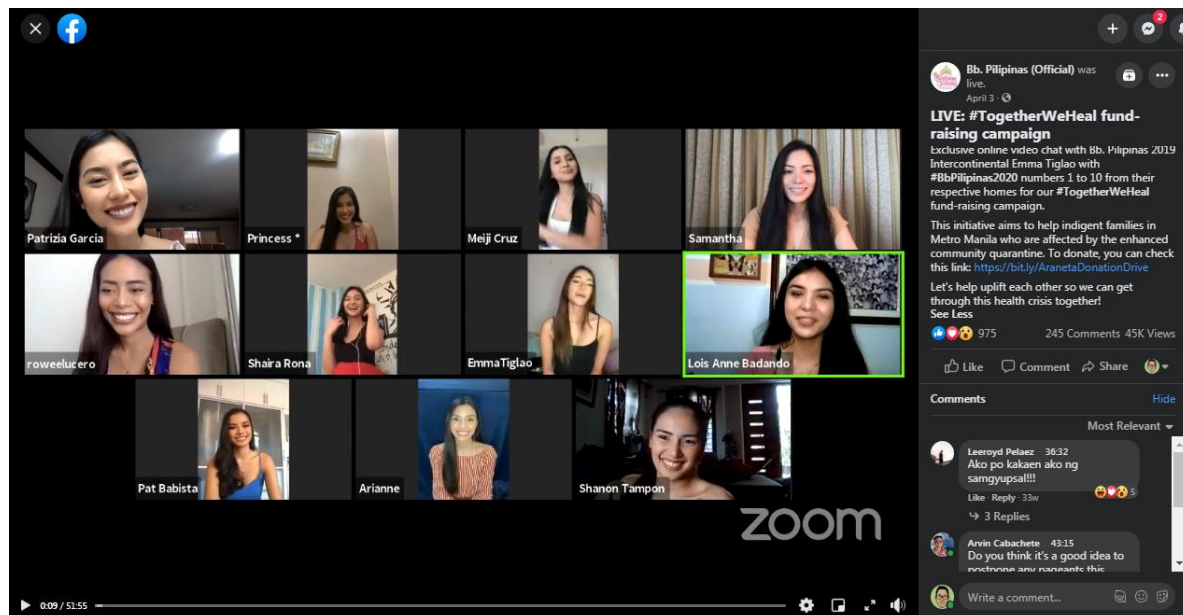
The team also had an online donation campaign drive, participated in by both the queens and candidates, to help BPCI generate donations for its COVID-19 relief operations. Aside from seeking donations, the girls were asked to share their personal stories of struggles and coping during the pandemic, and to impart information that will help the viewers stay safe.

FIGURE 8. A COVID-19 public service announcement video of Binibining Pilipinas 2019 winners.



SOURCE: Binibining Pilipinas Facebook page

FIGURE 9. Select Binibining Pilipinas 2020/2021 candidates during a virtual donation drive.



SOURCE: Binibining Pilipinas Facebook page

As mentioned by Ticaro, these social media presentations "make [pageant girls] relevant even during the pandemic". For her, it is a good use of the opportunity and platform to insert the promotion of timely advocacies. Also, "social media was really the way to go", as all on-ground pageant activities back then were cancelled by the pandemic.

And based on social media analytics, the digital materials have definitely reached the audience, and have made netizens interested to "consume" them. As of August 2021, the Binibining Pilipinas Facebook page and YouTube channels – platforms where all of the advocacy videos are uploaded -- reached 1.3 million followers and more than 90,000 subscribers, respectively. Each video generates views that reach anywhere between 1,000 and 40,000. In a press release, an official

of the pageant was quoted saying: "We keep up with the times by delivering quality entertainment, yet remaining to give voice to our Binibinis and talk about current issues, digitally." (Tinio, 2021)

These examples lead to the identification of the final element of social marketing in this study's context: the Promotion. Weinrich (2006) defined Promotion as "consist[ing] of the integrated use of advertising, public relations, promotions, media advocacy, personal selling and entertainment vehicles." As mentioned above, advocacy communication in pageantry (at least for Binibining Pilipinas) happens through media interviews and social media postings.

### **Framing Advocacies through Entertainment**

The examples mentioned above illustrate another form of message framing in relation to advocacy communication in pageantry. Apart from framing the advocacy messages on the personal stories of the girls (via personalization, as discussed earlier), the candidates were able to do advocacy communication through another form of framing: via entertainment. The girls were able to talk about their advocacy messages through showbiz interviews, social media presentations, and other entertaining digital presentations.

But this does not mean that the "entertaining" advocacy communication employed by pageant girls are not as effective as the "serious" methods. Kinuthia (2020) has implied in her study that advocacy communication can take different forms as long as they "promote active participation or involvement in any social issue that affects public lives" and "represent people's interests in times when public representation is not enough." These definitions are clearly visible in the advocacy communication participated in by the pageant candidates.

The methods of packaging and promoting advocacy communication cited above clearly suggest how pageantry can incorporate a commonly-considered "serious" advocacy communication with a "lighter" popular culture. The responses and observations show that even in a lifestyle/entertainment event like pageants, advocacy communication is possible. And even though it appears modern or unconventional, in the end, the definitions of advocacy communication remain visible.

This entertainment value confirms the idea of pageant girls as being subjected to "justified commodification". Through the digital activities, we can see how the candidates were "used" in a good way to advance causes, as the girls "served the function of adding value and reinforcement to the relevant meaning of a particular event" (Fernandez, 2015).

### **Pageants as Venue for Public Discourse**

Having all these interviews and presentations as part of the pageant contributed to making pageantry nowadays more empowering. Because advocacies have become a substantial component, they have allowed pageants like Binibining Pilipinas to become "public events [that] provide a space for discourse and cultural action in ethnic and national communities (de Windt, 2019)" and not just an entertainment contest. While pageant candidates would still have to showcase their pretty faces and fit bodies, they are also given the opportunity to express what is in their minds and hearts. This makes pageant girls "treated as individuals with substance, not exploited and objectified" (Fernandez, 2015).

In addition, the candidates believe this is the power that pageanty holds nowadays: to provide a platform for girls like them to voice out their thoughts and

educate. "We add a component of education [in our time in pageants]," Tiglao said, adding that pageant girls even provide "a face to causes". Tan even provided an insightful thought: "If people like us because of our advocacies, that's good" because it will open more conversations not just about the girls but also their causes.

The idea of putting "a face to causes" brings us back to the idea of message framing – particularly "human interest/personalization", which focuses on a person as the most important aspect of messaging. Arowolo (2017) further explained: "When giving a story to the audience, humanize it. Making it a character is far more encouraging than the essential appearances." This could be the reason why some advocacies are more associated with personalities who are active in campaigning certain causes, such as in the case of Nobel Peace Prize laureates Malala Yousafzai (for the fight for women's rights) and Maria Ressa (for the fight against disinformation). And, as mentioned earlier, the same goes with beauty queens like Wurtzbach and Gray whose advocacies have always been associated with them.

Given this, we see pageant girls going beyond being just models with pretty faces and impressive figures. As they are given the chance to speak about their advocacies, candidates also become communicators. They are given the chance to speak their minds (their knowledge about their advocacies) and hearts (their personal connections with their advocacies). Pageantry serves as the girls' platform to not just showcase their physical beauty, but also to relay relevant information and stories to the public.

This, basically, is the essence of advocacy. As explained by Kinuthia (2020), advocacy work is mainly a communication process. And with issues being discussed by the girls through pageants (like Binibining Pilipinas), we see the realization of an

advocacy's mission: "to raise public's consciousness about a particular issue" by "speaking on behalf of others" (Kinuthia, 2020).

## Chapter VI

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

For this study, an autoethnography approach was utilized to examine my personal experience and observations as part of the Binibining Pilipinas team, in order to fully understand how advocacy communication works in pageantry. Apart from my self-reflection, select queens and candidates were also interviewed to gather their thoughts about the advocacy promotion they did in the pageant.

All girls who join Binibining Pilipinas nowadays are also advocates for certain causes. Even though it is not required in the pageant, they are ready with their chosen advocacies, and they are ready to talk about them whenever they were given the chance to in interviews. Some would even reflect their advocacies through their fashion, or present them in various segments of the pageant such as the talent competition.

The fact that these girls are promoting advocacies in their pageant journey already suits the definition of social marketing, with the advocacies as the Product and the pageant as the Place.

In choosing their advocacies, they tap into their past experiences and personal backgrounds. This allows them to make advocacies more truthful, and to create real true-to-life stories that paint a clearer and more realistic picture for their advocacies. They frame their advocacy messages using their personal face/personality to become more natural and convincing to the audience – thereby making the Price of their social marketing more “affordable” or relatable to the audience. Plus, banner an advocacy also helps them create a positive public

image – one that makes them very “human” and even more relatable to the audience.

For some girls with enough resources, they produce digital presentations to showcase their advocacies. This involves doing research about their chosen advocacies, gathering relevant statistics, browsing current events related to the advocacies, etc. – anything that would help them justify, present, and promote their chosen causes.

In most cases, advocacy promotions in pageants are media-assisted – through the help of media interviews, specifically pageant bloggers. And in these instances, the girls always find a way to insert their advocacies in interviews even if they are not directly asked about them.

Even the people behind Binibining Pilipinas take part in helping the girls promote advocacies by producing digital materials posted on different online platforms of the pageant. This allows the girls to discuss their advocacies in full detail and relay necessary information to the audience. This practice was seen especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, as most pageant activities shifted to social media due to cancellation of traditional on-ground events and activities. This provided more exposure for the pageant queens and candidates in a virtual space. Promotion of the girls’ social marketing has then become digital and more entertaining. This method proves that advocacy communication is not just limited to political actions like lobbying and street demonstrations, and gives the traditional concept of advocacy work a “lighter” and more appealing approach.

This study clearly illustrates how pageants like Binibining Pilipinas contribute to advocacy and development communication. By looking at pageantry through the lens of social marketing, we can see pageant girls not as models with beautiful looks

but as communicators with stories and messages to share. While their main agenda in pageantry is to win and become beauty queens, incidentally, they are provided opportunities to talk about their personal advocacies during their time in the pageant. Through various activities where girls discuss their personal causes, pageants somehow transform into a venue for public discourse and for creating awareness on relevant issues.

Realistically, advocacy communication is “incidental” in popular culture like pageantry, as it is not the main purpose of the event. As admitted by the participants, advocacy communication serves as a “winning formula” or component for pageant girls. As explained by Delfinado (2015), pageant audiences are looking for girls who “represent a sector, country or advocacy”, and would root for a candidate “who has the characteristic of a hero who can save them from the oppressions that they are suffering from.” So basically, pageant girls would do everything to become more endearing to the public, and to garner more fans.

But this “incidental” component has helped contradict common criticisms that associate pageantry with the objectification and commodification of women. Through advocacy communication, pageant girls are also “treated as individuals with substance, not exploited and objectified” (Fernandez, 2015). By making them communicators, pageant girls are being noticed beyond their physical beauty. And by doing so, a new role is bestowed to popular culture – to help promote development communication.

Pageant girls associate themselves with real-life personal advocacies to make them more relatable and inspiring – hence, more appealing – to the audience. They express their knowledge or experiences about their chosen advocacies through media interviews and videos posted on social media. They take advantage of

situations or issues in society such as the COVID-19 pandemic to advance their advocacy communication work. This is how advocacy work happens in pageantry, and it reflects the very core of social marketing – to influence the acceptability of social ideas through interesting means in packaging and distributing helpful information.

In conclusion, I see pageants as being able to achieve two things in incorporating advocacy communication. First, they transform into a platform that not only looks at physical beauty but also one that serves as a springboard for information. It has further distanced the platform away from its original “beauty competition” branding (where girls are simply judged based on certain beauty standards) to a more modern and meaningful “beauty pageant” tagging (where messages are created and relayed).

Second, pageants allow the contestants to become more useful citizens by allowing them to partake in providing solutions to problems in society. As mentioned by Alzaga (2015), pageantry aids in the self-affirmation of women. By joining pageants, women "prove their worth or the fact that they are more than how they are seen." And through advocacy communication, pageant girls portray the famous line that Miss Universe 2018 Pia Wurtzbach has now immortalized: “confidently beautiful, with a heart.”

Through these two instances, beauty pageants are fully maximized as a valuable aspect of popular culture, and participants are able to contribute to advocacy and development communication in the country.

## **Chapter VII**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study shows that even in popular culture, advocacy communication can be practiced and incorporated. Social marketing elements that are crucial for advocacy communication have been observed in pageantry, particularly in Binibining Pilipinas.

It was highlighted, however, that this component is simply an “incidental” in pageantry. Advocacy communication is incorporated in pageants as a way of promoting the candidacy of the girls and improving their image to the audience. And after the pageant, only the advocacies of the winning girls remain active and remembered. As for the non-winning girls, while some of them continue to promote their advocacies in their personal capacities after the pageant, most girls discontinue their advocacy promotions.

I would love to see a more long-term approach be implemented by pageants in order to support all the girls – winners and non-winners alike – in sustaining their advocacy communication. This will help advocacy communication extend beyond the usual pageant period. Pageant girls are already considered as “national public figures” (Balogun, 2012) regardless if they win or not, so pageants can already maximize this to achieve more permanent advocacy and development communication campaigns.

As for future studies, it would be interesting to see advocacy communication in pageants from the perspective of the audience. This will help in determining the effectiveness of advocacy messages conveyed in pageants, and in looking at how these messages affected the pageant’s target audience. This will also help pageants

determine the necessary adjustments they need to make to further strengthen their advocacy communication processes.

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