

Online Icons: Clique-ing Extraordinary in Ordinairiness

Interview with Ramon Bautista

Shirley Palileo-Evidente

Ramon Bautista is a graduate of the University of the Philippines Film Institute (UPFI), College of Mass Communication in Diliman. His undergraduate thesis “Makina,” a short animated film on greed, won him first prize in the animation category of the 20th CCP Gawad Alternatibo. Since 2001 he has been a lecturer of the UPFI and has earned units from the institute’s master’s degree program.



Bautista is better identified as an Internet action star, disc jockey, MTV celebrity, and commercial talent. The website of the radio program “Brewrats” said he “invaded MTV with his very own show, staring (sic) in various music videos for local bands, endorsing products here and there, hosting the Pasyal television travel show for Studio 23, and the Brewrats radio program for Campus FM 99.5. This guy who claims bumming is his passion has a lot of work on his hands” (<http://thebrewrats.multiply.com/journal/item/3>). Recently, Bautista became an anchor at GMA 11 News’ “May Tamang Balita” (The News with Craziiness), which airs every Thursday at 10 p.m.

When first invited to be a lecturer at the UPFI, Bautista admits to feeling uneasy. However, recalling how his former film professors had inspired him

and perceiving the offer as a good opportunity, he accepted the invitation. He takes his teaching intently. In class, Bautista equips himself with his passion for film.

On camera, Bautista executes the extraordinary roles and stints despite an inherent coyness through a self-asserted thought deduction. As he puts it, “I am too shy that I am so shy to be shy at my director, so I end up doing the things that he wants me to do.”

In the interview conducted on June 1, 2011 at Chocolate Kiss at UP Diliman’s Bahay ng Alumni, Bautista discusses the disguised opportunities that set him to stardom and the ordinary ways that advanced his career as a public figure. He also shares his insights about the youth, mass media, and the effective ways to understand and “connect” with today’s youth.

Q What in your personality do you think the youth identify with?

A First, I look ordinary. Others think they can be me. It’s an inspirational thing. They would think, *“This guy can neither dance nor sing; he does not know how to play the guitar; and he is not particularly handsome,”* but somehow they know me. It means the youth collectively do not know how to sing or dance. They are not rock stars; they are not celebrities. If Ramon Bautista can be likable, it is likely they would also think that *“I can be likable as well.”* I am an ordinary person who is somehow popular. Take Nora Aunor: she is also an ordinary person who sings. It is really an old thing. It has long been a formula. Nora Aunor is dark-skinned amid mestiza celebrities in her time. People from the provinces idolize her. They think they look like her since they are provincianos. Another example is Bentong. He is a provinciano, too. Those who migrated to Manila see that despite his being a provinciano, he still became famous. This is neither something the Internet revolutionized nor something I exploited. The process and that kind of effect just also happened to me.

Q So this an observable pattern?

A Yes.

Q How do you feel about being an Internet icon?

A I am very careful since so many youth follow me. I cannot be a bad example. I am a kind person, so I am careful. Sometimes others will tweet about smoking joints. I am not like that. I am more conscious of what I tweet to them since I just might be their idol and they might imitate me. They might think it is a cool thing to do; thus, they might do it as well.

Q How does being “cool” make an impression on the youth?

A If you are not associated with any “place” and do not force things on them, that is cool. I also use the method of disconnection, which can be very effective. My posts show that I don’t really care. I don’t care how many hits it [a post] gets. I don’t care if many will like it or if it will leave an impression on those who follow me. I just do it because I like to do it. It’s my “trip.” It’s also about what my real job is. When asked what my work is, I’d say I am a teacher. When traveling by air, they ask about my occupation. I’d say I am a teacher because I am really a teacher in UP, that is what I really do. The Internet thing is just a sideline for me. It’s a weekend activity, so I don’t make a career out of it. So whenever I post, others will just think, “*Oh, here he goes again, and he’s posting pictures of celebrities, while his job is really teaching and as DJ.*”

Q Reaching out to the youth has always been the objective of many communicators [the government, advertisers, media producers]. How do you perceive the efforts of these entities relative to yours?

A Take the government, for example, or even marketing efforts for that matter. They like putting big logos and pushing for their products. That is hard sell. “Disconnection” is also done in advertising since they know that hard sell does not sell. The government is the worst creators of PSAs, or public service announcements: they do it fifth gear [“rekta”]. They’d say, “*Do this! Do that!*” It’s so much like home TV shopping style of work. They will insist that you do what they like. They do not exert any effort to be creative.

Q What makes an interesting tweet?

A It is something funny and insightful like a social commentary. Take the stand-up comedians. They are funny. Someone who throws so many funny jokes gets followed. There should also be interesting punchlines. I don’t like aggressive tweets, the kind that affects other people. I prefer even those that are self-deprecating. There is also more humor in objects like “*I wish you can miss-call a lost remote control,*” so one can easily find it. It’s a good social observation, and no one gets offended. It’s funnier than laughing at gays or others’ mishaps. I don’t find bully jokes fitting. It is not my style.

Q What is your take on divorce in your tweets?

A I tweeted that marriage “*should have what a driver’s license has: renewable every three years.*” You see, there are times when I don’t really believe my tweets. Some are made for the intellectuals who might just think that “*Ramon Bautista is fooling around again, doing mockery.*” The idea I tweeted

on divorce is stupid, and it gets confusing when I mix it with my smoking tweet that makes sense. The smart ones can detect that I'm in my fooling-around mode with the divorce tweet. Some can really tell when I am serious and when I am just fooling around. When one distinguishes one from the other, then the reward is something "*like hah, I get it!*" The problem is, not everyone knows when I am serious or not. And this is intentional. I am aware that my followers are smart since they have access to the Internet and listen to my radio program, which does not only air nonsense gossips. In addition, the documentaries we show on the Internet need a little brain to be appreciated. So I expect that they will appreciate the things I do. Perhaps, others think I am a fool or cruel since I seem to like divorce, so they get irritated.

Q Are you pro-divorce?

A No. I would prefer that the marriage license has something like a driving test too. Before anyone gives you a license, there is an assurance that your brain really is working fine, so there won't be breakups. Although that could be quite a challenge since marriage is all about love.

Q What is an Internet icon for you?

A I am just that. Most of the things I do get out through the Internet. In truth, the things I do are not that remarkable; they're not top of the bunch special. My Twitter feedback is not that high compared to those of celebrities. My YouTube hits are not too many. Perhaps the Internet icon thing happens collectively. My fame is due to the Internet. I was not discovered in TV. I will never excel in radio or be a musician. Fact is, I look like this. People (in TV) are all hunks, handsome, and good speakers. If you are a comedian, you'll make it if you are gay, look like a fool or someone who people want to slap to senses. But I am not gay. Neither am I utterly ugly nor too handsome. So why am I in TV? It is because of the Internet.

Q What do you think contributed to the growing success of the online media in reaching out to the youth? What does it have that works compared to other mass media?

A So many cool stuffs are happening in the Internet for the youth. There is Facebook, social networking, and then YouTube. Social media is really strong. Even cell phones now are like social media. In its hybrid form, it is linked with the Internet. The youth without computers can opt for Internet cafés that have mushroomed everywhere. They watch YouTube, then they have

Facebook. In social networking, when you are young, you want to socially network with your friends so that you feel you belong. If you do not have a Facebook account, it's like you are "*others*." Other than the social circle that we move around in and hang out at. When we are in the house and we don't have Facebook access, it seems like you are my friend and I did not add you to my list of friends in my account. You'd really feel sad. Sometimes I feel I've left out some of my friends since I've consumed the 5,000-friend limit in Facebook.

Q How effective do you think is the Internet in reaching out to the youth?

A It is so effective. If there's no Internet, I would be a street bum [*"taong grasa"*]. The Internet is a tool for many things. The Internet is so wide; it is the most wonderful invention for the past 50 years. It's like an "*electric fan*" that we need every day. It's like "*water*."

Q In your opinion, it is "*water*" for the youth?

A Yes, so much so. This is the new school of today.

Q What does it teach them?

A Everything one has to know.

Q What then is the role of the adult/educators within the seemingly rampant icons present in the online technology?

A It's the children who we need to control since we can't control the Internet. If one kid tries to find the formula to make a bomb, you can't control that. So the adult would have to say to the kid, "*Study hard and so and so is your role in life*." In the end it is still the values from home that matter since there are various ways to undo censorship in the Internet.

Q How do you define the youth today?

A Today's youth like to "*do*" the Internet. Even yesterday's youth would have liked to "*do*" the Internet but just didn't have access. That's why they use to "*trip*" on magazines such as *Liwayway*. They read gossips about Nora Aunor. With the Internet, the interests of today's youth have become more diverse. If before the only selection is Nora Aunor, now the choices are Justin Bieber, Miley Cyrus, Hannah Montana, Ramon Bautista. They can choose the personality they like. They can custom-make what they can be since they have a wide menu. If before the only viand is cassava, now there is more—it's an entire market place. So this generation of youth can find

themselves easily and change instantly. It's good that they change personality every now and then; it seems good since they are able to try so many of these.

Q If there is more selection in the “menu” and the youth, as you opine, seem very interested in online socials, what is its implication, if there is any, on the evolution of Filipino culture and the formation of our national identity?

A The Internet has a very high penetration in the Philippines. The Filipinos have a very high online literacy rate. But there is still a higher rate of TV viewing of shows such as *Wowowwee* or *Willing Willy*. So those with money, those who can buy computers and do the Internet are those who will get victimized by globalization. They will be the ones affected by globalization. Those who do not do the Internet are nailed to watching TV shows. TV is still strong. Some are like me: popular in the Internet but do not even have 100,000 followers on Twitter as of today. But for those who are popular on television, a following of 300,000 on Twitter is easy to get. Filipino identity will not be lost since there is still TV, which is very local. In any case, there is Filipino flavor in the Internet.

Q Can you cite some pictures or images the youth associate you with?

A Perhaps it's the lifestyle of fun—that I don't give a care, I do what I like to do, I'm young and carefree. I have Formspring, which is like an advice website, a question-and-answer website. I get 300 questions a day. Examples are “*Do you already have a crush on a UP faculty?*” and “*Have you had your first kiss?*” These are questions of the youth, unlike your questions which are professor-like. The youth are very “*emo*”—emotional—and gloomy. They do not have problems, so they invent emotional concerns such as “*nobody loves me*.” They are young, don't pay Meralco bills, and are bored with their lives. They have high energy, they have hormonal imbalances, and thus they become “*emo*.” They are likely to say, “*Why is it nice to emo when it's raining?*” When I answer, I'd refer to a music video of Hale [pop culture] to tickle them. Three hours ago, that only had 17 followers. That is very few. They also tell me they have crushes. An adult would not have to ask about their feelings on crushes. But the youth need to ask what to answer their crushes. Even if they know the answers, they just want an indiscriminate affirmation from someone who will say, “*Go ahead! Say I love you to your crush.*”

When I read their comments, they see me as cool. That's what I see that

they see in me. I am not saying I am cool, but most likely that is what they see.

Q Are you not cool?

A I don't want to declare that I am. If I do, then I am not anymore. It's like a crazy person. When the crazy says, "I'm crazy," then he's not one anymore since he already knows what is crazy and what is not. It's more proper that another person tells you if you are cool or not, or if you are an artist.

Q When the youth ask advice from you, is it because their parents or elders cannot address their question, thus it becomes a question for Internet icons?

A Would you ask your parents about your crush? Or would you ask your mommy and daddy if it's okay to have sex? I am just one of the many Internet icons. Perhaps for them I am someone wise, plus, I am a UP teacher, so they think I am smart.

Q As UPFI lecturer, was there ever a challenge of students not taking you seriously, as a consequence of the perceived image that you are carefree?

A When you are a UP teacher, there is respect because you have intelligent students. They know their roles in media and in real life. In class, it's different, especially when I write my messages on the white board. The film students are mature, especially so when I work with them in the industry. They take on their roles as camerapersons or as someone in the production very well.

Q What is your long-term vision for yourself as an educator and an actor-comedian?

A Continue teaching and put up a film school, especially now that there are so many new digital cameras that are faster and easier to use. These high-definition cameras will be great with online access. As an Internet star, you can never predict when you will lose fame. To be honest, when the number of people who find me funny begins to diminish, it'll be very sad since I've gotten spoiled. But I am not doing this to attract fans or to get famous. If that was so, I would have grabbed GMA 7 Network's offer to be a full-fledged comedian, to be ultimately famous. This idea is only good as long as I am having fun. I will do it while I am still having fun. Someday I will pay more attention to those who make videos like me. I will devote some time

to them, so they can also be in the spotlight, so they can sell themselves because there is really a great future in the Internet.

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