

# Beyond Face Value: The Dynamics of Talent-Talent Manager-Advertising Agency-Client Power Relations in the Production of Shampoo and Soap Television Commercials

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This study analyzes power relations that influence the employment of talents for shampoo and bath soap television commercials. It explains how power dynamics affect the behavior of the talent, talent manager, advertising agency and client in the hiring process. Intensive interviews, participant and unobtrusive observations as well as the recollection of personal experiences of 34 informants comprise the basis for the conclusion that the hierarchy of powers in the hiring process is mainly structured as Client – Advertising Agency – Talent Manager / Agency – Talent. In any of the seven arrangements of power relations analyzed in this study, the existing inequalities of these relations profit the client.

*Keywords: local talent, celebrity, foreign, power relations, hiring*

## Introduction to the Study

Becoming a commercial model is one of the most sought-after careers among entertainment professionals. TV commercials can launch young talent into movie and television stardom. Many of the country's most famous actors began their career as TV commercial models, including Toni Gonzaga in a soft drink advertisement, Marian Rivera in Skin White body lotion and Dingdong Dantes in Johnson & Johnson (Maglipon, 2008). In some cases, a character in a TV commercial is better retained in the audience's collective memory than the brand's name, such as "Karen" of a McDonald's campaign and housewife "Lumen" of a Surf laundry detergent advertisement.

The term "face value" is widely used by professionals in the entertainment industry to refer to a person's visual appeal. The beautiful faces selected to appear in TV commercials reflect the definitions of beauty in place in the commercial industry. Television transforms unknown people with features that are deemed by the industry to be beautiful, into celebrities.

## **Talents as stars and stars as symbols**

In one of Sunsilk shampoo's commercials (2008), actress Marian Rivera narrates how she succeeded in show business. In the script she says verbatim, *Paano ko nakuha ang dream role ko? Dinaan ko sa pagsasayaw – at sa buhok!* [How did I get my dream role? I turned to dancing –and my hair!]. The word *buhok* [hair] was used not just as an object to be desired by the audience, but also as an instrument to her rise in the entertainment industry, establishing in the minds of viewers that using Sunsilk improves one's physical assets to get ahead in life.

According to Tolentino (2000), “stars serve society as symbols of its aspirations, as means of understanding its dreams of improving its way of life and as cultural texts of popular consciousness” (p. 3, as cited in Brillon, 2007). Graeme Turner, the author of *Fame Games: The Production of Celebrity in Australia* explained “tapping celebrities is an efficient method of raising cultural significance on products, services and anything that can be bought” (Turner et al., 2003, p. 12). Thus, entertainment stars are commodities used to market other commodities.

## **Framework: Political Economy of Communication**

A political economy framework was applied to analyze the power relations in the dynamics among talent, talent manager, advertising agency and client. Mosco (1996) defines political economy as:

...the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources. In the context of a political economy of media, newspapers, books, videos, film and audiences are treated as the primary resources. (p. 25)

In the lens of political economy, social relations are organized by power. Mosco (2009) further defines power as the ability to control other people, processes, and things even in the face of resistance. It comes in many forms in the production, distribution and consumption of materials or resources involved in the operation of a media industry.

## **Commodification of talent's labor and physical attributes**

Commodification is the transformation of the use values of an object into exchange values once it is placed in a market. “Use value” refers to the capacity to satisfy human needs or wants while “exchange value” to the price

a product can command in exchange (Mosco, 1996). This means that in commodification, the value of an object transforms from its capacity to meet individual and social needs to its capacity to sell when placed in a market – and the object has become a commodity in the process. This commodity is the product of the rigid social relations (i.e. labor-management) involved starting in its production up to its exchange in a marketplace.

The production of a commodity starts when the producer buys other commodities, such as land, labor and capital. Then the final product is sold for more than the value of the first investment. Surplus from selling the product is reinvested to increase capital. In Marxian view, the whole process is exploitative because as the producer increases control, labor becomes a commodity just like land and raw materials.

In the case of commercial talents, a talent's labor power and physical attributes are sold as commodities to advertisers (clients). In this process of commodification, the exchange value (i.e. talent fee) of the talent's labor and physical attributes like facial features, skin complexion, height and hair are based on market conditions.

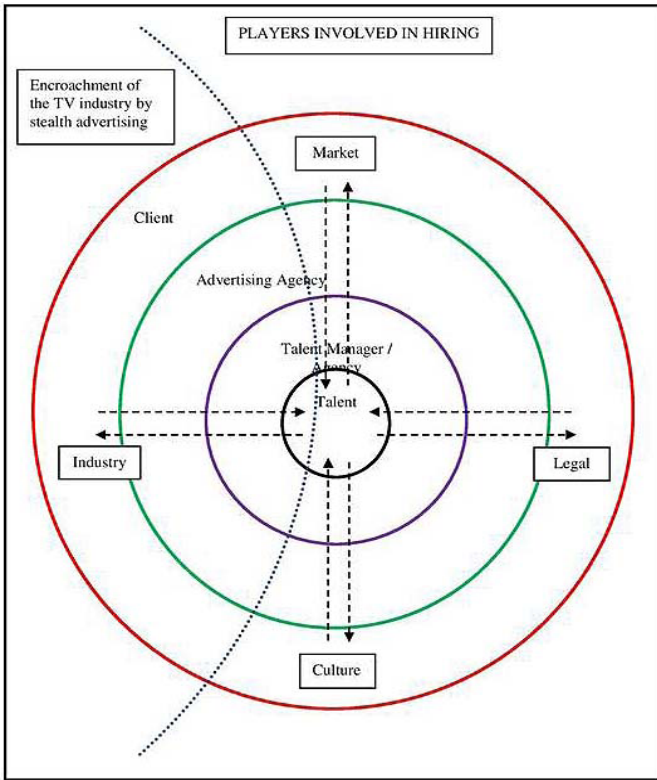
The process of commodification begins in the talent. To increase one's value as a commodity, a talent has to invest in his or her physical qualities in order to produce an image that is commercially viable to talent managers, advertising agencies and clients. Such image should be assessed as profitable by the talent manager who then markets it to client advertisers. At the final stage of this talent development machinery, the talent is a finished product placed in a TV commercial. The talent as an image and not as a person is valued by its capacity to fulfill different utilities for the client, especially as an advertising tool to sell a product or service. Ideally, this image should continuously generate income for the talent. The income could be reinvested for the talent's grooming and further acting and modeling workshops.

### **Factors affecting power relations involved in hiring TV commercial talents**

The *JMC Santos –RG Celades Model*<sup>1</sup> graphically represents the four factors affecting the power relations involved in the hiring of commercial talents. It also illustrates how the talent (innermost circle) is subsumed by other players who wield power in the hiring process.

There are four factors that orbit around the power relations (arrows pointing opposite directions) involved in hiring (and firing) of talents. These are industry, culture, legal and market; each significantly influences the employment of a talent. In addition to the four factors, the encroachment

of the television industry (arc crossing the four circles) through stealth advertisements has also altered the hiring route of talents.



**Figure 1.** JMC Santos-RG Celades Model: factors affecting power relations involved in hiring commercial talents

## Method

The power relations prevailing among and between talents, talent managers, advertising agencies and clients in the hiring of models were determined by analyzing behavioral patterns in the following arrangements:

1. talent–talent
2. talent–talent manager
3. talent manager–advertising agency
4. talent–advertising agency
5. advertising agency–client
6. client–talent
7. client–talent manager

Intensive interviews, participant observation (PO) and unobtrusive observation were used to gather data. A total of 11 different sets of intensive

interview questions were designed to extract responses related to issues on working conditions, compensation and welfare of the talent; client standards in the selection of commercial talent; influence of the talent manager or agency and the disparities between non-celebrity and celebrity talents. Follow-up questions were asked to clarify concepts mentioned by interviewees in order to deepen the understanding of issues cogent to the topic power relations.

The key personalities interviewed, who are considered as major players in the talent hiring dynamics, were the commercial models, showbusiness and non-showbusiness talent managers and scouts, casting directors, creative directors of advertising agencies, TV commercial directors and the brand managers of client companies that manufacture shampoo and soap products. In addition, supplemental interviews were administered with experts in the fields of law and market research. These individuals shared valuable insights that broadened the understanding of power relations.

This study obtained a total of 34 informants for intensive and supplemental interviews. Of these informants, one granted a second personal interview for supplementary data making a grand total of 35 interviews (12 emails and 23 personal interviews). The researcher's experiences qualify participant observation since he participated in two commercial castings, John Robert Powers' talent shows in 2004 and 2005 and had several video tests taken in several Makati-based modeling agencies. Unobtrusive observation was conducted during a final casting session for a soap TV commercial. The researcher observed how decision-makers chose a talent from a pool of aspirants. He used an observation journal with accurate time records and descriptions of all developments in the casting session.

In data analysis, the transcriptions from the intensive interviews and the journals from both of the researchers' participant and unobtrusive observations were qualitatively analyzed. The recurrent issues and problems from these data sources were reviewed and classified according to the seven arrangements of power relations observed. To determine the stratification and dynamics of talent-talent manager-advertising agency-client power relations, the classified issues and problems were regrouped under the four bases of power relations -- (1) market, (2) legal, (3) culture, and (4) industry.

## **Results**

The talents' time, skills, labor power and physical attributes are the commodities sold to clients by the talent managers, advertising agencies and the talents themselves. Their production and utilization as commodities are determined by the power relations between key players: the talents themselves,

talent managers or modeling agencies, advertising agencies and clients. In turn, the power relations that exist between the four players are influenced by the factors of industry, market, legal and culture. It is not necessary that all four factors affect each of the seven arrangements.

## 1. Talent –Talent

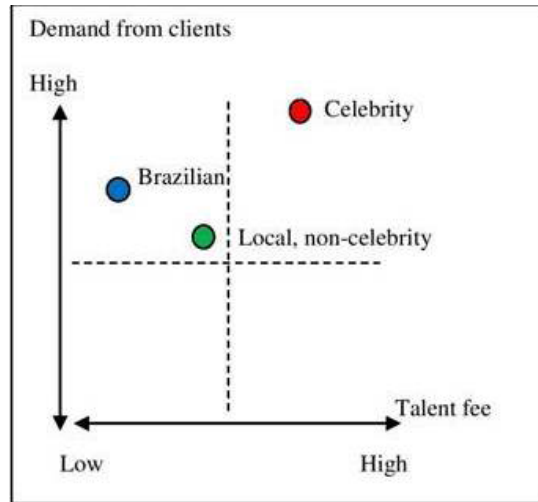
### Market

Analysis on the market-influenced power dynamics among talents requires using economic or business terms. One is “barrier to entry,” which is a competitive disadvantage and can be either high or low depending on many factors, such as disparities in technology and restrictions imposed by the laws of a country (Saloner et al., 2001). The fixed requirements for certain physical features and skills in order to become a commercial model serve as barriers for aspiring models to enter the industry. Categorically, the modeling industry had a high-entry barrier in years 2007 to 2009, because it was very difficult for a talent who did not have these years’ hottest looks to be profitable in the industry.

Two factors, talent fee and demand from clients, spell either profit or loss to talents. Figure 2 illustrates the positions of the local, Brazilian and celebrity talents in the model market from years 2007 to the first quarter of 2009.

The celebrity talent had the highest demand and commanded the highest fee among the three competitors. Between the Brazilians and the local talents, the former had a higher demand due to the low talent fees which attracted clients. The practice

of charging rates way below the industry’s standard is called “diving.” This induced a monopolistic climate with the Brazilian talents killing the competition by charging the lowest talent fee rates. As a result, big-budgeted



**Figure 2.** Market Distribution of Talents:<sup>2</sup> commercial talents in the Philippine TV commercial talent market, 2007 – 2009, 1st quarter.

contracts became scarcer for local talents as the bulk of modeling jobs went to Brazilians.

The illustration above conveys one main point: local, non-celebrity talent was the most disadvantaged in the conditions of the commercial model market from years 2007 to early 2009. Local talent had to contest with the “affordable Brazilian” at one end and the “in-demand but highly expensive celebrity” on the other. Ultimately, due to cutthroat competition, the local talent had to remain affordable to the client by keeping rates relatively low just to survive.

### *Culture*

Culture-based factors<sup>3</sup> that affected the talents’ chances of getting a job are the *kamag-anak* [kin] system and to some degree, the *kakilala* [acquaintance]. The *kamag-anak* system values family ties, above all others, in business transactions while the *kakilala* is based on referrals from work colleagues or associates and friends in an industry.

The *kamag-anak* system worked well with non-celebrity talents who used their social pedigree, specifically family ties and connections with influential individuals, in competing for a TV commercial project. This mentality defeated the system of meritocracy in castings or auditions.

## 2. Talent –Talent Manager

### *Market*

Talent managers today have become less keen on the backgrounds of the talents. What matters more to them is the commercial potential of their faces and physique. They treat the talents’ physical attributes like perishable goods that expire at certain dates. “Laugh lines,” “crow’s feet” and other signs of aging contribute to the devaluation of a talent’s market value. To keep such “goods” fresh and marketable, talent managers, especially in showbusiness, invest in expensive cosmetic surgeries such as liposuction, breast augmentation, rhinoplasty and hi-tech anti-aging treatments.

The over-emphasis on physical attributes also explains why talent managers invested in foreign models without scrutinizing their backgrounds. The talent managers who invested in the airfares, living allowances and accommodations for Brazilians were pressured to recoup their capital within the legal 90-day maximum stay in the Philippines. This scenario only pushed the managers to drop rates for Brazilians just to get as many projects as they could (M. Tiaoqui, personal communication, March 11, 2009).

## Culture

The *palakasan* system, in which for varied reasons a grantee is given either more privileges or extra-special treatment by the grantor, has remained widespread in talent management. This system is similar to the concept of favoritism and the talent manager is the grantor in this relationship. The talent management office that is personally managed by one individual is more likely to be infected with this *palakasan* mentality. The talent manager in this setting has the sole decision-making power, compared to an in-house talent manager of a TV network. However, it still depends on the talent manager's sense of integrity and fairness that modeling projects were allocated to those judged to have the most commercial viability based on popularity, demand, and work ethic.

A variant of *palakasan*, the term *alaga* [the English translation is “pet” but refers to a person who is prized and pampered] in talent-talent manager relations refers to a person who is always pampered and highly favored. Talent informants Ms. Lou Sison and Ms. Camille Jensen Hirro both agreed that the talent manager's *alaga* is always marketed to casters. Compared with the rest of the talent pool, a talent who is an *alaga* has better chances at future auditions and is more prioritized during castings. Merit-wise, it can mean that a talent, due to experience and established work relationships with casters and directors, is the *pambato* [bet] of a model agency and therefore, deserves to be the manager's *alaga*. However, the *alaga* system may encourage unprofessional behavior among talents. In the past, talents with attitude problems were still promoted by their managers as long as they kept raking money for the agency.

## Legal

Standard in all modeling contracts are lockouts, morality clauses, payment of talent fee and the medium to be used in advertising. A career-conscious talent is very judicious on the terms and conditions of all contracts signed. Lockouts, for example, may bar a talent from getting more lucrative projects.

At the level of talent-talent manager relations, a talent who agrees to exclusive representation cannot enter into new partnerships with other managers/agencies/networks. Exclusivity affects earnings. A talent who is exclusively tied-up cannot get any project throughout the contract's duration. However, talent manager and former president of the Talent Agents' Organization (TAO) Ms. Mayet Tiaoqui cited two problems caused by non-exclusivity (or in industry lingo, “freelancing”). First, conflicts of interest can happen if a talent did not inform Agents B, C, D and E of a booking secured



by Agent A for a TV commercial. It is possible that Agents B, C, D and E can pick projects from brands that compete with the brand currently modeled by the said talent--which makes both talent and talent manager liable to the client. Second is disagreements on commissions. Several agents can dispute a project's commission because they represented the same talent, so everyone will claim to be the first to book the said talent. For example, if a freelance talent was represented by Agents A, B, C, D and E, all of these agents might not know that they were all pushing the same talent for the same brand and for the same commercial. Finally, the talent manager must keep reminding the talent that contract violations can lead to dire consequences. It is stipulated in most contracts that both the talent and talent manager can be sued and/or ordered to return five to ten times the initial talent fee for a major violation (M. Tiaoqui, personal communication, March 11, 2009).

### 3. Talent Manager – Advertising Agency

#### *Culture*

A talent manager or agency's power in the hiring process depends on connections with the advertising agencies. However, connections, too, depend on the level of influence a manager or agency has in the industry. Managers of non-celebrities can only do so much in packaging their talents to suit the requirements of projects. They do not have the direct influence in contract provisions or work conditions since non-celebrity talents are easily replaceable by the Managers of non-celebrities. A common practice among casters is the preferential selection of models' portfolios or set cards from talent agencies that are their regular patrons. Casters do not even bother looking at the set cards from non-patron agencies. This unscrupulous selection is unfair to the client because the caster is not giving the widest possible selection of talents (M. Tiaoqui, personal communication, March 11, 2009).

The late talent manager Mr. Wyngard Tracy attested that in his 36 years of managing celebrities, an influential talent manager's opinions usually weigh heavily during negotiations (W. Tracy, personal communication). The same is true with TV host and public relations maven Mr. Boy Abunda. Advertising agencies knock on his doors to ask for celebrities under his management who are viable for shampoo endorsements (B. Abunda, personal communication, February 15, 2009). Although Mr. Abunda explained that offers from both local and multinational companies were done after feasibility studies of his talents, his name brand still influenced results on storyboards, talent fees and working conditions.<sup>4</sup>

## 4. Talent –Advertising Agency

### *Market*

Non-showbusiness talents and rising movie stars (and starlets) usually do not directly negotiate with an advertising agency. They fare better when represented by managers who have connections and can leverage bargaining power for a new actor. Oftentimes, it is the talent manager who chooses projects for them. However, advertising agencies may directly invite a few established non-showbusiness talents to endorse a brand without going through the standard casting process.

## 5. Advertising Agency –Client

### *Market*

Advertising is a cutthroat industry. Small advertising outfits fight with multinationals like Leo Burnett and J. Walter Thompson to offer campaign concepts and get accounts from companies. Inasmuch as the client is concerned with cutting advertising costs, they are also very intent in making sure that their investment in a concept guarantees sales.

### *Celebrity or non-celebrity talent?*

An advertising agency can only recommend to the client which talent is fit for a commercial. Even with the tested expertise of in-house casters and creative directors, the advertising agency's hand in choosing the talent only comes secondary to the client.

At times, the advertising agency recommends tapping a celebrity to compete with brands that also use celebrities, such as the case of Kim Chiu for Rejoice Shampoo. Usually, the commercials that utilize celebrities are initiated by the client while conceptual commercials, which typically star non-celebrities, come from advertising agencies (I. Basa, personal communication, March 13, 2009). Maxi-Peel's *Kutis Artista* [complexion like a star's] slogan needed a celebrity whom the masses could easily associate with. That is why Marian Rivera and Kristine Hermosa were easy picks for the commercial. Marian Rivera's popularity, as one of FHM's sexiest, white complexion and mestiza profile bolstered Maxi-Peel's appeal to consumers. For Skinwhite, another whitening but high-end product of Splash, someone elegant-looking and pretty but not necessarily popular could suffice with the company's standard (I. Soriano, personal communication, February 12, 2009).

## Economic fluctuations and political developments

Economic fluctuations and political developments also impact the client and advertising agency's selection. In the early eighties, the Spanish mestiza was the hit in the scene. Brown hair, thick eyelashes and pale white complexion were most-prized. As the Philippines approached its centennial, the mestiza trend slowly faded and the Filipino look took over. This shift rode with the era of the "buy Filipino" propaganda campaigns marked by the rise of proudly Pinoy products such as Splash's personal care items and Hapee Toothpaste. Models whose physical features were distinctly Filipino, including the likes of Phoemela Baranda and Isabel Roces, reigned supreme in this period (M. Tiaoqui, personal communication, March 11, 2009).

### *Effects of globalization and the regionalization of TV commercials*

The negative effects of globalization were clearly felt at the start of the 21st century. Increased competition and the aftermath of the financial crises which occurred in the 2000s prompted several multinational companies to look for cost-efficient methods in every phase of production. One of the multinationals' responses to the stringent economic situation was to cut their advertising expenses by producing one TV commercial per region, for example Southeast Asia. This is called the regionalization of TV commercials: only one TV commercial for a brand is produced, which will air in several countries within a region. Advertisers only have to concentrate on financing one advertisement for the region instead of spending for every country. Costs on talent fees were cut since regional ads needed fewer models. Advertisers only need add 50% to 75% to the initial talent fee should they decide to air a commercial in several countries.

Because of regionalization, clients began demanding for talents with facial features that easily meld with the general look of a region. This demand was met by the introduction of the Pan-Asians in the early 2000s. Their faces easily blend with the populations of Southeast Asia's countries. Although most of them have typically Asian features—slanted eyes, black hair and fair skin—a lot are actually either biracial or multi-racial.

The early 2000s also coincided with the popularity of Japanese anime and *Koreanovelas*, which received wide public approval (J. Santiago, personal communication, December 4, 2008). Advertising agency Leo Burnett took advantage of these trends by tapping Pan-Asians, such as Chinese actor Show Lou, for the Rejoice TV commercial series to make consumers more interested in the shampoo.

## 6. Client–Talent

### *Market*

With so many talents waiting to snag a project, clients are free to offer different talent fee rates to each prospective candidate for exactly the same amount of time and modeling skill required in the TV ad. This practice is known as “price discrimination,” which is assigning different prices for the same good or service (Levitt & Dubner, 2009). In the hiring of talents, clients pay different rates to local, foreign and celebrity talents when in fact, all three can offer the same commodities of time, labor and skill. Clients also treat talents as “perfect substitutes” or easily interchangeable goods. For example, if casting Talent A in a product’s commercial did not yield the expected sales, the client can simply switch to Talent B or C.

### *“Worn-out” talents and the effects of typecasting*

Before beauty queen-turned-actress Ms. Alice Dixon joined showbusiness, she became popular through the “I can feel it!” Palmolive soap commercial. It became difficult for her to be tapped in other commercials because clients feared that her popularity and association with the brand could obscure the campaigns of non-soap products (J. Austria, personal communication, December 2, 2008). Having numerous commercials can be a liability rather than an asset because the client prefers someone fresh and not made popular by any previous project. Rejoice shampoo’s creative director, Dingdong Baes of Leo Burnett, reasoned that a company prefers that the talent’s popularity be attributed to its brand, and not with any other product.

Not even a track record of successful modeling stints can guarantee corresponding talent fee increases. In Europe and the US, the more TV commercials the talent has, the higher his/her market value. But in the Philippines, some clients perceive talents who have had multiple commercials as *gasgas* [literally means “scratched” but connotes a state of overuse or being worn-out] (M. Tiaoqui, personal communication, March 11, 2009).

### *Client’s budget constraints*

Budget affects a client’s choice. A company with a measly allotment may settle for a “tier 2” talent or the owner’s “telegenic” relative who is eager to model for free. This usually happens in small companies scrimping on production expenses, so their last option is to hire relatives or lower-tier talents just to cut costs (D. Baes, personal communication, December 12, 2008).

## *Culture*

Colonial mentality has remained pervasive in the Filipinos' ideals of beauty. There is widespread preferential hiring of talents who look foreign or part-foreign. GMA Artist Center Assistant Vice President Ms. Ida Henares affirmed that even at the level of celebrities, shampoo and soap clients always pick the fair-skinned mestizas.

Brazilians are in vogue also because their looks appeal to the Filipinos' preferred physical attributes—pointed noses and “chiseled” facial features, in contrast to the relatively flat facial characteristics and brown complexion common among Filipinos. Moreover, according to agency owner and talent manager Mr. Ian Basa, Filipinos relate well with Brazilians because their overall physical profile is not as alienating as the typical blond and blue-eyed Caucasian (I. Basa, personal communication, March 13, 2009).

The Filipinos' fascination with Caucasian features encouraged multinational shampoo and soap brands to use either half-Filipino-half-European/American or Brazilian talents. In a casting session, the casting brief is practically useless the moment the client decides to hire a mestiza, as opposed to the *morena* requirement, simply because other competing brands are in the mestiza bandwagon.

Filipinos are also aspirational consumers, often swayed by advertisements that inflame their desires and aspirations. For example, fair skin is equated to self-confidence among middle and lower income groups. They believe that in a job application, the applicant with the fairer skin has a better shot at employment. To them, achieving fair complexion is a form of personal gratification. It also gives the impressions of “*pag-angat sa buhay*” (improvement in one's socio-economic status) and of being “*mukhang mayaman*” (affluent-looking) or “*sosyal*” (classy and sophisticated) (C. Sarthou, personal communication, March 3, 2009). It is a common perception among the masses, although not necessarily true, that the talents in beauty commercials come from society's old rich and upper-middle class.

## *Legal*

Only the talent, talent manager and advertising agency are on lock-out with the client. Excluded are the production houses, TV commercial directors and other individuals involved in producing the TV commercial. Most contracts stipulate that a talent should be paid additional fees if any advertisement showing his/her image in a photograph or video is sold to the client's affiliates in other countries. For contract renewals, in some cases, the

first renewal is 75% of the original talent fee and 50% for subsequent renewals (W. Tracy, personal communication, March 3, 2009).

Through the contract, a client can also limit a talent's earning potential. The non-celebrity talent and talent manager have the least clout in the duration of a contract's lockout. Ms. Tiaoqui cited a common dilemma among starting talents (M. Tiaoqui, personal communication, March 11, 2009):

Duration used to be 12 months from the date of contract-signing, but the advertising agencies demanded for 15 months from the date of contract-signing to have a 3-month allowance on post-production; granting that post-production takes three months, the client still has 12 months to air the program. However, some clients demand for 15 months from date of airing, which most talent managers of non-celebrities deem unfair, extending up to 18 months that the talent is locked from accepting other projects from competing brands.

On the other end, a celebrity endorsement contract, which ranges from 12 to 24 months, usually comes with a show sponsorship, a travel package with personal assistants included for shootings abroad and steady supply of the endorsed product (Maglipon, 2008).

Known for his celebrity clientele, Atty. Raymond Fortun advises that a talent may negotiate to make the terms more mutually beneficial. Both celebrity and non-celebrity commercial talents are entitled to additional fees for additional shoots and appearances agreed upon at the outset. If a contract does not specify additional fees, the talent will be bound by what he/she signed regardless of underpayment (R. Fortun, personal communication, March 9, 2009).

## *Industry*

Trends in TV advertising have altered the hiring patterns for talents. Techniques in promoting products, like stealth advertising, have proven to be both effective and cost-efficient for the client. However, what is considered a boon to the TV industry is a bane to the non-celebrity talents. Embedded advertisements has shifted the attention to celebrities aside from further lowering the rates for non-celebrities.

## *Stealth advertising and the network wars*

Clients conveniently use celebrities as talents in stealth advertising. Examples of stealth ads are “product placements” or “embedded advertisements.” This method allows clients to have their products shown, used or mentioned by celebrities in shows and movies.

Advertisers save tremendously from production costs through stealth advertising (Agulto, 2009). For example, clients can work out exchange deals or payments-in-kind with any talent, be it the TV host, actor or singer, to do promotions in a TV show instead of paying hefty fees to models in a TV commercial.

ABS-CBN and GMA are fighting not just in the ratings game but also in the promotion of their artists. Aside from shows, having their talents appear in as many endorsements as possible also generates income for their talent management departments—ABS-CBN has Star Magic and GMA the Artist Center (M. Tiaoqui, personal communication, March 11, 2009). Another advantage of using celebrities is that they can be promoted as regular talents if their TV commercials are aired in other countries where they are not known as stars, which, again, allows the client to save on costs since they only have to pay partial payments for every additional country. A good example is the Rejoice teleserye-type commercial that introduced matinee idols Dingdong Dantes and Dennis Trillo to the Thai public, not as Filipino celebrities but as models.

## 6. Client – Talent Manager

### *Culture*

Talent managers have their own hierarchy. At the pinnacle of this hierarchy are the big-time showbusiness talent managers who are power brokers in product endorsements. Well-connected talent managers of celebrities, considered as celebrities themselves, either offer “package deals” or haggle with clients. Tapping a celebrity for two or three media (i.e. print-TV-billboard) at a discounted rate is one example of a package deal (F. Austria, personal communication, December 2, 2008). Multimedia exposure may seem like a paycheck worth several millions but because of the client’s aggressive haggling with the talent manager, the actual talent fee can go lower by several hundred thousand to a few million pesos.

The agents who work for the star development and management departments of networks receive a fixed monthly salary but are not entitled to commissions from the bookings they get for their talents (M. Bagalacsa,

personal communication, August 26, 2008). At the bottom of this stratification are the scouts who assist talents on auditions and are even regarded at par with utility persons doing menial production jobs.

## **Summary and Recommendations**

This study concludes that, in all arrangements of power relations observed, the client wields the greatest power in the hiring of TV commercial talents. The hierarchy of powers among key players is ordered as: Client–Advertising Agency–Talent Manager–Talent.

Fresh talents and aspiring commercial models possess the least bargaining power, if at all, in the negotiations for TV commercials. Established professional models have clout to a certain extent. Benefits are skewed to favor celebrity talents the most. To struggling talents who have long wanted to succeed in this industry, their clamor for better treatment remains muted, keeping them in continuous compromise with the terms of their managers, who are in turn impelled by clients.

The process of commodification starts with the talents themselves, who sell their skills, physical attributes, time and labor power to talent managers, advertising agencies and client companies. The significant decline in the talent fees of commercial talents, except for celebrities, is brought by larger economic conditions, such as globalization and economic recessions. The regionalization of TV commercials is a manifestation of globalization and economic crises affecting Southeast Asia.

Talents with many commercials, whose images are already attached to a brand, can be perceived by clients as “worn-out.” This paradox proves that meritocracy in this business takes a backseat when the client takes full control of the hiring process.

## **Practical Issues**

The long-standing fad for foreign-looking talents reflects the cultural backwardness of Filipino audiences and the inherently weak and flawed hiring system of the Philippine modeling industry. Given these realities, advertising practitioners and talent management professionals are in a strategic position to address these problems.

Advertising agencies and television networks have a pivotal role in promoting and producing materials that diversify and liberate worldviews on beauty and body image. One viable solution is diversity casting. In US media, diversity casting was institutionalized to address inequalities in the representation of ethnic minorities in various roles in TV programs, including



advertisements. The Screen Actors Guild, for one, has a policy against unlawful discrimination and harassment. This non-discrimination policy ensures that members are not discriminated against on the basis of race, skin color and national origin as they audition for acting roles in commercials and soaps (SAG-AFTRA One Union, 2012). The Disney-ABC tandem also practices diversity casting in shows such as *Ugly Betty* and *Army Wives*. Talents from different racial, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds are encouraged to audition for the network's major TV roles. No race, skin color or socio-economic status is given undue advantage in casting requirements (Disney-ABC Casting Project, 2012).

Diversity casting still has a long way to go before it becomes institutionalized in the Philippines' modeling industry and in general, media and entertainment. Talents who are properly trained and have the right work ethic are worth fighting for irrespective of their ethnicities. The recent public outcry over Bayo's mixed-race campaign is a telling sign that Filipinos are still sensitive to images and messages served in their daily media fare. And this is a good sign for diversity casting to become a reality in the country's modeling, media and entertainment industries.

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## End Notes

<sup>1</sup>The model is a collective output of the author and his thesis adviser Prof. Josefina Santos of the UP College of Mass Communication.

<sup>2</sup>This model is patterned after the graphical illustrations use in the management textbook *Strategic Management* (Saloner et al., 2001).

<sup>3</sup>All culture-based factors are the author's interpretations on the responses of the key informants. To better understand Filipino values and customs, the author recommends R. Pe Pua's *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (1995).

<sup>4</sup>When Boy Abunda represented TV host and film actress Ms. Kris Aquino for a shampoo commercial, he wanted her to appear alone in the frame. Should it include several talents, only the actress' face is clearly visible (B. Abunda, personal communication, February 15, 2009).

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