

Cebu Coal Mine Tragedies: Print Media Effects on Policy Legislation

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Abstract

In crafting policies in the local setting, the study determines how the print media impacts legislation. It would point to the media as either an effective driver in policymaking or as a conduit to such. The researchers combed through the archives of three English newspapers in Cebu and the files of Cebu Provincial Board to substantiate the relation of the coal mine accidents to approved legislation. The study, however, is limited to four incidents that occurred for the years 2005 to 2012. The researchers then compared the newspaper archives with the approved legislation and assessed that print media only has a marginal effect as a conduit and none as a contributor to policy legislation. At the brim of coal mine accidents, policy makers respond immediately to issues which are repeatedly played over in the media and deemed by the researchers as typical for it is a precept that certain governing legislative bodies would often pay attention to certain recurring issues in the newspaper that may affect their image.

Keywords: media, news articles, coal mine accidents, provincial board resolutions

1.0 Introduction

The media in general are considered to be the primary source of information that the public needs to make a sound decision for themselves, family, work, community and country. Moreover, tragedies are considered accidental but there are some loss of lives and injuries to persons brought by indiscriminate and negligent practices in the workplace. Another role of the media aside from giving information is the watchdog role wherein it points out bad practices not only by the government but also of the private entities that employ workers. The researchers would try to find out whether newspaper coverage of coal mine tragedies in the province resulted in the formulation of sound policies affecting the industry. One of the causes of the tragedies is unfavourable

working conditions in the mining site, and this is depicted by the media. Despite the coverage of coal mine disasters in the province, miners still continue to endure below standard working condition that exposed them to hazards and possible death in the workplace. Four mine tragedies in the area starting 2005 up to 2012 claimed the lives of at least ten workers and injured several of them.

Accidents in coal mines occur mainly due to leaks of poisonous gases such as hydrogen sulfide or natural gases such as methane. Other causes include explosions, collapsing of mine stopes, mining-induced seismicity, flooding, or general mechanical errors from improperly used or malfunctioning mining equipment. According to SourceWatch, as published by the Center for Media and Democracy,

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inadequacy of regulation and enforcement further aggravate coal mining accidents and are referred as human-caused disasters. Globally, thousands of miners die each year from coal mining accidents, with the largest number of deaths occurring in China. Bansal (as cited by Torugsa and Hecker, 2013) noted that the health, safety and general well – being of employees should be given emphasis especially in the mining sector. In reference to the World Coal Association (WCA) mining policy statement, the coal industry deliberately takes the issue of safety. WCA members strive for a goal of zero fatalities and publish statistics on both fatal and non-fatal accidents in their annual reports. The WCA's "Commitment to Safety" policy statement demonstrates the critical importance the coal industry places on safety in its operations.

One needs to know why coal mine disasters continue to exist despite the prevailing regulation and the reasons why these regulations were not implemented. The United Nations Human Rights Council in its 2011 Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights designed to "operationalize" 'Protect, Respect, Remedy' highlighting the importance of the state duty to protect coal miners against violation and preserve their rights as human beings. Their safety is primordial in businesses but the latter do not consider their rights as a primary concern. Mining represents a serious threat to human life; it causes remarkable casualties not only among miners but also among individuals far from mine stopes. Countless accidents have happened and have affected thousands of miners in the country, directly or indirectly caused by hazardous mining operations.

With these existing issues, the researchers note that there is insufficiency of the studies related to the impact of the coal mining accidents reported by the media to the formulation of sound policies. The study will establish whether the media, being the main source of information and watchdog of the society has effectively communicated the importance of

safety in the workplace among coal miners.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

Howland et al (2006) as cited by Shanahan et al (2008) noted that in spite of the burgeoning attention captured by the media, policy scholars have not specifically determined the role of the media in the policy formulation or amendments. Some theorize that the media is a conduit for decision makers while others assert that the media is a contributor. The researchers reckon the following media theories as chronicled in decision making:

Firstly, the Agenda – Setting Theory, by McCombs, M. E., Shaw, D. L., & Weaver, D. H. (1997) invoking the media's ability to transfer salient issues through their news agenda so the public can form their understanding of the prominent issues. Two basic assumptions underlie most research on agenda-setting: (1) the press and the media do not reflect reality instead, they filter and shape it; (2) media concentration on a few issues and subjects leads the public to perceive those issues as more important than other matters. It tells people what to think about; subsequently, the public reacts not to the actual event produced but the picture of that event in an individual's memory.

Second, the Positive Feedback Loop as discussed in the textbook by S. J., & Davis, D. K. (2014) is an evolution of the Agenda Setting Theory. This theory states that an issue highlighted by the media would be considered by the public as significant and would also be deemed essential by the policy makers until it comes around like a loop. It also follows that issues being discussed in the media are commonly used and referred to by policy makers.

Third, the Libertarian Theory of Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, (1963) states that the function of the press is to protect the people's liberties and rights, and to inform the public so they can participate as citizens in democratic self-government. The Liberal Theory prefers a privately owned news media that is

maximally free to inform citizens and criticize public policies, as well as act as a watchdog on authorities. The right to publish and express oneself freely is not the prerogative of the state or the government. It is a fundamental right of free individuals.

Lastly, the Framing Theory by the Communication Scientist, Robert Entman, states that to frame means 'to select some aspects of a perceived reality to make them more salient, thus promoting a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and / or treatment recommendation (Franklin, Hamer, Hanna, Kinsey & Richardson, 2005). Framing theory focuses on the idea that the media frame the reality of an issue for the public.

Since the public rely on the media for information especially if they know little about a topic, the researchers suggest that the quality of reports delivered to the masses lie solely on the journalists'

personal judgment. This refers as to which angle is worth covering and which are not. Since different writers have different bases and considerations in identifying how a story is presented, quality journalism, researchers assess, also differs.

Based on the theories, it is argued that the media can be particularly effective in driving the policy making decisions of companies in the coal mining industry. Where these issues are highlighted, organizations such as the businesses and even the government, will respond by increasing the extent of disclosure policy formulated for the safety of the coal miners. Furthermore, higher levels of media attention (as determined by a review of a number of print media newspapers and journals) are significantly associated with higher levels of caution in crafting sensible policies.

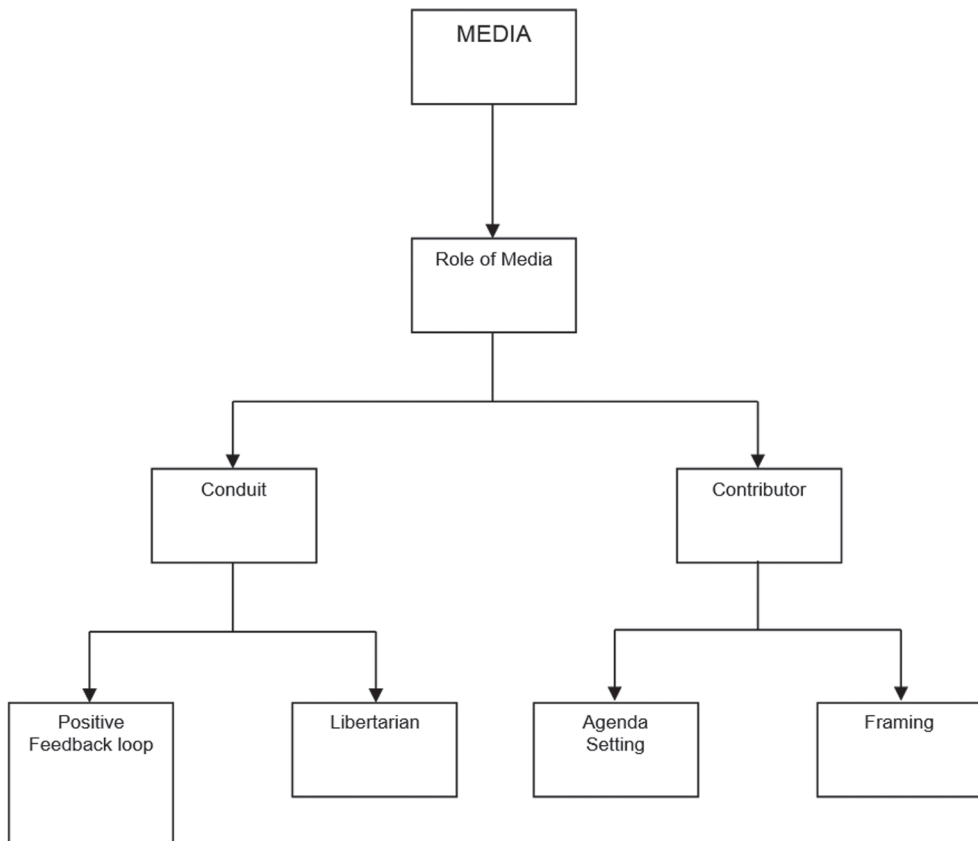


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3.0 Research Design and Methods

To establish whether legislation and news articles on the same subject matter have relationship, the researchers analyzed published news articles and legislation approved by the Cebu Provincial Board about coal mine disasters in the province from 2005 to 2012.

The required steps to accomplish the plan of research are as follows: first, collate coal mine disasters in the Province of Cebu using the online archives of the three English newspaper publications in Cebu; second, access the archives of the Cebu Provincial Board at the Capitol Building for approved ordinances and resolutions regarding coal mine incidents. The first two steps are realizable through the Internet – based search. Last, the gathered data

have to be analyzed to establish the assertion that the media is both a conduit and contributor to the passage of legislations. During the process of analysis, the researchers should determine the relation of a published article and an approved Board resolution considering the time element (date of publication and date of resolution's approval). The researchers should also base the comparison as to the board resolutions created as triggered by the news articles published.

4.0 Results and Discussion

The following table shows the data collated and compared to depict the relationship between published articles and provincial board resolutions:

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES				PROVINCIAL BOARD RESOLUTIONS		
Date of Publication	Title of News Article	Publication	Municipality affected	Date	Resolution Number	Resolution Title
12/10/2005	**Rescuers find bodies of 3 more miners in coal tunnel	Cebu Daily News	Dalaguete	12/12/2005	4944-2005	**Expressing heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families of the miners killed in the tunnel explosion of Ibalong Resources Development Corporation in Sitio Canlawilao, Dumalan, Dalaguete, Cebu
7/4/2006	**Ibalong Corp. pleads to keep open Dalaguete mining facility: New safety measures, jobs of 100 miners cited	Cebu Daily News	Dalaguete	12/12/2005	4938-2005	**Urging the Department of Energy and the Bureau of Mining and Geo – sciences to investigate and submit appropriate recommendations anent the explosion in the mining tunnel of Ibalong Resources Development Corporation in Sitio Canlawilao, Dumalan, Dalaguete, Cebu that has claimed two (2) lives and trapped six (6) other miners.
8/1/2006	**Governor favors reopening of Dalaguete's Ibalong mine	Cebu Daily News	Dalaguete	9/20/2010	1625-2010	Requesting the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) through the Bureau of Mines and Geosciences Bureau, to furnish the Sangguniang Panlalawigan through the Committee on Environmental Conservation and Natural Resources, the inventory of existing mining and/or quarrying operations in the province of Cebu and copies of these quarrying / mining operation's environmental protection and enhancement program.
8/14/2009	**Ibalong mine accident claims b-day boy's life	Cebu Daily News	Dalaguete	1/24/2011	107-2011	Requesting the Mines and Geosciences Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Region VII (MGB – DENR 7) to clarify issues on the implementation of specific policies / legislation on the issuances of small – scale mining / quarrying permits and clearances and assist the provincial government on the institutionalization of these permits and clearance issuances.

3/16/2012	DOE stops Argao coal mining	Cebu Daily News	Argao	12/5/2011	1849-2011	Authorizing Governor Gwendolyn F. Garcia to sign on behalf of the Province of Cebu, the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) on the implementation of a truckload limit on the loading and hauling of coal in the Province of Cebu to be executed by and among the Province of Cebu, Department of Energy (DOE), Regional Office 7 and the coal quarrying/extraction permit holders and haulers.
6/8/2012	Coal mine worker fall in pit, dies	Sun Star Daily	Argao	11/5/2012	1555-2012	Requesting all pertinent local and national government units / agencies involved in the issuance of permits/clearances, monitoring and enforcement of applicable laws and regulations to submit a report / position paper on the mining and quarrying operations in the Province of Cebu.
8/20/2012	Four coal miners suffer second – degree burns in the accident	Sun Star Daily	Danao			
8/24/2012	"Brownout" caused coal mine extraction	The Freeman	Danao			
12/23/2012	Coal mine firm faces suit from victim's kin	Cebu Daily News	Dalaguete			

** - related published articles and provincial board resolutions as to time and subject matter

Figure 2: List of published news articles and approved Provincial Board resolutions

Analysis and Interpretation of Results

Gas released during coal mining is primarily composed of methane, which, when mixed with coal dust, can dramatically increase the intensity of an explosion. The incomplete reaction of coal dust can also release poisonous gases, thereby resulting in more casualties and property losses. Explosions commonly cause the nature of the above-stated incidents. Hence, it is emphasized that prevention and control should be given priority. Historically, to prevent major gas accidents, the government often sent safety supervision teams to major coal mines with serious gas problems. They also invited colliery safety experts to evaluate safety situations in coal mines with the potential for dangerous explosions.

Of the eight resolutions retrieved from the archives of the Cebu Provincial Board pertaining to the mining industry, in general, only six pertained to coal mine accidents which happened. Furthermore, only two of the six articles were directly related to the articles retrieved from

the archives of the three newspapers about the same subject matter. Only Resolution Numbers 49382005 and 49442005 were directly related to the accidents that happened prior to the crafting of the resolution. Other resolutions were crafted to tap other various government agencies concerned with the issues highlighted by the media.

Hence, in determining whether the media is a contributor or a conduit, the study has established that media is not a contributor in the sense that, it was not able to set the importance of the issue nor present the issue to be perceived as a reality that is worth catching the attention of legislators pertaining to the Agenda-Setting and Framing theory, respectively. In addition, it is partly a conduit since it was able to transfer the information to the public and aims to protect the lives of those affected depicting the Positive Feedback Loop theory and Libertarian theory, respectively. However, it is not absolute that media is a conduit to either policy formulation or revision.

As a contributor, the media are supposed to

lead the public to perceive that the issue is more prominent than the other news articles depending on how they frame these matters. This must lead the public to react, particularly the agencies involved in the issue, emphasizing that their immediate action

is a necessity. The following table presents part of the news articles that the researchers deemed not worth catching the attention of legislators, making them decide not to give weight to the issues raised.

Date of Publication	Title of News Article	Publication	Municipality affected	Discourse Analysis (statements that are not worth paying attention of legislators)
12/10/2005	**Rescuers find bodies of 3 more miners in coal tunnel	Cebu Daily News	Dalaguete	**related to an approved legislation
7/4/2006	**Ibalong Corp. pleads to keep open Dalaguete mining facility: New safety measures, jobs of 100 miners cited	Cebu Daily News	Dalaguete	
8/1/2006	**Governor favors reopening of Dalaguete's Ibalong mine	Cebu Daily News	Dalaguete	
8/14/2009	**Ibalong mine accident claims b-day boy's life	Cebu Daily News	Dalaguete	
3/16/2012	DOE stops Argao coal mining	Cebu Daily News	Argao	"They violated the order because they continued to operate without a permit. We held their application, and we got the order from Manila that their permit won't be approved because of their continued defiance," Labios said.
6/8/2012	Coal mine worker fall in pit, dies	Sun Star Daily	Argao	Alta Tierra Mining and Development Corp. is co – owned by Cebu Provincial Board Member Wilfredo Caminero. "If there is an agency that deals with accidents in mines, it will be the DOE," Caminero said. The police ruled out foul play after interrogating Sandoval's co-workers.

8/20/2012	Four coal miners suffer second – degree burns in an accident	Sun Star Daily	Danao	The other miner, who was declared out of harm's way, stayed in the hospital and told police it was their first time to meet an accident. ..were going down the hole using a drum, but the cable that held the drum snapped.
8/24/2012	"Brownout" caused coal mine extraction	The Freeman	Danao	Amante said that it was not clear whether the accident was a mine explosion or a mine fire. Amante said that DOE – 7 is looking into why they were not informed immediately about the incident.
12/23/2012	Coal mine firm faces suit from victim's kin	Cebu Daily News	Dalaguete	Adelina Hermita, owner of the small-scale coal mine "If it is illegal, the government cannot earn from it, and all illegal have to be closed," Durano told the Freeman in a phone interview.

Figure 3: List of News Articles

As analyzed by the researchers, most of the published articles boil down to blaming the Department of Energy – Region 7, in ensuring safety precautions in coal mines. In reference to DoE website, a circular has been crafted to set rules and regulations regarding coal mine safety standards, namely BED Circular No. 1, Series of 1978. This order leads to the point that the Provincial Board legislators discounted their responsibility in ensuring the safety of coal mine workers. Instances can be cited referring to the accident in Argao (published on June 8, 2012) where a PB member was a co – owner of the mine and another article (published on March 16, 2012) referring to a mine as operating without a permit from the DoE Main office. Another reason for the occurrence of accidents is that most of them are man – made

disasters. These are due to the negligence of coal mine workers, as cited in articles published on August 20 and 24, 2012, hinting that the accident was only for the first time and the cause cannot also be determined. Lastly, one accident involved a small – scale mining in Danao City that was only determined as illegal after an accident occurred. The Provincial Board might have neglected this mining operation since it is small-scale compared to other mining operations in the province. The Board might have determined that this is not worth paying attention for it only involved minimal number of constituents.

5.0 Conclusion

The media have a vital role in developing the public's perception of news, particularly the policy

makers, be it in the government or the industry because it sides with the truth and relevant factors. It is the best tool to spread awareness in the society, be it political, social or economic. However, the role of the media also depends on how this society chooses to use it. This depicts that the relationship of the policymakers and the media are reflexive: there is an expected simultaneous effect between the media and the mass society. The media reports the coal mine accidents, serves an intermediary between the policymakers and the constituents, helps determine issues that are worth-discussing and opens the eye of the people to become actively involved in these scenarios.

In this study, the concept that the media is either a contributor or a conduit in relation to crafting government policies does not hold true. The media are not considered a contributor to policy formulation but slightly play a conduit role for such. Policymakers, human beings as they are, respond to issues which are repeatedly appearing in the media. These people tend to look after how their image is built. Hence, recurring issues on coal mine accidents only capture their attention for a particular time the media talks about it. They seem concerned of the constituents involved in the incidents, but not taking action to permanently eliminate undesirable practices in coal mining. Tragedies which only reported in the media once or a couple of times are overlooked and not given attention. With that, the media capture the attention of the policymakers to address the issues at hand, but there is no assurance that a sound policy is crafted directly related to these matters.

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