

## **Presentation and Comprehensibility of Public Policies in Online News Articles**

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### **Abstract**

Language is the primary vehicle in which public policies are expressed for “all concepts in law are linguistically constituted and expressed” (Silbey, 1989, p. 1) to the people. Public policies are acquired and consumed by the public through the media that today has taken on a new platform which is the internet. However, laws have a reputation of being incomprehensible due to the complexities of the legal language and become a problematic situation for the people who are directly affected by such difficulty. Hence, this research aimed at looking into how public policies are integrated and explained in online news articles. Furthermore, the study attempted to determine the text comprehensibility of these articles among the lay people in explaining the details of the laws embedded within these texts. Forty online news articles containing the Free Tuition Law and TRAIN Law were collected from two main news organizations in the Philippines. Pan and Kosicki’s (1993) Framing Analysis was used to determine how laws were incorporated in the news articles through syntactic structures. Focus group discussion was conducted to determine how lay readers comprehend the legal information in the news articles. In this study, it was revealed that public policies are used in the online news articles as an extension of the 5Ws and H of the story. This study also revealed that although public policy related news articles have similar dominant presentation styles, it can be noted that they also have differences.

**Keywords:** Media Discourse, Text Comprehensibility, Forensic Linguistics, Language and Media

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1. Background of the Study

For a society to thrive, public policies are implemented to establish order among its constituents in which the political system takes the position of an authority that allocates the values that are upheld by the society (Easton, 1965). Law becomes a moral mirror that reflects the “ways of being, social relations, and conceptions of value” (Silbey, 1989, p. 1) where language is seen as a useful means in the construction of social order. Solan, Stein, and Tiersma (2012) reiterate the connection between language and law for “all concepts in law are linguistically constituted and expressed” (1). In order to understand law, one must first understand language (Leonard, 2005). This connection can be seen in one of the branches of linguistics called forensic linguistics which tackles the interplay between language and law wherein the science of linguistics is used in exploring and appreciating issues that are related to law. One of the main purposes of forensic linguistics is to use language to provide insights to the understanding of legally significant language data (Christensen et al., 2017). This is in line with the goal of the field which is to help in the administration of justice.

However, Heaton (2013) states that people find difficulty in understanding legislation because of its structure, degree of detail and the occurrence of habitual amendments. Furthermore, legal language is known for its incomprehensibility to lay people due to its “great formality, wordiness, and complexity” (Boleszczuk, 2017, 68). Butt (2001) also adds that due to its aim of feigning a sense of precision in the use of language, legal English is now manifested as the usage of jargons and is distinguished as formal. Empirical research has shown that non-lawyers find difficulty in understanding legal documents such as consumer contracts, consent-to-surgery forms or statutes among others (Benson & Kessler, 1986). Given these characteristics of legal language, complications arise with regard to the capability of the ordinary people to understand legal documents.

Article 3 of the New Civil Code (NCC) of the Philippines states that "ignorance of the law excuses no one for compliance therewith" as one of its established principles (RBSI, 2011). This legal maxim means that no one is excused or exempted of these imposed societal rules for the reason of unfamiliarity to them. A support of this rule is provided in Article 2 of the NCC which states that a new law will only be considered in full effect after 15 days upon the fulfillment of publishing the newly ordained law in a newspaper of general circulation within the country and/or in the *Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines*, the official government-run journal of the nation. In the case of *Tañada v. Tuvera* (Supreme Court of the Philippines, 1986), which is viewed as a landmark case, it was established that publication of

a recent legislated rule is a vital process before a law takes effect. The Supreme Court of the Philippines has reiterated that citizens should be given a sufficient notice to regulate their behavior in accordance with a newly enacted law before its execution. The failure of such process is considered to be a form of injustice on the part of the people who will be charged of misconduct without a notice that such law has come into existence. Therefore, the media's ideal role is to be the source of information with a vital duty in educating the public.

### **1.2. Public Policies and the Media**

Public policy, in its broad term, refers to a principle of action proposed by the government that is created and implemented for the welfare of the public. Public policies include laws. In Political Science, law refers to the will and commands imposed by the state which is then enforced by its sovereign political authority (Bunquin & Calilung, 2014). It is a fundamental instrument that enables people to solve daily disputes like property, employment, and violence (Hadfield, 2017). Mackay and Shaxton (2007) explain that a government authority generates these policies as “normative guidelines for action” (p. 2) but there are other players in the policy cycle. One of them is the media. One cannot deny the media's role as the conveyor of information to the public to the extent of generating interest and shaping the opinion of the people (Mackay & Shaxton). In such manner, there can also be a problem arising as to how these laws are reached and understood by the lay people. The primary way of circulation of such information is through mass media. As the most influential information generator, the media serves as a driving force of what the masses knows about the newly enacted public policies that are in effect to the community.

With the multitude of events that takes place at a time, journalists have the role of deciding which occurrences are more newsworthy. According to Stephens and Lanson (1993), the journalists make the choice on what readers want or need to know such that the indispensable skill of news judgment is placed in the hands of media personnel who decides which news are worth pursuing and which stories deserve the most prominence. Ideally, the media's role is promoting democracy to create informed choices by offering balanced and reliable information.

### **1.3. Emergence of the New Media**

News making has evolved and visibly changed in today's era. Husni, Wenger, and Price (2016) describe the current state of print media as a medium in the United States of America. In recent times, there is now a need for the newspaper companies to adapt to the trend of digitalizing news consumption. Hicks (2016) explains this sudden change as a ‘disruption’ to the previously unchallenged domain of traditional newsroom. The main factor of this change

is to keep up with the increased amount of audience that switch to mobile use for newspaper content (Husni et al., 2016).

Moreover, Tereszkieicz (2012) noted that there is an occurring transformation in the form and text in media where online newspapers are a primal example of a complex news genre. This is because of the growing sense of urgency when it comes to the production of news. Since the dissemination of information in the platform is as easy as clicking a button, online articles strive to be published right after an event takes place to achieve the value of recency which is also an important factor in traditional news outlets. This is important to take note because the content, form, and style of a news article is largely entwined (Broersma, 2007).

#### **1.4. News Presentation**

The presentation of news can be looked at from the perspective of the different journalistic styles and forms employed by journalists to organize information. Hicks (2016) notes that there is more sense to say that the approach to news writing is mainstream or traditional – with a touch of variations. This is still an observed phenomenon today as news styles are still taught in journalism.

In books such as the *Introduction to Journalism* by Orellano (2017) and *Writing for Journalists* by Hicks (2016), it can be observed that the chapter for news writing includes two news formulas that are considered as the foundation for news writing. These are Rudyard Kipling's six questions and the inverted pyramid.

Orellano (2017) further explains that Kipling's six questions include the who, what, when, where, why, and how of a particular event. News writing strives to answer these basic questions in order to produce a good news story. These form and structure are sometimes called "the inverted pyramid" which is characterized by the decreasing importance of information in ensuing paragraphs with strong reference to the six questions in terms of content.

Among other structures present in this discipline, the "inverted pyramid" technique is one of the considered cornerstones in news writing. In this structure, the information that is considered as the most important goes at the top, followed by the elaboration and details, and where the least important information is found at the bottom of the conceived upside-down pyramid (Telg, 2015). Hicks (2016) states that the purpose of such writing style is for the readers to have an option to stop reading the article when their curiosity is quenched, this is without worrying that an important information is missed.

In journalism, Broersma (2007) explains that the utilization of forms and style assures the function of news. Its primary aim is "to impose and legitimize valid representations of the

social world” (p. 9). On the part of the readers, Zarrati, Nambiar, and Maasum (2014) state that the structure of the text assist in the process of constructing meaning wherein awareness of the text structure acts as an aid in improving a material’s comprehensibility.

### **1.5. Comprehensibility**

Comprehensibility is described as the ease of understanding, which is the principal factor in determining the utility of a text (Tanaka et al., 2013). Comprehensibility is one of the key factors of evaluating the quality of a text as well as gauge the reader's perception of the material presented.

Previously, determining the comprehensibility of materials was equated to the application of readability formulas (Zakaluk & Samuels, 1996). Clewell and Clifton (1983) state that factors of readability like vocabulary difficulty and sentence length were the primary criteria for determining comprehensibility, but such assumption was challenged since “comprehension may actually be negatively affected if texts are designed to meet the constraints of readability formulas” (219). This is in view of readability as more of a declaration of the difficulty of the text (Zakaluk & Samuels, 1996) rather than act as a gauge on the understanding of the readers. Researchers are now looking past the readability formulas to recognize the components of a text that contribute to its comprehensibility. Some of these features include the choice of information that is embedded within the text together with the way it is organized and the structure of the text itself. The text’s structure is regarded as an important feature of comprehensibility for it affects the information that a reader can recall. A text that is poorly organized imposes greater demands to the reader who links the relationships among ideas (Clewell & Clifton, 1983).

### **1.6. Review of Related Studies**

Heaton (2015) asserts that legislation that is marked by clarity and effectiveness is vital to a good government. However, there is a complication to the understanding of these texts because of the way it is presented. This is what Gunnarsson’s (1984) study found when he investigated the functional comprehensibility of legislative texts by testing the comprehensibility of the Joint Regulation Act in contrast with an alternative law-text that he wrote with consideration on content-structuring to express the provisions of the act clearly and explicitly. In his study, three groups comprising the following were chosen to be the participants for determining the comprehensibility of the text: the group of lawyers who have a background about public policies; the group of trade union members who are the directly affected people of the act, and the unemployed group who are not affected by the act.

Results showed that in the legislative text, the law group had the highest percentage of correct answers, whereas between the two non-law groups, the trade union had noticeable higher correct response frequency than the unemployed group. Meanwhile, the responses to the alternative law text showed that all groups had significantly higher correct response frequencies compared to those who had the original text. Obviously, the language used in the legal texts was more comprehensible to the legal professionals rather than to the people whom the laws are applied to and who have to abide by these laws. The results of the study are also remarkable in terms of the groups who examined the alternative law text where all had increased comprehensibility. Thus, public policies are well understood if the content and structural level are taken into account in the presentation of data.

In his study, Gunnarsson (1984) also presented pointers to the factors he considered in making the alternative law text used his study. He explained that to achieve increased comprehensibility in a legal text, it must be explicitly stated and be adaptive to the lay people's perspective. This means that the choice of rules, facts, and words can be analyzed from the view-point of the citizen's use of the text.

This is in line with the principle of the media in which the language used in a newspaper must be the everyday language used by its readers, to reach a larger audience (Howard, 2000). News is a manner of expressing the constitutive rules of public life (Ryfe, 2016), wherein the foremost source for the public to acquire and be educated with the newly enacted public policies by the government in the country is through its publication in news outlets of general circulation.

Now, the news has joined the digital revolution. Despite the emergence and unchallenging availability of the new media in today's daily life, online news articles still remain as an under-researched area (Tereszkiewicz, 2012). This is especially true in its responsibility to disseminate information relating to public policies and their effect on readers, especially that public policies have a reputation of being a laborious task to understand.

News, according to Broersma (2007), is studied through the context of other research disciplines, including language studies where the analysis of content and text widen the empirical basis of media history that "too often lacks a systematic analysis of newspaper content" (p. 12). Fischer (1991) studied the role of news media in policy making in the context of Canada. This was done to test the capacity of the media to take part in the legislation process through newspaper articles. Using content analysis, the study proved that rather than have a significant impact in the legislative setting, reporters were more influential in transmitting

information to the public. This is true to the function of the media which is to engage the citizens in the business of governance by informing and educating the public (Coronel, 2003).

Upon extensive research, it was found that no related studies were available for the analysis on the presentation of public policies in online news articles, as well as how readers comprehend these policies based on the way it is presented in this kind of text. Hence, it would be interesting to explore such undertaking.

### **1.7. Statement of the Problem**

This study aimed to identify how public policies are introduced in online news articles to inform and educate the readers of public policies through the analysis of the presentation style used in law-related online news articles. Moreover, the study strived to determine the text comprehensibility of these online news articles in explaining the details of the laws that is needed to support the news' claims of truth. Specifically, this research sought to answer the following questions:

1. How are public policies presented in online news articles?
2. How do the readers comprehend the public policies presented in online news articles?

### **1.8. Theoretical Framework**

This study was specifically anchored on the syntactical structure of the framing analysis proposed by Pan and Kosicki (1993). Framing devices act as "tools for newsmakers to use in composing or constructing news discourse" (59) in the text. In this framework, syntactic structure is referred to as the pattern of words or phrases within the sentences. The concept of the inverted pyramid is the main component of this strand since it deals with the sequential organization of the structural elements of a news report.

Telg (2015, p. 2) further categorizes the inverted pyramid into four parts. First is the *lead*, which he described as the "key" to a story that summarizes the five Ws and H (who, what, when, where, why, and how) of the account. This is followed by the *secondary information* that is an extension of the five Ws and H. Next would be *the background information* which includes the incidents that lead to or following the event. At the bottom-most portion of the pyramid is the *additional information* which adds details of the story.

This study specifically utilized Pan and Kosicki's (1993) syntactic structure category in order to determine the placement or location of the laws in the news articles through the inverted pyramid structure.

Kintsch and Welsch's (1991) Construction-Integration Model's construct of comprehensibility, which is the interaction between the perception and problem solving of the

reader, is seen as the guiding definition for comprehensibility in this study. Specifically, this paper looked at comprehension as the perceived ease or difficulty in understanding when it comes to the specific public policies presented in the online news articles. Moreover, the problem-solving ability of the reader is seen as the art of reasoning of a certain person as to how they regarded such information as easy or difficult to comprehend as a result of the combination of the reader's knowledge and the information in the text.

## 2.0 Methodology

### 2.1. Research Design

This research made use of the qualitative-descriptive design since its primordial purpose was to describe how online news articles on public policies were presented. Also, it explored the relationship between the presentation of the online news articles and the understanding of the reader through the design.

### 2.2. Research Corpus

The online articles that were collected for the study dated from January to December of 2017. *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (<http://www.inquirer.net>) and *Manila Bulletin* (<http://www.mb.com.ph>) were the main sources of the online news corpus. They were chosen as the origin of the online news articles since both media outlets are part of the most widely known major broadsheet in the Philippines. Therefore, their names are established to the Filipino people for bringing trusted source of daily information. It was also considered that the two media outlets have the same origins of starting out from printed media before taking on the virtual stage, making their articles to follow a suit of structure that is expected of journalism standards.

The two laws that were subjected for analysis are the following:

- Republic Act No.10931 or the *Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act* (also referred to here as the Free Tuition Law)
- Republic Act No. 10963 or the *Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion* (TRAIN)

The two laws were chosen since they had the most online news articles available. In total, 40 online news articles were used as corpus for this study. Five (out of the 20) news articles were chosen through random sampling for each law that were used for the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to determine the comprehensibility of the materials. The five news articles are meant to represent a sample of the corpus.

Meanwhile, the research participants for the FGDs, were two different groups of people that were directly affected by the specific public policy under study. This will be further elaborated in the next section.

For each public policy, the online news articles were labelled from 1 to 10 for the articles obtained from the *Manila Bulletin* (MB), and 11 to 20 for articles acquired from *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (PDI). For the excerpts indicated, the *Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act* was coded as (FT), while the *Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion* was coded (TR). For each paragraph, the number of articles out of the 20-chosen texts was indicated followed by the number of the paragraph within the news article to which the specific excerpt is found.

Sample code: (MB-FT, Article 2, 1.)

This means that the online news article was from *Manila Bulletin* under the *Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act*. The excerpt was from article 2, paragraph 1.

### **2.3. Research Participants**

The 10 participants that evaluated the comprehensibility of the online news articles about the *Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act* were third year students in a Bachelor of Arts program, aged 18 to 19 from a state university located in Tuguegarao City, Cagayan Valley, Philippines. On the other hand, the 10 professionals who took part in the FGD for the TRAIN Law were teachers aged 30-35 from the same government-run school.

The participants were considered as the target readers and were chosen through convenience sampling with the consideration that one must be part of the student/workforce bracket. The study population was meant to represent the wider population that are the directly affected group for the public policies under study.

### **2.4. Research Procedure**

The online news articles were culled and then evaluated using Pan and Kosicki's (1993) Framing Analysis framework particularly on the syntactic category. The structure of the online news articles was determined based on the organization of the information. The segmentation of the news articles was done by identifying the lead, secondary information, background information, and additional information. Tallying was done by counting the frequencies of the categories designed using content analysis to define the types of presentation style used in presenting the law. The number of occurrences for each category was considered for each part of the news article.

FGDs were conducted to determine the comprehensibility of the news articles based on their presentation in the online news articles. The researcher acted as the moderator that assisted in the flow of discussion.

The participants were given the option to express their opinions and ideas in the language they are most comfortable with. The FGD lasted for 45 minutes to an hour, both discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed.

## **2.5. Data Analysis**

In this study, the concept of qualitative content analysis was used by creating categories based on how public policies were presented in the online news articles. After the 40 online news articles under investigation were analyzed and categorized based on their placement format and presentation styles, the paragraphs containing any information about the public policies under study were classified under the categories *Direct Reference*, *Indirect Reference*, *Description*, *Effect*, *Objective*, and *Comparison* styles of presentation. Since this research is exploratory in nature, such categories were devised based on the distinct ways in which the public policies under study were presented in the corpus.

The following categories are as follows:

- *Direct Reference* - the information explicitly mentions the specific name of the public policy (i.e., *Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act* and the *Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion*). The name of the public policy may include terms such as Republic Act, the House Bill, the Senate Bill or the Implementing Rules and Regulations among others as they relate or refer to the particular public policy under study. Generic names referring or mentioning the specific public policy (i.e., law, bill) were also placed under this category.
- *Indirect Reference* – the information does not explicitly state the name of the public policy but merely refers to it.
- *Description* - the information states, explains, describes, summarizes, or expounds the public policy in relation to its provisions.
- *Effect* - the information states a possible outcome in the society or in the economy as a result of the public policy.
- *Objective* - the information comprises of the purpose or goal of the stated public policy.
- *Comparison* - the information involves the use of differentiation to distinguish two ideas that surround the public policy. For example, in the *Tax Reform for*

*Acceleration and Inclusion*, a comparison of the provisions about the public policy between the Senate and House Bills are presented.

### 3.0 Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Presentation of Public Policies in Online News Articles

The presentation of public policies was determined by looking at the occurrences of the presentation styles created using content analysis in each part of the online news articles according to the sections of the inverted pyramid.

**TABLE 1.**

**Summary of the Occurrences of Each Category under Each Part of the News Article for the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act**

CATEGORY	LEAD	SECONDARY INFORMATION	BACKGROUND INFORMATION	ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	TOTAL
<b>DIRECT</b>	16	89	39	21	<b>165</b>
<b>REFERENCE</b>					
<b>INDIRECT</b>	3	23	8	9	<b>43</b>
<b>REFERENCE</b>					
<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	12	42	21	9	<b>84</b>
<b>EFFECT</b>	0	7	4	3	<b>14</b>
<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	0	4	3	3	<b>10</b>
<b>COMPARISON</b>	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>45</b>	

In the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act, *direct reference* has the greatest number of occurrences in the *lead*, *secondary information*, *background information*, and the *additional information* of the news articles. An excerpt below shows how it was used:

(1) In August, President Duterte signed the **Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act (RA 10931)** which grants free tuition to all SUCs and LUCs in the country, despite having unclear source of funds. (MB-FT, Article 8, 3.1.)

It can be seen from the excerpt above that the name of the law was directly mentioned. This can be credited to one of the principles of news writing which describes news as specific, and should not be general in order to establish clarity (Harcup, 2015).

*Description* followed as the next most frequent category in *the lead*, *secondary information*, and *background information*.

(2) The **free tuition of accredited state universities and colleges (SUCs), local universities and technical vocation schools** may be funded through the budget realigned from three departments which underperformed in its usage of its funds. (PDI-FT, Article 19, 1.)

As seen in the excerpt above, it was observed in the *description* category that the most mentioned component of the law are the main provisions which are the “free tuition” and “state universities and colleges (SUCs)” which summarizes the intent of the law. It can be noted that this public policy is the first of its kind in the Philippines. Thus, introduction to the Free Tuition Law’s main elements is a crucial undertaking. This is in accordance to the principle of news writing wherein the news article should answer as much questions in the 5Ws and H as possible (Orellano, 2017).

In the *additional information*, *description* and *indirect reference* categories have the same number of occurrences. *Indirect reference* has the third highest frequency among other parts of the news articles.

(3) “The P6 billion would **fund the tuition in all state universities and colleges,**” Roque said. (MB-FT, Article 8, 2.8.)

In the excerpt above, the phrase, “fund the tuition in all state universities and colleges” was mentioned and used instead of the name of the law. It is evident that other than using the law terms to refer to the public policy, *indirect reference* also appeared by using the two salient provisions instead of just merely mentioning the name of the law. This can be explained by the fact that journalists are taught to avoid using the same word on the same paragraph (Orellano, 2017).

The *objective* and the *effect* of the law have minimal occurrences among all the articles. The sample excerpts for both presentation styles are the following:

(4) With the **Free Tuition Law, it is expected that many incoming college students will be applying in public colleges and universities.** (MB-FT, Article 2, 4.12)

(5) Duterte explained that he signed the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act into law **to provide all Filipinos with equal opportunity to quality tertiary education and give priority to academically able students who come from poor families.** (MB-FT, Article 8, 3.3.)

In excerpt 4, the writer included the effect of the new law to academic institutions. Meanwhile, excerpt 5 cited the objective of the free education law, which is to provide all Filipinos with equal opportunity to quality tertiary education and to give priority to academically able students who come from poor families.

The fact that the *Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education* is the first legislation of its kind and is still in the process of implementation explains the lack of evidentiality of using the *effect* as a presentation style category. However, this was not evident in all news articles. This can be indicative that the news articles presenting the *Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act* focused more on directly referring to the law and giving a brief description of its components rather than focusing on the purpose and effect of the law. Objective was rarely used as a presentation style which can denote that online news writers focus more on the provisions of the law rather than the objective when presenting the public policy.

It can also be seen that *comparison* was not utilized in this article as a testament to what has been pointed out that the Free Tuition Law was a newly established public policy in the country. Thus, no *comparison* was done on the news articles since no point of differentiation can be built on.

**Table 2**

**Summary of the Occurrences of Each Category under Each Part of the News Article for the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion**

CATEGORY	LEAD	SECONDARY INFORMATION	BACKGROUND INFORMATION	ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	TOTAL
<b>DIRECT REFERENCE</b>	16	44	35	15	<b>110</b>
<b>INDIRECT REFERENCE</b>	12	14	8	4	<b>38</b>
<b>DESCRIPTION EFFECT</b>	8	58	21	17	<b>104</b>
<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	6	47	19	14	<b>86</b>
<b>COMPARISON</b>	0	3	9	0	<b>12</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	1	7	2	3	<b>13</b>
	<b>43</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>53</b>	

Similar to what has been observed in the Free Tuition law, *direct reference* is the most frequent category used in presenting the TRAIN law among the *lead*, *secondary information*, *background information*, and *additional information*.

(6) Senator Emmanuel Pacquiao is urging President Duterte to veto **the tobacco tax provision under the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN)**.

(MB-TR, Article 5, 1.)

In the excerpt above, the whole name of the public policy was indicated within to signify that it was directly referring to the certain law specified. This is consistent to the principle of news writing, which is to be specific, and should not be general in order to establish clarity (Harcup, 2015).

It can also be observed in the TRAIN law-related articles that *description* is the second most frequent category among the online news articles.

(7) **The Senate version of the measure** proposes, among others, **tax exemption starting January 1, 2018 for individuals earning P250,000 and below a year.**

(PDI-TR, Article 19, 2.9.)

It can be seen that other than giving a brief background using *description*, most of those under this category mentions a specific provision of the law. This was mostly done by mentioning a certain clause in the TRAIN law. This can be attributed to fact that including the *description* of the TRAIN law as a part of the 5Ws and H is done to substantiate the main topic of the article.

On the other hand, *effect* is found to have the third highest frequency.

(8) But the TRAIN also contains provisions that would **increase tax impositions on petroleum, sugar-based beverages, coal, and other commodities that are expected to trigger higher prices in basic goods.** (MB-TR, Article 2, 4.6.)

It should be noted that there was a tax system that was implemented before the ratification of TRAIN. Thus, it can be inferred that the implementation of the TRAIN law would have an expected change to the old ways of taxation. Thus, *effect* was an evident presentation style.

*Indirect reference* also had a significant number of occurrences.

(9) Pacquiao said he is “not giving up” despite **the bicam approval of the low tobacco tax measure.** He vowed to “exert efforts to convince President Duterte to veto the tobacco tax provision of TRAIN.” (MB-TR, Article 5, 3.5.)

It can be noticed that identical to the usage of indirect reference in the Free Tuition Law, a certain provision about the TRAIN law was also indicated which is used as an indirect reference to the law.

There is also a considerable amount of *comparison* within the articles unlike the previous law.

(10) Rojas said Quimbo's version of **the excise tax rate—at P2.50 per pack—on top of the current P30 was too low compared to what was proposed by tobacco control advocates at P60.** (MB-TR, Article 6, 2.4.)

This can also be attributed to the political climate during the time of writing the online news articles in which the House of Representatives and the Senate disagree on the provisions of the law. Thus, the *comparison* for the contents of both legal documents emanating from the two legislative houses can be observed.

Lastly, it can be noticed that, like the Free Tuition Law, objective had the least number of occurrences which denotes that writers do not heavily focus on the objective of the law when constructing news articles.

(11) The package has **been designed to generate more revenues to finance ambitious infrastructure projects and make the tax system more equitable,**

Diokno said. (PDI-TR, Article 15, 2.1.)

In the above excerpt it can be seen that the main goal or *objective* of the law is stated in order to further enhance the story.

Based on the overall results, it can be seen that *secondary information* has the most occurrences in both of the *Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education* and the *Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion*. This is visible in all the categories of presentation style. This means that most of the news articles use public policies in providing information about the topic as what the secondary information is for.

Overall, the most used category for presentation for both laws were the *direct reference* followed by *description*. Using *direct reference* and *description*, the writer specifically mentions and explains the provisions of the law to introduce and inform the readers of the newly enacted policy. Both the *Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act* and the *Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion* minimally used objective which denotes that writers give more importance to the main provisions of the law rather than the purpose of the public policy. This is in accordance with the results of Fischer's (1991) study that sees the media as informational in nature when it comes to publishing matters regarding public policy.

However, it can also be seen that the two laws do not have the same third highest frequency when it comes to presentation style. It can be observed that the Free Tuition Law resulted to *indirect reference* while TRAIN law had *effect* for the third highest category for presentation style. This is because the impact of TRAIN Law can be easily felt as it is expected to alter the old tax laws which the people are formerly accustomed to. In contrast with the free tuition

which is a newly enacted public policy; that is why more citation is used through indirect reference to further explain it.

This can also be seen in the use of comparison where it was only evident on the TRAIN Law due to the fact that there were more disagreements that concurred between the house of representative and the senate which are the two legislative bodies that are responsible for the rules and regulations that are embedded in promulgating the law. Thus, there were news articles that showed comparison from both parties' statutory amendments. Furthermore, the fact that tax laws were already in place also gave way to comparing the new alteration from the previous tax legislations. It can be noted that comparison was not evident in the Free Tuition Law due to the fact that this law is the first of its kind, enables any point of comparison. Therefore, the presentation of the newly enacted public policies in our society is heavily affected by the political atmosphere during the law's passing.

### **3.2. Comprehensibility of Readers on Online News Articles**

The perceived ease or difficulty in understanding of the readers of the public policies presented in online news articles is construed as comprehensibility. All the participants stated that they are familiar with the public policy. This can be attributed to the fact that they are part of the group of people who are directly affected by the law. Thus, they were informed of the newly existing public policy.

As to the *Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act*, the participants believed that four out of the five online news articles were not successful in explaining the law in order to understand the public policy. The reason behind such assertion is because most of the news articles focused more on the events that are about the much-debated issue of funding the public policy, rather than on the public policy itself. One of the responses stated that the article entitled "Solon lauds Duterte's pro-people move in PAL debt-tuition" (Article 7) "only explained that such fund will be used (in) the implementation of the law but it did not explain about the law...only the fund." Another comment for the article with the headline "Senators urge Duterte to OK Law on free tuition in SUCs" (Article 6), said the "*fund ang focus ng article* [the fund is the focus of the article]." Another participant mentioned that the article was mainly "arguing (on) how will they implement this law, *kung* [if] there is scarcity in money..." They found the particular public policy unclear since the information given were not sufficient in determining the scope of the law, as one respondent mentioned after reading the third article (entitled "PAL's 6B settlement to fund free tuition in SUCs, LUCs" (Article 8) that "*combination lang ng 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> pero hindi parin clear kung sino parin yung qualified, sino yung makaka pasok at kung kalian maiimplement yung IRR* [It's just the combination of the first and second articles

although it is still not clear as to who will be qualified, who can enroll, and when the IRR will be implemented].” This is also the comment for the article entitled “Implementing rules on free college tuition out next month” (Article 9) stating that “*hindi clear ang covered sa free tuition [the coverage of the free tuition is not clear].*”

The respondents also acknowledged that there were terms that may not be easily understood by the reader. In Article 8, one commented that “*Yung paggamit din ng words...paano yung normal na tao na hindi na nakapagalar [In terms of the use of words... how about a lay person who is not educated] how will they understand what VETO means? They will not know. The comprehensibility is not thorough. It’s only those who are educated who understands what it means.*”

The participants acknowledged that only the article entitled “Duterte signs free tuition law” (Article 11) was the most understandable in terms of the public policy since it dwelt more on the provisions of the law, such as the exemptions, stating that, “*nag provide siya ng sagot sa mga possible questions natin. [it provided answers to our possible questions]*”. One expressed a reaction regarding the article stating, “*Yung part na retroactive- kaya pala nakuwestyon kami kung bakit hindi pinatupad, 2017 pa kasi yung sem na ito hindi kasali. Nasagot dito na school year 2018-2019 lang magsisimula [In the retroactive part- that is why we were questioned why it was not implemented, it’s because this semester is still part of 2017. It was answered here that it will be implemented in the school year 2018- 2019].*”

The participants proposed that the features of the law itself should have been included in the unclear articles since for the most parts it was just an overview of the law.

Considering the foregoing observations of the participants, it can be surmised that the presentation of the online news articles on public policy greatly affected the understanding of the readers. This claim can be supported by study of Gunnarsson (1984), wherein he proved that an alternative text that considers sensitivity to content-structuring in order to explicitly express provisions of a public policy improves comprehensibility. Thus, details of the public policy are very critical in the development of a good online news article. Lastly, it can be inferred that readers can best understand the public policy discussed in online news articles when the latter provides sufficient information about its provisions.

With regard to the *Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion*, the group collectively agreed that the certain provisions of the law that were introduced in the articles were clearly stated and well understood.

This was the case for the articles entitled “House agrees on tax exemptions of 13<sup>th</sup> month pay, bonuses” (Article 10), “House minority blocks Senate bid for tax exemptions on new

socialized shelter cost” (Article 9), and “Angara wants milk spared from Duterte tax reform measure” (Article 17). In this manner, certain provisions regarding the TRAIN law are clearly stated in the articles. For Article 10, one of the participants said that “It’s very clear in the article that under the TRAIN law the 13<sup>th</sup> month bonus is tax exempted but also under the same article from the tax cap for bonuses is raised from 82,000 to 90,000”. While in Article 9’s clear provision is that “the cost of a housing unit at P450,000-1,550,000”. On the other hand, the statement, “the higher the sugar the higher the tax” is the clearest part for Article 17.

However, the group also agreed that the majority of the articles were not enough to further gain understanding of the law. Article 10, as one of the respondents commented, “concentrates on the 13<sup>th</sup> month pay but not on the other aspect of TRAIN law” and also a noticed aspect for Article 9 as another stated that the “article merely presents the disagreement between the 2 chambers of the congress the upper house and the lower house (on the provisions of the law)”.

There is also an instance wherein one of the articles was not fully confirming to the intent of the law. This is the comment for the article entitled “Tax Reform Bill will increase electricity bills – Bayan Muna” (Article 11) as it is only “based on the research of Bayan Muna...they really didn’t put what the law says”. The participants also pointed out that some of the components of the article did not have a clear relationship to the main idea of the article or the sub heading introduced. This is in relation to Article 9 which came with an additional information on “the coal tax proposal”. The participants agreed that adding the said information was not coordinated with the main topic of the article. This is also observed in the article entitled “Tax Reform Bill signed amid criticism” (Article 14) where the sub heading “Vehicles” that talks about automobile excise tax include the explanation of taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages. For the TRAIN law, four of the articles were deemed as not sufficient in defining the law. One of the comments given by the participants was that there was “not enough information” given or the information was unorganized. The participants suggest that “the article should include what are the products that are excluded from the excise tax and what are the products that could be imposed with excise tax.” The consensus of the members of the discussion group found the news articles to have ample information about the law, but is not in depth.

In view of the above discussion, it can be surmised that these findings reveal that the understanding of the readers is dependent on the presentation of the online news articles. In summary, the news articles on both public policies are found to be insufficient in explaining the contents of the law. This is because most of the articles focused on the occurrence that is taking place with regards to the public policy, but further information explaining the public

policy itself is not that evident in the articles. Also, public policies have a reputation of being difficult to understand because of its “great formality, wordiness, and complexity” (Boleszczuk, 2017, 68). Moreover, majority of the online news articles failed to discuss comprehensively the provisions of the laws by not providing adequate information that were needed to gain a grasp of the law. The public policies were either explained through a brief overview or focused only on a certain provision which in turn affected the understanding of the readers on the real intents of the law.

#### 4.0 Conclusion

This study reveals that most of the categories for presentation under the Free Tuition Law and TRAIN law-related articles were found under the *secondary information*. This denotes that most of the public policies were presented in the body of the news story. The public policies are used in the news article as the extension of the 5Ws and H of the main topic. Furthermore, it also shows that public policy related news articles have similar dominant presentation styles specifically direct referencing the name of the law and description by indicating provisions of the law. It can also be noted that they also have differences due to the fact that presentation style varies depending on the political context to which the law was ratified and written for publication. This is seen in the differences between the Free Tuition Law and TRAIN law-related articles where the latter had more number for the effect category because the articles featured the impact of the law from the old taxation system and the disagreements between the two legislative houses.

As to comprehensibility, it can be concluded that the manner of presentation has a great impact on how the readers understand the context, message, or information that the news stories convey. Readers can understand better if not best the news stories when these are properly presented. Proper presentation means, the news stories are detailed by including sufficient information about the provisions of the law and a proper context. Furthermore, the used categories can help the readers understand the general context and the message of the news stories that the writers want to convey.

It can be concluded that different presentation styles are utilized depending on the context of the law. The online news writers set the agenda as to how and what the readers know about the newly enacted public policies in our society that is heavily affected by the political atmosphere during the passing of the laws. In this study, it can be noted that the political context is a substantial variable to the content as well as the way public policies are presented in online news articles which in turn affect the understanding of the readers of the public policies.

In light with the findings of this study, the following are recommended for further research:

- Since the paper focused on print media-based outlets as primary source of data, future researchers can look into the presentation styles of online news articles of other news media companies present in the Internet.
- Future researchers can also test the comprehensibility of public policies in online news articles to a larger sample population or different groups of individuals with different backgrounds.
- Lastly, future researchers can also look into other linguistic features that affect the presentation and comprehensibility of public policies in online news articles.

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