

ETHNOGRAPHIC MARKETING RESEARCH CONDUCTED IN A SLUM COMMUNITY IN
THE PHILIPPINES (Sample Partial report)

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Environment Description (Houses, Alleys and Access to the Slum Area)

The slum community, which consists of 1,059 structures, is always bustling around with people especially at night. Most of the structures along these two major roads consist of *sari-sari* stores (neighborhood stores often operated inside shopkeeper's house), videoke/ beer bars, bakeries, barber shops/beauty parlors, fast food stands and other commercial establishments. The Lotto station and OTB (Off Track Betting) station is especially often huddled with people.

To enter the interior of the slum community, one has to pass through numerous labyrinth-like alleys that range from two meters wide to as narrow as two feet. *Sari-sari* stores scatter like mushrooms in almost every corner and alley. Dogs and cats meanwhile could be seen everywhere sniffing for food around the alleys. They walk and idle around the alleys like humans, comfortably treating themselves as legitimate members of the slum community. Deeper into the slum area, open gutters with a repulsive smell, could be seen with cockroaches sneaking in and out. Some canals are dry and do not have liquid flowing through it but trash wrapped in plastic bags are scattered in some of these ditches.

. The alleys are oftentimes dimly lit or unlighted at night. This is compounded by the many manholes half covered, uncovered or covered only with old plywood, which puts a newcomer in the area in danger of falling into the holes. The ground is mostly cemented but grossly uneven. The plastic or metal water tubes could also be seen protruding from the cement floor.

On some areas, pieces of wooden planks are used as bridges over wide canals. Walking inside the slum community is made even more difficult because there are wet spots all over the

ground, even if it is not raining. This puts one in danger of slipping if he is not careful. One thus has to keep his eyes on the ground when walking inside the slum area, especially if he is a newcomer.

Turning to his sense of hearing to gain a feel of the neighborhood, the researcher observed that the alleys are particularly quiet in the evening for a place that it is full of people. The sounds that could be heard are from the television sets from different houses and some houses where people sing with their *videokes* at home. The televisions inside homes during night time are turned on in almost every home.

Most houses are around a meter wide and have two stories. Others are one story houses. The better looking houses have a patio and a gate in front of their house. The windows are often as wide as the houses and half the length of the house. Curtains are also pulled up, even at night so that passers-by are able to see the activity going on inside. Wet clothes can also be seen in hangers being dried outside houses. Teenagers meanwhile hang around dark alleys sitting on the floor, with their faces unseen. Others could be seen having a drinking session outside their houses. The alleys and sidewalks in the slum community are thus like an extension of their homes. Houses are built beside one another with almost no space in between. This makes all the houses in danger of burning down the whole community if one house catches fire.

With its huge population, it is no surprise that there is a big *talipapa* (small wet market) inside the slum community. Two long streets and an open space near the southwest part of the slum area are allocated to the *talipapa*. Most stores are bigger than the *sari-sari* stores around. Items sold include vegetables, meat, fish, rice, etc. The *talipapa* also sells all sorts of other items found in markets like Video discs, etc. The houses near the *talipapa*, which is near Agham road, also seem to be bigger. The alleys are likewise wider and better lit.

People and Community

Children especially brighten up the sidewalks around the slum area, playing skip rope or just running around. Teenagers are also commonly seen walking along the sidewalks or sitting and idling around. They can sometimes be seen drinking beer outside *sari-sari* stores or along the alleys even if they appear to be minors.

Barbeque vendors in carts or makeshift tables are also a common sight in the area. Grilled food sold includes *esau* or “IUD” (chicken intestines), pork BBQ, block of *dugo* (solid blood). These are dipped in bottles containing a mixture of vinegar, red onions and chili pepper as *sawsawan* (dip). Likewise, *Mani* (peanut) vendors selling their fried peanuts with garlic, ply the streets in carts with wheels.

Fights are also not uncommon according to residents from informal interviews done by the researcher. In fact, one night at around 10:30 pm, the researcher was going home when he chanced upon two neighbors shouting at each other. Residents around came out of their houses to see what the commotion was all about. The researcher noticed however that the residents seem to have come out of curiosity and only wanting to watch a scene from a true to life story because their faces seemed amused and not worried. It was as if it were a common occurrence to have fights among neighbors. The informant told the researcher that when some residents get drunk, they are prone to look for trouble. The informant/host told the researcher that one of the residents involved in the fight was holding a knife and advised the researcher to just walk straight and not mind what was going on so as not to get involved in the fight. The researcher was then always accompanied by the informant in and out of the community at night.

The ethnicities in the slum community are said to compose mostly of Bicolanos, Warays and Muslims according to residents interviewed. Near the *talipapa*, along Agham road, there is a mosque, where most Muslims are said to live around this area.

Interpersonal Relations

Another important dimension of slum life is the relational aspect or how members of the community interact with one another. The *kapitbahay* (neighbor) is best exemplified in terms of how one regards the other. Gossiping is one form of behavior through which neighborhood relations are articulated.¹ Gossiping may be viewed as a means of establishing group cohesion because a feeling of intimacy is developed once feelings, emotions and secrets are shared. Hence, it is not uncommon to see people idling outside their houses engaging in gossip. Coming into contact with neighbors and other residents is a way to pass away time and relax.

The slum community in Botanical compound is filled with colorful images of Filipino life to the interested observer. People in school uniforms, office uniforms, and even men without upper clothing could be seen. The harsh living conditions make the place appear as if it is despicable, but life in the slum community is hence a significant part of Filipino culture.

Despite the stench of the canals and the dilapidated houses, the physical make-up of their homes gives the people closeness to each other, as if people share a natural human bond with each other. This is exhibited by how neighbors know one another. People come out of the streets and talk to one another. The slum community is a community of people who seem to form a closer bond because they share the plight of poverty.

¹ Ibid, 187.

Home-based Drinking sessions

The researcher participated in a total of four drinking sessions with two different groups in the slum community during the month of September.

The very first drinking session the researcher attended in the area was on September 2. The host, who is forty-seven years old, is a nursing attendant of the Philippine Children's Hospital fronting the slum community. *Manong* Gilbert has been residing in the slum community for five years in a room he is renting inside a house whose occupants are all boarders in the house. (The address of the house is 144 Daisy Street - see map). There are five rooms in all, with everyone sharing the kitchen, living room area and a bathroom. The house is one of the few in the slum community that is bigger than most houses (around 50 square meters) and made completely from cement. There is even a gate and a patio in front of the house where occupants of the house can lounge and talk. This space is also where clothes are washed. (See pictures attached in appendix)

Items, Rituals and Routines

At around ten-thirty o'clock pm in the evening, after the host had come home from work, the drinking session started. Emperador brandy and a bottle of RC cola were bought from the sari-sari store nearby along with cigarettes. Two glasses were used: A glass for the cola as chaser and a small glass jigger for the hard alcoholic beverage. There were three participants in the drinking session including the researcher. The other participant, Teloy, is another boarder in the house. When another boarder of the house would pass by the gate, he would be offered a shot of alcohol. Many different topics were discussed. Teloy confided that there were many "shabu" (methamphetamine hydrochloride) addicts in the area. The slum area thus has likewise many "holduppers" (robbers) at night, most of them drug addicts who are in desperate need of cash to satisfy their vice.

The second drinking session was on September 16. The informant/host, Kiko, is an employee (merchandiser) of a toilet facilities store in The Fort, Makati. He has already been residing in the area since 1999. Slippers are taken off when entering the house. Almost all houses have their floor covered with linoleum. This is preferred to than the more expensive vinyl or tiles. An old shirt is used as a mop for the floor.

Kiko's live in partner has been residing in the area longer than him. The venue was inside the rented house of the informant, which was around four square meters big. Small as it was, the house had a second floor. The first floor is being rented for 1,200 pesos. The second floor is rented for the same amount. The house is built from old pieces of wood that are not even sanded. On the first floor, one can hear the floor above squeak dangerously whenever someone is upstairs. The live-in partners split the payment for the rent. The woman, *Ate* Salve has two daughters from a previous affair with a married engineer. She works in a restaurant grill operating from 6 pm to 3 am. At night, Kiko would be the one to take care of the two children (April and Sophia, ages seven and nine respectively).

There were four participants in this drinking session, including the researcher. The other two participants were neighbors of the host. At around 9 pm the drinking session started. The researcher bought pork barbeque and ballot for *pulutan* (food eaten when drinking). Grand Matador was bought and cola for chaser. Grand Matador is a brand of hard alcoholic beverage that is fast becoming popular because of its cheaper price compared to Tanduay Rum or Emperador Brandy. The researcher also observed this when he passed by several groups in the slum community drinking outside their houses. The downside, according to a participant, is that the bottle could not be resold to the *magbobote* (person who collects or buys empty bottles for a living). A neighbor who was a participant of the drinking session confided to the researcher that

iced or cold water was preferred to cola as chaser not only because it is cheaper but also because it does not cause hangovers. Cola was only bought because the guest (the researcher) may not be contented with water. Of course, there were cigarettes bought for participants who smoked. Cigarettes are a symbol of friendship. When one offers a cigarette to a new acquaintance, it is like he is offering his friendship by sharing a luxury he can afford.

Cold or iced water is preferred to by participants of the drinking session the researcher participated in the Botanical garden slum community than soft drinks as chaser. Not only is it cheaper according to one participant of the drinking session but it also tastes better and is healthier. (Coke was bought as a chaser because the researcher was asked of his choice before the drinking session). “*Tatay*”, who is 61 years old, also commented that it is ‘manlier’ to drink water as chaser. The choice of *pulutan* was also discussed. Kiko commented that cooked rice can also be good for *pulutan*. In fact, according to him, many do this to give them the energy to have a few more shots or bottles of alcohol. Tatay brought leftover food from his house to add to the *pulutan* that was bought.

Drinking Sessions in Videoke Bars

Two videoke bars from the many beer joints along BIR Road of the slum community were visited by the researcher. Behavioral patterns and physical description of the two pubs were observed.

The researcher counted more than ten beer joints around the slum area. Inside two of the *videoke* bars along BIR Road, adult men could be seen drinking gathered in groups of not less than two persons. The physical structure of these beer joints are often so that they do not have walls along the entrance. The entrances to these bars are wide open, which allows cool air in and at the

same time making them appear inviting to customers. Under yellow and different colored blinking lights, the men inside drink beer together in groups around tables of two to three square feet and sing by inserting coins into the slot videoke machine.

Though many of the customers of the bar appear to be residents of the area, some wear pants, probably because they have just come home from work. Others wear shorts and slippers. GROs (Guest Relations Officer or women who entertain male guests) work as waitresses but can be invited to sit beside male guests. The cost for a drink for a GRO, however, is much more expensive. For example, the price of a San Miguel Pale Pilsen for customers is twenty-five pesos. For a GRO, it is one hundred twenty pesos a bottle.

Sari-sari Store Purchase (Observed Purchase)

The *sari-sari* stores represent a vital part in sales and advertising of alcoholic beverages among the urban poor. Hence, four of the numerous *sari-sari* stores inside the slum community were observed and interviewed by the researcher.

Results from the observations and informal interviews conducted showed that one hundred percent of the time, residents of slum communities purchase their alcoholic beverages from the nearby *sari-sari* store. Based on this knowledge, alcoholic beverage firms could give *sari-sari* store owners special privileges or advertising materials to help them increase their sales of a particular alcoholic brand.

Another very important insight gathered was that ice is a prime commodity in the urban poor community. Almost all *sari-sari* stores sell ice because many residents can not afford a refrigerator. A circa 300 ml block of ice in a transparent plastic bag of around 4"X 7" inches costs

two pesos. The block of ice is crushed by hitting it against a cement wall to break it into small pieces.

During the three times the researcher went in the evening to have a drinking session, most *sari-sari* stores had already run out of ice. According to the owner of the store, it would take another three hours for the next batch of ice to freeze.

Interviewing the owner regarding brand preferences and sales, two owners of *sari-sari* stores inside the slum community revealed that Red Horse was the highest selling alcoholic beverage. Among the hard alcoholic drinks, Emperador Brandy was preferred although Grand Matador (owned by San Miguel Corporation) was fast catching up.

Analysis

The participant observation provided many interesting insights. Some of the interesting information gathered will be enumerated here.

The collectivistic nature of Filipinos especially among the poor encourages close interrelationships beyond family ties, such as among neighbors and other members of the slum community. Help is expected of each other during times of crisis. In the same way, alcohol drinking is considered a way to strengthen ties among friends and neighbors. Thus, a shot of rum is offered to a friend or acquaintance that passes by a group engaged in a drinking session. In the slum community, everything seems to be shared by all the members, as opposed to the middle and upper classes, where people live in houses that have high walls and gates. In the eyes of the slum community dwellers, when people prefer more privacy than social relations, the concept of neighborhood begins to be restricted. Slum dwellers attach a high value to living together,

irrespective of the economic and social difficulties they have. This means that the neighborhood is a network of ongoing interaction.²

Drinking Behavior, Norms, Consumption Patterns

Drinking sessions mirror the simplicity of the poor Filipino masses. Drinking on the floor at home is simple and comfortable. The plastic pitcher, jigger, drinking glasses and *pulutan* are put on the floor within reach of the participants gathered around sitting on the floor.

Alcohol drinking among groups is a convenient way, especially among men, to let out their emotions to friends and neighbors, because it is entertaining (friends are gathered together) and cheap (alcohol can be bought from the local variety store and drunk along the alleys outside their homes). Drinking with friends is a way of ventilating their frustrations or entertaining themselves. Hence, alcohol drinking is encouraged by the relational construct of a slum neighborhood. Further the Filipino value of *pakikisama*, which is particularly important among the lower classes, is articulated through the drinking activity. For example, friends are automatically offered a shot of alcohol when he passes by a group engaged in a drinking session.

Drinking is a social activity for the lower classes. Based on the informal interviews conducted, many respondents commented that one of the main reasons they drink is so that they could be with their friends.

The number of consumers, their language, and how much they are likely to buy differ. Based on the informal interviews and the survey the researcher conducted, alcohol drinking encompasses both genders and almost all age groups beginning from the age of thirteen. The women, because of cultural norms, are naturally less seen drinking in public places. But inside homes, it is accepted even by modern thinking husbands. In fact, many informants claim that the women who drink with them can drink more than them and do not seem to get easily drunk

² Jocano, *Slum as a Way of Life*, 180-183.

(“*Minsan mas matibay pa nga ang mga babae uminum.*”). The young adolescents and the teenagers, on the other hand, are initiated into the alcohol drinking through their *barkadas* (cliques). Starting from around the age of fourteen, a teenage boy is already allowed by parents to have an occasional bottle of beer or two or participate in drinking sessions during parties or other festivities. Girls are not allowed this privilege because it is deemed improper or else they would incite gossip. “*Ano ang sasabihin ng ibang tao tungkol sa iyo nyan.*”

The alcoholic beverage drinking subgroup among the urban poor can thus be characterized by members of the community who value community norms and values such as *pakikisama*. Alcohol drinking can be a way to be accepted by a group. It can also be an avenue for neighbors and new acquaintances to ‘loosen up’ and ‘break the ice’. In marketing strategy, this knowledge could be vital. Advertising strategies can use group influences to persuade consumers that the promoted brand is the one endorsed by the group. For example, advertisements could depict group norms which increases the feeling of involvement of the viewer and allows him to identify with the brand. During identification with an advertisement character, empathizing consumers begin to feel as if they are participating in the character’s experiences. That is, consumers imaginatively experience the story’s events from the perspective of the character with whom they identify. Colt 45, a competitor of the leading Red Horse beer can subtly integrate these Filipino values, norms and identity of the lower classes into their commercials to establish a sentimental connection with consumers from this market segment.

The observations narrated above provide depictions of slum life and the life of the lower classes in general... (Copyright: Business Private Eye)