

# **The Misuse of Internet Marketing: A Mail-Order-Bride Practice in Philippines**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Internet and the World Wide Web is a powerful tool in the proliferation of mail order bride activities. With just the click of a mouse, a woman's life and destiny maybe written or rewritten. Women's bodies and lives are marketed in this e-commerce generation. Women and girls become easy victims of the most modern way of woman trafficking.

This study focuses on the ad representation of a Filipina mail order bride used by websites/web pages in advertising them. Results indicate that the Filipinas' physical attributes make her the most "marketable women" in the mail order bride e-commerce business.

**Keywords:** Internet Marketing, Mail Order

## **INTRODUCTION**

The decades of the 70's and 80's created a phenomenal plight of the Filipino labor force. Massive unemployment brought about by the oil crisis in the 70's forced the government to open the gates to overseas deployment of professionals. Subsequently, with the shortage of "exportable" professionals the Philippine Labor Department chose to allow semi-skilled laborers to go abroad as overseas contract workers. Soon after even unskilled workers joined the bandwagon as domestic helpers. This later group is dominantly women. The decision also generated the popular notion of a Filipina as domestic helper, a perception that found its way or its inclusion in a foreign dictionary. It required a diplomatic intervention for its deletion in the lexical text.

Musicians, dancers and artists were also deployed during those lean years. The favorite target is ASEAN countries with particular preference for Japan. Unfortunately, due to lack of the required skills, many of the women in this group landed in prostitution. The result, Filipinas working in Japan was tagged as Japayuki, or entertainer in Japan.

In this decade of e-commerce, another Filipina nomenclature is emerging -mail order bride. Domingo (1999) cited that the mail-order-bride operation dates back to the colonialism era. Settlers in the "new world" write to request for wives from their native land. The pen pal system extended the scope of mail order bride to other countries. This activity usually starts with friendship as the primal purpose. Later a kind of romantic relationship would blossom often resulting to marriage.

Perversion of the pen pal activity started when a male national from a first world country tried to forge friendly relationship with women from a third world country with a purpose of marriage. Women from poverty stricken countries, especially Asia, dreamed of improving their sad state were enticed by the greener pasture of first world countries (Atlink 1995). The sex tourism business advertises the third world women as promiscuous in sex and in the mail order industry as monogamous (Rosario 1994). Further, Atlink (1995) advance that in Germany they are expected to work as unpaid domestic helper and deliver sexual services for free. This place inputs in the blossoming of a lucrative business that caters to the mail-order-bride.

According to Scholes (2002) there are approximately two hundred mail-order-bride agencies in the US alone and many more worldwide. The introduction of the Internet and the World Wide Web enhanced greatly the activity. Ordering of wives becomes easy that 4,000 to 6,000 weddings through this industry happen every year. Out of this number, 70 percent are Filipina (Scholes, 2002).

In its totality, like the Japayuki and the domestic helper, a new nametag is given to a Filipina – mail-order-bride. Libarois' (2001) study shows that most of these women are prey to prostitution and white slavery. Predators would seduce these women to advertise themselves in the Internet in order to find their luck in the US, Canada, Australia and

Europe. With the influx of the Filipina mail-order-bride in the Internet, they would eventually be tagged as Internet brides, a category fast emerging in the e-commerce era.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

This research studies the discourse used by websites/web pages in advertising a Filipina mail-order-bride. It covers the basic features of the Internet and Worldwide Web as a major tool in promoting the activity. Finally, the study investigates the image of the Filipina deduced from the descriptions and/or attributes presented in these web sites. It is via these ads that the Internet and Worldwide Web help generate a new and marketable depiction of a Filipina mail-order-bride.

The search and viewing was undertaken for one month during the school year break and was limited to five search engines commonly used by local internet users, namely: Yahoo, Excite, Lycos, Search, and Mozilla. These search engines cater to nine websites carrying this topic of interest.

## **RELATED LITERATURE**

The ideology of female domesticity is defined as a kind of false consciousness which functions to legitimize the prevailing patterns of gender hierarchy and relations (Discipulo, 1999; Sobritchea, 1992). The ideology works to make existing social inequalities acceptable to people and prove the rational that would make the current state of affairs just and fair (Sobritchea, 1992). Thus, the ideology legitimizes the domesticity of women. Those women are expected to take care of the spouse, the children and the house is an established fact in the patriarchal society like the Philippines. A married woman becomes bound by the tradition and culture to household chores as she is to her husband the moment she marries. Filipina women who deeply adhere to this tradition will become good wives and domestic workers to foreign husbands through the mail-order-bride industry (Discipulo, 1999).

De Guzman's *Body Politics* (2002), a collection of essays about cultural representation of women's body, in part touch how women's bodies are pictured in a patriarchal society as:

That a woman's body is commodity for sale in the global market (similar to Miss Saigon, and the booming of internet clubs projected as pen pals).

That women's bodies are object of sex as reflected in the line, "susukatin ang ganda mo sa kama" (your beauty is measured on bed) of Mabanlo/s poem.

That women's bodies are "being for others" (particularly men).

That women's bodies are similar to domestic belongings like household utensils, clothing, and food.

These representations of women's bodies may be used as yardstick in examining the discourses used by mail-order-bride sites to picture the Filipina in the Internet market and World Wide Web.

The Internet and worldwide web has intensified the industry of the mail-order bride. In just a click of the computer's mouse one can surf from one place to another and have access to the pictures and addresses of thousand of women worldwide. These women can be reached by either e-mail, chat or the Internet forum. They can also be reached through the traditional fax or mail. The speed of the Internet, however, provided the feature that attracts the clients towards the Internet as a medium since its invention in 1995.

As every one knows, the interest is a facility that has a multi-media capability whereby contents of web pages and websites to be transmitted to millions of locations worldwide at the same time (Libarous, 2001). It can also load and transmit to every computer with wide area network texts, graphics, animation and video. The "Net" serves as the link of many different computers because of its interconnection capability.

The worldwide web is just one of the programs that run through the Internet. It contains programs of addresses of websites that are usually searched using search engines. The original intention was to adhere to the principle and or culture of sharing. This implies that once published in the Internet any computer connected to the worldwide web can access it. Recently, programs bar the viewing of certain pages in the website and limits them only paying net users. The collection and mode of payment are usually prescribed and/or authorized by the owner of the websites. This makes

possible the buying and selling through the Internet. Naturally, this activity includes the mail-order-bride. The Internet and worldwide web, thus, in combination resulted in the birth of a “virtual library” (Libarous, 2002). At the same time, a “virtual super mall” was created. The Internet and the worldwide web became medium of representing or misrepresenting reality. As now part of the traditional marketing media, they have the potential to proliferate a myth and other knowledge without any basis of truth. Norland (2001) cited the abrupt increase of pedophile crimes as example.

Mail-order-bride activity is also affected by the “net” phenomenon. Dicipulo (2002) cited that sexuality is being emphasized as an integral part of women’s identity, which includes among others race and ethnicity. This activity not only encourages hostility to women but also discrimination and racial prejudice, both condemned by modern society. Thus the question: Did the use of the “net” as a marketing medium resulted in a misuse in the activity of the mail-order-bride?

## METHODOLOGY

Considering the objective of the study, the methodology used is content analysis. The focus of analysis was the descriptions/attributes highlighted in the advertisements of website/web pages “selling” the Filipina as a mail-order-bride.

Information gathered from 450 Internet cafes and other establishments indicated the following search engines as the most popular, in declining order of preference are Yahoo, Lycos, Mozilla, Excite, and Search. Using each search engine typing the words “filipina mail-order-bride” resulted in the following number of websites: Lycos – 11,970; Yahoo – 3,200, Mozilla – 897, Excite, 97, and Search 73.

The first ten websites/web pages that appear in the search category of the search engines were listed and visited. If the website/web page is similar in several engines, the website/web page is retained under one engine and removed in the others. These resulted in nine websites/web pages as target source of descriptions for analytical use. These are: Sexhymen.com, Asawa Webpage, Amoriental, Filipina Ladies, Everlastinglove.com, Filipino Website, Filipina Bride, Manilabeauty.com, and Eastwest Publications.

Advertisements in the above mentioned websites/web pages were downloaded. Phrases, sentences, words used to describe the Filipina as a mail-order-bride were noted and tabulated per website/page. From these tabulation, five clusters of description/attributes were drawn and ranked in each cluster according to the number of times they were mentioned in the website. The description/attribute with the rank of 1 and 2 were taken as the major representation of the Filipina as a mail-order-bride.

While the content analysis was being undertaken, a survey was also conducted among the users of the facilities of Internet cafes as to the features of the Internet and worldwide web that made them effective instruments of the mail-order-bride activity. A total of 327 respondents participated in the survey.

## RESULTS

Practically all the respondents have indicated speed (311) and wide scope of search (302) as the features that make the Internet and worldwide web as effective search avenues. The multi-media attribute (274) of the network ranked third in the collation of information. The fourth attribute that hit the preset cut-off level is the ability to provide instant communication (201). The first three features extracted from the survey result are similar to the findings of Libarios (2001) “has multi-media capacity . . . transmitted throughout all parts of the world, in millions of locations at the same time”.

Appendix 1 contains the descriptions or attributes of Filipina as reveled in the advertisements of the selected websites/pages. The descriptions culled were grouped into physical attributes, inner quality as shaped by culture, sexual attributes, and socio-economic attributes.

In Table 1, each cluster is supported by descriptions taken from advertisements of the selected sites. It reflects how often the descriptions/attributes were mentioned in the different sites/pages.

The cluster with the most number of descriptions is cultural attributes with 27. The attribute explains how a Filipina is loyal to her husband, honesty, timidity, subservice, and other qualities borne by culture and are being exploited by foreign men. It also indicate the dominance of patriarchy in the country (Table 2)

**Table 1 Cluster Attributes**

Clusters of Attribute	Number of Entries
Cultural	27
Sexual	24
Physical	18
Socio-economic	10
Intellectual	7

The ideology of female domesticity which requires women to attend to domestic activities, take care of the spouse and children is affirmed in the results. Moreover, the preference for older men may attract the retirees and handicapped men. They may exploit the Filipina and make her a caregiver, sex giver and domestic worker.

**Table 2 Top Ranking Cultural Attributes**

Description	Rank
Sincere ladies who are not quick to have intimate relations without marriage	1
Loyal housewives/loyal to husband, honest/prefer older husband, respect age as repository of wisdom	2

The second cluster with the most number of descriptions is sexual attributes. It has 24 descriptions. Descriptions/attributes within this cluster are also ranked accordingly. Findings reveal that the mail-order-bride industry caters to the sexual urges of foreign men in the guise of friendship or marriage. The highest rank in the sexual cluster reveals foreign men’s preference to virgin women.

The double standard set by the patriarchal society is affirmed in this study. It requires women to remain a virgin until marriage but allows men to be otherwise. This reflects that men who cater to the mail-order-bride business regard women as sex objects. It is the responsibility of the bride to provide sex to her man once requested or manipulate the man to have sex with her.

**Table 3 Top Ranking Sexual Attributes**

Description	Rank
Remain virgin until marriage/sexually innocent	1
They manipulate their men to the right course	2

Physical attribute is the third cluster. It is noted that virginity is again an important feature of women’s physical attributes. The mail-order-bride business caters to older men. As mentioned in the advertisement: Filipinas are willing to marry even handicapped, divorcées, or those who are older than the ladies (0 to 40 age or even above age gap). The retirees who are ripe with age are no longer virgin, yet, because they call the shots they require their bride to be a virgin. Because women are regarded as sex objects, they should be perpetually beautiful, slim and maintain sexy figure. The physical attributes are also ranked accordingly.

**Table 4 Top Ranking Physical Attributes**

Description	Rank
Remain virgin even in marriageable age	1
Beautiful/seems naturally slim/they rarely loose their figure as they age	2

Results for the cluster pertaining to Socio-economic attributes imply that the mail-order-bride is poor. It is the reason why she is willing to marry anybody who could provide her with secure “nest.” This also implies that the Filipina mail-order-brides are desperately in need of money that they would take “anyone” from rich country to be their husband.

**Table 5 Top Ranking Socio-Economic Attributes**

Description	Rank
Many of them come from lower socio-economic status/ they com from poor families	1
They have real financial need	2

The least number of attributes is found in the intellectual cluster. The results show that the highest intellectual attribute of a Filipina is her knowledge and usage of the English language. Foreign men, particularly Americans and Europeans, prefer Filipinas because they can read, understand and speak English.

This affirms the belief that men who patronize the mail-order-bride business do not prefer liberated women. They do not prefer a bride who maintains a career instead of fulfilling her role as housewife. The reason for this preference is that simple women can be easily manipulated.

**Table 6 Top Ranking Intellectual Attributes**

Description	Rank
They can read, understand and speak English	1
They have real financial need	2

The results discussed above points to four major interpretations.

**Cultural, Sexual and Physical Attributes of the Filipina is the selling point of the mail-order-bride industry.**

These three are inseparable criteria in looking and selection of a housewife who would take care of the domestic responsibilities and be a man’s sexual partner. This picture is also prevailing in a patriarchal society. The Filipina’s yielding, subservient, and domestic nature is shaped by her culture. Thus, it appears that her culture aggravates the situation for her but at the same time enhances the mail-order-bride activity. Likewise, this supports the ideology of female domesticity.

The Filipina’s sexual attributes and physical characteristics are emphasized in the advertisements of the industry. The industry, therefore, further enhances the already prevailing notion or picture of women as objects of sex. In effect, sexual exploitation of women goes global through the facilities of the Internet and worldwide web.

**The Filipina’s Socio-Economic Situation makes her an easy prey of the industry.**

Her socio-economic situation pushes her to look for a more financially secure person to save her from poverty. Most prey of the mail order bride business come from third world countries and is poor. Most of the takers of the brides come from the first world countries. The issue of economic disparity between the first and third world countries results in the poor women’s propensity to be victimized by men from rich countries. These men pose as women’s refuge in times of trouble. This is pictured by Libarious (2001), as the Filipina is a damsel in distress waiting for her savior in shining armor.

The intelligence of the Filipina is not a selling point. American men who have married women through mail order bride business boasts about traditional values possessed by their brides. These values are no longer observed or practice by modern American wives (Scholes, 2002). An educated woman is not contented to be a wife and mother alone, but seeks personal satisfaction through her own career and interests. A foreign woman who still possesses traditional values is happy and fulfilled to be a homemaker and asks for nothing more than husband, home and family.

The more educated a woman is, the more she will be liberated and be like Americans and other first world women. This explains why men choose not so educated or intelligent Filipinas as wives via the mills of the industry.

The study reveals the manipulative nature of foreign men. Simple-minded women are easy to handle and exploited by the dominant patriarchal society.

**The “Net” as tool for women trafficking.** The role of the Internet and worldwide web in the development of a new Filipina image as a mail-order-bride is highly supported by the results of the study. Despite the existence of R.A 6955, a law banning mail-order-bride operation in the Philippines, the business still thrives underground. Diocson (2002) cited that an estimated 1,000 to 2,000 Filipina enlist in mail order bride routes annually with almost all resulting in marriage. This highly indicates the powerlessness of the law.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The proliferation of mail-order-bride business is being supported by an infrastructure provided by the Internet and worldwide web. With this e-commerce toll women’s bodies and lives becomes a highly sought after commodity. Women and girls become an easy prey of this innovative, technological and electronic marketing phenomenon.

The Filipino culture has shaped the women to be domesticated, subservient, loyal wife, sincere, honest, who remains virgin until marriage. They respect older people and not averse to them. They even consider them as wise and repository of wisdom. As a result, Filipinas can even tolerate taking care of handicapped and old husband and live even in the remotest area. Her culture has cultivated her to be a prime target of foreign wives seekers.

Her marketability is further enhanced by her physical attributes of being a virgin until marriage, being beautiful and slim. To support this positioning the mail order bride business supported this image by her sexual attributes of being sexually innocent and once married to an older man she can manipulate him to the right course.

Being poor, the Filipina can take a man of whatever state. She is financially in need and has to support her family in whatever way even if danger is around such choice. Presented in another outlook, it can be said that she is willing to sacrifice her personal choices in favor of a good life for her family.

The Filipino reads, speaks, and understands English... this is a strong plus factor in her marketability. In comparison to her foreign counterparts, the Filipina, being simple, is happy and fulfilled to be a homemaker, a wife and a mother.

The Filipina attributes make her the most marketable commodity in the mail-order-bride business. With the support of the Internet and worldwide web the previous names attached to her, as Japayuki is now slowly being replaced by “internet-bride”.

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### Appendix 1 Cluster Attributes

Description	Website/Page
<p>Filipinas are mystic            Filipinas possess virtual characteristics of any Asean            She has beautiful Asean blend            Reads, speaks and understand English            Interesting and captivating</p>	<p>Asawa Webpage            Amoriental</p>
<p>Urges a man to feel excited about getting married            Beautiful            Sincere            Interested in meeting men around the world            Desire to meet men either for friendship or beginning a serious relationship            Attractive physically and intimately            No celebrity-like or photo studio type of picture due to the fact that having their picture taken from photo studio is quite expensive            Lovable</p>	<p>Filipino website            Filipina Ladies</p>
<p>Philippine women make perfect wives            Loyal housewives            They make excellent mail-order-bride for American men            She is undoubtedly Asean            With neat little nose            Sun tanned skin            Dark hair and eyes            Their littleness adds to their femininity            Seem naturally slim            Generally well educated            They speak English            They are Christians            They respect age as repository of wisdom and stability            Innocent sexually and beautiful girl            Remains virgin even in the marriageable age group they believe that men must have regular sexual activity            Filipina make herself available for her husband whenever requested            She is a provider of quality sex            They are liable and yielding            They guide their men in a subtle or obvious way to the right course            The manipulate their men to the right course</p>	<p>Sexhymen.com</p>
<p>Filipinas remain virgin until marriage            Too shy            They prefer older husband</p>	<p>Everlatinglove.com</p>
<p>They are simple and obedient            College educated            Speak fluent English            They seek better life and opportunity            Honest            Faithful            They rarely lose their figures as they age            Extremely supportive more about your heart than your wallet</p>	<p>Manilabeauty.com</p>
<p>Sincere            They seek love            They seek for romance and marriage to men who choose them</p>	<p>Filipinas bride</p>
<p>They are eager to meet gentlemen to be fiend or life partner            They are looking for a men to provide a secure “nest” for them            Many of then come from a lower socio-economic class            They come from poor families            They have real financial needs</p>	<p>Eastwest            Publications</p>