# Experiences of Student Journalists during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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## A B S T R A C T

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the human beings in the community. Student journalists are the ones who endured many challenges in their publication work. They acquired experiences that develop their capacity to cope from difficult situations. Hence, this study ascertained the experiences of student journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic. The qualitative-phenomenological approach of research design was employed using a researcher-made written interview form administered through messenger and email among five (5) purposively selected editors-in-chief from different universities and state colleges. The environmental, technological and psychological experiences of the student journalists were revealed. There were six (6) meaningful categories taken from data transcripts. Student journalists were able to (1) manifest positive outlook in life and (2) render democratic community empowerment services as their environment-related experiences. Besides, their media technology-related experiences included (3) adjust to unprecedented working transition and (4) encounter misinformation and disinformation. Finally, they earned psychology-related experiences such as (5) confront social communication disparity and (6) endure from self-efficacy enervation. Since student journalists facing many challenges, they still show their willingness to serve the school and the community during hard times. Thus, student journalists' roles and responsibilities are to deliver factual information and help the people in the society.

Keywords: Experiences, student journalists, COVID-19 pandemic

## 1. Introduction

Student journalists embody various efforts to cover relevant development and issues amid the current global crisis. They use their vocal and physical power to deliver factual information and inspiring stories to the people. As agents of truth and consciousness, student journalists have crucial functions in spreading awareness in global and online communities (Wu, 2020). However, the COVID-19 pandemic brings struggles to student journalists, wherein they encountered certain difficulties in obtaining responses from interviewees, as well as working with the colleagues for school paper publication (Joung, 2020). The student journalists avoid physical conducting of interviews because they may be potentially exposing themselves to the virus. As a wise alternative, they come up with unique yet creative ways to interact with people in getting stories and salient pieces of information. As a result, student journalists do their job, even though they are confronted by the COVID-19 challenges (Mook, 2020).

In the past two years, there is 44% of teachers who reported a sudden rise in journalism class enrollment and more than 30% increase in students' interest who majored journalism in universities and colleges. Because of this, journalism students are encouraged by the academic curriculum to focus more on state and local news that can lead to a more productive dialogue inside the class. Thus, students acquire more opportunity to cover and influence community events (Jones, 2019). Several studies about student journalism have strictly concentrated on emphasizing the roles and significance of student journalism in the school curriculum and student skills development. Campus student journalism promotes life-long learning that enhanced both academics and life skills essential to the lives of the students. Nevertheless, campus journalists' expressions of ideas are censored by school administrators (Ortiz, 2017; Omay, 2020). This is pinpointed by some previous studies, wherein they concentrate on censorship concerns in college campus papers and examine the factors predicting student journalists' content decisions. One study has found out that censorship administration and students' individual willingness in censoring are not significant predictors of student comfort in publishing controversial materials, but student journalists' roles and perceived content reviewers are significant

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predictors of student comfort level in producing manipulated information. Consequently, the results have recommended to help the student journalists to think at the margin of legal and ethical principles in making content decisions (LoMonte et al., 2013; Cogar, 2021). Despite the retrieved literatures and studies, existing knowledge about the experiences of student journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic is relatively scarce. Acquiring information in relation to the student journalists' experiences can help people understand their participatory activities and civic engagement strengthening foundations of developed knowledge and identity (Bobkowski & Miller, 2016; Vogts, 2018).

In this time of crisis, it is important to turn our attention to student journalists and identify the sources of their challenges and ways of survival as they continue their publication roles and responsibilities. Hence, this study seeks to answer the question, what are the experiences of student journalists during the emergence of the global pandemic? The findings of this study demonstrate the environmental, technological, and psychological experiences of student journalists. These will serve as an eye-opener to the students, teachers, school curriculum, information agencies, broadcast centers, future researchers and other social groups in the community about acquired experiences of student journalists encompassing challenges to face and opportunities to cherish. The literature reviews and previous studies are strengthened foundations of the discussion of the topic, methods, and results. Finally, this study aims to recognize the contributions of student journalists in education, information, and communication.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Purpose of the Study and Research Design

This qualitative-phenomenological study described by Sandelowksi (2000) that helped to ascertain the experiences of student journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was anchored on a constructivist epistemology which pursued to examine what is assumed to be a socially constructed dynamic reality through a precise description of the phenomenon under investigation (Pedroso, et al., 2021). The experiences of student journalists are supported by John Dewey's Pragmatic Theory of Experience in which acquisition of experiences is dependent on (1) the relationship between the present experience, the past and future ones, (2) the tangible and social context of a person's situation, and (3) an individual's connection to the situation or environment (Stark, 2022).

### 2.2 Respondents

This study was participated by five Editors-in-Chief of different student publication of colleges and universities. The informants were chosen through purposive sampling which also treated as judgmental or selective sampling (Pedroso, 2021). The inclusion criteria of the informants were also employed: a) 18-22 years old during the conduct of this study; b) an editor-in-chief in the school publication; c) designated as a student journalist of a Tertiary Higher Education Institution; and, d) with a minimum of 2 years of service as a student journalist.

Table 1 displays the informants' profiles. The five (5) college student journalists included one (1) male and four (4) female informants. Their age ranged from 18 to 22 years old. The informants had a minimum of two year-service as editors-in-chief. They came from two (2) private and three (3) public higher education institutions. Furthermore, one (1) of them came from the Province of Guimaras; one (1) from Sarangani; one (1) from Antique; and two (2) from Iloilo. The informants were assigned pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

**Profile of the Informants**

| College Student Journalist | Age | Sex | Location | No. of Years as a Student Journalist in University/College Publication | Position | Type of Tertiary Higher Education Institution |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Joy | 22 | Female | Guimaras | 3 | Editor-in-chief | Private |
| Ela | 21 | Female | Antique | 3 | Editor-in-chief | Private |
| May | 21 | Female | Iloilo | 5 | Editor-in-chief | Public |
| Lyn | 22 | Female | Iloilo | 4 | Editor-in-chief | Public |
| John | 18 | Male | Sarangani | 2 | Editor-in-chief | Public |

### 2.3 Instrumentation

The researcher-made written interview form was validated by the panel of experts which used to gather responses and collect experiences of student journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic. The English language was used to organize the semi-

structured question and other necessary information to fill out there in. The interview form is created through a Microsoft Word document. The letter for the informant was also attached and followed with the instructions in providing information on the given template (Kendra, 2020; Pedroso et al., 2021). In addition, critical analysis of literatures, studies, and diagrams were applied to strengthen the foundations of the study's findings (Pedroso, 2021).

### 2.4 Ethical Consideration

The researchers were guided in the ethical conduct of this study by Republic Act 10173 also known as the "Data Privacy Act of 2012". It is hereby stated in its Section 8 that publishers, editors, duly accredited reporters of any newspaper, magazine or periodical shall ensure always the value of confidentiality of any personal data that comes to its knowledge and possession. The Section 20 (a) of the said law also emphasized that personal information controller must implement reasonable and proper organizational, physical and technical measures intended for the protection of personal information against any accidental or unlawful deterioration, modification and disclosure, as well as against any other unlawful processing. In the succeeding paragraph of the section, it is further elaborated that the information controller must determine the appropriate level of security by taking into account the nature of the personal information to be protected, the risks represented by the processing, the size of the organization and difficulty of its operations, data privacy practices and the cost of security imposition (Philippine Government, 2012). The approved letter of information, waivers, and written consent forms were utilized to gather participants' voluntary participation in this study. The researchers maintained utmost anonymity and confidentiality throughout the data gathering process.

### 2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

After a letter of permission to conduct a study was approved by the Dean, data gathering started on January 30, 2022. The researchers were able to find eligible editors-in-chief from college or university publications through Facebook messenger for easy and convenient communication. The Word document written interview form was sent among the identified informants though email. The informants were given approximately one week to accomplish and submit the written interview form. The researchers are the controllers of information with maintenance of data confidentiality and responsibility.

### 2.6 Data Analysis Procedure

Since the informants submitted their finished written interview forms during the set week of working and submission. The researchers were opted to electronically download and store the gathered documents for direct and fast access. Eventually, the data gathered underwent analysis, comparison, and interpretation using Wolcott's "Transforming Qualitative Data" which organize, categorize, and code the merged data from the informants (Pedroso, 2021). The collected transcripts were systematically organized using the data analysis matrix to identify the environment-related, media technology-related and psychology-related experiences. The researchers initially concurred that the embedded statements and phrases of the informants would be highlighted and assigned with appropriate codes. Furthermore, the identified codes were classified also into various relevant categories based on the similarities and differences of thought. Meaningful categories were formulated by grouping relevant codes, while different categories were eliminated and grouped based on the different experiences of student journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic. The process of data analysis was finished for two (2) weeks. Lastly, the manuscripts were presented to the informants for data validation (Pedroso et al., 2021).

### 2.7 Reliability

The researchers underwent a thorough data gathering procedures and processes to ensure the reliability of this qualitative phenomenological study. It applied also pertinent text descriptions, direct quotations from collected transcripts, and validation of informants' profiles (Pedroso et al., 2021). The research making and conducting activities are formally agreed by the researchers, in order to maintain coordination and track study's gradual progress. The results are the accurate interpretation of the participants' responses. Indeed, the integrated review of related literatures and studies to support the findings of the study are carefully included and cited to avoid plagiarism accusations.

## 3. Results and Discussion
### 3.1 Results

The environment-related, media technology-related and psychology-related experiences were gained by the student journalists during the existence of the COVID-19 pandemic. There were six (6) important categories taken from the data transcripts. The student journalists acquired environment-related experiences such as (1) manifest positive outlook in life and (2) render democratic community empowerment services. They also obtained media-technology related experiences such as trying to

(3) adjust to unprecedented working transition and (4) encounter misinformation and disinformation issues. Additionally, the global pandemic triggers the student journalists from different universities or colleges to draw psychology-related experiences wherein they (5) confront social communication disparity and (6) endure from self-efficacy enervation.

## Environment-related Experiences

The experiences of student journalists were drawn from their ability to respond and deal on prevailing current new normal community situation. There were two (2) examined categories that are relevant to environment-related experiences of the student journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic namely (1) manifest positive outlook in life and (2) render democratic community empowerment services.

## Manifest Positive Outlook in Life

The emergence of the global pandemic brought destructive impact to the student journalists' adaptation to the new normal community condition, but they remain flexible and resilient to perform and thrive in their duties. This is divided into two (2) subcategories namely (1) display situational resilience and (2) exhibit constant decisiveness.

- *Display Situational Resilience*

    The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the capacity of student journalists to be flexible and resilient, in spite of the current unpleasant community situation. They have possessed positive abilities to cope and deal from encountered challenges.

    *Joy:"As resilient student journalists, we're taught to see beauty in everything amidst difficulties."*
    *May:"We experienced a lot of drawbacks but we became stronger in terms of internal and external operations."*

- *Exhibit Constant Decisiveness*

    Student journalists are dedicated to continue their roles and responsibilities. They are also committed to show to the people that they are strong and capable to rise from various struggles.

    *May: "With the lack of budget, coverage, travels, and other amenities we have during the face-to-face classes, this pandemic has been a test of passion and commitment to our craft in writing and reportage."*

## Render Democratic Community Empowerment Services

The student journalists were proactive to extend their efforts and influences both inside the campus and in the community, helping the needy people in the society for social consciousness and development. This was divided into two (2) subcategories namely (1) organize educational election campaign and (2) initiate student leadership virtual training.

- *Organize Educational Election Campaign*

    The community restrictions and lockdowns are not seen by student journalists as hindrances, rather ways to extend their efforts to the community. They are goal-driven to implement community activities to promote social awareness.

    *John:"Meanwhile, as part of the annual Buwan ng Kabataang Sarangan celebration, we launched a month-long young voters' education campaign last August2021 to assist the youth in our community in making informed choices for the upcoming elections."*

- *Initiate Student Leadership Virtual Training*

    The work and stay at home scenarios were used by student journalists to propose virtual trainings and seminars. Their willingness to serve and desire to influence the social groups in their community can produce beneficial outcomes.

    *John:"With the rising trend of fake news, we organized a local campaign called "Project Verified."*
    *John:"This month-long virtual training aims to equip student-leaders in our community with the mindset, skills, and techniques necessary to improve the information in our environment."*

## Media Technology-related Experiences

The experiences of student journalists were anchored on the encountered media and technology struggles and challenges in times of the global outbreak. There were two (2) identified categories that are relevant to media technology-related experiences

of student journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic namely (1) adjust to unprecedented working transition and (2) encounter misinformation and disinformation.

**Adjust to Unprecedented Working Transition**

The big challenge on the part of campus student journalists was the unforeseen transition and migration of the college or university publication to online community that greatly affected their culture of work. This was divided into two (2) subcategories namely (1) embrace online publication modality and (2) react on existing connectivity issues.

- *Embrace Online Publication Modality*

    The global pandemic became the primary driver of sudden migration of student publication. The student journalists from different colleges and universities were adjusting from in-school to virtual work.

    *Lyn:"Due to the pandemic, the learning modality has shifted to the online set up which prompted the publication work to also migrate online."*
    *Ela: "Online publication is still a learning curve for me and I hope that the things that I have learned during my time as an EIC will help future writers in our publication."*

- *React on Existing Connectivity Issues*

    The transition to online modality of publication has increased the demand for complete technology devices and internet connection. The lacks and difficulties needed are inevitable to experience which student journalists are facing while working and meeting online.

    *Ela: "Connectivity issues have also been brought to my attention many times during meetings  and  I  believe  this  has hindered some of the participation of our members."*

**Encounter Misinformation and Disinformation**

The world of cyberspace during the COVID-19 was grounded with a lot of misinformation and disinformation that mislead the citizens in the society. This was divided into two (2) subcategories namely (1) deliver impartial quality of information and (2) stand with strong personal convictions.

- *Deliver Impartial Quality of Information*

    The online community is dominated with false information that has been intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. So, the student journalists are doing their utmost to combat the rampant spreading of misinformation and disinformation.

    *Joy: "Social media is the only option we have and that's one of the biggest challenges, to deliver relevant, factual, and dignified quality student journalism through social media platforms that are dominated by the mainstream and international media where there is rampant use and threats of fake news."*

- *Stand with Strong Personal Convictions*

    The salience of truthful and dignified student journalism is important for college student journalists. With this, they ensure objective and factual delivery of news and information for public consciousness.

    *Joy:"However, we ought to stand still with our convictions without prejudice, bias, and second thoughts."*

**Psychology-related Experiences**

The experiences of student journalists were centered on their social, emotional, and mental conditions during the surge of the COVID-19 pandemic. There were two (2) identified categories that are relevant to psychology-related experiences of the student journalists during the COVID-19 Pandemic namely (1) confront social communication disparity and (2) endure from self-efficacy enervation.

**Confront Social Communication Disparity**

The student journalists had observed the growing distinction of establishing tactful communication with their family, friends and fellow staffers. This was divided into two (2) subcategories namely (1) handle challenges on diplomatic relationship and (2) manage prevailing virtual interaction.

- *Handle Challenges on Diplomatic Relationship*

    Physical interaction and social gathering are prohibited in compliance to the implemented health protocols. The student journalists are working a little harder to communicate with their fellow staffers not only for publication matters, but also to establish a good relationship with them.

    *Ela:"A lot of new members were hired for the new school year and I was really stressing out about how I can establish rapport and a good working relationship with the newbies."*

- *Manage Prevailing Virtual Interaction*

    With the imposed community limitations and health advisories, student journalists are utilizing the online social communication platforms. With the help of these, they can maintain their connection, conduct meetings and discuss important things about the publication.

    *Lyn: "Furthermore, at the height of the pandemic, morale has also decreased. Zoom or online conferencing fatigue has started to kick in."*

**Endure from Self- Efficacy Enervation**

The drastic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic designed a lot of negative psychological responses for the student journalists that weaken their function and mental health condition. This was divided into two (2) subcategories namely (1) suffer diminishing level of motivation and (2) balance mental health and responsibilities.

- *Suffer Diminishing Level of Motivation*

    The absence of social and emotional attachment to other people has decreased the motivation of the student journalists. They work in an isolated and distanced mode, thus affected their interest and energy.

    *Lyn: "Staffers were losing energy and motivation to work because of isolation."*

- *Balance Mental Health and Responsibilities*

    Stress, frustrations and anxiety are the adverse effects of the global pandemic to the student journalists. They are struggling to balance their mental health and publication responsibilities as they confront the impacts of the COVID-19.

    *Lyn: "It took us a year to get the hand of everything and balance our mental health and responsibilities."*
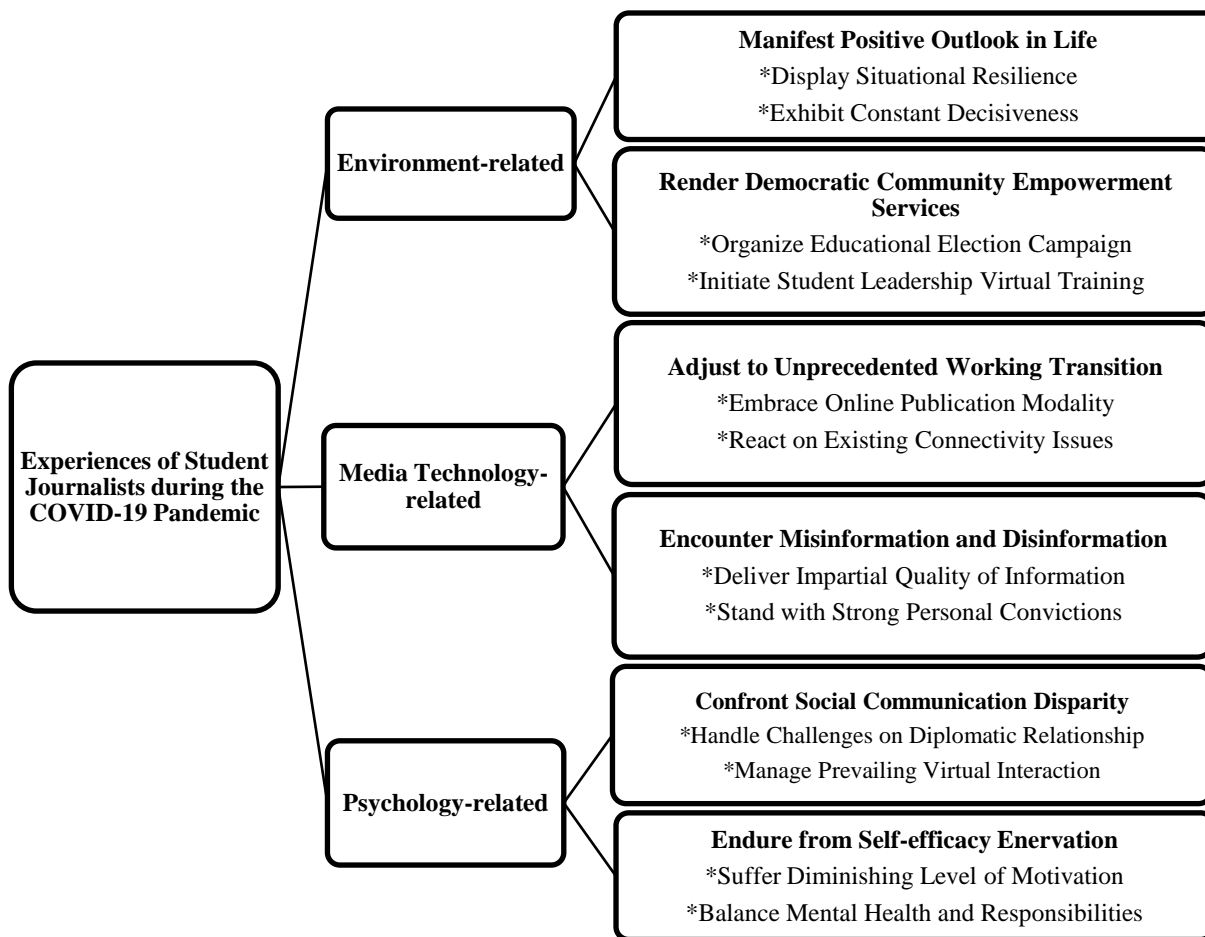
*Figure 1. Demonstration of meaningful categories of the study*

### 3.2 Discussion

This phenomenological study aims to examine the experiences of student journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their experiences were elaborated by the three (3) significant themes such as environment-related, media technology-related, and psychology-related. After the deep review of the interview transcripts, six (6) major categories were selected from the informants' responses. The researchers utilized a careful analysis to set the findings of this research in the context of related literatures and the results of previously relevant research studies.

The COVID-19 pandemic has modified the lives of various human races in the world (Wang et al., 2020; Serrano Sarmiento et al., 2021). The health guidelines and protocols in communities have affected the socio-economic, emotional, and educational situation of the entire nations (UNESCO, 2020; Serrano Sarmiento et al., 2021). However, in the research papers of Pavlik (2013) and Perreault (2021), it is noted that the environment with societal norms, protocols and practices is not a hindrance to cope with the challenges. This perspective is in contrast to Smith et al. (2015) and Tandoc & Takahashi (2018) who have emphasized that journalists are involved in traumatic situations and difficult challenges that weaken their physical immunity (Smith et al., 2015; Tandoc & Takahashi, 2018). In like manner, it is justified in the study of Buchanan & Keats (2011), Ikizer et al. (2019), and Seely (2020) that they usually display feelings such as guilt, depression, fatigue, pressure, and many others (Buchanan & Keats, 2011; Ikizer et al., 2019; Seely, 2020). However, in the study of Moran et al. (2019) and Serrano Sarmiento et al. (2021), it has been mentioned that they have developed coping mechanisms that enable them to display resilience, decisiveness and adaptability to the present environmental situation of the world. Correspondingly, they have established strategies such as daily exercise, appropriate sleep patterns, balanced diet, and adequate time for relaxation are essential and beneficent to sustain work and individual life (Keats & Buchanan, 2012; Ogunyemi, 2021). These ideas are completely supported by Izquierdo (2021), who emphasized that although the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the roles and functions of student journalists, but they to work inside the publication and employ initiatives to participate and provide services to the people in the community. To follow, both the research articles of Brown (2018) and Pedroso et al. (2021) have suggested them to deal on the

COVID-19 using their personal dispositions, so that they can definitely continue their work in times of the global pandemic. Their experiences make them competent, determined, and flexible individuals who can rise from difficult situations.

The social media and internet are technology trends which serve as channels of the student journalists to ameliorate the awareness and engagement of youth in political concerns and issues. (Bryant et al., 2020; Lancker & Parolin, 2020; Nicola et al., 2020; Patel et al., 2020; Kwan, 2021). They are similarly willing to influence and promote youth civic and political participation (Landman & Splendore, 2020; Kwan, 2021). In different tone, the study of Beech (2020) and Kwan (2021) confirmed that student journalists are interested to implement community activities but physical contact is restricted by government authorities. Even so, the research articles of Pollock (2020) and Pedroso et al. (2021) have asserted that they are extraordinary drivers and leaders in this time of crisis. This is agreed by Welton (2020) and Perreault (2021) who stated that student journalists are important to show their accountability as providers of public information. Student journalists are serving the large public with also large number of needs for mass awareness through proper education. They should strike a balance between personal safety and civic responsibility. With this, the study of Beech (2020), Tan (2020) and Kwan (2021) highlighted that they can manifest their community sensitivity by informing the youth of their right and duty as citizens of the nation to exercise their suffrage. On the other hand, Lyons et al. (2020) and McKillop (2021) responds to their ideas that community actions and services can help student journalists to build closer relationships with their peers and other people in the society. In similar focus, many school publications have implemented virtual trainings and sessions that encouraged the youth involvement. They have learned to use instruments such as reflection and feedback in making experiences and understanding of leadership practices. Participants who have attended in particular leadership trainings conducted by the student journalists, exhibit engagement and discernment of the leadership learning outcomes (Goucher, 2022). Thus, the student journalists are doing their best to construct links between the youth's efforts and people's situations. With their employed virtual leadership training, the students can increase their contributions for the development of their communities (Kiesh and Peter, 2017; McKillop, 2021).

The transition to online modality has occurred that presented challenges to the teachers, students and campus journalists of the school publication. The online media and technology platforms required necessary digital literacy skills. Because of this, student journalists face hardship in collaborating with their fellow staffers and submitting finished articles (Burki, 2020; Burns, Dagnal& Holt, 2020). In agreement with this, the created pressures to the publications wherein they modify their work procedures and processes. It is undeniable that it also makes online education and videoconferencing affairs institutionally mandatory (Alfadda and Mahdi, 2021; Pedroso et al., 2021). However, the research papers of Link and Marz (2006) and Burns et al. (2020) have opposed to their conceptions and have affirmed that media, technology and digital literacies are significant skills and abilities to perform by student journalists in order to accomplish their publication duties. To support, student publications reorganization of necessary tasks and responsibilities can strengthen their work system and virtual cooperation (Garcia-Aviles 2021; Quandt and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2021). Nevertheless, barriers to publication learning and work are inevitable such as undeveloped technical skills, insufficient infrastructure, absence of strategies and support from the people (Last and McGrath, 2018; Ozudogru, 2021). It is also discussed in the research articles of Varma et al. (2021) and Barrero et al. (2021) that some working individuals experience internet access challenges in the midst of the crisis (Varma et al., 2021; Barrero et al., 2021). This is parallel to the study of Balatayo et al. (2021), Baticulon et al. (2021) and Pedroso et al. (2021) who likewise recognize technology-related issues that affect the work of the people. As a result, their participation is impaired that affects the term of work accomplishment (Apriyanti, 2020; Ozudogru, 2021). Despite of these, the study of Mahmud (2010) and Ozudogru (2021) have declared that universities or colleges consider the scarcity of technology resources and internet connection both as challenges to overcome and opportunities to receive (Mahmud, 2010; Ozudogru, 2021). Indeed, it is suggested that government should promote universal access to internet and technology tools, enabling work efficiency and capability (Barrero et al., 2021).

Misinformation and disinformation have been intensified across the different media platform during the pandemic (Wang et al., 2019; Bastick, 2021; Greene and Murphy, 2021; Massarani, et al., 2021). They circulated inside the different platforms of media that call the attention of the democratic citizens (Pickard, 2016; YarivTsfati, 2020). They both invalidate the accuracy and reliability of published or produced information (Madrigal, 2017; Benkler et al., 2018; YarivTsfati, 2020). In the same way, misinformation and disinformation mislead, deceive and indirect the attention of the large audience that express personal and ideological motives (Jang & Kim, 2018; Cervi & Carrillo-Andrade, 2019; Tejedor et al., 2021). Additionally, they can also destruct and affect the perspectives and behaviors of the public. The absence of gatekeepers online creates a flourishing misinformation (MacDonald and Guirguis, 2015; Shin et al., 2018; Chen and Stoecker, 2020; Vai et al., 2020; Hameleers, 2021). In fact, in the modern era of news consumption and production, student journalists are considered as frontliners who furnish optimal services to the public (Tandoc, 2017; Balod and Hameleers, 2021). However, the study of Reich and Barnoy (2019) and YarivTsfati (2020) has pinpointed that media and technology challenges become the measurements of student journalists' competence and proficiency to deliver truth in the wake of lies. This is in converse to the ideas of Godler and Reich (2017) who has expressed that journalists in academic and media institutions have obligations to combat such issues through compact

verification of information in compliance to journalism principles. To concur, school journalism practices such as fact-checking and verification are main strategies to eliminate misinformation and disinformation in the online community (O'Carroll, 2019; YarivTsfati, 2020; Patatt and Rocha, 2020; Brotas et al., 2021; Massarani, et al., 2021). It is further included in the study of Herrero-Diz et al. (2019), Mendiguren et al. (2020) and Tejedor et al. (2021) that journalism students are well-equipped to handle the prevailing media and information issues across the space of social media through definite identification and authentication. They are determined to maintain dignified and worthy journalism in the physical and virtual world. Research article authors Svensson (2017), Balod and Hameleers (2021), Perreault and Perreault (2021) and Massarani et al. (2021) that they should strengthen their roles in combating fake news through careful presentation of information. They need also to commit on the formation of democracy through dignified journalism.

There are many nations that enforce the sanctity of physical distancing which prohibits the world citizens to have minimum and restrictive distance of interaction. This has incremented their engagement and dependence on social media platforms to establish attachment and moment with important people in their life. In the context of the student journalism, it is difficult on the part of journalists to connect and communicate with their fellow staffers. They often use Facebook, Zoom, Microsoft Teams and many other online platforms for socialization. Although they can see each other on screen, but the emotional connection is not felt entirely (Pliushch, 2018; Vaskovskaya, 2018; Voronova et al., 2020; Olusanya, 2020; Wong, 2021). In like manner, the increasing use of videoconferencing in school and workplaces which seems challenging to others who are new in the altered mode of social communication. Many global users complain regarding their experienced frustration from videoconferencing, most of the time is Zoom online platform (Fosslien & Duffy, 2020; Strassman, 2020; Karl et al., 2021). Their ideas are extended in the study of Greenfield (2018) and Greenfield et al. (2021) who has explained that the imposed stay-at-home orders in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic is the main reason of the shift on human values, societal activities, people's relationships, and learning environment. As a result, the student journalists reduced their contact with new and old publication staffers, as well as changes on modes of building relationships. But some journalists in academic learning institution and companies are trying to understand the encountered social dynamics in the present new normal situation. They accept the reality that they have to bridge the social and emotional gaps, in order to continue their work and responsibilities (Kuzminykh and Rintel, 2020; Karl et al., 2021). Additionally, the student journalists are embracing the virtual interaction during meetings, conferences, workshops, and more (Grigoriev et al., 2019; Voronova et al., 2020). These are all conceded by Evers et al. (2021) and Greenfield, et al. (2021) who mentioned that student journalists respond in order to survive from the sudden alteration in social interaction. However, they have lost publication cultures that value freedom over constraining rules (Gelfand, 2020; Greenfield, et al., 2021). This perspective is different from Aleksieienko-Lemovska (2019) and Voronova et al. (2020) who have compelled that virtual interaction offers advantage of work accomplishment; however, students experience heavy loads in which they became frustrated and pressured while working in the virtual space. So, the distance publication work and processes raise a lot of concerns that require immediate yet feasible solutions (Tishchenko, 2020; Voronova et al., 2020).

The primary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities are forced to close at the onset of the global pandemic affecting 98.5% of the world's student population (UNESCO, 2020; Qui et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020; Salari et al., 2020; Mak, 2021). Consequently, this has reduced the motivation of the ordinary students and student journalists evident in developing countries (Parczewska, 2021; Mak, 2021; Zacher& Rudolph, 2021; Rahe and Jansen, 2021). This is coupled with the study of Büssing et al. (2020), Rahe and Jansen (2021) who stated that the global pandemic has decreased the human satisfaction and physical function, so they are less inclined to work on their tasks and activities. To further support, it is also reported in the United States of America that there is a decline on student journalists' physical activity and work efficiency. The current dilemma can challenge them while balancing their academics, mental health and publication responsibilities (American College Health Association, 2019; Grubic et al., 2020; Mo et al., 2020; Stogner et al., 2020; Vagni et al., 2020; Spoorthy et al., 2020; Maelan et al., 2021; Maher et al., 2021; Rahe and Jansen, 2021). In spite of these, the research papers of Husky et al. (2020), Wang et al. (2020), Grubic et al. (2020) and Bourion-Bedes et al. (2021) have justified that the student journalists have overcame severe anxiety and stress, despite the home quarantines and community restrictions. On one hand, Wang et al. (2020) and Grubic et al. (2020) have discovered that there are research conducted that assess the mental health impact of the COVID-19, discussing public experiences such as anxiousness and depression. This is the same on the report of the YoungMinds (2020) and research articles of Torales et al. (2020) and Grubic et al. (2020) that many young people have said that the global pandemic worsens the psychological conditions of the people that devitalizes routine, social interaction, and societal activities. This is similarly agreed by the research studies of Osmann et al. (2020) and Osman et al. (2021) who have revealed that student journalists acquired lack of social and emotional support from colleagues. Moreover, they find difficulties in balancing personal care, mental health condition, and publication responsibilities (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020; Osman et al., 2021). Therefore, the Elevate Education (2020) together with Mak (2021) have advised the schools to implement appropriate measures to address decreasing motivation. Also, the study of Thorell et al. (2021) have expressed that the school teachers and parents' support are

crucial on heightening the motivation of student journalists.

As with the related literatures and studies, this current research has many limitations that should be discerned and may be addressed by future studies. First, this study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to examine and describe the experiences of student journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, the findings are only anchored on the experiences of the college student journalists. Second, it is mainly conducted on student journalists from different universities or colleges, which the embedded applications of the findings and implications of the study to student journalism programs may be recognized. Future studies can impart further and extended information of their coping mechanisms and acquired opportunities aside from endured challenges. Finally, the researchers utilized written interview questions, thus there might be a possibility of distortion through self-report bias. Nevertheless, the stated limitations in this study imparted sufficient data on experiences of student journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic that informs the future researchers about this topic.

The findings of the study have demonstrated the relevant experiences of student journalists in times of the global crisis, which has not been highlighted by the previous researchers. It would have huge contribution and embodiments to all academic fields of research. For other research enthusiasts and aspirants in pressing issues related to the impacts of the COVID-19 on the lives of various social groups from different institutions, this study can embark significant pieces of understanding and awareness on the various experiences of the college student journalists, promoting resilient and empowered student journalism inside and outside of the school premises. The next challenge that they have to conquer is how to sustain environmental, technological and psychological adaptations they have manifested to overcome the impacts of the COVID-19 on their roles and responsibilities. In this age of information and communication, student journalists need to widen their influence and strengthen their work in covering human stories and news happening in different corners of the global communities. This is a realization for the current and future student journalists that their work as delivery agents of informationisuneasy but full of publication's experiences that can amplify their inmost skills and abilities as 21st century citizens.

## 4. Conclusion

The experiences of student journalists are reflections of the positive and negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. They have practically utilized their encountered hardships as weapons to continue to raise the torch of student journalism. They are committed to serve the academic learning institution and the people in the community discounting vulnerability of infection. Indeed, student journalists are victims of the global crisis, as well as stewards of civic responsibility and participation. Their job as forefronts of mass information and communication does not end at the tip of a pen and paper, rather they have extended their efforts to the living social groups in the democratic society. Therefore, the school's curriculum has crucial accountability to uplift the vitality of student journalism and render support and guidance services to maximize their capabilities to rise from any challenging situations.

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