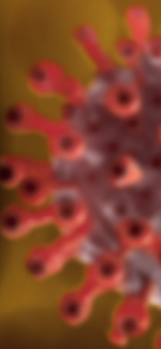
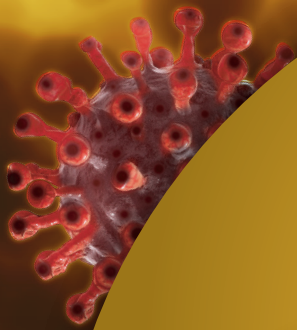


# QUARANTEEN:

Narratives of the Filipino Youth  
amidst a Pandemic;  
Issues, Challenges and Opportunities





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# MESSAGE

**Marilu Rañosa Madrunio, PhD.**

*Dean*

Faculty of Arts and Letters

University of Santo Tomas



We live in an era of exponential change. When leadership gurus talked about VUCA decades ago, they were already referring to a “new normal”. In fact, these gurus view volatility (V) as leading to flexibility; uncertainty (U) leading to clarity, complexity (C) leading to understanding, and ambiguity (A) leading to resilience. They believe in the capacity of individuals to rise to the challenges of VUCA with deeper wisdom, resilience, compassion, and skillfulness.

With the challenges brought about by this global pandemic, this monograph organized by the Department of Political Science, will help the youth to navigate the situation and grow from there. Resilience, which is a 21st century skill, will allow them to leap back. There are many definitions of ‘resilience’ but I would like to underscore Windle’s (1999) definition: “the successful adaptation to life’s tasks in the face of social disadvantage or highly adverse conditions.” This means that after being disrupted by change and stressors, we still find the strength to grow stronger after soul-searching and deep thinking. As Henderson and Milstein (1996) put it: It is the ability to recover from negative life experiences and become stronger while overcoming them.”

It is in this context that I would like to congratulate the Department of Political Science, the RCSSD and the Konrad Adenauer Philippines, in providing a venue for the discussion of opportunities in which the resiliency, ingenuity, civic mindedness and nationalism of the Filipino youth can be highlighted.

May you all find this academic exchange worthy of your time and a means to increase your level of resilience and have a winning attitude all the time. As Jamais Cascio stated: “Resilience is all about being able to overcome the unexpected. Sustainability is about survival. The goal of resilience is to thrive.”

Thank you very much.



# MESSAGE

**Prof. Belinda de Castro PhD.**

*Director*

Research Center for Social Sciences and Education (RCSSED)

University of Santo Tomas



According to the International Labor Organization (2020), the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the youth sector is evident on areas such as jobs, education, rights and mental well-being. Though various states and nations are enacting vital containment and mitigation measures to address the impact of this global crisis, its overall effect on the development of human capital has yet to be seen and assessed in the coming months and years. The strict quarantine measures being observed in many areas has practically changed the youth's perspective of time and space. Specifically, the massive implementation of the remote learning modalities (using radio, TV or online platforms) has witnessed how the youth as a vulnerable sector is relying heavily on the support of their families. No less than the United Nations (May 2020) aptly articulated that "less than half of the households in majority of countries around the world have access to internet and only 38% of rural households do have television in 60 developing countries". There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic situated all sectors under a great human crisis.

Considering the vulnerability of the youth to the dangers and perils of the virus, vital measures need to be undertaken to ensure everybody's transition to what is called as the new normal. While medical science has been up front in responding to the cure for COVID-19, the social science perspectives cannot be underestimated nor overlooked at this time. Our efforts as social scientists in providing a solid understanding of the dynamics of human behavior are crucial in managing the demands of the pandemic.

This Quaranteen Research Monograph is indeed a great opportunity for us to learn what the soft sciences can potentially offer in navigating the realities that confront today's Filipino youth in this once-in-a-lifetime pandemic. I congratulate the organizers and those who responded to the call to empirically investigate the Filipino youth. May this scholarly exposition of ideas serve as an impetus for more research undertakings that can be translated into relevant policies and measures necessary to helping our young generation survive the new normal.



# MESSAGE

**Dennis C. Coronacion PhD.**

*Chairperson*

Department of Political Science

University of Santo Tomas



Since its inception in 2015, the Department of Political Science of University of Santo Tomas has made building a culture of research as one of its top goals. In fact, we launched ASSEMBLEA: The Online Journal of Political Science in 2019 to promote research culture among the academic staff. Over the years, we have gradually reaped the fruits of our labor, for instance, through the steady increase in the numbers of researches presented by the UST political science faculty in the annual conferences organized by the various professional organizations.

The research culture that has set in our department has spurred us to demonstrate our capability to conduct empirical researches through this book titled *QUARANTEEN Narratives of the Filipino Youth Amidst a Pandemic: Issues, Challenges, and Opportunities*. It is our modest contribution to the burgeoning literature on the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on politics and society. The book surveys the many experiences of the Filipino youth as they cope with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Each of the 15 studies included in this book gives the readers a glimpse of the Filipino youth's new social and political realities brought about by the pandemic. This monograph is a milestone for the UST Department of Political Science in so many ways. In several formal and informal gatherings of the political science faculty, we would often discuss our dream of publishing a book that could show either our expertise or research skills. This book is a fulfilment of that dream. Moreover, this is our first time to collaborate with the research fellows of RCSSED, led by RCSSED Director Dr. Belinda D.V. De Castro, for a book publication. It is also an honor for us to earn the trust and experience the generosity of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) led by Prof. Dr. Stefan Jost.

We are grateful to everyone who has shown support for this book. First and foremost, to Prof. Dr. Marilu Madrunio, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Letters, who has shown her unwavering support for this endeavor. To RCSSED Director Dr. Belinda D.V. De Castro, who has shown her unconditional support for this research collaboration and partnership. To Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, especially to its country director, Prof. Dr. Stefan Jost, and to the highly commendable Program Manager, Ms. Ronna Mae Villanueva, for their generosity, support and unwavering trust.





# MESSAGE

**Froilan C. Calilung PhD.**

*Faculty*

Department of Political Science

University of Santo Tomas

*Co-Organizer*

Quaranteen Research Monograph



The onslaught of the COVID 19 pandemic has created multifarious effects throughout the entire world. It disrupted the way we normally do things, created massive impact in the economic forefront of nation-states and forced governments to implement tight measures such as lockdowns. Young people in particular are especially vulnerable to this unprecedented development especially in this generation. The youth is especially at risk of being left behind in education, employment opportunities, health and well-being especially in this crucial juncture of their lives.

But amidst these challenges, we also see opportunities for the Youth, in not only coping effectively but also leading the charge towards promoting positivity and opening doors of opportunities amidst the pandemic. The primary goal of this research endeavor is to shed light on the impact of this pandemic to the Filipino Youth as well as provide an ample avenue for discussion of opportunities in which the resiliency, ingenuity, civic mindedness and nationalism of the Filipino youth can be highlighted.

Through this research undertaking, we envision this monograph to be a lasting contribution to show the future generations how the Filipino Youth was affected, coped, managed and triumphed over this pandemic brought forth by COVID 19 in this era. We envision this document to be a true testament to the resiliency and the strength of character of the Filipino Youth.

I would like to take this opportunity to give our sincerest gratitude to the very important people who made this monograph possible. First and foremost, to my colleagues from the UST- Political Science Department and UST –RCSSD for their scholarly contributions to this research project. Likewise, to the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Letters, University of Santo Tomas – Prof. Marilu R. Madrunio PhD. for her invaluable support to this undertaking, to Prof. Belinda de Castro for the collaborative trust and assistance extended to us.

Most importantly, I wish to thank Prof. Dr. Stefan Jost, the ever dynamic Country Director of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung-Philippines as well as the indefatigable Program manager, Ms. Ronna Villanueva, for all the unwavering assistance and support extended to us for the completion of this monograph. I am fervently hoping for many more years of meaningful collaboration and partnership between our respective institutions.

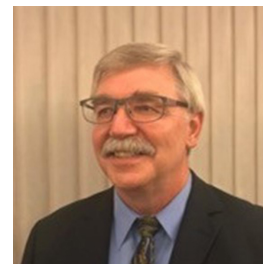


# FOREWORD

**Prof. Dr. Stefan Jost**

*Country Director*

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Philippines



“The COVID-19 pandemic will have long-lasting social, cultural, economic, political and multidimensional impacts on the whole of societies, including young people.” (United Nations, 2020)

The current crisis has indeed disturbed all aspects of life in an unprecedented manner. While many of its implications, such as confinement-related psychological distress and social distancing measures, affect all of society, different age groups experience these impacts in distinct ways. With the gradual transition of government responses from immediate crisis management to the implementation of recovery measures, several concerns are emerging, such as increasing levels of youth unemployment and the implications of rising debt for issues of intergenerational justice, as well as threats to the well-being of youth and future generations.

For young people, and especially for vulnerable youth, the COVID-19 crisis poses considerable risks in the fields of education, employment, mental health and disposable income. Moreover, while youth and future generations will shoulder much of the long-term economic and social consequences of the crisis, their well-being may be superseded by short-term economic and equity considerations.

In a recent report by the United Nations (2020), young people are already among the most affected by the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 response:

- More than 1.5 billion young people, or 87 per cent the world’s student population, are kept away from school and universities in more than 165 countries.
- Young people are particularly at risk of increased anxiety and mental health concerns.
- Young women and girls are at higher risk of intimate partner violence and other forms of domestic violence during the pandemic.
- Young people will suffer greatly from a global recession.
- Young people make up more than 30 per cent of the world’s migrants and refugees who also stand to suffer disproportionately both from the pandemic and its aftermath.

Given the above mentioned circumstances, young people all over the world are joining the global response against COVID-19 in many ways. They are running awareness campaigns, hand washing campaigns, volunteering to support the elderly and vulnerable populations, contributing as scientists, entrepreneurs and innovators.

This publication entitled " Quaranteen: Narratives of the Filipino Youth amidst a Pandemic; Issues, Challenges and Opportunities" contains insightful involvements of the youth during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It consists of a remarkable diversity of current issues. All fifteen articles are subdivided into three main topics: The Filipino Youth in the midst of a pandemic, The Filipino Youth Coping and Hoping through a Pandemic and The Filipino Youth rising above the Pandemic.

We, at the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Philippines, are delighted with the result of our partnership with the University of Santo Tomas Department of Political Science; and Research Center for Social Sciences and Education (UST RCSSED) because this monograph embodies an integral part of our work in the Philippines in the area of youth involvement in democracies.

All in all, I would like to express my appreciation and acknowledgement to Dr. Dennis Coronacion and Dr. Froilan Calilung from the UST Department of Political Science; for their guidance in bringing together a pool of experts, who have made substantial contributions through their research on the issues, challenges and opportunities faced by the Filipino youth during the pandemic. Last but not the least; I thank Ms. Ronna Mae Villanueva, Program Manager of KAS Philippines for her valuable time in coordinating with UST for this project.

It is in our hope that this publication will raise awareness on the role of the youth in times of crisis.

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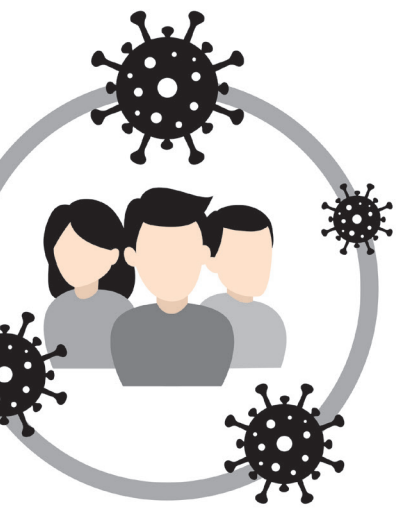
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## Chapter I

# The Filipino Youth in the midst of a Pandemic

In this chapter, selected articles highlight some of the issues, trials and challenges that the Youth had to undergo in this COVID-19 pandemic. In the paper titled *Mobility, teens, and quarantines: COVID-19's impact on the mobility of students and young individuals*, Dr. Louie Benedict R. Ignacio dwelled largely on how restrictions of mobility affect young individuals, particularly their physical activities and health, education and motivation to finish a degree, economic progression, and possibly missing job opportunities. In Dr. Allan de Guzman et.al, research titled *The image is the message: What do metaphors say about the Filipino youth during the COVID-19 pandemic?*, the paper describes the three (3) faces of the Filipino youth (*helplessness, habitualness, and hopefulness* that operate in a two skewed views of their family (*bonded yet challenged*) and their community (*alarming yet determined*).

The challenges faced by the youth are further highlighted with the work of Dr. Jeanine Castro; *Learning in trying times:: Online education in the midst of a pandemic* which mainly tackled the problems faced by the Youth in their pursuit of education in the middle of this global health crisis. In another contribution of Dr. Allan de Guzman et.al, titled *The dilemmatic faces of the beginning Filipino professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic: Going beyond tele-counselling sessions*, the prolific researcher highlights a micro-case reporting of the journey of six (6) beginning Filipino professionals as they health-seek through tele-counselling sessions. This chapter caps off with Dr. Froilan Calilung et.al.'s *The young and the restless: A Youth based assessment on the implementation of the Enhanced Community Quarantine in NCR and its impact on mental well-being*, a paper that sought to distinctly correlate the current pandemic with the mental challenges that the young have to contend with.





# Mobility, teens, and quarantines: COVID-19's impact on the mobility of students and young individuals

**Louie Benedict R. Ignacio, Ph.D**

Department of Political Science

University of Santo Tomas

## Abstract

The abrupt closure of educational institutions has affected students and student's mobility in particular. This short piece dwelt into the concept of mobility, its varying definitions, and how restrictions of mobility affect young individuals. Particularly, their physical activities and health, education and motivation to finish a degree, economic progression, and possibly missing job opportunities. Using data from previous researches and collected literature, this paper defined various types of student mobility. It could be characterized as physical movement from one place to another, and how mobility restrictions prevented them from getting out of their residences or getting home from their campus residences. This mobility could also pertain to the international students' movement, and how the pandemic has influenced their decision to move and where to pursue higher education. Mobility also means movement between and within social classes because of education; how a successful integration to online learning allows those in a privileged position to move continuously, while those with minimal resources are forced to stay. This is true as well in terms of their economic positions, a consequence heightened by the movements or the lack thereof, in the students' social position.

## Keywords

student mobility, young individuals, pandemic, COVID-19

## Introduction

Whether natural calamities, human-made catastrophes, or pandemics, people are exposed to risk in times of crisis. This exposure requires an adequate amount of knowledge and information, social and economic resources, to correctly decide how to navigate through the crisis. In the case of the new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), this is extremely difficult given the virus' novelty, the characteristics of how it spreads, and how government agencies and individuals address the pandemic and try to curb its spread.

A brief review of the timeline of the spread of SARS-CoV-2, which causes the illness officially named as COVID-19, shows the widespread effects of the disease in China, where it started, and other countries in Asia and practically around the world. This spread is already showing repercussions to the various aspects of people's personal lives, from governance, the economy, health, and most especially education. To put emphasis, some schools have declared postponement of its opening or closures for

an entire semester or year. States and governments consider what is happening now as a public issue. Borrowing it from Ulrich Beck, “we are at a risk society.” He describes the current context of a global society where individuals, communities, institutions, and even governments are mindful of the experience of risk in different aspects including individual health, education, and profession. Beck recognizes three primary responses to this. He mentions denial, apathy, and transformation. Denial is when individuals act as if the risk does not exist. By being apathetic, people may acknowledge the risks they are exposed to without responding to it. Given the gravity of the situation caused by the pandemic of COVID-19, neither of those two can save the people. This leaves individuals with a responsibility to transformation. By this, Beck means taking collective, communal, and societal action.

One of the traditional measures used to address this new problem is movement control. Quarantines, lockdowns, and mobility restrictions were implemented in some countries with exacerbated fines to prevent the virus’ spread. Strict lockdowns, city, and regional quarantines were implemented early in Asian countries, such as China, Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia (Mohammed, Uddin, & Saidi 2020). In the Philippines, being the biggest island in the country, a Luzon-wide general community quarantine was implemented since 15 March 2020. Although quarantines may be seen as effective mechanisms to stop the further spread of a virus, its benefits need to be carefully weighed against the inevitable adverse effects, particularly to economic, psychological, social, and mobility aspects of human lives (Amerio et. al., 2020).

To make this strategy effective, schools on the entire island of Luzon were closed. All are encouraged to continue through distance learning set-up. This is true not only in the Philippines, but across the world. UNESCO reports estimate more than one and a half billion students from 160 countries were affected by such closures (UNESCO, 2020). This is estimated to be 87% of the total student population around the world.

This short piece dwells into the concept of mobility, its varying definitions, and how restrictions of mobility affect young individuals, particularly their physical activities and health, education and motivation to finish a degree, economic progression, and possibly missing job opportunities. This paper describes how mobility restrictions could have long-lasting and detrimental effects on the youth’s personal, social, and economic characteristics and capital.

## **Definition of mobility**

Mobility is a necessary characteristic of human life. It is even considered as one of the most basic human rights. The ability to move and go from one place to another, literally or figuratively across many social dimensions, should be kept free and without restrictions. The United Nations characterizes various reasons why people move — going to workplaces, for purposes of education, moving to and from educational institutions, retail and recreation, and through various means from walking to public and private transport systems (United Nations, 2020).

When the first case of COVID19 in the Philippines was declared at the end of January

2020, and with the inevitable declaration of its first local transmission a few days later, the Philippine Government declared putting the entire island of Luzon into General Community Quarantine. Quarantine is one of the oldest practices used to curb the spread of communicable diseases. Quarantine was used, and was successful in previous public health emergencies, such as the spread of SARS in the early 2000s. Quarantine is the restriction of mobility of people presumed to have been exposed to a contagious disease, which is not manifesting symptoms, yet either because they are not infected or are still within the virus' incubation period (Wilder-Smith & Freedman, 2020). The concept of quarantine may be applied to specific and targeted individuals or an entire community. This may also be voluntary or made mandatory by government authorities as deemed necessary (Wilder-Smith & Freedman).

Another form of movement restriction used in the Philippines is physical distancing. At first, the more common term of social distancing was used. However, social distancing is considered a measurement of perceived differences among groups in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, economic class, and age. The term physical distancing was later used since it refers to preventing the spread of the novel coronavirus from people to people (Mohammed, Uddin, & Saidi, 2020). Physical distancing is designed to reduce interactions between individuals who may be carriers of the virus, but symptoms of the disease are not manifesting yet, and those who are healthy and unaware that they are interacting with a possible carrier (Wilder-Smith & Freedman, 2020).

A review of Google's COVID19 Community Mobility report would show how these policies on restrictions on movements reduced various types of movements. Google's Community Mobility Map traces movements of various purposes such as retail and recreation, grocery and pharmacy, parks, mobility, transit stations mobility, and workplace mobility (Google 2020). Data from Google would show mobility in almost all areas decreased; -52% for retail and recreation, -16% for grocery and pharmacy, -50% for parks, -67% for transit mobility, and -49% workplace mobility. This 30 September data is compared to the baseline data set early this year, on an average of five weeks (January to February). The data also shows a +24% residential mobility, expected due to lockdowns and community quarantines. These data show how effective the Philippine government is in restricting the movement of people. This also shows how public places such as malls, parks, workplaces, and even schools, commonly crowded, are the most affected by movement restriction policies. Therefore, it is easy to confer that individuals frequent in these areas are most affected by the same movement restrictions.

One of the most affected by the pandemic, and the movement restrictions that come with it, are schools and the education sector. Lockdowns severely restrict access to all socializing venues, including workplaces and schools (Haesebaert, Haesebaert, Zante, & Franck, 2020). Upon declaration of community quarantine, schools indefinitely suspended classes. In Manila, the capital city, the suspension of classes was declared a week earlier than the Luzon-wide lockdown. This provided students with the time to arrange their

things, pack, and go home to their families for the then month-long suspension of face-to-face classes. In a previous study co-written by the author (Ignacio et al., *forthcoming*), a survey of 2200 students of higher educational institutions, four within Manila and one outside of Metro Manila, showed that more than 50% of the students do not live in their permanent addresses with their family, and instead are living either in a dormitory, apartment, or condominium within or near the vicinity of the schools they go to. Of the same sample population, more than 50% do not live with their parents and are living alone, or with dorm-mates, sharing an apartment or a condominium unit, or are living with distant relatives whose residence is within or near the vicinity of the school. This number shows how much students moved during the declaration of lockdowns as a precautionary measure for their safety.

Unfortunately, not everyone went home with the knowledge of online classes to proceed, and they do not have proper internet connection in their home provinces. A good number of these students, not knowing that the lockdowns will continue until the end of the term, or at least three months after its declaration, were stuck in their temporary residences like dormitories or apartments. The physical limitation alone is a challenge to reckon with. Individuals who live in tiny apartments without outdoor space, especially in urban areas where higher population density makes social distancing difficult, have few alternatives for going out and maintaining physical activity (Haesebaert, Haesebaert, Zante, & Franck, 2020). For these students, there appeared to be no single emotion (Capanghay, 2020), but an “emotional rollercoaster”

of different reactions (Amundson & Borgen 1987 in Capanghay) as the participants experienced the COVID-19 pandemic in its different stages. Although, young individuals, especially students, see the importance of performing certain preventive behaviors to avoid contracting the virus (Ignacio et al., *forthcoming*) — leaving their residence only for classes, distancing from someone who is coughing, avoiding large gatherings, talking to people who are coughing, and sitting with people who look sick, the restrictions on their movement(s) still have various effects on them.

### **Actually moving**

Although almost ten times higher in population at 1.3 billion, compared to the Philippines’ 109 million, India and its highly populated cities face the same dilemma as that of Philippines’ cities in terms of mobility and mobility restrictions during the pandemic.

Like Mumbai and Delhi, major cities in India average a population density of 20,000 people per square kilometer. This is nothing close to the City of Manila’s population density, which is at more than 42,000 people per square kilometer. Thus, some programs such as physical distancing are not only useless; it is practically impossible in high-density areas like these.

Both major cities experience a drastic effect on their economy, especially in the informal sector, since most income sources for both locations come from informal economies and small enterprises. With the Philippines given a leeway of two days and India with only four hours, the lockdown of these cities made it impossible for these sectors to prepare

for a more than a month-long freeze. Informal settlers in highly dense and urbanized areas are least prepared for a public health emergency. The consequences of extended lockdowns or mobility restrictions will have long-lasting effects (Corburn et al., 2020).

This is what the citizens may call public issues, including the perennial problem of lack of proper transportation infrastructures, mass transportation, and the flocking of Filipinos to the metro for economic opportunities. These go beyond the hard-headed and undisciplined arguments thrown at the working class for not following the simple one-to-two-meter physical distancing policy. Policies like these only show problems with the solutions that the government is presenting. The solutions that various agencies are presenting and implementing lack grounding, such as restricting and easing mobility. The government wanted to allow the opening of establishments and go back to work in some industries to address the inevitable consequences of an economic slump, without considering how the actual workers can go back to work—the opening of classes without ensuring proper preparedness for both students and the education system itself. Public transport was not immediately allowed to return on the road. Provisions for free rides were not enough. The response needs to involve actors from multiple levels, including national and local governments, bilateral and multilateral international agencies, CBOs, NGOs, and foundations (Corburn et al., 2020). Higher educational institutions are commonly situated in densely populated areas. Manila alone would roughly have more than one million students. The complexity brought about by restrictions

on mobility has multiplier effects on students' personal, social, educational, and even professional and economic lives. Notwithstanding the difficulty in measuring school closures' specific impact since it was done coinciding with other public policy and public health interventions (Mustafa, 2020), the consequences of movement restrictions are already inevitable.

### **Effect of restrictions on physical mobility and mental health**

Similar to how people in different social classes are differently affected by the movement restrictions, students from various social classes also experience movement restrictions differently. When lockdowns due to COVID19 were announced in Malaysia, students who are housed on-campus residences were advised to stay on campus and finish the term in-residence. During this enforcement, students from less economically stable families had to endure difficulties in making sure they would have enough to last for the entire duration of the lockdown. Since all was unexpected, these families were not prepared to either provide more than usual. The absence of constant support from their family, who would usually visit them in-campus, also contributed to some experiencing issues on nourishment due to lack of food or lack of variety of nutritious food (Vasudevan & Abd Fatah, 2020). The combined consequences of not having enough support from family, rationing of food, and inability to move around led to physical and mental health issues.

Studies of Brooks et al. (2020) in Haesebaert, Haesebaert, Zante, & Franck (2020)

show diverse types of psychological disturbances or mental disorder symptoms. This is doubly difficult for individuals, particularly students who have pre-existing vulnerabilities, such as those with limitations in space and access to gadgets and connectivity.

An increasing number of studies have been conducted on the relationship between the built environment in cities and urban areas, and human health in both outdoor and indoor spaces (Thompson, 2013; Wilkie, Townshend, Thompson, & Ling, 2018; WHO, 2013; Hoisington et al., 2019 in Amerio et al., 2020). Living in a room with a limited space, without a view outside, and with a protocol not to go out, leads to depressive symptoms. Even the limited space at home or in dormitories, to serve as a study area, leads to decreased productivity. The difficulty in distinguishing spaces for study, leisure, and rest causes more trouble to students restricted to move and go out.

Given the condition that this pandemic is going, long term national policies even on structures, must be revisited to ensure that impacts of long-term restrictions, although not ideal, will be reduced.

The restrictions on mobility have limited even the simplest physical activities of students, and even adults alike. In the study of Galle et al. (2020), they argued that walking was the primary type of physical activity reduced during the lockdown. In some cases, even if there are lighter mobility restrictions, people find it difficult to go out still due to fears of contracting the virus. Decreased activities and social isolation, due to restrictions on mobility,

can heighten feelings of despair. Vasudevan and Abd Fatah (2020) argue that this can amplify feelings and levels of stress, anxiety, and bad moods. Many young people experienced becoming stressed, edgy, anxious, worrisome, fearful, lonely, and having other negative feelings.

Since the 1980s, socioecological theories have identified different physical structures and characteristics of built-environments as stress generators with an impact on individual performance and mental health that may be powerfully mitigated through environmental enhancements (Amerio et al., 2020).

A strong association between poor housing and moderate to severe depression symptoms was found, with particular reference to small apartments, poor-quality views, and poor indoor qualities (Amerio et al., 2020). Also, worsening working performance related to working from home increased the risk of depressive symptoms four-fold. School closures impact students, teachers, and families, and have far-reaching economic and societal consequences (Mustafa, 2020). School closures in response to COVID-19 have shed light on various social and economic issues, including student debt, digital learning, food insecurity, and homelessness, and access to childcare, health care, housing, internet, and disability services (Mustafa).

The impact was more severe for disadvantaged children and their families, causing interrupted learning, compromised nutrition, childcare problems, and consequent economic cost to families who could not work (Mustafa, 2020).

## Effects of restrictions on social mobility

In the study of Mohammed, Uddin, and Saidi (2020), they argued that being on self-quarantine, students have commonly felt the frustration because of poor internet connection, limited view, no place to go, and lack of physical contact with people. Affected by months-long quarantine, this has affected students in terms of their relationships and interaction with their fellow students. In the context of the French student population, they are faced with cumulative effects from the restrictions on mobility — social rupture, closure of universities, and uncertainty on their academic performance (Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, 2020 in Haesebaert, Haesebaert, Zante, & Franck, 2020).

Lockdowns and restrictions on mobility also have repercussions on the students' sense of freedom. This is especially crucial at this age, where many aspects of the students' social development require a constant and engaged relationship with others who belong to the same age group. As freedom is known to be a critical component of happiness (Layard 2005), Haesebaert, Haesebaert, Zante, and Franck (2020) hypothesized that there would be an impact on students' well-being. This line of thinking argues that the effects of mobility restrictions will include those that involve self-determination, unpredictability for future relationships, and profession, and even of personal hope and positivity.

As earlier mentioned, the pandemic and the restrictions on mobility would have effects on the education industry. In particular, education's role in providing social capital and leverage for

individuals to compromise and to acquire what they need may be hindered by delayed degree acquisition. This is possible, especially if a student chooses not to proceed with the education given the difficulty of the condition. The absence of a gadget and stable internet connectivity may hinder students from moving from one educational level to another, from one social classification to another.

This is particularly true in the aspect of globalization or internationalization of education. The demand for quality higher education, not only from local institutions, but also outside, is made possible because "mobility has been intensified by the advent of ICT, which enables a far larger percentage of students to have international contacts and access to information to arrive at informal choices over their pursuance of higher education abroad (Knight, 2008 in Tan and Goh 2014:490)."

The current global health emergency raises many concerns about the future of globalization and the internationalization of higher education. In the study of Xiong, Ho Mok, Ke, and Oi Wun Cheung (2020), 84% of their respondents already showed no interest in going to another country for higher education.

In 2000, data shows that there were 1.8 million international students around the world. Global estimates put the number at 7 million by 2025. This increase in number is true even in the local context in various countries. In Canada, between 1960 to 1970, 10% of the schools had international students. In 1986, it grew to 82% of all the schools in Canada (Hurabielle, 1998). In Australia, there



were 15000 international students in 1984, which grew to 75000 in 1998 (Burn, 200), which is already ten percent of Australia's students. This percentage grows up to 20% if within the context of some local universities. In Hungary, 1.6% of the total student population in 2017 are international students (Komives, Heder, and Dajnoki, 2018). Here in the Philippines, 2018 data shows that there are 12000 international students scattered all over the country. This data only includes students in higher educational institutions, students taking collegiate degrees, and post-baccalaureate degrees. This much and many more are affected by the current global pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic's influence is significant in international higher education, especially in student mobility (Xiong, Ho Mok, Ke, & Oi Wun Cheung, 2020). Thus, it is anticipated in many universities across the United States; for example, that there will be a drastic reduction of income coming from the tuition of international students. Based on the survey conducted by the Institute of International Education, about 90 percent of US colleges and universities will feel this burden (Martel, 2020 in Xiong, Ho Mok, Ke, & Oi Wun Cheung). On the side of the students, particularly in the case of Malaysia, if they are confined due to mobility restrictions, they may miss or lose significant educational and even professional opportunities (Vasudevan & Abd Fatah, 2020).

These consequences highlight the social and economic inequalities across different systems of higher education when some countries would fail to cope with the changes, and fail to maintain the scale of international learning because of

different economic recovery paces in the COVID19 era (Xiong, Ho Mok, Ke, & Oi Wun Cheung 2020).

The restrictions on international students' mobility would also have economic impacts on schools that greatly rely on international students' tuition. The extensive industry of and for international students will feel the vacuum of not having enough international students moving around. The international education sector will also turn into a buyers' market, in which the incoming international students become scarce sources (Xiong, Ho Mok, Ke, & Oi Wun Cheung, 2020).

Some see this phenomenon as the end of globalization in general, and internationalization of higher education in particular. The condition right now will encourage regional cooperation between states, and educational institutions in these states rather than engagement at a global scale. The fear for students to go out of the country may be lesser if they are to go only to neighboring countries. Xiong, Ho Mok, Ke and Oi Wun Cheung (2020) argue that higher education's regionalization might be enhanced due to the pandemic.

The pandemic also brought self-imposed mobility restrictions, especially for students who have planned to study abroad. The British Council published a study in April 2020 showing that more than a quarter of Chinese students are no longer particular whether they will pursue their plans to study abroad, particularly in the US and in the UK (Durnin, 2020 in Xiong, Ho Mok, Ke, & Oi Wun Cheung, 2020). Australia will also feel the impact of the loss of 150000 international students coming from China alone (Mercado, 2020 in Xiong, Ho Mok, Ke, & Oi Wun Cheung).

While the pandemic has significantly decreased international student mobility, it is also shifting the mobility flow of international students. Hence, East Asian countries and regions are facing more opportunities in the increasingly competitive higher education sector for international students (Xiong, Ho Mok, Ke, & Oi Wun Cheung, 2020).

### **Effects of restrictions on personal and socio-economic mobility**

Economically, and given the condition individuals across the globe are in right now, higher education institutions cannot open yet for a residential-class. Therefore, in face-to-face set-up, should already be considered in planning for the next two years or even more. A lot is at stake. The number of enrollee for highly hands-on programs, such as those in science and engineering, performing arts, plans on international mobility and international programs, consequences to employees working “in-campus” like computer technicians, and maintenance, among others, are concerns HEI administrators must think about. This is on top of the fact that the Philippines is simply not ready for a heavily online education mechanism.

The mobility restrictions leading to the use of online class highlighted not just socio-economic class, but also the technological gap. In an economically diverse society just like the Philippines, not everyone has access to the internet, not everyone has access to gadgets, and not everyone has access to space. The need for internet connectivity and the gadget is easily understandable. However, they also have to consider that to make an online class, or even a work-from-home set-up to be effective; as such, a

student would require a space at home that would be suitable and conducive for home-based learning. This is why lifting of mobility restrictions, and reopening of educational institutions to in-person instruction or face-to-face set-up, is considered as beneficial pedagogically and financially (Gressman and Peck, 2020).

The experience of countries varies depending on the context the countries are in. In Malaysia, students are encouraged to stay on campus, risking isolation from their family and friends. On campuses in the United States, in-campus residences are shut close together with other facilities due to mobility restriction policies, risking homelessness, and economic repercussions to the schools and universities.

The economic loss of educational institutions is already expected. However, what comes with it is the economic losses of other industries surrounding the educational institutions. In some countries, universities are considered small cities, where industries like food establishments, cafes, libraries, and residential spaces for rent are thriving because of the high density of population and foot traffic coming from the students. The closure of schools, and the imposition of mobility, restrictions resulted in the majority of these businesses closing down. There are small towns that rely on educational institutions and college students’ presence to support the local economy, and provide opportunities for employment and labor to local businesses and residents. These local businesses are significantly impacted by school closures and students’ exodus from campus (Mustafa, 2020).

## Conclusion

In this short piece, the proponent has defined various types of student mobility. It could be characterized as physical movement from one place to another, and how mobility restrictions will prevent them from getting out of their residences, or getting home from their campus residences. This mobility could also pertain to the international students' movement, and how the pandemic has influenced their decision to move, and where to pursue higher education. Mobility also means movement between and within social classes because of education; how a successful integration to online learning allows those in a privileged position to move continuously, while those with minimal resources are forced to stay. This is true as well in terms of their economic positions, a consequence heightened by the movements or the lack thereof, in the students' social position.

This paper also looked at the consequences of immobility of students. The consequences discussed in this work include physiological, pertaining to the nutritional intake of the students; mental, brought about by the inability to connect with other people and prolonged enclosure to a small space; delayed acquisition of degrees or lost employment opportunities or professional growth; and economic repercussion on universities in particular, and communities in general.

C. Wright Mills invites to look into the ordinary and try to see, to understand how and what people are experiencing is an intersection between the individual experiences, and institutional problems. What individuals go through is an intersection between the individual concern

as students, and the societal issue of public health emergencies. This pandemic is a public issue because the phenomenon is a huge one — big enough for it to have an impact on the economy, daily lives, tourism, and closer to home, education. To acquire the appreciation of this intersection, between personal troubles and public issues, allows individuals to see the problem in a holistic manner. Furthermore, it serves as a foreground on how people can resolve this issue.

Mobility restrictions will only be significant if partnered with mass testing. If only the community quarantine will be pushed through, without testing the people, undeniably, it will be useful in a sense because the virus will be trapped at home, or individuals can protect themselves from being infected by not going out, and interacting with people who are either symptomatically positive or an asymptomatic carrier. Hence, in a sense, it is good. However, it is deemed incomplete. Basically, it is limiting the government responses to mobility restrictions without systematically addressing other issues. These are structural troubles, and public issues, that need to be addressed immediately because people should not live in a vacuum where uncertainty is the norm.

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# The image is the message: What do metaphors say about the Filipino youth during the COVID-19 pandemic?

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## Abstract

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 global health crisis has created a portrait of both manifest and latent paralyses to human activities. With the forced lockdown, quarantine, curfew, isolation and social distancing as safety protocols being observed in many parts of the globe, the youth sector is one of the largest sectors that are silently affected. Considering the detrimental and long-lasting effects of COVID-19 safety protocols to youth's psycho-social well-being, as empirically disclosed, this paper argues that the ability of the youth to withstand the challenges of a global health pandemic depends, in great measure, on their ability to cope and how they are supported. Capitalizing on the power of arts-based methodologies, this paper offers fresh and interesting perspectives on how a select group of youth (n=109), aged 16-21, metaphorically represent their quarantine experiences in the context of self, family and community levels. Guided by Steger's (2007) three-step metaphor analysis, this study yielded "The Filipino Quarantined Youth in a road of skewed perspectives" that describes the three (3) faces of the Filipino youth (*helplessness, habitualness, and hopefulness* that operate in a two skewed views of their family (*bonded yet challenged*) and their community (*alarming yet determined*). Implications of this study to youth empowerment in times of crisis are also discussed in this paper.

## Keywords

Filipino youth, doodles, metaphor analysis, negatively skewed Filipino family, positively skewed Filipino community

## Introduction

### The youth and the Filipino youth

The term "youth" is an ambiguous word as no international definition exists to describe it. In fact, the United Nations (UN) (n.d.a.) for its part,

believes that the term "youth" changes from country to country depending on circumstances including demographic, financial, economic and sociocultural

settings. However, despite the amorphous nature of this term and for statistical purposes, the United Nations (n.d. a) operationally defined youth as those who are between the ages 15 to 24 years. In 2019, there was an estimated 1.2 billion youth worldwide and this accounts for the 16% in global population (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019). Interestingly nearly half of the world's youth are living in Sub-Saharan Africa, and has been increasing in the same location along with South East Asia (Gray, 2018).

In sociological contexts, youth is a transitory period between childhood to adulthood and considered as a time of experimentation and discovery without the burden of social norms and obligations (Henze, 2015; National Research Council, 2003; Puyat 2005). For Davies (2020), the youth especially of today, cannot be regarded as a parental property anymore, rather, they should be considered not only as a biological category, but also a societal invention and a public institution. Price (2018) also averred that many of the successful historical movements that changed the world were initiated by young people. Notably, the United Nations (n.d.a) affirms this capacity of the youth to become a positive driving force of global development, hence the declaration of August 12 as the International Youth Day that celebrates youth as a potential partner in improving today's society. It should be noted, however, that despite the promises of being a youth, this stage is still subject to social responsibility and protection; and the need for guidance and security from the dangers of the world is highly called for (Henze, 2015).

Interestingly, the Philippines boasts its highest number of youths to date. An estimated 30 million people aged 10-24 make up 28% of the country's total population (United Nations Population Fund, 2019). Although the UN declared ages 15 to 24 as the youth, the National Youth Commission, as mandated by the Philippine government in terms of youth development, adopted an extended age bracket of 15 to 30 as Filipino youth by virtue of Republic Act 8044 of 2005 (Puyat, 2005).

In the study of Puyat (2005) on Filipino youth, he ascertained a set of characteristics that describes this group of people which also makes them unique from other nation's youth as well. These characteristics include high self-esteem, possesses both individualistic and collectivistic goals, a well-rounded personality, with good sense of control of his surroundings, robust in the face of life's challenges, family-centered and most of all, highly spiritual. Angara (2020) also opines that the Filipino youth are the torchbearers of the Philippine's future. Remarkably, a National Youth Assessment conducted in 2015 also revealed that majority of Filipino youth participate in socio civic projects and are politically active albeit mostly were seen spending a lot of time using gadgets which also manifests their highly digitized nature (Ambisyon Natin 2040, 2019). However, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines warns that this exposure to technology and media along with lack of love and support may have brought many Filipino youth to struggle with self identity (CBCP News, 2017). Nevertheless, the country strongly upholds the capacity of Filipino youth in nation-building as demonstrated by the aggressive implementation of

the Philippine Youth Development Plan 2017-2022 which aims to promote active youth participation and mold them to a responsible citizen.

### **Major social issues confronting today's youth**

The youth of today shows more affinity towards social networks and having virtual friends which impact their educational and employment trajectories (Kelly, 2014) and even lead to symptoms of depression and anxiety (Primack, et al., 2017). Other problems such as emotional eating and weight concerns (Belcher, et al., 2011; Puhl, et al., 2013) and those involving youth minority groups (Lawlis, Donkin, & Bates, 2017) are experienced globally by the youth of today. World-wide, there are strong platforms of actions to address various social phenomena where the youth are affected. Continuous and collective efforts are initiated by various agencies to provide youth programs and services that regularly undergo monitoring and evaluation, to see how responsive these are to the multi-faceted needs of the youth.

In the Philippines, the vital role of the youth in nation-building has been specifically recognized in one of the country's laws (RA 8044) and the pressing need to address the myriad of social concerns at the grassroots level which includes poverty, lack of education, substance abuse, crime and unemployment (SB 848). Although a lot of youth protection platforms exist, there are still major social issues affecting the lives of the Filipino youth as reported by different government, non government and private entities. Corporal punishment, teenage pregnancy, and sexual abuse (Aurelio, 2017), risky sexual behaviors and reproductive health, education, employment, and mental health

(Martina, 2016) are the most reported and recorded Filipino youth problems. Moreover, there has been a lot of transition with the youth of today with the surge of technology, and yet, these youth issues are still applicable at this technology-laden era.

Consequently, the internet and social media, among other influential factors, play important roles on how the Filipino youth handle problems. In this generation, where the youth is considered the generation Z (or iGen, centennials, post-millennial), individualistic characteristics are more noted (Puyat, 2005) than being culturally attached. However, despite this aim for individualism, it cannot be denied that they are still family-dependent and living with parents (McCann, 2016) who they rely on for important life decisions. The Filipino youth of today are not only faced with challenging social, mental and political issues but are also in the quest of finding out how they can find true happiness (Dion, 2019) while the adults need to adjust to the characteristics of the Filipino youth today. Time and again, the Filipino youth are always caught in between the social dilemmas that adults are facing whether in the individual, community, or societal levels. What usually is missed in helping them is being shown genuine understanding and respect as the future of the society.

### **COVID-19 and youth**

In the last weeks of 2019, an outbreak, caused by a novel coronavirus (2019- nCoV) took place in Wuhan, China that eventually spread globally, causing the current worldwide health predicament known as SARS-CoV-2 or COVID-19 pandemic (Adnan Shereen, Khan, Kazmi, Bashir & Siddique, 2020). The global health crisis, which



caused an unprecedented number of deaths, economic recession, and disruption to human daily activities, among others, have not spared anyone, including the youth. Although data show, that the fatality rate among COVID19 infected young persons is very low as compared to older populations especially in South East Asia (Chouhan, 2020), still, this sector is an excellent vector of transmitting the virus to others, hence, forcing of lockdowns and efforts to restrict them from any physical contacts from the outside could slow down the virus transmission. In spite of these efforts, an analysis by the World Health Organization has revealed a staggering trifold increase of COVID-19 infected youth recently (TRTWorld, 2020).

The global pandemic has also forced many businesses to foreclose leading to many losing their jobs and livelihood. Younger persons, for one, have been vulnerable within the workforce even before the current health crisis, yet, the economic crisis brought by the pandemic could exacerbate this situation leading to a greater number of youth unemployed or displaced from the labor market for some time (Blustein, et al 2020). Notably, unemployment, according to Crocitta (2020) and Zhubanova (2020) is topmost fear and issue confronting the youth of today.

Several studies have also revealed the detrimental and long-lasting effects of COVID-19 lockdowns to youth's psycho-social well-being. For instance, a cross-sectional study conducted two weeks after the occurrence of COVID-19 in China showed that infectious diseases such as COVID-19 have immense effect on youth's mental health (Liang, et al, 2020). Such result was also observed among

the youths from European countries like Spain and Italy (Orgilés, et al., 2020). Moreover, isolation during the pandemic was found to negatively affect the youth, especially those who have clinical high risk for psychosis (DeLuca et al, 2020). Further, those youth who have varying types of mental health conditions, such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety disorders and anorexia nervosa have noted that the health crisis worsened their mental health conditions as well (YoungMinds, 2020; Secer & Ulas, 2020). Many young persons have also developed poor sleeping habits and sedentary lifestyle that may eventually affect their mental health in the long run (DeLuca et al, 2020; Power, et al., 2020; Wang, et al., 2020; Casagrande, et al., 2020).

Additionally, vulnerable members of the youth sector, including those with disability, LGBTQ, homeless, maltreated, in foster care, and struggling with substance misuse may also face elevated risks of neglect, further abuse including physical and sexual due to measures and efforts solely focused only on mitigating the effects of the health crisis (Cohen & Bosks, 2020; Masten & MottiStefanidi, 2020; Gabrielli & Lund, 2020).

Interestingly, the youth copes with the crisis in diverse ways. For instance, a study by Orgiles and colleagues (2020) shows emotional-oriented coping style, task-oriented and avoidance-oriented styles as ways by which youth mentally deals with the pandemic. Yet, young people may still find it challenging coping with the situation as their coping skills are not at par to that of an adult as coping is a developmentally acquired skill (Fields & Prinz, 1997 as cited by Power et al., 2020)

By and large, the recent health situation has greatly affected the lives of the youth and this certainly calls for immediate, coordinated, holistic public health approach that carefully balances costs and benefits as we cannot wait for the pandemic to subside for these issues to be addressed and their overall well-being of the youth sector secured (Cohen & Bosk, 2020; Efuribe, et al., 2020).

### **COVID-19 as a shaping mechanism**

The youth, as one of the age-groups belonging to the vulnerable sectors during this COVID-19 pandemic, paved way to having varied perceptions and responses towards rejection, aggression, and resentment. Not being able to go out to meet friends, to dine out or have drinks in their favorite fast food chains and cafes, to go to school and tourist spots during school breaks and weekends made the quarantined lives of the youth unbearable and unacceptable. What was accessible and permissible is to use social media platforms to get updates about the COVID-19, to get connected with friends and family, to have virtual classes, e-shopping and entertainment. The computer mediated social interactions (Shmueli, et al., 2014) has in fact curated a platform which shaped the youth's adaptation of the new normal. Undoubtedly, stress and fear as integral responses to infectious diseases (Shultz, et al., 2016), and trauma brought about by COVID-19 and quarantine (Moore, et al., 2020) do not exempt the youth.

On one hand, the traditional coping mechanisms such as keeping a daily routine, physical activity, and positive reappraisal/reframing (Shanahan, et al., 2020) are still found to be excellent indices of adaptation, healthy diversions

and productive activities while on quarantine. On the other hand, a strong evidence exists that exergames, which integrate physical activity and exercise with appealing digital games (Viana & de Lira, 2020) are great outlets to handle distress and anxiety among the youth. Although COVID-19 shaped adaptive/coping behaviors leaning towards more to screen-based interactions, there is an undeniable shift in reconnecting with family members who they are quarantined with. There is also research evidence that parental support and encouragement are associated with better adaptability (Moore, et al., 2020) with movement restrictions and understanding of the pandemic situation. Moreover, a higher awareness for the need to focus on mental health concerns through online social support systems (Cohen, & Bosk, 2020) and telepsychotherapy (DeLuca, et al., 2020) to respond to emotional and psychological distress associated with COVID-19 were recognized as effective means to alleviate the emotional turmoil the pandemic produces.

Despite the shaping mechanisms that COVID-19 brings, this paper argues that the ability of the youth to withstand the challenges of a global health pandemic depends, in great measure, on certain predisposing characteristics, support systems and coping strategies of the youth. Specifically, the influencing personality aspects of the youth become the bases for their COVID-19 associated behaviors and are shaped by their salient self-perceptions (Petrocelli, et al., 2010). These shaping tendencies will be strengthened through social support provided by external resources that will assist them to thrive in this challenging health crisis.

While it is true that there are a lot of research focused on COVID-19 and the youth (Alvis et al., 2020; Barbhuiya & Mazmuder, 2020; Cohen & Bosk, 2020), little is known about how the use of doodles can help surface the interesting perspectives of the quarantined youth to qualify their COVID-19 experiences involving personal, family and community issues. There had been previous research proving the powerful message of doodles in different psychological and sociological contexts (Villamor, et al., 2018), however, this is among the first among COVID related studies that will use metaphors to extract the sequelae of the present pandemic to the cognitive and emotional states of the youth.

Finally, it is noteworthy to mention that mitigating the negative impact of COVID-19 to the youth should be prioritized and that although there are virtual forms of help received, a pressing need for structured programs are needed. Moreover, there is an uncertainty as to how the youth will be supported as proposed in the Philippine Youth Development Plan (PYDP) 2017-2022. To date, youth development programs, youth-centered services, and youth civic participation amid the pandemic are still not given focus or implemented.

## **Theoretical Framing**

This paper is anchored on the Theory of Mind (ToM) to describe the worldviews and preoccupations of quarantined youth during this COVID-19 pandemic. ToM was first introduced by Premack and Woodruff (1978) as the ability to represent one's varied cognitive states and functions as a predictor for another's responses. Moreover, ToM conceptualizes that learning about the world

is derived from claims of trustworthy testimonies (Carlson, et al., 2013) showing the ability to qualify and describe mental states to oneself and others (Gabriel, et al., 2019). These mental states are represented into two component processes; the cognitive perspective taking and understanding emotions (Sebastian, et al., 2011).

The mental state of an individual can be primarily determined by predisposing factors such as age, gender and other predictors where intelligence and learning are expected. Pandemic-wise, the cognitive and affective mental states of an individual are shaken and need to re-adapt depending on how threatening or intimidating circumstances are handled. This theory gives emphasis to knowledge, beliefs, emotions, perceptual acuity and language comprehension which are noticeable developmentally. Correspondingly, like other cognitive-emotive-behavioral perspectives, the existing literature on the development of ToM starts in childhood and becomes pronounced in adolescence until adulthood (i.e. Dumontheil, et al., 2010; Hughes, 2016; Im-Bolter, et al., 2006; Vetter, et al., 2013). Thus, the quarantined youth's worldviews and preoccupations reside in ToM's cognitive and affective mental states.

The worldviews and preoccupations of the youth during this pandemic ensue a social awareness that will redefine an understanding of interrelationships with self and others. In this study, the ToM has been utilized by the researchers to describe the youth's cognitive and affective mental states. These will bring forth stronger personal and social reflections and a clearer collective sense of countering an upsetting situation, such as the

COVID-19 pandemic, to become motivating factors for intellectual and emotional growth.

## **Methodology**

### **Design**

Considering the promises of doodles as powerful tools in eliciting one's view, this investigation employed the qualitative semiotic design (QSD) in describing how the Filipino youth describes themselves, their family, and the community during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Liamputtong (2009), QSD centers on surfacing the processes of making meaning and how signs affect prospective consumers; hence, making it appropriate in analyzing signs in everyday life. Interestingly, QSD has been utilized in analyzing doodles in recent studies on historical thinking skills among pre-school students (Atkin, 2016), the concept of fatherhood among Filipino fathers (Villamor, et al., 2018), and works of Kunizo Matsumoto, a painter with mental illness (Surace, 2016), among others.

### **Study site and subjects**

One hundred eleven (n=109) Filipino youth, aged 16-21, were recruited from a private Catholic school at the capital of the Philippines. As illustrated in Table 1, most of the participants were 17 years old (56%), male (57.8%), single (100%), Roman Catholics (89%) living in the National Capital Region (76.1%). Moreover, the majority were availing a postpaid internet subscription (53.2%), with gadget experience of 5-10 years (45.9%) and a daily average gadget usage of more than 5 hours (67.9%). In terms of devices used, most of the quarantined youth use both laptop and smartphones (41.3%). Accordingly, almost everyone owns a social media

account (99.1%) with social and media sharing networks being regularly used (72.5%) along with lifestyle, games and entertainment applications (32.1%).

Following the class suspension due to the rising cases of COVID-19 infection, the government on March 10, Manila, including other cities in the National Capital Region, were placed under Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), which only allowed the essential workforce to go outside from March 15 to April 13 (Nakpil, 2020; CNN Philippines, 2020a). The ECQ was then extended up to April 30 until the city was placed under Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine (MECQ) on May 16 to May 31 that authorized select businesses to resume operations (CNN Philippines, 2020b). To date, Manila City is under the General Community Quarantine (GCQ), where most of the business establishments have reopened. However, schools are only permitted to resume online, and youth (ages below 21) must still stay at home (Ranada, 2020). Summarily, the youth participants in this investigation have been staying inside their homes for almost seven months.

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### **Instrumentation**

A two-part data gathering tool was prepared to collect pertinent information for this naturalistic inquiry. First, a demographic information questionnaire was used to determine the baseline characteristics of the participants. Personal information including age, gender, civil status, religion, region of residence, technological devices used, type of internet subscription, social media accounts owned, other online applications

used, years of experience and daily average use of gadgets were sought. Second, a doodling sheet where participants were asked to draw representations of themselves, their family and community during COVID-19 pandemic was utilized. It should be noted that the participants were also asked to freely elucidate in writing their rationale for doodling their choice of graphic interpretations for each.

### **Data collection and analysis**

Data were collected from August 17-28, 2020 via Google form. Participants were asked to accomplish the demographic questionnaire and afterwards, voluntarily sketch corresponding doodles on a clean sheet of paper, take a photo of each and place it in a google document file. The data files were then collected using google drive folders provided to the students.

Accordingly, the information gathered from the demographic questionnaire were descriptively analyzed and summarized in a composite table. Subsequently, the illustrated doodles (Figure 1) were scrutinized using Steger's (2007) three-step metaphor analysis. First, the collected metaphorical doodles were reviewed through metaphor identification and selection via reading and re-reading to gain a raw overview of the illustrations. Second, a general metaphor analysis was conducted by comparing doodles that may express the similar contexts. In this stage, the researchers also identified connections between groups of doodles with the same meaning to achieve a deeper understanding of metaphors in general.

Lastly, the use of text-imminent metaphor analysis allowed the researchers to understand

further the metaphoric doodles in a particular context. Notably, a repertory-grid was also employed to facilitate the surfacing of data categories from the field texts and eventually themes that elucidate how the Filipino youth view one's self, family

and community in the current health pandemic. Member-checking procedure was conducted to establish the trustworthiness of the surfaced findings of the study.

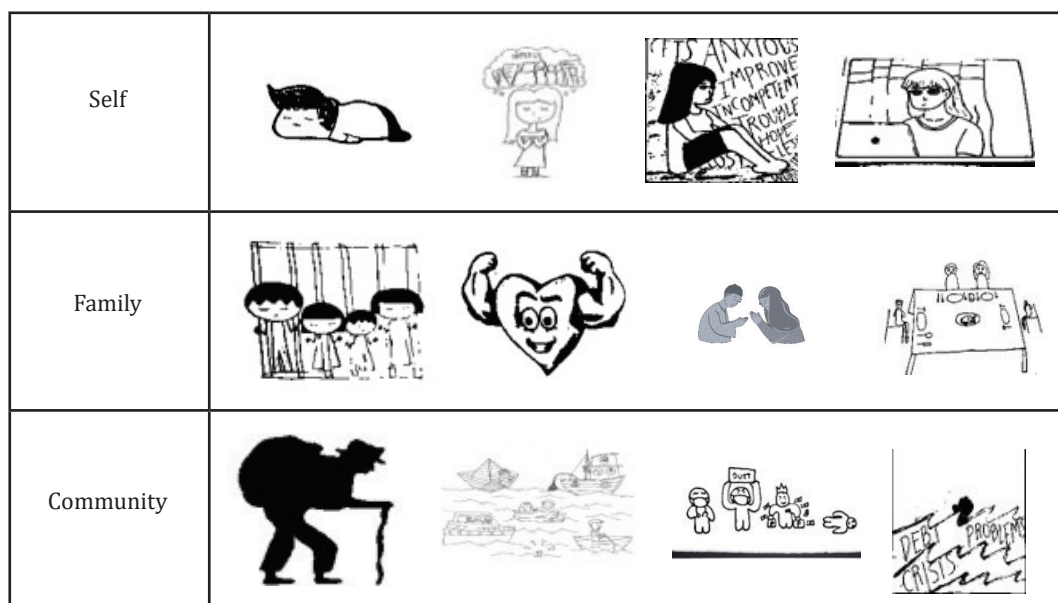
**Table 1: Demographic profile of the participants (n=109)**

Profile	n	%	Profile	n	%
<b>Age</b>			<b>Gadget Experience</b>		
16	1	0.9	Less than one hour	7	6.4
17	61	56.0	1-5 hours	28	25.7
18	41	37.6	More than 5 hours	74	67.9
19	4	3.7	<b>Technological devices used</b>		
21	2	1.8	Desktop computer only	3	2.8
<b>Gender</b>			Desktop computer and Laptop	7	6.4
Male	63	57.8	Desktop computer, Laptop and Smartphone	7	6.4
Female	46	42.2	Desktop computer, Laptop, Smartphone and Smart TV	1	0.9
<b>Civil Status</b>			Desktop computer, Laptop, Smartphone, Smart TV and Tablet	3	2.8
Single	109	100	Desktop computer and Smartphone	6	5.5
<b>Religion</b>			Desktop computer, Smartphone and Tablet	1	0.9
Catholic	97	89	Laptop only	5	4.6
Protestant	2	1.8	Laptop and Smartphone	45	41.3
Others	10	9.2	Laptop, Smartphone and Smart TV	3	2.8
<b>Region of Residence</b>			Laptop, Smartphone, Smart TV and Tablet	3	2.8
NCR	83	76.1	Laptop, Smartphone and Tablet	1	0.9
Region III	9	8.3	Laptop and Smart TV	2	1.8
CALABARZON	15	13.8	Laptop and Tablet	1	0.9
Region X	1	0.9	Smartphone only	16	14.7
Region XI	1	0.9	Smartphone, Smart TV and Tablet	2	1.8
<b>Internet Subscription</b>			Smartphone and Tablet	3	2.8
Prepaid	49	45	<b>Owning a social media account</b>		
Postpaid	2	53.2	Yes	108	99.1
Both	58	1.8	No	1	0.9

Profile	n	%
<b>Type of Social Media Used</b>		
Social Networks only	13	11.9
Social and Media Sharing Networks	79	72.5
Social, Media Sharing, and Blogging Networks	5	4.6
Social, Media Sharing, Blogging and Discussion Networks	1	0.9
Social, Media Sharing, Blogging Discussion and Review Networks	1	0.9
Social, Media Sharing and Discussion Networks	6	5.5
Social, Media Sharing and Review Networks	2	1.8
Social and Discussion Networks	1	0.9
Media Sharing Networks only	1	0.9
<b>Other Online Applications Used</b>		
Lifestyle Application only	2	1.8
Lifestyle, Games and Entertainment Applications	35	32.1

Profile	n	%
<b>Other Online Applications Used</b>		
Lifestyle, Games and Entertainment and Productivity Applications	18	16.5
Lifestyle, Games and Entertainment, Productivity and News / Information Applications	13	11.9
Lifestyle, Games and Entertainment, News / Information Applications	1	0.9
Games and Entertainment Applications only	20	18.3
Games and Entertainment, and Productivity Applications	11	10.1
Games and Entertainment, Productivity and News / Information Applications	2	1.8
Games and Entertainment, Productivity, News / Information and Other Applications	1	0.9
Games and Entertainment and News / Information Applications	2	1.8
Productivity Applications only	1	0.69
Not Applicable	3	2.8

Figure 1. Sample Doodles

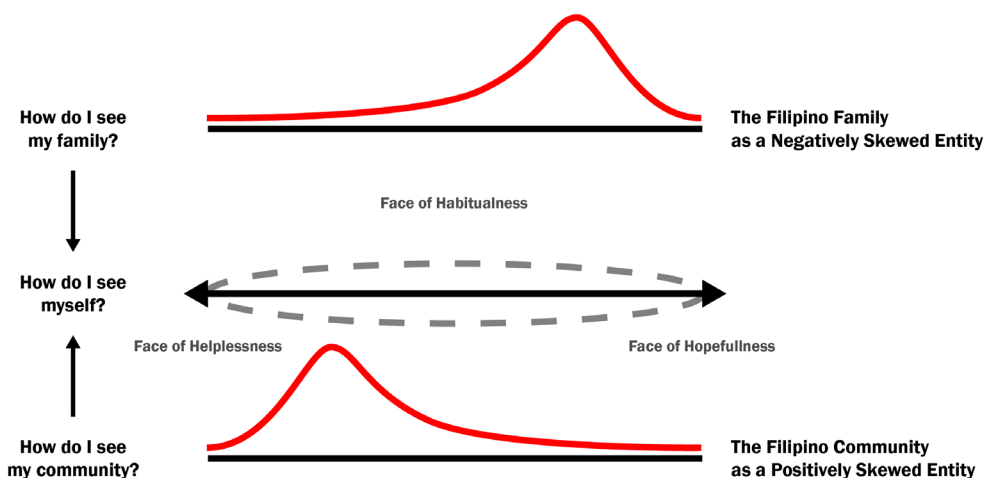


## Findings

Guided by qualitative semiotic design, this investigation afforded a model that describes how the Filipino youth view themselves, their family and community under the current health pandemic. As a road of skewed perspectives (Figure 1) the shared views using metaphors of oneself among quarantined youth reflect the linear relationship of the three faces of helplessness (being unable to control the situation), habitualness (being able to cope by pursuing other interests and improve oneself) and hopefulness (being optimistic about the future). Moreover, taking to account the importance

of the external environment among a select group of participants in these times, the model also offers a unique and fresh perspective of the participants toward their family and community. Notably, the quarantined youth view their family as a source of positivity and hope in this current situation hence, the negative skewness (*The Filipino family as a negatively skewed entity*) while, the community was seen to be very problematic and suffering making it positively skewed (*The Filipino community as a positively skewed entity*).

Figure 2. The Filipino quarantined youth in a road of skewed perspectives



### Face of Helplessness

It is interesting to note that in this study, the participants see themselves as powerless in the current situation brought by restrictions for their age group to go outside their homes. The participants are one in expressing themselves as deprived of freedom due to imposed quarantine

to control the spread of the virus. For instance, some doodles depict a person being inside a prison or locked up in their own house. One participant also depicted himself as a boy looking through the window thinking about what is going on outside their house. Impliedly, the image of prison or



being inside a closed house best describes the lack of freedom experienced by many youths during COVID-19 pandemic.

Notably, being quarantined have led some of the participants to view themselves as anxious and pre-occupied by the situation. Many participants described their negative emotions through illustrations of a sad face, a person crying, a boy down on his knees with his fist in the chest, and a person with a lot of thoughts running in his head, among others. Further, several words involved in some doodles include hopeless, lost, incompetent and anxiety strongly reflect the emotional challenges the participants are facing themselves. These images may signify the negative impact of quarantine to the youth's mental health.

Summarily, the *face of helplessness* depicts the view of the quarantined youth of themselves being out of control of the current situation due to restrictions to their movement that leads to negative feelings and thoughts.

### **Face of Habitualness**

To cope with the challenges of not being allowed to go out to their physical, mental and emotional states, it should be noted that many participants see themselves being relieved by using social media platforms. In fact, illustrations depicting persons using social media application were very common among the doodles provided by the participants. Symbols and logos of famous social media networks such as Facebook, Tiktok, Twitter, and video- streaming applications like Netflix and YouTube were prevailing in the set of metaphors collected. Interestingly, some participants also

illustrated people sleeping with the phone or laptop beside them. Notably, the doodles characterize the consolation that social media provides to the participants while they are staying inside their homes with limited activities to do.

Some participants also portrayed themselves as exploring other talents or improving themselves as during the quarantine period. For example, illustrations depicting a person playing a particular sport, working out or baking may signify that the youth in this study took the lockdown as an opportunity to learn more about their skills and talents, and improve them. Some participants also provided images of a person selling goods online that may also characterize the sudden increase of people starting their virtual business to cope with the financial challenges brought by the pandemic.

Additionally, the youth in this study described themselves as preparing for the online classes that they will have in the new academic year. Several images of students in front of their laptops represents this view among the participants. For others, images of a person with a blackboard or gadgets while studying also depict this perspective.

On the whole, the *face of habitualness* depicts the view of quarantined youth of themselves trying to cope with the challenges of COVID-19 through the use of social media applications, pursuing activities for self-improvement and preparing themselves for the new set-up of the upcoming academic year.

## Face of Hopefulness

Despite the ongoing health crisis that overwhelms the participants mentally and emotionally, the quarantine youth view themselves as optimistic and maintain a belief that eventually, this problem will end. This perspective is commonly signified by illustrations of a person having hopeful thoughts. Some are also very confident that COVID-19 will be defeated as characterized by cartoon characters fighting the virus with sword or a fist smashing the virus. Another participant also symbolized hope through spiritual images of a girl praying the rosary or a boy praying in front of a crucifix. Others also depicted hope as a sun above a person's head

Remarkably, other images provided by the quarantined youth signifies resilience and strength to overcome the current pandemic. For example, one illustration depicts a man with both biceps that are flexed along with the word "strong". One participant also sketched a person with big heart doing actions denoting strength such as taking-care of oneself and others.

Surprisingly, this belief that everything will be eventually fine made some of the participants relaxed and comfortable in spite of being quarantined. Images of person or an animal sleeping soundly with a smile were drawn by the participants to characterize themselves during the quarantine period.

In this study, the face of hopefulness depicts the view of quarantine youth of themselves as being optimistic and resilient in the face of this health crisis making them feel relaxed and comfortable despite an overwhelming situation.

## How do I see my family?

### The Filipino family as a negatively skewed entity

During the quarantine period, most participants stayed with their families to avoid being infected by the virus. Initially, the quarantined youth see their families as more bonded than before as signified by many illustrations of a family inside the house doing activities together including watching the television, having dinner together, cleaning and doing other household tasks, among others. Apparently, the quarantine period has afforded the families of the youth participants to spend more time together during the pandemic. In addition, several doodles of families holding hands together depict not only being bonded but also being united in their journey in this pandemic.

For other participants, the family signifies safety or security to the crisis. Images of house covered by masks or a family holding each other or in a circle protected from the COVID-19 virus reflects the role of the family as security to the crisis. For one participant, a drawing of her parents holding an umbrella to protect the family against the virus represents this view. Other depictions like family praying together also entails the role not only of the family but also of spirituality in protecting the household from the health crisis.

However, it is also noteworthy that few participants saw their families as distant from each other. An example is a doodle of families far from each other despite being inside their house. Another is a doodle of family members living in different houses. In this context, it seems that not all families became bonded unlike for many youths in this study. Further,

some images of anxious, tired and scared families also depict the emotional challenges brought by the pandemic to the participant's household.

By and large, *the Filipino family as a negatively skewed entity* describes a more positively leaning views of the quarantined Filipino youth toward their families as more bonded, unified, coping, and a source of security and safety despite being emotionally challenged and distant during COVID19 pandemic.

### **How do I see my community**

#### **The Filipino community as a positively skewed entity**

Considering digital media becoming the main source of information about the community during this health crisis, it is captivating to note how the quarantined youth perceived their surroundings. Perturbingly, many participants viewed their community as burdened or declining. An image of an old man using a cane with heavy bag on its back describes this perspective. Doodles of exhausted front liners also depict this view of their community among the quarantined youth. Moreover, images of arrows going down or spiraling down characterizes the declining situation of the community in the minds of the participants.

Additionally, some participants also see their community as ailing, helpless and dying. For example, a number of doodles of the earth wearing masks depicts the ailing state of the world for the quarantine youth. In terms of being helpless, some images of the earth being inside the prison, crying, or even drowning characterizes the forlorn state of many communities. A few doodles like a wilted

tree with a snake, skulls, tombstone, empty streets and buildings also reflect the dying state of their community for some quarantined youth.

The notion of a community as corrupt during COVID-19 pandemic was also seen in the doodles of the participants. Images of politicians stealing money, people protesting against the government and sketches of chains portrays this perspective. Furthermore, some participants also see their community as chaotic as evidenced in the following doodles: a confused man, circus and a cluttered room.

Remarkably, there are still few quarantined youths who view their community positively. For example, doodles depicting the "bayanihan" (Filipino word for community spirit) among the Filipinos signify the cooperation among the citizens of the country. Further, several images of the Philippine flag held by people and Filipino front liners defending the country against the virus characterize the view of the determination of the country to win the battle against this crisis for the participants.

Summarily, *the Filipino community as a positively skewed entity* characterizes a more negative perspective of the quarantined youth about their community centering on the lapses of the government and the world in general to properly respond to the global health pandemic.

### **Discussion**

Metaphors were utilized in this qualitative inquiry, as a rich cognitive and affective tool to comprehend how the youth perceive themselves,

their families and their communities in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of this study presented a varied collection of the youth's representations of the self, family and community as described through their doodles. This pandemic brought forth a lot of changes, challenges and confusions, thus, a spectrum of emotions was felt by everyone. This is especially true for the youth who experience the most transitions developmentally. The quarantined-self, resulting from the youth's sketches; showed a varied range of perspectives: Powerlessness (*face of helplessness*), coping (*face of habitualness*) and optimistic (*face of hopefulness*). Remarkably, these perspectives also created an appearance of symmetry where the negative skewness entity is ascribed to the bonded yet challenged Filipino Family, and the positive skewness entity is attributed to the alarming yet determined Filipino Community.

### **The three (3) faces of quarantined self: helplessness, habitualness and hopefulness**

Perceiving oneself is part of an attribution to the identity which can be examined in the individual, group or environmental levels (Udall, et al., 2020). Self-perceptions can be self-insightful (Morry, et al., 2010) and with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, individuals are given more introspective opportunities while quarantined. Being in a quarantine state, the youth primarily show a *face of helplessness*; characterized by being powerless, anxious and troubled attributed to movement restriction, routine change, missing people, travelling and attending school. The *face of helplessness* for the youth encapsulates their fears of inadequacy to control what is happening

around them. Viewing that the pandemic is beyond their regulation, leads to distressing thoughts and feelings. However, they are aware that considering the helplessness of the situation, they are stressing themselves out with something they cannot do anything about. Self-stress among students (Samadarshi, et al., 2020) is highlighted as part of psychological impact (Brooks, et al., 2020) brought by the pandemic. This is initially the reaction in a helpless situation and usually needs intervention to lessen and regulate the negativity (Li, et al., 2020; Moore, et al., 2020). In contrast, the youth also display a *face of habitualness*, described by a coping attitude via new learning and discovery afforded by the new normal. This suggests that the quarantined youth, in their adaptation process, possess protective factors (Moron & Biolik-Moron, 2020) that adequately manage emotional threats posed by the pandemic. They show effective attempts to adjust with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic through means that are accessible to them while quarantined. These are through the use social media applications, finding healthy diversions that will improve themselves and productive preoccupations on how to arrange for their online classes this coming academic year. This is consonance with the recent research findings (i.e. Alvis, et al., 2020; Shanahan, et al., 2020; Viana & de Lira, 2020) that the youth strives for prosocial interactions and engagements despite the pandemic as their productive coping mechanisms. In a helpful continuum, the youth also demonstrate a *face of hopefulness*, ensuing the thinking that the pandemic will eventually end and an antidote will be soon discovered. It was evident in the youth's doodles that they view being quarantined an avenue for optimism and resiliency despite the health crisis, finding effective means

to become stress-free and contented even with an overwhelming situation which they cannot control. Cultivating hope is recognized as an important factor for psychological well-being (James, 2020) and significantly contributes to happiness. Upliftingly, the Filipino youth show hope despite the health crisis and believe there are still a lot of things to be encouraged about, in an aspiration of improving their life circumstances.

### **The Filipino family as negatively skewed entity: Bonded yet challenged**

The quarantine period which the youth is set to contend with, posed a lot of trials in terms of familial situations and relationships. The COVID-19 created a dichotomy in family interrelationships where both positive and negative effects were enmeshed simultaneously. This qualitative inquiry established that the quarantined youth viewed the Filipino family as a negatively skewed entity which describes putting weight on a more positive understanding on how the family can offer support, strength and unity among themselves. Through the pandemic, the family became more bonded and a steady source of financial, emotional and more security despite some external and internal challenges. Congruently, research findings show that confinement created stronger family ties and bonding (Ahmed, et al., 2020) and led to positive repercussions for family members. Spending more time at home paved way to recreational activities done together and reconnecting with family members. However, a spike in domestic violence and family abuse (Usher, et al., 2020), parenting stress (Brown, Doom, et al., 2020) and reduced family resources (Baltar, et al., 2020) were reported due to social isolation and quarantine. These

represents the challenges that a family may face under the restricting conditions of the pandemic. Nonetheless, at the core of this global problem, the youth has stronger realizations that there are more important things over friends and leisure. They became more concerned with health and family (Li, et al., 2020), and more positively attached and considerate with each other. By and large, the family resilience that will be one of the key aspects to withstand the tribulations brought forth by the pandemic will depend on the collective strength of the family. Ultimately, the family's psychological well-being will improve as family and personal resources (Baltar, et al., 2020) are placed into high relevance and crucial focus to assist in the youth's overall psychological wellbeing.

### **The Filipino community as positively skewed entity: Alarming yet determined**

Today's Filipino youth show a greater sense of civic responsibility and concern, especially now that the country is faced with an insurmountable challenge to combat the pandemic. Collectively, the youth described the Filipino community with a distressing perspective; focusing on the ineffective community interventions to 'flatten the curve', the lack of attention given to the immediate needs of the economically deprived and the COVID-19 patients, and the deteriorating government measures. Interestingly, the awareness of COVID-related disparities (WalterMcCabe, 2020) also motivated the youth to generate chances for prosocial acts (Alvis, et al., 2020) that show determination in strengthening community ties. The quarantined youth in this present study viewed the Filipino community in characterization of more undesirable and harmful perspectives centered on the gaps

and breaks of the current administration and the worldwide conditions on how the pandemic is being addressed from the micro to macro levels of the society. It is in this context that the quarantined youth is alarmed and dissatisfied with how their community is contributing to the negative aspects of this global health crisis.

Nonetheless, the quarantined youth, possesses the capacity to still see rays of hope and being positively selective on the bits of pieces of sunshine showing up from the alarming condition of the Filipino community. This was depicted by James (2020) redounding that there is still happiness amid the pandemic. The quarantined youth showed appreciation and upholds the contribution of the healthcare workers who are the frontline workforce during this pandemic. Despite their perspective that the country has multi-faceted errors in administration, they fully acknowledge and respect people who sacrificed their personal and family safety for the greater good. Ultimately, these observed community perspectives are valuable entry points to involve more youth to prepare for recovery planning and post-pandemic actions. The community involvement will improve the youth's ability to engage in collective civic efforts (Barbhuiya & Mazmuder, 2020), to restore optimism and pathways of opportunity (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020) and to bolster their confidence in future disasters that they may face.

## Conclusion

This study is an attempt to create a meaningful space to listen to the obfuscated voices of a select group of Filipino youth as they mirror their once-in-lifetime quarantine experience.

Difficult as it may seem, the quarantine period has created a wide spectrum of thoughts and processes that were captured vividly through metaphorical representations. Listening to these metaphors or doodles is tantamount to listening to their unique and collective voices. These unheard voices are windows to better understand their being and existence in the context of self, family and the society at large.

This perspective-driven investigation afforded the emergence of interesting faces of the Filipino youth and how they collectively viewed the present dynamics of their families and the community in which they live. The profundity of their faces of hopelessness, habitualness and hopefulness highly speak of the field of forces and energies that envelope and direct their day-to-day pandemic experiences. The identified faces are valuable resources in identifying the support mechanisms that can be initiated to help them manage squarely the pressures and tensions of a quarantined life. These mechanisms are vital in facilitating their growth and development under the new normal. The skewed perspectives of the youth about their family and community are tensions that need careful attention and consideration. Impliedly, there is a need to mobilize agencies and sectors in society in fostering healthy family relationships and strengthening family resilience through a meaningful and sustained family education program. Further, the skewed perspective of the youth about their community is an open invitation to contest the traditional ideology that '*children are seen but not heard*'. Today, more than ever, giving emphasis to the significance of youth participation cannot be underestimated. As the country faces governance

frailties, welfare disparities and refuted health programs and battles for the cure and prevention of COVID-19, youth engagement program and initiatives remain as promising and urgent frontiers aimed at enabling the youth to experience meaning-making of their social world and to embrace a culture of interrogation through community connectedness and action-driven orientation.

Though the portrait of the Filipino quarantined youth has been initially described in this study, the need to expand and deepen the frontiers of knowledge about this important sector in Philippine society warrant further empirical investigation. Future studies may consider the involvement of youth sector from a cross-sectional perspective and using a mixed methods and longitudinal approach to generate a more robust description of their being and existence during this global crisis.

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# Learning in trying times: Online education in the midst of a pandemic

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## Abstract

With the onset of the recent outbreak of the pandemic, a drastic shift in the education frontier of the country took place, as many schools opted to an online platform of instruction to continue instilling learning to the students in the midst of a health crisis. Although this learning environment opens up new possibilities for education, its flexibility, availability, and functionality, questions about its effectiveness were raised. This study anchors itself on the necessity of undermining the current conduct of online education. A total of 105 randomly selected students enrolled in private higher learning institutions were asked to answer an online survey questionnaire, developed with Google forms, to gather the necessary data. The responses were tallied and interpreted with the use of mean percentage. The study revealed that there are problems associated with online education, and that there exists serious concerns regarding its effectiveness.

## Keywords

pandemic, online education, effectiveness

## Introduction

Education has always been ingrained in the socio-cultural psyche of Filipinos. For a long time, the country basked in high levels of literacy which served as cornerstone of social mobility (Panopio & Raymundo, 2004). In fact, there have been countless tales of Filipino students who braved walking miles, even crossing rivers just to be able to go to school and acquire learning. Indeed, sacrifice for education and the desire to possess knowledge is an inherent quality that Filipinos possess (Maligalig et.al, 2010).

In 2020, this innate passion to learn, as well as the entire education realm of the country, was put to a test. COVID-19, a disease that sprung in Wuhan,

China in the tail end of 2019, has created such a huge impact in the world. The death toll that steadily rose has prompted schools to shut down temporarily in order to abate the transmission of the disease (Riley, 2020). The face to face education of more than 300 million students globally were affected by the pandemic caused by COVID-19.

It is in this context that a new system for knowledge transmission paved way for the online education. While not entirely new, online platform for education has been widely utilized by tertiary education institutions as a complement to the face-to-face classes. This was made possible by the advent

in technology since the turn of the century, and has been widely adapted since. On-line instruction has been growing at a fast pace. In the U.S in 2002, a total of 1,602,970 students in higher education took online classes. In 2011, 6,714,792 students have at least taken an online course. This amounts to an increase of 318.9% or a 4.189 ratio (Stack, 2015). However, for many schools in the Philippines, this is considered a big transition.

It is indeed a big turn-around that many schools, especially in the provinces, will turn to purely online education for the first time. In fact, before the pandemic, not many thought that learning can be extended from the traditional face-to-face encounter towards a virtual environment (Caroro et. al, 2013). The internet has paved way for extending education and learning, and has established new paradigms for learning (LaPointe & Reissetter, 2008; Al-Dosari, 2011; Fasso, 2013).

Internet-based tools used for instruction aims to strengthen the relationship between the teacher and students both inside and outside the classroom. The industries of technology have created dynamic applications and websites that helped facilitate the online learning experience using BlackBoards and other web-based learning technologies (Brooks-Young, 2008; McCall, 2009; Aranda, 2011; Blanco & Ginovart, 2012; and Truelson, 2012; Fasso, 2013). The use of the online platform in enriching face-to-face learning gained advantage towards accomplishing students' activities using the resources of the World Wide Web (Ng & Nicholas, 2010).

On the other hand, it is also true that social distancing will have a negative impact on learning

opportunities. Educational Units had to deal with this challenging situation. This situation needs a scenario planning which is needed in the academic institution (Riley, 2020). There is in fact an urgent action need to be taken to protect and save the lives of the students, faculty, faculty academic staff, communities, societies and nation as a whole (Shivangi, 2020).

In this regard, it should also be understood that several problems on online education may arise such as accessibility, affordability, flexibility, learning pedagogy, lifelong learning and policy related to online teaching strategy. It is said that online education can reach the remote and rural areas. It is considered to be cheaper in terms of lower cost of transportation, accommodation and institution-based learning, but flexibility is another important aspect for learner to complete the online course (Shivangi, 2020). In addition, students were found not prepared for balancing their time in terms of work, family, social lives, and studying in online learning environment. Study showed that students were rated poorly in terms of e-learning competencies and academic competencies. The students had low level of preparedness in terms of usage of Learning Management System. (Parkes et. al., 2014).

There also exists the general perception that an online education is not as robust as the face-to-face method of instruction (Brazina & Ugras, 2014; Verhoeven & Wakeling, 2011). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2010), a meta-analysis revealed, when used by itself, online learning may be as effective as face-to-face classes, but not more so. There is considerable debate on the reason why this platform is economic rather than pedagogical, which brings researchers to explore how learning outcomes

are achieved in the online environment (Stacey & Rice, 2002). The study of Herman and Banister (n.d.) presented evidence of positive learning outcomes achieved in an online course, and also explored the correlation between student achievement and course design.

While a shift to online education maybe the best option at this point to counter the threats posed by COVID-19, there are some challenges to online learning. This includes the student perceptions of isolation and lack of community (Cook, 2007; Lyke & Frank, 2012; Rochester & Pradel, 2008; Summers et.al, 2005). Students have emphasized the importance of instructor engagement and skills in online teaching and handling course material for the purpose of accomplishing the established learning outcomes (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007; Holzweiss et.al, 2014).

## Research Questions

In the light of the foregoing, the researcher sought answers to the perception of the youth, particularly, the students, in relation to the conduct of online learning amidst the pandemic. The study is anchored mainly on assessing the perception of students regarding online education and its effectiveness as a substitute modality to face to face instruction in this time of crisis.

1. What are some inherent and immediate problems that students face in the current online learning set-up?
2. Which method of instruction between online and face to face learning is more effective based on the assessment of students?

3. How can online education in the country be further improved?

## Methodology

### Research design

The researcher employed a quantitative research design to obtain the perception of the student respondents in relation to the conduct of online education in this time of pandemic. The researcher made use of a self-constructed survey questionnaire as the primary data gathering instrument.

### Data collection method

Since many places were placed under quarantine, an online survey was conducted to gather the data to be used in this study. The online survey form was designed to answer questions regarding the availability of resources of the students to gain access to online classes, the more applicable method of instruction for the program of the students, the comparison of the attainment of learning objectives via face-to-face classes and online classes, the preferred learning environment of the students, the flexibility of online education, and lastly, the social relationship of the students affected by the online education. The questionnaire prepared was developed through reading reference materials and related literature about the effectiveness of face-to-face classes and online classes in the attainment of learning objectives of the students.

### Population and statistical treatment

A total of 105 respondents participated as respondents in the survey. They were randomly



chosen by the researcher, and majority are college students. After the raw data has been obtained, the data was tabulated and percentage analysis was meted out.

### Results and analysis of data

The following results were yielded to the quantitative primary data.

Age	Frequency	Percentage
17-20 years old	96	91.4%
21-23 years old	9	8.6%
13-16 years old	0	0
Total	105	100%

**Table 1. Age and frequency of respondents**

This section covered the respondents' age. These data helped contextualize the findings and formulation of appropriate recommendation.

Data revealed that the youth age group of 17 to 20 constituted the bulk of the study respondents. They gained the highest frequency of 96 and a percentage of 91.4% respectively. They have interest to pursue their education in spite of the on-going pandemic.

Education System	Frequency	Percentage
Public	0	0
Private	105	100%
Total	105	100%

**Table 2. Education System**

As can be gleaned from the data above, the respondents mainly came from private learning institutions. This can be attributed to the fact that private schools and universities are able to purchase software platforms like Moodle and Blackboard, needed for blended or purely online learning.

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage
Grade 7 to 12	3	2.9%
College	99	94.3%
Graduate School	3	2.9%
Short Courses	0	0
Others	0	0
Total	105	100%

**Table 3. Educational level**

Available data revealed that college students had the highest frequency of 99 and a percentage of 94.3% respectively in terms of educational level.

Satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	32	30.5%
No	73	69.5%
Total	105	100%

**Table 4. Satisfaction on online education**

Data shows that the respondents were not satisfied on online education with a frequency of 73 and a percentage of 69.5% respectively. This is due to problems in connectivity, monetary expenses. Moreover, the glaring factor that not everybody are equipped in device usage.

Therefore, it is important to underscore what the literature reveals in comparing online with face to face classes. In the case of Atchley et.al (2013), the authors compared the course completion and student performance through online and traditional courses. The study revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between students enrolled in online and traditional courses. Analysis found that there was a significant difference in both course completion and academic students for students enrolled in online versus traditional courses. Helms (2014) compared student performance in online and face-to-face delivery modalities, and found mixed significant and non-significant results. Analyses revealed that students did not differ in terms of variables, such as hours transferred to the university from prior schools, hours earned toward their degrees, and number of hours currently attempted. However, online students had significantly lower grade point averages, missed more grade opportunities, and more likely to fail the course as compared with their face-to-face counterparts.

Satisfaction with the Philippines' internet connection	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	2	1.9%
No	103	98.1%
Total	105	100%

**Table 5. Satisfaction with the Philippines' internet connection**

Table 5 above revealed that the respondents were not satisfied with Philippines' internet connection, revealing a frequency of 103 and a

percentage of 98.1% respectively. E-learning has certain weaknesses in the form that it can hamper the communication between the learner and the educator that is when direct communication and human touch are lost. Users can face many technical difficulties that hinder and slow-down the teaching-learning process (Favale et al., 2020).

In addition, Arinto (2016) explained the issues and challenges in open and distance e-Learning from the perspective of the Philippines. Arinto stated that there must be a plurality of pedagogical models based on understanding of pedagogical priorities. Ni (2013) asserts that persistence in an online environment was more challenging in research method classes. However, the paper presented evidence that student performance, as measured by grade, was independent of the mode of instruction but much is still dependent on the level of connectivity that is available.

Preference Mode of Delivery of Online Education	Frequency	Percentage
Face to Face Education	101	96.2%
Online Education	4	3.8%
Total	105	100%

**Table 6. Preference mode of delivery of online education**

Data revealed that student respondents preferred face to face education with a frequency of 101 and percentage 96.2% respectively. Filipino students are accustomed to it and the teacher to gauge the understanding, and interest of the students.

As opined by Milliszewska, (2019), face to face education is more conducive to learning process, affording better opportunity to share knowledge, more interactive and compatible to the needs of students.

In a study by Arias et.al (2018), the efficacy of online delivery relative to face-to-face delivery using an enrolment protocol that eradicates self-selection bias was explored. A pre-test and post-test were administered to the respondents of the study. Students in the face-to-face section have significantly higher exam scores and statistically greater improvements on the 3 post-test.

The results indicated that both objectives and the mechanism used to assess the effectiveness of the two modes of education play a vital role in assessing the effectiveness of both platforms. Kemp and Grieve (2014) studied the opinion of undergraduates on test performance in classroom vs online learning. They found that students preferred to complete activities face-to-face rather than online, but there was no significant difference in their test performance between the two modalities.

In the written responses, students expressed strong preference for classroom discussions rather than online discussions. Students appreciated the convenience of accomplishing tasks online but preferred to discuss course content in the classroom. Students would rather accomplish tasks online and have discussions in the face-to-face interactive format. The study of Caroro et.al (2013) showed that the students perceived the online learning system as effective and integrating the online system with traditional teaching enhances learning and allows room for convenience to the students.

Teacher's competitive delivery of Online Education	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	76	72.4%
No	29	27.6%
Total	105	100%

**Table 8. Teachers' competence for delivery of Online Education**

Table 8 demonstrates the perception of the respondents regarding the competence of the teachers in handling online classes. The teachers attended numerous training development program provided by the school for online education program. This readiness and competence can be attributed to the various training and retooling programs that the universities and schools provide their faculty to prepare them for the online teaching environment.

School ready for online education	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	68	64.8%
No	37	35.2%
Total	105	100%

**Table 09. Institutional readiness for online education**

Data revealed that most private schools were ready for online education with a frequency of 68 and a percentage of 64.8% respectively. According to Hernado-Malipot's (2020) article in Manila Bulletin, the Department of Education said that private schools already started their classes on schedule 24 of August 2020, provided that distance learning modalities will be used, and no face to face classes.

Preference in terms of learning	Frequency	Percentage
Ebooks	16	15.2%
Module	24	22.9%
Books	65	61.9%
Total	105	100%

**Table 10. Preference in terms of learning tools**

Data reveals that books remain to be the topmost choice for learning tools with the highest frequency of 65 and a percentage of 61.9% respectively. This again creates a bias for the respondents in favor of face to face learning.

Gadget Needed for Online Education	Frequency	Percentage
Desktop	3	2.9%
Laptop	62	59%
Tablet	3	2.9%
Wifi Connection	35	33.3%
Tablet/laptop/wifi	1	1%
All of the above	1	1%
Total	105	100%

**Table 11. Gadgets needed for online education**

Data gathered shows that the laptop has the highest frequency of 62 with a percentage of 59% respectively. Laptop is more convenient and can be used with greater ease and mobility. However, it cannot be denied that access to gadgets remain to be a problem especially for many students who belong to the lower economic strata. Many families

do not have the financial capabilities to purchase gadgets needed for online learning not to mention the cost of internet in the country is one of the most expensive in Asia (Benitez, nd).

Philippines ready for online education	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	0	0
No	105	100%
Total	105	100%

**Table 12. Philippines readiness for online education**

Data from Table 12 reveals that the country is not ready for online education with frequency of 105 and a percentage of 100% respectively. Problems like connectivity issue, gadget, and expenses for interconnection, skills, knowledge in computer and competence in handling online education.

According to Kritz (2020) in the Manila Times, the Philippines is not ready for online schooling. The Department of Education (DepEd's) ICT Service Director Aida Yuvienco mentioned that "Public schools were connected to the internet with percentage of 26%."

Indeed, the data clearly shows that the respondents think that the current status of the country, in terms of its economic status, and the level of connectivity may not yet be enough to support online education on a massive scale. Thus, this may pose several effects on its presumed effectiveness. The results of the survey generally paint a negative reaction to the effectiveness of online education, as opposed to face to face learning.

There are, studies however, that suggest that no significant difference exist between online and face to face classes. A national study of differences between online and classroom-only set-up of community college students was done by Shea et.al (2016). They found that students who engaged in online education had either attained an associate degree or transferred to a different institution. Stack (2015) noted that there was no significant difference on the exam scores and student evaluations between sections of students that are exclusively enrolled in an online and face-to-face education environment.

Xu and Jaggars (2016) explored the online gaps between online and face-to-face courses using differences across types of students and academic subject areas. They found that there was a wider online performance gap in some academic subject areas including business, law, and nursing. Kelly et.al, (2007) stated that there was no significant difference in the proportion of appraisal text segments by delivery method. However, there were significant differences in the proportion of text segments in student evaluations.

Arinto (2016) explained the issues and challenges in open and distance e-Learning from the perspective of the Philippines and stated that there must be a plurality of pedagogical models based on understanding of pedagogical priorities. Ni (2013) stated that persistence in an online environment was more challenging in research method classes. However, the paper presented evidence that student performance as measured by grade was independent of the mode of instruction

## **Summary, conclusions and recommendations**

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic poses to create drastic and deep seated changes in the Philippine education landscape. The imposition of quarantine measures necessitated that a shift to online learning modality becomes inevitable because of the current crisis the whole world is experiencing. Learning must continue, thus, online modalities can be explored to make this possible.

There are, however, challenges that hounds this shift. In this study, data from 105 respondents who participated in the survey were mostly college students, and are enrolled in private schools with online learning set up. The data obtained from the survey indicated that online education may not be as effective as traditional learning modalities. There are a host of challenges that is attached to the matter, such as good internet connection, faculty and institutional readiness, in terms of accessibility and availability of online learning platforms. Economic issues also hinder some students from having the hardware and gadgets needed in an online learning environment.

It can also be gleaned from the study that the student respondents believe that the country is not yet ready for this kind of learning set up.

In the context of online education, internet connectivity is viable to be able to participate in such programs. In line with this, the need for suitable gadgets, such as laptops and mobile cellphones, are required (Singh & Han, 2005).

It can also be concluded that students should have the skills that are sufficient enough to easily maneuver into the learning site. The aforementioned

is to ensure that students can take part in the lessons being uploaded in a stable online platform. This could also help the students be more engaged in learning because they are able to go back to the lessons they did not understand, without technical distractions. Online sessions can be done anywhere, thus, allowing the students to take up their course whenever they want to; it permits them flexibility, where they can learn in their own convenient time (Poirier et al., 2018).

Although online sessions may have its advantages, it still has its limitations when it comes to its teaching effectiveness. The skills that are necessary for students to acquire in their courses cannot be taught in front of a screen. Traditional face-to-face classes are still important to make sure that students are able to apply what they have learned, physically. Also, this lets the professors monitor them whenever they have to carry out academic activities. This gives the students the motivation to accomplish their tasks.

Even though online education permits the students with the flexibility to learn at their own pace, this provides distractions. According to Keis et al. (2017), the flexible time allocation given in online classes indicates a lack of pressure on the students, leaving their activities on-hold due to a no fixed time completion. Another disadvantage is that whenever they have questions regarding lessons, wherein they need to consult their professors and classmates, online communication does not easily resolve their concern.

In a study by Shillair and Wash (2015), interaction with peers and instructors is an essential part of learning since it allows them to have a deeper

understanding of the class concepts, and online learning struggles to replicate this concept.

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that while online education is being harnessed, students still prefer traditional face to face learning. This is something that is understandable given the current limitations and challenges to the online learning environment, as well as the preference of students to the traditional face to face learning modality. Adjustments from the students, the faculty, the institutions of learning, and the government are deemed necessary in order to make online education serve its avowed intent.

It is recommended that the government, through the DICT, create measures and programs that will increase the level of connectivity in the country since for the duration of the pandemic, this will remain to be the most viable way to affect the continuity of learning. The ISP's must also strive to provide better, faster, and cheaper internet service to the people, especially in this time of crisis. Governments, both at the national and local levels can execute programs that will enable students to avail of gadgets necessary for online education. For the schools and professors, it is also recommended that recalibration of course plans be tailored to fit in online learning. The course plans must be carried out together with adequate and enhanced training, and re-tooling of faculty competencies in the delivery of lessons.

The limited number of respondents included in this study is an inherent limitation, and as such, it is recommended that further studies be made in the future with a bigger study sample to arrive at better findings and more solid assertions.

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# The dilemmatic faces of the beginning Filipino professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic: Going beyond tele-counselling sessions

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## Abstract

The COVID-19 global health crisis is a perfect storm to examine the terrain on how sectors of society are affected and how they should be supported. Of particular interest is the millennial group who, despite being digital natives, future-oriented, assertive, reward and ambitious, is enmeshed, inundated, and victimized by the consequences of the pandemic and its allied processes. Admittedly, the beginning professional group operates in an intersection of business decision to close down or downsize, tension in self and the family, and the need for resiliency during and even after the pandemic. This study highlights a micro-case reporting of the journey of six (6) beginning Filipino professionals as they health-seek through tele-counselling sessions. The narratives shared by this promising yet threatened sector of society during the pandemic opens a diaspora of experiences that underscores the need for tele-counselling sessions which are expected to play an important role in the lives of beginning professionals whose life's struggles deserve empirical attention, collective action and support structure. This paper concludes with a clear-cut exposition of the pluses, minuses, and promises of tele-counselling.

## Keywords

dilemmatic faces, beginning professionals, COVID-19, tele-counselling, micro-case reporting

## Introduction

The novel corona virus disease (COVID-19) is probably one of the most serious challenges the world has ever faced in recent years. The havoc

that this health crisis has brought to human life and its allied processes cannot be underestimated (Bucoy & de Guzman, 2020). As of August 2020,

more than 25 million cases have been confirmed globally, and the death toll has passed 847,000 with 210 countries and territories affected (WHO, 2020). Alarming, the most vulnerable segments of society, especially those living in extreme poverty, are being hit the hardest. According to the International Labor Organization (2020), full or partial lockdown measures which are being implemented across the world have affected more than 5 billion people which bear a significant impact on informal workers with an estimated number of 1.6 billion. Undoubtedly, this sector needs to earn an income to feed themselves and their families, as most of them cannot rely on income replacement or savings. Although people of any age with certain underlying medical conditions are at increased risk of contracting and succumbing to COVID-19 and those who live with them, pregnant women, older people (e.g. 60 years and older) and the younger ones are considered the vulnerable groups (WHO, 2020), not to mention the “forgotten” and excluded population which includes the homeless, the urban poor, people in jail, sex workers, and sexual minorities. Today, more than ever, the risks and challenges that confront these vulnerable groups call for more multi and inter-disciplinary empirical exploration for improved planning and decision-making at both the individual and societal levels.

Pending the discovery of vaccines and treatments to prevent the coronavirus (Le et al., 2020), people are faced with a number of painful dilemmas which include lockdown, isolation and loneliness due to social distancing, quarantine, school and business closures, online classes and work-from-home set-ups. The manifest and latent paralytic effects of the virus (Bucoy & de Guzman,

2020) are critical and alarming spaces that call for close examination and interrogation. For instance, individuals living in the informal economy, for their part, struggled with one moral dilemma: “to die from hunger or from the virus” (ILO, 2020). Additionally, employers are torn between saving the business or livelihoods (Batra & Sethi, 2020). Such moral dilemma has, in fact, prompted a number of companies and business establishments to observe downsizing which, according to de Guzman and Tio-Cuison (2020) is an extraordinary and demoralizing human resource practice during the pandemic.

In the latest Job Displacement Monitoring Report of the Philippine Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), more than 120,000 workers representing 4,955 private establishments were displaced nationwide (Aquino, 2020). Understandably, the decision to downsize the number of employees is governed by the last-in-first-out (LIFO) policy. Such policy indicates that between two or more employees affected by a retrenchment program, the last one employed will be the first to go and seniority of the ones hired earlier prevails. Presumably, the displaced workers during the pandemic are those coming from the millennial or Generation Y. According to Swanzen (2018), this generational cohort has been receiving attention as they have entered tertiary institutions and the workplace over the past decade. Previous studies suggest that characteristically, millennials want guarantee for their performance (Espinoza, 2011), expect organizational accommodation (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010), are ambitious, crave prestige and status in their jobs, impatient and expect immediate rewards in promotion and pay (Nitya & Anand, 2016), have higher self-esteem and

assertiveness (Twenge & Campbell, 2001 as cited in Deal et al., 2010), expect mentors, coaches, and programs to help them develop their skills so they can rise quickly to higher levels in the organization (Alsop, 2008), optimistic (Phillips, 2016), keener to change jobs (Pyöriä, 2017), and have higher levels of entitlement (Brant & Castro, 2019), among others.

This paper argues that the foregoing attributes of the millennials are threatened and weakened by the unprecedented and unexpected consequences of the global health crisis. As victims of the last-in-first-out policy of most organizations, the psychosocial effects of the pandemic, specifically to the beginning or early career professionals, as well as the tensions in oneself and family dynamics, cannot be overlooked nor underestimated. In fact, the forced migration from face-to-face interactions to conscious physical distancing (de Guzman & Clemente-Faustino, 2020), social isolation and loss of structured occupations and training are predicted to trigger recession on young people's mental health (Power et al., 2020). Studies conducted about the mental health of youth during the COVID-19 pandemic suggest that youth are at a risk of developing sleep disorders and psychological distress (Casagrande et al., 2020); changes in emotional state and behaviors which include difficulty concentrating, boredom, irritability, restlessness, nervousness, loneliness, uneasiness and worries (Orgiles et al., 2020).

Driven by the need to understand the impact of the COVID-19 on the life of beginning professionals as victims of untimely downsizing, ailing self and family dynamics, and other pandemic consequences, this study purports to describe

a portrait of a select group of Filipino young professionals as they withstand the ecology of the pandemic and the promises of their telecounseling session journey. Specifically, case scenarios are used to mirror specific situations of six selected beginning professionals in their quest to overcome their personal problems vis-à-vis their mental health concerns and personal challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Theoretical framing**

Gadamer's *Horizons of Understanding* (Reagan, 2012) was used as a framework for this paper to examine the importance of conversations as a process of understanding another person's needs, beyond what is verbally expressed in a counseling session. In an intense conversation, every detail of the experience narrated in a story is worth listening to, especially the intonation of voice, the whispers, sighs and meaningful silences. One's predisposition, family orientation and life's circumstances shape the strength of an experience expressed in a directed conversation. The person who will listen to these lived stories will tend to create different meanings and perspectives which may be the similar or in contrast to what was actually experienced. Thus, subjectivity, personal biases and self-orientation will shape one's perspective upon listening to one's lived experience. Moreover, the mode of disclosure; whether face to face, virtual and other modalities will give an important bearing to the interpretation. Spence (2017) highlighted that by using the Gadamerian lens, it will be easier to be guided in reflectively and reflexively engaging and expanding one's horizons of understanding. Thus, in the context of tele-counseling or providing tele-psychological services, many restrictions exist and may produce prejudices and

pre-understandings of the one being counseled. With the COVID -19 pandemic is experienced worldwide, virtual counseling/psychotherapy sessions are sought to be the most accessible help to address mental health dilemmas. Thus, being hermeneutic will be a challenge for providers of tele-counseling or tele-psychological services to fully understanding the dimensions of their counselees' lived stories needing clinical attention and further intervention plans.

The horizons of understanding in hermeneutic phenomenology reveals aspects of phenomena that are rarely noticed, described, or accounted for (Crowther et al., 2017). As tele-counselors, it is vital that overtones and undertones of the counselee's disclosures are taken note of, so as not to discount important indicators that will help in the counseling procedure. The counselees' language or nonlanguage use will determine the willingness or resistance in receiving help. As Regan (2012, p. 288) expressed, "hermeneutics promotes human potential for understanding the meaning of language to expand the infinite possibilities of human thought". Hence, if the tele-counselor is able to adapt this level of understanding, a successful counseling process is likely to be achieved. Specifically, in this paper, a closer focus is given to beginning/young professionals who are seeking consultations from professional counselors/psychologists due to difficulties experienced in relation to work transitions during the pandemic. The multi-faceted case scenarios of the beginning professionals can be hermeneutically explored to show the realistic essence of experiences where there are overwhelming moments of helplessness, despair and distress.

In this study, the horizons of understanding as a hermeneutic methodology, was used to account for the collective problematic experiences which the beginning professionals have in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. The case scenarios presented in this paper, which are the direct accounts of experiences will serve as what Stephenson and colleagues (2018) redounded to be positioning of the ontological nature of shared experiences within a specific context. It is the intent of this paper that through the Gadamerian principles in expanding the horizons of understanding, the interpreted intersubjectivity of the collective stories will determine what can be done to provide more intervention programs encompassing personal, work and home concerns beyond telecounseling.

## **Methodology**

### **Design**

This paper was written with the goal to describe the dilemmatic faces of a select group of beginning professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research utilized the case study design, a qualitative approach that uses the exploration of a time- and space-bound phenomenon (Alpi & Evans, 2019). Case study is a method of empirical inquiry bound to determine the ways and reasons of a phenomenon, with the intention to capture it holistically and in real-life contextualization (Yin, 2018). This case study design was used to explain the complexity of the real-life dilemmas of young professionals in the time of this unexpected pandemic. Specifically, it employed the micro-case study, which presented brief cases that occur in a short time frame, such as telecounseling sessions, with a clear problem of interest, detailed features

and obvious lessons but without an offered definitive solution (Alpi & Evans, 2019) for the tele-counselles.

### Subjects and study site

The themes which were generated in this study came from the narratives of six (6) beginning Filipino professionals who availed of the free tele-counselling services at the height of the imposed quarantine protocols in the country, where an escalating number of mental health issues were

reported. Purposive sampling facilitated the selection of the cases presented in this paper. The inclusion criteria are as follows: (1) Filipino; (2) aged 21-25 years old; (3) has been employed in their jobs for not more than 4 years; (4) has attended the free tele-counselling services; and (5) is facing a mental health concern due to the effects of the pandemic. Table 1 shows the summary of the case scenarios reflecting the pre- and peri-pandemic profile of the beginning professionals.

**Table 1. Highlights of the cases of Filipino beginning professionals before and during the pandemic**

Client	Pre-pandemic Situation	Peri-Pandemic Dilemmas	Reasons for Seeking Tele-counselling Services
Beginning Professional 1 ( <i>The Despairing Maiden</i> )	Slowly building up financial independence and a stable personal relationship with a significant other.	Laid off from work which causes financial instability and complicated personal relationship.	Self-harming behavior, crying spells, difficulty breathing, loss of appetite, insomnia and suicidal ideations
Beginning Professional 2 ( <i>The Grieving Daughter</i> )	With a stable career and business but struggles to overcome traumatic experiences.	Due to restrictions, idle moments cause mulling over problems and responsibilities.	Lack of sleep, lost interest in dealing with others and frequent panic attacks and suicidal ideations
Beginning Professional 3 ( <i>The Struggling Employee</i> )	Challenging work set-up for a newly hired employee who strives to be independent from an affluent family.	Failure to maintain a worklife balance due to quarantine protocols.	Anxious most of the time, overthinking, shortness of breath, chest pain and disrupted sleep patterns.
Beginning Professional 4 ( <i>The Laid Off Overseas Contract Worker</i> )	Salary from a work abroad compensates the finances and school needs of siblings.	Unemployment due to retrenchment causes inability to support the financial needs of the family.	Rapid heartbeat, shortness of breath, chest pain, sleepless nights, overwhelming sadness, upset, irritable moods and lack of interest to social interactions.
Beginning Professional 5 ( <i>The Suffering Breadwinner</i> )	A product of a broken family who works independently to support the financial needs of the family.	Loss of job triggers financial difficulties and recurring thoughts of parents' separation.	Loss of appetite, sleepless nights and social withdrawal.
Beginning Professional 6 ( <i>The Favored One</i> )	A favorite daughter and employee who suffers from sibling rivalry and harassment at work.	Lack of adaptive coping mechanism due to restriction of social interactions.	Palpitations, sweating of hands, over thinking, irritable, shortness of breath, self-harming behavior and suicidal attempts.

## Data collection procedure and ethical consideration

Pursuant to the practice of psychology and counselling, whether it is through providing face-to-face or remote services, ethical considerations are advertently complied with. These ethical measures include securing an informed consent before the conduct of the tele-counselling sessions, ensuring the confidentiality of data and safeguarding of personal identifiers; such as contact numbers, email, home and/or work addresses.

In narrating of each case, some details were purposely left undocumented in the descriptions presented to protect the identities of the actual clients. The authors made sure that no confidentiality was breached and has written the case scenarios with cautious adherence to the existing Philippine laws which govern the practice of psychology and counseling, which include, The Code of Ethics for Psychologists, The Philippine Mental Health Law (*Republic Act 11036*), The Psychology Law (*Republic Act 10029*), The Guidance and Counseling Act (*Republic Act 9258*) and the Data Privacy Act (*Republic Act 10173*).

## Findings

The following section paints the portrait of micro-case report of the dilemmatic passage of six (6) beginning Filipino professionals (aged 21-25) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their dilemmas which cut across personal, family, and workplace spheres prompted them to seek professional help by availing free tele-counselling services. The individual disclosures captured the situations prior the pandemic, how these were aggravated during the pandemic and how the tele-counselling sessions

assisted them to have a better grasp and create a refractive perseverance needed in improving their dilemmatic circumstances. The identities of the cases were hidden through Beginning Professional (BP) code names and personal and professional identifiers were carefully removed to protect privacy and confidentiality.

### Case Scenario 1: *The Despairing Maiden* *Female, 24*

Beginning Professional 1 (BP1) describes herself as a lost girl with a frightened soul who easily gets discouraged and depressed. It is difficult for her to be happy because she feels restricted and violated with the dynamics of her family. Completing a college degree, her parents pressured her to take the licensure examination for pharmacy but she failed. Receiving nothing but discouragement and reproach from her family, she immediately sought employment so as not to be financially dependent on them.

At the age of 23, she found a job, and then things began looking up as she saw a passage for leaving home. Fortunately, her job in a known pharmaceutical company afforded her to stay in a dorm and she relished in living independently. She also accepted a co-worker suitor and felt secured with the relationship. She would have stayed for a year now in her job if only COVID-19 did not happen. If it was not for the pandemic, her anxiety and depression would not have intensified too. Suddenly, her good start in living independently was falling apart. She was temporarily laid off from work, she was having problems with her boyfriend; who was also laid-off, and she is running out of savings to pay for monthly expenses. She began

to despair her situation, and felt sorry for herself. She feels lonely and has no one to support or uplift her. She began hurting herself, has crying spells, difficulty breathing, loss of appetite and insomnia but refused to ask for help, especially from parents. She thought of suicide many times and being alone in her apartment makes it easy to attempt to.

In despair, she sought professional help through an online psychosocial support program and while she had sessions with a tele-counselor, she was also referred to a psychiatrist to stabilize mood and sleep. BP1 was given prescriptions but cannot buy the medicines due to her depleted savings. She does not want to ask for monetary help from family or let them know that she is seeking professional help. As the quarantine period continues, BP1's sessions with the tele-counselor frequented, relying on the sessions to manage her anxiety and depressive symptoms and applying relaxation and de-stressing techniques to ease her tensions and panic attacks. In one insightful tele counselling session, she decided to go back to her family while she is out of work. She was convinced that there is more to her life and that it is unfair to turn her pains inwardly or continue her self-defeating practices. Now that BP1 is staying with her family, she is re-adjusting and trying her best to keep herself together through the assistance of the tele-counselor. Going back home made her despair for life again and her old fears and pains from childhood and early youth days were revived. She feels emotionally detached from her family and does not talk with them even if they see each other daily. What makes her more anxious and desperate right now is waiting to have another job and going back to her place. Her plans to raise money, keep enough savings to support herself and go back to living independently still stand.

## **Case Scenario 2: *The Grieving Daughter***

*Female, 25*

Beginning Professional 2 (BP2) replays her anticipated death over and over in her head. She already envisioned meeting a fatal car accident, jumping from her 32nd floor condominium and drowning herself in the bathtub. She revealed that these are not impossible and she knows her ability to complete any of these suicidal thoughts if everything else fails. However, all of these are in her head and becomes her consoling thoughts when anxious or distressed. She is seen by her family members as the most practical, strongest and bravest among them. However, they do not have a clue that BP2 has been suicidal since she high school, looking at death as a final escape, just like what her mother did. She witnessed her mother's completed suicide when she was only a child and that tragedy is still ingrained in her mind. That is why when her stepfather died from a heart attack day after her mother committed suicide, she just felt dazed and numbed. She grew up looking at life as something you have to work hard for, but death is her comfort when she is ready to give up.

BP2 is gainfully employed starting the age of 21 even before she obtained her college degree. In her four years of employment, she was able to build a stable marketing career and a business in baking to make her self-sustaining. She supervises her own professional pursuits, controls her major expenditures and assumes responsibilities beyond her personal needs. Highly independent, BP2 takes care of her sisters, aunts and grandmother. She drowns herself with work, travel, doing errands for her family and investing with small scale-businesses because any idle time will cause her to mull over her



problems and when she is tired, she sleeps deep, not really caring if she will not wake up the next day.

When COVID-19 pandemic happened, she struggled hard with lockdown and restricted with movements. Suddenly, she was having a lot of free time at home, confined and idle. She cannot go to sleep, had no interest in dealing with supposed business transactions and had frequent panic attacks. She also found caring for her family burdening and cuts communication with them. But then her grandmother suddenly died. Everyone was in shock and depended on BP2 to take care of everything—finances, interment and keeping everyone sane. It struck BP2 that she had a lifelong responsibility for others but nobody seems to notice that she also needs help. This prompted her to seek professional support and to receive virtual counseling. She felt safe disclosing to her telecounselor and unabashedly shared about her most morbid thoughts and feelings. She also realized the guilt-laden life she is living; thinking that she could have saved her mother from committing suicide. All these she has to face alone, without the support of her family who does not have a clue what is really going on with her and does not get to talk or give importance to mental health. Nonetheless, now that she is taking prescriptions from virtual consultations with a psychiatrist, her sleep started to be regulated and has lessened panic attacks. She started adapting a work-from-home routine and resumed her baking business online. Right now, she continues her telecounseling sessions and finds practical mindfulness activities, self-caring practices and relaxation techniques as healthy outlets when stressed and when in need to divert self from suicidal ideations. Although she was very

honest to say that she still looks at death as a final relief to all worldly problems, she is working better now at loving herself more, to continuously care for her family and to delay her death wish.

### **Case Scenario 3: *The Struggling Employee***

*Female, 21*

Beginning Professional 3 (BP3) is a probationary employee in a private company. She just recently joined the work force and was promised to be regularized at work after a year of excellent performance. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, she was experiencing over exhaustion due to the demands of her work. She oftentimes feels the need to impress everyone so that she will get the permanent status. Whenever she commits mistakes, she feels incomplete and worthless. She is always worried that her supervisor will notice the mistakes and take them against her much needed regularization.

Back at home, she is the youngest in the family and everything is provided to her, even before she asks for it. When she was in college, life was so easy. Her parents and siblings were all supportive of her studies both emotionally and financially. So, when she finally got her baccalaureate degree, she strived hard to land a job and to prove that their sacrifices are all worthy. She never imagined that the transition from a pampered life to meeting the “real” life will be so difficult.

BP3 reported feeling anxious most of the time, over-thinking about many situations in her workplace. This is characterized by shortness of breath and chest pains which contribute to her disrupted sleep patterns. Work was very challenging before the pandemic,

but it became more and more demanding due to the quarantine protocols set by the government. Going to work and returning home became stressful because of lack of public transportation. She cannot afford to rent an apartment because her salary is not enough, and she does not want to ask money from her parents nor her siblings anymore. Thus, on a daily basis for months now, she has been commuting. More so, she does not want them to know her daily suffering, because she wants to project growing up to be an independent young woman. She also does not want to miss a day for work in fear of upsetting her evaluation. These affected her so much that she became detached to her family and friends. She felt losing her work-life balance due to the pandemic, because much of her time was consumed in commuting and having eight hours of office schedule. She is even left without time for herself.

It was her first time to seek help from a mental health professional. She said her life was going pretty well and beautifully; only when she started work that life became taxing for her. BP3 attended two sessions of tele-counselling, and was taught of breathing and relaxation techniques to relieve the anxiety and make her feel more relaxed to aid deep sleep. The tele-counselor helped to consider re-affirming her worth and reframing her thoughts about her situation at work. Finally, the tele-counselor convinced her of the importance of letting her family know her present struggles.

After adhering to the advice of the tele-counselor, at present, she reported better sleeping patterns, a more relaxed workplace condition and a more satisfying relationship with her own self, family and friends.

#### **Case Scenario 4: *The Laid Off Overseas Contract Worker***

*Male, 23*

Beginning Professional 4 (BP4), is a young contract worker in one of the Middle East countries. He started to work abroad as an engineer right after he got his license. His salary abroad is quite sufficient to provide for his needs and to support siblings at home. For two years of being the breadwinner of the family, he felt so fulfilled and loved for being able to help finance the studies of two siblings.

However, when the pandemic hit the construction sector abroad, he was one of those who lost jobs. He was forced to go back to the Philippines and was advised that when the situation normalizes, he will have to re-apply to the company. At home; he felt so helpless, from receiving a huge salary to having no salary at all for four months caused him much anxiety. He worries that if this will continue; his savings will be affected and can no longer give family support in the following months. He tried online selling but failed because he admitted not being a people-person, and finds it difficult to talk to strangers. He felt even more devastated because it seems he lost his siblings' and mother's affection without financial help. Being unable to provide for their needs gives him rapid heartbeat, shortness of breath, chest pain and sleepless nights. The uncertainty of when will he be able to return to being the breadwinner causes him too much sadness. This sadness overwhelms him to the point of not function well as evidenced by upset and irritable moods and lack of interest to social interactions.

BP4 considers himself as an introvert. He finds it difficult to translate his feelings into words

especially to someone he does not know. However, his sadness became unbearable that he decided to contact tele-counselling services. During the first session, he found it difficult to disclose feelings on his situation. However, establishing rapport and trust with the counselor, he has slowly shared the thoughts that bothered him. He was reminded to remain hopeful about the situation and to personally talk with his family to air concerns. The tele-counselor let him consider some tips to overcome anxiety and depression and some creative ways to surpass this difficult situation.

Upon follow-up, BP4 is now into gardening and seriously considers it as a business venture. He felt more relieved by re-directing negative emotions to something more productive. Although situation in his family has not changed yet and still cannot return to work, he now feels more relaxed and hopeful. His condition improved by being able to cultivate an old interest into something therapeutic to him.

#### **Case Scenario 5: *The Suffering Breadwinner***

*Male, 22*

Beginning Professional 5 (BP5) reported frequent emotional stress and depression strongly associated with the pandemic. It is also during the pandemic that he was stranded at his boarding house in the city, while his family was in the province and he lost his job as a marketing agent in an insurance company.

He disclosed that his parents separated when he was in Grade 4. His father had another family, leaving him and two younger siblings with his mother. His mother is an online seller and the money is not enough to support them. Since then, in

order to continue his studies, he became a working student constantly changing jobs until he graduated with a business-related course. He had suffered as a working student making him independent and became the breadwinner of the family.

BP5 reported having loss of appetite, sleepless nights and social withdrawal. Common triggers for these thoughts include the uncertainty of job, state of family, and recurring thoughts of parents' separation. Protective factors include being busy (*trying a new hobby and being productive*), applying online for a job, watching funny videos, looking at online inspirational content and prayers. He mentions that these usually help him cope in managing thoughts; however, there are times when managing prove difficult. Due to the persistence of these stressors, he decided to seek further help with a mental health professional. He was given tele-counselling and psychoeducation for better management of his current condition. After two weeks, a follow-up was made and it was noted that his condition improved. His support system was also strengthened and has a positive thought for a bright future for him and his family.

#### **Case Scenario 6: *The Favored One***

*Female, 23*

Beginning professional 6 (BP6) is single, graduated with flying colors in her college degree. She presently works in an advertising company. According to her, anxiety issues started when she was in college. She usually experiences palpitations, sweating of hands and shortness of breath. The reason is the usual loneliness teenagers experience, the pressure in school and issues in the family (sibling rivalry). Her older sister views her as a perfect daughter for their parents and envies her. This created a gap between

them. She discloses crying silently at night, during times she is burdened with problems. She cannot disclose anything to her parents, worried about their hypertension. At work, they tend to view her as the “boss favorite” since her opinion is favored most of the time. She experienced being verbally harassed by some workmates and even thrown some papers on her face. She dreamed for her job at present, but now, she is torn of whether to stay or quit.

During the pandemic, things worsened since she tends to over-think about many things and became very sensitive and irritable. She already attempted suicide twice by taking overdose medicines, and engages in self-injury. Her common coping strategies was to have outings with college friends, malling and doing some shopping, but stopped because of pandemic. Due to the persistence of things that cause her anxiety, she decided to seek for further help with a mental help professional. During the session, counselling and some coping strategies were discussed to help manage feelings of anxiety. Psycho-education were done to build better relationships and give information to overcome situations without suicidal thoughts. Follow-up was made about her condition and notably, she deeply expresses appreciation about the mental health services extended to her. She also mentions that it is the best decision that she made in her entire life. She also claimed understanding and knowing herself more and has better relationship with her sister and workmates.

## Discussion

With the purpose of developing an understanding on how the COVID-19 global pandemic affected today’s youth, this micro-case

study highlighted certain personal, social, emotional and financial difficulties of a select group of beginning Filipino professionals. The documented tele-counselling narratives of the participants yielded to three interlocking zones that typify the dilemmatic faces of beginning professionals. These include Territorializing Zone (*Where am I now?*), which represents the terrain of career uncertainty, quest for social and emotional stability, and financial independence, (b) Tormenting Zone (*What went wrong?*), which depicts the distress caused by the COVID-19 and its havoc that threatened social and emotional resiliency and financial stability, (c) Trussing Zone (*What better pathways can be taken now?*), which shows the beginning professionals’ initiative to seek professional help through tele-counselling sessions and use this as a meaningful trajectory that facilitates their renewed sense of direction amidst the challenges of the pandemic.

### Territorializing Zone (*Where am I now?*)

The identified faces of the six (6) beginning Filipino professionals (aged 21-25) in this study may represent the attributes of individuals belonging to the Generation Y or the millennials. Comparable previous studies (see Alsop, 2008; Brant & Castro, 2019; Espinoza, 2010; Hershatter & Epstein, 2010, Nitya & Anand, 2016) describe this group as those needing guarantee and accommodation for their performance, ambitious, entitled, craving job prestige and status, impatience, assertiveness and expectant of promotion and pay. Yet, despite these social ascendant and domineering characteristics, the cases described in this study had self-doubts and an affirmation need to discern how they are faring by themselves. Transition-wise, they have just completed a developmental stage where they are

still socially, emotionally and financially dependent on their parents and the remnants of this comfort still linger. Now that they already belong to the workforce, they are facing yet another milestone towards adulthood and independency.

Prior the pandemic, these six (6) beginning professionals showed the initial stages of building themselves and their careers which vary depending on personal and family dispositions. For instance, in the first (*The Despairing Maiden*) and third case scenarios (*The Struggling Employee*) they started to enjoy financial independence and living autonomously after years of restricting and overbearing home dynamics. This is in contrast with the fourth case scenario (*The Laid off Overseas Contract Worker*), whose salary from working abroad is allotted for the finances and school needs of siblings. As the family becomes more dysfunctional and obstructive, the more the beginning professionals struggled in their pre-pandemic lives. Like the fifth case scenario (*The Suffering Breadwinner*) who came from a broken family, the sixth case scenario (*The Favored One*) with sibling rivalries and second case scenario (*The Grieving Daughter*) who experienced chronic trauma in the family. Considering all these personal, home and career experiences, they operate in the Territorializing Zone, which is collectively referred as a state where beginning professionals are pre-occupied with finding the right place as they curve the dynamics of their career and how they matter to people around them while moving slowly away from the comforts of parents and family to gain financial independence.

The individual and collective narratives of these beginning professionals, afforded to highlight

their quest to establish important aspects of their lives. Revealingly, indicators of how these beginning professionals will survive in the rigors of adult life manifested in the parental relationships and familial circumstances affecting one's self-management skills. This is in consonance with the findings of Givertz and Segrin (2014), emphasizing that controlling parental behavior is associated with diminished self-efficacy and exaggerated psychological entitlement. Further, these six (6) beginning professionals present risk factors for mental health issues with the dysfunctional families and poor home dynamics that they have. Collishaw and colleagues (2016), for their part, accentuated that resilience is developed if family, social, cognitive, and health behavior protective factors are evident. Considering the uncertainties faced by the beginning professionals in this study, a make-or-break outcome is most likely to happen if their risk factors are not countered with protective factors. As they start to revolve around the idea of being socially and emotionally competent, beginning professionals need to develop a strong self-compassion and psychological resilience (Neff, & McGehee, 2010) to surpass personal, social and emotional difficulties. Faced with this, it is important for educators, advocates and mental health professionals to consider structuring parent education and family support programs focused on closely identifying, understanding and breaking maladaptive chains within the family which can become pervasive in adulthood.

### **Tormenting Zone (*What went wrong?*)**

Through the careful comparisons of significant verbalizations, emotional disclosures and reveries of the participants, their dilemmas during the pandemic were successfully unfolded. Distressingly,

their conditions speak of their tumultuous and chaotic journey since the country was declared with lockdown and restrictions imposed. From their cases scenarios, it was noted how the pandemic affected their daily independent lives which they were starting to get accustomed with. Their reported symptoms while quarantined reflect mental, social, emotional sequelae which they are ineffectively handling. While some of them continued going to work, majority of the cases showed retrenchment, unemployment and being financially crippled. Besides the feelings of uncertainty for safety, risk of being exposed to the virus in the workplace (Da Silva & Neto, 2020), there are psychological and physical pressure (Barello et al., 2020), social isolation and loss of structured occupations and training (Power, et al., 2020) which fueled the threats to their psychological wellbeing.

Unfortunately, the beginning professionals of this qualitative inquiry showed great distress and found themselves operating in the Tormenting Zone with the ongoing pandemic. Collectively, this zone is defined as being enmeshed with twist and turns brought about by the present global health crisis, the beginning professionals' sense of direction and purpose is shattered by the social restrictions, retrenchment and financial difficulties resulting to certain psychological imbalances and dilemmas. Similarly, recent studies conducted about the mental health of young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic suggest their being at a risk of developing sleep disorders and psychological distress (Casagrande et al., 2020); changes in emotional state and behaviors which include difficulty concentrating, boredom, irritability, restlessness, nervousness, loneliness, uneasiness and worries (Orgiles et al., 2020).

As seen in this study, the beginning professionals' social and emotional resolve was greatly endangered as the pandemic heightened. Various emotional and behavioral responses such as anxiety, depression, self-harming behaviors affected sleep, eating patterns, breathing and of having headaches and body pains while operating in the Tormenting zone. Considering their personal and family backgrounds, it was found that coping responses depend on emotional stability and personality (Volk et al., 2020). Moreover, their pre-COVID emotional stability greatly affected coping practices and the acceptance of the social, emotional and financial changes during the pandemic. This was also clearly accentuated by Shanahan and colleagues (2020) who mentioned that pre-pandemic distress, secondary consequences, and pre-pandemic social stressors were found to be associated with emotional distress during this global health crisis. Hence, it is the hope of this research to contribute and strengthen the mental health advocacies promoting psychological well-being by starting with prevention. This paper is driven by the need to understand the current state of the beginning Filipino professionals with a view to guide them in building better psychological resilience to cope with the adversities of life, especially in dealing with a pandemic.

### ***Trussing Zone (What better pathways can be taken now?)***

Challenged by the tremors and disillusionment of the pandemic, the six (6) beginning professionals found themselves surviving as they enter the realm of the Trussing Zone. This zone refers to beginning Filipino professionals' initiative to health-seek through tele-counselling sessions provided by voluntary groups which afforded

them with a meaningful space to re-examine their lifeworld to rebuild the broken pieces of themselves with a renewed sense of direction and purpose in life. Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic also opened a portal of social and mental awareness which facilitated to strengthen mental health services (Buenaventura et al., 2020; Toquero & Talidong, 2020) and revitalized the acts of shared humanity among Filipinos.

Due to the pandemic, different adaptation of the tele-counseling was carried out. This is especially true in the Philippines, where providing tele-counseling (Laguilles-Villafuerte & de Guzman, 2020) becomes one of the modified modalities to provide the surge of mental health concerns of Filipinos. As this paper highlighted six (6) real-case scenarios adapted from the tele-counseling sessions, it created meaningful spaces to capture and understand the struggles of beginning professionals in adapting to the changes brought by the pandemic and how tele-counseling services facilitated their openness and ability to practice more acceptable coping strategies.

It was emphasized in the cases how the beginning professionals benefited from the tele-counseling sessions received and how it helped them productively reconstruct their lives and to improve how they take care of their mental health. Recent studies (Pierce et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2020) show evidence of how effective tele-mental health services are to address depression and anxiety, and other psychological concerns. Pandemic-wise, these feelings may persist throughout the quarantine period with residual effects after several months that confinement will be lifted (Brooks et al., 2020). More

than the help they received from the tele-counseling sessions is the need to empower them with self-care practices and a balance across the wellness aspects to assure that they are engaged in avenues to make themselves feel intrinsically better. Although receiving tele counseling sessions are vital to guide them in addressing their mental health concerns, it is crucial to make them self-reliant and discourage dependency towards the counseling process. Going beyond tele-counseling will entail the government establishing more concrete actions/programs that will include psychological preparedness (Talevi et al., 2020) in emergency management, that institutions will provide avenues for workplace support to the beginning professionals as a chance to adjust to work settings and transitions. Ultimately, the realization of family members that mental health concerns are not just made up or imagined discomforts or overdramatic responses will go a long way in understanding personal, family, and specialized challenges which the beginning professionals experience.

## **Lesson Learned**

While the far-reaching impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has called the attention of all sectors of society for better crisis knowledge management, this micro-case study serves as an eye opener about the silent yet disturbing journey of beginning professionals who, despite the gift of being youthful and the pluses of being a millennial, were shaken and perturbed by the consequences of this global health crisis. True enough, the narratives shared in this study are powerful lenses to magnify and recognize the fact that beginning professionals are in the state of crisis. The spectrum of narratives captured in the three intersecting zones of territorializing, tormenting, and trussing may be

considered as a human dashboard that displays the dilemmas that beginners in the professional world of work may encounter. The extent to which they develop readiness and resiliency in the field depends, in great measure, on the availability and responsiveness of support structure provided at home, the community and in the workplace. Findings of this study underscore the ever-evolving role and promises of telecommunication technology or tele-counselling in bridging the gap between clients and mental

health professionals. The benefits that have accrued from this modality as captured by the beginning professionals' experiences with tele-counselling sessions, especially on how they look at themselves in particular and life in general, are valuable starting points to examine the affordances of tele-counselling in global crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The pluses, minuses, and promises (Table 2) of this modality deserve a colloquy of ideas, intersections of innovations, and dialogue of expectations.

**Table 2. Pluses, Minuses and Interesting Promises (PMI) of tele-counselling**

Pluses	Minuses	Interesting Promises
Ensuring safety for both client and counsellor by reducing the risk for spreading and contracting the virus.	Legal and ethical matters such as duty of care, role in emergency situations, privacy and confidentiality, and security of data.	<b>Better public health:</b> Providing a feasible alternative for the existing and grossly scarce mental health service.
Improve access to mental health specialty care that might not otherwise be available ( <i>in rural and remote areas</i> ).	Communication: Communicating across a digital channel can make it more difficult to read body language and other subtle cues thus, authenticity of the clients' personality and presenting problem might be misperceived ( <i>different in reality</i> ).	<b>For direct service or as an adjunct to other mental health services:</b> It uses technology ( <i>i.e., video conferencing, wireless communications, remote data collection and image streaming</i> ) for direct service or as an adjunct to other mental health services.
Reduce delays in care and barriers of distance or potential transportation barriers, such as lack of transportation or the need for long commutes by bringing care to the patient's location.	Genuineness of the counselling relationship might not be established and hard to establish rapport and empathy.	<b>Ready-accessible:</b> Helps maintain high levels of clients' access, utilization and meet patients' needs for convenient and affordable mental health services.
Reduce the barrier of stigma and discrimination.	Technical difficulties: problems in internet connection.	<b>Diversity in therapy:</b> Format, intervention models and therapists providing treatment.
Convenience ( <i>good option for anyone already seeing a therapist in person, but cannot make every appointment in-person</i> ).	Counselling environment: lack of space or venue for proper counselling session.	<b>More privacy:</b> People who choose telecounselling do not have to sit in busy waiting rooms but can seek treatment in the privacy of their own homes especially for symptomatic patients, to stay at home and communicate with counselors through virtual channels, helping to reduce the spread of the virus to mass populations.
Improve continuity of care and follow-up (short term).	Limited information that will put the client at heightened risk if not managed well.	<b>Flexible clinical practice:</b> in terms of time savings and its appeal to all ages, from younger to older adults.
Lower costs.	Time-limited intervention	



Impliedly, the foregoing exposition of the ontology and axiology of tele-counselling invites a collective rethinking of the current delivery of the said modality to identify new frontiers, policies, and support structures to be able to maximize its benefits while facilitating the successful and resilient journey of beginning professionals in times of crisis and life's adversities.

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# **The Young and the Restless: A youth based assessment on the implementation of the Enhanced Community Quarantine in NCR and its impact on mental well-being**

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## **Abstract**

The imposition of quarantine measures and lockdowns initiated by governments around the world were carried out with the hope of checking the tide of COVID-19 transmission. While this may have contributory effects, the impact of lockdowns, especially to the mental and emotional state of individuals, the youth in particular, cannot be undermined. This study employed a mixed method design through an online survey and focus group discussion (FGD). It was found from the majority of the data culled, based on the individual's basic demographic profile, that stress and anxiety are the leading mental health challenges. Notably, the second leading factors are loneliness and isolation, as well as economic worries brought forth by the pandemic. Due to the ages of the respondents ranging from 19-22 years old, surprisingly, the strongest factor that influenced their mental health state are the classes conducted online and the overall new mode of learning. The internet and social media, as well as support from the immediate family, proved to be the integral coping systems for the youth in these trying times.

## **Keywords**

enhanced community quarantine, COVID-19, youth, mental well-being

## **Introduction**

The year 2020 has spawned the entire world in unimaginable levels, largely due to the onset of a pandemic brought by a new strain of coronavirus that was said to have originated in Wuhan, China. There is without a doubt that COVID-19 is an ongoing health concern globally, as the number of infected individuals still continue to rise (Zaharieva, 2020). In fact, drastic measures such as lockdowns were implemented by many nation-states in the hope of possibly containing the spread of the deadly

virus. It is also worthy to note that the impact and strain on healthcare were experienced by nations at different scales with the countries boasting of far more advanced and superior healthcare systems such as the USA and Italy (which have been overwhelmed by the number and severity of cases) (Duddu, 2020).

Cash and Patel (2020) assert that in other countries, patients still die from other illnesses

aside from COVID-19 and the implementation of lockdowns have restricted their access to health care. This goes to show that drastic measures can strain the health care delivery, thus affecting the health outcomes in the health care system of a country which can be detrimental to their development. Moreover, Musselwhite, Avineri, and Susilo, (2020) succinctly points out how this COVID-19 outbreak also highlighted the importance of rethinking the basic design of social and economic resilience, in particular for disadvantaged poorer and rural communities, during such a disruptive event. When the low income population is neglected, it could lead to detrimental results, as their living conditions are favorable to the spread of the virus. Hence, a huge increase in the number of cases is also expected. This creates a big impetus on the mental capacity of individuals to bear the brunt of this current situation.

Furthermore, Cavallo, Donoho, and Forman (2020) also explained how the pandemic is making the healthcare system reach beyond its capacity and making it challenging for the healthcare workers to make rational decisions for the patients infected with the virus. The hospitals are running low on resources that are used for the patients such as hospital beds. They stated how some hospitals can only accommodate a number of patients due to their limited capacity. They observed how Italy's healthcare delivery was severely affected due to the limited number of hospital equipment, drug supplies, and personal protective equipment (PPE). A scenario like this actually poses a heavy effect on the mental well-being of individuals with anxiety and inherent fears.

Leadership within the public health system is also an important element that affects the responsiveness of the country during a pandemic. In fact, Hennekens et. al. (2020) stated that the pieces of evidence provided by the COVID-19 pandemic shows serious concern and urgent need for a public health leadership. Public officials that have direct control on resources should be trained to know how to maximize the resources, at the same time minimizing the risk of their constituents from getting infected. Hence, political efforts are similarly one of the crucial elements that determine the chance of success in overcoming a pandemic.

The Philippine government decided on authorizing a lockdown in March of this year. The decision of the government to place the country, especially the NCR, under ECQ or Enhanced Community Quarantine came after reports of community transmission of COVID-19 has been prevalent and widespread. The two months under ECQ proved to be challenging particularly from the mental health perspective. The anxiety brought forth by the pandemic has exerted a great toll on the mental well-being of the people especially the youth.

Mental health, being part of the health care delivery system, must be taken into account. There were numerous reports of increased concerns about the mental health of the citizens as lockdown policies were implemented. The pandemic has brought upon serious anxiety and panic among the public. This also increased the pressure in the health care delivery of mental health patients. According to The Lancet Psychiatry (2020), the continuous neglect for mental health services through

implementation of weak systems will surely be reflected in this pandemic, as it is a vulnerable area. They emphasized the importance of mental health by stating that in order to develop a fair society and health systems when the spread of the COVID-19 recedes, mental illnesses must be addressed as an essential area of health that needs utmost attention (Killgore, et.al, 2020).

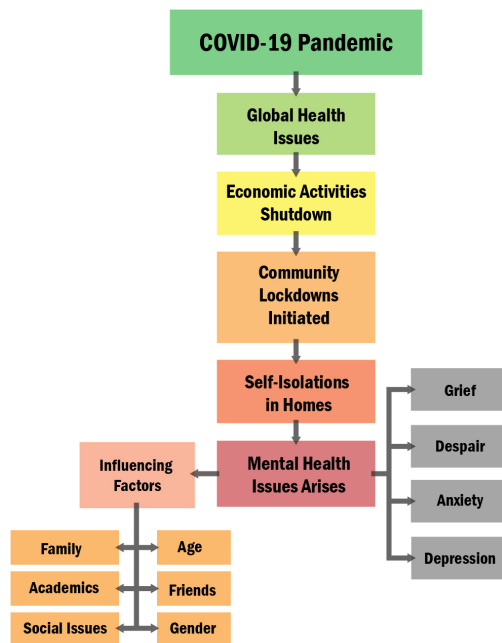
This study is mainly anchored on the assessment of the imposition of ECQ and its impact on mental health from the perspective of the youth. From the works of Garcia, Cuellar-Flores (2020), Su, et.al (2020), and Brooks et.al (2020), it was demonstrated effectively how lockdowns and quarantines imposed mental and emotional impact on the youth.

Specifically, the paper sought answers to the following research questions:

1. How did the youth perceive the imposition of ECQ (Enhanced Community Quarantine), learn and inquire about the general condition or status over a group of individuals in quarantine/ lockdown? How are they managing to cope with the stress and mental/emotional effects they are sustaining from the current crisis?
2. How did the imposition of the ECQ affect the mental well- being of the respondents who mainly belong to the youth sector?
3. What are some possible recommendations that can be made based on the observations made from the lens of the youth concerning the necessary outcomes of the study?

The paper aimed at quantitatively correlating the responses based on the overall reported ratings of the mental health status of the respondents, reported ratings on the fear of COVID-19, and mental health problems and challenges encountered while in quarantine. Moreover, learning the influencing factors (i.e. family, friends, social media, work and, education) which affect their mental health and how they have responded to coping with these mental health problems. The researcher hopes that upon correlating the imposition of the enhanced community quarantine and identifying its effects on the mental well-being of the youth, it may lead in helping the citizens propagating awareness, and making the necessary adjustments to increase the efficacy and efficiency of the imposed policies.

**Figure 1. Theoretical Framework**





## **Methodology**

### **Research design**

A mixed method design was employed in the study. Primary data was obtained through a quantitative technique using a self-constructed survey questionnaire as an instrument. A descriptive survey was used to learn and analyze the effects brought upon from quarantine and lockdown to an individual's mental health under the threat of COVID-19. To further substantiate the data obtained from the survey, a qualitative measure through a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was made.

### **Research environment**

In the light of the inherent logistical limitations brought about by the ongoing pandemic, the researchers disseminated online (i.e. through social media messaging) survey questionnaires to be answered by the target population. The FGD was conducted using the video-app Zoom.

### **Research subjects**

The total respondents of the study were 30 young adults, all of whom are within the age bracket of 18 to 25 years old. Particularly, those who experienced being under quarantine and lockdown brought upon by the pandemic. Majority of the participants were 19 years old. The researcher made use of convenience sampling to determine the respondents, since it was voluntary participation and was sent to all available contacts. The researcher purposely selected the age range of the participants, since individuals within that age range are more prone to the negative feelings caused by isolation and social depravity, combined with the paranoia,

anxiety, and fear of the virus. For the FGD, a total of seven participants were included in the session. The breakdown follows:

- 2 - Student leaders
- 2 - Barangay Youth volunteers
- 1 - Psychologist
- 2 - Parents

### **Procedure**

To ensure the utmost safety and health of both the researchers and participants, it was decided that surveying would be conducted online through Google Forms. This digital platform was chosen for its convenience, accessibility, and ease of dissemination. The link to the survey was sent across three social media sites (Facebook Messenger, Twitter direct message, and Instagram story) to reach a wider range of contacts. Responses were collected and ended on May 20, 2020. After the target number of respondents was reached, the survey link was closed for access.

### **Research instrument**

For this study, the quantitative data was obtained through the use of Google Forms to create an online survey split into 2 sections. The 1st section asked for the participants' demographic profile (age, gender, occupation), whereas the 2nd section contained questions focusing on mental health during the quarantine and lockdown. For the FGD, a 10-item guide questionnaire was used as the instrument for the qualitative data.

## Results and Discussion

### A. Quantitative data Results

The responses from the 30 respondents were used to substantiate the results and findings of this study.

Figure 2 shows the ratio of the ages that responded to the survey. Of the total number of respondents 14 are aged 19; 11 respondents are 20 years old; 4 respondents are 18 years old, and 1 respondent is 22 years old.

**Figure 2. Ratio of the ages that responded to the survey**

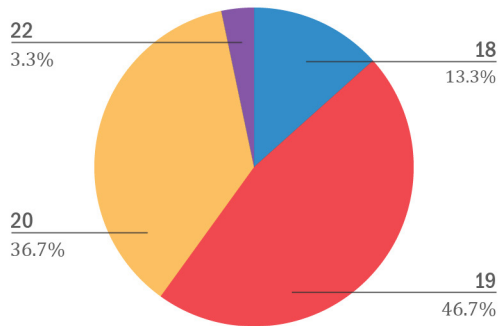


Figure 3 depicts the ratio of the genders that participated in the survey. Fourteen are female, thirteen are male, while three would rather not say.

**Figure 3. Ratio of the genders that participated in the survey**

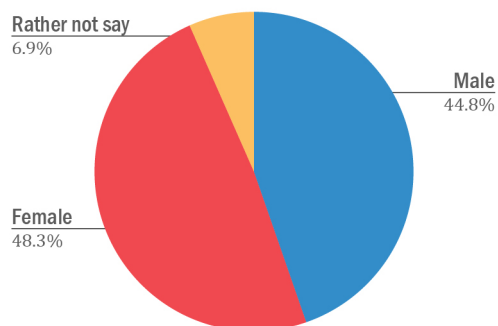


Figure 4 represents the ratio of respondents currently in quarantine. Twenty-eight responded “yes,” while two responded “no.”

**Figure 4. Ratio of respondents currently in quarantine**

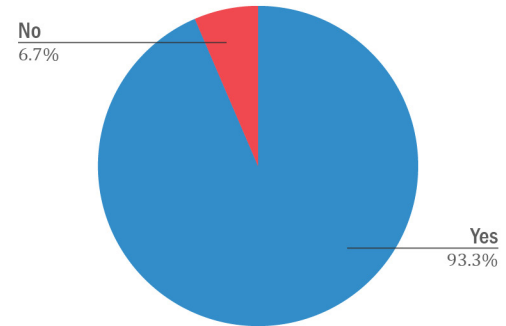


Figure 5 represents how long the respondents have currently been in quarantine. Among the 28 respondents that said they are currently in quarantine, 14 have been in quarantine for more than 10 weeks, 9 have been in quarantine for 8 weeks, 4 have been in quarantine for 9 weeks, while 1 has been in quarantine for 4 weeks.

**Figure 5. Ratio of the length of quarantine**

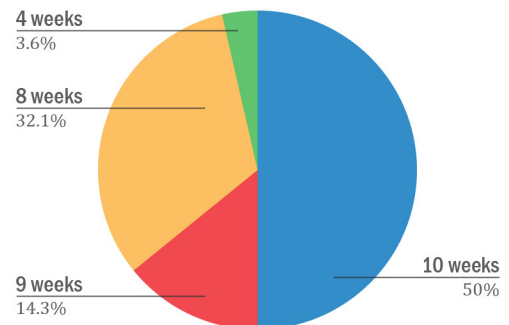


Figure 6 depicts the overall mental health of the respondents. The respondents were asked to rate their overall mental health from 1 to 6, with 1 being “excellent,” and 6 being “poor.” Thirteen rated themselves 3, seven rated themselves 4, six rated

themselves 5, two rated themselves 2, one rated self 1, and the other, rated self 6.

**Figure 6. Respondents rate their overall mental health**

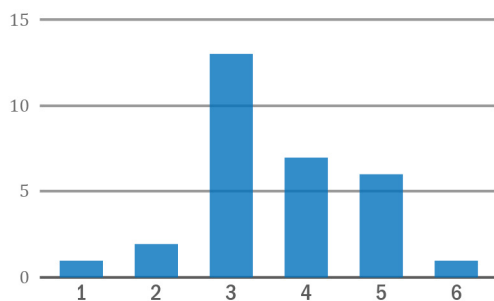


Figure 7 shows how much the respondents fear COVID-19. The respondents were asked to rate their fear of COVID-19 from 1 to 6, 1 being “no fear,” and 6 being “very fearful.” Eleven rated their fear as 4, six rated their fear as 5, five rated their fear as 2, three rated their fear as 6, and one rated their fear as 1.

**Figure 7. Respondents rate their fear of COVID-19**

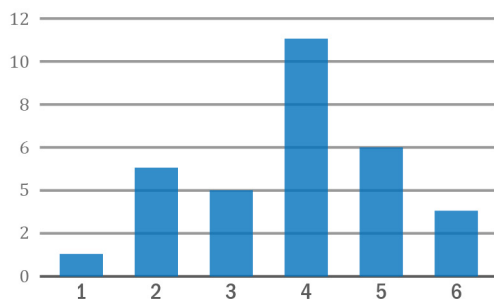


Figure 8 represents the ratio of respondents that experienced mental health challenges during the quarantine. Twenty-seven respondents checked “yes,” while three checked “no.”

**Figure 8. Ratio of respondents that experienced mental health challenges during quarantine**

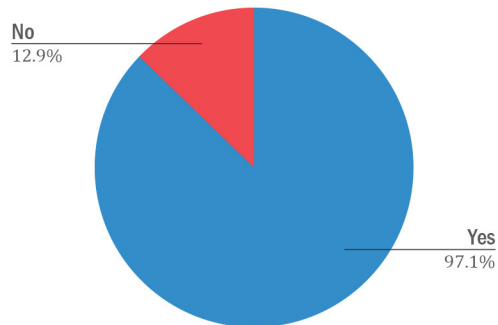


Figure 9 shows the mental health challenges experienced by the respondents. The 27 respondents that answered they experienced mental health challenges during the quarantine were asked to check all options that apply to them. Twenty-one experienced “stress,” twenty experienced “anxiety,” seventeen experienced “emotional exhaustion,” sixteen experienced “insomnia,” fifteen experienced “fear” and “emotional disturbance,” eight experienced “depression” and “panic attacks,” three experienced “post-traumatic stress symptoms,” two experienced “Obsessive Compulsive Disorder,” while one chose the “other” option and indicated they experienced “self-harm.”

**Figure 9. Mental health challenges experienced by the respondents**

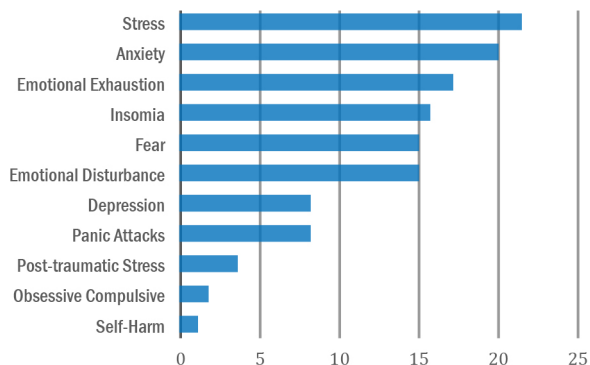


Figure 10 depicts the factors affecting the mental health of the respondents during quarantine. The respondents were asked to check all the options that apply to them. “Education” affects the mental health of 25 respondents, “loneliness and isolation” affects the mental health of 20 respondents, “family” affects the mental health of 18 respondents, “friends” and “social media” affect the mental health of 14 respondents, “monetary issues” affect the mental health of 5 respondents, “work” affects the mental health of 4 respondents, “physical illness or disability” and “loss or death” affect 2 respondents, “abuse,” “unemployment or loss of business,” and “lack of food” affect 1 respondent respectively. One chose the “other” option and indicated that “pre-quarantine events” affect their mental health during quarantine.

**Figure 10. Factors that influence the mental health of the respondents during quarantine**

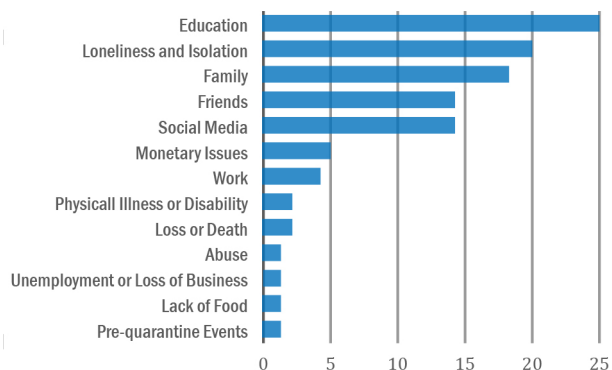


Figure 11 represents the ratio of respondents that approached others regarding their mental health. Twenty respondents answered “yes,” while ten answered “no.”

**Figure 11. Ratio of respondents that approached others regarding their mental health**

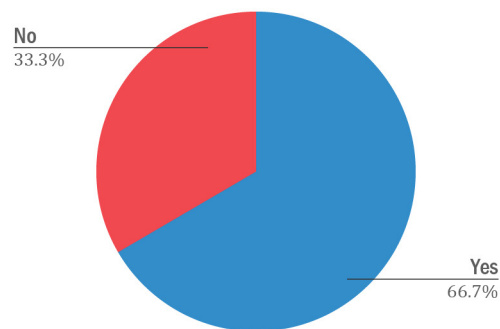


Figure 12 shows who the respondents approached regarding their mental health. The twenty respondents were asked to check all the options that apply to them. Fourteen respondents approached “friends,” six approached “family,” three approached a “mental health expert,” two respondents picked the “other” option and stated they approached their “significant other,” while one approached the “mental health hotline.”

**Figure 12. Who the respondents approached regarding their mental health**

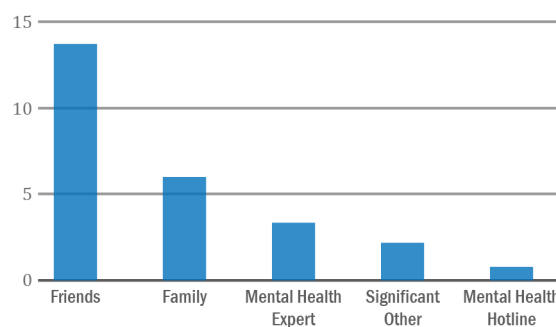
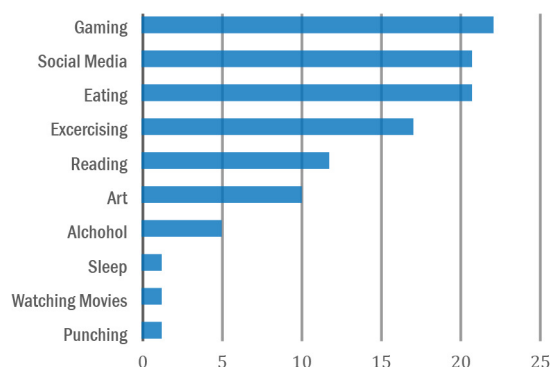


Figure 13 depicts how the respondents cope with their mental health during quarantine. The 30 respondents were asked to check all the options that apply to them. Twenty-two respondents cope with “gaming,” twenty-one respondents cope with

“social media” and “eating,” seventeen respondents cope with “exercising,” twelve respondents cope with “reading,” ten respondents cope with “art,” five respondents cope with “alcohol,” and three respondents chose the “other” option where one stated they cope with sleep, one stated they cope with “watching movies,” and stated they cope by “punching something that will not hit them back.”

**Figure 13. How respondents cope with their mental health during quarantine**



Based on the results, all of the respondents are students with an age range of 19-22 years old, in which majority of them are 19 and 20 years old (see Figure 2). There is a small difference in the ratio of female and male respondents. Furthermore, 3 respondents would not rather say their gender (see Figure 3). With the ongoing pandemic, the majority of the respondents rated their fear of COVID-19 as 4 which is a middle ground between ‘no fear’ and ‘very fearful’, but leaning more towards the ‘very fearful’ scale (see Figure 7). During the deployment of the survey, 28 were currently in quarantine (see Figure 4) with lengths ranging from 4 to 10 weeks in which majority of them are in the ten-week mark (see Figure 5). The overall mental health of the respondents has an average rating of 3 which is a middle ground

between ‘excellent’ and ‘poor’, but leaning more towards the ‘excellent’ scale (Figure 6). Out of the 30 respondents, only 3 have not experienced mental health challenges (see Figure 8).

### **Mental health challenges experienced by the respondents**

Mental health challenges may vary from anxiety, stress, depression, insomnia, panic attacks, and post-traumatic stress symptoms (Cabico, 2019). As observed in Figure 9 (see results), the respondents have experienced different mental health challenges in the duration of the quarantine/ lockdown. Stress and anxiety are the mental health challenges that majority of the respondents experienced. According to a 2018 poll report and global well-being index, among the countries that were part of the list, the Philippines placed second in the most stressed countries (Cabico). Fifty-eight percent of the Filipinos that participated in the poll were stressed a day before it was conducted. With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its possible effects it may bring to the daily life of people, the feeling of stress and anxiety can become one of the reactions in this situation (Canadian Mental Health Association, n.d.).

### **Factors that influence the mental health of the respondents during quarantine**

#### *Education*

As observed in Figure 10 (see results), education is one of the leading factors that affect the mental health of the respondents. To comply with the ongoing pandemic quarantine policies and procedures, most schools and learning institutions have decided to close down; opting for online discussions or activities.

Switching from face-to-face meetings to online classes may sound easy, however, one must consider unpredictable factors such as access to stable internet connection and technological gadgets (desktops and laptops) that vary according to social disparities (UNESCO, 2020). Indeed, there are inequalities between public and private learning institutions, the former having less resources as compared to the latter. Moreover, there is also the impact of these school closures to skill development and learning outcomes (UNESCO). Many organizations, such as UNICEF and UNESCO, are now striving to innovate ways on how children and students can handle learning at home without having to risk themselves (Miks, and McIlwaine, 2020).

#### *Loneliness and isolation*

The second leading factors are loneliness and isolation, which is no surprise given that most of the people are currently self-isolating during this pandemic. The respondents, categorized as young adults (18-25 years), are most vulnerable to this factor. As opined by Robson, (2020), since humans are inherently social beings, an abrupt, or if one could even say forced due to the pandemic, physical separation from society may be difficult to cope with. Not only COVID-19, loneliness is likewise an epidemic in itself, and it is spreading fast. Furthermore, mental health is subjective, depending on the person himself or herself. Loneliness and isolation are proven to be associated with depression, anxiety, stress, and suicidal tendencies, and other mental health issues (as seen in Figure 9) (Sanders, 2020). Research shows that confinement leads to a decrease in cognitive performance. Post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD (as seen in Figure 9), is also possible during long-term isolation

(Douglas, 2020). Efforts to maintain mental health, such as hotlines, social media groups, or other outlets, must be done in order to alleviate the strain of isolation and loneliness (Killgore,2020).

#### *Family and friends*

As seen in Figure 11 (see results), twenty respondents approached others regarding their mental health. When asked who the respondents approached for mental health advice, the majority said that they turned to friends and family (see Figure 12). Most of the people in this age group are still living with their respective families at home or rooming with friends. Being stuck with others for too long, even with family, can lead to irritability, annoyance, and conflict. In terms of financial and food stability, most families are struggling due to the disrupted economy (Discovery Society, 2020). On the contrary, long-term separation and distance with loved ones or friends may result in various mental health problems (see Figure 9). Strategies to address these problems must be implemented. An example would be giving each other space, spending quality time together, or distracting yourselves with hobbies and activities (see Figure 10) (NYU Langone Health NewsHub, 2020).

#### *Social media*

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, social media can be classified as either helpful or harmful to mental health (see Figure 10 and 13). As opined by Ariaga, et.al (2020), the prosides of social media in the current pandemic include the effective and efficient public health communication, enhancing of connectedness with loved ones and the world, dynamic communication with different organizations, and alleviation or

coping mechanism of mental health issues. The cons include the use of social media as platform for discrimination or bullying, easily disseminated fake news or misinformation, and what World Health Organization (WHO) calls the “info-demic”, which refers to an overload of information.

Social media is the perfect way to spread and share information fast, where people are free to comment and write their own opinions. However, if too much freedom is given in the cyberworld, abuse, bullying, and trolling are inevitable. Such example is the discrimination against those of Asian decent and frontliners. Another is the circulation of fake news, hoaxes, and misinformation, which could cause serious harm or unnecessary risk to vulnerable populations, i.e. the children and the elderly. The President of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, once shared a video on Facebook about how hydroxychloroquine works to treat the COVID-19 despite it still being in the testing phase, which was quickly disproven and taken down (Ferri, 2020).

Social media is one of the best ways to cope with the lockdown, as it addresses the most pressing problems in terms of mental health, which is communication and information. It allows the presence of mental health support groups and reaching out to significant people such as friends, families, and experts (see Figure 12). At present, the Department of Health (DOH) has partnered up with the World Health Organization (WHO) in providing Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), as interventions for psychological issues (World Health Organization, 2020).

## B. Qualitative Data Results

A focus group discussion was conducted last September 1, 2020 via Zoom platform and the outcomes of the said session became the basis of the primary qualitative data of the paper. A total of 7 participants took part in the FGD.

The participants with their assigned names in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 are as follows:

Participant	Assigned Names
Student Leader 1	SL 1
Student Leader 2	SL 2
Barangay youth volunteer 1	BYV 1
Barangay youth volunteer 2	BYV 2
Psychologist	PSY 1
Parent 1	P 1
Parent 2	P 2

Themes	Participant / Respondent
1. The mental health of the youth is adversely affected by the pandemic	SL 1, SL 2, BYV 1, BYV 2, PSY 1, P 1, P 2
2. The anxiety caused by the possibility of contracting COVID-19 is a mental concern among the youth.	SL 1, BYV 1, BYV 2, PSY 1, P 2
3. Economic reasons and loss of livelihood of the heads of the family is a mental burden among (many young people.	SL 1, SL 2, BYV 1, BYV 2, PSY 1, P 1, P 2

Themes	Participant/Respondent
4. The Enhanced Community Quarantine brought diminished physical interaction among peers which resulted in anxiety and mental stress.	SL 1, SL 2, BYV 1, BYV 2, PSY 1, P 1, P 2
5. Online classes became a source of mental fatigue among students.	SL 1, SL 2, P 1, P 2
6. The lockdown brought uncertainty, and increased stress and mental anxiety among the youth.	SL 1, SL 2, BYV1, BYV 2, PSY1, P1, P2
7. The Internet and social media became a refuge for many young people	SL 1, SL 2, PSY 1, P 1, P 2
8. Parents must guide their children in these trying times to augment their mental and emotional state	SL 1, SL 2, BYV 1, BYV 2, PSY 1, P1,P2
9. Focus on other things like developing a hobby, or hearing mass can be a way to fight anxieties brought forth by the lockdown.	P 1, P 2, PSY 1
10. The ECQ has contributed significantly to the mental and emotional problems of the youth	SL 1, SL 2, BYV 1, BYV 2, PSY 1, P 1, P 2

The first theme that emerged from the FGD corresponds to the adverse impact the pandemic has brought to the mental well-being of the youth. All of the participants in the FGD agree that the lockdown resulted in an impact to the mental well-being of the youth. This has been evident in how they behaved in the household. In fact, P1 opined that her son, who used to be very jolly and cheerful suddenly behaved differently in the two weeks after the declaration of the ECQ. She opined *Dati, masayahin kaya lang*

*siguro natakot din dahil sa Covid at saka hindi nakikita mga kaibigan kaya naging parang balisa sya* (FGD via Zoom, September 1, 2020).

As for SL1, she opined that the lockdown came abruptly and suddenly all the other activities like bonding with friends or going to the mall suddenly were halted and this became real concerns for many young people. In this regard, SL 2 also added: *Ang mas nakakabother po kasi is yung hindi mo alam kung ano mangyayari or kung hanggang kailan itong ganitong sitwasyon kaya mahirap lalo na sa mga kabataan na maintindihan kung bakit kailangan pagdaanan natin lahat ito ganitong problema.* (FGD via Zoom, September 1, 2020). This can also be correlated with the fourth theme that emerged from the FGD - The Enhanced Community Quarantine brought diminished physical interaction among peers which resulted in anxiety and mental stress.

This is actually not surprising. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states that the outbreak of COVID-19 may be stressful to people, as fear and anxiety about a pandemic may be overwhelming, and can certainly cause strong emotions in both adults and children respectively (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). It should be understood that the causes of these fears and anxiety stressors the very deep concern of the people about their own health and their loved ones. As for PSY 1, she opined that even fear and anxiety are enough to stipulate one's overall mental health, inducing changes in sleep, eating patterns, focus and concentrating, which further leads to chronic health problems and worsening of mental health conditions (FGD via Zoom, September 1, 2020).



In addition, PSY 1 also added that each person reacts differently to stressful situations which can depend on their personal background or their overall community; where people who may respond more strongly to the stress of a crisis include: older people and people with chronic diseases who are at higher risk for severe illness from acquiring diseases not just particular to COVID-19, and children and teens who are yet emotionally and socially mature enough to understand the gravity of the situation (PSY1 ,FGD via Zoom, September 1, 2020).

Another theme that emerged from the FGD hinges on the anxiety brought about by the fear and the possibility of contracting the disease. In fact, BYV 1 added: *Kasi po yung nga napapanuod naming sa TV at mga video sa FB lalo na yung mga linya ng patay sa Italy tsaka yung mga cremate agad pag nagka Covid , para sa amin pong mura pa ang isipan , mabigat po talaga sya.* (FGD via Zoom, September 1, 2020).

In the FGD also, P2 also agreed, sa amin yung mga anak ko , parang nagka phobia na talaga sila lumabas, andun talaga yung takot kahit na sabihin pa na hindi naman talaga tinatamaan ang mga bata, sila talagang ayaw nila ma expose (FGD via Zoom, Sept.1, 2020).

Even if the majority of the participants agreed that in a way, this is good because at least the young are afraid to step out of the confines of their houses. This means lessened possibilities of them being infected. However, the fact remains that it has serious implications to their emotional and mental state.

In effect, it can be said that because of this COVID-19, social distancing measures were also

implemented. The practices of physical distancing and self-isolation play a crucial role in reducing further transmission of COVID-19. However, according to Dr. Amir Khan, an NHS doctor and a senior university lecturer in the United Kingdom, states that “as important as it is to keep these measures in place, it is also important to recognize the psychological effects this can have on people” (Khan, 2020). Humans are social creatures. Losing these important connections on individuals can come at a high psychological cost, therefore, have resulted in an increased number of people feeling lonely, and that loneliness, in particular, has been linked to a number of adverse health outcomes.

As for PSY 1, social isolation, especially in a fearful scenario such as COVID-19 makes the lockdown worse. She opined: *Yun nga lang ma cut off ka sa ibang tao , mahirap na eh, mas malala since na cut off tayo at nandun yung fear na baka magkasakit din tayo kaya mas mabigat ang effect nya.* ( PSY 1, FGD via Zoom, September 1, 2020). P2 also added, *hindi talaga sanay ang mga kabataan ngayon nang hindi nagkikita at hindi magkakasama , actually mas sanay nga sila na sila ang magkakasama madalas ,tapos ngayon biglang wala silang choice kundi makasama ang mga kapatid at magulang nila kaya kumbaga nabigla talaga ang marami sa kanila* (P2, FGD via Zoom, September 1, 2020).

This is a complex reason as to why the youth are having a hard time coping with. In fact as opined by Khan (2020), during this pandemic, individuals are losing another essential human connection which is the physical touch. This is due to the fact that human touch and contact releases a hormone in the body called oxytocin, which plays a

huge role in recognition, sexual arousal, trust and anxiety. Researches have shown that lower levels of oxytocin have resulted in higher levels of stress and anxiety. Therefore, mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety are more prevalent among those isolating themselves during the pandemic.

Another theme that emerged from the FGD corresponds to the economic reasons and loss of livelihood of the heads of the family. Undoubtedly, this is a mental burden among many young people. In fact, all of the participants agreed that this is a big contributory factor to their stress levels and mental worries. For SL1 and BYV2, this was very evident since their fathers lost their jobs in April of this year at the height of the ECQ. Both of their fathers are on a “no work, no pay” status. In fact BYV1 mentioned: *Mahirap po talaga lalo na po since factory worker po si Papa and nung walang operations , wala din po sila sweldo so ayun umaasa lang talaga kami sa ayuda ng city hall kaya po napilitan din ako mag volunteer sa barangay po namin, lima po kasi kaming magkakapatid at wala din po work Mama ko* (BYV 1 , FGD via Zoom, September 1, 2020). As for SL1, she mentioned that she was laid off from the fast food chain where she was working. Her dilemma is how she can proceed with her studies, since she is a working student.

These economic reasons can aggravate a toll on the mental health of individuals, especially the youth. In fact, the European Public Health Alliance stated that “feelings of loneliness and social isolation, heightened by the current public health crisis, can have severe health consequences for a number of socioeconomic groups; this furthermore limits the access of normal daily activities, not just

going to work, but normal social interactions with others provokes mental health issues, and weakens physical health for those who already struggle to maintain good health and wellbeing” (as cited by Zaharieva, 2020).

The participants also agreed that the online classes brought about by the pandemic further exacerbated the anxiety that they are feeling. This is because of the stress brought about by online classes such as the poor internet connection, and the lack of gadgets and equipment. In fact, SL 2 even opined: *There are times po na natutulog ako 4 am na halos kasi po dun lang mejo gumaganda ang internet connection sa lugar namin kaya struggle talaga plus andami pang kailangan tapusin na schoolworks kaya mas lalong pabigat sa isipan ang online classes* (SL2, FGD via Zoom, September 1, 2020).

Undeniably, the lockdown increased the anxiety and emotional stress of the youth since it is unprecedented. Hence, the mental preparedness to face anything like this where social, physical contact was lost all at once was very heavy to the youth according to PSY 1 (PSY1, FGD via Zoom, September 1, 2020).

Due to the lockdown, the youth turned on to the virtual domain to still be in contact with the outside world. In fact, the internet became a “saving grace” for many young people which enabled them to still keep in touch with the outside world. In fact, in the FGD that was conducted, every participant lamented at how things could have gotten worse for young people if the pandemic happened without virtual connectivity.

In fact, BYV 2 opined: *Siguro po mas nakakabaliw pag walang net kasi imagine nasa loob lang ng bahay, walang magawa tapos walang social media , sobrang hirap po talaga nun kaya buti na lang may net nung lockdown* (BYV2 , FGD via Zoom, September 1, 2020).

As for SL2, she opined that social media sites like FB and a Tiktok provided the needed balance. However, she also mentioned that the videos they were able to watch such as the rise of death rate in Italy last April and May also compounded their worries and added to their anxieties.

However, it is different in the case of P2 who mentioned that the internet connection in their place is very slow. Hence, they just turned to TV for news and entertainment.

For PSY 1, she mentioned how the pandemic created different types of experiences across various social classes. She opined: *It depends also sa economic well- being ng family or household, like sa internet, some families kasi just relied on data connection which is mahirap talaga, may mga bahay na maliit, masikip at mainit while some are in big air conditioned homes. So yung mental effects depende rin talaga sa estado sa buhay , I mean young people in better environments mas ok ang situation. But we also cannot discount the fact that young people who grew up in depressed areas are more resilient kaya mas stronger din ang coping mechanisms nila* (PSY1 ,FGD via Zoom, September 1, 2020).

Another important theme that came out from the FGD hinges on the emotional support that the family, especially the parents must extend to

their children. This is challenging for some parents who, all of a sudden, had to be with their teenagers most of the time. In fact, it served as a “bonding moment” for many families and often, realizations came in during the course of the ECQ.

For instance P1 opined: *Grabe pala talaga at ang dami ko nang hindi alam sa anak ko, angdami na pala nyang alam at kayang gawin na hindi ko nakita dati siguro nga dahil bihira kaming magkasama ng matagal , syempre dahil sa trabaho and most of the time nga nasa labas kaming lahat, so maganda na nagkasama sama ang mga magulang at anak kasi nagkaroon ng time para makilala ulit ang isat- isa* (P1, FGD via Zoom, September 1, 2020).

For BYB 2, she mentioned how their family grew better because of the lockdown which opened communication channels, especially with her parents.

For PSY1, she opined that lockdowns are really hard, especially for the youth, because they have no choice but to be with their families or parents who over the course of time may have drifted apart from each other, due to busy schedules and other preoccupations. However, she lamented that this can be opportune times where parents can reach out, since their children need the corresponding guidance. In addition, several coping mechanisms in the form of learning a new hobby or developing family habits such as attending to online masses proved to be effective in attaining mental balance in times of lockdown. For SL 1, she mentioned that the lockdown gave her time to pursue a passion which is dancing. In the case of BYV 2, she focused on painting and poetry. For P1,

their family became stronger amidst the challenges of the pandemic through attending daily masses on TV and online. For PSY 1, boredom brought forth by long lockdowns can be countered by doing productive things such as engaging in hobbies that will keep the mind preoccupied.

This can be correlated to the last theme that emerged from the qualitative data- *The ECQ has contributed significantly to the mental and emotional problems of the Youth*. It is true that this pandemic may bring about the existence of a “lockdown generation” as opined by Killgore et.al (2020), wherein the already troubled state of adolescence will be compounded — even further by the long term ill effect of the pandemic leading to a more anxious and mentally stressed youth. As opined by Garcia and Cuellar-Flores (2020), the pandemic and the lockdowns, coupled with the horrific news and images that the youth see on the internet and media, are contributory elements to their mental state. Therefore, interventions, either through the help of family and friends, and a greater sense of positivity can lead to a more managed state of mental well-being for the youth.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

This paper titled, “The young and the restless: A youth based assessment on the implementation of the Enhanced Community Quarantine in NCR and its impact on mental well-being” looked into the imperatives of the ECQ or lockdown imposed in the National Capital Region to alleviate the spread of COVID-19. Using a mixed method design, the researcher was able to undermine the factors that affected the mental well-being of the youth, and the corresponding impact that it had created on them.

It was clear from the findings based on the survey that the respondents experienced stress, anxiety, depression and other mentally induced dilemmas set forth by the lockdown. The most compelling factors such as education, family, and peers, as well as social media were also figured prominently in the survey. The findings of the qualitative data through the FGD also proved to be crucial in determining the effects of the pandemic and the corresponding lockdown to the mental well-being of the youth. It highlighted the feelings and emotions, alongside related problems that confronted the youth in this ordeal.

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic created public health barriers between individuals to decrease transmission. However, it caused stress and negative effects to their mental health. Based on the results, being on lockdown affects the mental health of individuals. Therefore, a proper implementation of the quarantine and lockdown must occur. The physical health must be prioritized, but along with it must be the mental aspect. Access to mental health services must be readily available to everyone and everywhere covered by the quarantine and lockdown.

It is recommended that specific and clear cut measures be created. These measures will ensure that the mental well-being of the youth can be well guarded, especially during long lockdowns. The government through DOH, and other agencies, such as the National Mental Health Association or the Psychological Association of the Philippines can form meaningful alliances to craft programs that can augment the mental and emotional impact of imposed lockdowns like the ECQ. It is also

recommended that the academic institutions, like schools and universities, integrate programs in the curriculum that shall focus on improving the mental well-being of students in the current remote and blended learning set-up. Furthermore, it is highly recommended that parents become more open in communicating with their children in these trying times. It is in these times that families can prove to be solid fortresses and pillars of strength.

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## Chapter II

# The Filipino Youth Coping and Hoping through a Pandemic

It can be recalled that the first chapter of this research compendium primarily centered on some problems and issues faced by the Youth. In this chapter, the research articles shall deal mainly with how the Filipino Youth is able to cope with the pandemic. This is a testament to the resilience and the adaptability of the Filipino youth in the face of this enormous battle set forth by COVID-19. The first featured article for this chapter, by Mr. Jazztin Manalo M.A. titled *Easing anxiety through the use of social media among the youth: How Thomasians cope with during the COVID-19 pandemic* demonstrates how social media proved to be an essential coping instrument by the Youth to combat stress and anxieties brought forth by the long and arduous lockdowns. In another titled *Responses, adaptations, and alternatives: The National Movement of Young Legislators of the Philippines (NMYL) and the COVID-19 pandemic*, Dr. Frederick Iguban Rey provides solid assertions that explored the responses, adaptations, and proposed alternatives of young legislators as they govern in this pandemic.

For his part, Dr. Dennis Coronacion presents the dilemma set forth by the proliferation of fake news and how the youth managed to cope with this occurrence in a paper titled, *Alone in the echo: A study partisan selective exposure to the news consumption and the Youth's susceptibility to fake news*. In another interesting article titled *Bursting bubbles: COVID-19 and college sports in the Philippines*, Mr. Amr Solon S. Sison M.A. demonstrates the impact of the pandemic to collegiate sports and the coping measures in place to ensure the continuity of these youth based sports spectacles. Lastly, the article titled, *"Infodemic", Social media, and the youth: A cross-sectional study on gathering, use, and sharing of online news in the Philippine amidst the coronavirus pandemic*, Dr. Froilan Calilung et.al. analyzed the importance of social media, and the importance of reliable news, to cope with the global health crisis.





# **Easing anxiety through the use of social media among the youth: How Thomasians cope with during the COVID-19 pandemic**

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## **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic which began in the first quarter of 2020 has significantly changed the way of education to the tertiary level. This study provides the different perspectives of students of the University of Santo Tomas and how they are utilizing social media as a means of coping with during the pandemic and the community quarantines that were issued by both the local and national government. A total of 279 student responses were yielded based on the student population last academic year 2019-2020. Results show that there is dependence in utilizing social media in terms of communication and entertainment. However, there is a 'neutral' decline in terms of mental health and being a safe-space. The study also recommends to conduct a larger scale research and include not only tertiary education, but also primary and secondary. State universities and colleges are also recommended to further the study.

## **Keywords**

COVID-19, social media, mental health, safe-space

## **Introduction**

In recent times, there have been various inventions and innovations that have resulted in the improvement of the quality of life. This is the result of various breakthroughs in the technological and scientific fields of study. An example of this is the pharmaceutical or medicinal benefits which can cure illnesses that have previously taken many lives due to lack of treatment. Another example which can be cited are the vast options for transportation available, which makes it possible for individuals to visit different areas, with a significantly shorter travel period as compared before. One of the most significant scientific developments is the creation of

methods on how to harness the power of electricity and use it to augment daily life.

Undoubtedly, humanity owes its survival to these breakthroughs. However, there are also many scientific and technological advancements that have resulted in many machines and activities for recreational purposes. Examples of these are televisions, handheld smart phones, and the computer. Previously complicated or cumbersome tasks were made easier to handle and accomplish by computer technology, such as accounting, computing, and taking inventory.

This study presents several aspects on how Thomasian students are coping with during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it will present how social media serves as their means of easing their anxiety and mental health. It will also tackle how the pandemic has led to the 'dependence' of most students to social media as a form of alternative ranging from communication, entertainment, and medium for academic requirement. The study is only limited within the students of University of Santo Tomas who were enrolled during the second semester of the academic year 2019-2020.

### **Reasons for using social media**

Although social media can serve as a source of information, it is without doubt that rampant false information is being circulated throughout all platforms. These "fake news" have long been a concern for users of social media platforms, resulting in confusion and anxiety. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have combated these in the past by verifying accounts or profiles owned by legitimate and credible sources of information, such as news or public affairs companies. Another way that Facebook combats false information is through its newsfeed function. Facebook is engaging its newsfeed function to direct users to the websites of WHO and local health authorities (Duraismy, Rathinaswamy, Jayaseelan, & Kadeswaran, 2020). False information is a complex problem for social media platforms, as well as government officials and authorities. With billions of individuals online each day, it has become pervasive with multiple digital sources without editorial oversight. It could easily be trusted or taken seriously (Duraismy, Rathinaswamy, Jayaseelan, & Kadeswaran, 2020).

### **Social media in times of pandemic**

As previously mentioned, social media is an incredibly versatile tool. In times where an individual cannot freely go outside their home due to quarantine policies, businesses have taken advantage of social media platforms to advertise their services. Cargo delivery and courier services have created a wide variety of delivery services to cater to the needs of users in times of pandemic. Markets and restaurants with delivery services are able to safely provide groceries and meals to those unable to venture out (Kushner, 2020). Streaming businesses, such as Netflix, has increased the number of titles and shows that can be viewed to provide a better entertainment outlet. As can be observed from these examples, during times of pandemic, social media has evolved and is continuing to do so to cater to the needs and wants of its users.

Humans crave any form of interaction from other humans. According to Aristotle, man is by nature a social animal, and cannot live without social interaction. With the aforementioned technological advancements, the usage of social networking sites or social media platforms have been undeniably deemed significant.

### **Methodology**

The timeframe of this research is from July 2020 – September 2020. Data was culled through survey and document analysis, particularly through convenience sampling. The respondents were students from the University of Santo Tomas. According to the Varsitarian (2019), the university had 40,375 students for the Academic Year (A.Y.) 2019-2020. It is also important to note that the students who participated in this survey does not

include the freshmen of A.Y. 2020-2021 as they were not yet enrolled in the University when the pandemic occurred in the 2nd Semester of A.Y. 2019-2020.

Utilizing Slovin's formula as a tool for sample size, a 6% margin of error was utilized with a 95% confidence level. Below shows the equation for the actual number of respondents for the sample size:

$$n = N/(1+Ne^2)$$

Where:

n = number of samples

N = Total Population

e = margin of error

$$n = 40,375/(1+((40,375) \times (0.06^2)))$$

$$n = 40,375/(1+(40,375 \times 0.0036))$$

$$n = 40,375/(1+(145.35))$$

$$n = 40,375/(146.35)$$

$$\mathbf{n = 276}$$

The survey was executed through Google Forms. Moreover, the respondents are only limited to undergraduate students, specifically not including the graduate students from the Faculty of Civil Law, Graduate School, and Faculty of Medicine and Surgery. Document analysis was also used to backup different arguments for the result.

## Results and Discussion

Despite being a recent addition to the Internet landscape, social media have witnessed an exponential growth (Faizi, El Afia, & Chiheb, 2013). It has definitely infiltrated almost every field of discussion available, with a good example being the

field of education. Examples as to how social media is utilized in the field of education are through the nearly-effortless dissemination or distribution of information from mentors to students. Discussions and debates can be held through online video meetings or conferences. Modules can be and homeworks can be easily assigned and distributed through a simple post or chat. Instructors can answer students' questions via a Facebook page or Twitter feed, post homework assignments and lesson plans, extend in-class discussions, send messages and updates, schedule or announce forthcoming events, and inform learners about special lectures, panel discussions or guest speakers (Faizi, El Afia, & Chiheb, 2013). With the slow but steady progress and development of the computer, it has definitely contributed in the budding generations to be intertwined with technology from the digital age. As compared to generations before them, they are more adept at learning and utilizing the new devices and technologies that are increasingly getting more sophisticated as time progresses. This has resulted in the increased popularity and usage of social networking sites, or social media platforms.

The world and society has been shaken and reshaped by the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost all countries have put their cities and communities in quarantine to reduce the amount of individuals that might get the virus. With people not being allowed to go outside for an extended period of time, the usage of social media platforms is significantly higher. Social media platforms undoubtedly play a vital role in the implementation of the "new normal". 279 student respondents of the University of Santo Tomas answered the survey via Google Forms. However, not all colleges of the University were able

to answer due to connectivity issues and technical problems encountered.

Table 1 shows that most of the data were yielded from the Faculty of Arts and Letters, College of Fine Arts and Design, Faculty of Engineering, and Faculty of Pharmacy. The lowest came from the Institute of Information and Computing Sciences, College of Accountancy, College of Science, and College of Education. Overall, the number of

respondents had an excess three respondents based on the ideal number of sample size which is 276.

In terms of social media usage, all of the respondents have a social media account which can range from having an account in any or from multiple social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, Tiktok, Snapchat, Tumblr, Viber, Discord, Twitch, Telegram, and en Reddit.

**Table 1. Population of the student respondents and college affiliation**

College of Affiliation	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Faculty of Arts and Letters	93	33.3%
College of Fine Arts and Design	53	19.00%
Faculty of Engineering	47	16.80%
Faculty of Pharmacy	33	11.80%
Conservatory of Music	2	0.70%
College of Architecture	18	6.50%
College of Commerce and Business Administration	15	5.40%
College of Rehabilitation Sciences	14	5.00%
College of Education	1	0.40%
AMV College of Accountancy	1	0.40%
College of Science	1	0.40%
Institute of Information and Computing Sciences	1	0.40%
<b>Total</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

### A. Utilizing Social Media for communication

It is a great platform for communication with friends and loved ones despite differences in distance. It is a source of information and local news to most users of social media platforms, through online articles. Besides maintained communication and staying up to date with current events, social

media is mostly utilized, as previously mentioned, for entertainment purposes. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are great examples for the three aforementioned reasons. Users of these platforms may 'follow' specific pages that post news updates to stay posted to current events.

**Figure 1. Students' response in using social media as means of communication**

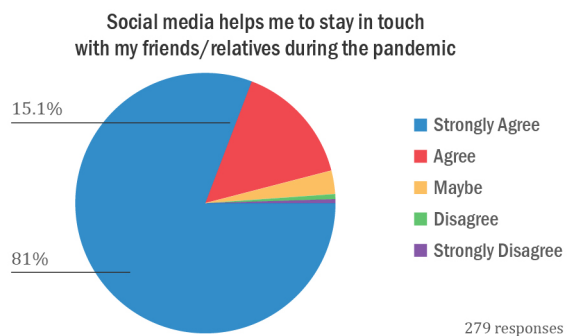


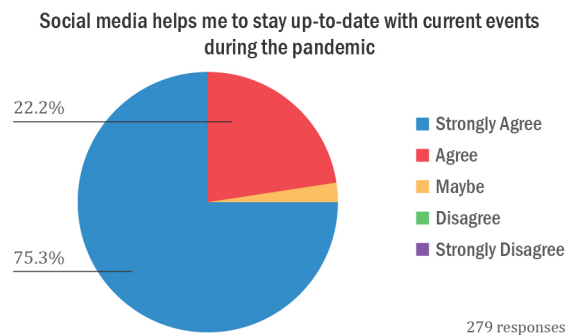
Figure 1 shows that at least 81% from the respondents or 226 are effectively using social media in terms of keeping in touch with their friends, classmates, and relatives during the pandemic. This is made possible mainly due to the low cost and accessibility of new technology that allows more options for media consumption. Instead of only a few news outlets, individuals now have the ability to seek information from several sources. Moreover, to dialogue with others via message forums about the information posted (Manning, 2014). Figure 1 also shows that only a few to only 15.1% or 42 out of the 279 respondents 'Agreed' that they utilize social media. Thus, this means that the others who disagreed or were not sure may have other means of communication. Hence, do not fully rely towards social media especially during this pandemic.

### B. Social media to stay up-to-date

During the verge of the pandemic, social media has played a vital role in minimizing the damage done to communities and societies. Health experts and scientists are using social media to directly engage with the public, to share accurate information and discuss awareness, as well as safety measures and emerging research. Similarly, community leaders

are using it to form networks of public volunteering, to help the vulnerable (Duraismy, Rathinaswamy, Jayaseelan, & Kadeswaran, 2020). Government officials, specifically local government units, have also taken advantage of social media platforms to announce their upcoming plans and projects aimed at providing assistance to their area of jurisdiction.

**Figure 2. Students' response in using social media to stay up-to-date during the pandemic**



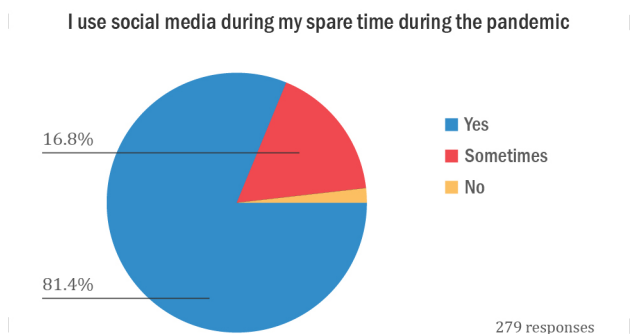
This can be seen on Facebook. The platform has a dedicated section for COVID-19 updates, the Coronavirus Information Center. The section keeps track of the statistics related to the pandemic, particularly of the daily and overall COVID-19 cases for every country, as well as the global confirmed cases, casualties, and recoveries. In Figure 2, at least 75% or 210 out of 279 respondents strongly agree that they utilize social media to get updates on current events. These include the total number of infected cases, status in other countries, and source of entertainment to keep them 'sane' during the Enhanced Community Quarantine. There were no respondents who answered that they disagreed, which means that all of them are quite dependent on keeping up with what is happening in the world. Several parts in the social media contain facts about the virus that have caused this pandemic, as well as

suggestions to minimize one’s risk and exposure. This is significant to combat the pandemic. Accurate and credible dissemination of right information about the virus causing a pandemic could help in controlling its spread causing anxiety in half the population (Duraisamy, Rathinaswamy, Jayaseelan, & Kadeswaran, 2020).

### C. Using social media during spare time

Research suggests that young people who use social media heavily, i.e., those who spend more than 2 hours per day on social networking sites are more likely to report poor mental health, including psychological distress (Glazzard & Stones, 2019).

**Figure 3. Utilizing social media in spare time during the pandemic**



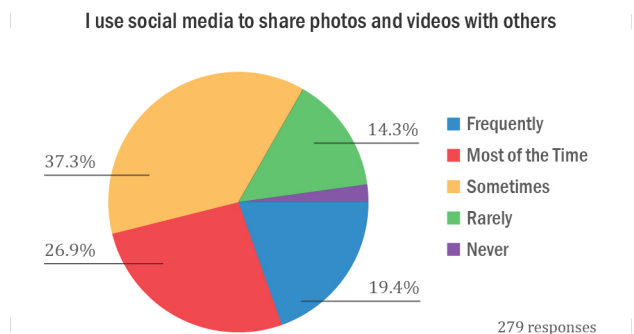
Looking at Figure 3, 81% or 227 respondents are utilizing social media during their spare time as the pandemic goes on. While only five or 1.8% do not use it during spare time, the remaining 16.8% or 47 respondents however, find it only optional. With the on-going imposed Community Quarantines in different LGUs within the country, it would be difficult to find ways on how to be productive once their academic duties have been done. Therefore, respondents have resorted towards social media. Similar to any other platforms, social media has its

downside. Certainly, there is a significant amount of people who are addicted to it. The social media platforms and the easy access to the Internet bring about the potential for addiction, namely, the irrational and excessive use of social media to the extent that it interferes with other aspects of daily life (Hou, Xiong, Jiang, Song, & Wang, 2019).

### D. Social media and entertainment

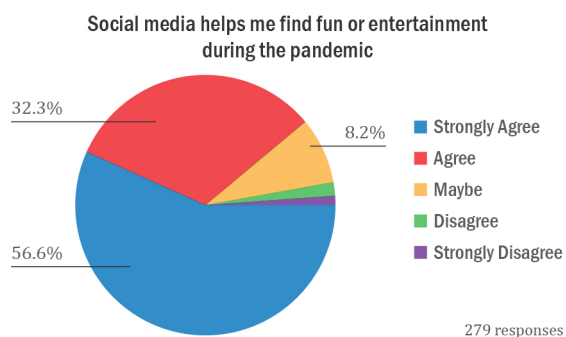
Most people use social media not only for communication, but also as a source of entertainment. They follow pages that are focused on providing entertaining content, such as videos and funny photos, or memes. They can add people that they know on these platforms to communicate or stay in touch with one another regardless of distance. Looking at Figure 4, it would be safe to say that there is a significant difference between the respondents because most of the respondents which is 37.3% or 104 out of 279 rarely or only share videos/photos and not all of the time. This is quite big in comparison to those who frequently (19.4% or 54 out of 279) share photos/videos through social media and do the same activity most of the time (26.9% or 75 out of 279).

**Figure 4. Social media utilization for video and photo sharing**



Users can also meet new people through these social media platforms, extending their network of friends and acquaintances for future purposes. Figure 5 below, however, shows that the majority of the respondents which is 56.6% or 158 out of 279 strongly agree that social media helps them find entertainment. The second response which is 32.3% or 90 out of the 279 respondents shows that they agree, while only a few of the respondents do not agree well in terms of finding social media as means of entertainment.

**Figure 5. Social media as form of entertainment during the pandemic**



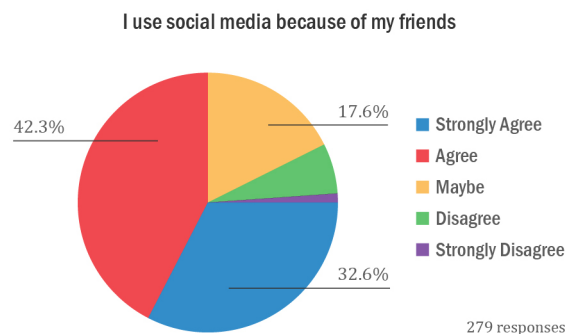
Without social media, all of these aforementioned would be complex and time-consuming, if not impossible. Everyone has a hard and fast life. Notably, in this life, social media is time saving (Riaz, Ishaq, & Abbasi, 2018). Essentially, management of an individual's social life has been made easier with the use of the social media platforms that are currently available.

### E. Social media and peer pressure

During times of pandemic or disaster, there might be limitations to the ways of how one can communicate or interact with others. Social media platforms definitely play an important role in addressing these

concerns through remote communication. In Figure 6, it shows that almost 75% of the respondents have expressed that they were induced with peer-pressure to use social media. This confirms the fact from the earlier discussion where all respondents have at least a social media account. Moreover, if based on the exact number of respondents, Figure 6 also states that 42.3% or 118 out of 279 have agreed to peer-pressure as a factor together with the 32.6% or 91 out of 279 respondents. However, there is no assurance if it was peer pressure that made them use social media.

**Figure 6. Peer pressure as a factor to use social media**



A great example for this is the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that has redefined society. With the international pandemic going on, the so-called 'new normal' is that every individual should have less contact as possible to minimize risk and exposure to the virus. Social media has been the go-to method in establishing and maintaining communication during the long periods of isolation due to quarantine during this pandemic.

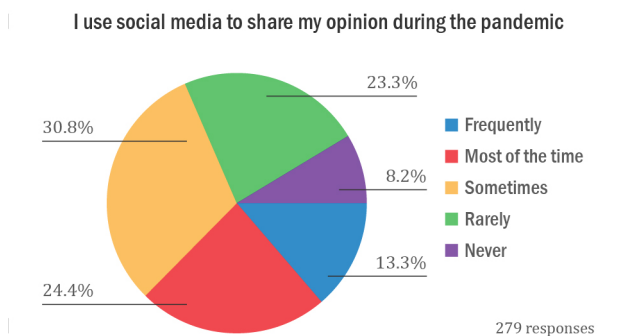
### F. Opinions and knowledge-sharing

With social media, it is accessible to disseminate information regarding the pandemic, particularly how the virus spreads and infects



individuals, and what are the steps or precautions to take. Such information can help keep individuals safe, providing a better understanding of what is occurring and how it might impact everyone (Kushner, 2020).

**Figure 7. Social media as medium for opinion-sharing**

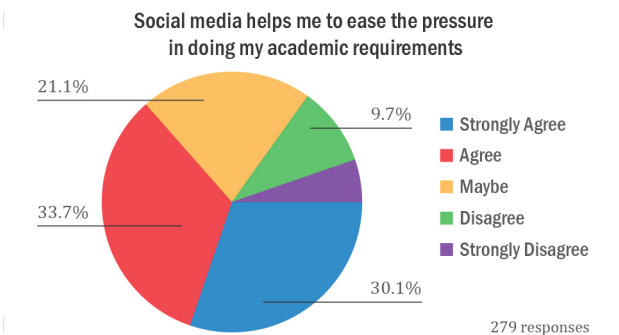


Looking at Figure 7, it shows that only a few from the respondents are actually sharing their opinions through social media during the pandemic. Out of the 279 respondents, only 37 or 13.3% are active or frequently sharing their opinions, while the 30.8% which has the most response shows that 86 out of 279 respondents only share their opinion through social media at some time. Social media also affects mental health in such a way that one's personal beliefs, opinions, and perspectives are attacked by other users. An example of this can be seen in any Facebook comment section or a Twitter thread. While there are some of these sections or threads that house legitimate and healthy debate among individuals, most are sadly inhabited by mean and snarky comments between users with opposing opinions or beliefs. Ad hominem insults as well as unrelated issues can be observed in these instances.

## G. Tool to ease pressure in academic requirements

In education, technology has allowed the dissemination of knowledge to be dispersed instantly. It allows for quicker and effective communication (Harris, Al-Bataineh, & Al-Bataineh, 2016). Information sharing across most parts of the world has been made significantly easier to do because of the internet. The computer is a device that has long been used due to its versatility. With the rise of digital and mobile technologies, interaction on a large scale became easier; as such, a new media age was born where interactivity was placed at the middle of new media functions (Manning, 2014).

**Figure 8. Social media eases pressure in doing academic requirements**

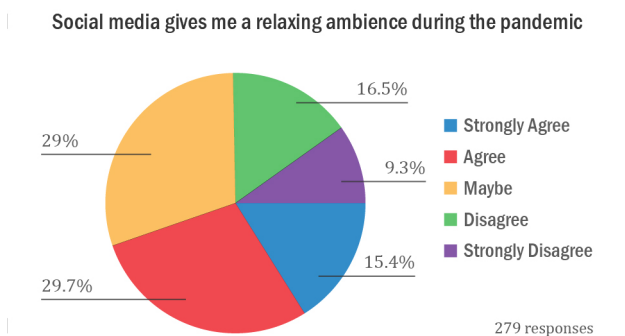


Referring to Figure 8, respondents agree that with social media, there is less pressure in doing academic requirements during the pandemic. It is notable that 33.7% or 94 out of 279 respondents agreed on this and another significant percentage of 30.1% or 84 out of 279 respondents strongly agree that social media has helped them ease the pressure in doing academic requirements.

## H. Social media as a relaxing ambience for coping up mentally and emotionally

Experiencing things like this when using social media might negatively impact the mental health of a user. Cyber-bullying is also rampant in social media. The methods of cyber-bullying varies, as it can include the posting of hurtful comments online, threats and intimidation towards others in the online space and posting photographs or videos that are intended to cause distress (Glazzard & Stones, 2019).

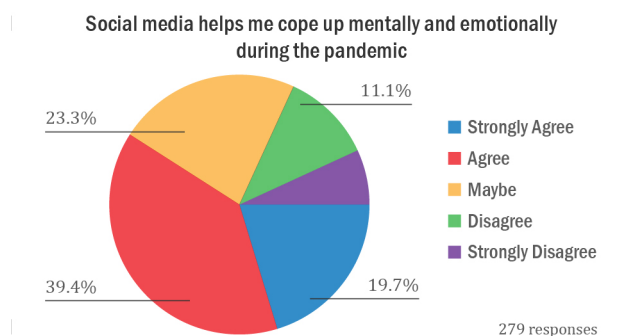
**Figure 9. Social media gives relaxing ambience during the pandemic**



This is the reason as shown in Figure 9 where majority of the respondents only agreed and not sure if social media would give them a relaxing ambience. Looking at Figure 9, it shows that 29.7% or only 83 out of 279 respondents agree that gives a relaxing ambience, while 29% or 81 out of 279 respondents are not sure if it actually is. However, using social media platforms for an extensive period affects the state of an individual's mental health. This may be likened to a mild version of narcissism, as when individuals see reactions and comments on their online social presence, it can crucially boost their self-esteem (Manning, 2014). The reason for this is that social media gives individuals a sense

that they are being given attention by those who comment and react to their posts, resulting in a kind of high that is addicting in its own way. This goes both ways, as it may have a good or bad effect to an individual depending on the situation. The attention gained from the likes and comments may boost their self-confidence, but it may also lower it when there is a lack of this aforementioned attention. The reason for this is because social media users are frequently exposed to others' selective and glorified online self-presentations, which can, in turn, reduce the viewers' self-esteem (Hou, Xiong, Jiang, Song, & Wang, 2019).

**Figure 10. Social media as means of coping up mentally and emotionally during the pandemic**



Cyber-bullying seems to occur for no reason other than to provoke or cause vexation to others. However, some of the most observable causes of cyberbullying are body shaming and differences in opinions, specifically political opinions. Body shaming or body image concerns have long been a susceptible cause for affecting the mental health of social media platform users. The posts that users see from their co-users have a seemingly negative effect, i.e. more 'favorable' body type than them. This can result in low body-esteem, particularly if young people feel that their own bodies do not

compare favorably to the “perfect” bodies they see online (Glazzard & Stones, 2019). As shown in Figure 9, the majority of the respondents which is 39.4% or 110 out of 279 respondents agreed that social media has helped them to cope with the pandemic. Additionally, it is significant to take into action that 23.3% or 65 out of 279 respondents are not sure if social media has helped them cope with their mental and emotional health. The remaining 49 out of 279 respondents did not agree that social media can be considered as a medium for coping with mechanisms during this time of pandemic.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The study presented that students have various ways of utilizing media as a medium for coping with anxiety, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the utilized functions of social media are communication and information dissemination. Thomasians also took notice that entertainment can also be found in social media to keep their minds occupied, aside from the toll of academic requirements from the alternative mode of learning (online class). Additionally, as shown in the results, social media has been considered as a ‘not safe space’, e.g. if an individual would like to experience a relaxing ambience.

With the study being limited only to the University of Santo Tomas, it is recommended that a larger scale of respondents be included, i.e. other educational institutions. Several factors such as the student’s access to the internet should be taken into action, as it is mostly assumed that students from private universities like UST have better access to internet and social media. The study also recommends that there should be a moderate usage

of social media, particularly during a pandemic — as this may consume the user’s time for work, study, and even time for rest.

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# **Alone in the echo: A study on partisan selective exposure to the news consumption and the Youth's susceptibility to fake news**

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## **Abstract**

The abundance of choice brought about by the drastic change of the media environment has translated to not only to people choosing their own news, but also to people choosing their own facts. This is deeply concerning for any democratic society which requires dialogue, coalition building, and some degree of compromise and cooperation. However, with social media's algorithms that increasingly shows content that users already agree with, and with features that allow the same users to literally tune out any content that might offer a different perspective, more and more people find themselves happily ensconced in their own filter bubble or echo chamber. As previous studies have suggested, this ultimately leaves more people to be less informed, less tolerant and trusting, and more dismissive to views and voices that disagree with them regardless of merit. Even more troubling, the prevalence of so-called fake news in recent years has only been poisonous to the public discourse in that it has only fueled the existing tribalism and polarization that exists in the digital space and by extension, to the public sphere. This misinformation be it deliberate or not, has a way of going unchallenged and even amplified in these echo chambers as long as it affirms user's preexisting biases. This study aimed at looking at the news consumption behavior of the youth to determine whether or not they engage in this partisan selective exposure, and how that relates to their susceptibility in believing and sharing misinformation.

## **Keywords**

partisan selective exposure, fake news, echo chambers, social polarization

## **Introduction**

The connectivity that defines the digital age has allowed an influx of content and information to reach people who would have found it inaccessible not that long ago. In less than five minutes, a teenager from the Philippines can literally scroll past through a live stream of a presidential debate in the United States, news report of an escalating conflict in Armenia and Azerbaijan, an infographic

on the importance of mental health from the World Health Organization and an interview of a teacher struggling to reach her students amidst a global pandemic. If nothing else, today's media landscape is nothing but a testament to a world brought closer together. Ironically though, there has been a noticeably growing body of research that suggests that despite the abundance of content, internet

users, specifically social media users, are consuming content that aligns closer to their political beliefs (Flaxman, Goel, & Rao, 2016). In seeking political information, in a high-choice media environment like the internet, it has been seen in several studies that respondents were shown to be more inclined to select news articles from outlets that resemble their own political attitudes than they would be to contend that they disagree with ideologically (Cinelli, et al., 2020; Garrett, 2009; Iyengar and Hah, 2009). This tendency to exclude such content has raised debate among scholars that the internet is increasingly contributing to a more tribal, fragmented, and polarized citizenry (Sunstein, 2001).

This is particularly troubling especially from the perspective of promoting a healthy democracy, i.e. a well-informed citizenry that is exposed to, and engages in various viewpoints and opinions as a necessity. This exposure, as has been argued by Mutz (2008), deepens people's understanding of their arguments both for and against their political beliefs. This results in a more informed, and more tolerant political attitudes and behaviors towards one another. However, all of this becomes a more difficult undertaking as selective exposure behavior in the media, specifically in the internet has been repeatedly linked to a growing sense of polarization amongst the public. As has been noted by Stroud (2008), different news exposure and consumption patterns may lead audiences and readers to develop different impressions of what is happening in the world around them. Without a shared base of information, it is difficult to imagine citizens agreeing on matters of public policy; thus, it is easy to envision citizens developing highly polarized attitudes toward political matters. Hence,

it is deemed common to get to two or more wildly different takes from the same political content.

Technological changes over time have only further this ideological segregation. Search engines, news aggregators, and popular social media networks have developed features that allows users to essentially customize the content they receive on these platforms. Through the use of algorithms and machine learning models, sites have played an outsized role in curating their users' experience on their platforms by only exposing their users to content that they already agree with, or to content that does not stray far from their respective comfort zones (Cinelli, Morales, Galeazzi, Quattrociochi, & Starnini, 2020). A more active approach in sifting through politically diverse content is with the aforementioned features present in most social media platforms. Options such as *mute*, *unfollow*, *unfriend*, *suggested pages/ videos* are on its face benign features that merely affords users greater control to what they see and hear online. However, coupled with social media's algorithms for content exposure, users then are driven, whether consciously or not, to their own echo chamber or filter bubbles that isolate them dissonant beliefs regardless of merit.

The proliferation of echo-chambers, created by this selective exposure and heightened social media, has proven to be an effective vehicle for misinformation (Tornberg, 2018; Flaxman, Goel, Rao, 2016; & Dallipane, 2011). In recent years much attention has been given to misinformation, as it has been a pervasive problem that came along with the wide scale accessibility and popularity of social media. However, digital misinformation itself

is not a new phenomenon. According to Freedom House (2017), in the years that it has started tracking government-backed commentators that have attempted to generate seemingly grass roots support to their government in 2009, they have noticed that in recent years, this practice has become even more widespread and sophisticated. This was on full display in 2016 when misinformation or as its known shorthand, fake news, has, according to Freedom House played an important role in no less than 17 major elections around the world, including the United States and more closely, here in the Philippines.

### **Social media, misinformation, selective exposure breeds polarization**

There is ample evidence that Filipinos love social media. In their Digital 2020 Report for the Philippines, the firms We Are Social and Hootsuite (2020) showed that Filipinos spend close to ten hours on the internet, nearly four hours of which is devoted to social media. In fact, the Philippines has consistently outranked every other country in the world in this category for half a decade now. This is what led others to consider the Philippines as the social media capital of the world. On the other hand, this is surprising since the country has a well-documented record of problems regarding internet affordability (Surfshark Ltd, 2020), accessibility (Jones, 2019) and quality. Contrary, with the number of social media users globally, social media has steadily increased in recent years — the Philippines being part of this trend is perhaps to be expected. Another reason why social media use has increased in the country is the wide access to mobile phone connections. As mentioned in the same report, 94% of the Filipinos aged 16-64 either have a mobile

phone or smart phones (with 73 million people in the country are internet users). As expected, the most used social media platform in the country is Facebook then followed by Youtube and FB messenger.

The outright ubiquity of Facebook in the country had been an effective tool for misinformation during the 2016 presidential elections. For Letter (2017), since being elected in May 2016, Duterte has turned Facebook into a weapon. The same Facebook personalities who fought dirty to see Duterte win were brought inside the Malacañang Palace. Using the platform, enemies and critics of the administration were smeared by so-called trolls, and the subsequent online mob that would come to be known collectively as “DDS”. Contrary, critics would engage in their own partisan attacks on the platform. Cabanes and Cornelio (2017) assert that the promise of social media was to democratize public participation, but it was accompanied by the curse of hate. Supporters and critics alike were united in opposition to one another, some have even found a source found glee in the demonization of the other side.

The distillation of partisan rancor, hate, and suspicion seen on Facebook in the 2016 elections is a good example of as to how selective exposure, echo chambers, and misinformation can poison public discourse and even have deleterious effects on public policy. Functioning democracies require consensus and cooperation but that cannot happen if no one is willing to listen and believe the other side. Now four years later, this study explores the news consumption patterns — whether or not the youth engages in partisan selective exposure, and



its effects on their susceptibility to misinformation. Insights from this study can help in addressing the scourge of misinformation, and providing a better understanding to those who carries varying views.

## **Aims and methodology**

The study aimed at contributing to the broader understanding of the youth's news consumption in the age of digitized media. The study looked into the selective exposure behavior, and how it affects their susceptibility to fake news. Specifically, this study has three main objectives:

1. To establish that Filipino youth has been engaging in selective exposure with regards to the news they consume
2. To determine whether or not selective exposure contributes to the cascade and spread of so-called fake news
3. To find out the effects of selective exposure to public discourse and in Philippine politics in general

To achieve these objectives, this study made use of a quantitative methodology through the use of a survey. Due to the restrictions brought about by the pandemic, respondents were asked to fill-out a self-completion questionnaire. The questionnaire then was divided into three general parts. The first part of the questionnaire aimed to form a general profile of the respondent. A salient feature of this part of the questionnaire is that it asks whether or not the respondent is a critic or a supporter of the current administration. This distinction has to be established early on, as has been noted in several studies (Rodriguez, Moskowitz, Salem 2017; & Arceneaux, Johnson, Cryderman 2013),

partisan selective exposure derives heavily from an individual's political preferences. The researchers hypothesize, that respondents who clearly identify in one side will be more receptive to likeminded content from like-minded media outlets, pages and or, personalities.

The second segment of the questionnaire explores the news consumption patterns of the respondents. It looked at the sources of their news, the digital platform of their choice, and the varying levels of engagement with both like-minded and no likeminded content from these platforms. In this regard, this part of the study patterns its questionnaire to various media consumption questionnaires online and most notably in the study of Masip, Suau-Martinez and Ruiz-Caballero (2017) regarding the impact of social networks on political news consumptions. Moreover, this part of the questionnaire also looked at how respondents actively isolate themselves from political content that they disagree with through the use of the many features social media sites offer on their platforms as shown in the studies of (Ardi, 2019; Flaxman, Goel, Rao, 2016; & Stroud, 2010)

The last segment of the questionnaire focused on the respondent's behavior when presented with fake news. The researchers selected posts, headlines and, quote cards, that were classified to be outright fake or false by the non-profit, independent, fact checking organization Vera Files. According to its website, the organization rates content as "FAKE" if the claim is completely fabricated while claims that contradicts official records, international or national laws and/ or scientific studies are rated as "FALSE" (Vera Files, 2020). Of the collected content,

two sets were prepared. One set is overtly critical of the administration and its officials, while the other is supportive of the administration or critical to members of the opposition. Respondents are asked on the likelihood of them sharing said content, and likewise the underlying reason if they choose not share it. The researchers hypothesize that the respondents who identified themselves as critics of the administration will be more likely to believe content albeit fake, that coincides with their political identification and vice versa.

Questions used in the questionnaire, specifically in the second and third part, were modeled with responses in the form of Likert Scales in order to establish strength and linearity of attitude. In the first part, the respondent is asked at what extent do they support the administration, with three response options (1 = oppose to 3 = support,) this is used to identify themselves as either a Critic or a Supporter of the administration. The second part where behavior of Selective Exposure was driven and associated, the sample of question was: How many times have you unfollowed/blocked people/pages/personalities/outlets whose views you disagree with, with five response questions rating (1 = Never, 5 = More than 10.) Another survey question that was used for analysis concerns the immediate behaviors or actions that they may do once they are presented with material that they disagree with, these are separated into 5 different attitudes with 5 response ratings (1= Very Unlikely to 5 = Very Likely.) In the last part of the survey questionnaire are 12 distinct fake news material that measured their susceptibility, they are then given the question whether or not they agree that the material is factual, with a 3-point scale (1 = Don't Agree to 3 = Agree.)

The survey was conducted with the assistance of university students through dissemination to various social media platforms, university organizations, and social media groups among others. Participation was voluntary. Before answering the questionnaire, the participants were provided with consent forms, detailing the extent of their participation, the purpose of the study, and their right to privacy. The survey takes about 10-15 minutes to accomplish. Ultimately, the data from the questionnaire was analyzed using the Goodman and Kruskal's gamma coefficient to measure the strength and direction of association between variables.

## Results

According to data from the Philippine Statistical Authority (2017), there is about 4,111,851, both male and female ages 15-30, from the Total Population by Single-Year Age and Sex in the National Capital Region as of 2015. The researchers conducted the study with a sample size of 344 respondents, and a confidence interval of 5.28, the confidence level is set at 95%, to compensate for the lack definitive total number of population to the present date.

The survey questionnaire consists of 29 questions in total, including the 3 personal and demographic questions, of that relating to name, age, and gender. The rest consist of questions relating to media engagements, behavior, and issue identification. Among the 344 respondents recorded, 56.7% or 195 are male respondents, and 43.3% percent or 149 are female respondents.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	195	56.7	56.7	56.7
	Female	149	43.3	43.3	100.0
	Total	344	100.0	100.0	

**Table 1. Distribution of gender**

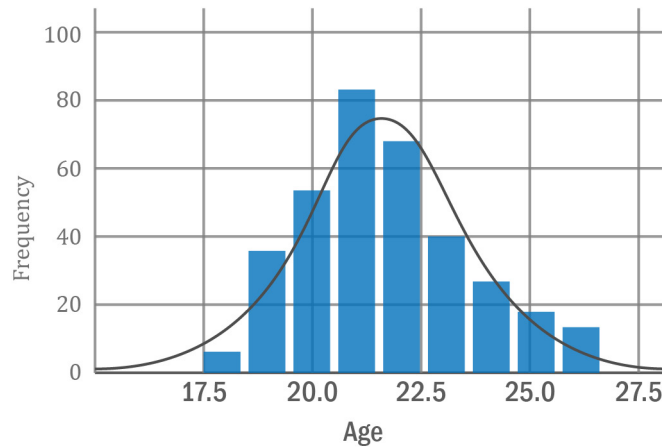
The survey is conducted with a target respondent age of 15-30 years old to comprise the youth population, with a total collected only from 18-26 years old. The mean age of respondents is 21.68 years old, with a standard deviation of 1.839.

	Age	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Report
Valid	18	2	0.6	0.6
	19	37	10.8	11.3
	20	55	16.0	27.3
	21	83	24.1	51.5
	22	68	19.8	71.2
	23	40	11.6	82.8
	24	27	7.8	90.7
	25	19	5.5	96.2
	26	13	3.8	100.0
Total		344	100.0	

**Table 2. Distribution of age**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	344	18	26	21.68	1.839
Valid N	344				

**Table 3. Descriptive statistics**



**Figure 1. Histogram**

In the study conducted, respondents were asked to identify themselves with regard to their political association. Out of 344, 58.4% or 201 identified as critic/non-supporter of the current

administration, 25% or 86 identified themselves as non-affiliated, and 16.6% or 57 individuals identified as a supporter.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Critic / non-supporter	201	58.4	58.4	58.4
	Non-affiliated	86	25.0	25.0	83.4
	Supporter	57	16.6	16.6	100.0
	Total	344	100.0	100.0	

**Table 4. Political association**

The Goodman and Kruskal's gamma is used to measure the strength and direction of association that exists between two variables on ordinal scales. The researchers used Goodman and Kruskal's gamma to identify if there is an association between three pairs of variables, since most of the survey questions were constructed in a 5-point, 4-point,

and 3-point Likert scales, namely, a) political association, b) behavior of selective exposure, and c) immediate behavior against news in disagreement, all paired to d) susceptibility to misinformation. Satisfying the two assumptions required to run the analysis, the researchers used IBM SPSS statistical tool to run the series of tests.

Ordinal by ordinal	<i>G</i> coefficient	Valid cases	Asymptotic standard error	Approximate T	<i>p</i> value
PA * Q1	-0.006	344	0.086	-0.074	0.941
PA * Q2	-0.016	344	0.093	-0.177	0.859
PA * Q3	-0.063	344	0.104	-0.609	0.542
PA * Q4	0.029	344	0.085	0.344	0.731
PA * Q5	-0.295	344	0.079	-3.534	0.0
PA * Q6	-0.040	344	0.084	-0.478	0.633
PA * Q7	-0.336	344	0.078	-3.995	0.0
PA * Q8	-0.069	344	0.086	-0.798	0.425
PA * Q9	-0.291	344	0.085	-3.144	0.002
PA * Q10	-0.249	344	0.082	-2.905	0.004
PA * Q11	0.068	344	0.097	0.690	0.490
PA * Q12	0.034	344	0.084	0.410	0.682

$G = 1$ , perfect positive correlation,  $G = -1$ , perfect inverse correlation,  $G = 0$ , no association between variables  
 $*p < 0.05$ ,  $**p < 0.01$   $***p < 0.001$

**Table 5. Relationship of political association and susceptibility to misinformation**

Goodman and Kruskal's gamma was run to determine the association between political association and susceptibility to misinformation among 344 respondents. Results yielded that out of twelve questions to analyze if the rise of political support will have effect susceptibility to misinformation,

only four indicated an inverse correlation with statistical significance: with gamma and  $p$  values for Question 5 ( $G = -0.295$ ,  $p = 0.0$ ), Question 7 ( $G = -0.336$ ,  $p = 0.0$ ), Question 8 ( $G = -0.291$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ), and Question 9 ( $G = -0.249$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ).

Ordinal by ordinal	<i>G</i> coefficient	Valid cases	Asymptotic standard error	Approximate T	<i>p</i> value
SE * Q1	0.319	344	0.074	4.234	0.0
SE * Q2	0.0	344	0.084	-0.002	0.998
SE * Q3	-0.275	344	0.083	-3.160	0.002
SE * Q4	-0.974	344	0.010	29.654	0.0
SE * Q5	-0.04	344	0.076	0.531	0.596
SE * Q6	0.698	344	0.045	12.305	0.0
SE * Q7	-0.184	344	0.073	-2.52	0.012
SE * Q8	-0.181	344	0.072	-2.512	0.012
SE * Q9	0.309	344	0.081	3.716	0.0
SE * Q10	0.255	344	0.073	3.401	0.001
SE * Q11	0.319	344	0.082	3.790	0.0
SE * Q12	0.442	344	0.066	6.178	0.0

$G = 1$ , perfect positive correlation,  $G = -1$ , perfect inverse correlation,  $G = 0$ , no association between variables  
 $*p < 0.05$ ,  $**p < 0.01$   $***p < 0.001$

**Table 6. Relationship of selective exposure behavior and susceptibility to misinformation**

In the selective exposure behavior and susceptibility to misinformation, results revealed ten out of twelve observations has statistical significance, six has strong statistical significance, with varied positive and inverse correlation: Question 1 ( $G = 0.319, p = 0.0$ ), Question 3 ( $G = -0.275, p = 0.002$ ), Question 4 ( $G = -0.974, p = 0.0$ ), Question 6 ( $G = 0.698, p = 0.0$ ), Question 7 ( $G = -0.184, p = 0.012$ ), Question 8 ( $G = -0.181, p =$

$0.012$ ), Question 9 ( $G = 0.309, p = 0.0$ ), Question 10 ( $G = 0.255, p = 0.001$ ), Question 11 ( $G = 0.319, p = 0.0$ ), and Question 12 ( $G = 0.442, p = 0.0$ ). Out of all the observations,  $p$  values with greater than 0.001 indicated an inverse correlation, while the rest that garnered a value of  $p < 0.001$  demonstrated a positive correlation that as the number of Selective Exposure Behavior increases, the Susceptibility of the respondents to Misinformation also increases.

Ordinal by ordinal	<i>G</i> coefficient	Valid cases	Asymptotic standard error	Approximate T	<i>p</i> value
IB1 * Q1	-0.013	344	0.063	-0.203	0.839
IB1 * Q2	-0.166	344	0.076	-2.147	0.032
IB1 * Q3	-0.021	344	0.084	-0.245	0.807
IB1 * Q4	-0.230	344	0.068	-3.306	0.001
IB1 * Q5	0.06	344	0.07	0.855	0.393
IB1 * Q6	-0.168	344	0.07	-2.403	0.016
IB1 * Q7	-0.145	344	0.067	2.161	0.031
IB1 * Q8	0.212	344	0.066	3.227	0.001
IB1 * Q9	-0.029	344	0.068	-0.429	0.668
IB1 * Q10	0.099	344	0.067	1.469	0.142
IB1 * Q11	0.059	344	0.076	0.781	0.435
IB1 * Q12	-0.046	344	0.071	-0.641	0.522

$G = 1$ , perfect positive correlation,  $G = -1$ , perfect inverse correlation,  $G = 0$ , no association between variables  
 $*p < 0.05$ ,  $**p < 0.01$   $***p < 0.001$

**Table 7. Relationship of immediate behavior in disagreement (ignore) and susceptibility to misinformation**

The observation for the relationship of immediate behavior in disagreement (ignore) and susceptibility to misinformation indicated only four results with statistical significance: Question 4 ( $G = -0.230, p = 0.001$ ), Question 6 ( $G = -0.168, p = 0.016$ ), Question

7 ( $G = 0.145, p = 0.031$ ), and Question 8 ( $G = 0.212, p = 0.001$ ). The values of the results came with varying degree, with inconclusive definitive values of correlation to be inferred.

Ordinal by ordinal	<i>G coefficient</i>	Valid cases	Asymptotic standard error	Approximate T	<i>p value</i>
IB2 * Q1	-0.207	344	0.068	-3.021	0.003
IB2 * Q2	-0.230	344	0.072	-3.154	0.002
IB2 * Q3	-0.285	344	0.081	-3.367	0.001
IB2 * Q4	-0.176	344	0.075	-2.349	0.019
IB2 * Q5	0.047	344	0.072	0.662	0.508
IB2 * Q6	-0.137	344	0.071	-1.904	0.057
IB2 * Q7	-0.122	344	0.069	-1.770	0.077
IB2 * Q8	-0.027	344	0.067	-0.399	0.690
IB2 * Q9	0.014	344	0.086	0.158	0.875
IB2 * Q10	-0.142	344	0.072	-1.965	0.049
IB2 * Q11	-0.490	344	0.065	-6.878	0.0
IB2 * Q12	0.001	344	0.072	0.016	0.987

$G = 1$ , perfect positive correlation,  $G = -1$ , perfect inverse correlation,  $G = 0$ , no association between variables  
 $*p < 0.05$ ,  $**p < 0.01$   $***p < 0.001$

**Table 8. Relationship of immediate behavior in disagreement (reading and engagement) and susceptibility to misinformation**

For the observation of relationship of immediate behavior in disagreement (reading engagement) and susceptibility to misinformation, results showed five cases with statistical significance, namely, Question 1 ( $G = -0.207$ ,  $p = .003$ ), Question 2 ( $G = -0.230$ ,  $p = .002$ ), Question 3 ( $G = -0.285$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), Question 4 ( $G = -0.176$ ,  $p = 0.019$ ), and

Question 11 ( $G = -0.490$ ,  $p = 0.0$ ). All results with notable statistical significance, yielded a negative gamma value, that indicates that as respondents increase their time to read and engage to fake news material their susceptibility to misinformation decreases.

Ordinal by ordinal	<i>G coefficient</i>	Valid cases	Asymptotic standard error	Approximate T	<i>p value</i>
IB3 * Q1	0.219	344	0.063	3.446	0.001
IB3 * Q2	0.219	344	0.071	3.056	0.002
IB3 * Q3	-0.051	344	0.077	-0.668	0.504
IB3 * Q4	0.002	344	0.069	0.023	0.981
IB3 * Q5	-0.178	344	0.067	-2.617	0.009
IB3 * Q6	-0.047	344	0.063	-0.739	0.460
IB3 * Q7	-0.044	344	0.067	-0.656	0.512
IB3 * Q8	0.039	344	0.067	0.583	0.560
IB3 * Q9	0.515	344	0.057	8.035	0.0
IB3 * Q10	0.234	344	0.065	3.511	0.0
IB3 * Q11	-0.192	344	0.067	-2.858	0.004
IB3 * Q12	-0.058	344	0.060	-0.969	0.333

$G = 1$ , perfect positive correlation,  $G = -1$ , perfect inverse correlation,  $G = 0$ , no association between variables  
 $*p < 0.05$ ,  $**p < 0.01$   $***p < 0.001$

**Table 9. Relationship of immediate behavior in disagreement (criticism) and susceptibility to misinformation**

Out of the twelve observations tested, relationship of immediate behavior in disagreement (Criticism) and susceptibility to misinformation, six observations revealed statistical significance: Question 1 ( $G = 0.219, p = 0.001$ ), Question 2 ( $G = 0.219, p = 0.002$ ), Question 5 ( $G = -0.178, p = 0.009$ ), Question 9 ( $G = 0.515, p = 0.0$ ), and Question 10

( $G = -0.192, p = 0.004$ ). In the six observations, two observations revealed strong statistical significance with positive correlation, Question 9 and Question 10, two observations with statistical significance with value of  $p > 0.001$  reflected varying positive and inverse correlations.

Ordinal by ordinal	G coefficient	Valid cases	Asymptotic standard error	Approximate T	p value
IB4 * Q1	-0.090	344	0.068	-1.321	0.186
IB4 * Q2	0.239	344	0.067	3.533	0.0
IB4 * Q3	0.068	344	0.084	0.81	0.418
IB4 * Q4	-0.302	344	0.068	-4.357	0.0
IB4 * Q5	0.011	344	0.075	0.152	0.879
IB4 * Q6	-0.32	344	0.065	-4.784	0.0
IB4 * Q7	0.167	344	0.064	2.576	0.010
IB4 * Q8	0.213	344	0.064	3.308	0.001
IB4 * Q9	0.149	344	0.07	2.123	0.034
IB4 * Q10	0.028	344	0.067	0.412	0.680
IB4 * Q11	-0.431	344	0.065	-6.316	0.0
IB4 * Q12	-0.047	344	0.068	-0.688	0.492

$G = 1$ , perfect positive correlation,  $G = -1$ , perfect inverse correlation,  $G = 0$ , no association between variables  
 $*p < 0.05$ ,  $**p < 0.01$   $***p < 0.001$

**Table 10. Relationship of immediate behavior in disagreement (persuade others) and susceptibility to misinformation**

For the relationship of immediate behavior in disagreement (persuade others) and susceptibility to misinformation, results showed that out of twelve observations, seven observations exhibited properties of statistical significance: Question 2 ( $G = 0.239, p = 0.0$ ), Question 4 ( $G = -0.302, p = 0.0$ ), Question 6 ( $G = -0.320, p = 0.0$ ), Question 7 ( $G = 0.167, p = .010$ ), Question 8 ( $G = 0.213, p = 0.001$ ), Question 9 ( $G = 0.149, p = 0.034$ ), and Question 11 ( $G = -0.431, p = 0.0$ ). Out of all the

results, three in the four observations with strong statistical significance ( $p < 0.001$ ) showed an inverse correlation which indicates that as respondents take time to persuade others regarding fake news material their susceptibility to misinformation decreases. Three results with p values greater than 0.001 reflected positive correlation coefficients and relatively lower values of correlation than the earlier four.



Ordinal by ordinal	<i>G coefficient</i>	Valid cases	Asymptotic standard error	Approximate T	<i>p value</i>
IB5 * Q1	-0.196	344	0.066	-2.934	0.003
IB5 * Q2	0.098	344	0.079	1.234	0.217
IB5 * Q3	0.177	344	0.082	2.147	0.032
IB5 * Q4	-0.053	344	0.072	-0.742	0.458
IB5 * Q5	-0.004	344	0.071	-0.053	0.957
IB5 * Q6	0.028	344	0.068	-0.417	0.677
IB5 * Q7	0.178	344	0.066	2.654	0.008
IB5 * Q8	0.091	344	0.067	1.347	0.178
IB5 * Q9	-0.304	344	0.067	-4.577	0.0
IB5 * Q10	-0.113	344	0.064	-1.761	0.078
IB5 * Q11	-0.102	344	0.082	-1.242	0.214
IB5 * Q12	-0.072	344	0.069	-1.053	0.292

$G = 1$ , perfect positive correlation,  $G = -1$ , perfect inverse correlation,  $G = 0$ , no association between variables

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$  \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

**Table 11. Relationship of immediate behavior in disagreement (rationalize) and susceptibility to misinformation**

Lastly, in the relationship of immediate behavior in disagreement (rationalize) and susceptibility to misinformation, four out of twelve observations yielded results with statistical significance: Question 1 ( $G = -0.196$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), Question 3 ( $G = 0.177$ ,  $p = 0.032$ ), Question 7 ( $G = 0.178$ ,  $p = 0.008$ ), and Question 9 ( $G = -0.304$ ,  $p = 0.0$ ). Observations that has a stronger statistical significance or  $p$  value, that which with  $< 0.001$ , reflected a negative gamma value or an inverse correlation, specifically in Question 1 and Question 9, where this could be interpreted as rationalization increases, relatively, susceptibility to fake news decreases.

## Discussion

In studying the news consumption patterns of the respondents, it is made abundantly clear that Facebook has a major role in delivering news and political content to the youth. Most have

attributed the internet, specifically the platform as their primary source of news. Though the platform experiences high popularity and used in most age groups as studies show, the youth are particularly receptive of the platforms features and more in tuned to recent trends happening all around the world. The wide-scale adoption of getting news from social media platforms is partly driven by a general sense of dissatisfaction with traditional sources of media. Though the reasons for this dissatisfaction have not been explored in this study, the responses collected paints a picture of young demographic who uses Facebook heavily and tunes mostly to like-minded content.

In contextualizing this phenomenon, it has been deduced that the respondents have demonstrated varying degree of selective exposure behavior to the content and information they see online. To some extent, this is to be expected

as selective exposure behavior can be a benign and natural reaction to content that they do not prefer. After all, selective exposure is driven by confirmation bias or that phenomenon that sees dissonance. In this case, dissonance in the political content that they consume in social media and their own political beliefs as Cinelli, et al, (2020) would put it as being “psychologically uncomfortable”. For the purposes of this study though, it has been demonstrated that the respondents engage in behavior that is conducive to the creation of echo-chambers. There have been numerous scholars who have decried that given the current media landscape, people are increasingly encasing themselves in spheres consonant views that is impenetrable to opposing ideas regardless of merit and validity. The resilience of selective exposure behavior can act as a mechanism to reinforce an existing opinion within a given echo-chamber. If left unchallenged, entire groups may move towards more extreme opinions. Moreover, this lack of exposure to alternative ideas also creates a misleading sense of unanimity, thus a different perception of reality across from other non- aligned groups. It has long been stressed that groups have to operate in a shared base of reality and information before it can cooperate and compromise with another. The resulting tribalism and polarization can hinder a healthy public discourse and debate from taking place. This polarization is manifested in the current Philippine political discourse. Ascribing entire groups as “Dilawan” or “DDS” is a natural manifestation of polarization. Though most reject the dichotomy, there is a noticeable absence of dissonant or at the very least, self-critical content in their social media pages.

Further analysis of the data collected from respondents of this study revealed that the assumption that political association may affect susceptibility of the youth to misinformation is rather inconclusive. Results show that out of twelve instances, only four yielded a slight inverse correlation between the variables, with statistical significance. The inverse correlation means that as political support to the administration increases, the susceptibility of the youth to misinformation decreases. However, as much as strength of the statistical significance is given, the G values posits a rather low association values for the inverse correlation. One thing that may be noted for this is that the youth may not be ideologically driven enough that they do not believe solely based on their political leanings, but they may rely more on context clues to identify whichever news may be deemed false. Further study of relationship of the political association and susceptibility to misinformation may be considered, due to certain factors — one is that the identification of political leaning may not give substantial framing of the support or opposition because this only generate two opposing extremes, second is that support and opposition may not give the exact political leaning of the respondent from the broad spectrum of political ideology.

As has been discussed, misinformation tends to “cascade” in echo chambers if it displays similar traits or it fits the narrative of the group. This is often due to the fact that echo-chambers are not places where ideas are usually challenged or subject to scrutiny. In this study however, the link between political association and their susceptibility to misinformation has not been established, as respondents who identified themselves as

supporters and critics have not simply believed and shared misinformation. This is particularly because it coincides with their political beliefs. It has been observed that the respondents are more receptive to other cues to online content that may alert them or make them doubt its credibility. This is partly one of the reasons why older people are more receptive to misinformation — a mix of cognitive decline, social changes and digital illiteracy (Brashier & Schacter, 2020).

Lastly, selective exposure may not be attributed to susceptibility to share misinformation. Sharing as an action tends to deviate from an array of multiple possible intentions, be it criticism, poke fun of the material, and hold as truth. Results from this study may establish the common ground for one of the possible causes of susceptibility to misinformation, which is selective exposure. Further studies and in-depth analysis of possible motivations for sharing misinformation may be conducted, but limitations of this study has proven inconclusive for the endeavor. The researchers recommend that a thorough introspection for the phenomena be constructed to associate the appropriate possible causes for sharing misinformation.

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# Responses, adaptations, and alternatives

## The National Movement of Young Legislators of the Philippines (NMYL) and the COVID-19 pandemic

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### Abstract

All the established codes on how to understand order and power relations were suddenly obliterated by the apparent powerlessness of all social institutions in managing the COVID-19 pandemic. It is in this context that the research sought to explore the responses, adaptations, and proposed alternatives of young legislators rising over this pandemic. Close ended interview schedule was used in the study. The data was assessed through content and contextual analysis. It was found that the LGUs responded using its legislative powers to contain the spread of COVID-2019. However, the LGU is limited by its financial inadequacies, as well as the lingering imposition of the central government. However, it must be emphasized that the national agencies, as well as the barangays, extended their best efforts to respond to the need(s) of the LGUs during the emergency.

### Keywords

COVID-19, LGUs, pandemic, national agencies, barangays

### Introduction

From the early beginnings of the social analysis, taking off from structural functionalist perspective, social Darwinists, such as William Graham Sumner in his work, *Sociology* (1881), and Herbert Spencer's *The Principles of Sociology*

in 1876, both argue that most societies appear and disappear based on natural selection. They stressed that this system allows natural giftedness or adaptive advantage to be transferred from one generation to the next. Thus, the society projects an

impression that through constant adjustments and realignments, they develop their fitness allowing individuals to accumulate wealth and power.

Marx's (1867) *Das Kapital* and George Simmel's (1900) *The Philosophy of Money* assumes that economic power determines the location of social power, thereby defining the layers of classes and individuals. Social exchange theorist George Caspar Homans (1974) proposes that the understanding of social order is based on the rational calculation of reward and punishment. Symbolic interactionist like Erving Goffman argues that impressions and projections are the basis of appreciating various actors in the theater of the social. Postmodernism, feminism, queer theory, and phenomenology have their eyes on the multiplicity of truth centers — bracketed and redacted the over impositions of grand narratives, such as the state, culture, and traditions.

However, all these established codes on how to understand order and power relations were suddenly obliterated by the apparent powerlessness of all social institutions in managing the COVID-19 pandemic. It is in this context that the research sought to explore the responses, adaptations, and proposed alternatives of young legislators rising over this pandemic.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

### **For experiential inferences**

Close ended interview schedule was used. Its purpose is to understand how the studied subjects see the world. It also allowed the researcher to capture the meanings based on their individual

perceptions and experiences (Corbetta, 2003) to arrive at the study source or the nucleus of truth.

### **For policy inferences**

In this research, the conduct of policy analysis was done from two perspectives.

### **Content analysis**

This approach goes beyond the mere examination of the provisions of law, but also casting them in some kind of general categorization using typologies or taxonomies (Brochu, n.d.; McBride, Terry-MCelrath, Hardwood, Inciardi, & Leukefeld, 2009; MacCoun, Reuter, & Schelling, 1996; Ostrowski, 1989; Reuter, Falco, & MacCoun, 1993).

### **Contextual analysis**

This approach to policy analysis examines the contextual milieu of the policy. Thus, COVID-19 related policies were analyzed in context and in situ, with local realities and situations taken into account of (Ritter, Bammer, Hamilton, & Mazerolle, 2007), while focusing and highlighting the broader historical, social, economic, political, cultural and philosophico-moral factors that shape their formulation (Cohen, 1993; Ghodse, 2010; Harrison, Backenheimer, & Inciardi, 1996; Jelsma, 2010; McBride, et al., 2009; Sinha, 2001; Stoker, 2008).

## **Data Processing Technique and Analysis**

### **For experiential inferences**

The traditional conduct of social science inquiry, in the domain of qualitative research, was faithfully followed in order to establish rigidity and scientificity.

Six (6) stages of data management was observed. The first stage is **data collection**, second, **encoding**; third, **coding**; fourth, **sorting**; fifth, **memoing**; and finally, **decoding**.

### **For policy inferences**

The research used the manifest-latent analysis technique in analyzing the content of the ordinances crafted by various LGUs within the country.

In a manifest analysis, the researcher performed a close reading of the text to describe the visible and obvious in the text (Bengtsson, 2007). This technique takes into consideration what was mentioned in the text.

Contrary, latent analysis is extended to an interpretive level in which the researcher seeks to find the underlying meaning of the text: what the text is talking about (Berg, 2001; Catanzaro, 1988; Downe-Wambolt, 1992). This technique takes into consideration the intention of the text.

In total, five (5) interviews were conducted, while twenty-six (26) legislative actions were subjected to content analysis.

## **Research Findings**

### **Responses**

The local government units were empowered by the Local Government Code of 1991, wherein it was declared that the territorial and political subdivisions of the State shall enjoy genuine and meaningful local autonomy to enable them to attain their fullest development as self-reliant communities

and make them more effective partners in the attainment of national goals (Section 2, LGC: 1991).

For almost two (2) decades, after the institutionalization of local autonomies, the central government and its devolved counterparts are working hand in hand to provide for a more responsive and accountable local government structure instituted through a system of decentralization. Aside from the powers, authority, and resources delegated by the national government to the local government units (LGUs), the LGUs were also given immense responsibilities to look after the well-being of its own people, as a natural consequence of the decentralization process.

Thus, the formulation and implementation of policies and measures in the conduct of local autonomy rests heavily on the capacity of the LGU to balance the distribution of power, resources, and accountability.

In an ideal situation, more than the national government, the LGU is obliged to be responsive and anticipatory especially during a crisis.

However, the impact of the COVID-19 health crisis announced the structural defects and imbalances particularly in poorer municipalities. In the Visayas, LGUs are highly dependent on their internal revenue allotment (IRA), and are now facing the immediate and long term health, economic, and social consequences brought about by the pandemic (HB:2020). Stressing on the challenges of having limited local funds, the LGUs asserted that with the challenges in human and logistical resources, they have to be creatively resourceful to



efficiently manage the pandemic-related crisis, and respond to the needs of the people (HB).

The ingenuity of the LGUs were exhibited as they rushed to find innovative ways to protect their people. Generally, LGUs responded using a two-pronged approach; firstly through its power to legislate, regulate, and restrict; and secondly, through its inherent obligation to nourish, protect, and promote the right to life, and right to health of every constituent.

With regards to legislative actions, LGUs dig deep into their reserves by passing ordinances which enable them to mobilize supplemental budgets, and re-program savings from the previous fiscal year to subsidize units within the LGU. This is to finance COVID-19 related programs, activities, and projects (PAPs), procurement of equipment, personal protective equipment (PPEs), medicines and supplies, as well as assistance to individuals in crisis situations (MM:2020).

Seeking support from the Office of the President, and national agencies like Department Of Health (DOH), Bureau of Quarantine, and the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office (PCSO) for financial assistance through resolutions and memorandum of agreements (MM:2020) were some of the substantial ways of generating funds imagined by the LGUs. Major efforts were made in terms of fund mobilization for the food security of the constituents, and assistance for food and accommodations to suspected persons under quarantine (MMPM: 2020).

As an immediate response, health and safety protocols were put in place by local legislators, in partnership with the local chief executives: regular meetings with provincial health officer (PHO), municipal health officers (MHOs), mayors, and provincial inter agency task force (IATF) to activate provincial and municipal surveillance teams, barangay health emergency response teams (BHERTS) and the Boracay COVID-19 response team were activated and trained in latest protocols to aid and assist returning overseas Filipino workers (ROF), locally stranded individuals (LSIs), authorized person outside of residence (APOR) (MM:2020).

To regulate and restrict the movement of people, provincial governments drafted the assistance of artificial intelligence for online health declaration card — to easily manage data that can be used for contact tracing for airline and Roll-on Roll-off (RoRo) passengers. Digital land border control was also deployed in airports, jetty port, and island transfers (MM: 2020). Local and international flights were cancelled, and protocols are already in place upon resumption of flights (MM: 2020).

Similarly, hospitals and rural health units (RHUs), within its territorial jurisdiction, were instructed to establish COVID-19 triage areas to assess patients with COVID-19 related symptoms, province-wide COVID-19 referral, and monitoring system (MM: 2020). Similarly, all municipalities within the province were tasked to set up and maintain LIGTAS COVID-19 CENTERS (quarantine facilities) which adhere to infection control standards, evaluated by the Department of Health (DOH) and Provincial Health Office (PHO) (MM:2020).

In Luzon, local legislators responded to the COVID-19 crisis by implementing ordinances and health protocols, e.g. lockdowns. Travel restrictions were raised to both incoming and outgoing passengers. Only essential cargoes were allowed in order to sustain the availability of goods, medicines, and other needs of the constituents (JB: 2020). Overall, restriction on the mobility of people was imposed. Other than the locally initiated responses to the pandemic, the national COVID-19 response plan of the central government was replicated by the LGUs. Particularly, the municipality applied the national guidelines for precautionary measures to contain the spread of the virus (MPPM: 2020).

The steps taken in Mindanao were similar to that of Visayas and Luzon counterparts, the City Government has worked closely with the City Health office and Department of Health at the onset of the outbreak (KS:2020). The city government initiated steps and programs to combat COVID-19, borders were secured, movement of people within the city was limited, and health protocols were observed (KS: 2020).

Physical infrastructures were put into order by acquiring health equipment and other materials needed to ensure the safety and well-being of the citizens (KS: 2020). Moreover, provincial hospitals were equipped since they became the default COVID-19 referral hospital. Thus, equipment were procured, such as video laryngoscope, mechanical ventilators, isolation rooms, and adequate personal protective equipment (PPEs) to comply with the requirements of the DOH (MM: 2020). Furthermore, local communities were also organized to become self-sufficient. Since the locality is dependent on neighboring areas for food

and other resources, the city has rolled out plans on food security, and encouraged locals to do backyard gardening to stabilize the supply of vegetables, and other food commodities (KS:2020).

When the local transmissions became apparent, the physical, e.g. health equipment and quarantine facilities, social infrastructures, e.g. family and school, as well as the administrative infrastructures of LGUs were in place ready to be deployed. When the first case of COVID was recorded, the City health officials conducted massive contact tracing. Moreover, containment measures were executed to avoid the further spread of the virus. The legislative department also crafted different measures to help the executive perform its action, and be able to deliver services to the people of Isabela. The legislative department has also enacted an ordinance to protect patients, frontliners, and health workers from all forms of discrimination related to COVID-19 (KS: 2020).

The City Government of Masbate for instance, covered the significant areas of survival, prevention, and containment of the support food packs for their 30 barangays. They are very strict in implementing the health protocols, such as using facemask and alcohol, and social distancing. They also implemented the regulations that those ages below 21 and Senior Citizens are not allowed to go outside their home(s). Furthermore, the LGUs implemented checkpoints in every barangays. They distributed one quarantine pass per household to buy their needs. Lastly, the city government implemented restrictions on social gatherings, such as in restaurants and establishments. The City government provided a quarantine facility for

the locally stranded individuals (LSI), authorized persons outside of residence (APOR), and overseas Filipino workers (OFWs). They carefully guide and ensure this through following the protocol (JB: 2020). Strict implementation of face masks, face shields, and installation of suitable physical protective barriers in all public places (MM: 2020) as the first line of defense were mandated by LGUs throughout the entire duration of the enhanced community quarantine (MM). Local inter-agency task forces were ordered to solicit absolute compliance from the community during the state of public health emergency (MM).

### **Adaptations**

Since the decentralization, the responsibility of the local government has been magnified. As such, the crisis that caught the entire globe by surprise, made its impact more devastating to the LGUs.

The LGUs in the Visayas were left with no choice, but to adapt and imagine new systems to address the needs of the present situation, i.e. establishing quarantine and isolation facilities, and conducting contact tracing as protocols to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus). The LGUs implemented new policies to help address the situation and its immediate and long term impacts to the municipality (HB: 2020).

Among others, the Masbate LGU adapted the new systems by making some transactions online. At the same time, they mandated that all offices in Masbate strictly implement the “NO FACE MASK, NO FACE SHIELD NO ENTRY” policy (JB: 2020). Visitors were also required to log personal information

before entering offices for the purpose of contact tracing (JB: 2020). The LGU Masbate implemented the use of face shield(s) in all public transportations. Also, limitations on the number of passengers were also imposed to observe social distancing (JB: 2020). The business establishments were likewise regulated through limited operating hours from 8am-5pm. However, drug stores and markets are allowed to operate up to 7:00pm (JB: 2020).

Similarly, the city of Cabanatuan adapted some systems that will help the local economy to recover without risking the local transmission of the virus. Specifically, the LGU maximized the use of technology platforms that can offer online transactions and payments. They also modified some procedures in acquiring government services. In the distribution of food supply, they implemented the no contact policy, dynamically created ordinances that will secure the health of the constituents, such as the wearing of masks and face shields, regulation of mass gatherings, and enhancing the data collection for the enhanced contact tracing (MMPM:2020).

In Mindanao, new guidelines and activities have been implemented from time to time (KS: 2020). Practices are constantly modified. They have strictly imposed lesser face-to-face transactions with strict compliance of wearing face masks in public places. Similarly, they have encouraged full cooperation and discipline to the people. Skeletal force has been implemented in government offices with respect to the omnibus guidelines of the Inter-Agency task Force (IATF). Moreover, curfews have been enforced, i.e. both night curfews and 24/7 curfew for minors) (KS: 2020).

Once the health protocols were in place, other spheres of human existence were taken into consideration.

For the economic well-being of the citizens, payments of existing loans and real property taxes were suspended, price control measures on basic and prime commodities, including agricultural products, were likewise legislated.

On the other hand, the local legislative councils requested all local government units to prioritize buying fresh products from local farmers. In lieu, this is to be included in food relief packs for distribution during the general community quarantine period. The LGUs were likewise encouraged to create a market link of all farmer-producers. This is to ease logistical arrangement of food supply delivery and distribution during the general community quarantine period (MM: 2020).

For the social life of the community, social gatherings were temporarily deferred such as religious, recreational, and community assemblies to maintain social distancing.

For the mental health of the citizens, dignity and honor were preserved by legislating the prohibition of any person from committing any act which causes stigma, disgrace, shame, humiliation, harassment or otherwise discriminating against a person suspected, probable, or confirmed infected with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). These include public and private doctors, nurses, health workers, emergency personnel and volunteers, service workers who are assigned to hospitals, or other centers where these persons are being treated or managed. Specifically, through

imposing the appropriate penalties for violations thereof (MM: 2020).

Care and protection were likewise extended to students by requesting the private and public colleges and universities to be considerate in the giving of marks during this critical time brought about by COVID-19 global pandemic (MM:2020).

The public-private sector partnership became apparent not only with the compliance of private universities and schools, but also corporate foundations were responsive in the areas of COVID-19 response capacity build-up. Moreover, there have been donations of personal protective equipment (PPE).

### **Discoveries and new alternatives**

The validated techniques and alternative propositions are highly significant to further prepare the LGUs to respond in future crises.

In the Visayas, the health protocols designed by the national government were put in effect to enhance their capabilities to test, trace, and treat patients with COVID-19. They must strengthen the quarantine measures, test, isolate, and cure strategy that will hopefully curb down the numbers of COVID-19 related cases (HB: 2020).

Furthermore in Luzon, the centralization of information was proposed through the Public Information Officer to lessen the fake news (JB: 2020) if necessary. The need to prepare the Barangay Officers, including the Barangay health workers, through proper training (JB: 2020) on health emergencies became apparent in order to

synchronize the efforts of the central and the local governments.

The pandemic gave the LGUs the opportunity to revisit its delivery of services, hence, made it clear that online transactions on the issuance of permits, clearances, certificates and other documents (JB:2020) are possible.

The pandemic similarly revealed the extended influence of the national government over the LGUs. This prolonged hierarchical arrangement limited the immediate control of the LGU over its territory encouraging local legislators to suggest that every LGU must be given the power of full control and to secure their boundaries. Through this, they can control the spread of virus in their respective jurisdiction (MMPM: 2020).

To institutionalize the mobilization of funds for LGUs independently during a pandemic without waiting orders from the central government. There must be a national law that in times of pandemic every LGU can mobilize their own fund or budget without waiting for the national government to issue guidelines regarding the funding in addressing the pandemic issues.

Moreover, the need for self-rule does not only go with the allocation and the use of funds, but also on the actual implementation of localized protocols. It is, therefore, proposed that there should be an autonomy on the imposition of the different categories of quarantine in the city which will be allowed to extend, maintain, or alter. This is, of course, after further assessment and evaluation aligned to the Omnibus guidelines of the IATF (KS: 2020).

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Responses**

The LGUs responded using its legislative powers to contain the spread of COVID-2019. However, the LGU is limited by its financial inadequacies, as well as the lingering imposition of the central government. However, it must be emphasized that the national agencies, as well as the barangays, extended their best efforts to respond to the need(s) of the LGUs during the emergency.

### **Adaptations**

The automation and presence of artificial intelligence in the local governments is a rising opportunity to explore, even without the presence of a crisis. Additionally, the work-from-home and the skeletal workforce arrangements are some of the alternatives that can be considered to respond to the various issues confronting the labor force.

### **Discoveries and new alternatives**

An efficient masterplan from the national government defines the success or failure of the nation's response to a crisis; since the LGUs are dependent upon the central government for guidance and resources. The presence of reliable and verifiable information is critical during the pandemic.

The LGUs hesitated to implement its full power within its territorial jurisdiction, as suggested in the Local Government Code. The selection of recipients must be more inclusive, an enhanced version of the model presented by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

Lastly, the government must allocate a special fund for future pandemics (JB: 2020).

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# Bursting bubbles: COVID-19 and college sports in the Philippines

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## Abstract

COVID-19 has abruptly ended the second semester season of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the University Athletic Association of the Philippines (UAAP). These two leagues are the apex of collegiate sports in the Philippines. They are the main gateway of youth athletes for national teams and professional success. However, the pandemic did not only ended the sports schedule of the two associations, but it also led to the revelation of the major issues surrounding collegiate sports in the country. The Sorsogon Bubble and its aftermath revealed the problem of commercialization of college sports. Both issues represent the governance problem in Philippine collegiate organizations. There is a controversy of the lack of proper regulation in this level of competition. This research explored the possibility of reforming the system by proposing another layer of governance similar to the American NCAA model. The framework followed by US college sports allows more leagues and institutions to participate in the governance process of collegiate athletic competition. Based on how the American organization handled the problem of commercialization and COVID-19, it will be a good framework for the Philippine collegiate associations to follow for its own new normal future.

## Keywords

COVID-19, UAAP, NCAA, college sports

## Introduction

COVID-19 has gravely affected the Philippines' sporting calendar. The virus has closed the season of every league in the nation, both the professional and amateur level. However, the impact of the suspension of play has greatly affected the amateur level more, particularly the collegiate leagues. This is due to the number of college circuits, and limited capacity of participant schools in absorbing the cost of operation of their respective collegiate sports associations. A handful of colleges

and universities have reconsidered their continued support on their sports programs. Cancellation of support on collegiate teams means possible displacement of coaches and student athletes. The level of displacement has affected almost all tertiary sporting leagues, even the two most popular circuits in the Philippines, which are the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the Universities Athletic Association of the Philippines (UAAP). The cancellation of the second semester season has



tremendously affected the status of the sporting programs of the member schools. With the prospect of moving forward from the pandemic a bit unclear, the state of collegiate sport reflects the massive problem to student level athletics. It showed that even in the level of amateur sports, the prospect of proper governance and supervision is necessary to have a more coherent approach in re-establishing student level competition. In the case of the UAAP and the NCAA, the lack of proper guidelines from relevant government agencies, within both leagues has resulted in a strain in the balance of sporting competition.

Unlike in the professional level, the restart window is not considered to open anytime soon. On the contrary, what made it more problematic for the two college leagues is the lack of oversight agency, akin to the Games and Amusement Board (GAB) for the professional level. It has stunted the progress of college teams amidst the lockdowns. With no prospect of a restart plan, a handful of collegiate programs have engaged in illegal training activities. These actions violating quarantine rules transpired because of the absence of an oversight structure. This structure oversees the development of a road map for collegiate sports to bounce back from the complexity brought about by the pandemic. Hence, this research analyzed the problematic state of the NCAA and UAAP in their attempt to move forward from the pandemic. The paper also explored the need for the development of an overall regulatory structure that will supervise collegiate sports in the country — to ensure the athletes' well-being, fair competition, and any form(s) of activities that is detrimental to youth sports respectively.

## **Collegiate sports in the Philippines**

Collegiate sports is the basis for the development and progress of the Philippine sporting landscape. College leagues serve as the main feeder for national athletes representing the nation in international events. These circuits also provide the foundation for skill development that is essential in the pursuit of a professional career. The two largest and most popular collegiate leagues, namely the NCAA and the UAAP, have a long history of providing talented athletes for flag and country. The two leagues are also the main feeder for the professional associations level, such as the Philippine Basketball Association (PBA) (Ballesteros, 2016).

Participating in the NCAA and the UAAP is the highest stage for an amateur athlete to attain possible stardom and popularity. Most of the stars in the sport of basketball, football, and volleyball came from the two leagues. It is therefore important to note the special status of the two leagues in representing youth sports in the country. There are other leagues that are also worth mentioning outside the NCAA and the UAAP. Leagues like the National Athletic Association of Schools, Colleges, and Universities (NAASCU) and the Cebu-based Cebu Schools Athletic Foundation, Inc. (CESAFI) have also become major contributors to the sporting landscape of the country (Nakpil, 2016; Navarro, 2019). However, these two leagues are relatively younger compared to the NCAA and the UAAP.

### **NCAA- oldest collegiate league**

The NCAA is the oldest multi sports league in the Philippines. It was founded in 1924 “upon the initiative of Dr. Regino R. Ylanan”, Physical

Education Department head of the University of the Philippines (Malonso, 2011). The founding member schools were the University of the Philippines (UP), the University of Santo Tomas (UST), University of Manila (UM), De La Salle University (DLSU), and Institute of Accountancy, which is presently known as the Far Eastern University (FEU). At present, the NCAA is composed of ten schools carrying team monikers. These colleges and universities are the following: the Arellano University- Chiefs (AU), College of Saint Benilde-Blazers (CSB), Colegio de San Juan de Letrán-Knights (CSJL), Emilio Aguinaldo College-Generals (EAC), Jose Rizal University-Bombers (JRU), Lyceum of the Philippines University-Pirates (LPU), Mapua University-Cardinals (MU), San Beda University-Red Lions (SBU), San Sebastian College-Recoletos-Stags (SSCR) and the University of Perpetual Help-DALTA-Altas (UPHD). The league season runs parallel to the school year with the first and second semester sports calendar.

The NCAA hosts eleven sports in two levels with both male and female teams. The junior level is played by the junior and senior high school athletes, while the seniors are participated by college and graduate students. Almost all of the participating schools have teams both in the junior and senior level in the following sports: basketball, chess, swimming, football, taekwondo, tennis, track and field, volleyball, table tennis, and beach volleyball. The men's basketball competition is the centerpiece sport of the League having a long history of rivalries and successful alumni that have transitioned to professional stardom in the PBA. NCAA basketball teams have also had success in the national circuit through the Philippine Collegiate Champions

League with Lyceum, San Beda, and San Sebastian teams winning the national crown. San Beda Red Lions has won the tournament twice.

### **NCAA as an organization**

The NCAA is composed of ten colleges and universities. Each member institution participates in the eleven sports competition held each season by the NCAA. A host school is chosen for every season. The institution will then handle the theme and proceedings for the whole two semester sporting calendar. The administration of the league is handled by the league commissioner while the policy board handles the internal and external affairs of the NCAA (Blanco & Bairner, 2018). A management committee, under the policy board, is given the task of handling the playing and other game concerns. All these institutions are essential in ensuring the fairness and competition in all the sports hosted by the NCAA.

### **Commissioner**

The role of the league commissioner covers the implementation of the NCAA's rules and regulation. The league commissioner ensures the parity and fairness of play that is essential in ensuring the competitive balance of collegiate sports. The power of appointing a league commissioner is given to the host institution. This power is also subject to the rotational status of being a season host. The position is given a level of power that determines the condition to play in a sport like basketball. In the NCAA, the Commissioner can choose freely the referees and the staff that he can engage and work with in his tenure (Roque, 2016). This power is important in the role of an arbiter and overall manager of the competition.

## **Policy board**

Composed of College and University Presidents or Rectors, the NCAA policy board handles the internal and external affairs of the league. The board is headed by a President that is rotated yearly depending on the host institution. The specific role of the board is to tackle the issue of acceptance, replacement and suspension of member institutions. This indicates that the Board is more focused on the health of the league and its future, rather than the day to day affairs. The board also serves as the main overseeing group that can assess the actions and decisions of the commissioner and the Management Committee (Blanco & Bairner, 2018).

## **Management committee**

The Management Committee (MANCOM) is composed of athletic moderators or directors that are selected by the Presidents or Rectors of the member institutions. A rotational Chair heads this committee. The Chair is appointed based on which school is hosting the league season like the president of the Policy Board. The main role of the MANCOM is to handle the management affairs of the NCAA. The body tackles the condition for playing, sanctioning of players, coaches, and referees, and the review or reversals of games played. The board also spearheads the investigation of any infraction committed by a member school, such as the issue of eligibility of a player or the determination of policies, e.g. the banning of foreign players playing for member schools (De La Cruz, 2020).

## **UAAP - The glamour league**

The UAAP was founded by some of the prominent members of the NCAA. The National University (NU),

the University of the Philippines (UP), the University of Santo Tomas (UST), and Far Eastern University (FEU) formally established the UAAP in September 27, 1938 (de Villa, 2019). Currently, the league is composed of eight teams with the University of the East, Adamson University, De La Salle University, and Ateneo de Manila University joining the previously mentioned institutions. The UAAP is considered to be the more 'popular' league due to the participation of the major universities in the country. The Ateneo-La Salle rivalry has also added greater attention to the UAAP due to the two universities' "elite" status and well-funded basketball programs that are supported by well-to-do alumni. Similar to the NCAA, the UAAP holds its season parallel to the school year followed by the member institution. The first semester competition runs through September to December, while the second semester sporting events are played through February to May. Sixteen sports are held in both the juniors and seniors level with both male and female teams, except for baseball and softball, which are only participated by male and female teams, respectively. The following are the other sports that are held in the two-semester season of the UAAP: athletics, basketball, badminton, beach volleyball, chess, fencing, football, judo, swimming, table tennis, taekwondo, tennis, and volleyball (Gealogo & Peralta, 2018). The latest addition is the 3x3 basketball competition which is now counted as a regular event in season 82 (inquirer.net, 2019). The UAAP has also contributed a handful of the national athletes that represent the country in international events. Many of the member schools have also been the breeding grounds for professional athletes in the line of basketball and football. Like the NCAA, the member institutions of the UAAP have fostered the development of youth sports by providing high level

training, and polishing for Filipino or even foreign student athletes for higher level competition.

### **UAAP organizational structure**

The UAAP is composed of eight universities participating in sixteen sports. Similar to the NCAA, the league also follows the host school system where one institution will serve as the season's main facilitator and organizer. Hosting is rotated to all the member institutions. Since season 80, the UAAP has implemented key reforms in the administrative and policy structure of the league (ust.edu.ph, 2017).

### **Commissioners**

Basketball and volleyball, the two most popular sports in the UAAP, have specific commissioners. The role is given the task to supervise the play and the operation of basketball and volleyball tournaments. They also manage the proceedings of sports. However, due to the changes in the scheduling of high-school basketball and volleyball, the appointment of the commissioners are now year round. This is due to the rescheduling of the boys' and girls' basketball and volleyball which are now held in tournament windows that pass through the first and second semesters of the school year. They are still appointed by the host school for the season (Blanco & Bairner, 2018).

### **Board of Trustees (BOT)**

This is composed of the institutional heads of member universities. Since the reorganization of the UAAP in 2017, the BOT, composed of Presidents and Rectors of member schools, are given more regulatory roles unlike the previous set-up which relegated the school executives as mere ceremonial figures (ust.edu.ph, 2017).

### **Executive Director**

Lawyer Rebo Saguisag is the first executive director appointed by the UAAP. The position is charged with a handful of duties like the implementation of the league policies, the provision of support for the board of trustees, the board of managing directors, and the league committees (spin.ph, 2017). Overall, the league executive director will oversee the general operations of the UAAP (sunstar.com.ph, 2017). Under the position are the league committees that handle the special interests of the league from promotions to investigations

### **Board of Managing Directors (BMD)**

This is composed of the college or university representatives. This used to be the powerful UAAP Board which was heavily criticized for backdoor deals and overwriting decisions of the commissioner. The reorganization provided an oversight relationship between the board members with the board of trustees. However, the board was still able to retain their general role as the policy body of the league and the quasi-legislative department that charts the health and future of the UAAP (ust.edu.ph, 2017).

### **Role of the NCAA and UAAP in Philippine sports development**

The Philippine sporting landscape mirrors some aspects of the American sports model. This is perhaps due to the colonial past of the Philippines under the United States of America (USA) stewardship (Antolihao, 2015). Youth sports reflect the school based system that are popular in the United States. College leagues represent the highest peak of amateur youth sports in the country similar

to the US NCAA. Club-Based Academies, similar to the European Model, is still limited to the recently opened football academies run by Philippine Football Clubs and International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) supported by Philippine Football Federation (PFF) programs (Songalia, 2015). On the other hand, most of the polishing and preparation for elite Filipino athletes are still conducted through the collegiate sporting circuits. The UAAP and the NCAA are the apex leagues in this regard. Member institutions tend to perform better against other schools and universities that are playing in other college leagues. This is evident with the dominance of UAAP and NCAA schools in national meets or competition like the PCCL (Olivares, 2020). In basketball, which is the most popular sport in the Philippines, the NCAA and UAAP provide the best avenue for exposure and skills development for aspiring PBA players. This is evident in the number of players drafted from these two leagues. Although there are also players from smaller leagues that have reached stardom in the PBA like Junmar Fajardo and Vic Manuel, they are mostly exceptions rather than the norm. Even in football, the professional league, Philippine Football League (PFL), still mostly rely on NCAA and UAAP players even if the club teams have already established their own academies.

However, the dominance of the NCAA and the UAAP can be a problematic state of Philippine youth sport development. The disparity of competition among the NCAA, UAAP, and other Leagues represents the polarized nature of youth sport in the country. The polarization is mainly due to the disparity in the access of funding and infrastructure of sporting programs. The Manila-based NCAA and UAAP schools serve as the apex

of the youth sport programs due to the immediate access to private funding and exposure (sunstar.com.ph, 2020). The member institutions also have direct and immediate access to facilities that are already present in the capital city. With a paying TV contract, the games that are played by the two leagues provide the bulk of funding for sports programs of individual member schools. Other leagues have it differently. Although other Manila based collegiate leagues such as the National Athletic Association of Schools, Colleges, and Universities (NASSCU) and the National Capital Region Athletic Association (NCRAA) have TV deals, the level of exposure is different due to the massive deals signed by the NCAA and UAAP with ABS-CBN sports (pageone.ph, 2020). Even with the cancellation of the network's franchise, both leagues will still find their ways into lucrative media deals that will beam their games nationwide. The situation is very different for provincial based leagues. Most of these collegiate leagues have limited access to funding and media exposure. Only the Cebu-based CESAFI have the semblance of media exposure and private support similar to the Manila-based circuits (Alison, 2016).

### **COVID-19 and collegiate sports**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the second semester sporting calendars of the NCAA and the UAAP abruptly ended. Even prior to the passing of Proclamation 992, which declared a State of Public Health Emergency in the entire country due to the corona virus on the 8th of March, there were already precautionary cancellations of NCAA and UAAP events (Saldajeno, 2020; Sevilla, 2020). The detection of early cases of the virus in January and February have resulted in the suspension of games in both leagues. The postponement disrupted

the start and continuance of popular sports like Volleyball and Football for both leagues. Initially the disruption in the game schedule was considered temporary due to the precautionary approach adopted by both leagues. However, after the declaration of Proclamation 992 and the suspension of classes in mid March, there were doubts on the continuation of Season 95 and 82 for the NCAA and UAAP, respectively. Eventually, the two leagues decided to cancel their second semester season based on the brevity of the threat of COVID-19 and the extension of the state-mandated quarantine guidelines (Yumol, 2020). The Philippine President Rodrigo Roa Duterte declared the major Island of Luzon in a state of Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) and State of Calamity due to the coronavirus via Proclamation 929 (officialgazette.gov.ph, 2020). Due to the declaration of the ECQ and the recommendation of the Inter-Agency Task Force for Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF) to suspend classes and sporting events, the NCAA and the UAAP decided to terminate the remainder of Season 95 and 82. The UAAP declared the abrupt end of the season on March 14 whilst the NCAA followed suit on the 19th (Yumol, 2020). This was disappointing news to players, coaches, and fans respectively.

### **Loss of scholarships and jobs**

The lockdowns imposed by the Philippine government to combat COVID-19 have not only resulted in a sudden end of the season for the various college leagues in the country, it has also threatened the security of coaches and student athletes of participating schools. Outside the NCAA and UAAP, there are schools and universities which discontinued their sporting programs due to the economic effect of the pandemic in the financial

health of educational institutions. One example is the Technological Institute of the Philippines' disbandment of their varsity program due to the harrowing effect of the COVID-19. Specifically, this is due to the related restrictions in the capacity of the school to sustain the operation of their athletic programs (Leongson, 2020). TIP and other educational institutions are forced to rationalize their operations and funnel their budget to ensure their continued operation with the impending drop of enrollees for the coming school year. Even with the venerated teams of NCAA and UAAP colleges and universities, which are known to have better sources of funding, the direct and indirect effect of the pandemic is forcing most member universities to slash a sizable chunk of the sports budget. According to Hercules Callanta, Lyceum of the Philippines University athletics director, via a Rappler interview, it has become "very expensive for some schools to maintain their sports program". Even other NCAA member institutions have also downsized their athletic programs. Schools like Colegio de San Juan de Letran (CSJL) and University of Perpetual Help DALTA (UPHD) have also implemented budgetary cuts and suspension of sports team operations (Cabildo, 2020). Coach Frankie Lim mentioned that UPHD has made it clear that because of the difficulties brought about by COVID-19, the University is not prioritizing its sports division at the moment due to the struggle in securing stable enrollment levels (Lozada, 2020). Even among UAAP schools, there is pressure in sustaining all varsity teams. The University of Santo Tomas (UST), the school with the most number of overall championships, mentioned all the possible downsizing of its sports programs and realignment of funds due to the economic losses incurred from

the reimbursement of students' matriculation fare brought about by the cancellation of face to face classes in the second semester (Micaller, 2020). However, this rumor was eventually laid to rest through a letter by the University's Rector Magnificus Rev. Fr. Richard G. Ang, O.P. to all the stakeholders. The Rector ensured that the scholarships are assured to the student athletes (metronewscentral.net, 2020). Undeniably, COVID-19 has drastically placed Philippine Collegiate Sports in a state of uncertainty.

### **Shut down of media partner**

The non-renewal of the franchise of the ABS-CBN has also contributed to the already complex situation of the NCAA and UAAP in the time of pandemic. ABS-CBN is a major reason why both leagues have attained commercial success within the last two decades (pageone.ph, 2020). The NCAA, started their partnership with the broadcast giant in 2002. Crucially, they are still in the middle of their ten year deal that is supposed to last until 2025 (Leongson, 2020). Notably, the UAAP had a longer relationship with the station. The collegiate league was the first partner of ABS-CBN after it secured its media rights in 2000 (Leongson, 2020). The partnerships of the Bohol-based network with both leagues had been beneficial for the growth and promotion of youth sports in the country. Besides the ratings and popularity of athletes from both leagues, the wide span and coverage of the ABS-CBN allowed greater development of sports promotion like the growth of major sports like Football and Volleyball (pageone.ph,2020). The promotion of these two sports started with the increase in coverage of NCAA and UAAP games. Volleyball has attained immense success since the network started

to constantly cover collegiate womens' games. Although still trailing to basketball, the constant and consistent coverage of Volleyball, Football, and other sports included in the two leagues, has created a new 'field of dreams' for the youth to pursue athletic excellence beyond basketball. The loss of the TV partner, even though not directly connected with COVID-19, is also a great loss for the two leagues' income and promotional future. This condition will make things more complicated for the "moving on" process to restart the next season which is planned next year, 2021.

### **Restarting sports in a pandemic**

Even with COVID-19 still haunting the Philippines, the clamor for a restart of sporting related activities has slowly emerged. However, the possibility of moving forward for collegiate and youth sports, in general, is still facing a rocky path due to the lack of guidelines for a re-start of training and conditioning for players. The initial attempt to restart practice was limited to professional players. The IATF, Philippine Sports Commission, and the GAB already approved the resumption of training for contact sports leagues like the Philippine Basketball Association (PBA), the Philippine Football League (PFL) and the Chooks to Go 3X3 league (Miranda, 2020). These professional leagues were given the green light for restarting practice and player conditioning activities but with certain guidelines to be followed. However, these leagues are also given the task to plan a "bubble" competition similar to that of the National Basketball Association (NBA) and other professional leagues in the world which have already resumed their respective league games (Leyba,2020). The "bubble" approach is based on the idea of isolating key and essential personnel

in a controlled area that is heavily monitored with constant health checks. One of the main models to be followed by the PBA, PFL, and Chooks 3X3 is the NBA model which housed its players, coaches, training/conditioning staff and other important personnel in the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex at the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando Florida (Haislop, 2020). The concept of the NBA bubble is to create a controlled environment with ensured health protection against COVID-19. All the three professional leagues mentioned above have already laid plans in their own specific bubble. The PBA has already chosen Clark Pampanga as their site whilst the Chooks 3X3 league will be housed in the Inspire Academy in Calamba, Laguna (Yumol,2020;Tupas,2020). This re-start initiative, however, is limited to professional leagues and players. Amateur and Collegiate Leagues like the NCAA and the UAAP are still prohibited to conduct practice or direct contact activities. The IATF and the partner agencies remained firm in the ban of contact sports activities in the non-professional level.

### **Bubble problem of collegiate sports**

Due to the high level of competition in the collegiate leagues in the Philippines, coaches and players are compelled to produce results to meet the expectations of the school and their supporters. But these expectations may have spurred some teams to violate protocols that are implemented by the government to combat COVID-19. In the last few months a handful of controversies has hounded Philippine college sports. The most polarizing incident was the Sorsogon 'bubble' of the UST Men's Basketball Team in Capuy, Sorsogon. The "UST bubble" controversy started with the Cansino expulsion from the team (Morales, 2020). CJ Cansino,

the team captain of last UAAP season's runner-up team, was removed from the roster due to cited differences between him and the coaching staff of the UST Tigers (Atencio,2020) . It started with his sudden announcement of his departure and his eventual transfer to the Diliman-based UP Fighting Maroons. But the popping of the bubble started when Casino hurled mistreatment accusations against the team staff and managers. He, along with other players, claimed that they were not given ample food and medical support by the team coaches and managers while they were undergoing a bubble type of conditioning and team development activity. The revelation of the Sorsogon Bubble led to the investigation of IATF and UAAP. It has resulted in the imposition of an indefinite ban on Coach Aldin Ayo and the resignation of the Sports Director of the University (Giongco, 2020). The incident also led to the transfer of eight key players to different schools in the NCAA and UAAP. UST is facing possible sanctions from both the government and the UAAP, although the latter has earlier mentioned that it cannot sanction the school initially because the bubble did not violate any rules of the league. The problem of the UST men's basketball team is not an isolated event. There are other similar incidents which also led to the investigation of the IATF and the UAAP. NU is also accused of breaking protocols with the discovery of a social media post showing the Bulldog's Women's Volleyball team working out in their Laguna Facility. NU is also facing possible sanctions but not at the same level as that of UST.

### **Professionalization of amateur sports**

An offshoot dilemma of the bubble fiasco is the seeming commercialization of collegiate sports. This problem has already been lingering



and threatening the integrity of college level sports even before the pandemic; to the extent that some sports writers have broached the idea of removing the concept of amateurism; thus, fully embracing professionalism because commercialism already engulfed the NCAA and the UAAP (Guerrero, 2015). But with the revelation of the Sorsogon Bubble and the sudden departure of key players of the UST Men's Basketball Team, the ugly head of 'professionalized' college sports revealed itself. Starting with the Sorsogon incident, the over-eagerness to win a championship compelled the managers, coaching staff and even players to participate in the NBA-like bubble. With disgruntled CJ Cansino leaking a group chat thread in his social media account, containing player grievances about the condition in Sorsogon, the whole bubble mess was uncovered (Mangubat, 2020). In addition to Cansino's leaks, there were also pictures and videos posted in different social media platforms showing the team conducting drills that are still not allowed by the government (fastbreak.com.ph,2020). However, basing on the internal investigation of the University and the report released by the Philippine National Police in Sorsogon, which was certified by the Governor of the Province, the team's stay was for agricultural and husbandry seminars and in fact the report of the police clears Coach Ayo and the team of any violations of IATF policies (Jugado,2020;Salumbaga,2020). The report stated that the coaches and players passed all the mandated requirements and that the team did not engage in basketball training activities (Leongson,2020).

The Sorsogon 'bubble' revealed that the over eagerness to win among coaches, players and team supporters have made the quest for a crown

in amateur/college sports steadily becoming as cut throat as in the professional level. The cost of developing college teams have increased exponentially in the last few years. There is now a high level of competition for the recruitment of players and coaches. NCAA and UAAP member schools are now contending not just inside the court but also outside of it. But in order for an institution to recruit the best it needs funding. Boosters and well endowed backers have been part of the NCAA and UAAP in the last two decades (Terrado, 2016). Their presence represents the realignment of collegiate sports development and expectations to the same level of professional clubs. The UST Sorsogon incident is an example of the increasing cost of running a collegiate team. It had a 3 million budget for its operational duration; a sizable amount for a single basketball team (Castillo, 2020). However, what really made the controversial bubble an example of the problem of collegiate sports commercialization is its aftermath.

When the bubble popped, the UST team imploded. It lost its coaching staff and most of its key rotation players. Cansino was the first to go due to his removal from the lineup, but unlike him, the other athletes basically packed their bags and joined other collegiate programs. Rhenz Abando, a promising star for the team, transferred to the Colegio de San Juan de Letran in the NCAA. He is joined by other core players like Brent Paraiso and Ira Bataller (Matel,2020). Shifty guard Mark Nonoy and Deo Cuajao moved to Dela Salle University Manila (businessmirror, 2020), while promising incoming rookie Bismark Lina joined Cansino in the University of the Philippines (Satumbaga,2020). The loss of these players have relegated the Tigers

back to obscurity. A sad end for the runners up squad from last season.

Technically there is no issue with players transferring to other programs. In fact they are given the freedom to choose their career direction and this is protected by Republic Act 10676, an often cited law that protects college players from unjustified restrictions from educational institutions (varsitarian, 2015). In the case of Casino, his removal from the team validated his decision to join the Maroons. But for the other athletes, there is a lingering issue of player agents deciding the fate of an athlete's stint in a collegiate team. There is this long standing controversy of collegiate and even high school players signing with a manager like a professional athlete (Juico, 2014). In the case of the UST players, there are accusations that the whole transfer fiasco is more of a business decision, which goes against the whole spirit of amateurism as per the argument of veteran sports columnist, Quinito Henson (2017). He opined that commercialization is reserved for the pros and not for budding players in the college level. There should be more value given to school pride and loyalty over career goals.

However, with managers and player agents creeping into college leagues, the whole point of school loyalty is lost in the NCAA and UAAP. The increasing commercialization of the two leagues carried with it the problems of piracy and overcompensation. These two issues have challenged the core of amateurism of both leagues (Henson, 2017). Most of the member institutions of the NCAA and UAAP have engaged in tug of wars for talent, enticing athletes with perks like allowances and other types of reward they can receive, once

they join their teams. This competitive climate gave the incentive for managers and agents to penetrate and control the player supply system for collegiate leagues. They become arbiters between school management and the players. This arrangement redefines the relationship structure in amateur sports. Agents and managers influence the fate of athletes by becoming the brokers. Institutions are also forced to rely more on these personalities to ensure the supply of talent and convincing prized athletes stay in the program. This type of activity is similar to the professional level, where agents are essential to ensure the maximum benefit from the pay-for-play set-up (Leongson, 2020). However, this type of relationship is questionable in an amateur and college level system. This is hounding the likes of Abando, Bataller, Nonoy, and the other former UST players who switched squads after the bubble popped. Rather than staying with the team, these players decided to leave in order to secure their career and to escape the possible sanctions levied to the team and the university. The process of the transfer is also questioned due to the possible roles of agents in the players' decision to move to a new program. The controversial bubble revealed how the relationship of coaches, boosters, and agents have become a major determinant for players in sticking with a team or going elsewhere.

### **Challenge of moving forward**

Besides the controversies hounding the NCAA and the UAAP the challenge of starting a new season is perhaps the most problematic for the two leagues. So far both are planning to open their seasons in the first quarter of 2021. But due to the continuous onslaught COVID-19 in the country the the NCAA and the UAAP are adjusting their

next seasons' events and game schedules to meet the new normal condition. According to its press statement, the NCAA is planning to only have the four mandatory sports for season 96 (Isaga, 2020). Only basketball, volleyball, swimming, and track and field sports will be organized and played by member schools. The UAAP, however, is considering holding a shortened tournament format for all its sports akin to the approach taken by last year's Southeast Asian Games that was held in Manila (gmanewsonline, 2020). Season 83 will basically be a second semester league with all sports packed into it (Verzosa, 2020). The planned opening for both collegiate leagues are still, however, subject to government regulations. Thus, there are still no approved guidelines for the restart of sports related activities for the collegiate level. The Commission for Higher Education (CHED) with the help of the Philippines Sports Commission (PSC), the Games Amusement Board (GAB) and the representatives from the NCAA and the UAAP have created a Technical Working Group (TWG) to develop guidelines and a roadmap for the restart of sports related activities for amateur and collegiate leagues (Satumbaga, 2020). This will be patterned after the initial experiences of the professional leagues in the country which has already developed restart guidelines for team practices, and have already started with their respective league games. The PBA and the Chooks to go 3X3 league are also willing to assist the panel in crafting guidelines for amateur sports. They will provide inputs based on their experiences of holding their team practices and their bubble based tournaments (Terrado, 2020). With the recommendation of GAB, the most viable approach so far is the bubble system. Both the PBA and the Chooks 3X3 are to conduct their league games in this manner, but one major

problem here is that the NCAA and the UAAP are multisports associations. In addition, the two associations will hold different sporting events in different classifications and levels. Hosting different events that are played by men and women teams in both high school and college levels will make the bubble approach very complicated. Being both collegiate associations, the NCAA and UAAP are also restrained by the status of most of its student athletes which are mainly minors. With the IATF guidelines limiting the movement of underage individuals in quarantined areas, the process of developing restart guidelines will be more difficult.

### **Restructuring of collegiate sports governance**

Allowing the NCAA and the UAAP to restart sports related activities is important in ensuring the development of youth sports in the country. Both leagues are essential building blocks in the training and enhancement of the skills of athletes that will represent the country in international events. The two associations are also inspiration for many young Filipinos to participate in sports and live a healthy lifestyle, important in the time of pandemic. But it should also be noted that COVID-19 and the controversial events that have followed both leagues recently are signs of the need of restructuring the country's collegiate sports set-up. The virus has revealed the problem of the lack of a proper governance structure that can ensure and protect the progress and welfare of athletes in the state of pandemic. The absence of an oversight system made the process of addressing the 'Sorsogon Bubble', solving issues of commercialization, and the crafting guidelines for the return of practices and the eventual launch of the new season very difficult. The current situation is also an opportunity for the

implementation of key governance changes in the college sports landscape.

### **Adopting the US NCAA model**

The American National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is one of the most successful college sports organizations in the world. It is “a member-led organization dedicated to the well being and lifelong success of college athletes” (ncaa.org, 2020). It has 1,098 member colleges and universities and 102 athletics conferences. It hosts 24 sports in three divisions. Clearly, the scale and magnitude of the US NCAA is far greater than its Philippine namesake and the UAAP, but what makes this organization successful is that, as a sports governance model, the US NCAA acts as the supervising structure that looks after its member leagues and participating educational institutions. However, it is not a simple governing entity, but rather a mechanism of governance that is mainly determined by the member institutions themselves (Senne, 2016). After the implementation of the new organizational framework in 2014, the NCAA has now expanded representation to students, alumni, and faculty members ensuring the balance of academics and athletic development of student athletes and their institutions (ncaa.org, 2014). The organization also serves as the avenue for its members to ensure and protect parity, fairness, and welfare of collegiate sports. Being composed of different athletic leagues the US NCAA facilitates the representation of more stakeholders that is essential in the standardization of sports rules, and the protection of amateurism in the American sports system. It also boosts the interaction between education and sports by promoting proper educational standards and having support programs for student athletes (ncaa.org, 2014)

The dominance of the Manila based NCAA and the UAAP in the Philippine college athletic landscape limits the democratization of college sports in the country. The two associations have polarized youth sports development by being the two most dominant collegiate leagues in terms of talent acquisition, and access to financial resources. Media exposure is also highest between the two, due to their long standing partnership with the largest media company in the country. Both leagues have also complicated the standardization of recruitment rules, players eligibility, and the overall protection of amateurism in the collegiate level. A specific example is the NCAA MANCOM ruling which will ban foreign student athletes starting in season 96, while there is no such rule in the UAAP and other college associations (Flores-Colina, 2020). This is deemed discriminatory to qualified foreign players and will limit the development of Filipino players in terms of competing with bigger and stronger opponents (Jacinto, 2018). What makes this problematic is the absence of uniform standards in eligibility. Adopting the US system may help create uniformity in the sporting guidelines in the country. By establishing a common approach to college player eligibility there will be a clearer and more defined player development process in the country. The proposed structure can also help in streamlining the process of developing the guidelines for both college and amateur sports in the new normal condition.

### **Avoiding another ‘Bubble’ and ‘Transfer’ issues**

The UST bubble is a major side note in Philippine collegiate sports history. It revealed the problem of overzealousness to win in a sports competition. Although winning is part of collegiate sports, it should never undermine the safety and

welfare of student athletes. In moving forward, the NCAA, the UAAP, and other associations of the same level should learn from the controversial event. However, it would be unwarranted if the said event does not push towards reforms in the overall condition of college sports. It is important that there should be an introduction of a framework of governance that could tow all the stakeholders in college sports together, similar to the US NCAA. The Manila based NCAA and the UAAP should be the main stewards to this reform, being the two most popular and successful associations in the country. It is synchronous to the interest of both leagues to create a structure that can develop proper mechanisms for all the stakeholders. There is a need for the NCAA, UAAP, and other collegiate organizations to formulate regulatory procedures that will clearly define the mandates of college sports based on amateurism, and the protection of the welfare of youth athletes. The UST incident is an indication of the lack of college level regulations that made the whole instance of finding its resolution complex and complicated. This is evident with Coach Ayo and the UST team being cleared by the regional government and the PNP investigation. The whole event did not violate any state protocols as per the declaration of the local government and the police. However, to a certain degree the health and welfare of student athletes and the team's staff were put at risk. COVID-19 placed the whole collegiate sports system of the country, not just UST and the UAAP, into an uneasy situation. Having an organization that could clearly define the overall policy narrative of college sports would be ideal in the new normal condition. New 'bubble' controversies may be avoided or properly handled if there are clear

guidelines to follow. This could also resolve the issue of protecting amateurism in college sports.

The implosion of the UST men's basketball team is not just due to the aftermath of the bubble incident, but it is also the representation of the problem of over-commercialization. The player transfers, and the role of agents in these instances is a by-product of the lack of clear narrative of defining amateurism in Philippine college sports. Rather than highlighting education and school loyalty, the transfer of former Tiger players to other schools highlight the lightness of school pride. The narrative of protecting the player's career has devalued the essence of college sports. This is more akin to the world of professional athletes where the value of the player is given most value over anything else. The presence of managers and agents helped in making amateurism in the NCAA and the UAAP faded. One reason for this is that both leagues have reached a level of financial brevity that has placed incentives for this kind of activity. One way of resolving this issue is the institutionalization of policies that will protect amateur sports like what the US NCAA has done. The American system has undergone major reforms since the last decade. One of them is that it recognized a level of freedom to all its league members and players. It has also allowed player-agent relationships, but unlike that of the Philippine setting, the US NCAA was able to develop a clear narrative and guidelines for this kind of operations. Two examples would be the licensing requirement to possible player agents, and their roles as arbiters, limited to the players eventual decision on turning pro- or joining professional league drafts. This is what is sorely lacking in its Philippine namesake league and the

UAAP. Both associations have no clear guidelines in regulating agents in dealing with their players, thus they have become powerful determinants in every decision made by collegiate players. There have been long standing proposals to ban or limit agents representing young athletes in both leagues, but the absence of a higher organization such as the role played by the US NCAA made these attempts to solve the problem unsuccessful.

### **Better path for a restart**

COVID-19 has greatly altered the sporting landscape of the Philippines. From the amateur to the professional level, all the sports associations in the country have their seasons abruptly ended. It is inherent for the sake of the nation's health to restart athletic activities, and that include sports competitions. The IATF has allowed the re-opening of professional leagues like the PBA, Chooks-to-go 3x3 , and the PFL. These professional associations have already started their team build-up since August. On the other hand, not all members of the community are able to do the same. This is evident in the collegiate level. Understandably the condition for the college leagues are not the same with professional organizations. Being mainly composed of student-athletes, the restart of the collegiate competition in the NCAA and the UAAP is very complicated. These two leagues host a number of sports in different levels of competition, unlike that of the professional leagues in the country. The complexity of collegiate structure is evident in the process of creating guidelines for the initial phase of re-introducing athletic activities. There are still no proper guidelines for practices and player development routines for college sports. Most of the players are only limited to online individual drills

which does not help the team-based programs. This difficulty is due to the lack of an organizational system that defines the aspect and nature of a particular sport like basketball, volleyball, soccer, and others.

The establishment of an American NCAA framework may resolve this kind of issue. Having a mechanism for stakeholders to define the rules and regulations of each sport event hosted by the NCAA and UAAP will resolve the issue of complexity in crafting the restart guidelines. Guidelines that should be considerate to the different game rules for each sport. The creation of the TWG led by CHED is commendable, but the complexity of collegiate league competition and the types of sports hosted by college leagues will be major barriers for the TWG. This is evident with the CHED heading the technical working group, the institution is mainly focused on education related matters. Its involvement was mainly due to the student status of the athletes participating in this level of competition. The participation of GAB and the PSC made sense because both represent the regulation of athletes and sport competition but their involvement in the NCAA, UAAP, and other college leagues are limited and may not hold well in the narrative of college level sports. GAB was created to regulate professional leagues while the PSC serves the main state agency that manages and develops all types of sports played in the country. It seems that the best actors to lead the restart college sports are the leagues and institutions that participate in this level. Due to the absence of another organizational layer, the ideal process of stakeholder defined guidelines is next to impossible. The adoption of the US NCAA model could possibly resolve this problem by having

a committee structure for each sport. Composed of representatives from different leagues in the country, the system can streamline the process of policy formulation and articulation. This model will also broaden the representation for the other leagues in the country outside the NCAA and UAAP; strengthening the possibility of standardization of rules, procedures, and competition. Having a common narrative helps develop the overall condition of youth sports development in the country.

## **Conclusion**

COVID-19 and the controversies that followed the NCAA and UAAP revealed the structural weakness of college sports in the country. The complexity of collegiate competition has made the effects of the pandemic more difficult for student athletes and educational institutions. The UST bubble issue, and the increasing commercialization of college sports are products of organizational deficiency. The independent nature of college leagues and the absence of a governing layer contributed to these unfortunate events. Both the NCAA and the UAAP failed to develop protocols that meet the demands in protecting the welfare of athletes and personnel from the pandemic. However, the two leagues are the main representation of the overall deficiency of sports governance in the college level. It is inherent for the NCAA and the UAAP to lead the reform in college sports. Their status as the top associations in college sports make them the ideal leads for improving the status quo of collegiate competition heading towards the new normal.

The establishment of a governing framework in college sports in the country is essential for the

future of Filipino athletes. This will improve the narrative of competition through standardization of developmental practices in college programs, which has been the main weakness of Philippine college athletic associations. Mainly functioning as independent circuits, Philippine college leagues tend to craft their own regulatory policies, making certain organizations more competitive than others in terms of recruitment, eligibility, and sponsorship. Disorganization in the sports governance at this level leads to inequity in youth sports development. This is epitomized by the superiority of the NCAA and the UAAP.

Collegiate leagues are the most successful, and oftentimes, the most efficient developers of young talent in the Philippine. The recruitment of talented players from national high school meets by college based teams provides them the opportunity to study and train with higher consistency and sophistication. The NCAA and UAAP are prime examples of how sports development in the country works. Contrary, the dominance of the two leagues represents the unbalanced development in the country. Youth prospects are often hoarded by the NCAA and UAAP recruitment system. Both leagues have better resources and access to superior sports technology. Their status makes these associations the de facto primary sources of national and professional athletes. Due to the lack of regulation, amateurism of both leagues are eroded by the increasing competition for recruitment and the eagerness to win championships. This imbalance in league competitiveness and progression of talent will not help the growth of youth sports. Youth development requires a level of parity based on well defined standards in recruitment and athlete

development. It is therefore important that in order to ensure the growth and progress of young athletes, college sports associations should be able to organize their own level of governance framework that decentralizes competitiveness. It should be a mechanism for all stakeholders to develop a clear policy direction that represents the collective interest of all associations in the country, not just the NCAA and the UAAP. The pandemic and the controversies in college sports are eye opening events to finally realize the need to improve the predisposition of the collegiate sporting landscape of the country. This will benefit not just the leagues and associations, but also the aspiring youths who are dreaming of becoming stars in their preferred sports.

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# **“Infodemic”, Social media, and the youth: A cross-sectional study on gathering, use, and sharing of online news in the Philippine amidst the coronavirus pandemic**

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## **Abstract**

Social media is an effective tool for information dissemination to the general public regarding health information and updates to the current health crisis brought about by the COVID-19. However, concurrent with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is an “infodemic” of misleading information about the disease on social media. A sample of 227 Filipino youth respondents ages 18 to 24 were given survey questions to determine the effects of social media on information dissemination amidst the COVID-19 crisis. Primary quantitative data was made through an online survey composed of a series of questions that determined the accuracy and reliability of disseminated information across social media platforms. Research findings indicate that Twitter and Facebook were the topmost social media platforms utilized for acquiring information. The results also indicate that despite the proliferation of misleading news on the internet, the Filipino youth is aware of these and cautious in sharing such information. Hence, the study shows that the youth is not easily swayed by fake news about COVID-19, and mindful when it comes to sharing information about the disease online.

## **Keywords**

COVID-19, infodemic, youth, social media, fake news, online

## **Introduction**

The internet can be largely regarded as a “game changer” in the COVID-19 crisis. The connectivity that the world has at the moment, despite the lockdowns and social distancing measures puts people at a slightly better position compared to a hundred years ago when a worldwide pandemic also struck. It can be argued that the global economy at large is able to cushion the effects of this massive crisis because of the presence of the World Wide Web.

One of the important domains that must be positively exploited in this situation is the capacity of the internet, through social media, to provide accurate, timely, and aggregate data. The access to information that is shared through social media platforms is indeed crucial in framing the responses and reactions of individuals, communities, and the governments with regard to the ongoing global health crisis.

As opined by Kushner (2020), social networking sites allow the circulation of real-time information and updates of the current status of the pandemic, ensuring the awareness of the citizens.

Not only this, but social media platforms also influence public response to the virus outbreak, wherein due to the increasing awareness of the people, practices such as social distancing and home quarantine have become a “trend.” These practices, in turn, are able to contribute to controlling and limiting the spread of the virus. Although these online platforms are identified as crucial tools for the circulation of information during the COVID19 pandemic, drawbacks with the use of such are still seen. An example of which is how these platforms instigate the spread of fake news, in which information posted online is inaccurate and lacks scientific evidence.

This is indeed very alarming. In fact, COVID-19 has not only spread among nations, but it has also started its own viral pandemic of misinformation and falsehoods on social media (Pennycook et al., 2020). This “infodemic,” termed by the World Health Organization (2020), refers to the plethora of information proliferating around the internet which may or may not be trustworthy. The United Nations (2020) has similarly coined the term, “disinfodemic” which pertains specifically to this so-called avalanche of misinformation that places other people’s lives at risk. As mentioned by Garrett (2020), social media platforms have become sources of misinformation due to the anti-science and conspiracy claims found or posted online. In line with this, Berger (2020) from the United Nations stated that this spread of misinformation has become

commonplace even amidst this pandemic; posing a threat to the reliability of news and journalism, as it seems there is barely an area left untouched by fake news. WHO (2020) states that there are four major topics that people seek accurate answers, but may be compounded with misleading information instead: the virus’ cause and origin; its mode of transmission and symptoms; treatments; and the interventions done by health authorities or other institutions. According to Pennycook et al. (2020), there are a lot of conspiracy theories and inaccurate claims about possible remedies against the virus spreading around the internet. In fact, according to a PEW Research Center Report, a great number of people in the United States have admitted to seeing misleading news about COVID-19 circulating the internet (Kushner, 2020). Consequently, this may lead people to resort to unproven remedies, overreact to distorted truths presented about the virus, or underestimate the threat posed by the virus (Pennycook). It was also stated that people who rely more on their intuition instead of engaging in analytical thinking are more inclined to share news content based on unreliable and unvalidated sources (Pennycook).

A survey question conducted by the Office of Communications (2020) in the United Kingdom revealed that 40 percent of adults are finding it difficult to determine which is true or false about the virus. Milne (2020), a deputy from a fact-checking site, stated that this spread of confusion is most likely caused by fake news starting off in one place, translated into lots of different languages, moving from platform to platform, and spreading from country to country. With this being said, it is certain that this type of confusion in differentiating

factual and fake news is not just present in the United Kingdom, but technically in every nation with access to the internet (Child, 2020). In another journal article, confusion, fear, panic, and even racism may result from misleading news articles about the virus (Depoux et al., 2020). Based on the study conducted by Huynh (2020), overexposure to mass media may elicit fear, overreaction, and pessimism regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, Garfin et al. (2020) states that global media exposure to the crisis can escalate fear and heighten stress and anxiety levels which can directly affect an individual's help-seeking behavior, overburdening health-care facilities in the process. Moreover, the media fuels mass panic, resulting in hoarding of medical supplies and stockpiling of essential items (Garfin et al., 2020).

Additionally, a state of panic brought about by social media and the lack of awareness for fact-checking sites led to the stockpiling of vital medical supplies by individuals and its shortage for the use of healthcare workers (Garfin et al., 2020). In view of this, WHO (2020) indicates that the proliferation of this infodemic may exacerbate the public health crisis, since the lack of accurate information may affect the actions that people take in protecting themselves and others from the virus. The large scale of this crisis that encompasses all global borders, combined with the interconnectedness of people through social media, which leads to rapid information dissemination, actually worsens this infodemic, consequently undermining outbreak response (WHO, 2020). Indeed, effectively dealing with this issue is a crucial step in mitigating the global impact of the pandemic (Hua & Shaw, 2020). Concerned organizations, such as the

aforementioned WHO and United Nations, have been tracking down misinformation, and taking active measures to upload articles with “myth busters” to debunk false information related to the virus. However, these efforts have not been enough to stop the circulation of inaccurate information (Iwai, 2020).

## **Research Problems**

Social media can indeed be a convenient way to spread information to anyone who is able to access it. However, the concern is whether or not the information being disseminated is actually relevant and factual. Considering that anyone could post about anything online, it can be difficult to preserve the integrity of news amidst this pandemic. As this health crisis continues to bring about worry among citizens, some may even struggle with differentiating factual news from fake ones. As globalization plays quite a large role through the interconnectedness of the internet, it is essential to determine if this connection is still contributing to this dilemma, in the aspect of information dissemination from the lens of the youth. With all this being said, this study then aims to further assess whether the use of social media sites, as tools to disseminate information, has resulted in more positive or negative effects. In lieu, considering the presence of the aforementioned fake news, and how it is being perceived by teenagers and the youth sector in general. It is directed mainly towards evaluating the Filipino youth's awareness of news, misinformation, and whether their current knowledge of the pandemic is accurate, based on present scientific findings. As social media is the point of interest, this study's respondents include students, due to their greater exposure to social media sites; thus, making them more susceptible to

seeing fake news online. In effect the study sought answers the following:

1. How does the youth obtain news from various social media platforms?
2. How does the youth perceive fake news and its proliferation online especially in social media in this time of pandemic?
3. What is the level of awareness of the young people with regard to news, misinformation and their current knowledge of the pandemic?

## Methodology

### Research respondents and sampling method

The chosen respondents for this study were random Filipinos within the age group of 18-24 years old; since according to a study conducted by Estares (2019), the biggest group of social media users in the Philippines are within these ranges or the university to early career age – making up 33% of active users among millions of users. This is an important factor since social media is considered as one of the main focuses of this study. The sampling method used was stratified random sampling; wherein the population was characterized according to age, and only the mentioned age group was selected in the population to participate in the study. Furthermore, in order to determine the sample size of the study, Slovin's Formula ( $n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$ ) was used with a given population size (N) of 1000 and a 0.05% margin of error (e), getting a total of 285 respondents (n) however due to time constraints, only 227 respondents were surveyed.

## Research design

In conducting this study, the researchers used the quantitative approach; wherein this type of research method requires quantifiable data involving numerical and statistical explanations. Causal-comparative/quasi-experimental research was also utilized to establish an in-depth understanding of the impacts of rapid dissemination of information on social media amidst the ongoing health crisis in the Philippines.

## Research Instruments

To obtain the data needed by the researchers, an online survey questionnaire using Google forms was used. The survey question was divided into two categories: (1) a series of questions that evaluates different social media platforms along with the type of information they usually encounter; and (2) an assessment with regards to COVID-19 to identify whether they are getting accurate and reliable information using social media. Each question in the survey question was designed to the corresponding study objectives in determining the positive and negative impacts of the rapid dissemination of information in the current health crisis. Participants in the study were asked if they get quickly updated by news using social media; if they utilize their social media accounts; and how frequently they are using the following social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, Viber, and Email. They were also asked various questions to determine if they can distinguish reliable news from fake news, such as whether they often see reliable information or fake news; whether they easily believe or share posts on Facebook; and whether they use a fact-checking website or they only rely on the opinion of family members and friends. It also aimed at

identifying how the participants usually react after encountering fake news by asking whether they get disturbed by it or not. In line with this, appropriate ethical considerations were also taken into account to assure that the participants' answers remain strictly confidential, i.e. will be used only for the sole purpose of the study.

### **Data analysis procedure**

After the researchers collected all the responses, graphic organizers such as pie charts and bar graphs were used to represent the obtained percentage of responses from each question. Thereafter, the figures were analyzed and compared based on the research objectives. Additionally, the respondents' answers on objective questions regarding COVID-19 were also checked and validated by the researchers to determine if the information that the respondents acquire from social media platforms is correct. Pie charts were used as a form of visualization in this section to distinguish correct answers from incorrect ones. This gave the researchers an idea on the depth of knowledge and understanding the respondents have on COVID-19.

With the help of the study's respondents, the group was able to assess whether the use of social media for fast propagation of information is efficient and useful to Filipino citizens in addressing the ongoing pandemic concern or it only serves as an avenue for misleading information and unreliable sources.

### **Results and Discussion**

The following discussion is an analysis of the respondents' answers from the aforementioned

survey question conducted. The content of the survey question, along with the figures mentioned are located in the appendix portion at the end of this paper.

#### **Survey question #1**

As observed from Figure 1 (see appendix C), it shows how 62.6% of the respondents chose the highest rating score while 34.8% chose a satisfactory mark of 3. These percentages indicate that social media platforms have served as an individual's primary source of obtaining information about COVID 19. According to an article by Haselton (2018), it was described how most individuals now get news from social media sites than from print newspapers. In order to support this claim, another article by Ospina (2019) states that "The increase in social media use over the last decade has, of course, come together with a large increase in the amount of time that people spend online." Thus, individuals are more likely to obtain news indirectly via social media rather than obtaining them from other sources such as newspapers, print ads, etc. In fact, the growth of social media has constantly been rising. Social media has changed how we find information, how we are able to access it and how we, as individuals change it. Moreover, social media has been heavily relied on by different people of all ages. According to Khalid (2019), "Every major social network (with the exception of Tumblr), saw a rise in users relying on it for news when compared to last year. Social media has become the main source of news online with more than 2.4 billion internet users, nearly 64.5 percent receive breaking news from Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Snapchat and Instagram instead of traditional media (Martin, 2018). The same article gives statistics based on a recent survey question.



It is explained that 50% of individuals hear about updated news through social media even before hearing it on television or through a news station. In fact, breaking news has many times appeared on their Facebook feeds numerous times. With this, it was also found that 57% of social media traffic stem from needing information about the latest news.

### **Survey question #2**

Figure 2 (see appendix C) shows how 69.6% of individuals use their social media accounts in order to easily get updated on COVID 19. 23.3% of the respondents also gave a score of “3” supporting this claim. Due to this, we can see how COVID 19 has changed social media engagements. As this has happened, we see that social media has become an important tool for connection (Arens, n.d.). Statistics have shown how many industries have increased their sent message volume, of which the healthcare sectors and media, highly participate. In line with this, there have also been trends in engagement such as in terms of consumer goods, health care, and media. With social distancing and going online being the top priority, social media has surged. According to Holmes (2020), “A study of 25,000 consumers across 30 markets showed engagement increasing 61% over normal usage rates. Messaging across Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp has increased 50% in countries hardest hit by the virus. Twitter is seeing 23% more daily users than a year ago. When it matters most, people are turning to social media for updates and connection.” Social media indeed has enabled access towards giving behind the scenes clips of what is really happening. It has enabled people to utilize platforms in order to help different foundations. Furthermore, it has allowed individuals to appreciate the heroism of different

frontliners and allowed individuals to have their questions about the pandemic answered. Social media has also played its part in this pandemic by assuming an activist stance in rooting out wrong content or content that is misleading. Since social media, not being able to totally eradicate the circulation of fake news, verified organizations such as the World Health Organization or Center for Disease Control and Prevention are able to prevent its fast and casual spread.

### **Survey question #3**

In Figure 3 (see appendix C), it was observed that 50.2 % of the respondents chose a rating score of “4” indicating that they often check their social media accounts for COVID 19 updates. This is supported by the score of “3” given by 35.7% of the respondents. From this, we are able to observe that social media plays numerous roles. According to Kushner (2020), one role that we can observe is the fact that it serves as a source of information, as well as misinformation. The pandemic is a time where people are in dire need of information. Thus, the public is often easily susceptible to fake news. This is due to the fact that social media has control over what news updates we see. There are many fake news headlines that compete for sensational headlines in order to get shared. Thus, authentic news may be difficult to find at times. According to a new PEW Research Center report, about half of Americans say they have seen made up news about the coronavirus. Thus, it is important to distinguish between social media sources that are valid and accurate from those that are spreading false claims. Social Media has served as a means for people to respond to this pandemic. Different businesses and organizations have utilized social media in order

to spread awareness of this pandemic as well as the different measures that may be taken in order to prevent its further and faster spread. It is also through the increase in frequency of social media use that different protocols and trends have gone viral. Due to social media, there have been calls for social distancing, shaming panic buying and the like. The frequency of going online has also presented a defining moment towards being socially responsible. It is here that individuals may be constantly updated on how to take responsibility, how to safely get groceries delivered, how to take up online courses and the like. Despite all its imperfections especially with regards to fake news, social media has proven to give security, bring connection and allow the flourishing of lifesaving information that may help in battling this pandemic.

#### **Survey question #4**

Figure 4 (see appendix C), shows how 51.1% of individuals utilize Facebook as the social media platform that helps them obtain and share information. By looking at the graph, it may be observed that this is supported by 30.8% of individuals who gave a score of “3”. The results obtained from the Survey Question may be supported by an article by Ospina (2019), wherein it was stated that Facebook, being the largest social media platform in the world, has 2.4 billion users. According to the article “Facebook has dominated the social media market for a decade” with 2.26 billion users logging in the past 30 days in 2018. This has proven to be the most popular social media networking site due to its ability to push interactions through different status, photo, video sharing. Moreover, it is focused on community, display, and user-generated content. Facebook

has also added a new tab to the top navigation bar which will automatically take you to its new content. This tab is designed to cater verified news which does not share misinformation. According to Facebook, approval to participate in the news page would be based on published facts and content that is not aggregated from other websites or not personal user-generated. It is through this way that Facebook would be able to create a website that is free of bias, accurate, reliable and informative (Hutchinson, 2019). Another article on the Role of News on Facebook has stated that Facebook exposes news to people who might not get it. These people would be defined as individuals who are less engaged than their elders such as younger adults from 18 to 29 years old. These individuals account for about a third, 34% of Facebook news consumers. In support of this, “Two-thirds (67%) of those who use Facebook for at least an hour a day get news there compared with only 41% of those who spend less than an hour a day on the site.” (Mitchell, et al., 2013). It was also observed that 49% of Facebook news consumers report getting news on 6 or more different topics. An article by Haubrich (n.d.) explains how Facebook accounts for 20% of all time online, thus, the more people are on Facebook, the more updates they are able to receive.

#### **Survey question #5**

Figure 5 (see appendix C), shows how often Twitter is utilized as a platform for sharing and receiving information. By looking at the graph, it can be observed that choice “4” obtained the highest number of votes, which essentially means that Twitter is often used by most of the respondents during the COVID 19 pandemic. The results obtained from the survey question can be

reflected in Twitter's 2020 demographics by age, in which the largest proportion of users of the said networking site, amounting to 44%, comprises users with ages ranging from 18 to 24 (Chen, n.d.). Looking at it, one of the possible reasons as to why Twitter is commonly used, especially during this global emergency, is because of how it serves as a real-time platform. Meaning, users are able to have access to real-time information and breaking news with regards to the ongoing pandemic -- these include the global statistics of COVID 19 cases, deaths, and the like. At the same time, with the help of this real-time platform, users are able to share or disseminate news and information at an instant with their fellow users, making the information more accessible to others (Benton, 2020). As Manjoo (2015) said, *"Among the many uses that Twitter fulfills as a social network, there is one it is uniquely suited for: as a global gathering space for live events. When something goes down in the real world — when a plane crashes, an earthquake strikes, a basketball game gets crazy, or Kanye West hijacks an awards show."*

Additionally, by relating the results of the Survey Question with that of past studies, it becomes clear as to why Twitter is made use of during pandemics. An example is the study conducted by Chew (2010) which was able to answer as to why Twitter was utilized by many during the H1N1 pandemic. The study was able to see that Twitter had significant importance amidst the said pandemic for it served as a news re-broadcasting tool, in which users are able to propagate news via retweets. Not only this, but several analyses have also shown that during the H1N1 pandemic, users tend to retweet tweets containing detailed information regarding

the pandemic, instead of tweets containing only personal anecdotes (possibly due to the little interest or little benefit perceived by the users when retweeting such kinds of tweet). Likewise, the study was able to observe that 90.2% of the tweets concerning the pandemic provided the references used for the information shared on Twitter, proving the credibility of the information posted. This can be related with how the study was able to identify only 4.5% of manually coded tweets containing false information and speculations.

This being said, a possible explanation as to why most respondents chose "4" with how often they use Twitter during the ongoing pandemic is because of how the site serves as a real-time platform, from which users are able to obtain and disseminate necessary and useful information regarding the COVID 19 pandemic. Another reason could be because of how information or data found on Twitter are relatively credible, just like what was observed in past studies that explored the use of Twitter during the H1N1 pandemic.

#### **Survey question # 6-9**

It can be observed that Figures 6-9 (see appendix C), have relatively similar results. By looking at Figure 6, which indicates the respondents' use of Instagram during the pandemic, it can be seen that there is no significant difference between choices "1" and "2." This ultimately reveals that Instagram is not commonly used as a source of information as compared to the aforementioned platforms, namely Facebook and Twitter. Similarly, Figure 7 and Figure 8, both of which having choice "1" with the most number of votes, show that just like Instagram, networking sites Telegram and

Viber are not usually used amidst the COVID 19 health crisis.

A possible reason as to why Instagram is not a common platform used for acquiring news, information, and updates is because of how the *“news found on Instagram is usually a side feature rather than a primary.”* Meaning, Instagram is more known for its other features -- in which the platform is used merely as a tool for entertainment, wherein users may explore sections such as beauty, sports, travel, gaming, and the like. Looking at it, there is no section dedicated for news on Instagram, thus it can be said that acquiring news on this platform is less accessible as compared to other networking sites. As mentioned by an Instagram user, *“I have to search up a specific account in order to find the news, there is no way to search up a specific caption or topic without having to look up a news channel (Bernard, 2019)”*.

Similar to this, both Telegram and Viber are not commonly used possibly due to their number of active users. For example, by comparing the number of active Filipino users on Viber with that of Facebook, a significant difference between the two is observed -- in which Viber has 25 million Filipino users in 2016, whereas Facebook has 41.2 million Filipino users in the same year (Sanchez, 2020). The reason as to why several platforms have more active users than the other could be related to the kind of features being provided to the users. Looking at it, it can be seen that Facebook and Twitter are preferred by many because of how these platforms provide more features as compared to platforms such as Telegram and Viber. Similar to what was previously mentioned with Instagram, platforms like Telegram and Viber have limited features that generally are

only catered to sending and receiving messages to the user’s contacts. However, when it comes to sites such as Facebook and Twitter, users can not only receive and share messages to their contacts, but they, too, are provided with features that allow them to post, share, comment, and whatnot (Hynson, 2018). Not only this, but Facebook and Twitter also provide features that help their users have access to real-time information -- these include Facebook’s “Instant Articles” and Twitter’s “Moments” and “Trending topics” (Setalvad, 2015).

Comparative to Telegram and Viber, email providers such as Google and Yahoo Mail are rarely used by the respondents (62.6%) to check the news for COVID 19 as well based on Figure 9 (see appendix C) despite being one of the most widely used features of the Internet (Christensson, 2014). Only 3.5% of the respondents answered that they use their emails to check news about the pandemic. A possible reason for this is because unlike social media sites like Facebook and Twitter which show real-time information and updates, emails are used to send and receive messages and are mostly used for communication (Azyan, 2019). However, even now, social media are more commonly used for easier and more instant messaging than emails which are more used for professional, work, and educational purposes. This just proves that people are starting to move away from email as a primary form of digital communication (Brandon, 2015).

With all these being said, it can be seen that the features presented by networking sites serve as a huge factor to the users, especially when it comes to acquiring information during global emergencies like the COVID 19 pandemic. It shows that during

the current health crisis, social media users prefer using networking sites that provide features that cater to news and updates.

### **Survey question # 10**

From Figure 10, it can be observed that the highest percentage of respondents (49.8%) agreed that they usually read the whole article and not just the headline when given a piece of information. Although this is the highest percentage of respondents, there are still a number of people who do not agree with the statement (14.4%). Additionally, a 2016 study by computer scientists at Columbia University and the French National Institute shows that 59% of links shared in social media have never been clicked which just shows that a lot of social media users only read the headline before sharing an article. This is especially concerning in a crisis since according to a study by Montejo and Adriano (2018), the selection of words used in headlines shows biases and writers even intentionally choose words that may create sensational news for the readers. It also shows the writer's angle of judgment and how he or she wanted the readers to perceive the news. These misleading headlines can affect what existing knowledge is activated in a reader's head and can, therefore, be sources of fake news and misinformation (Konnikova, 2014).

### **Survey question #11**

Based on Figure 11 (see appendix C), the majority (50.7%) of the respondents answered "3" on the statement "I can distinguish fake news from facts." This is closely followed by those who answered "4" (40.5%). This indicates that social media users know the difference between fake news

and facts. Although some fake news can be easily spotted, such as those that have poor writing and badly photoshopped pictures, there are fake news that contain bits of factual information which makes it harder to differentiate what is true and what is fake (Vanderslott, 2020). It is important to spot fake news, especially, in a pandemic because according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2020), fake news is putting lives at risk by making those who have symptoms try remedies that have no scientific evidence in the hope of curing themselves.

### **Survey question #12**

Based on Figure 12 (see appendix C), the majority of the respondents (54.2%) answered "3" on the statement that they often see reliable sources on social media. This shows that despite the proliferation of fake news and misleading information, there is still a lot of reliable information that is present in social media sites. This is because at present, various traditional organizations and newsrooms continue to adjust their strategies to reach out to more audiences (Armstrong & Gao, 2011). In the context of the Philippines, various Philippine news organizations such as CNN Philippines, ABS-CBN News, and GMA News have Facebook and Twitter accounts to easily circulate news and update social media users. Although it is true that there are reliable news outlets in social media, users must be critical in using social media as a major source of news since fake news and inaccurate information can easily be published or posted. As mentioned by Sutton, Palen, and Shklovski (2008), despite the unclear accuracy of the information on social media, it is still gaining prominence as an information source in disasters

and crises. As such, Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube, among others, have announced that they will take down or issue warning labels content that present harmful, dubious, and misleading information related to the COVID-19 pandemic (CGTN, 2020).

### **Survey question #13**

As observed in Figure 13 (see appendix C), the highest percentage of the respondents (37.4%) agreed to have received or often encountered fake news on the internet. This indicates that several unreliable references continuously circulate around social media platforms despite evidence that most people today respond sensibly and being vigilant with COVID-19 news. Unfortunately, fake medical news can also be written very persuasively which makes a lot of people fall into false claims. A research study conducted by the Pew Research Center and Ofcom suggest that in the previous months, one out of two people have come across false or misleading information about the virus, and the common misconceptions about this include its origin, mode of transmission, and treatment.

The “infodemic” and “disinfodemic” terms by the World Health Organization and The United Nations respectively, have become more dangerous than the crisis itself since it can put lives at risk and lead to worst-case scenarios if not controlled immediately. There were reports that unproven remedies and medical products were sold in markets to “supposedly” diagnose, prevent and treat symptoms of COVID-19 in some regions, and this may only induce higher infection rates and harm other people if not corrected properly. Hence, appropriate interventions were established in addition to ones from the past years, to help

minimize confusion from inaccurate information. This includes novel strategies that tackle mainly the known infodemic. According to a journal authored by Gavgani (2020), the World Health Organization’s Risk Communication Team launched a new information platform called “WHO Information Network for Epidemics” which helps in identifying misinformation in social media platforms, and searches for related scientific evidence from scientific papers to publish them on an official website in order to provide accurate information for the people. This probably explains the reason why 33.5% of the respondents were able to disagree in terms of encountering fake news during the pandemic. Aside from this, there are also fact-checking websites to help verify the information and classify its accuracy, thus, controlling the spread of unreliable sources.

However, despite the efforts from the World Health Organization in assuring that right information is disseminated from trusted sources, and the growing cautiousness of the people using online platforms, monitoring the movement and accuracy of the information on social media remains an ongoing process due to a wide range of features brought by technological transformations. Therefore, the data still showed that the presence of fake news and misleading information in social media regarding the COVID-19 are still prevalent for most users.

### **Survey question #14-15**

In Figures 14-15 (see appendix C), it can be seen that both have shown comparatively similar results regarding how the respondents easily believe posts on Facebook and if they instantly

share them without checking its integrity. From the data gathered, it can be observed that the majority of the respondents do not easily believe posts on social media (50.2%) and they don't also share posts without fact-checking them (59.9%). This indicates that most of the users can properly assess the quality of information that they normally see online and make sure that they thoroughly examine any type of information initially so that they don't immediately disseminate references that may potentially misinform other users.

### **Survey question #16**

Correspondingly, in order to examine information properly, Figure 16 (see appendix C) showed that the highest percentage of the respondents (37.9%) are using fact-checking websites that rate factual accuracies and classifies media sources on a bias spectrum in terms of reporting, and also agreed to verify first any encountered COVID-19 information on social media to official health organization websites. This suggests that the respondents try to confirm any updates, knowledge, findings, or materials related to COVID-19 first from official health agencies before believing or sharing them, thus, preventing further propagation of inaccurate claims or unproven evidence.

The health sectors of the country are the primary actors in ensuring the provision of quality health services and information for the betterment and development of community health. They work together with the World Health Organization which directs international health and leads partnered sectors in global health preparedness and responses. With the advancement brought by technology, these health sectors can now carry

out their mission in social media platforms to build a stronger connection with the community and to safeguard the health of individuals through effective dissemination of information. Therefore, respondents of the study were able to access reliable sources such as verified accounts handled by official health agencies for timely and accurate updates. Aside from this, fact-checking websites also play a significant role in distinguishing fake news from reliable news. These are mainly handled by fact-checking organizations from different countries in order to maintain plausible findings regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. And the study reveals that most of the users were also considering using this as an option to confirm any information that they encounter for a thorough and unbiased assessment.

### **Survey question #17**

As observed in Figure 17 (see appendix C), most of the respondents (37%) chose the rating score "2" while 32.6% of the respondents chose a rating score of "1". These scores indicate that the respondents do not rely on the opinion of friends and family members with regard to the reliability of the posts that they see online. In order to support the previous discussions, we may infer that respondents often fact check their websites and do not automatically believe any update that they may hear or see. Fact-checking deems to be incredibly important in anything that you do. Once this isn't practiced, it may hold serious consequences. Lile (n.d.), states that because fake news has become such a pressing issue nowadays, audiences have become more cautious and skeptical towards anything that they hear. Thus, 69% of individuals always fact check their own content as well in order to prevent the exponential spread of fake news and

misinformation. Instead of believing the opinions of those friends and family, most respondents use google to verify information that they obtained followed by books (40%). In line with this, fact-checking has become more prevalent due to the increasing numbers of fact-checking websites and fact-checking organizations that have been established. It is up to the users of social media to use discretion before sharing anything that is inaccurate. Along with this, it is also their duty to make sure that any content that is read or obtained is legitimate and based on scientific facts.

### **Survey question #18**

As observed in Figure 18 (see appendix C), the majority of the respondents get disturbed whenever they see or encounter fake news circulating around social media. This just shows that many users are aware of the presence and prevalence of fake news on the different online networking sites, hence they are able to combat it. As seen in the previous discussions, many of the social media users or respondents are able to execute the recommended practices or strategies in distinguishing real and accurate information from false ones. These practices include reading the entire article (and not just the headline), as well as using a fact-checking website to verify the information. This then explains as to why most of the respondents do not easily believe the information presented to them and why they do not instantly share such information with others. This way, the respondents are able to contribute to alleviating the persistence of fake news on social media.

In order for the researchers to completely assess the credibility and accuracy of the information

acquired by the respondents in their social media accounts, a short quiz was conducted. This way, the group can properly determine whether social media has really brought about positive or negative effects when it comes to information dissemination amidst the pandemic.

### **Quiz 1-3**

The first three questions of the quiz are examples of the “must-knows” of the COVID 19 pandemic -- these include the causative agent of the disease, its mode of transmission, and whether there are already interventions for this. Looking at it, majority of the respondents were able to correctly answer that COVID 19 is caused by a virus (86.3%), that it is transmitted through droplets and contact with contaminated surfaces (99.1%), and that there are no current interventions or vaccines for the disease (94.7%). These are evident in Figures 19-21 of appendix C.

### **Quiz 4**

Figure 22 (See Appendix C), shows that the majority of the respondents (67.8%) answered correctly that people would not catch the coronavirus from their pets such as dogs and cats. Although there are reports of positive cases of COVID 19 in dogs and cats, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2020), the risk of animals spreading COVID-19 to people is considered to be low based on limited information.

### **Quiz 5**

As shown in Figure 23 (see appendix C), most of the respondents answered correctly regarding the quarantine guidelines issued by the president of the Philippines. Based on the memorandum released



by the executive secretary (2020), a strict home quarantine shall be observed in all households and only frontliners such as healthcare workers shall be allowed to travel. Additionally, movement shall only be limited to accessing basic necessities. This means that citizens are not allowed to leave their houses whenever they please during the quarantine period.

### Quiz 6

Although the majority of the respondents (63.4%) answered question number 6 correctly, there are also a lot of respondents (36.6%) who answered incorrectly. This indicates that there is still confusion as to how many feet away from other people must be observed in social distancing. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2020), people must stay at least six feet away from each other to slow the spread of COVID-19. (Figure 24, appendix C)

### Quiz 7

Question 7 showed that almost all of the respondents (96.9%) got the correct answer. (Figure 25, appendix C). Although face masks are highly recommended as primary protection against COVID-19, still it does not guarantee 100% protection from the virus since other ways of transmission are also capable of putting an individual into high risk. Aside from using face masks, frequent hand-washing and social distancing must be practiced to help slow down the spread of the disease and protect oneself from acquiring it (MayoClinic, 2020).

### Quiz 8

In Question 8, the majority of the respondents (85%) also answered correctly since

antibiotics do not work against viruses but only to bacteria (Figure 26, appendix C). The virus causing COVID-19 is classified as a new coronavirus and therefore, antibiotics should not be used as a means of prevention or treatment (WHO, 2020). This is also because COVID-19 does not have a specific vaccine or medicine for treatment yet and is currently under extensive research, hence, antibiotics are not recommended.

### Quiz 9

Relatively, 93.4% of the respondents answered correctly in Question 9 since, after possible exposure to COVID-19, the World Health Organization requires people to self-quarantine for a period of 14 days due to the nature and incubation period of the virus (Figure 27, appendix C). According to an article by Wamsley & Simmons-Duffin, the incubation period is the time between being infected and the start of shedding the virus through coughs or sneezes - which can infect other people unknowingly. The 14-day guideline is what they call the "safety margin" to be certain that a person has not developed the infection after exposure, and to prevent further spread since transmission to another person can occur even before the onset of visible and persistent symptoms.

### Quiz 10

Question 10 has shown that 92.1% of the respondents got the correct answer (Figure 28, appendix C). Although, bananas and garlic are nutritious foods that must be included in the diet, eating them will definitely not protect an individual from COVID 19. Bananas are in fact one of the fruits that contain essential nutrients as

they help lower blood pressure due to the fact it contains fiber, potassium, folate, and antioxidants such as vitamin C and reduces the risk of cancer. Other benefits of bananas include the fact once eaten, it can lower blood sugar levels and promote regularity in digestive health. All these are reasons why bananas contain essential nutrients that give protective and positive impact on one's health. (Ware, n.d). Similarly, garlic also provides nutrients that may boost an individual's health. Some benefits of garlic include boosting immunity, being anti-inflammatory, and improving cardiovascular health. This has been proven by a Women's Health Study wherein 41,000 women ate garlic routinely and had a 35% lower colon cancer risk. Garlic also produces antioxidants and antibacterial properties that can also kill bacteria that propagate food poisoning (Jeffers, 2015). However, there has been no evidence from the pandemic that eating garlic or bananas can protect people from the new coronavirus (World Health Organization, n.d).

### **Quiz 11**

Question 11 has shown that 90.3% of the respondents got the correct answer (Figure 29, appendix C). Drinking saltwater or hot water per se will not kill the virus causing COVID 19. There is no verified evidence that regularly doing these two will protect people from infection with the new coronavirus neither will it not prevent the virus from entering the lungs. However, this may help soothe a sore throat. Thus, there is no harm in doing these measures but this cannot be looked to be preventive against the virus. In fact, gargling is highly encouraged as well as handwashing and social distancing especially with the COVID 19 pandemic ongoing (Mascarenhas, 2020).

### **Quiz 12**

In Question 12, it is observed that 90.7% of the respondents were able to answer correctly that COVID 19 cannot be transmitted in places with hot or cold temperatures (Figure 30, appendix C). According to the World Health Organization, there is no evidence so far that the virus cannot be transmitted in areas with hot and humid weather. It is possible for an individual to catch COVID-19 whether it is burning hot or freezing cold, thus, it may be transmitted in all areas. In fact, there is evidence that it may thrive anywhere for countries with hot weather such as the Philippines which has numerous cases of the disease. We must take in mind that regardless of the climate, each individual must practice protective and preventive measures such as cleaning hands frequently, avoid touching nose, mouth, and eyes and always wear personal protective equipment.

### **Quiz 13**

Similarly, the majority of the respondents (96%) were able to correctly answer that people of all ages are susceptible to contracting the disease (Figure 31, appendix C).

### **Quiz 14**

For question number 14, the majority of the respondents (88.5%) answered correctly (Figure 32, appendix C). Surfaces and different objects such as packages and doorknobs can be contaminated by coronaviruses. In a study conducted by scientists of the University of California- Los Angeles (2020), the virus that causes COVID-19 can remain on surfaces and aerosols for several hours. This study also suggests that coronavirus may be acquired through

air and after touching contaminated objects which is why proper handwashing and personal hygiene is important in battling this disease.

### Quiz 15

The majority of the respondents (95.6%) also answered correctly in question no. 15; since according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, it is best that hands are properly washed or cleaned during the pandemic especially after visiting public places and touching an item or surface that may be frequently touched by other people. In order to do this, it is ideal to scrub the hands with soap for at least 20 seconds (Figure 30, appendix C).

### Conclusion

Social media platforms continue to serve as crucial mediums for information dissemination amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the integrity of such information online is not always guaranteed due to the prevalence of fake news or the newly-coined, “infodemic”. Misinformation creates fear amongst citizens and even leads them to believe in false practices thus, raising the need to delve deeper into the effects that misinformation brings. After conducting this research however, the findings presented strongly suggest that based on the 227 Filipino respondents, fake news amidst the pandemic has not affected them negatively.

Seeing the responses, social media is indeed considered a primary source of obtaining information about COVID-19 and similarly, is utilized as a means to get updates or news concerning it. Amongst the most common social media platforms

provided, Twitter and Facebook have appeared to be the most used ones in acquiring information. As for the news posted online, most are wary of the prevalence of fake news and are cautious in sharing articles before reading them. Moreover, the respondents are able to properly assess the integrity of posts online seeing that they do not simply share without cross-checking the post’s information with reliable sites. Seeing as well that the respondents are not strongly influenced by the opinions of peers when it comes to determining the integrity of a post online, shows how vigilant and watchful the “social media group” is.

It is well enough that the respondents are aware of the prevalence of such misinformation however, there is still a need to guarantee the credibility and accuracy of the information they received. For the test portion of the survey question conducted, most respondents generally answered the questions correctly. Showing that they are well aware of COVID-19 facts and practices. Although there was still a number that answered incorrectly, the majority still outweighs them.

The presence of fake news especially during these trying times is as mentioned, burdensome and alarming especially since practically anyone with an internet connection can access social media sites; anyone can post what they wish and anyone can read what they post. Seeing that the target respondents whose age groups are considered as the biggest social media users in the Philippines are able to properly manage this adversary has proven that despite being vulnerable, fake news does not negatively affect them as long as they remain vigilant and wary.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

Survey Question on the Pros and Cons of Rapid Information Dissemination in Social Media amidst the COVID-19 Crisis in the Philippine Setting

*(Section 1 of 4)*

Email Address:

Name (Optional):

Age:

Occupation:

*(Section 2 of 4, Survey question on social media platforms)*

This section of the Survey Question aims to assess the respondent's use of social media platforms in information dissemination.

1. I am quickly updated on the news about COVID 19 through social media platforms (Giving a score of 1 means you do not agree with the statement. A score of 4 means you fully agree with the statement.)
2. I utilize my social media accounts to easily get updated on COVID-19 (Giving a score of 1 means you do not agree with the statement. A score of 4 means you fully agree with the statement.)
3. I often check my social media accounts for COVID-19 updates (Giving a score of 1 means you do not agree with the statement. A score of 4 means you fully agree with the statement.)
4. Facebook (Rank this social media platform according to how often you use it to receive or send information. 1 being the lowest, 4 being the highest.)

5. Twitter (Rank this social media platform according to how often you use it to receive or send information. 1 being the lowest, 4 being the highest.)
6. Instagram (Rank this social media platform according to how often you use it to receive or send information. 1 being the lowest, 4 being the highest.)
7. Telegram (Rank this social media platform according to how often you use it to receive or send information. 1 being the lowest, 4 being the highest.)
8. Viber (Rank this social media platform according to how often you use it to receive or send information. 1 being the lowest, 4 being the highest.)
9. Email (Rank this social media platform according to how often you use it to receive or send information. 1 being the lowest, 4 being the highest.)

*Section 3 of 4 (Survey question on the information that I see on my social media)*

This section of the Survey Question aims to assess the respondent's use of social media platforms in information dissemination and his or her response to circulating fake news. Giving a score of 1 means you do not agree with the statement, while giving a score of 4 means you fully agree with the statement.

10. When receiving information, I usually read the whole article and not just look at the headline title.
11. I can distinguish fake news from facts.
12. I often see reliable sources on social media.
13. I often see or receive fake news on the Internet.

14. I easily believe posts posted on Facebook about COVID-19.
15. I instantly share with my friends the post/s I see about COVID-19 on my social media without fact checking it.
16. I use a fact checking website or verify first the information that I received by referring to official health organization websites.
17. I rely on the opinion of my friends or family members with regards to the reliability of the posts I see online.
18. I get disturbed whenever I see or read fake news on social media.
8. Antibiotics are recommended to treat COVID-19. (True/False)
9. If I am suspected to have COVID-19, I should self-quarantine for 5 days. (True/False)
10. Eating bananas and garlic will not protect me from COVID-19, however, they are nutritious foods that I should include in my diet. (True/False)
11. Drinking salt/hot water can kill the virus causing COVID-19. (True/False)
12. COVID-19 cannot be transmitted in places with hot or cold temperatures. (True/False)
13. People of ALL ages are susceptible to COVID-19. (True/False)

#### *Section 4 of 4 (Survey Question /Quiz on COVID-19)*

This section of the Survey Question aims to assess the respondents knowledge on COVID 19. The questions must be answered as honestly as possible. Answer True if you agree with the statement, False if otherwise. No searching on google please!

1. COVID-19 is caused by bacteria. (True/False)
2. COVID-19 is transmitted through respiratory droplets and touching contaminated surfaces. (True/False)
3. There is already a known vaccine to prevent COVID-19. (True/False)
4. I won't catch the corona virus through my pets such as dogs and cats. (True/False)
5. I am allowed to leave my house whenever I please during the quarantine period. (True/False)
6. Social distancing means I need to be at least 4 feet away from other people. (True/False)
7. Face masks do not guarantee that I am 100% safe from COVID-19. (True/False)

14. Letters, products, and packages do not get contaminated by the coronavirus. (True/False)
15. Washing my hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds will help kill the virus causing COVID-19. (True/False)

#### **Appendix B**

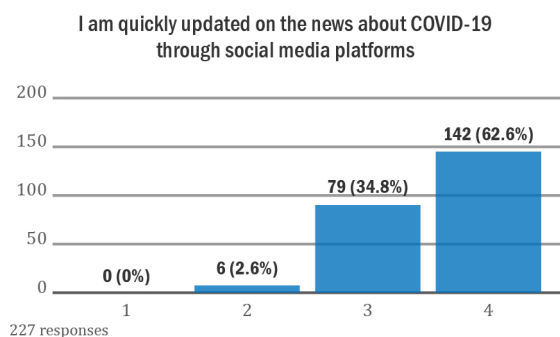
Answer Key for the Survey Question /Quiz on COVID-19 (Section 4 of 4)

1. COVID-19 is caused by bacteria. (False)
2. COVID-19 is transmitted through respiratory droplets and touching contaminated surfaces. (True)
3. There is already a known vaccine to prevent COVID-19. (False)
4. I won't catch the corona virus through my pets such as dogs and cats. (True)
5. I am allowed to leave my house whenever I please during the quarantine period. (False)
6. Social distancing means I need to be at least 4 feet away from other people. (False)

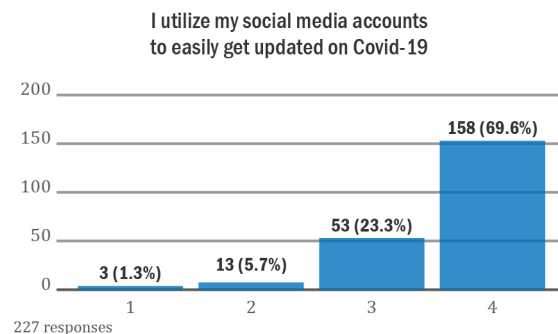
7. Face masks do not guarantee that I am 100% safe from COVID-19. (True)
8. Antibiotics are recommended to treat COVID-19. (False)
9. If I am suspected to have COVID-19, I should self quarantine for 5 days. (False)
10. Eating bananas and garlic will not protect me from COVID-19, however, they are nutritious foods that I should include in my diet. (True)
11. Drinking salt/hot water can kill the virus causing COVID-19. (False)
12. COVID-19 cannot be transmitted in places with hot or cold temperatures. (False)
13. People of ALL ages are susceptible to COVID-19. (True)
14. Letters, products, and packages do not get contaminated by the coronavirus. (False)
15. Washing my hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds will help kill the virus causing COVID-19. (True)

## Appendix C

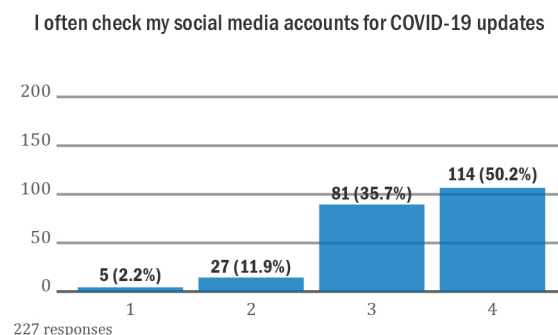
Section 2 of 4 (Survey question on social media platforms)



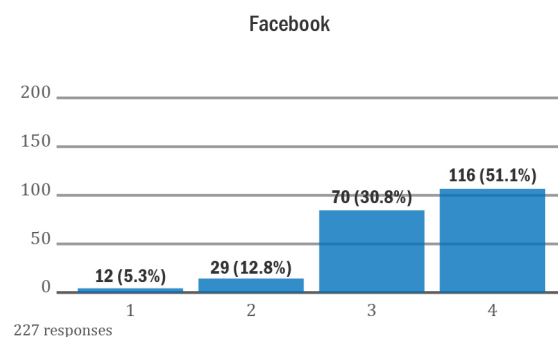
**Figure 1. Information dissemination on social media platforms**



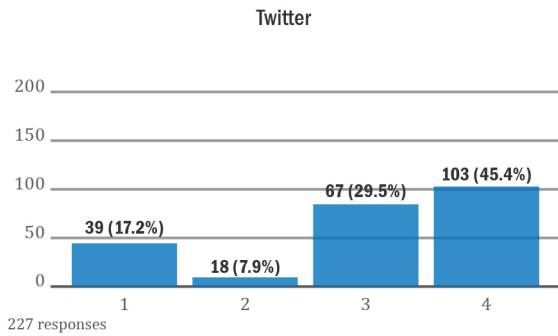
**Figure 2. Utilization of social media for COVID-19 updates**



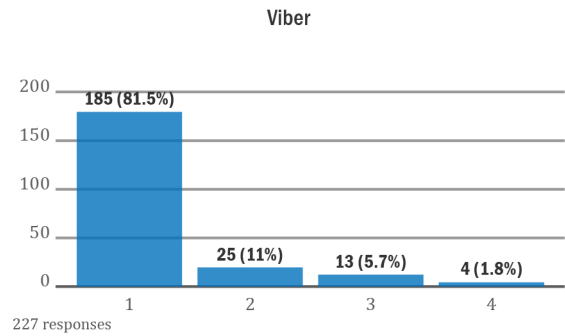
**Figure 3. Frequency of checking social media for COVID-19 updates**



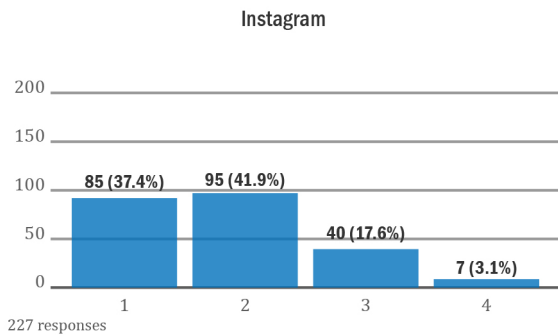
**Figure 4. Facebook as a source of COVID-19 updates**



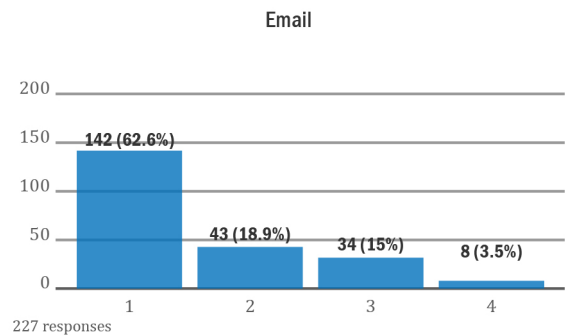
**Figure 5. Twitter as a source of COVID-19 updates**



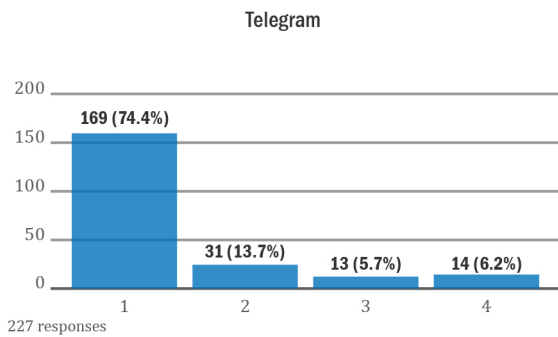
**Figure 8. Viber as a source of COVID-19 updates**



**Figure 6. Instagram as a source of COVID-19 updates**

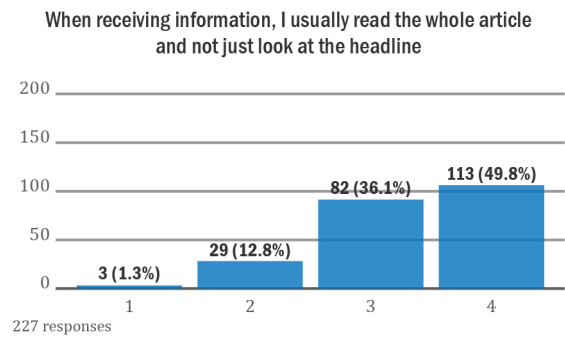


**Figure 9. Emails as sources of COVID-19 updates**

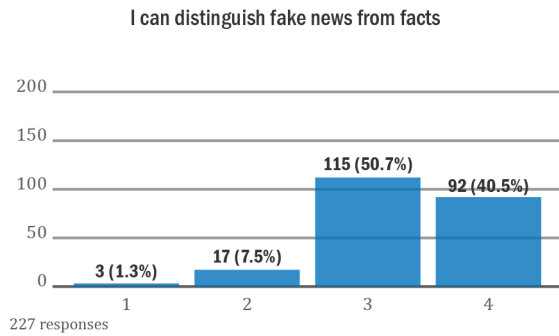


**Figure 7. Telegram as a source of COVID-19 updates**

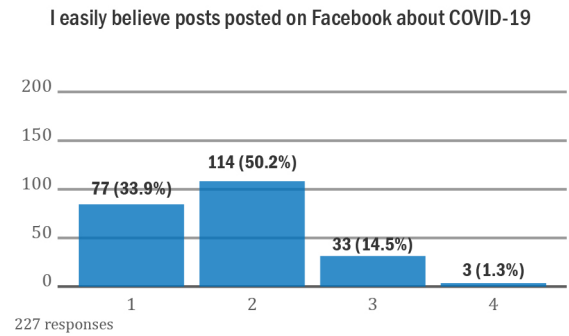
*Section 3 of 4 (Survey Question on the information that I see on my social media)*



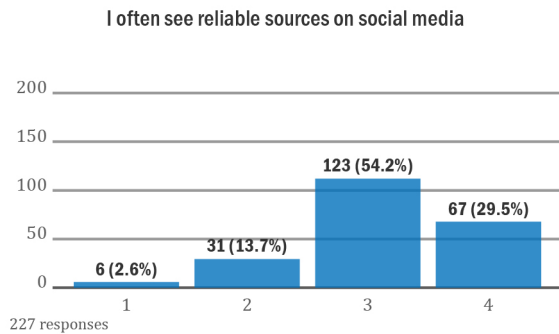
**Figure 10. COVID-19 articles and headline titles**



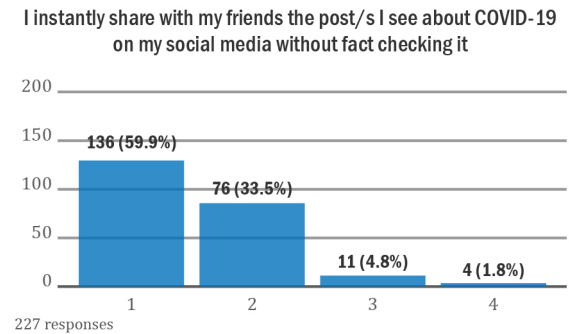
**Figure 11. Ability to distinguish factual news from fake news**



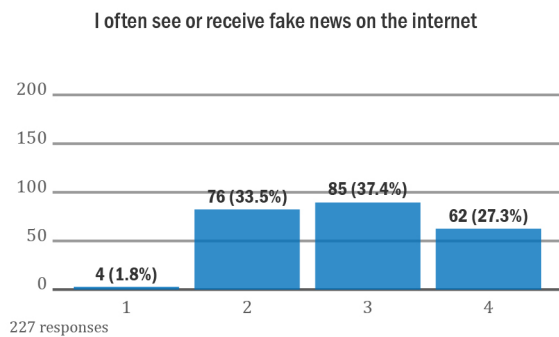
**Figure 14. Credibility of Facebook posts about COVID-19**



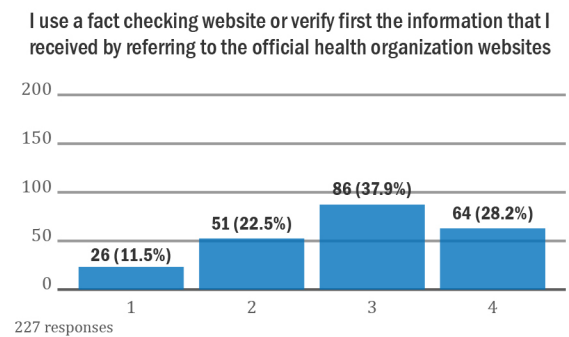
**Figure 12. Reliable sources on social media**



**Figure 15. Sharing posts about COVID-19**

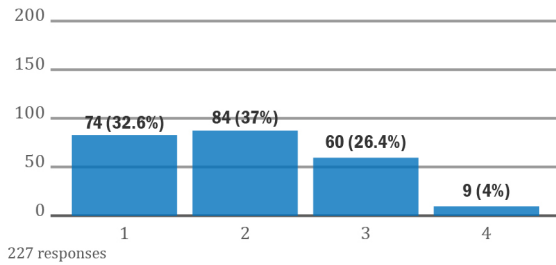


**Figure 13. Misleading information on social media**



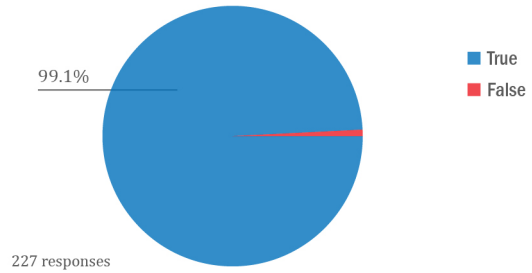
**Figure 16. Utilization of fact checking sites**

I rely on the opinion of my friends or family members with regards to the reliability of the posts I see online



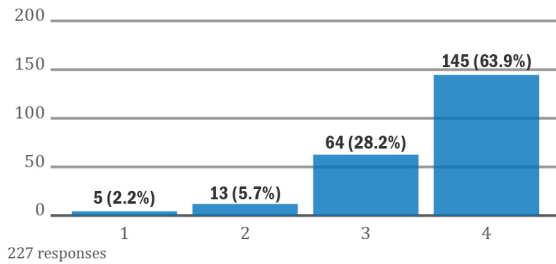
**Figure 17. Opinions versus the reliability of posts regarding COVID-19**

COVID-19 is transmitted through respiratory droplets and touching contaminated surfaces



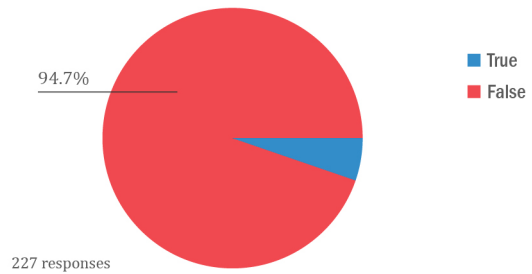
**Figure 20. COVID-19 transmission**

I get disturbed whenever I see or read fake news on social media



**Figure 18. Effect of fake news on social media**

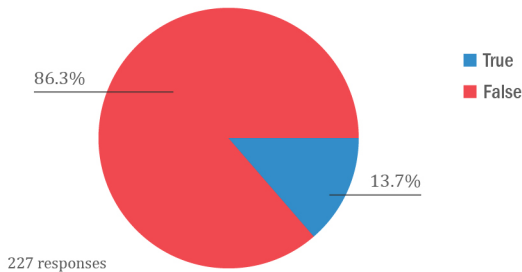
There is already a known vaccine to prevent COVID-19



**Figure 21. Vaccine against COVID-19**

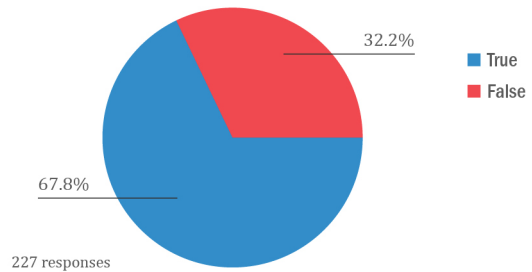
*Section 4 of 4 (Survey Question /Quiz on COVID 19)*

COVID-19 is caused by a bacteria



**Figure 19. Causative agent of COVID-19**

I won't catch the corona virus through my pets (dogs and cats)



**Figure 22. Zoonotic sources of COVID-19**

I am allowed to leave my house whenever I please during the quarantine period

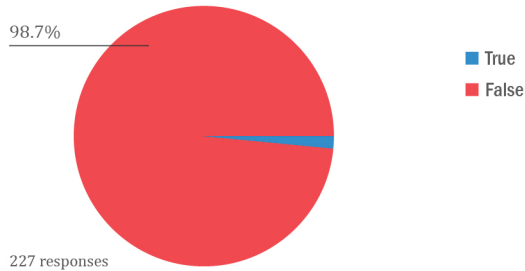


Figure 23. Quarantine guidelines

Antibiotics are recommended to treat COVID-19

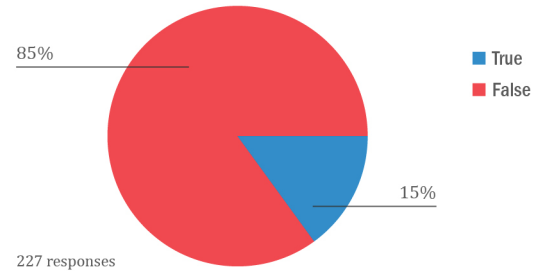


Figure 26. Antibiotics as treatment for COVID-19

Social distancing means I need to be at least 4 feet away from other people

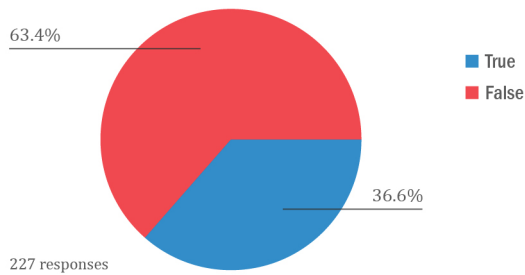


Figure 24. Social distancing

If I am suspected to have COVID-19, I should self quarantine for 5 days

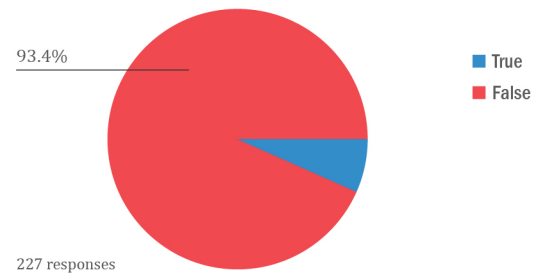


Figure 27. Self-quarantine

Face masks do not guarantee that I am 100% safe from COVID-19

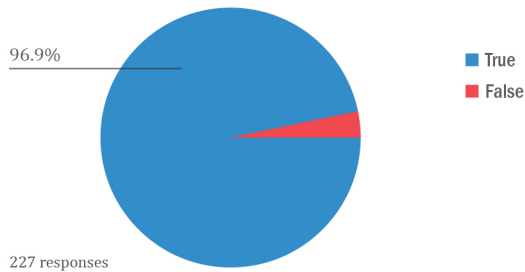


Figure 25. Face mask percentage of protection

Eating bananas and garlic will not protect me from COVID-19, however, they are nutritious foods that I should include in my diet

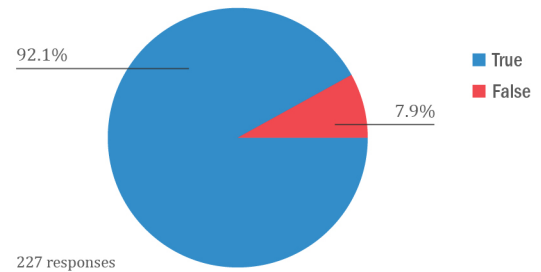


Figure 28. Certain food against COVID-19



Drinking salt/hot water can kill the virus causing COVID-19

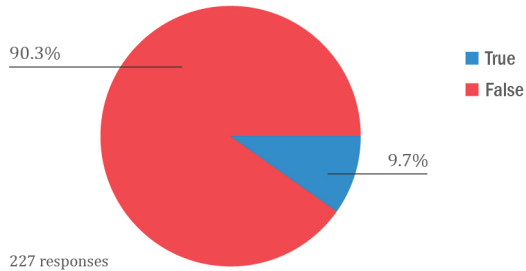


Figure 29. Salt/hot water against COVID-19

Letters, products, and packages do not get contaminated by the corona virus

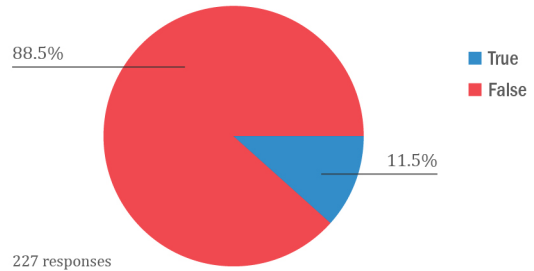


Figure 32. COVID-19 on inanimate objects

COVID-19 cannot be transmitted in places with hot or cold temperatures

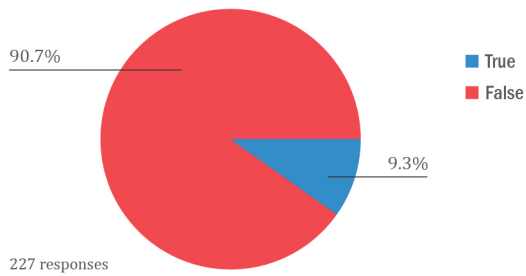


Figure 30. Temperature and COVID-19 transmission

Washing my hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds will help kill the virus causing COVID-19

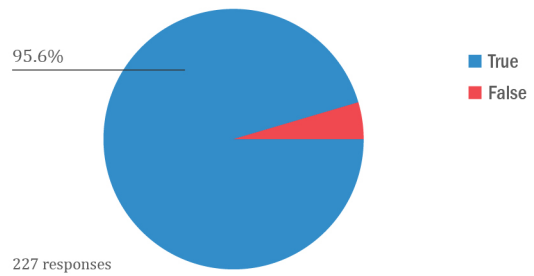


Figure 33. Hand-washing against COVID-19

People of ALL ages are susceptible to COVID-19

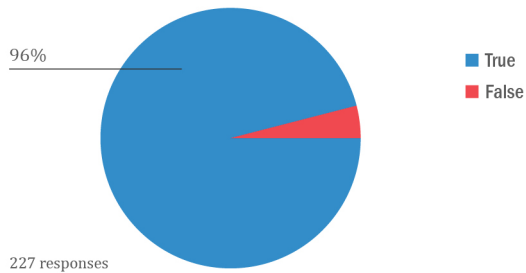
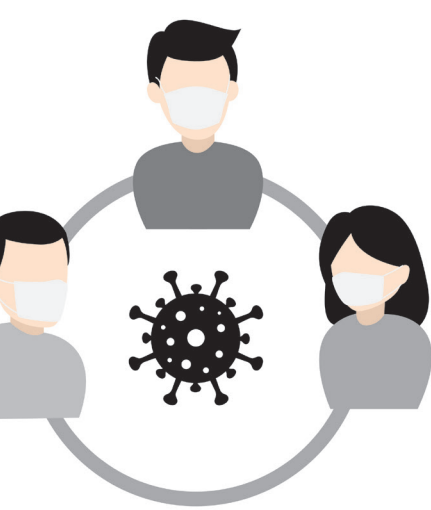


Figure 31. Susceptibility to COVID-19 based on age



## Chapter III

# The Filipino Youth Rising Above the Pandemic

In this last part of the monograph, narratives championing the innate innovativeness, talent, and determination of the Filipino youth in the face of the COVID-19 shall be at the forefront. In the paper titled, *Examining the role of Facebook use intensity, information-seeking behavior in civic engagement among Filipino youth during the COVID-19 pandemic*, Dr. Belinda V. de Castro et.al. investigated the rise of diverse democracy, the growing popularity of Facebook use, and the promises of digital citizenship among the youth in this current ordeal.

The political and civic awareness of the Youth was the subject of Mr. Anthony Andrew Divinagracia's paper titled, *Of echo chambers and necessary noise: How student activists viewed the Duterte Administration's medical populism and other unnecessary actions amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, an exploratory study*. In addition, the paper of Mr. Paul Micah Francisco, *Vlogging the sustainable development goals: A synthesis of the youths quarantine life in relation to SDG 3 and SDG 4* showed the civic mindedness of the youth in the midst of the pandemic. Aside from civic engagement and political consciousness, the youth was also able to turn online for profitable ventures and earning avenues in Ms. Jeshamar Villasis' work titled *PM is the key: Gen Zers transforming the crisis into profitable opportunities*.

Lastly, a fitting end to this collection, Mr. Jose Ricart Origenes M.A. presents narratives of hope and optimism among the Filipino Youth in his article titled, *Resilience, radiant smiles and silver linings: COVID-19 and Filipino Youth narratives of hope and optimism*.



# Examining the role of Facebook use intensity, information-seeking behavior in civic engagement among Filipino youth during the COVID 19 pandemic

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## Abstract

While the COVID-19 pandemic has become an acid test for global resilience, solidarity, and renewal, it has also created an empirical space to reconcile tensions between and among social realities. Notably, at the crux of the rise of diverse democracy, the growing popularity of Facebook use, and the promises of digital citizenship, is the youth sector whose action and inaction in the midst of a global crisis may pose a number of perils and questions to their pivotal role in nation building. A cross-sectional investigation involving a total of 334 youth respondents aged 15-24 was carried out to examine the interactive influence of Facebook use intensity and information-seeking behavior on their civic engagement during the COVID-19 global health crisis. Through the use of multivariate analyses such as factor analysis and structural equation modelling (SEM), results indicated that the Filipino youth's more intense use of certain facets of Facebook contributed less to their engagement in civic activities, despite the positive correlation between their information-seeking behavior and intensity of use. Notably, results of this study depicted the Filipino youth as a sector operating in a realm where the prevalence of a culture of Facebook regular use outweighed a culture of purposive use. Implications of this study to youth empowerment and positive development are also discussed in this paper.

## Keywords

COVID-19, Filipino youth, Facebook intensity use, Facebook information seeking behavior

## Introduction

The latent and manifest paralytic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be underestimated (Bucoy & de Guzman 2020). The perils of this

pandemic have, in fact, challenged all sectors of society to devise alternative and creative options to ensure that the business as usual philosophy

remains afloat. With very little to no opportunity to go outside, many have turned to social media to keep themselves updated, communicate, and socialize (Nortajuddin, 2020). Accordingly, a global survey conducted during the peak of the COVID-19 outbreak in March 2020 revealed that 45% had spent more extended time using messaging applications and social media (Watson, 2020). In the US, it was reported that about 46% to 51% of adults utilized social media more during the outbreak. At the same time, most of those belonging to ages 18-34 were found to have increased use of specific social media platforms (Samet, 2020). Moreover, in a survey conducted among internet users across 17 countries, the Philippines was found to have the most significant number of users spending more time on social media. An average of 64% of Filipino internet users said that their social-media time increased compared to the global data of around 47% (Nortajuddin, 2020).

Notably, the Philippines has been consistent in social media use, even in the pre-pandemic setting. For instance, data show that in 2019, social media users in the country have grown from 67 million to 76 million, with 75 million considered as Facebook (FB) users. Such a significant number of social media users have made the Philippines the country that tops the worldwide social media use for four straight years (Gonzales, 2019). Interestingly, this notion of being the "most social nation" is associated with the country's young population considering that more than 53 percent of the youth access the internet through mobile phones, spend an average of 6 hours on the internet per week, and consume 4.7 hours of their day on social networking sites (Camus, 2018; Jphiego

Philippines, 2017). However, too much use of social media may lead to serious problems such as increased risks of experiencing cyberbullying, social comparison, and replacing important life activities with social media use, among others (Nesi, 2020; Cho et al, 2020) hence the need to educate the youth for a safer, responsible and productive use of this social platform (Raisingchildren.net.au., 2020) Social media allows its users to interact by sharing and augmenting media or posting and responding to other people's posts (Robertson, 2018). Impressively, this promising technological platform has been utilized by the youth in diverse ways. For example, the youth describes social media as their means to connecting, maintaining relationships, being creative and exploring the world (Anderson & Jiang, 2019). For Wood and colleagues (2016), social media is utilized for experimentation of different behavior and interaction styles which foster identity formation among the younger users. Furthermore, social media also serves as an outlet for the youth to actively engage in politics (Keating & Melis, 2017). With the increasing use of social media among the youth vis-à-vis the affordances this technological platform offers, it is also noteworthy to look at how social media foster civic engagement among this young group.

Previously, studies have shown various antecedents that shaped the youth's civic engagement. The study of Gibson (2008), for one, revealed that religiosity influences the youth's intention to volunteer. Additionally, nationwide surveys among individuals aged 18 to 24 years old conducted in 2006 and 2007 have indicated that generally, parents and gender affect participation in civic activities (Portney et al, 2009). Among college

students in the United States, expectations of efficacy and sense of control over public affairs significantly predicted civic participation (Nishishiba, et al, 2005). Notably, in the current rise of popularity of social media, scholars have highlighted social media's immense potential to facilitate civic engagement especially among the youth (Uldam & Vestergaard, 2015; Warren, et al, 2014; Robertson, 2018; Kenna & Hensley, 2019; National Council for Social Studies, 2018). Likewise, a study among Singaporean youth reported that consumption of news from online and social networks sites significantly influences both offline and online political and civic engagement and political knowledge as compared to traditional media (Hao, 2014). More recently, the emergence of social media trends like #GirlsToo movement along with the #MeToo movement which advocates addressing sexual trauma among teenage girls (Runcie, 2019) and the #BlackLivesMatter that inspired the youth to take action against crimes committed based on an individual's color (Muñoz, 2020) highly speak of social media's huge role in motivating the youth to partake in civic activities which are instrumental to a democratic society (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013).

For Checkoway and Aldana (2013), the different forms in which the youth participates in civic activities, including the use of social media, have given birth to the concept of "diverse democracy". Characteristically, "diverse democracy" implies that as the society becomes diverse, so as the ways people take actions to address public concerns. Similarly, the youth's participation in civics and politics through online platforms may also be classified as "digital citizenship" (Cortesi et al, 2020). In digital citizenship, a digital citizen utilizes knowledge

and skills in digital technologies to communicate, consume and create digital content and participate in society (Council of Europe, 2020). From these concepts, it can be deduced that digital citizenship as a new way of engaging in civic activities among the youth and democracy are closely associated with each other. In fact, a recent cross-sectional study on over 125 countries around the world revealed a positive correlation between social media (ex. Facebook) use and democracy especially among low-income countries. Furthermore, social media use was also seen to be associated with the increase of democracy index of about 8-points (Jha & Kodila-Tedika, 2020). Undoubtedly, digital citizenship is changing the landscape of democracy by expanding the public square that is more inclusive, hence allowing more and diverse individuals to voice out their concerns and participate in causes concerning the majority and minority digitally. It should be noted, however, that the exploitation of the speed, wide reach and complexity of the internet, especially social media, for misinformation might have detrimental effects on democracy in the future. As matter of fact, a survey conducted by Pew Research in 2019 on technology and democracy shows that among technology innovators, developers, business and policy leaders, and researchers, 49% say that technology will greatly weaken democracy in the next coming years (Anderson & Rainie, 2020). Yet, in another study on digital innovation and democracy, 69% of the total experts involved still foresee favorable outcomes of digital innovations on enhancing democracy in the future for its power to promote positive social and civic changes (Vogels et al, 2020).

Considering the copious number of investigations rallying the notion of social media

as a promising civic participation platform across the youth sector and its possible implications on democracy, determining if social media use could lead to better civic engagement especially in the current health pandemic context merits an empirical exploration thus, this quantitative study attempts to ascertain the relationship of FB information-seeking behavior and intensity of use with engagement in civic and charitable activities among a select group of Filipino youth during COVID-19 pandemic. Results of this quantitative study could provide a basis for promoting, developing, and strengthening civic engagement among the youth using social networking sites like Facebook through involvement of key institutions and agencies to ensure effective, mindful and judicious use of digital platforms.

The subsequent sections of this study discuss this investigation's theoretical basis, the review of supporting literature, and the hypothesized model. This is followed by the methods section that describes the data collection and analytic processes involved. The results and discussion, and conclusion were provided in the final part of this empirical study.

## **Theoretical Background**

### **Theoretical framing**

This study is anchored on the relational nature of the Social Capital Theory. Social capital refers mainly to social relationships where people share norms, beliefs and values that allow them cooperate and work collectively; thereby establishing relational networks that operate in the spirit of mutual trust and reciprocity (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1995; Conrad, 2008; Bhandari &

Yasunobu, 2009; Tsutsumi, 2017). Originally used by Hanifan in 1916 to broadly describe schools as educational and social centers, Hanifan associated social capital not to material goods but to goodwill, fellowship, sympathy and social intercourse among individuals that constitute the social unit (Tsutsumi, 2017). This concept was later theorized by Bourdieu and Coleman whose works on social capital are grounded on the Marxist theory and structural functionalism paradigm (Rogosic & Baranovic, 2016), respectively. While both of these sociologists emphasized the importance of structure in social capital, Bourdieu (1986) elaborated on social capital in relation to power and how social capital reproduces inequality while Coleman (1988), for his part, accentuated how social capital enables people within social structures to take action.

Putnam (1995) advanced this concept but explained how traditional groups in the United States are slowly declining, with the emergence of new groups and social movements (Tsutsumi, 2017) which include virtual communities formed using social media platforms like Facebook. Putnam's approach (1995) to social capital emphasized democracy and civic action. He implied that communities with high social capital would lead to better democratic engagements. Putnam's ideas of bonding and bridging (2000) are applicable in social media networks (Tsutsumi, 2017) where individuals and groups are linked, and access and sharing of information and resources become faster and more efficient. The act itself of providing resources and benefitting from them are the constituent elements of social capital (Conrad, 2008).

The Philippines, being a collectivist society, is a fertile ground to explore social capital in the social media realm. In the country, there are more than 73 million Facebook users with about 24 million in the 18-24 age group (NapoleonCat, 2020). Owing to the popularity of Facebook among the Filipinos and the power of this platform to equip adolescents with tools to learn and participate in civic activities (Lenzi et al., 2015), this study aimed at determining the influence of FB intensity use, information-seeking behavior, and prior civic engagements of Filipino youth on their civic and charitable activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Underpinned by both bonding and bridging forms of social capital (Putnam, 2000), Facebook features enable users to communicate with family and friends, and establish connection with external groups to expand their networks; hence, making it possible to mobilize civic and charitable activities during the pandemic. Though results of studies on the impact of virtual communities on social capital are mixed, a United Nations Children's Fund's study by Cho, Byrne and Pelter (2020) acknowledged that there is a direct link between the youth's Internet use and civic engagement, while Warren, Sulaiman and Jaafar (2015) affirmed that Facebook fostered new patterns of online civic engagement.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Engagement in civic and charitable activities**

The advent of modern technologies gave rise to the need for digital citizenship which has been described widely and differently by scholars, ranging from knowledge and access to digital media to ethical and responsible behavior in the online environment (Searson et al, 2015). By and large,

frameworks on digital citizenship were developed for adults and lacked comprehensiveness, which prompted Kim and Choi (2018) to formulate a more inclusive model applicable to the youth which consists of five dimensions, namely: ethics for the digital environment, fluency, reasonable activity, self-identity and social/cultural engagement. Civic activities are enveloped in the last dimension which includes expressing their thoughts and opinions and working with others in the online community to solve school and regional problems. This so-called "digital civic engagement" among young people was defined by the United Nations Children's Fund as the individual and collective action of the youth to participate in various forms of activities aimed at social reconstruction (Cho, 2020).

Active civic engagement is a reflection of a functioning democracy. However, across the globe, civic engagement posted a seemingly low index. In the 2016 Global Civic Engagement Report by Gallup involving adults in 140 countries worldwide, 44% helped strangers in need; 27% donated money to charity; and 20% volunteered time to a civic organization. The Philippines ranked 44th with an index score of only 40, but placed seventh in terms of likelihood to volunteer time to an organization. Its southeast Asian neighbors Myanmar, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand have relatively higher ratings, with Myanmar taking the top spot with an overall index score of 70 (Gallup, 2016) despite its 'least developed' country status. In more developed Asian countries like Singapore, non-political civic engagement was found to be influenced by generalized trust, personal values and religiosity (Tan & Tambyah, 2017).



At the turn of the century, researchers observed a general decline in civic engagement among the youth. It appears that trust is a key element for civic engagement. An overall decrease in social trust was reported among Americans (Putnam, 1995) and the decline in civic engagement among American youth was due to trust issues, dwindling interest in news, political and public affairs, and indifference (Delli Carpini, 2000). In the Philippines, declining trust in the government due to unresponsive governance has affected citizens' engagement (Brillantes & Fernandez, 2011). However, based on historical data from the Social Weather Station (2017), net satisfaction of Filipinos with the general performance of the national administration had considerably increased starting 2010 with good-very good ratings. Responding to the occurrence of the global civic malaise, Inglehart and Catterberg (2002) reasoned that the perceived decline in civic participation was not a sign of civic inertness but reflected a post-honeymoon period of disillusionment with democracy. In fact, civic participation is expected to grow across the world due to new modes of participation particularly actuated by advancement in information and communication technology (Low et al., 2016). With this, the concept of civic action among today's youth is not rooted on dutiful citizenship anymore but grounded on "personalized politics of expressive engagement" (Bennett et al., 2010; Cho et al., 2020).

Studies on the impact of social networking sites on civic participation is generally mixed. While social networking sites offer new opportunities for civic engagement, Morozov (2011) argued that they failed to actively mobilize people beyond mere "likes" (as cited in Lie, 2018); created "slacktivists" with a

token display of support (Delli Carpini, 2000) like in the case of the "Save Darfur Cause" (Lewis et al., 2014); and unlikely to replace the potency of offline civic engagement (Jugert et al., 2013). Additionally, information on youth engagement sites still emphasized the old concept of dutiful civic action and not on participatory affordances; thus, failing to meet the realities of today's digital natives (Bennett et al., 2010). However, there are those who believe in the promises of social networking sites to correct democratic deficits of modern societies in the long run (Buckingham & Martinez-Rodriguez, 2013). For instance, Lie (2018) noted that popular social media platform Facebook had been used effectively by youth organizations in informing the wider community about fundraising events and crowdsourcing. Using the positive youth development framework (PYD), Facebook was also found to develop positive traits among young users, largely on connection, competence and contribution, which consequently incite future civic engagement (Lee & Horsely, 2017). In a comparative study of civic engagement using Facebook in Indonesia and Malaysia, Facebook sparked civic interest and action through publication of information, dialogue and lobbying decision makers (Warren et al., 2016). In Hong Kong, the youth's motivation toward civic participation is high with many young people expressing their opinions on certain social issues through social media, and engaging in volunteer work (Low et al., 2016). In the Philippines, Brillantes and Fernandez (2011) acknowledged how social networks can be used as tools for communicating and soliciting input from citizens; thereby possibly restoring trust in governance. Delli Carpini (2010) claimed that the American youth's disinterest for political participation may be mitigated if they are given channels to reach

political elites and organized groups, which is now possible through social networking sites.

Despite the aforementioned studies, there continues to be a lack of solid understanding as to how Facebook drives the youth's civic participatory efforts (Warren et al, 2016; Jugert, 2013; Delli Carpini, 2000). While there had been an increasing number of researches on youth's civic engagement, to the best knowledge of the researchers, there has been no published study on the impact of Facebook on the online civic engagement among Filipino youth during the COVID-19 pandemic. It would be interesting to see how the pandemic intensified or changed the way they participate civically and the type of civic activities they engage in using Facebook.

### **Facebook information-seeking behavior**

Facebook has evolved from just a mere tool for connecting people to an information hub that quickly and efficiently collects and publishes news and information through its News Feed exposing the youth to both deliberate and incidental news. The active and purposeful search for information because of a need to satisfy a goal is what is described by scholars as information seeking (Wilson, 2000), and about 43 to 64 percent of children aged 9-17 years old across 11 countries including the Philippines, search for news online (Cho et al., 2020). However, information-seeking does not seem to be the main drivers of FB use. In a literature review, Nadkarni and Hofmann (2012) cited the social needs of belongingness and self-presentation as motivational factors for FB use.

Notably, FB information-seeking as an underexplored topic prompted Asghar (2015) to

develop a valid and robust scale to measure it, identifying five factors: social searching; hedonic proclivity; social browsing; consumer trends information; and general erudition. In another study, Facebook was the top search tool used primarily because of convenience of information, social entertainment, and professional development (Campbell & Craig, 2014). Literature on information-seeking using Facebook is relatively few with existing ones primarily focused on health particularly by those with chronic illnesses (e.g. Shaw & Johnson, 2011), and on political and environmental activism (Warren et al., 2015; Warren et al., 2016).

Wilson's (1999, 2000) model of information behavior, used by researchers to explain information seeking (e.g. Asghar, 2015) shows that one's information-seeking behavior, when deemed successful, may lead to information processing and use. Additionally, it may prompt the information seeker to share useful information to other people. When one's perceived need for information is not met, the search process is reiterated. The model may be applied to FB information-seeking behavior and how such behavior may be related to FB intent use if users are driven by their need to find relevant information which may include current news of public concern. With the functions of Facebook that allow news sharing and community engagement through comments, live broadcasts and events, it is plausible that information-seeking behavior may lead to civic engagement and charitable activities. This study makes the following hypotheses:

H1: FB Intensity of use and Information-seeking behavior are positively correlated.

H2: Better FB information-seeking behavior in FB will lead to more engagement in civic and charitable activities

### **Facebook intensity use**

A number of studies had been conducted on the use of social networking sites like Facebook which is particularly popular among the youth (Lenzi et al, 2015; Anderson et al., 2012). In a literature search conducted by Nadkarni and Hofmann (2012), Facebook users are motivated by their social need for belongingness which is influenced by demographic and cultural factors; and self-representation which is impacted by neuroticism, narcissism, shyness, self-esteem and self-worth. The amount of FB use is either driven by their sociality to reach out to others which they feel is rewarding or by the users' feeling of disconnectedness as a way of coping (Sheldon et al., 2011; Anderson et al., 2012), with serious positive and negative effects on psychological well-being (Rae & Lonborg, 2015). However, certain negative impacts had been identified by scholars. For instance, the quantity and longer duration of use creates a distorted impression that others are happier than they are (Chou & Edge, 2012) and when motivated by friendship purposes may contribute to psychological distress (Rae & Lonborg, 2015). While Facebook and other social networking sites have the potential to generate new problems (Anderson et al., 2012), it carries with it the conceivable power to motivate and offer opportunities of engagement in civic work as Facebook provides communication tools and efficient exchange of information (Lie, 2018; Lenzi et al., 2015; Delli Carpini, 2000). Stimulating awareness and interest on civic issues may inspire active engagement (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012).

In a study by Lenzi and associates (2015), the effects of Facebook on civic engagement are contingent on the reason for its use. They added that the youth's intention for future participation is dependent on the development of their civic competencies which in turn can be developed when young people utilize Facebook to learn about current events which can stimulate them to engage in productive discussions of issues with community members. It should be noted, however, that the FB intensity use has not been investigated yet in the context of the Filipino youth's civic engagement. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: More intensive use of FB will lead to more engagement in civic and charitable activities.

### **Prior civic engagement**

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the youth at various levels – health and well-being; education; employment and civic activities due to social distancing policies. Countries were able to adapt to the situation by migrating to the online environment. In view of civic engagement, social networking sites can extend the youth's offline civic activities by affording quick and flexible access to greater volume of information and opportunity for interaction among people with shared interests. A number of evidence exist as to how new technologies offer previously engaged citizens a means to expand and enhance the quality of their engagements, as well as target non active citizens by tapping their interest on particular social issues to motivate and transform their slacktivism to active participation, granting that such impacts are not deterred by fragmented information, information overload and the dominance of entertainment

media over in-depth news and public affairs (Dell Carpini, 2000; Cho, 2020).

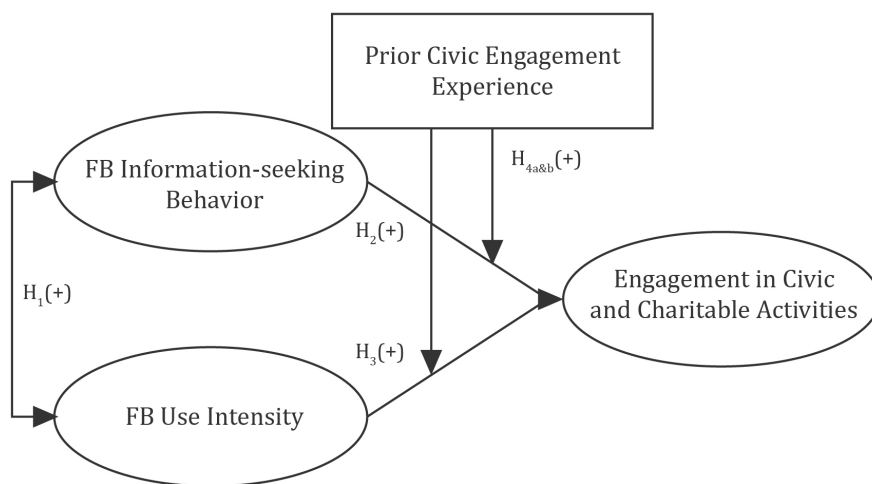
In a study concerning the correlates of youth's offline and online civic engagement, Jugert et al. (2013) found that young adults with civic knowledge and prior hands-on civic engagement experiences reported higher levels of offline and online civic engagements, and that motivation and collective efficacy are both positively linked to online civic engagement. Additionally, FB information use is associated with better civic competencies especially when mediated by frequent discussion on civic issues, and competence for civic actions in turn is linked to stronger intention for future civic engagement (Lenzi et al., 2015). Youth civic competencies are basically developed through civic learning and democratic engagements. In a study involving multiracial students in a public school, adolescent students with voluntary

service experiences predict intended future civic engagement, and that 'social service cause participation' stimulates their concern for social issues (Metz et al., 2003).

The foregoing studies support the argument that prior civic engagement among the youth may moderate the impact of FB information-seeking behavior and intensity of use on their online civic engagement.

H4a: Prior CE Experience moderates the impact of FB information seeking behavior on the respondents' engagement civic and charitable activities.

H4b: Prior CE Experience moderates the impact of FB intensity of use on the respondents' engagement civic and charitable activities.



**Figure 1. The Hypothesized Model**

## Methods

### Design

The study utilized a descriptive-exploratory design with the use of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to surface the role of FB use intensity, information-seeking behavior in civic engagement among a select group of Filipino youth aged 15-24 during the COVID 19 pandemic. According to Sahin, Akyurek and Yavuz (2014, p. 169), SEM is an “efficient method of testing and developing a model which can explain the cause and effect relation of the variables in the hypothesis and enables the chance to test the theoretical models as a whole”. The model has four (4) latent variables with four (4) hypotheses, wherein information-seeking behavior and intensity of use are considered to be exogenous, civic engagement as endogenous and prior civic engagement experience as the moderating variable.

### Subjects and study site

Target respondents of the survey are Filipino youth, from ages 15 to 24 years old, currently residing in the country. Since this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic period, the survey was fielded online, through Google forms, to get a higher response rate from a wider set of audience. At the same time, a greater percentage of the target respondents (ages 15 to 21) were not allowed to get out of their homes during the quarantine period. Respondents were randomly selected through snowballing. “a timely and cost-effective sampling method” while at the same time “maintaining appropriate research standards and rigor” (Dusek, Yurova, & Ruppel, 2015, p. 1). Considering a large youth population, Cochran’s sample size formula was used to determine the ideal sample size (Singh

& Masuku, 2014). Computed sample size was found to be 368 respondents, using a 5% margin of error, 1.96 z-value at a 95% confidence level, and a 40% estimated proportion of the population who are involved in civic engagement.

Table 1 depicts the demographic profile of the respondents. Of the 373 respondents, the majority are within the age bracket of 20 to 24 years old (319 or 85.5%), single (339 or 90.9%), and Catholics (290 or 77.7%). More than half are female (257 or 68.9%) and employed in the public sector (179 or 48/0%). On FB use, they are almost unanimously using its Messenger application (372 or 99.7%) but only a few are using its fundraisers and crisis response features (80 or 21.5%). They are very familiar with the Facebook structures, particularly, newsfeed (96.5%), messages and inbox (94.6%) and friends (94.9%). Only a little more than half of them had experience in volunteer, civic or charitable work for the last three years (193 or 51.7%), of which majority of them are directly involved.

**Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (n=373)**

Profile	f	%
<b>Age</b>		
15-19	54	14.5
20-24	319	85.5
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	257	68.9
Male	116	31.1
<b>Civil Status</b>		
Single	339	90.9
Not Single	34	9.1
<b>Religion</b>		
Catholic	290	77.7
Non-Catholic	83	22.3

Profile	f	%
<b>Facebook features and application used</b>		
Messenger	372	99.7
Groups	303	81.2
Friends	291	78.0
Pages	273	73.2
Memories	211	56.6
Saved	201	53.9
Events	185	49.6
Marketplace	178	47.7
COVID-19 Information Center	152	40.8
Watch	137	36.7
Games	130	34.9
Nearby Friends	110	29.5
Recommendations	106	28.4
Weather	81	21.7
Jobs	67	18.0
Notes	46	12.3
Fundraisers	42	11.3
Crisis Response	38	10.2
City Guides	30	8.0
Offers	29	7.8
Dating	23	6.2
	312	99.7
<b>Experience in volunteer, civic or charitable work in the last three years</b>		
Yes	193	51.7
No	180	48.3
<b>Type of involvement in civic and charitable activities</b>		
Direct	93	24.9
Indirect	51	13.7
Both	53	14.2
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Basic ed student	35	9.4
College student	93	24.9
Employed in private sector	51	13.7
Employed in public sector	179	48.0
Self-employed	5	1.5
Unemployed	19	5.1
<b>Membership in organizations</b>		
Professional organization	114	30.6
Religious organization	87	23.3
Environment, conservation and wildlife organization	14	3.8
Civic and social organization	13	3.5
Voluntary health organization	7	1.9
Political organization	5	1.3
Human rights organization	4	1.1
Grantmaking foundation/ charitable trust	5	1.3
Business association	4	1.1
Labor union and similar labor organization	2	0.5
None	179	48.0

Profile	f	%
<b>Facebook structures familiar with</b>		
Newsfeed	360	36.0
Messages and inbox	353	35.3
Friends	354	35.4
Timeline	345	34.5
Notifications	345	34.5
Comments	343	34.3
Groups	342	34.2
Wall	333	33.3
<b>Nature of involvement in civic and charitable activities</b>		
Giving (cash donations, in-kind donations, charitable bequests, etc.)	144	38.6
Environment-friendly behaviors (recycling, planting trees, buying organic food, etc.)	95	25.5
Volunteering (regular or informal volunteering, disaster volunteering, service learning, etc.)	101	27.1
Association participation (active membership in voluntary organizations)	72	19.3
Supporting-helping individuals (blood/ organ donation, random acts of charity, etc.)	59	15.8
Political and social behaviors (joining political forum, rallies, protests, etc.)	17	4.6
Not applicable	143	38.3

## Data Measures

Data needed for the study were gathered using the following instruments: *Robotfoto* or Pen Portrait, Information-seeking in Facebook Scale (ISFS), Multidimensional Facebook intensity Scale (MFIS) and a researcher-made instrument measuring the respondents' engagement in civic and charitable activities using Facebook. The moderating variable indicating their prior engagement in volunteer, civic or charitable work for the last three (3) years is a categorical variable using a dichotomous scale.

### *Robotfoto* or pen portrait.

This part sought for the demographic information of the respondents such as age, gender,

civil status, religion, employment status, Facebook features, applications and structures familiar with and involvement in civic and charitable activities

#### *Information-seeking in Facebook Scale (ISFS).*

Adapted from Asghar (2015), this scale consists of twenty-one (21) statements reflecting the core information-seeking behavior in Facebook usage. Agreement to said items is measured using an 8-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (8) to strongly disagree (1). The construct has a reliability coefficient of 0.927 even after modification of statements to fit the current COVID-19 pandemic situation.

#### *Multidimensional Facebook Intensity Scale (MFIS).*

The survey tool (Orosz et al., 2015), composed of thirteen (13) items, is adopted to measure the most important facets of Facebook use, with good psychometric properties both in terms of validity, internal consistency and temporal stability. Agreement to statements indicative of FB intensity of use is measured using an 8-point Likert scale and has a reliability coefficient of 0.911.

#### *Engagement in civic and charitable activities using Facebook.*

This latent endogenous construct, with a Cronbach alpha of 0.930, consists of eighteen (18) statements measured with a Likert scale ranging from always (8) to never (1). All statements are preceded with the phrase “In using Facebook, I...” and examples such as “contact friends for donation, create a group or page devoted to mutual support during the COVID-19 crisis, and express support to health workers and frontliners” were used to determine how the youth engage in civic and charitable activities.

### **Data collection procedure and ethical consideration**

Data needed for the study were collected through a multi-aspect survey questionnaire. Validity of the survey was ensured by content and research experts. Pilot testing was done to 20 students prior to actual data gathering to ensure reliability and internal consistency of the items to the constructs being measured. Since fielding of the survey cannot be done physically, the invitation to participate in the Google form questionnaire was sent to the target participants (proponents' current and former students within the age range criteria) through social media (Messenger, email) from July to August 2020. This resulted in a 90% response rate. Participation rate in the survey was increased further through snowballing, that is, requesting respondents to field the survey also to their families and friends corresponding to the inclusion criteria. Thus, participation of respondents from all over the country was made possible.

Ethical consideration was assured by securing the availability and willingness to participate by the participants through a letter of consent, explaining the purpose of the study, extent and nature of participation, potential benefits, voluntary nature and right to withdraw at any time without penalty prior to the survey. Respondents were likewise informed of the confidentiality of responses and data privacy policy indicating how data will be stored and disposed. Anonymity of the respondents was maintained by not requiring their email addresses to warrant confidentiality and privacy of data.

## Data analysis

The gathered data was processed through SPSS 24 and AMOS 16. Structural equation modeling was used to estimate and assess the hypotheses of the proposed model while factor analysis was used to determine the underlying dimensions for all the latent constructs. Also, descriptive statistical tools were applied to characterize the respondents of the study.

## Results

Latent variables such as Filipino youths' information-seeking behavior in Facebook, their intensity of use and their civic engagement and charitable activities were measured using several item indicators. Data reduction was done on these latent variables using exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation to surface distinct characteristics of Filipino youth in the use of Facebook. Several decision rules were applied to achieve the least number of underlying dimensions to represent each latent variable. Decision rules include the use of the Kaiser Meyer Olkin value of 80% and above as an indicator that the sample size is adequate enough for factor analysis to proceed. Factor loading of 0.40 and above indicate the strength and direction of the individual items to the delineated factor dimension. Eigenvalues of 1 and above indicate that the items under each dimension were able to measure the elements of the said section. The percent variance of each dimension (should be at least 4%) represents the contribution of the underlying dimension to the variable being measured. Dimensions with Cronbach alpha with at least 60% shows that the items are internally consistent. Preceding decision rules resulted to the rejection of one (1) item in the

information seeking behavior construct (*It is fun to go over Facebook posts, especially jokes and memes during the community quarantine period*) and two (2) among the civic engagement statements (*Avoid spreading COVID-19 fake news and Check in on physically or mentally vulnerable people during the pandemic*). Notably, all items under the intensity of use construct were accepted to represent its underlying dimensions.

Exploratory factor analysis of the 21 items depicting Filipino youths' information seeking behavior in Facebook during global pandemic yielded three (3) distinct factor dimensions arranged in decreasing % variance, namely: Assimilative-Infusive, Expansive and Evasive Approaches to FB use. The first dimension, labeled as Assimilative-Infusive Approach to FB use pertains to how the youth tends to utilize Facebook to draw textual and visual information from groups, pages and friends about the COVID-19 virus and the pandemic which they find personally relevant and entertaining. The second dimension called Expansive approach to FB use describes how the youth's propensity to use the platform to stay informed on the status of their family and friends during the pandemic and to widen their knowledge and understanding of the pandemic. The last dimension, identified as the Evasive approach to FB use, describes the youth group's tendency to dislike certain information and products offered through Facebook.



**Table 2. Exploratory Factor Dimensions of the Filipino Youths' Information Seeking Behavior in Facebook**

Factor Dimensions	Factor Loading	Eigenvalue	% variance	Reliability
<b>Assimilative-Infusive Approach to FB Use</b>				
I use Facebook to post questions because Facebook users (e.g., friends, group members or others) provide me with better information about COVID-related issues than an Internet search.	0.805			
Facebook helps me find answers to personal problems brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.	0.798			
The exchange of information offered through Facebook allows me to answer personal issues brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic effectively.	0.730			
I use Facebook to see new photos/photo albums/videos about the COVID-19 pandemic.	0.712			
Reading Facebook newsfeed about the COVID-19 pandemic and related issues is entertaining.	0.681			
I have a good time reading posts about COVID-19 developments and response efforts shared through Facebook.	0.665			
I feel that in order to know more about the COVID-19, I have to like groups and pages about the pandemic.	0.634			
The advice offered by friends/members during the COVID-19 pandemic allows interaction with people.	0.551			
<b>Expansive Approach to FB Use</b>				
Facebook keeps me informed about the lives of my friends and/or family members during the COVID-19 pandemic.	0.796			
Facebook makes me learn about things concerning COVID-19 I am not familiar with.	0.782			
I think reading Facebook feed about the COVID-19 pandemic is informative.	0.769			
I believe that Facebook provides me with information on many subjects related and unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic.	0.731			
Facebook groups/pages keep me informed about developments on the COVID-19 pandemic.	0.653			
I use Facebook to follow developments and updates on COVID-19.	0.616			
News, quotes and scientific facts about the COVID-19 pandemic shared through Facebook are informative	0.571			
In general, I read news, scientific facts or inspirational quotes about COVID-19 shared on Facebook because I find them informative.	0.516			
In general, I read news, scientific facts or inspirational quotes about COVID-19 shared on Facebook because I find them informative.				
<b>Evasive Approach to FB Use</b>				
I do not use Facebook as a source of information	- 0.820			
I do not use Facebook to follow a trend	- 0.767			
I do not find informative posts on Facebook	- 0.744			
I do not like the brand's or store's pages for offers, sales, or new products	- 0.736			
<b>Total variance explained</b>			<b>61.52</b>	

*Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = 0.940, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-Square = 4617.480, df = 210, p < 0.01*

Table 2 indicates the exploratory factor analysis of the 13 items depicting the intensity of FB use of Filipino youth during global pandemic yielding three (3) distinct option orientations, namely: v FB Predilective (Factor 1), Devotion (Factor 2) and Consumption (Factor 3) Option Orientations, labelled in the decreasing order of explained variance (26.97, 25.14 and 18.51). Factor 1 refers

to the Filipino youth's preference for Facebook as a primary source of leisure and entertainment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Factor 2 delineates to the youth's constant commitment and loyalty toward FB use compared to other social media sites. Factor 3 pertains to Filipino youth's inclination to spend a substantial amount of time and effort in using Facebook over other activities.

**Table 3. FB Intensity of Use Scale Factor Dimensions**

Factor Dimensions	Factor Loading	Eigenvalue	% variance	Reliability
<b>FB Predilective Option Orientation</b>		<b>2.62</b>	<b>26.97</b>	<b>0.893</b>
If I'm bored, I open Facebook.	0.878			
When I'm bored, I often go to Facebook.	0.866			
Watching Facebook posts is good for overcoming boredom.	0.832			
Before going to sleep, I check Facebook once more.	0.64			
<b>FB Devotion Orientation</b>		<b>2.86</b>	<b>25.14</b>	<b>0.857</b>
It is important for me to update my Facebook profile regularly.	0.812			
I like refining my Facebook profile.	0.796			
My Facebook profile is rather detailed.	0.774			
I feel bad if I don't check my Facebook daily.	0.617			
I often search for Internet connection in order to visit Facebook.	0.546			
If I could visit only one site on the Internet, it would be Facebook.	0.542			
<b>FB Consumption Orientation</b>		<b>1.93</b>	<b>18.51</b>	<b>0.839</b>
I spend more time on Facebook than I would like to.	0.834			
I spent time on Facebook at the expense of my obligations.	0.804			
It happens that I use Facebook instead of sleeping.	0.768			
<b>Total variance explained</b>			<b>70.62</b>	

*Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = 0.895, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-Square = 2746.565, df = 78, p < 0.01*

Exploratory factor analysis of the 18 items depicting the Civic Engagement and Charitable Activities of Filipino Youth using Facebook during global pandemic yielded three (3) distinct initiative drivers arranged in decreasing % variance (Table 4). Dimension 1, labeled as People and information mobilization-driven initiatives, pertains to the youth's active coordination with key groups aimed at advancing the welfare of people and dissemination of accurate

COVID-related information. Dimension 2, labelled as Vigilance-driven initiatives, describes the youth's alertness and participation in maintaining public order during the pandemic by reporting infractions in the implementing rules of the government during the pandemic. Dimension 3, named as Morale-boosting-driven initiatives, indicates how the youth propagates public optimism through affirmations, words of encouragement and relevant news sharing.

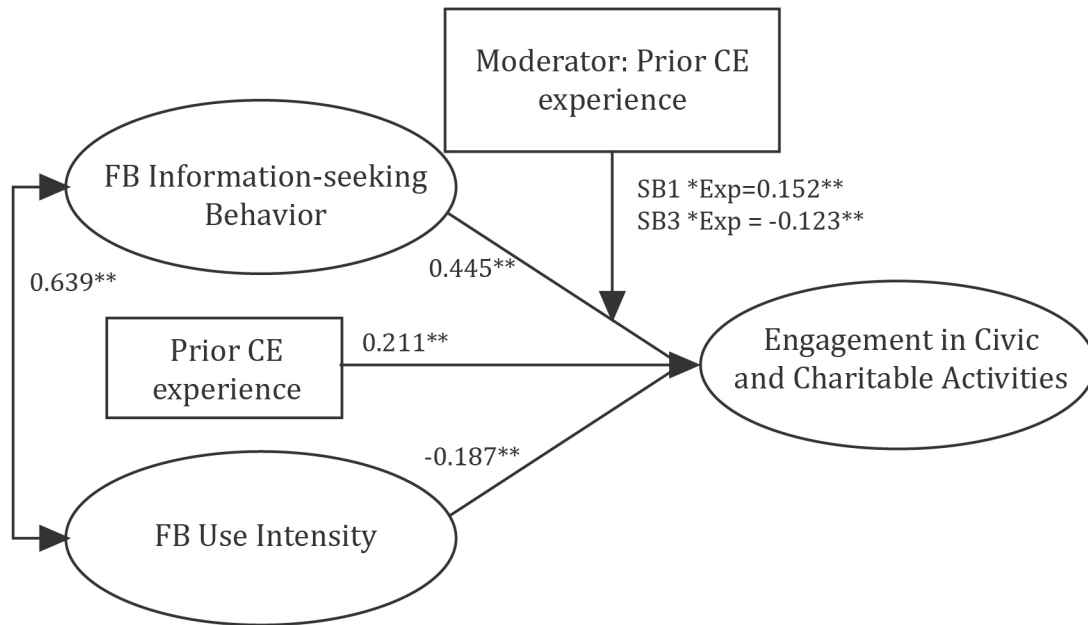
**Table 4. Exploratory Factor Analysis Results of Civic Engagement and Charitable Activities of Filipino Youth using Facebook**

Factor Dimensions and Items	Factor Loading	Eigenvalue	% variance	Reliability
<b>People and Information Mobilization-Driven Initiatives</b>		<b>3.61</b>	<b>28.23</b>	<b>0.924</b>
Contact friends for donation.	0.800			
Search for suppliers of hygiene kits and pandemic supplies for donation	0.794			
Create a group or page devoted to mutual support during the COVID-19 crisis.	0.794			
Communicate with volunteer groups.	0.693			
Initiate live video discussions about prevention and control of COVID-19 and other developments.	0.668			
Initiate or join online prayer initiatives by religious or community groups.	0.644			
Initiate or participate in social media-based fundraising or donation-drive.	0.639			
Provide free online counselling for mental health and psychological support.	0.575			
Post COVID-19 materials I prepared to raise awareness and prevention.	0.517			
<b>Vigilance-Driven Initiatives</b>		<b>1.72</b>	<b>16.28</b>	<b>0.846</b>
Report COVID-related irregularities and fraud to concerned agencies through their Facebook accounts/groups.	0.818			
Report COVID-19 fake news and accounts propagating them.	0.817			
Report quarantine and curfew violators.	0.619			
<b>Morale-Boosting-Driven Initiatives</b>		<b>1.93</b>	<b>18.51</b>	<b>0.839</b>
Express support to health workers and frontliners.	0.739			
Forward/repost relevant news and health information from authorized agencies.	0.704			
Post photos, inspirational thoughts and messages in social media.	0.641			
Share thoughts on government's response efforts and actions towards controlling and mitigating the pandemic.	0.618			
<b>Total variance explained</b>			<b>60.05</b>	

*Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = 0.922, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-Square = 3499.100, df = 153, p < 0.01*

Figure 2 shows the causal relationships between and among the variables relative to the role of FB use intensity, information seeking behavior in civic engagement among Filipino youth during the COVID-19 pandemic. Regression weights indicate that FB information-seeking behavior and intensity of use

have opposing effects on their civic engagement. While their information-seeking strategies were found to have a direct moderate effect on civic engagement ( $\beta=0.445$ ), the intensity of FB usage showed to have a weak inverse effect on the latter ( $\beta=-0.187$ ). This indicates that the more certain strategies are used



\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Figure 2. Resulting Model of the Effect of Information-Seeking Behavior and Intensity of Usage of Facebook on the youth engagement in civic and charitable activities**

to obtain specific information in FB on COVID-19, the more they get to engage in civic and charitable activities. Additionally, this effect is being moderated by their prior experience in such activities, specifically enhancing the effect of the assimilative-infusive approaches ( $\beta=0.152$ ) and retarding the consequence of their evasive approaches ( $\beta=-0.123$ ) to their engagement. Moreover, this prior civic engagement experience contributed positively to a little extent to engaging more in such activities ( $\beta=0.211$ ). In contrast, more intense use of certain facets of FB contributed less to their engagement in civic activities, even if information seeking strategies and intensity of use are positively correlated ( $\beta=0.639$ ).

**Table 5. Model Fit Statistics of the resulting models**

Measurement	Values
$\chi^2 / df$	3.413
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	0.079
Incremental fit indices (IFI)	0.942
Normed-fit index (NFI)	0.920
Comparative fit index (CFI)	0.942

Table 5 reveals the model fit statistics of the resulting model namely:  $\chi^2 / df$ , root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), normed-fit index (NFI) and comparative fit index (CFI).  $\chi^2 / df$  value of 3.413 emphasizes compatibility of the proposed model. RMSEA value 0.079 falls in between the

ideal range, less than 0.08 indicates the fitness of the proposed model. Other fit indices, the IFI (0.942), NFI (0.920), and CFI (0.942), likewise indicated measures

within the acceptable level of 0.90, thus showing support of the proposed model.

**Table 6. Regression weights of factor dimensions to respective constructs**

Factor Dimensions	Regression Wt. to Information Seeking Behavior Construct
Assimilative-Infusive Approach to FB Use	0.982**
Expansive Approach to FB Use	0.796**
Evasive Approach to FB Use	0.147**
	Regression Wt. to Intensity of FB Use Construct
FB Predilective Option Orientation	0.787**
FB Devotion Orientation	0.670**
FB Consumption Orientation	0.663**
	Regression Wt. to Civic Engagement and Charitable Activities Construct
People and Information Mobilization-Driven Initiatives	0.881**
Vigilance-Driven Initiatives	0.745**
Morale-Boosting-Driven Initiatives	0.708**

\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Taking a closer look at the factor dimensions, regression weights indicate what the Filipino youth exhibit more contributory to each construct (Table 6). It could be gleaned from the table that they make use of the assimilative-infusive ( $\beta = -0.982$ ) and expansive ( $\beta = -0.796$ ) approaches to FB rather than the evasive approach ( $\beta = -0.147$ ). Values also showed almost the same intensity of usage of certain facets of Facebook from their predilective options ( $\beta = -0.787$ ) to their devotion ( $\beta = -0.670$ ) and consumption ( $\beta = -0.663$ ) orientations. Their civic engagement was found to be more people and information mobilization-driven ( $\beta = -0.881$ ) though their vigilance-driven ( $\beta = -0.745$ ) and morale-boosting-driven initiatives ( $\beta = -0.708$ ) are not that far behind.

## Discussion

In the present study, multivariate analysis was applied on the variables of three constructs, namely: FB information-seeking behavior, intensity of use and civic engagement. Exploratory analysis of the factor structure of the respondents' information-seeking behavior in Facebook generated three dimensions as against five previously identified by Asghar (2015). This may be due to the different dynamics surrounding the Filipino youth's FB use during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the variation may be attributed to the age group as Asghar's (2015) study participants were adults. Among the three factors identified in the study, the *assimilative-infusive approach to FB use* carries the

highest regression weight as the respondents tend to use Facebook to keep abreast of the COVID-19 situation and be entertained. Ultimately, this can develop social responsibility and political engagement among the youth as news consumption using digital platforms was found to incite online and offline political and civic participation (Hao, 2014). With heightened familiarity with the 'newsfeed' and use of the 'groups', 'friends' and 'pages' features of Facebook, the youth's information-seeking behavior finds concurrence with what Wise and associates (2010) call passive social browsing and extractive social searching. Additionally, Facebook is used by the respondents to find answers to personal problems and issues. This is possible through crowdsourcing (Lie, 2018) and by interacting with friends whom teenagers perceive will support them in difficult times (Anderson & Jiang, 2018).

The Filipino youth respondents likewise use Facebook to *expand* their knowledge of the pandemic. This is corroborated by the descriptive data that about 41% of the respondents access Facebook's COVID-19 Information Center. With a significant decrease in the number of youth reading local newspapers, Facebook alternatively offers them an avenue for information to be disseminated and shared (Lie, 2018; Anderson & Rainie, 2020). The youth's expansive approach to FB use, particularly how they monitor information about COVID-19, may be reflective of their attitude concerning the seriousness of the situation as well as their sense of social responsibility (Oosterhoff & Palmer, 2020). The respondents' *evasive approach to FB use* may be attributed to the proliferation of online misinformation or fake news prevalent in social networks which can potentially weaken certain

democratic aspects (Cho et al., 2020; Anderson & Rainie, 2020). Statistically, fewer teens believe that social media contain trustworthy information (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). It may also be plausible that Filipino respondents look for information elsewhere other than Facebook considering the large volume and high activity of social media users in the Philippines (Gonzales, 2019). In fact, Filipino Internet users have an average of 9.9 social media accounts (Globalwebindex, 2020). Nonetheless, the low regression weight associated with this factor dimension indicates the affinity of the youth respondents to Facebook despite the presence of untrustworthy information and irrelevant advertisements.

In the exploratory factor analysis on the intensity of FB use, the respondents' reason for using Facebook is mainly for leisure or entertainment. This *FB predilective option orientation* of the youth may be due to the social atmosphere at the time of the data collection. The Philippines was under lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and with the closure of schools, tourist destinations and entertainment venues, as well as curfew and social distancing policies, the Filipino youth were generally confined in their homes with little options for leisure and recreational activities. In a current study by Globalwebindex (2020), 29-36% of Facebook users had been sharing funny videos and memes on social media during the pandemic, exploiting social media for entertainment on a larger scale compared to the period before the virus outbreak. This underlying motive of FB use is termed by Asghar (2015) as hedonic proclivity and had been explored by multiple scholars (e.g. Campbell & Craig, 2014; Orosz et al., 2015) utilizing

the uses and gratification theory (UGT) (e.g. Karimi et al, 2014). The youth respondents' *FB devotion orientation* is supported by social media figures citing Facebook as the most pervasive platform in the world, with 53% and 67% of its users from the Gen Z and millennials group, respectively (Globalwebindex, 2020). Such fidelity to this social networking site may be ascribed to the control afforded by Facebook to its users in regard to the creation and management of their Facebook profiles. Facebook allows its users to set up and present their virtual persona; hence, giving them the capacity to manage other people's impression of them (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012; Chou & Edge, 2012; Anderson et al., 2012). As for the respondents' *FB consumption*, this factor is supported by social media statistics. The Filipino youth spends a significant amount of time on social networking sites, especially Facebook (Globalwebindex, 2020; Camus, 2018; Jphiego Philippines, 2017). The youth's strong FB consumption and their basic need for self-presentation may result in issues of narcissism, self-esteem, self-worth and addiction (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012; Anderson et al., 2012; Rae & Lonborg, 2015).

The factor-analyzed dimensions of Filipino youth's civic engagement reveal the types of civic related initiatives they embarked on during the pandemic. *People and information mobilization driven initiatives* bear a highly significant regression weight. Facebook was utilized by the respondents to contact friends and communicate with volunteer groups for the donation of pandemic supplies to medical frontliners. This runs counter with a recent study involving adolescents in the United States which reported that donation of personal

protective equipment is the least frequent prosocial behavior (Alvis et al., 2020). The difference may be due to a prevailing collectivist culture in Philippine society. Interestingly though, Facebook's fundraising feature is apparently underutilized by Filipino youth (11.3%) which explains the relatively low factor loading for social media-based fundraising or donation drive. Beside the economic slowdown caused by the pandemic, it is worth to mention that not all respondents are employed or some may be victims of downsizing measures. Nonetheless, the initiatives of youth respondents during the pandemic reflect their degree of social responsibility. After all, the youth who value others' welfare are more inclined to engage in civic and charitable activities (Alvis et al., 2020). Other prosocial behaviors like initiation and participation in online prayer initiatives may be attributed to the respondents' religiosity and possibly their membership in religious organizations. In studies involving American (Gibson, 2018) and Singaporean youth (Tan & Tambyah, 2017), religiosity was found to be a predictor for one's intention and attitude for civic engagement. Results also showed that *vigilance-driven* and *morale-driven* initiatives of Filipino youth are equally important. These actions imply that Filipino youths' civic engagement are propelled by their desire to help in maintaining public order and spreading optimism during the COVID-19 pandemic. Optimism is a key feature of resilience (Boldor et al., 2012) which Filipinos are generally known for (Tan, 2006).

Results of the SEM showed significant effects of the respondents' FB information-seeking behavior and intensity of use to their online prosocial participation. FB information-seeking behavior

positively but moderately impacts the youth's civic engagement, while intensity of FB use negatively but weakly influences it. The moderate strength of the causal relation between FB information-seeking behavior and the youth's civic engagement may be explained by their lack of digital citizenship skills. Bennett et al. (2010) explained that while the youth can readily and extensively use participatory media, they lack the skill to do so. In this study, about half of the respondents do not have any prior civic experience and 48% are not a member of any organization with civic aims. Impliedly, such skills may be emphasized in the Media and Information Literacy subject in the Philippine senior high school curriculum and may be deepened further in collegiate courses.

The negative impact of FB intensity use on the youth's civic engagement may be explained by their predilective option orientation that Facebook is used for leisure rather than as a channel for civic communication. While there is a moderate association between FB intensity use and information-seeking behavior, the disparate priorities in their predilective option orientation aimed at personal amusement and their assimilative-infusive approach toward information may lessen the youth's civic engagement. Young people whose primary predilection to FB is entertainment are not stimulated to engage in political and civic activities (Park et al., 2009; Theocharis & Quintelier, 2016). A study involving adolescents in Belgium affirmed the entertainment-oriented nature of Facebook and that civic engagement leads to more FB use and not the other way around Theocharis and Quintelier (2016). However, in Malaysia where a culture of indulgence promoted more frequent FB engagement

among the youth, online civic participation using FB was still evident which may be attributed to their high community-outcome expectations (Warren et al., 2016).

Enmeshed by the consequences of the pandemic, the Filipino respondents' use of FB may be interpreted as a way to cope with boredom (Orosz et al., 2015). This coping mechanism may be an offshoot of the psychological impact of the pandemic (Tee et al., 2020). Moreover, prolonged homestay and quarantine conditions may have prompted Filipino youths to intensify their use of Facebook in order to restore connection (Sheldon et al., 2011), but not necessarily for civic reasons. However, the prolonged use of FB may escalate their levels of anxiety and depression especially when used to develop new connections instead of maintaining current ones (Rae & Lonborg, 2015). As for the association of FB use to civic engagement, a study conducted in the United States bared that adolescents who experienced greater anxiety and burdensomeness during the COVID-19 pandemic had even greater prosocial response purportedly to alleviate their distress (Alvis et al., 2020). Apparently, prior civic engagement in this study contributes to some extent to the effect of the youth's assimilative-infusive approach to FB use on civic engagement. This means that for those with previous civic experiences, using Facebook to find relevant information about COVID-19 can lead to more civic participation. It is likely that their increased social awareness and better civic competencies on account of their prior civic engagement incited them to use Facebook as a communicative and mobilization tool which facilitated their on-going civic engagement (Lie,



2018). Meanwhile, the seemingly negative influence of prior civic experience on the effect of the youth's evasive approach to FB reinforces the assertion of many scholars that Facebook, or social media in general, can incite civic engagement among the youth (Uldam & Vestergaard, 2015; Warren, et al, 2014; Robertson, 2018; Kenna & Hensley, 2019; National Council for Social Studies, 2018). The results imply the need to intensify curricular efforts to bring service learning as an integral component of the reconstructionist orientation of today's schools, colleges and universities. Striking a good balance between idealism and progressivism can expectedly realize the very aim of education which according to the second Vatican Council (1965) is geared "toward the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which, as man, he is a member, and whose obligations, as an adult, he will share."

## Conclusion

Finding the nexus between civic engagement as an active ingredient of democracy and Facebook use as an important component of democratic participation is a critical engagement to better understand the nature, process, and value of youth empowerment and the meaning of their citizenship in today's digital world. Against the backdrop of the portrait that empirically describes the impact of FB intensity of use and information-seeking behavior among a select group of Filipino youth aged 15-24 on their civic engagement, is a pivotal area to examine the possible tension between regular use and purposive use of Facebook. The seemingly contradictory realities of youth's FB use and their extent of civic engagement is a threat to the future of digital citizenship and the

life of democracy in this part of the world. The Filipino youth's strong leaning toward Facebook as a source of leisure and entertainment during the pandemic vis-à-vis their commitment to and extent of use of this social media platform highly speaks of the prevalence of a culture of regular use at the expense of a culture of purposive use. This seemingly surface level understanding of the role of Facebook is an invitation for self-transcendence toward societal transformation. Britzman's 1991 book entitled *Practice Makes Practice* is a powerful vantage point to see the challenge of developing a culture of purposive use of Facebook among its biggest consumers. The deep level understanding of Facebook use entails the development of a continuum where youth progress from mere consumers to active producers and managers of relevant knowledge and socially-oriented decisions and actions.

Empowering this sector of society in a highly mediated democratic environment entails a process of judicious and responsible use of Facebook and its features as a new and creative way to social participation. Such a process could potentially create an army of nation builders and vanguards of democratic ideals. The youth's overall ability to create and co-create meaningful and collective actions for the ills and perils that confront today's society is not born overnight. As digital citizens they need to develop a heightened sense of agency to gather, analyze, and disseminate information that shapes and reshapes the future of their immediate communities. Allowing them to use the available technological tools and platforms is not tantamount to facilitating their maximum and effective use of the present-day media forms. Promising and

malleable as they are, they deserve a kind of ecology that is educative and supportive. Framing a technology-mediated democratic participation is a by-product of a clear-cut school-community partnership framework. At the school level, the curriculum is undoubtedly a powerful platform by which teachers can integrate civic engagement initiatives across various learning areas capitalizing on the students' strong inclination for social media use and the emerging social concerns. Linking what social media can do and what the community requires would create a dialogue characterized by awareness, knowledge, involvement, and innovation. At the community level, working for a youth-powered democracy requires a participatory approach that recognizes the unique and important role of the youth in enhancing the democratic life of their communities. An inter-agency collaboration that promotes and advocates youth involvement in shaping their communities during national and global crises like COVID-19 may be undertaken through online projects and activities. The youth sector's civic engagement narratives during the global crisis may be documented and used for more intensified initiatives and innovations.

Though the Filipino youth's portrait of Facebook use and civic engagement during COVID-19 pandemic has been initially described in this quantitative exploratory investigation, a much thicker description and elucidation is needed through the use of qualitative attempts may warrant an exposition of their struggles, successes and trajectories as silent yet promising agents of and for democracy.

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# PM is the key: Gen Zers transforming the crisis into profitable opportunities

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## Abstract

Apart from exacerbating the health system issues in the Philippines, COVID-19 has inevitably affected other development aspects in the country. The increasing unemployment rate, and more Filipinos experiencing hunger, have created a bleak picture impacting of the mental health situation, particularly for the youth. However, many young people try their best to overcome the challenges presented by the health crisis. They found different ways of coping with, specifically through the available resources and support system. In this article, three college students from the University of Santo Tomas shared how they rose above the challenges of COVID-19 by pursuing their profitable initiatives in time of pandemic. They may have different motivations, but setting-up their online income activities did not only allow them to gain additional revenue for their families, but helped them cope with the COVID-19 situation and develop their personal skills. Their strong support systems, personal bravery, and determination have enabled them to carry-out an endeavor rising above the various challenges caused by the pandemic.

## Keywords

COVID-19, young people, coping with, online income activities, pandemic

## Introduction

On the 9th of March 2020, several local governments in the Philippines ordered a suspension of classes at all levels until 15th of March as a preventive measure against COVID-19 (CNN Philippines, 2020). During his press conference on the 12th March, President Rodrigo Duterte imposed a community quarantine in Metro Manila, which took effect on the 15th of March until the 12th of April. The quarantine measure was a response to the increasing COVID-19 cases, which was then rapidly rose to 52 cases on the 13th of March (Presidential Communications Operations Office, 2020). The country is at the 20th spot with the

highest number of COVID-19 cases as of the 1st of October (Madarang, 2020).

Almost seven months into quarantine, having the world's longest lockdown, the Philippines is the only country among the World Health Organization's (WHO) 22-member Western Pacific region that continuously reports up to a thousand COVID-19 cases daily (Yee, 2020). The increasing number of cases reinforces the government's decision to keep the quarantine measures in place through varying degrees. The COVID-19 preventive measures intend to control cases of infections and fatalities, but they

inevitably affected other development aspects in the country. Unemployment rate increased to 10% in July 2020 compared to the 5.4% recorded in July 2019. This is equivalent to an estimated number of 4.6 million unemployed Filipinos aged 15 years old and above (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020). In the most recent mobile phone survey conducted by the Social Weather Stations (SWS) last 17-20 September, 30.7% or an estimated number of 7.6 million Filipino households are experiencing involuntary hunger or hunger due to lack of food to eat. This rating has exceeded the 23.8% mark recorded in March 2012, and increased from the July 2020 record at 20.9% (Social Weather Stations, 2020). Student enrollment from Kinder to Senior High School decreased from 27 million in S.Y. 2019-2020 to 23.6 million this school year (Malipot, 2020). This lower enrollment figure resulted as well in the non-operation of 856 private schools (Rubio, 2020).

This bleak picture has created an impact in the mental health situation of the country. The Philippines' National Center for Mental Health (NCMH) noted the rise in the number of depression-related calls monthly from 80 pre-lockdown to nearly 400 (World Health Organization, 2020). Hopeline Philippines, a helpline founded by Natasha Goulbourn Foundation dedicated for suicide prevention and crisis intervention, also affirmed the 200% increase in calls they received in April. Its founder, Jean Goulbourn, said that 70% to 85% are calls reflective of high anxiety (Nortajuddin, 2020). WHO foresees that "social isolation, fear of contagion and loss of family members [...] caused by loss of income and often employment" will continue to have an impact on the mental health (Nortajuddin, 2020).

Despite these concerns presented by COVID-19, many people, particularly the youth, try their best to overcome the challenges presented by this health crisis. Young people have their different ways of coping with the crisis, through the available resources and support system. Several of them took the quarantine period as an opportunity to venture into economic activities that would help them develop their skills and assist them in their personal financial challenges. This article looked into how and why few young people, specifically three College students from the University of Santo Tomas, started to pursue their profitable initiatives in this time of pandemic. The study delved into their motivations and insights on how these kinds of activities have helped them cope with the mental health challenges of COVID-19.

### **Starting up: Motivations and challenges in pursuing economic endeavors in the midst of COVID-19**

*Enjoying a dream despite COVID-19.*

If not for COVID-19, 20-year old Angela Morales from Las Piñas City, Metro Manila would not be pursuing her two online businesses. Angela and her friends from Junior High School have been planning to put up their online cosmetics business next year. However, COVID-19 happened, which forced them to stay at home and gave them more time to spare. They decided to launch their online shop last May of 2020. As if not yet busy with her first online business, Angela pursued with another one. She noticed the flood of posts of baked goodies in her social media. Since she knows how to bake, Angela thought of capitalizing on her talent. "*Marami akong nakitang post from people craving*

*for sweets so I thought, instead of not doing anything at home, gumawa ako ng business na nageenjoy din ako” (I saw posts online from people craving for sweets so I thought, instead of not doing anything at home, I started with a business that I would also enjoy doing), she shared.*

As a Financial Management student, Angela knows the risks she may encounter with her businesses, but she bravely pursued with her dream anyway. E-commerce may have provided a new convenience, but it has also presented different kind of challenges for online sellers like Angela. Gaining customers’ trust may be more difficult because of the virtual set-up. For first time buyers, Angela fears that she may not be able to meet their expectations. *“Pero kapag binigyan mo naman sila ng best quality, madali na lang kumuha ng customers at kailangan ko na lang siguraduhin na babalik uli sila para bumili”* (but if you give them the best quality, it would be easy to get more customers and I just need to make sure that they would be back to buy from me), she added. Another trust concern she had to settle was with their partner couriers. In their cosmetics business, one of their customers complained receiving a broken lip tint despite giving the product to the courier in good condition. They reached out to the courier service through all possible platforms but to no avail. They replaced the broken product with a new one and have it delivered through a different courier. *“Until now, the courier has not responded to any of our messages so we just let it go since we changed into a better one”*, said Angela. Looking for product packaging and ingredients has an added layer of concern for Angela. Due to the quarantine restrictions, she only has the option of buying the materials she needs online. Aside from not being

able to ensure the quality of the items, Angela finds it more expensive because of the delivery fee that she has to cover.

#### *Working harder during the quarantine.*

Aside from selling banana graham online, Will Dullas, an incoming 3rd year Information Technology student from Iba, Zambales, became a delivery guy and a farm laborer during the quarantine period. A month into the quarantine playing games and watching Netflix, Will realized that he had to do something aside from these. He searched for jobs in their area, and learned that one of his relatives need a laborer in their farm to plant and harvest. However, Will was not satisfied with the income he got. *“After two weeks, I realized that the income is not enough because I can only save Php 100 a day”*, shared Will. Fortunately, his father, who owns a local drugstore and distributes medicines, was needing an extra hand in delivering essentials around the Province of Bataan. Will asked his father to get him as his delivery guy, where he got paid for Php 500 a day. Inspired as well by his friends’ posts offering baked goods, Will thought of creating a dessert that he could sell for more income. Seeing that nobody else offers this kind of product in their area, he came up with his own version of banana graham.

Will found selling banana graham online more challenging than the physical demands of laboring in a farm and delivering essentials around Bataan. As the brain and hands behind the product, Will had to work around his limited market. Based in Zambales, he had to decline a lot of inquiries from friends and contacts living in Manila. His customers

in Zambales cannot consistently buy his product due to financial problems brought by COVID-19. Will likewise pointed out the limited choices of suppliers for his product. He observed that *“most of the cheap deals are in Manila and due to the increasing cases of COVID-19, it was difficult for me to get there and back in Zambales.”*

### *Making money out of technology.*

While most young people created their TikTok accounts during the quarantine period, Aubrie Cabling, 20, utilized her video editing skills for profit. In April, she decided to set-up an account in a freelancing website where she looked for clients needing assistance in video editing, data entry and translation. Later on, Aubrie created a social media account for her online video editing service named “AC Motion Arts”, giving the public a glimpse of what she has to offer. She used her digital skills effectively in scouting for more potential customers in different online platforms. Even as online classes are ongoing, she continues with her side gig. Since she started, Aubrie was able to serve 10 clients and complete 15 projects. Just like Angela and Will, Aubrie would not be able to pursue her online service if not for COVID-19. She thought of turning her free time into profit and the situation goes favorably for her. Due to the increasing need to create and publish online content, fortunately, her video editing skill is in demand.

Despite the high demand for video editors, Aubrie still finds the competition challenging. She shares, *“There are other great and more talented video editors around the world, and they have a lot more to give than I do”*. But this is where she exerts

her perseverance and patience in looking for clients whose needs she perfectly addresses. This also inspires her to learn beyond what she already knows in video editing. Aside from the technical aspect of video editing, Aubrie learned how to negotiate with her clients. She makes sure that aside from just following the inputs of her clients, she is also able to communicate her own thoughts and ideas on the projects she is doing. Her new found profitable activity does not only add more funds to her purse, but it made her get out of her comfort zone.

### **Rising up from COVID-19: Life lessons beyond the crisis**

COVID-19 has provided an opportunity for these three young people to explore their dreams and challenge themselves. If not for the quarantine situation which forced them to stay at home, they would not have thought of utilizing a lot of their extra time for some extra income.

Aside from the insights they gained from the challenges they faced, their economic initiatives made them realize important life lessons that they would bring beyond the pandemic. For Angela, Will and Aubrie, they learned about the value of using money wisely. Angela shares, *“Natutunan ko rin na dapat walang nasasayang na packaging, ingredients at mismong produkto dahil lahat ng ito ay binabayaran at mahirap mabalik ang pera”* (I learned that no packaging, ingredients or product should be wasted because all of these have their respective cost and it is difficult to earn back the money). Will and Aubrie’s experiences made them more responsible in spending their hard-earned income for their needs. Angela adds that saving money from her income is important, especially

when another crisis like COVID-19 happens. Managing two online businesses also taught her to manage her time better. Similar to managing finances, Angela and Aubrie learned that time, being finite, should be maximized efficiently.

Patience is truly a virtue, as Will learned in running his own online business. He learned not to expect that success will immediately come. The discomfort imposed by COVID-19 encouraged Aubrie to get out of it and take the risk of venturing into an initiative that she has no experience yet. But as Will attests, *“Doing things I have never done before made me grow”*.

Coming from the reality of the pandemic, Angela, Will, and Aubrie learned that things should not be taken for granted because the future is not assured. The indifference of the virus to a person’s economic status, and the rising number of deaths by the day, served as their wake-up call to make the most out of their lives by taking chances and risks.

## **Overcoming the mental health threats of COVID-19**

The quarantine or “the separation and restriction of movement of people who have potentially been exposed to a contagious disease” (Brooks, et al., 2020) , imposed by the government to contain COVID-19, did not only had an impact in the economy and social welfare, but in the mental health as well. Studies show that quarantine measures, or being apart from loved ones, which led to perceived loss of freedom, and boredom may result to “emotional disturbance, stress, low mood, post-traumatic stress symptoms, and emotional exhaustion” (Brooks, et al., 2020).

These may manifest through irritability, insomnia, unproductivity, reluctance to work, anger, and weak concentration among others.

According to WHO, those aged 15-29 years old are most vulnerable to mental health concerns (World Health Organization, 2020). Their risk to mental health problems may further increase due to the length of quarantine, lack of reliable information and necessary supplies, social distancing, school closures (Loades, Chatburn, & et.al, 2020), work from home set-up, and job or livelihood insecurity, on top of the fear from the virus and the unknown. If not address immediately, this may lead to one of the most common manifestation of mental health problems — depression. Worse, depression, the fourth leading cause of illness among young adolescents (aged 15-19 years old), can then lead to suicide, if neglected (World Health Organization, 2020).

Although Angela, Will and Aubrie did not experience the symptoms described above, they definitely felt sad about the situation. As young people who grew up socializing with their peers, the changes brought by the pandemic affected them. On the other hand, as they have shown, they took advantage of the situation. COVID-19 may have placed them in unfavorable circumstances, but they rose up to the difficulties.

The support from their families and friends further encouraged Angela, Will and Aubrie to pursue their online business. Particularly for Angela and Will, their families are helping them in sourcing out ingredients and materials and even in baking. Their relationship with their families

improved because of a new way of bonding during the quarantine period. Apart from her family's pride and support, Aubrie gets strength from her friends whom she constantly communicates with. Despite the distance, having friends to talk to helped Aubrie cope with the challenges of her new undertaking.

In recent years, social media may have gained a negative reputation but Angela, Will and Aubrie were able to harness its positive use. Besides scrolling through their feeds, and learning latest updates about their friends' lives, they got ideas on how they can use their time more productively. They saw the potential of their skills and talents, as well as the power of social media to market what they can offer. Ironic as it may be, but COVID-19 has expanded their network. The quarantine measures barred them from physical meet-ups, but the situation enabled them to meet and engage with new people. This social aspect may be a key factor in their eagerness to keep on doing their online economic initiatives, and in conquering the threats of isolation due to lockdown.

One value commonly attributed to Generation Z (or Gen Zers) is their pragmatism or practicality. They would usually "*prioritize financial security over "personal fulfillment"*" (Gomez, Mawhiney, & Betts, 2019). Angela's mother is one of the many economic casualties of COVID-19. A portion of her profit pays for their household expenses, previously covered by her mother's salary. Aubrie also does the same. Learning from the economic crisis individuals are facing, she makes sure to keep a huge portion from her income for the emergency savings. In Will's case, due to the high demand for essential goods in their area, he saw his father's

difficulty in fulfilling the delivery requests. More than the need for additional income, he stepped up to help in their family business. Seeing the possible effects of the economic crisis, Will wanted to earn more to save for his education. With the two side jobs and an online business, he was able to earn at least Php 60,000 which enabled him to cover half of his tuition fee this semester. The economic impact of COVID-19 in their families further motivated these three Gen Zers to push through with their profitable endeavors, even as the online classes begun particularly for Angela and Aubrie.

## Conclusion

In the stories of Angela, Will and Aubrie, their strong support systems enabled them to grab the opportunity to initiate their economic activities. Their personal bravery to enter an unfamiliar zone, and their determination to face the unknown helped them in continuously coping with the COVID-19 situation. In seeking help or support from their family and friends, Aubrie further shares that individuals must learn to help themselves first. It begins with accepting where they are, and recognizing that they need help. It takes a lot of courage to not just accept that one needs help, but as well as opening up to others.

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# **Vlogging the sustainable development goals: A synthesis of the youths quarantine life in relation to SDG 3 and SDG 4**

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## **Abstract**

The paper aimed at synthesizing the narratives of the video logs (vlogs) culled from the different members of the youth sector. It constructs a narrative from the ideas and perspectives expressed by the participants. The first part of the narrative dealt with the quarantine life of these young people. The second and third part covered the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from the perspective of the participants – SDG 3 and SDG 4 respectively. The final part of the paper presented the insights, conclusions, and recommendations from the narrative constructed.

## **Keywords**

quarantine life, SDG 3, SDG 4

## **Introduction**

In the year 2019, a young Swedish activist addressed the United Nations General Assembly — Greta Thunberg. During that time, Thunberg is around 16 years old. She captured the interest of the world due to her dedication to promote the need to address climate change as a world dilemma. It was then that she claimed that ‘there is no future’ because of the older generation’s fault. Thus, she emphasized the need to solve the issue not only for the sake of the current generation but also for posterity.

There are two related and significant observations that can be discerned from this

occurrence. First, the world’s timeline is dynamic. Moving past back by half or even a quarter of a century, a young Greta Thunberg might not become someone prominent to be listened to. However, due to the continuing intensification of globalization, the world is coming together progressively. In the words of Friedman (2005), the world is flat due to its interconnectedness. This interconnectedness has created opportunities for an individual to become relevant. Thus, there is Greta Thunberg who took advantage of this opportunity.

Second, today’s youth are becoming increasingly active due to the intensified nature

of globalization. Basically, the rapid development of technology has, for better or for worse, opened opportunities for everyone to be 'more relevant' to the world. The rise of social media and other platforms has allowed people to speak their minds on relevant issues, such as climate change. In particular, the youth has spoken their minds on a plethora of issues that has affected them.

Apparently, these two observations can be synthesized into the idea that the youth can always raise their collective voice to action. The developments in information and communication technology are utilized to express their opinions, analysis, and speculations on different issues around the world. Globalization has created the space for them to do such. Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, have been the 'open arena' where the youth can engage on socio-economic and political issues.

In the light of expressing themselves, the youth has been very creative. From Facebook posts, to the use of humor through memes, the youth has become the major actor in the social media sphere. In this paper, the researcher focused on one of the means that the youth can express themselves – video logs (vlogs). Specifically, the paper looked at the vlogs of young people in relation to their experience during the quarantine, i.e. enhanced community quarantine, and how it is related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Due to the contemporary context (the time of the COVID-19 pandemic), the researchers chose to cover only two (2) of the seventeen (17) SDGs – SDG3 (good health and well-being) and SDG4 (quality education).

Essentially, the paper aimed at synthesizing the perspectives of the youth who expressed themselves using vlogs. The paper allowed the better understanding of the situation of the youth in relation to the pandemic, and their possible future in relation to the attainment of the SDGs in 2030. Moreover, the paper was divided into three main sections that were further divided into sub-sections.

The first section of the paper dealt with the context of the research. This part was divided into two sub-sections. First, it provided a discussion of the general situation of the Philippines in relation to its experience with the COVID-19 pandemic. As of the time of writing, the community quarantine has been relaxed to the General Community Quarantine (GCQ) from the strict Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ). It should be noted, however, that before it was relaxed to GCQ, it was relaxed to the Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine (MECQ) first. The basic idea is that there should be a gradual relaxation to avoid the 'explosion' of the rapid number of cases. The second sub-section covered the method of the research. It extended the discussion on how the researcher proceeded with the research, and how the data was gathered.

The second section of the paper discussed and synthesized the data culled. This part was further divided into three sub-sections. The first sub-section looked at how these young people lived their lives during the first phase of the community quarantine that started last March 15, 2020. It looked at how it changed their everyday lives, and how they adapted to the challenges of this pandemic. The second sub-part discussed their perspective on Sustainable Development Goal 3

(good health and well-being). It synthesized their views, and the relevance of SDG3 in relation to what they have experienced during the community quarantine. The last sub-section covered its relation to the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (quality education).

The third section of the paper contained the insights, conclusions and recommendations from all the data, analysis, and synthesis done in the previous part. This is where the proponent established the argument that the youth is a significant actor in this era of globalization. In fact, by looking at the perspective of the youth, the older generation might be able to gain insights that can change the world and aid in the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals. Therefore, the research paper is hoped to serve as a stepping stone to achieve such a goal.

## **Context**

### **COVID-19 and community quarantine**

As early as December of 2019, there have been reports of a new strain (possibly an evolved strain) of corona virus that has been discovered in China. According to the media reports, this strain was acquired because of the culture of eating 'exotic' animals in the Wuhan province in China (WHO, 2020). Consequently, this resulted into something unexpected especially after entering 2020. It started from rapid infections in the city, spread throughout China, and later on, became a full-blown pandemic (WHO). Currently, the World Health Organization has reported more than 34 million people who are infected by the coronavirus. Out of these infected, there are more than one million who have succumbed

and died. Mostly, it is related to the complications of the virus. Fortunately, more than 24 million have recovered from the virus. As of today, the main target of countries around the world is to develop a vaccine to counter the virus. Countries, such as China and Russia, and international pharmaceutical companies (e.g. Pfizer) are already starting to develop a vaccine that can counter the virus.

In the Philippines, despite calls for a travel ban to those coming from China (particularly Wuhan), as early as January, the Duterte administration did not succumb to such demands. In fact, President Rodrigo Duterte personally rejected such a call since he does not want to tarnish the diplomatic relationship between China and the Philippines. However, this decision has been fatal. It was Monday of March 9, 2020 when everything has changed. Mayor Francisco 'Isko' Moreno-Domagoso suspended classes and work in the City of Manila to avoid further community transmission. This was a preventive measure by the chief executive since the first community transmission was reported in Greenhills in the City of San Juan. Consequently, the people in Malacañang would react to such, and later on declared a Community Quarantine starting March 15, 2020 in Luzon. This would later be upgraded to the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ).

Presently, the number of cases has continued to increase. There are more than 322, 000 cases today. Among the infections, almost 6,000 people have succumbed and died because of the disease. Almost 274, 000 have recovered from the disease. All these statistics were yielded from the Department of Health (DOH) in the Philippines. This proved to be highest in Southeast Asia and the 20th in the

world. Although the cases have been continuing its rise, a research group from the University of the Philippines have already said that the curve is gradually ‘flattening’, particularly in Metro Manila (once the epicenter of infection). However, there must be a continued implementation of the health protocols to mitigate the further spread of the disease. Thus, the community quarantine remains and will possibly remain until the next few months.

In the context of the different variations of community quarantine implemented, the lives of Filipinos were altered. Individuals are encouraged to stay at home, and can only go out to buy essentials. Authorized people who can go out of their homes are only those with quarantine passes. Moreover, public transport and public gatherings were suspended. Hence, this resulted in both social and economic repercussions which emphasized the suffering of people who live below the poverty line (Albert et. al., 2020). Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic and the community quarantine has changed the lives of people around the world. The paper, however, focused on the youth sector.

To put emphasis, the youth would continue to express their opinion and ideas by utilizing the tools and technological platforms available. Social media, during the time of pandemic, has an opportunity for the youth to become more active (given that they have always been active) in different platforms. Most youths used their digital platforms to express their concerns and perspectives on what is happening around them.

Whether it is a critique or a praise, the youth will use whatever means available on the internet

to raise a collective voice to action. For example, it might be a Facebook post that would tackle their feelings and anxieties during the community quarantine. Possibly, they would use Twitter to write a short ‘blog’ on what they think should be done. Additionally, more articulated members of the youth have resorted to longer blog posts or have taken pictures of the current situation of their respective communities. The creative ones used the arts or memes to express their thoughts. In short, there are a plethora of ways to send a message to the world about your current situation. For the purpose of this study, the researcher looked at the video logs (vlogs) of some young people to discern on how they viewed, and lived their quarantine life, connecting to the specific SDGs.

## Methodology

The research followed a qualitative method. Specifically, it followed a phenomenological research design. It covered the experience of the youth in relation to the pandemic and the community quarantine. The proponent yielded their perspectives on specific SDGs (SDG 3 and SDG 4), and connected it synthesizing their quarantine life through narratives. Some kind of ‘inter-subjectivity’ was established. Thus, the synthesis can be considered as a glimpse to the lives of the youth during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The participants are students who belong to the middle to upper class cluster of the society. This inference is based on the notion that they are all studying in a private university which can be afforded by such socio-economic class. Hence, the findings of the study may only be limited to the young people belonging to such groups. The original target

for this study is about ninety-four (94) students. However, when the consent form was sent through Google Forms, only thirty-three (33) students were able to respond affirmatively while the others did not respond to the consent form. Furthermore, out of the 33 who responded affirmatively, only twenty-seven (27) vlog posts were utilized since the other six (6) were inaccessible at the time of writing. But still, given the nature of the study, this number is enough. It provided the researcher with a glimpse of how the youth live their lives during this pandemic.

The video logs (vlogs) utilized are originally the final project in a particular course. The researcher is also the facilitator of learning for these multitude of classes. The main purpose of these vlogs is to allow students to experience catharsis since this pandemic has affected the emotional and mental states of the youth. Boredom and anxiety are the generally expressed emotions during the quarantine (*see Appendix C*). Thus, the researcher thought that this was a platform for them to express themselves, and deal with their own issues. When the research opportunity arrived, the author immediately thought of synthesizing the ideas found across the different vlog posts. Specifically, since the data can be aligned with the theme of the youth monograph. Fortunately, some of the students are willing to share their ideas in the study. Ethical considerations were followed, strictly securing the anonymity of the participants. As an alternative, the paper used codes (e.g. VLOG1) to cite their ideas. The paper is hoped to serve as a platform to the ideas of these youth.

## **Synthesizing the Narratives**

This section of the paper includes the different ideas and narratives coming from the video logs (vlogs) from the members of the youth. Basically, this part was divided into three main sub-sections – 1) The quarantine life of the youth (during the enhanced community quarantine); 2) perspectives and ideas in relation to Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG3); and 3) perspectives and ideas in relation to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4). The ideas can be found in the Appendix C. The main objective of this paper is to synthesize the narratives — to get a glimpse of the experiences and mindset of the youth in the context of a pandemic. Moreover, it tries to collect their ideas and perspectives in relation to two important sustainable development goals that are perceived to be important during this pandemic.

### **Quarantine life during ECQ**

The participants in the research expressed different narratives and perspectives in line with their life during the period of enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) here in Luzon. Such variant of the quarantine started last March 15, 2020, and lasted until the end of April 30, 2020. It basically suspended all economic activities, implemented a curfew (8pm-5am), and encouraged people to stay at home especially those who are considered to be the most vulnerable – 1) Senior Citizens and 2) Below 21 years of age (E.O.112). Apparently, the participants of this research are all prohibited to get out of their homes due to their young age (the range is around 18-19 years old). Thus, the very first narrative discussed was based on their life routine.

VLOG 12 emphasized such a narrative, when the respondent stated that “*I stayed at home for 80 days straight.*” The emphasis on the number of days could mean that the respondent is already bored and counting the days until this quarantine is over. Moreover, such a feeling may become a source for a ‘loss of motivation’ according to VLOG 2. The long stay at home has taken its toll on these young people especially if they are not used to such.

Based on all the vlogs used here, they have established new routines during the quarantine. The usual pattern, according to what they have shown in the vlogs — they start by waking up, fixing their bed, making themselves busy (includes attending online classes and complying with the requirements), eating (sometimes preparing their own meals such as VLOGs 10, 20, and 25), and, of course, sleeping and resting. Such a routine has turned too rigid at times that some of them have shown their loss of motivation, and responded with taking ‘long rests’ (VLOG 3), ‘laying in bed’ (VLOG 7), or flat out sleeping (VLOG 20). In other words, this pandemic and quarantine has undeniably affected how they live their lives daily. Thus, it would be normal to find ways to counteract this feeling. Based on these vlogs, there are four (4) ways the youth can do it: 1) entertainment through multimedia; 2) keeping the mind and body pre-occupied with a multitude of activities; 3) self-reflection, self-care, and spirituality enrichment; and 4) social life in the new normal.

The first one is quite relatable since it is about using different forms of media to entertain oneself. Apparently, there are a few platforms that the participants used to entertain oneself. VLOG

1 talked about using the television as a way to entertain himself. Moreover, most of the participants who would watch videos found online (either using a streaming service like Netflix or an open source like YouTube). Moreover, watching Japanese Anime and Korean drama appeals to the youth as means of entertainment during these trying times. In addition, social media platforms, such as Tiktok (VLOG 3) also helps in killing boredom. There are also members of the youth that would either hone their talents or learn new things (e.g. dancing and playing guitar) (VLOG 13).

Moreover, there are also some notable activities that the participants have done to entertain themselves. VLOG 10 and VLOG 26 both gave emphasis on playing, and taking care of their respective pets during the quarantine. It proved to be a relaxing activity since you can interact with others aside from people near you. VLOG 25 also shared a very intriguing way to entertain herself. She practiced her painting skills during the quarantine period while watching swimming routines online. She does the latter since she is a member of the swimming varsity team. The last interesting entertainment activity of one of the participants is to ‘prank people through calls.’ According to VLOG 27, he was so bored during the period of the quarantine that he would often do prank calls on his family and friends. Consequently, we can infer here that people (especially the young) would do anything to avoid being bored or anxious during the quarantine.

According to the vlogs of young people, the most common way to keep self-busy is to perform household chores (VLOGS 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 13, 15, 16, 20, 23, 24, and 25). Usually, they would fix their own

beds, wash the dishes, and water the plants (VLOG 7 and 15). Also, there are participants who would cook for themselves and their respective families (VLOG 10 and 25). In relation to cooking, there is a participant who would practice baking due to the pandemic (VLOG 20). Some of them would do more tedious tasks like house painting (VLOG 6) and cleaning the whole house – cleaning both the backyard and front yard (VLOG 23). Essentially, keeping yourself busy would actually take your mind away from the stress and challenge the pandemic.

The next way to counteract the ill feelings caused by the pandemic, and the quarantine, is through focusing more on the ‘self.’ Particularly, the researcher identified three varieties of how the participants did this during the time of the quarantine. The first one is through self-reflection. The participant that emphasized such is VLOG 16. She mentioned in her vlog that she will always have her “me time.” This would allow people to develop inner peace, and to fight the negative feelings that one can suffer from during a crisis. VLOG 21 would reinforce this idea of self-reflection when she shared that she would go to the garden to experience fresh air. Basically, this allows people to relax when surrounded by nature.

The second way that is evident in the vlog entries would be self-care. Drinking vitamins (VLOG 24 and 27), and emphasizing personal care (VLOG 9, 16, and 24) are two activities that can be done to achieve such self-care. Aside from showing self-care, it also keeps one busy — doing something aside from the normal routine. In a way, looking good on the outside can also help in making oneself feel good inside.

The third one is related to the spirituality of the youth. VLOG 6 mentioned that she would often pray the rosary especially when the pandemic and quarantine started. This shows how prayer is a way to ease the worries that a person feels during a crisis. Thus, VLOGS 14 and 24 do the same thing. In addition, prayer can also be done with the family, like what VLOG 15 has done. Aside from prayer, daily devotions are performed by few of the participants. According to VLOG 15, she does daily devotions to ‘lessen the fear in everyday challenges.’ Possibly, the same effect happens to VLOG 16 when she does her daily devotion. Lastly, despite the pandemic and the community quarantine, VLOG 21 is still able to attend church services online. From these stories, it cannot be doubted that religion and spirituality play a huge part in the everyday life of the youth.

The last one would be the attempt to establish a “social life” amid the pandemic. According to the vlog entries, if there is a positive thing about this pandemic, it is that they were able to spend more time with their family (VLOG 1 and 20). In fact, they were able to establish ‘hang-out’ places, such as the stairs (VLOG 2), and the garden (VLOG 4). As mentioned earlier, it was also emphasized that one should pray together with their family (VLOG 15). Furthermore, VLOG 20 also narrated how he would initiate video calls to his friends for them to have a platform to bond even thru the “digital world.” Consequently, this proves that human beings are undeniably social beings as Aristotle has perceived thousands of years ago. It remains true even at the time of the pandemic.

All these previous discussions have shown the quarantine life of young people during the



pandemic. More particularly, this covered how their lives were changed — establishing a different routine from the pre-pandemic days. However, the routine gets too rigid that boredom, anxiety, and possibly, depression might sink in with these young people. Looking at their generation, they have the tendency to be more sensitive than the older ones (Deloitte, 2019). Thus, there must be ways for them to cope with the difficulties of the quarantine life. In this light, the paper discussed the ways the participants were able to cope with during their quarantine life – through entertainment, self-care, and digital social life.

The next discussion covers the ideas and perspectives expressed by the participants in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). More specifically, the paper focused on their ideas related to SDG 3 and SDG 4. The reason for that is that they have been mentioned in all the vlogs watched by the author (even in those that were not able to respond to the consent form). Hence, it can be inferred that these two SDGs would be the most significant in relation to the quarantine life of the participants.

### **Ideas and perspectives related to SDG 3: Good health and well-being**

According to Hwang and Kim (c2018), the youth plays a vital role in the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (p.30). The reason for such, according to the My World Survey (as cited in Hwang and Kim, c2018), people who are between 16-30 years old covers much of the world population. Particularly, more than 50% of the world population belong to this age group. Consequently, there is no doubt that today's youth are of utmost importance in achieving the SDG goals.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the goals that turned out to be the most affected is the SDG 3: good health and well-being. In the context of the Philippines, the country has not performed well in relation to the attainment of SDGs in general (UN, 2019). Due to the pandemic, the performance of the country may become worse especially with SDG 3. In fact, as of the time of writing, the cases continue to rise while the government continues to struggle with its response. In this light, this might be the time to ponder on the situation, and consider the narratives and perspectives offered by the different sectors of society. More specifically, to look at some of the ideas and perspectives from the youth sector.

Looking at the vlogs examined here in the paper, there is a seemingly unanimous perspective that SDG 3 has become very important. In fact, as VLOG 21 said, SDG 3 must be “prioritized” by the government due to the challenges presented by COVID-19. VLOG 4 argued that the “frontliners” (nurses, doctors, and other medical personnel) should be given support. Moreover, the same vlog post also mentions that scientists who are trying to develop a vaccine should be given incentives. Furthermore, there is a recognition in VLOG 18 that this is a difficult situation for a lot of countries since “*only few are prepared*”. Therefore, there is a cynical perspective on how SDG 3 targets can be reached (VLOG 21).

Basically, this negative look on the COVID-19 response was expressed by one of the vloggers. VLOG 11 saw the problematic response to the pandemic as part of the weakness of the government and health care institutions. Moreover, the same vlog believes that the government does not

know its priorities. Instead of focusing on the health sector, the government focused on the economy and infrastructure more. He is actually referring to how the government could have prevented this situation if it immediately closed its borders to those coming from China. He expressed his dismay with regards to the situation. However, there is nothing we can do about it except improving on the response.

In this lieu, VLOG 3 suggested ways on how the government can improve in its response against this pandemic. First, she suggested that public information about the pandemic should be factual. In the time of social media, “fake news” has been widespread. It has misled people on believing things that are not true. Thus, the government must improve its public information system to let the people be aware and vigilant of what is happening around them. Second, she suggested the strict implementation of social distancing. Regardless of one’s socioeconomic status, this policy should be implemented strictly to combat the further spread of the disease. Lastly, she suggested that there should be mass testing. Also, proper care should be given to those who have tested positive. Apparently, this suggestion was also supported by VLOG 25 who also believes that mass testing, and vaccination should be executed as soon as possible to completely combat this pandemic.

VLOG 3 also contributed to the discussion of trying to address this pandemic. One of her suggestions is the “*change of behavior*” for government officials. According to her, they should aim for the betterment of everyone, not on their vested interest(s). This idea is affirmed by VLOG 25, when she said that the government should focus on

“*helping people*” and “*set aside corruption.*” Moreover, she also suggested a more multi-dimensional approach in resolving the pandemic. It is true that there should be focus on health during this time. However, there should also be economic and social considerations in formulating health responses. In short, this suggestion is the recognition that sustainable development (even its individual goals) is holistic (SDSN, 2012).

Aside from proposals for the improvement of government response, there are also suggestions on how the citizens themselves can contribute to the governance of COVID-19. VLOG 1 and 23 called for the people to “*stay at home*” so that the further spread of the virus can be lessened. Moreover, the people can improve their own health by having a healthy lifestyle (VLOG 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 20, and 27). Exercise, eating healthy, and taking vitamins are important reminders provided by the participants. VLOG 25 also provided insights on how citizens can help the government in addressing this pandemic. He suggested that individuals must simply follow and cooperate with the government and their respective communities. He assumes that this is the best way to address our current predicament. In a different light, VLOG 22 took a “more aggressive” approach than just following the government. She basically emphasized a more active way of participation. She emphasized that we could contribute through “*donations*” of essentials to the people who are affected by the pandemic. For example, in her case, they donated face masks to the community so that they can help in mitigating the spread of COVID-19. Hence, this action by VLOG 22 affirms the concept of good governance being participatory (UNESCAP, n.d). Ultimately, it should be recognized

that addressing this issue must be the result of the cooperation among the different sectors of society, i.e. which includes the youth sector.

However, it should be recognized that this pandemic affects more than just the physical health of a person. In fact, SDG 3 itself transcends the physical well-being of a person. According to the list of targets of SDG 3, mental health and well-being are also included (Target 3.4). Thus, even the young participants of this study have expressed their ideas and perspectives in relation to the mental health effects of this pandemic and the community quarantine. All the vloggers have done everything in their capacity to become busy and entertain themselves (*see previous discussion*). Moreover, they have tried to establish social connections to their respective families and friends (through video calls) to make sure that they would not feel the ill feelings caused by this pandemic. In short, there is doubt that this pandemic has not only affected those who are infected by the virus. It has affected everyone, most especially the younger generation. Therefore, an equally linear solution might be needed.

The discussions prove that this pandemic has undeniably affected the possible attainment of the third sustainable development goal in 2030. The complexity and multitude of effects, this pandemic present, has been complex for the young participants of this study. For instance, it has affected them physically (even though they were not infected), emotionally, and mentally. Nevertheless, they continued to persevere and developed ideas which can contribute to a better response against this pandemic.

#### **Ideas and perspectives related to SDG 4: Quality education**

Another SDG that has become relevant based on the survey of the different vlogs is the SDG 4: Quality Education. Contrastively, this sustainable development goal became important, alongside being scrutinized, due to the shift from the face-to-face classes to distance learning. In the context of the participants, the form of distance learning they were given is through online learning using a particular Learning Management System (LMS). In this section of the paper, the writer has thematically arranged the ideas and perspectives by the participants into two. The first one discussed the belief of the vloggers — that online classes would result in quality education. Hence, this is the part where some optimistic ideas were presented by the participants. The second part, however, focused more on the pessimistic views on the achievement of quality education through online classes. Significantly, to quantify, based on the number of vlogs versus this survey, the latter would outnumber the former. Therefore, there is a need to consider such views to possibly improve the quality of education at the time of the pandemic.

According to Target 4.3 of SDG 4, there should be quality tertiary education. This target is applicable to the participants in relation to the level they are in. Apparently, this is the main concern of all the vlogs reviewed in this paper. According to VLOG 10, he has no doubt that quality education can be attained through online classes. It is something that the young people are not used to, but it will be part of adjusting to the “new normal” (VLOG 11). VLOG 16 also agrees to such since she believes that it is the only way students can continue their studies

in the context of the pandemic and the community quarantine.

Moreover, VLOG 24 argues that this mode of learning would teach the youth to become independent learners. Basically, this can help to prepare them in the professional league. It would also help if the teachers are mostly considerate and understanding of their students in these kinds of situations (VLOG 26). If such is the case, students will not worry too much on the deadlines. Thus, they will not experience any depression or ill feelings towards this mode of learning. As such, self-paced learning might be emphasized.

In short, there are participants who believe in the possibility of quality education through online learning. There is an adjustment period for such novelty but it will pay-off later. However, most of the vloggers are skeptical towards the attainment of SDG 4 through online education. Apparently, one of the participants (VLOG 27) emphasized his skepticism in relation to online classes. He expressed dismay on his experience with online classes (most especially in relation to the professional subjects) since it does not produce the same learning output as face-to-face classes.

Another perspective to take note is based on VLOG 13. She argues that this situation (not only in online classes but the situation in general) has aggravated the existence of inequality in Philippine society. Similarly, VLOG 9 expressed the same concerns due to the existence of students with unstable to completely no internet connection. Such concern in relation to the internet connection was emphasized by the other participants in this research. VLOG 1 argued that online classes will be

“challenging and hard” due to the limitation(s) of internet connectivity. In fact, some of the students, according to VLOG 4, may not have any internet connection and gadget(s) to use. Thus, there will be difficulty in compliance (VLOG 14).

VLOG 4 also mentioned that there may be difficulty for students to “focus” on their classes since they are in the domains of their homes. The learning environment is not susceptible for learning to happen due to too many distractions. As per VLOG 6, another possible difficulty would be studying independently. Although the previous participant (see discussion above) views studying independently well, this presents an alternative perspective. For her (VLOG 6), the faculty members are needed to facilitate the learning of students. There may be difficult and technical concepts that may need the expertise of the faculty members. Thus, online learning cannot easily provide such.

Furthermore, VLOG 5 and VLOG 8 agreed on a notable issue on quality education: “you are just doing your requirements not for learning but for compliance”. This might not sound problematic at first. However, it might affect the aim for quality education since students are merely complying and not necessarily learning. Consequently, it can be inferred from this perspective that they are slowly losing motivation in their studies due to this pandemic.

If VLOG 21 is correct, online classes are “not for everyone.” In fact, the same participant argued that the Philippines in general is “not prepared” for online classes. Moreover, this can be reinforced by the idea that this mode of learning is only for the rich

(VLOG 4). The requirement of having stable internet connection and having gadgets to participate in online classes might prove this claim. Thus, there is a need to address these issues that were experienced by the participants (i.e. the participants are already members of the middle to upper class. However, they are experiencing these problems).

Based on the perspectives, and ideas expressed through the vlogs, it would seem like there are real problems in relation to the achievement of quality education. These problems and difficulties were aggravated by the existence of this pandemic and community quarantine. Thus, some of the participants have expressed their suggestions on how to make things work. There are two suggestions that are notable.

The first one would be the demand for better internet connection for everyone (VLOG 15 and 17). According to both participants, the government must provide infrastructure(s) to cater the need for internet stability. Moreover, the government should make sure that everyone will have access to this service to achieve quality education. Another suggestion comes from VLOG 21. Her suggestion is mainly addressed to the educational institutions. She believes that the different educational institutions should listen to the “voice of the students” and not just implement policies as if they are applicable to everyone. It can be inferred from this suggestion that she believes in a more democratic and participatory formulation of policies in relation to distance learning. Thus, it is important that these ideas and perspectives are expressed and communicated to the different stakeholders involved.

The achievement of quality education may still be farfetched, especially with the current predicament that the world is experiencing. Based on the data from both ESCAP (2015) and UNESCO (c2018), countries around the world are generally not on track to achieve SDG 4. Hence, there is a need to work harder to achieve not only SDG 4, but the SDGs in general. Possibly, one way to start such is to listen to the different experiences from the “ground” to improve the strategies and mechanisms to achieve the sustainable development goals.

From the discussion of the data gathered, it is undeniable that the COVID-19 pandemic, and the community quarantine that resulted from it, has truly altered the lives of the young people in the Philippines. First, it changed the way they live their lives – both positively and negatively. On a positive note, they were able to spend time with themselves and their families. It became an opportunity for them to step back and see the world in a different light. However, the negative effect of this context has undoubtedly affected their health and well-being (physical, emotional, and mental). This, of course, can be related to SDG 3. They expressed their concerns with the need to improve the response of the government and the citizens. Moreover, the current situation has also impacted how quality education can be achieved (SDG 4). Although the participants presented both optimistic and pessimistic views, it cannot be denied that there is a need to improve the conduct of distance-learning – most specifically, online classes. Issues of internet connectivity, gadgets, and socio-economic inequality are hindrances to the success of online classes or distance learning in general. In this light, there is a need for both the government and

educational institutions to consider the different contexts of students and implement the proper policies and strategies for the students.

These video logs are sources of reliable (narrative-based) information. Basically, they were able to express themselves and perform catharsis to deal with emotional and mental issues caused by the pandemic. However, a question may be asked: what is the significance of these narratives that were synthesized? The final part of the paper deals with this question, along with the conclusions and recommendations that can be derived from the whole narrative constructed.

## Conclusion

### Insights

The narrative presented above should not remain as a narrative in paper. The experiences and stories found in the vlogs are as valid and important as those found in traditional media of expression. In this part of the paper, the author attempts to discuss the significance of the narratives synthesized. There are a couple of insights that were considered: 1) the ideas and perceptions of the young participants in this paper have importance in the context of youth development; 2) the narratives have implications in the context of good governance, more particularly, in relation to its participatory nature; and 3) the narratives provide the readers a glimpse of what it means to be a part of the youth sector in this challenging times.

According to van de Vijver and He (2018), youth development is related to the overall condition of young people around the world (physical,

emotional, mental, and spiritual condition). This is related to the sustainable development goals through a framework on looking at the conditions of the youth in different parts of the world. Moreover, this work provided two important perspectives related to youth development: *emic* (culture-specific) and *etic* (culture comparative) (van de Vijver & He). Both perspectives are rooted in the field of psychology, and have something to do with the conditions of the youth related to their culture.

In the context of the study, the *emic* perspective can be used to explain the narratives gathered from the vlogs. According to this perspective (as discussed by van de Vijver & He, 2018), psychological phenomena (e.g. boredom and anxiety) are “intrinsically linked to their context.” Basically, the feelings, behavior, and actions that the participants have shown are all related to the existence of this pandemic and community quarantine. They are just reacting based on the challenges presented to them. Furthermore, the way they react is also rooted in their cultural backgrounds. The resilience that the vloggers showed could be attributed to Filipino culture.

The *etic* perspective can also be a source of insight(s) for this narrative. As compared to *emic*, this perspective views psychological phenomena as universal (*Ibid.*, p. 330). In this light, it can be argued that the feelings and issues discussed in the vlogs can also apply to the other young people around the world. However, this paper cannot make that universal claim due to its nature (qualitative). Admittedly, the study may have aimed at getting a glimpse of the lives of the youth during this pandemic but, the author does not expect it to

develop universal narratives. The claim that the narratives can also be applied to other young people around the world is more of an assumption that can be confirmed later. Perhaps, a more quantitative approach can be used since it aims more on the development of generalizations that can be applied to different contexts.

Nevertheless, the main point here is that these narratives will remain significant if there will be a collaborative strategy to help the youth sector become more relevant. For as long as their voices are not heard, their development will be hindered. If such a thing happens, they will not have the capacity (Sen, 2000) to really change the world even if they are composed of more than half of the population in the world (Hwang & Kim, c2018). In relation to this idea of changing the world, the youth can also become important in governance – both internationally and domestically.

According to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) (n.d), good governance has the following characteristics: accountable, transparent, responsive, equitable and inclusive, effective and efficient, rule of law, participatory, and consensus-oriented. Essentially, this framework can serve as the guiding principles of the governments around the world — to continue improving their performance in delivering social service(s) to their people.

The narratives culled emphasized several characteristics in relation to the framework. Some of the vlogs focused on the need for governments' to have accountability and transparency. They believe that some government officials veer away from their

vested interest(s), and instead focus on helping its citizenry. Equally the same, there is also a demand for a more responsive government since they have not responded to all the people who are in need. In relation, there should be a more equitable and inclusive implementation of the support coming from the government. Furthermore, the narratives demanded that the government should be more effective and efficient with their services during this pandemic. However, what might stand out is the implication that these vlog entries emphasized the need for a more participatory and consensus-oriented form of governance. As discussed above, these vlogs can become the avenue for the youth to express their ideas and perspectives in relation to their quarantine life and SDGs. Since they were able to do that, the paper hopes that these narratives can be used to improve governance not only here in the Philippines but also, internationally.

The final insight has something to do with getting a glimpse on the life of the young people during this pandemic. The lives of these young participants are truly in transition. Based on the narratives they provided, they have struggled in a lot of ways — physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. This pandemic and quarantine have transformed their lives and how they behave. Consequently, the same can be said with the other members of the youth sector here in the Philippines, and possibly the world. Apparently, there is an undeniable difference in cultural contexts but, there is a uniting factor here: the COVID-19 pandemic. It has provided a common ground for all people around the world. Thus, this can serve as an opportunity to respond as a 'united world' against a pressing crisis. This is, of course, easier said than

done. However, this is an important opportunity that the youth around the world can take advantage of to make their voices heard.

The paper aimed at providing a synthesis of narratives coming from the video logs (vlogs) of young people. More specifically, it wanted to look at two things in general: 1) the quarantine life of the youth; and 2) their ideas and perspectives related to the sustainable development goals – particularly, SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 4 (Quality Education). From all those narratives, the paper was able to formulate three important conclusions.

First, the pandemic and the quarantine that resulted from it has transformed the lives of the youth. It has forced them to adapt a new routine that could become rigid as time passes by. In this light, the youth has been very creative in trying to deal with this rigidity. Based on their stories, they have been successful but, they do hope that this will end soon. However, the resilience and idealism of these young people are undeniable amid this challenge presented.

Second, the young participants in this study are skeptical with regards to the attainment of the two SDGs that were given focus in this study. It has become apparent that the pandemic really hindered the progress of the Philippines and other countries vis-à-vis the SDGs. The continuing pandemic has provided challenges to having a world with better health and well-being. Moreover, the mental and emotional toll of this situation has impacted the youth, since there is a feeling of boredom and anxiety. In the context of SDG 4, distance learning

(i.e. online classes to be more specific) is perceived skeptically by narratives. The existing limitations, such as unstable internet connectivity and lack of gadgets may hinder the achievement of quality education. In fact, it can emphasize the inequality in the country.

Third, there is a need for more young people to be involved in the process of governance. The ideas and perspectives presented in this paper can serve as the basis of policies and solutions that can help address the challenges presented. In this case, the government and other stakeholders should not remain “deaf and blind” with the collective voice to action of the Filipino youth.

## **Recommendations**

The paper hopes to lay three recommendations. The first one goes with the policymakers in the Philippines. Narratives coming from below must be given attention. As a democratic society aiming at the achievement of sustainable development, there is a need to open spaces (possibly digital spaces) where the youth can freely interact and voice their “calls to action.”

Another related recommendation is for the young people. They must remain active and vigilant at times like this. In fact, the youth should do more during this pandemic. The creativity and resourcefulness of young people must be taken advantage of during this time. Digital movements and discussions become important at this time to participate in governance. The youth must be able to develop alternatives that are helpful to all Filipinos in general.



Lastly, the paper would like to challenge future researchers to take into consideration this kind of topic. They could use a different framework of research design and method (e.g. quantitative) to inject new insights and conclusions for the youth. In the end, this paper hopes that the youth will continuously play their vital role in the society. They should, at all times, demand to be heard. They should continue to participate in both traditional and modern media.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Research Consent Form and Cover Letter

Dear Thomasians,

Greetings in the name of the Lord!

I hope this survey finds you well and safe. I do hope that you still remember me from last semester in the course The Contemporary World. I would like to inform everyone that I am currently involved in a research project which is a partnership between the UST Department of Political Science and Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS). The main theme of the project is about the youth and their lives during the quarantine. Thus, I am asking for your help for me to complete my research.

Since our final output last semester is video log (vlog) of your quarantine life and the SDGs, I came up with the idea to synthesize your ideas into a research output. Basically, this will give readers an idea on how the youth lived thru the challenges of the quarantine. Moreover, it would help us send a message regarding your perception on the Sustainable Development Goals (more particularly SDG 3 and SDG 4). The working title of the proposal is "Vlogging the Sustainable Development Goals: A Synthesis of Youth's Quarantine Life in relation to SDG 3 and 4."

In this light, I am humbly requesting permission from each one of you to allow me to use your ideas in your final outputs. More particularly, your perspective on the SDGs will truly be helpful. You can be confident that no personal information (even your name) will be mentioned in the research. Everything will remain private and you will be assured that this is for academic purposes only. With that, I hope you can give me your permission.

Below is a single question where you will choose to allow me or not to use your vlog. Please choose your answer. This is voluntary.

Thank you very much and I hope for your favorable response.

Sincerely,

Paul Micah S. Francisco  
Faculty  
Department of Political Science  
University of Santo Tomas

1. Email Address:

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2. Will you allow the researcher to use your ideas you expressed in your VLOG regarding your quarantine life in the research?

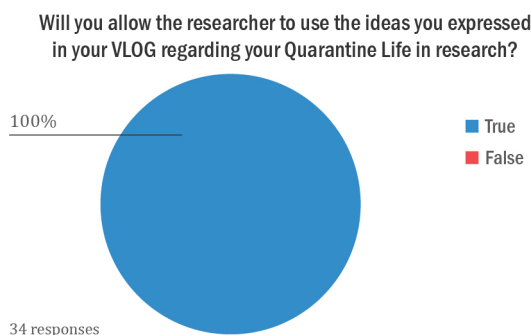
YES

NO

***\*This form was sent through email and used Google Forms to collect the responses. Here is the link for the forms for your reference: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScN-APKwbgXtWiPTMNZnMZTwJ\\_C3engNtfWRzp0wWhewFGlw/viewform?usp=pp\\_url&entry.260750449=YES](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScN-APKwbgXtWiPTMNZnMZTwJ_C3engNtfWRzp0wWhewFGlw/viewform?usp=pp_url&entry.260750449=YES)***

## Appendix B

### Summary of Google Form Response



#### Notes on the Responses:

- 1. The researcher sent more than 100 emails to the students. Although there are just 94 target participants, some of them used more than one email address. To increase the assurance of their response, the researcher sent the email in all addresses available.*
- 2. Based on the pie chart, the researcher received 34 affirmative responses and 0 negative ones. However, by close examination, one student responded using 2 different email addresses. Thus, they will be counted as one.*
- 3. Out of the 33 possible vlogs, only 27 were utilized since the other 6 are not available to view.*

## Appendix C

### Summary of the Data Gathered

VLOG	Quarantine Life	SDG 3 Perspective	SDG 4 Perspective
VLOG # 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Watching TV</li> <li>Playing Board Games</li> <li>Bonding with Family</li> <li>Household Chores</li> <li>Exercise with Mom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Living in the world with good health</li> <li>Encouraged to stay at home during the quarantine</li> <li>Healthy lifestyle and well-being</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality education for all children</li> <li>Online learning as challenging</li> <li>'Hard thing' because of the limitation on internet signal</li> </ul>
VLOG # 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wake up at 8am</li> <li>Watching videos from 10pm onwards</li> <li>'Hanging-out' in the stairs</li> <li>Waiting for breakfast</li> <li>Check the groceries and store food in the refrigerator (fruits and yogurt)</li> <li>Giving extra food to the security guards</li> <li>'Lost motivation' since he cannot go out</li> <li>Indoor exercises</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eating healthy</li> <li>Exercise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online classes</li> </ul>
VLOG # 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre-workout drink at 8am</li> <li>30-40 minutes of workout</li> <li>Cool down and shower</li> <li>Breakfast at 10am</li> <li>Going to the grocery to buy essentials</li> <li>Entertaining self (Netflix and Tiktok)</li> <li>Late afternoon lunch</li> <li>Long rest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasis on good health and well-being because of the pandemic</li> <li>The government must do the following:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure the public are informed</li> <li>Advocating the practice of 'social distancing'</li> <li>Providing access to testing and appropriate care</li> </ol> </li> <li>Suggested solution to pandemic:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Change of behavior</li> <li>Emphasis on public health principles with economic and societal considerations</li> </ol> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online Class</li> </ul>
VLOG # 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wake-up</li> <li>Clean the room</li> <li>Eat breakfast</li> <li>Studying (online class)</li> <li>Hanging out in the garden</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be thankful to the front liners and scientists (for the attempt to develop the vaccine)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality education must still be ensured despite the pandemic</li> <li>Difficulty in the focus</li> <li>On-line class is not enough</li> <li>No internet connection, no gadgets</li> <li>On-line class is for the rich people</li> </ul>

VLOG # 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wake-up at 8am</li> <li>• Breakfast</li> <li>• Entertaining self (playing guitar, on-line games, watching K-Drama and Youtube)</li> <li>• Doing household chores</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental and emotional health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online classes (limited connection)</li> <li>• Doing activities for compliance</li> </ul>
VLOG # 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cleaning the room</li> <li>• Prepare breakfast</li> <li>• Sushi Business</li> <li>• Praying the rosary</li> <li>• House painting</li> <li>• Dinner</li> <li>• Take a bath</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental and emotional health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online classes are 'harder because you need to learn for yourself'</li> </ul>
VLOG # 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doing groceries</li> <li>• Arrange food</li> <li>• Watch videos</li> <li>• Online classes</li> <li>• Reading and chatting with friends (online)</li> <li>• 'Lay in bed'</li> <li>• On-line shopping</li> <li>• Watering the plants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental and emotional health (rest and watering plants)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On-line classes</li> </ul>
VLOG # 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breakfast</li> <li>• Work-out</li> <li>• Do online classes (doing schoolwork for compliance)</li> <li>• Dinner at 7pm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The pandemic made me realize the importance of health so we eat more fruits and vegetables</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do online classes (doing schoolwork for compliance)</li> </ul>
VLOG # 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breakfast</li> <li>• Take a bath</li> <li>• Skin care</li> <li>• Watch videos</li> <li>• Work-out</li> <li>• Dinner</li> <li>• Sleep</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking care of health and well-being through exercise and rest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inequalities in on-line classes</li> </ul>
VLOG # 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watching videos (Anime)</li> <li>• Playing with dogs</li> <li>• Coping Mechanism: Playing Games</li> <li>• Work-out</li> <li>• Online Classes</li> <li>• Cooking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staying at home and staying healthy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online classes can be used to provide quality education</li> </ul>
VLOG # 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breakfast</li> <li>• Study (online classes)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical health is having security in terms of financial resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school is doing all things possible to adapt to the new situation and he is proud of the school</li> </ul>

- Government and health care institutions are weak, and their service is slow and insufficient ('not enough')
- The focus of the government is the economy and infrastructure-building and not this kind of challenge

VLOG # 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inside the house for 80 days</li> <li>• Wake-up at 8am</li> <li>• Breakfast</li> <li>• Study (Online Classes)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The need to solve the problem of the lack of medical supplies and personnel</li> <li>• Health is part of our treasure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online classes</li> </ul>
VLOG # 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eating breakfast</li> <li>• Watering the plants</li> <li>• Entertain self (dancing and playing Monopoly)</li> <li>• Study the lessons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental and emotional health</li> <li>• Fighting inequality (SDGs in general)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online classes (self-study)</li> <li>• Fighting inequality (SDGs in general)</li> </ul>
VLOG # 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wake-up</li> <li>• Prayer</li> <li>• Take a bath</li> <li>• Breakfast</li> <li>• Studying and complying with requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental and emotional health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online Classes (Difficulty of compliance)</li> </ul>
VLOG # 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wake-up</li> <li>• Fixing the bed</li> <li>• Eat breakfast</li> <li>• Daily devotion to lessen the fear in everyday challenges</li> <li>• Eat lunch</li> <li>• Washing plates</li> <li>• Take a bath</li> <li>• Baking</li> <li>• Study</li> <li>• Praying together with the family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exercise</li> <li>• Mental and Emotional health (Spirituality)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online classes should be improved by providing better internet connection</li> </ul>
VLOG # 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wake-up</li> <li>• Fix the bed</li> <li>• Personal Care</li> <li>• Breakfast</li> <li>• Daily Devotions</li> <li>• Eating lunch</li> <li>• Washing the dishes</li> <li>• Taking a bath</li> <li>• 'Me' Time</li> <li>• Rest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good mental and emotional health (personal time with self and spirituality)</li> <li>• Regular exercise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality education can be provided through online classes</li> </ul>

VLOG # 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wake-up (between 8 – 10 am)</li> <li>• Eat breakfast</li> <li>• Opens computer to watch videos</li> <li>• Lunch</li> <li>• Online class</li> <li>• Take a bath</li> <li>• Entertain self (Online games and watching anime)</li> <li>• 6 or 7pm dinner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental and emotional health (Online games and watching videos)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government should provide better connection in lieu of online classes</li> </ul>
VLOG # 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wake-up</li> <li>• Eat breakfast</li> <li>• Watch videos</li> <li>• Eat lunch</li> <li>• Online classes</li> <li>• Buy groceries online</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few countries are ready to face the COVID-19 crisis</li> <li>• With regards to the attainability of this goal, it is 'not attainable due to the current conditions.' A lot of countries are still far from attaining the SDGs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online classes</li> </ul>
VLOG # 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usual routine</li> <li>• Prayer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental and emotional health (spirituality)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality Education thru online classes</li> </ul>
VLOG # 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baking</li> <li>• Workout routine</li> <li>• Sleeping</li> <li>• Watching videos</li> <li>• Bonding with family</li> <li>• Video call with friends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Road to a healthy lifestyle</li> <li>• Mental and emotional health (Family and friends)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online classes</li> </ul>
VLOG # 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wake-up</li> <li>• Personal care</li> <li>• Prepare food for the family</li> <li>• Breakfast and Lunch</li> <li>• Exercise</li> <li>• 'Going to the garden to experience fresh air'</li> <li>• Wait for announcements (in relation to the quarantine)</li> <li>• Attending church service online</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good health should be prioritized in these trying times</li> <li>• The government should give food and support to the vulnerable communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online classes are not accessible for all students</li> <li>• Some students are not ready since they left their materials in the premises of the university</li> <li>• The Philippines is not ready for online classes because of the limited access (unstable) to the internet and the lack of gadgets</li> <li>• Eradicate corruption</li> <li>• The school must 'understand the voice of students' because of the difficulty in internet connection</li> </ul>
VLOG # 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breakfast</li> <li>• Take a bath</li> <li>• Online classes</li> <li>• Eat lunch</li> <li>• Arrange face mask (donations)</li> <li>• Exercise</li> <li>• Dinner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping communities through donating face masks (citizen participation in attaining the goals)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attending online classes</li> </ul>

VLOG # 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wake-up at 630am</li> <li>• Wash face</li> <li>• Breakfast</li> <li>• Household chores (Washing dishes, Cleaning the house, Sweeping the backyard and front yard)</li> <li>• Take a bath</li> <li>• Online classes</li> <li>• 'Relax'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staying at home as an important part of dealing with the pandemic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online classes</li> </ul>
VLOG # 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wake-up at 4am</li> <li>• Prayer and reflection</li> <li>• Prepare food</li> <li>• Eat breakfast</li> <li>• Taking vitamins</li> <li>• Household chores (cleaning the house, washing the dishes)</li> <li>• Online classes and Reviewing of lesson</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental and emotional health (spirituality)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online classes (Independence in studying)</li> </ul>
VLOG # 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wake-up</li> <li>• Fix the bed</li> <li>• Household Chores (Cleaning the house, Watering the plants)</li> <li>• Morning walk/jog</li> <li>• Online training for swimmers</li> <li>• Prepare breakfast</li> <li>• Entertain self (Watch TV, Tiktok, Painting)</li> <li>• Cook Lunch and Dinner</li> <li>• Online Class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow and cooperate with the government and the community</li> <li>• Suggestion for the government: focus on helping people and 'set aside corruption'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online classes</li> </ul>
VLOG # 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online classes (Considerate Teachers)</li> <li>• Playing with pet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The problem on the pandemic will continue unless there will be mass testing and vaccination</li> <li>• The lack of funds would lead to the lack of nutrition</li> <li>• Mental and emotional health (pets)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online classes (considerate teachers)</li> </ul>
VLOG # 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wake-up</li> <li>• Household chores</li> <li>• Breakfast</li> <li>• Online class</li> <li>• Lunch</li> <li>• Read</li> <li>• Entertain self (Prank calls)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take care of ourselves</li> <li>• Drink vitamins, eat healthy, and exercise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questioning the attainment of quality education through online classes (Skeptical)</li> </ul>

*NOTE: As part of research ethics, the names of the participants will remain anonymous.*





# Of echo chamber and necessary noise

## How student activists viewed the Duterte Administration's medical populism another necessary actions amid the COVID-19 pandemic: An exploratory study

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### Abstract

This paper sought to explore how student activism remained a source of political dissent amid the physical restrictions brought about by quarantine measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Student activists interviewed in this paper particularly criticized the government's alleged mishandling of the COVID-19 crisis, as manifested in the medical populism and other deemed unnecessary actions of President Rodrigo Duterte. The critical responses were extracted from interviews of leftist student activists examined as "necessary noise" to counter the president's "echo chamber" — in relation to selected central and peripheral issues directly and indirectly related to the pandemic. A scrutiny of the interview responses revealed the student activists' high awareness of the issues confronting the Duterte administration's pandemic response. Some of these responses appeared to be reiterations of previous statements in the media against the Duterte government. Other responses offered workable and realistic suggestions to help the government attain a better COVID-19 response. Moving forward, it is recommended that further studies be made to involve non-aligned student groups as subjects, aside from the more dominant left-leaning sectors of the youth activist movement.

### Keywords

Duterte, student activists, COVID-19, medical populism, unnecessary actions, political dissent, protest

### Introduction

Politics and pathogens rarely intersect. When they do, expect a public health crisis to emerge. It has almost been the rule more than the exception. Governments wrestle for solutions but the problem is more than just stockpiling medical supplies and equipment to combat the global scourge that has reached pandemic levels, much like the COVID-19 debacle right now. It impairs the

human physique, the country's economic life, and ultimately the body politic. The Philippines is now standing in the middle of this public health crisis as one of the pandemic hotspots in Asia. President Rodrigo Duterte has reorganized his administration to handle its national response to the global killer that has now infected over 250,000 Filipinos, with more than 3,000 deaths, since last month.

Led by Duterte's most trusted cabinet men, the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID) was convened in January to mount a whole-of-government approach to the deadly virus that has crippled East Asia, particularly the Chinese city of Wuhan, where it reportedly originated. Yet, it will take almost two months before the Duterte administration orders to lockdown the entire Philippine capital from local and foreign travelers as the Department of Health announced the country's first COVID-19 case – a 38-year old Chinese female – on January 30. Luzon, the Philippines' biggest island mass, was placed under Enhanced Community Quarantine on March 16, two days after the measure was implemented in Metro Manila. Business establishments, offices, and schools were shut down to stifle any public gathering that would accelerate the spread of the virus through multiple human hosts. Mass demonstrations were also prohibited. But the fervor to protest among student activists removed from physical schooling because of the pandemic, did not wane.

This paper argues that student activism remained as one of the bastions of political dissent in the country even at the onset of the pandemic, providing the “necessary noise” to dispute the Duterte administration's “echo chamber” of policy pronouncements, anchored on medical populism and other unnecessary political actions which sought to project government control over the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, it explores why the informed critique to substantiate this “necessary noise” continues to fall on deaf politics by underscoring the cynical and cyclical tone of criticisms that reflect the left's anti-establishment views. The importance of sustaining a voice of

dissent, at the height of the COVID-19 crisis, was also discussed within the context of student activism's consistency in calling out the government for its shortcomings. Moving forward, the paper suggests a brand of student activism that looks beyond reactionary political discourse and mere enumeration of the wrongs of the sitting power. It must repackage political dissent as a remedy to bureaucratic incompetence and inaction through realistic and workable solutions that involve the youth and the community, even as the government continues to ignore or downplay these civic efforts.

The “necessary noise” framework for this paper were critical reactions of student activists against the Duterte administration, rooted in central and peripheral issues, directly and indirectly connected to the government's COVID-19 action plan. By central, these are issues related to medical populism. Meanwhile, peripheral issues are those conceived as untimely or unnecessary matters which can be deemed as aggravating circumstances to the country's already problematic COVID-19 response. These issues were chosen as recurrent themes in the Philippines' pandemic news cycle and ventilated through medical populism as a framework. According to Lasco and Curato (2019a), medical populism works by creating a shared imaginary of “the people” as aggrieved parties, if not victims of diseases due to the system's neglect. While other forms of populism build on cultural and economic insecurity, medical populism emphasizes the threats to public's health and safety. As with other forms of populism, the ‘others’ against it include powerful elites such as pharmaceutical companies, supranational bodies, and ‘medical establishments’ (i.e. ‘vertical divisions’). They may

also include ‘dangerous others’, such as migrants that are blamed for the crisis and cast as sources of contagion (i.e. ‘horizontal divisions’).

### **Duterte populism as “echo chamber”**

Before subscribing to medical populism, President Rodrigo Duterte was considered a proponent of “penal populism” which crudely described his political style as an irreverent, but starkly charismatic candidate that won the presidency in 2016. This type of populism “builds on collective sentiments of fear and demands for punitive politics” (Pratt, 2007). Penal populism draws its discursive power from its capacity to attribute blame to both offenders and the political establishment that perpetuate shared anxieties (Curato, 2016). However, Duterte’s case thrives in a unique combination of fear, anxiety, and hope which greatly appealed to the Filipino electorate. His centerpiece campaign against illegal drugs and criminality reverberated among over 16 million voters who catapulted him to power. Interestingly, however, a great majority of them came from the middle and upper classes, those who are financially capable but often victimized by criminals and other unscrupulous elements. This departs from the conventional populist narrative which extols and uplifts the masses as the “people” over the exploitative and abusive “others,” often depicted by manner of deduction as the moneyed or privileged members of society. A strong leader evoking a sense of control resonated to communities who wished to reclaim stability in an otherwise fragile context. The “politics of anxiety” was, to a certain extent, a productive political discourse, in the sense that it gave a voice and visibility to otherwise latent issues of social menace caused by illegal drugs (Curato,

2016). In Duterte’s populist playbook, retribution is the answer to fear and anxiety, considering its underlying life-over-death message to the voting public. Curato also mentioned a “politics of hope” which expands the “space of political action” as the populist publics wheels in the gears of reciprocity to support Duterte’s presidential bid anchored on his dual role as the “punisher” of thugs and misfits, and “protector” of the people and the republic. His *malasakit* (empathy) as shown by his immediate response to help victims of Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) in 2013 sowed the seeds of electoral reciprocity in the fertile grounds of discontent, cultivated by the Aquino administration’s mishandling of the natural catastrophe. Hope as a political action projected Duterte as a cursing, gun-wielding messiah out to right the many wrongs of the past with his no-nonsense politics. To the voting public enticed by this “politics of hope,” supporting Duterte is a moral obligation. But as history has shown the public, the politics of hope could also produce disproportionate optimism that could ultimately result in unmet expectations and further frustrations to electoral politics (Curato).

David (2016) labelled this populist appeal as “Dutertismo” hinged on a personal resentment of the establishment which he now heads. Theatrics fall short as a concept, with Duterte’s ability to solicit emotional allegiance from a desperate and disillusioned audience as if to convey “I feel what you feel.” The populist as fascist is not an infant concept in political discourse. But that of Duterte metaphysically or mystically embodying the public’s sentiments against the failings and callousness of previous administrations has taken a life of its own. Unlike the typical rabble-

rousing populist-fascist, Duterte has a program of government that echoes the long-standing gripes of the majority: to stomp out criminality and corruption towards peace and prosperity. Calling Duterte a fascist would probably not mean anything to the average Filipino. If at all, it might focus inordinate attention on the man himself and the dark charisma he projects, when what is needed is to understand the movement he has given life to and the collective anger and despair it represents (David). The “disjunction” of the liberal reformist order provides an explanation of why Duterte’s promise to resort to violence to solve the country’s drug problem, to which he linked other problems, particularly corruption, proved effective during his presidential campaign. Duterte was able to radicalize his predecessor Noynoy Aquino’s reformism, abandoning its liberalism by promising quick results through extra-legal means (Thompson, 2016).

From Day 1 as president, Duterte has galvanized an echo chamber befitting his stature as a populist idol, worthy of the public’s protection while inflicting punishment to their enemies. Progressive thinkers view this as feudalism reimaged within the scope of give-and-take. The echo chamber, however, is more than just the voices in Duterte’s head. They are people breathing his ideas, which has now spilled from the halls of power to the vast wilderness of social media. Duterte’s loyal followers have in fact created a social media fortress to shield the president from opposition attacks. This shield also doubles up as a sword to cut down Duterte’s actual and perceived enemies from the realm of political discourse. Taking the cue from Freedom House’s illiberal toolbox of media co-optation, these “smear of proxies” became

a potent weapon to sidetrack or silence any form of resentment against a president parlaying his own personal resentment into actual policy. The illiberal toolbox called this “elements of positive narrative building.” More importantly, this narrative shields the president’s image against media criticism by taking the political discourse away from the conventional vehicles of the press (e.g. TV, radio, and newspaper) where the public voice has been muted or ignored. By doing so, they encourage netizens to voice out their sentiments in a universally accessible platform like social media, and in effect, retake public opinion from the hands of corporate media bosses and their political associates, especially the pronounced enemies of the president (Divinagracia, 2020). Yet for pro-Duterte influencers, the rise of independent pages is the rise of independent thinking, where political commentators can speak their mind more freely than those who belong to mainstream organizations. This is the first time in history, that virtually any Filipino with a smartphone can make their voices heard, with no editorial teams and business interests to prevent him from doing so. Indie pages, managed by regular people, now have a voice that can influence millions of Filipinos. This is democracy at work (Nieto, 201). Indeed democracy nurtures diversity of views. Yet, the lure of confirmation bias as a safe zone for protectors of the president and punishers of his enemies makes this diversity parochial like-mindedness. At best, it is a closed community, irrespective of its members’ exposure to various media dishing out unfavorable content against the president. The only key to open up this well-guarded community is to embrace the president and *his* people as authentic as they come. Even in the middle of a pandemic, this narrative hardly changed.

### **Student activism: The “necessary noise”**

The Philippines’ so-called “parliament of the streets” has a proud and enduring tradition of operationalizing mass dissent against the lapses and excesses of any sitting government. At the forefront of this undertaking are student activists, most prominently from the ideological left. Their groups have participated in almost every major protest since the pre-Martial Law years. The rise of the political and social consciousness among Filipino students was part of a growing sentiment against the enormous power wielded in the Philippines by a small, corrupt, self-perpetuating oligarchy (CIA, 1972). Samonte defines student activism as the involvement in mass demonstrations of young people drawn predominantly from college and university populations who are protesting the status quo or some segment of it (a phenomenon of varying magnitude, intensity and organization) and raising some problems of public order for the university and/or public authorities. Not falling within the purview of this definition are such activities as student government, campus elections, or membership in fraternities or sororities — enterprises that do not normally raise problems of public order (1970). But Valte looks at it from a social perspective, describing students as the most volatile section of the middle class. Since they are not part of the forces of production and due to their unique position in the university, they have every opportunity to study all the experiences of society with a sense of detachment. This in turn makes them receptive to diverse ideas and perspectives. Among all progressive sectors, the students are the most ideologically committed, borne out of their experiences in the struggle and their capacity to systematically study society. For

this reason, they are in the best position to carry out political education, criticism, and propaganda for or against the ruling class(es), the State, and the existing social order (1987). This paradigm molded student activists to be naturally anti-establishment, assuming the role of watchdogs against any form of political maneuvering or manhandling by those in power over the most vulnerable sectors of society. It has become, to some extent, a patriotic pledge, if not a moral obligation among student activists. One vital element of this is personal sacrifice, which protesting students have consistently shown at the cost of alienating family and friends hostile or passive to these “dangerous” demonstrations, and missing schoolwork, among others. On the other hand, there were other factors that motivate student activists to march on the streets and challenge the status quo.

At the heart of every protest are grievances — the experience of illegitimate inequality, feelings of relative deprivation, feelings of injustice, moral indignation about some state of affairs, or a suddenly imposed grievance (Van Stekelenburg : Klandermans, 1997). Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans also noted efficacy as a reason driving activists to protest. To them, people are more likely to participate in movement activities when they believe this will help to redress their grievances at affordable costs. The relationship is straightforward — the more effective an individual believes protest participation is, the more likely they will participate. Efficacious and inefficacious people take different routes to social change though — while normative forms of protest such as petitioning and demonstrations, tend to attract highly efficacious people, on the other hand, non-

normative forms of protest are more likely to attract low efficacious people (Tausch et al., 2008). Identification is another matter, accompanied by an awareness of similarity and shared fate with those who belong to the same category (Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013). This is driven by a shared sentiment among activists and the people whose interest they represent and champion. Experiences vary among individuals, but personal streams of emotion have a way of reaching a common outlet where these differences are reconciled and molded into a single voice, with the activist as social agent of change. Student activists frequently serve as a social and political barometer of their societies. Through the issues that they focus on, they sometimes point to flashpoints of concern, sometimes before these issues reach a social boiling point (Altbach, 1989).

In the Philippines, student activism shares a lot of similarities with the mainstream movement. Similar to the core organizations, student activist groups are mostly part of either the nationalist democrats (ND) or the social democrats (SD), as the two dominant blocs in the leftist ideological plane. Valte (1987) described ND as the precursors of the student movement in the Philippines, composed of a breakaway group that formed the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). It later gave birth to the *Kabataang Makabayan* (KM), which led student protests during the infamous First Quarter Storm of 1970. For KM and its fraternal organizations, the FQS marked the end of the student movement had fully transcended the confines of the academe and had merged itself with a broader movement for national liberation and social change. The CPP, for its part, lauded the activists' efforts to link up with the oppressed masses. Seeing in the ND student

movement a vehicle to advance its revolutionary project, it encouraged the students to launch more militant actions and more importantly, to join the New People's Army. This was in keeping with the Party's view that the urban struggle is secondary to that in the countryside (1987, 55). Now, most student activists are stereotyped as NPA cadres or at least set for recruitment by the communist insurgents. Others are simply typecast as street anarchists seeking to overthrow the entire political order and seize power from the legitimate or legal authorities. The apathy or lack of interest toward radical measures to reform society saw the emergence of the SD and its student affiliates, which sought political change through non-violent means. The SD stance rubbed well on student councils, especially in private universities. Its leaders were trained to "balance organizing and academics" but not all of them joined the mainstream upon graduation, putting a dent on the already fragile mass base of the organization. Valte noted how former activists saw one of the major weaknesses of the SD "student movement" which pertains to its cadre-formation: the inability to transcend personal and family problems that hamper their effectiveness in the political struggle. Corollary to this is the weakness of political guidance and skills-formation (1987, 57). She also mentioned a supposed "third force," the so-called independent socialists under the Student Union for the Realization of Genuine Emancipation (SURGE) in UP which organized former ND members and unaffiliated Marxists. This group criticized the ND's "sectarianism" and the "purely electoral politicking" of the SD, unlike SURGE which aimed to be "complementary rather than antagonistic to the efforts of (the NDs) in reviving student activism in campus." To this, SURGE

believed student commitment must be fired up by the concrete understanding of reality rather than by simply appealing to emotions. Student radicals must be capable of analyzing instead of merely mouthing slogans (p.59). The CIA considers the National Union of Students of the Philippines (NUSP) as a moderate student organization claiming to represent “about half of the country’s college and university students, but it is loosely structured and has had little sense of direction.” Student organizations in the Philippines have traditionally been, and still remain, very unstable. Organizations have sprung up only to be shattered as leadership feuds caused breakaway faction (1970, p.2).

Observers posit the ND-SD rivalry as an offshoot of the great ideological divide between the reaffirmists and the rejectionists. The schism began when Armando Liwanag (nom de guerre of Jose Maria Sison) issued a manifesto titled “Reaffirm our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors” which sought to revive the founding principles characterizing the Philippines as “semi-colonial” and “semi-feudal,” forging the alliance of workers and peasants to pursue a new democratic revolution, win over the urban petty bourgeoisie or middle class, and “encircle the cities from the countryside” in a protracted people’s war. Groups and personalities supporting the ‘reaffirm’ document were identified as ‘reaffirmists’ (RA), while those against it are ‘rejectionists’ (RJ). In recent years, critics have branded some Filipino youth activists as “slacktivists” for calling mass actions at the comfort of their personal spaces in social media. Radical youth movements today are seen as a chimera of the bygone era of a now-defunct ideology. The state-sponsored civic education simply dilutes

and channels youth activism towards slacktivism that supports government programs and state ideologies, while remaining blind to the neoliberal “regime of lives” that shape the curriculum. Youth activism today, therefore, is ‘decaffeinated.’ Like corporate social responsibility, it is equated with being “cool” and “hip” (Lanuza, 2015). But for better or for worse, the ideologically competing cliques of the student left have always provided the “necessary noise” to counter the deafening silence of subservience to the status quo, and in today’s context, the “echo chamber” of conformism to the country’s faltering crisis managers. In the age of the pandemic, student activists regardless of ideological pedigree, are dramatically combining social media protests with sporadic physical demonstrations to keep its voice and relevance afloat, despite strict quarantine restrictions.

### **PH COVID-19 pandemic response: An overview**

On March 7, the Department of Health confirmed the local transmission of COVID-19. A few days later, President Rodrigo Duterte placed Metro Manila, and later the entire Luzon under Enhanced Community Quarantine, a more technical term for strict lockdown measures. Opposition personalities readily lashed at the Duterte administration for its belated response and its decision not to issue a travel ban on Chinese tourists, as the number of cases spiked in neighboring countries. Palace officials defended this move, saying it would be the height of discrimination or xenophobia for the Philippines to bar the entry of its Chinese friends. The Duterte administration’s stand found stark comparison from other countries such as Taiwan, which immediately closed its borders to Mainland China after the virus spread like wildfire in Wuhan. This pro-active yet



politically charged measure paid off as Taiwan recorded only a few COVID-19 cases and fatalities despite its proximity to the virus' ground zero. Rather than shuttering its economy for weeks on end in an attempt to slow the virus, Taiwan went another way — after quickly closing its borders and banning exports of surgical masks, the government used contact tracing and mobile sim-tracking to identify and ensure those in quarantine were actually abiding by the rules. Taiwan has a single-payer healthcare system, medical officials held briefings for the public daily, and businesses were kept open by using aggressive precautionary measures like taking temperatures and providing sanitizer before patrons could enter business establishments. Throughout, the government's centralized response was seen as convincing and credible — it certainly did not hurt that Taiwan's vice president is an epidemiologist (Bremmer, 2020). Along with Singapore, South Korea, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada, Taiwan was included in Time magazine's list of countries with the best global response to the pandemic. Some of these countries will later experience a resurgence in infections, but their governments' ability to manage the issue with a relatively lower death rate was still commendable.

The Pew Research Center came up with a survey in late August which saw 73 percent of 14 advanced economies saying they did a good job handling the virus. Denmark had the highest national average at 95 percent, along with a 72-percent figure in terms of forging national unity to fight the pandemic. Only 27 percent of respondents believe their country did a bad job to contain the virus. However, division was pegged at 48 percent during the crisis, compared to a 46-percent feeling of

national unity in the face of the ongoing pandemic. In two countries – the United Kingdom and the United States – people are divided in their beliefs when it comes to rating their government's performance responding to the coronavirus. These two nations also have high levels of political polarization on views of the government's handling of this crisis. In the U.S., 76% of Republicans and independents who lean to the Republican Party say the government has done a good job, while just a quarter of Democrats and Democratic leaners agree, a 51-percentage point difference. A majority of right-leaning Britons (55%) give a positive rating to their country's handling of the pandemic, led by Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative government, but just 26% on the left hold the same opinion (Devlin, 2020). Meanwhile, 59 percent of respondents, mostly aged 18 to 29, believe more global cooperation can be helpful to reduce the number of cases in their country.

On February 3, the World Health Organization (WHO) published the first COVID-19 Strategic Response and Preparedness Plan (SRPP) which introduced three objectives to fight the virus: [1] establish international coordination to support countries to plan, finance and implement their response; [2] set out the necessary steps to ensure a clear and transparent global process to set research and innovation priorities, to fast track and scale-up research and development, and ensure the equitable availability of candidate therapeutics, vaccines, and diagnostics, and [3] beef up preparedness and response operations at the national level. WHO officials also urged governments to remind their citizens not to administer “unproven treatments” to COVID-19 patients until there is sufficient evidence to prove the efficacy of these medications as it awaits

the development of candidate vaccines. Experts are now studying if existing antiviral drugs can be used to mitigate the ill-effects of the virus through clinical trials. Some of these drugs which are part of the WHO solidarity trials are Remdesivir, Lopinavir/ Ritonavir, Lopinavir/Ritonavir with Interferon beta-1a, and Chloroquine or Hydroxychloroquine. The Philippines joined 100 countries in the solidarity trials in mid-April. The Philippines also began its trials of the Japanese antiviral drug Avigan last August. The WHO later included 13 vaccine candidates in the solidarity trials with the Philippines allotting an initial P30 to P40 million for every trial. The Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF) said it approved the recommendation of the DOST for the Philippines to collaborate in the trials for vaccines being developed by Taipei-based Adimmune Corporation, Academia Sinica of Taiwan, Chinese Academy of Sciences – Guangzhou Institute of Biomedicine and Health, Sinopharm Group Co. Ltd.-Wuhan Institute of Biological Products Co. Ltd., and the Beijing Institute of Biotechnology (Calica : Crisostomo, 2020). A fourth vaccine candidate – developed by Chinese manufacturer Sinovac Biotech Ltd – was also approved by the IATF for trial. But in mid-August, the Philippine government announced it will also begin its trial of the Russian vaccine candidate “Sputnik V” in October. No less than President Rodrigo Duterte volunteered to be part of the Sputnik V trials to assure the Filipino public amid safety questions from health experts. Russian President Vladimir Putin described Sputnik V as the first approved COVID-19 vaccine in the world.

In his State of the Nation Address, Duterte recalled government efforts to address the pandemic as a “war” which the country is due to win like his

infamous “war on drugs.” But critics clapped back at the president, stressing his failure to present a concrete road map to steer the country away from the COVID-19 crisis. Unprecedented though the crisis may be, Duterte's aberrant leadership has severely undermined the Philippines' already limited capacity to manage a national emergency of this scale. Just like other populists around the world, Duterte first obstinately ignored the pandemic, downplaying its potential to cause havoc, undermining the government's ability to implement preventive measures that have so helped nearby countries such as Taiwan and Singapore (Heydarian, 2020a). The president also drew flak from various sectors for rambling about other issues in his late-night public addresses supposedly mandated to report the progress of his administration's COVID-19 response activities since the lockdowns began in March.

Despite these criticisms, the Philippines still obtained a high satisfaction rating of 49 percent and ranked eight of 23 nations when it comes to COVID-19 response measures, according to a Global Crisis Perceptions poll conducted by insights firms Blackbox Research and Toluna. The same survey showed that 45 percent of Filipinos rated “highly” the Duterte government's efforts to combat COVID-19 while 37 percent also lauded the corporate leaders' amid the health crisis in the country. Thirty-six percent of Filipinos were also happy with the community's help while 78 percent believed the national media has performed responsibly during the COVID-19 pandemic (Valente, 2020). The poll which ran from April 3 to 19 and released in early May involved 12,500 respondents from 23 countries who were asked to rate their governments based on four indicators: national political leadership, corporate

leadership, community, and media. The public also appeared to back the government's strict quarantine measures based on an SWS survey in June, which showed 84 percent of respondents saying the stay-at-home measures "are worth it to protect people and limit the spread of the coronavirus." Only 15 percent believed it placed "too many burdens on people" (see SWS 2020a). The minimum health standards set by the government were also well-supported by Filipinos saying they always use facemasks (77 percent), wash their hands (68 percent) and practice social distancing (64 percent), based on an SWS survey in early May (see SWS 2020b).

Local officials were also deeply involved in the pandemic response efforts, although most Filipinos (60 percent) believed the national government "is more responsible for solving the COVID-19 crisis" according to a July survey (see SWS 2020c). A survey in early May showed the top-performing mayors of Metro Manila at the onset of implementing city-wide pandemic-response measures. Valenzuela City mayor Rex Gatchalian placed first among 17 fellow chief executives with a 92 percent rating. He was followed by Pasig mayor Vico Sotto, who had a little run-in with national government officials over the use of tricycles as public transport for residents and frontliners during the Enhanced Community Quarantine. Sotto got an 83 percent rating, while Manila mayor Isko Moreno placed third (76 percent). Marikina mayor Marcy Teodoro (69 percent) and Taguig mayor Lino Cayetano (68 percent) completed the Top 5. The survey also revealed 49.6 percent approve or strongly approve of their mayors' response to the pandemic, while only 26.8 percent disapprove or strongly disapprove and 23.6 percent neither approve nor disapprove (See Publicus, 2020).

Aside from Sotto's tricycle issue and a brief standoff between Teodoro and the health department over the Marikina molecular laboratory project to test COVID-19 samples, other local chief executives have likewise expressed qualms regarding certain nationally-led initiatives like the Balik-Probinsiya program, whose supposed loose requisites only spread the virus in the countryside from returning locally stranded individuals.

## Methodology

The paper drew the "necessary noise" model from a select group of student activists as primary interview respondents, who have first-hand knowledge as organizers and participants of various mass demonstrations in the past from the university or local to the national level. Information collected from them were done through structured interviews, where they were asked to answer a prepared questionnaire covering the background and extent of their involvement in student activism, knowledge of the coronavirus as well as the central and peripheral issues surrounding the government's COVID-19 response. The central issues were assessed to underscore the elements of medical populism underscoring Duterte's "echo chamber" in relation to his COVID-19 response. Meanwhile, the responses to peripheral issues were cross-referenced with the four thematic categories that served as the "necessary noise" against the Duterte administration's supposed unnecessary actions amid the COVID-19 crisis. The elements of medical populism are the following:

- [1] simplification of the pandemic which sums up to "downplaying the virulence or severity of the outbreak (e.g. 'It's just like the flu'), promising quick fixes like an effective drug (e.g.

hydroxychloroquine) or a forthcoming vaccine, or making simplistic arguments that pit liberty and the economy against public health (Lasco & Curato, 2019b);

[2] dramatization of the crisis, where political actors portray the pandemic as an exceptional threat as a pretext to gain ‘emergency powers’, while simultaneously casting dramatic measures of ‘lockdown’ and declarations of ‘war’ and ‘emergency’ as commensurate and valid responses to safeguard public safety (Lasco, 2020a);

[3] forging of divisions, which according to Laclau, involves a ‘dichotomic division of society into

two camps – one presenting itself as a part which claims to be the whole’ [2005, p. 83], pitting ‘the people’ against ‘others’ cast as a public health threat; and

[4] invocation of knowledge claims or assertions about the virus’ origin (e.g. ‘It came from a laboratory in China’), true epidemiology and patho-physiology, proposed cures and solutions, as well as projections of and prognostications about the future. While some of these claims go against established scientific facts and verge on fake news, they may just as likely involve invocations of ‘science’ and ‘public health’ (Lasco, 2020b).

**Table 1**

CENTRAL / CORE ISSUES DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE PANDEMIC RESPONSE  Weight score: 61-100	MEDICAL POPULISM (ECHO CHAMBER)			
	Simplification of the Pandemic	Dramatization of the Crisis	Forging Divisions	Invocation of Knowledge Claims to the Virus
<b>NECESSARY NOISE (RESPONDENTS REACTIONS)</b>				
<b>A. MILITARY-LED SOLUTION</b>		100 100 100 95 90 90 90		100 90 90 90 65
<b>B. PROBLEMATIC DISTRIBUTION OF AID TO AFFECTED FAMILIES</b>	90 80	100 100 100		
<b>C. LOCALLY STANDARD INDIVIDUALS SUFFERING</b>	100 100 100 90			

<b>D. QUARANTINE VIOLATIONS</b>		90 90 90 90 70		
<b>E. DISMISSING FRONTLINERS / EXPERTS SUGGESTIONS</b>	100 100 100 100 100 90 70		100 100 90 65	
<b>F. RELYING ON VACCINES FROM CHINA AND RUSSIA</b>	90			80
<b>G. MOTORCYCLE BARRIERS</b>				80 75 70
<b>H. DOH ACTION / DATA TRACKING MASS RECOVERIES OF COVID-19 CASES</b>				100 100 90 90 90
<b>I. DISTRACTIONS</b>	90 80 70 70 65			

On the other hand, the “necessary noise” for this study is categorized as follows: challenge/motivation to mobilize, government repression/questionable policies, corruption/other anomalies, self-serving motives/ revenge.

The respondents were student activists coming from the reaffirmist, rejectionist, and centrist quarters of the political left. They are between 18 to 25 years old, had at least three years of active

membership to a youth activist group, and had physically or virtually joined protests against the government since the quarantine period began in March. The central issues which the interview respondents commented on are the following: the Duterte administration’s military-led response to the pandemic, problematic distribution of aid to affected families, the suffering of locally stranded individuals, preference to some quarantine violators, negative view of frontliners’ call for a “timeout”, relying on

vaccines from China and Russia, motorcycle barriers, DOH actions and inconsistent data tracking on COVID-19 cases and distractions from the Palace itself. This alludes to peripheral issues such as the Anti-Terrorism Law, ABS-CBN shutdown, PhilHealth corruption scandal, calls for a revolutionary government, online classes, rallies and/or show of dissent, continuous anti-drug campaign, economic recession due to the pandemic, and the Manila Bay white sand project. These issues were chosen based on their prominence and recurrence in the country's pandemic news cycle since the lockdowns were implemented in mid-March.

Given the mobility restrictions set by the local and national governments as part of the COVID-19 protocols, the physical or face-to-face interviews were substituted by online interviews via Google Meet. The answers were coded through the qualitative software Max QDA and evaluated using the elements of medical populism and unnecessary actions to depict Duterte's pandemic-time "echo chamber." This enabled the researchers to come up with a more thematic analysis as to how student activism managed to stay relevant despite the physical restrictions brought about by the pandemic and the government's corresponding quarantine measures. The respondent answers were assigned weight scores to determine their proximity to the "echo chamber" issues highlighting Duterte's COVID-19 response. Weight scores that range from 60 to 100 were delegated to "core" issues or responses directly related to the government's pandemic response. The 1 to 59 weight scores were given to "peripheral" issues or responses on activism in general, knowledge of the coronavirus and news topics indirectly related to the pandemic.

## Results

There is no fundamental difference in the responses of student activists from the reaffirmist, rejectionists, and centrist camps in relation to the Duterte administration's medical populism and the central issues connected to the pandemic response. Table 1 shows the weight scores that represent the coded reactions ("necessary noise") for each aspect of medical populism ("echo chamber") in relation to the central issues. The full text of these responses can be seen on Appendix 1. If anything, they practically mirror each other's thoughts on the alleged government mishandling of the pandemic. Duterte's military-led solution to the COVID-19 crisis (see appendix 1, row A) largely was generally viewed by the respondents as a "dramatization of the crisis" by projecting the health issue as a "war" that must be fought largely by the country's uniformed personnel under the guise of law, order, and discipline. Given this situation, the respondents were hardly surprised that the majority of the members of the IATF are former military officials who also serve in the Duterte cabinet. In relation, they detested the human rights violations that resulted from this set-up, like the killing of former Army officer Winston Ragos by Police M/Sgt. Daniel Florendo during an altercation in a Quezon City checkpoint. Ragos allegedly violated quarantine protocols and threatened to shoot one of the police officers. Prior to this, Duterte had ordered the police and military to "shoot quarantine violators if they are unruly and prove to be a threat to law enforcers' lives after residents of a Quezon City barangay staged a protest demanding food aid, which they said they have yet to receive (Gregorio, 2020). Ragos was one of the casualties of this dramatization as what the respondents implied. According to the findings of the NBI Death Investigation Division, "the

elements of murder are present in the instant case,” adding that the killing “was attended by treachery and abuse of superior strength.” It said that Ragos was unarmed when he was shot twice by Florendo while the .38-caliber gun allegedly recovered from him was planted (Valenzuela, 2020). The respondents also noted how uniformed personnel overstepped the bounds of law enforcement by physically harming citizens whom they consider as quarantine violators without the benefit of explanation or due process. A telling fact with respect to Duterte’s approach is that, as of early April, his regime had arrested almost as many people for violating COVID-19 curfews and lockdowns as it had tested for the virus (Hartung, 2020). The respondents also questioned how “war” was contextualized against the virus, thereby neglecting the more health-related course of actions like increased mass testing amid the rising number of cases. Former military generals as heads of the government’s top policy-making body against the pandemic also intended to invoke knowledge claims on the virus, according to the respondents, given their lack of scientific and medical training to deal with a deadly pathogen. This underscored Duterte’s penchant for equating the virus to an arms-wielding enemy of the state and a health crisis to peace and order problem.

Problematic distribution of aid to families affected by strict lockdown measures fell on simplification of the pandemic, dramatization of the crisis, and forging divisions based on the respondents’ assessment (see appendix 1, row B). They deemed the government’s Social Amelioration Program (SAP) as a “quick fix” to help the public, particularly the poor, overcome unemployment and hunger as the economy —

and practically all human activity — were shut down to prevent the further spread of the virus. The Social Amelioration Program grants a P5,000 to P8,000 monthly cash subsidy to low-income families for two months, depending on the area of residence. The subsidies provide marginalized sectors of society the means to afford basic needs during the pandemic (Apostol, & Go, 2020). The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) earlier said 13.7 million beneficiaries have already received their cash assistance from the government, but criticism of the prolonged implementation of the aid program has continued (Ordinario, 2020). The SAP distribution, therefore, was only for good optics, since the government only wanted to emphasize the administration’s supposed concern despite massive irregularities in the dissemination of aid at the local level.

Aside from passing the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act (Bayanihan 1) which allocated P199.975 billion to the Department of Social Welfare and Development as SAP fund, the government has secured \$9.29 billion worth of loans from various international lending organizations to support its COVID-19 welfare support program, but the respondents still found it wanting for health care and educational assistance to the poor, with a lot of families still feeling the quarantine crunch. The Bayanihan to Recover as One (Bayanihan 2) is also no different, with the respondents seeing it as merely a stop-gap measure, despite carrying allocations to fund the improvement of health-care resources and cash-for-work programs, and provide agricultural support, assistance to affected industries and funds to purchase vaccines. The biggest share of the budget, around P39 billion, will go to loans

for sectors hardest hit by the pandemic like micro, small and medium-scale enterprises, transport, tourism, etc (Aurelio, 2020). The respondents believed the government's move to slowly re-open the economy under General Community Quarantine guidelines is also a dramatization, given government pronouncements that it will help the working class regain its financial bearing. This is only mere lip service as far as the respondents are concerned, calling it "fake concern" since it's the businesses, and not the skeletal workforce, that will benefit more. Duterte was granted emergency powers under Bayanihan 1. The special authority granted to the President under the Bayanihan law includes the provision of financial assistance to 18 million low-income households for April and May, the realignment of the national budget to fund COVID-19 response measures, and the procurement of personal protective equipment and other supplies for frontline health workers (Dela Ctuz, 2020). Duterte's new powers extend to the narrower sectors of hospitals and public transportation. He can direct private hospitals and medical facilities to house health care workers and serve as quarantine centers and take over public transport operations to ferry front-line workers. But even these measures have drawn criticism (McCarthy, 2020).

The Balik-Probinsiya program was likewise a simplification of the pandemic, which compounded the woes of locally stranded individuals (LSIs) as the respondents scored the government's thinking that herding people back to the countryside will help the public stay away from the virus in Metro Manila by relocating to the countryside (See Appendix 1, Row C). Duterte institutionalized the Balik-Probinsiya of his former aide, Senator Bong Go through Executive

Order No. 114. Part of the Balik-Probinsiya program is the provision of "comprehensive assistance packages" to encourage workers in Metro Manila or migrant workers to return to their home provinces and find employment there. But much of the Balik-Probinsiya program's components aren't anything new. It lists down initiatives that the government is already doing through various departments and agencies (Rañada, 2020). Go proposed the Balik-Probinsiya program last April, after several workers in Metro Manila who wanted to head back home to their provinces were trapped due to the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ). According to Go, this program is intended to prepare for the new normal that would be sprouting out of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this proposal was met with widespread criticism as it allegedly showed the administration's penchant for temporary measures instead of long-term solutions (Lalu, 2020). Thousands of Balik-Probinsiya beneficiaries were packed in crowded stadiums and other holding centers as they waited for flights, ferry and bus trips to the provinces. Physical distancing protocols were not followed as province-bound passengers swarmed airports, seaports and bus stations to get into the first available trip of the day. The respondents claimed the rising cases of the virus might have been brought by those who came from Metro Manila.

Quarantine violators drawing punishment from uniformed personnel is a by-product of the government's military-led response (see Appendix 1, Row D). But it is dramatized in such a way as to show "compassion" for administration allies who actually violated quarantine protocols, subjecting them to so-called investigations that appear only as mere procedural slaps on the wrist, based on the respondents' observation. They particularly



noted how activists and ordinary citizens, who observe physical distancing while protesting, were apprehended while some government officials got off the hook, notably Senator Koko Pimentel and NCR Police Chief Debold Sinas. The so-called *mañanita* to celebrate Sinas' birthday stirred an uproar as ordinary citizens raised the issue of double standards, with the PNP severely punishing those it deemed as quarantine violators while seemingly allowing gatherings in a police headquarters. Sinas and 18 other PNP officials were charged with Less Grave Neglect of Duty and Less Grave Misconduct, which carries a maximum 60-day suspension, and violation of Republic Act No. 11332 or "Law on Reporting of Communicable Diseases" and a city ordinance upholding quarantine protocols for staging then PNP chief Archie Gamboa defended Sinas, saying there was physical distancing during the event. But photos shared by the NCRPO on Facebook, some of which had been deleted, showed officers giving Sinas roses and cakes during the gathering. The official was also photographed mingling at a table while others lined up at buffet meals. Sinas said his men wore masks and gloves during their visit and that he gave them packed lunches. He also however claimed other photos circulating online were fake (ABS-CBN News, 2020). Gamboa though insisted the issue was already closed after Sinas and his men were charged. Pimentel for his part, drew flak particularly from medical workers after violating quarantine protocols. The senator accompanied his pregnant wife at the Makati Medical Center despite waiting for his swab test result. He eventually tested positive for the virus which caused an alarm among frontliners in the hospital. Pimentel claimed he learned that he had tested positive for COVID-19

when he was already at the hospital. Makati Medical Center had denounced the senator's "irresponsible and reckless action" which forced the hospital to quarantine more members of their depleted medical staff due to possible exposure to the virus (Pazzibugan, 2020). The Justice department is now reviewing the complaint filed by lawyer Raul Quicho against Pimentel for alleged violation of Republic Act 11332 or the Mandatory Reporting of Notifiable Diseases and Health Events of Public Health Concern Act and three Department of Health issuances -- Memorandum Circular No. 2020-0090, Advisory No. 2 and DOH Circular No. 2020-0080, concerning quarantine measures implemented due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic (PNA, 2020). To the respondents, playing the disciple card while practically absolving undisciplined and unprincipled public servants reflected the government's double standards, with ordinary citizens getting jail time and eventually being infected by the virus while in prison.

Also reflective of Duterte's simplification of the pandemic according to the respondents was his decision to forego the issuance of a travel ban against China, where the virus was said to have originated (see appendix 1, row E). While Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Hong Kong took the early initiative on travel restrictions and emergency measures, the Philippines was noticeably late to follow suit. Duterte ordered a travel ban only for passengers coming from Wuhan, China specifically on January 31, a day after the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in the Philippines. A few days later, the ban was expanded to the entirety of China, with the delay, as affirmed by Department of Health (DOH) chief Francisco Duque attributed to a reluctance

to upset relations with China (Beltran, 2020). The president even told the public there is nothing to worry about, and that the government is ready to address the matter, which eventually led to months of lockdown and rising cases, especially in Metro Manila. Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo for his part told the people to simply boost their immune system to avoid getting infected, amid calls for the government to show its COVID-19 response plan as

cases began to soar in neighboring countries. In one of his public speeches, the president also claimed the virus was airborne (*nasa hangin lang*) despite the health department’s pronouncement that its transmission is through saliva droplets. He asked his people not to be “hysterical” but instead “have faith in humanity,” especially since the Filipinos are a “resilient” people (Heydarian, 2020b).

**Table 2**

PERIPHERAL ISSUES INDIRECTLY RELATED TO THE PANDEMIC RESPONSE  Weight score: 0-60 / 61-100	UNNECESSARY ACTIONS (ECHO CHAMBER)			
	Challenging Protestors	Government Repression / Questionable Policies	Corruption / Other Anomalies	Self-Serving Motives / Revenge
<b>NECESSARY NOISE (RESPONDENT'S REACTIONS)</b>				
<b>A. ANTI TERRORISM LAW</b>	70 50 50	90 85 80 80		90 90 75 55
<b>B. ABS-CBN SHUTDOWN</b>		90 50 50		85 80 70 50
<b>C. PHILHEALTH ISSUE</b>			95 90 85 80 70 50	70
<b>D, REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT</b>			50	80 80
<b>E. ONLINE CLASSES</b>		90 80 80		
<b>F. RALLIES / SHOW OF DISSENT</b>	60 60 50 50		90	95 90 90 90

	50 50 50 40 30			
<b>G. CONTINUED ANTI-DRUG CAMPAIGN</b>		65 65 60 60 30		
<b>H. RECESSION / ECONOMIC PROBLEMS DUE TO PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN</b>	80	100 100 100 80 75	100 80 50	100
<b>I. MANILA BAY WHITESAND</b>		80 75 75 50 30		

Duterte also forged divisions by warning health workers from staging a revolution against the government after they requested for a “time out” or urging authorities to revert to a stricter Enhanced Community Quarantine as infections re-emerged in July and congest COVID-19 hospitals (see appendix 1, row E). The health department supported the medical frontliners’ plea. In sounding a distress signal, the medical community urged the government to collaborate with experts among them to refine current pandemic strategies. But Duterte took it the wrong way and claimed that “rampaging” doctors were crying out for a “revolution” (Tomacruz, 2020a). Malacañang said the president was hurt when the medical frontliners directed their plea to the media. Duterte’s social media supporters took the cue from there, lambasting the medical frontliners for making the government look negligent and insensitive. They were framed as pro-opposition or “Dilawan” and ingrates who only wanted to overthrow the government despite

all its efforts to address the crisis, even as various medical groups denied staging an upheaval against the administration. The respondents saw it as an attempt to pit the medical frontliners against the people. In reality, it is the public health system and the medical frontliners, especially in government, that suffer the most with meager salaries and inadequate equipment as a result of budget cuts. One of the respondents noted the medical frontliners complained because they saw the government is practically doing nothing to help them.

Relying on vaccines, most especially from China and Russia is another simplification of the pandemic (see appendix 1, row F). The respondents thought the Duterte administration is not really addressing the pandemic by just waiting for a vaccine and making it appear that there’s nothing the government can really do. This smacks of fatalism and wishful thinking hinged on the so-called “mutual ties” of Duterte with the leaders of

China and Russia. The respondents doubt if these powers will actually prioritize the Philippines over their own constituents once the vaccine is available. Duterte singled out China, which he said was unlike other countries seeking a “reservation fee” or advance payment. “The one good thing about China is you do not have to beg, you do not have to plead,” he said. “One thing wrong about the western countries, it’s all profit, profit, profit” (SCMP, 2020). Philippine laws prohibit the government from buying things that have yet to be produced. The president also threatened Western pharmaceutical companies that are asking for advanced payment for the vaccine. The respondents also noted the issue of the Russian vaccine not completing the trail stages to prove its efficacy amid safety concerns even as Duterte volunteered to a test subject for Sputnik V. Experts have warned that Russia’s decision to approve its Sputnik V vaccine, despite barely starting Phase 3 clinical trials, gambled safety and public trust – elements crucial in effectively vaccinating people (Tomacruz, 2020b). The country’s vaccine expert panel though would disqualify Duterte in the Phase III trials because priority will be given to people aged 18 to 59 and are at high risk of coronavirus infection. These people include health workers and contacts of COVID-19 patients (Yee, 2020). Undoubtedly, the respondents do not like the idea of the Filipino people acting as guinea pigs of China and Russia in the vaccine trials.

Obliging motorcycle riders to install barriers before travelling also underscores the government’s attempt to invoke knowledge claims to the virus, respondents said (see appendix 1, row G). They called it “illogical” since the rider and the back-rider are both wearing masks and closed helmets, which

health experts say are enough protection against the virus. There is also no scientific evidence supporting the effectiveness of the barriers to prevent the virus transmission. The barriers even caused accidents because of aerodynamic issues. The motorcycle brands that comprise the Motorcycle Development Program Participants Association, Inc. (MDPPA) pointed out in their July 21 statement that the shield (barrier) would “create significant wind resistance when the motorcycle is in motion,” which would “drastically reduce” aerodynamic efficiency and also make it easier for crosswinds to throw the motorcycle off-balance even when running at low speeds (Inquirer, 2020). Couples or relatives living in the same house were barred from riding together without a barrier. The IATF eventually scrapped the barriers as a requirement for motorcycle riders with a backride living in the same house and under General Community Quarantine. The backrider must also be an Authorized Person Outside Resident (APOR) like medical frontliners or those with passes. But the announcement was only made after most riders have bought a barrier for their motorcycles, which the respondents branded as a waste of money. After the announcement, some netizens demanded the government to reimburse the money used to purchase the safety barrier, following the previous national government directive (PressOne, 2020). The respondents likewise deemed the government’s drastic, and sometimes unannounced changing of parameters for tracking, recording, and consolidating COVID-19 cases as another case of invoking knowledge claims to the virus (see appendix 1, row H). The most glaring of this so-called medical manipulation was declaring mass recoveries among asymptomatic patients even if the virus is still present in their

systems during the 14-day quarantine period. The DOH explained that this clinical recovery protocol is followed by the United States' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the European CDC and India. Citing its interim guidelines, the DOH said that asymptomatic cases or those who never experienced any symptoms or showed signs of being sick must follow 14-day isolation management protocols from the day of swab testing (Jaymalin : Mateo, 2020). The IATF has approved a resolution adopting the DOH recommendation to implement a "time-based reckoning" for COVID-19 recoveries. But to the respondents, this move was just a face-saving measure to offset the government's alleged incompetence, amid the rising cases of COVID-19 infections despite months of lockdown. Another issue central to the government's pandemic response are the distractions or trivial matters that some Palace officials throw before the public which the respondents saw as a means to cover up their incompetence (see appendix, row I). The respondents did not enumerate these distractions. But the researchers believe they are pertaining to the peripheral issues that came amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Responses to peripheral issues indirectly related to the COVID-19 pandemic were cross-referenced with the protest-inducing themes which student activists deemed as the "necessary noise" to confront Duterte's "echo chamber" anchored on his medical populism. Table 2 shows the weight scores for the coded responses ("necessary noise") to the president's other unnecessary actions amid the pandemic ("echo chamber") in relation to the peripheral issues. The full text of the responses can be seen in appendix 2. The enactment of the

Anti-Terrorism Law at the time of the pandemic was the biggest challenge for student activists in terms of mobilizing their ranks and expressing their concerns to the government (see appendix 2, row A). But the respondents though admitted, the new law helped unite the opposition, which included the left. Yet did not concede the fact that the measure is "unnecessary for the people" as the country continues to fight an unseen enemy like COVID-19. The Anti-Terrorism Law simply doesn't "inspire confidence" in the government" and would only be used to violate human rights by labelling activists and civic workers as "terrorists." Other respondents see the law to propagate "red-tagging" and Duterte's way to consolidate power under the guise of legality. It will not solve the roots of terrorism in the country. They likewise claim that the law was passed as a result of the IMF-World Banks' pressure on the government to protect foreign investments in the country.

The ABS-CBN shutdown amid the pandemic was also a flashpoint for the respondents, which saw the closure of the country's leading broadcast network as another "unnecessary policy" of the Duterte administration (see appendix 2, row B). It actually brought disservice, with the public needing to stay updated about the pandemic, especially in far-flung areas that only ABS-CBN's signal can reach. The issue also fell on the revenge category of the study, with the president vocally declaring in past speeches that he will make sure to shut down the network for its journalistic bias against his administration. The respondents were also convinced that the non-renewal of ABS-CBN's franchise to operate is not just about press freedom. It is also a labor issue as 11,000 workers lost their jobs amid the economic

pains brought by the pandemic, following the network's massive retrenchment to prevent further financial losses. Duterte, by and large, reprised what former president Ferdinand Marcos did to ABS-CBN during the Martial Law period, the respondents added. One respondent, though, defended ABS-CBN for broadcasting critical stories or commentaries against the government "because that is their job" and that "it is a business more than an advocacy." But despite ABS-CBN's supposed bias against the government, Duterte allies in Congress were obviously prejudiced and gave the network a run-around, added the respondents.

Corruption and other irregularities dominated the PhilHealth issue, based on the respondents' observation (see appendix 2, row C). It did not help that the billion-peso disbursement scandal involving the country's state insurer was exposed during a health crisis. The respondents believed PhilHealth should not be run like a business which prioritizes the earnings of private hospitals over the medical welfare of the poor, especially during the pandemic. The respondents likewise noticed how some supporters of the president blamed Sen. Risa Hontiveros, even if the former PhilHealth board member has nothing to do with the corruption fiasco. It has only distracted the public's attention away from the medical frontliners, and families that bore the economic brunt of the pandemic. Meanwhile, talks of forming a revolutionary government amid a health crisis smacks of self-serving motives, according to the respondents, even if the government has distanced itself to the issue's supposed proponents (appendix 2, row D). It becomes obvious that the present administration wanted to stay in power beyond

Duterte's term, said one respondent. Another thought Malacañang did not take this "rev-gov" calls seriously, to spare itself of a "creating a monster in the middle of the pandemic." One respondent said pushing for federalism as an offshoot of a revolutionary government will not achieve its goal of decentralized power. It will actually concentrate it in the hands of one man and his allies. When it comes to online classes during the pandemic, the respondents believed that the government should have heeded calls for an academic freeze, as they questioned the readiness of the Education department to conduct distance learning via the internet. Some students were forced to drop out this year due to lack of funds to support their online schooling, from buying electronic gadgets to securing a stable internet connection, which comes at a price. Aside from online classes, students were stranded in dormitories because of the government's belated decision to stop physical classes.

Government measures to stifle public dissent and opposition is three-fold as far as the respondents are concerned (appendix 2, row F). Yet while the ban on mass gatherings and threats of police arrests pose challenges to their ability to mobilize street protests, the respondents felt it helped unite their ranks as part of the opposition in countering the administration's oppressive policies during the pandemic. As students, they admitted having difficulties reaching out to their youth bases in schools and communities, despite the availability of online platforms for communication. But some respondents stressed how student activists' focus on key issues were easily distracted by trivial matters thrown by the government. They still believe talking to people on the ground is more

effective in mobilizing mass action. The respondents likewise found the administration's deployment of uniformed personnel as pandemic-time frontlines anomalous and unacceptable, underscoring the police and military proclivity for abuses. One of the respondents recalled how a teacher was arrested for posting a status saying he would order the president's killing out of frustration, even if it was supposed to be a joke. Student activists have also echoed various medical associations in urging Health Secretary Francisco Duque to resign for his incompetence despite the president's insistence that the cabinet official should remain in his post to oversee the pandemic response. Duterte has repeatedly said on national television that he still trusts Duque and sees nothing wrong with the health chief's management of the pandemic.

The respondents frowned upon the Duterte administration's questionable policy of continuing a bloody anti-drug campaign amid the pandemic (see appendix 2, row G). They even compared it to the punitive measures the police resort to in dealing with quarantine violators. Just like COVID-19, they said illegal drug use is a health issue addressed by the government through police and military means. The drug-related killings have persisted even as the country grapples with the pandemic. Government continues to disregard pleas from human rights groups to stop its repressive actions against both victims of illegal drugs and COVID-19, the respondents added. Recession and economic problems due to prolonged lockdowns further exposed the questionable policies the government has imposed to deal with the pandemic (see appendix 2, row H). The respondents thought the country could have averted 27 million job losses had

the president listened to the health experts early on to issue a travel ban to China before the first cases of community transmission in the country were reported. The government was also slow to address the difficulties of medium and small enterprises greatly affected by the lockdown. Some respondents believe the unabated practice of contractualization only worsened the situation for most workers who were easily terminated by companies in the red. Opening up the economy will only endanger the health of the workers, the respondents added. They likewise implied corruption with the government's repeated pronouncements that it has no more money to fund cash aid programs for the poor and the struggling middle class, despite securing huge loans from international lenders. Some of them fear that Duterte can use the ongoing economic crisis to consolidate his power and project himself once more as a political messiah deserving of a term extension. One respondent thought the youth to empirically define and challenge existing theories, politics and economics amid the dangers posed by the pandemic.

Manila Bay's dolomite beach project was a product of another question, according to the respondents, who deemed it as a mere distraction and a waste of resources that could have been used to help people affected by the ongoing health crisis (see appendix 2, row I). It only drew public attention away from the government's shortcomings during the pandemic. Some respondents called it a band-aid solution to the environmental woes that attended Manila Bay for decades. The dolomite sand overlay across the rehabilitated beachfront did not clean the polluted waters, the respondents added. But one respondent blamed the DOH for flip-

flopping on its statement about the health hazards of dolomite sand after the Environment department said it has scientific basis to rebuff these claims. Another suggested it could have been better if the authorities planted mangroves along the Manila Bay instead of dumping dolomite sand on its shores.

## Discussion

The analysis of the data revealed that the respondents were very much aware of the government's COVID-19 response. But their knowledge of the issues relative to the president's medical populism and other unnecessary actions amid the pandemic does not end with a simple enumeration of the supposed negligence and transgressions of the current administration to its people. It brought to the fore the struggle for political relevance as the government continues to control the bigger portion of the public narrative, hinged on a constant reminder that the Duterte administration is doing its best, despite criticisms, to overcome the challenges of this health crisis. Change advocates like student activists may be perceived as whiners or mudslingers that only see the shortcomings of government. Yet it is important to note that in the context of the public sphere, a determined opposition is crucial to ensure the political resolve of the incumbent. While it is vital to heed public opinion, presidents traditionally utilize the collective counsel of their political advisers, in and out of government, especially in situations that require immediate attention such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet based on the respondents' observations, backstopped by news accounts, it appears that the president's inner circle was also liable for keeping the chief executive either confused, ignorant, or visibly out-of-touch about the scientific

facts and socio-economic details that could have better directed and managed the national pandemic response. Some Palace officials would cover up for these blunders by conveniently charging it to the president's witticism (i.e. "nagbibiro lang ang presidente"). It also did not help that the president was easily piqued by criticisms, particularly from the left, prompting him to resort to scare tactics. Yet for the respondents, Duterte's medical populism and other unnecessary actions during the pandemic are simply aggravating circumstances that only worsened the plight of the poor and marginalized. Their responses basically gravitated to the recurring subjects of double-standard, corruption, and insensitivity of the administration from both central and peripheral issues. While it is true that the government could have done more, this outlook presupposes that any sitting president should have ready answers to the worst problems that might confront the country, which implies nothing but an impracticable Philippine utopia under a messianic leader. This comes even as Duterte's supporters continue to project him as a political martyr who would rather turn the other cheek and endure the tainted heckling of the mob (that includes the respondents and other quarters from the opposition) than fail to deliver the people from personal damnation caused by the pandemic. On the ground, this portrayal seemed to work based on a recent public perception survey on the government's pandemic response. Pulse Asia found out eight in 10 Filipinos approve of Duterte's response to the pandemic. Meanwhile, 92% of Filipinos believed that President Rodrigo Duterte has "done well in terms of preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the country," according to the Pulse Asia survey. Only 3% disapproved (Gavilan, 2020).



The study also showed the thought process which the respondents employed to generate critical statements against the Duterte government's COVID-19 response. Most of the responses against Duterte's medical populism and his other unnecessary actions were criticisms that were already expressed and repeated in the media by a broader portion of the activist movement and other cause-oriented groups. It risks the danger of courting political hobbyism or the practice of merely "arguing about the news, sharing the news, reacting to news, and being an at-home pundit about the news. All of those things that involve giving politics your headspace and emotion but not doing the real work of it" (Hersh, 2020). While it staves off indifference from the youth during a health crisis, mere reiterations expose the quality of criticisms to charges of partisan thinking and rhetorical parroting along ideological lines. Viewed by their political adversaries as a noisy bunch of anti-establishment fence-sitter, it now behooves student activists to break from the mold and unlearn certain convictions which determine the results of their criticism even before they can express them in the public forum. These convictions function as apriori truths that inform the activist critic's analysis. Thus, the results are often preordained and conveniently support the activist critic's political point of view (Black, 2000). One major pitfall of hardline, ideology-loaded criticisms is that it espouses templated thinking that is no better than the government's groupthink and yes-men, even as some observers argue that everyone is ensnared, consciously or unconsciously, in his own ideological trap which periodically escapes through manifestation of one's beliefs.

Student activists can argue that they are just responding to the vicious cycle of government ineptitude and the same general problems that continue to beset public administration, now exacerbated by the pandemic. Their clamor for change and reform remains the same, thematically consistent and enduring, for as long as public authority remains averse of their criticisms as suggestions to better governance. But then again criticisms should be proactive, in the sense that it offers realistic or operational alternatives to the conventional wisdom of the sitting power. The Duterte administration can always claim that the peripheral issues in this study are also major concerns in relation to the government's pandemic response, hence it should not treat COVID-19 as a be-all and end-all problem that requires undivided attention. It has to be forward-looking. Yet in essence, this spin is only a characteristic retort to the political left's supposed jaded negativity and relentless finger-pointing from a government standpoint. In addition, peripheral issues distracting student activists from holding the government accountable for its botched pandemic response, only implies the establishment has succeeded in muting their collective voice, as one of the respondents observed. Some are tactful in dissing the Left. They recognize the role of activism in politics, but they also quickly dismiss it by demonizing the struggle and tilting the discussion towards the other supposedly superior forms of political engagement. They usually cite the positive legacy of activism in their lives, and some are exhorting the public to respect activists, but they always emphasize the futility of perpetual dissent (Palatino, 2015).

It takes two to tango. Some of the respondents managed to pitch workable alternatives to address the COVID-19 debacle and offer a level-headed assessment of the government in terms of avoiding ill-conceived decisions that mislead the president, sticking to the key issues of the day rather than gaslighting or distracting the public, and toning down its political pride in the face of public suffering. Yet all these are just words that foreshadow public recommendations. Government must recognize all, if not some of them, as concrete solutions to the problem at hand as conceived in the moment of dissent. Essentially, the moments of dissent require an open questioning of the political and social orders, regardless of their being translated into a broader societal change or a narrower institutional change. Broadly stated, dissent is the expression of oppositional voices and the manifestation of disagreement against the dominant order, but it must be taken into consideration that not all people are included in the political discourses since they are excluded through the politics of consensus (Bak Jorgensen & Agustin, 2015). In terms of politics of consensus relative to the sitting power, the student activists and the general left are deemed outsiders, therefore barred from directly charting the direction of the pandemic response. The incumbent's authority to exclude only reinforces, if not galvanizes, the echo chamber enclosing the presidency, resulting in pronouncements espousing medical populism and other unnecessary actions that could hinder a more decisive and potent response against the pandemic. It is also worthy to note the aspects of medical populism that the president has adversely articulated through his late-night speeches. He tends to simplify the impact of the pandemic by telling the public about the

“solutions” his government has come up with and dramatizes their response by appealing to the Filipinos' never-give-up spirit which is historically invoked during wars or disasters to command unity and cooperation among the people. But he divides the people at the same time by portraying the opposition and those questioning or offering alternatives to his policies as obstacles to resolving the difficulties brought about by the pandemic. He then invokes knowledge claims to the virus by subscribing to unproven remedies or solutions, thus confusing the public that takes his words both as public policy and household rule of thumb. Taking the cue from a recent Pulse Asia survey, people tend to buy Duterte's medical populism and defend his supposed unnecessary actions because they hardly see the liberal opposition and the political Left as viable alternatives to the pseudo-science and other untimely ventures of the sitting power. Given his high trust and approval ratings despite steady criticisms, it can be said that Duterte has effectively incited the public to partake in his echo chamber and consequently ignore the “necessary noise” or political dissent of his critics, which include the student activists. The president and his men “relish things unsaid.” They simultaneously hide from public attention things that they don't want others to notice, such as the political dissention of student activists (Keane, 2018).

In the post-truth age, where feelings supplant or suppress facts, it's the student activists' moral obligation to lead the citizenry out of the emotional vortex of populist pandering. However, self-awareness has to be exercised. The activists are well aware of how they were positioned by the Other, i.e. the right-wing politicians, as militant left-

wing extremists. Strategies to contest this position could be observed, often by using the discourse of participatory democracy to position themselves as active citizens. However, the activists also used the adversary's discourse in their favor, to position themselves as peaceful demonstrators and the politicians as undemocratic and authoritarian (Svensson, et al, 2012). This portrayal can only go so far. Demonizing authorities in the post-truth age and against the political backdrop of a popular president will only deepen public resentment against student activism, assuming the survey numbers about the administration's high trust and approval ratings hold ground for the entire duration of the pandemic. Student activists at this point should present a counter-narrative not hinged on black propaganda and vitriol that the prevailing narrative has been resorting to since the president assumed power. Matching the Duterte administration's condescension with the same imposing pontification is akin to a political stalemate that does not benefit anyone, especially a pandemic-troubled citizenry. Civil disobedience is a misplaced course of action at this point. Some respondents in this study have done their best to reach out at the community level through projects that seek to help those affected by pandemic-related measures. Their initiative will never match the resources of the state, but it is a step in the right direction.

Student activism must redirect political dissent to the path of participatory democracy. Anti-establishment critics and dissenters must not short-change nor betray their convictions by retreating to the comforts of political opinion-making behind the keyboard or in front of the camera. It must continue to engage even the most indifferent of

administrations until the democratic spaces open up for inclusive debate and discussion on better governance. It must also engage the disinterested non-activist to overcome their political passivity and exhibit more discernment of issues anchored on the Duterte administration's appreciation of the COVID-19 crisis. In parallel with activism are debates about activism. If a particular form of action alienates too many people, then it is hardly worth doing. Therefore, convincing people that forms of action are acceptable is a key part of making activism viable. Debates about activism take place in the media, in everyday conversations, and not least among activists themselves (Martin, 2007). It may appear as wishful thinking. But Rome, like the Duterte administration, was not built in a day. In the end, the "necessary noise" must permeate the president's men who hold the keys to his "echo chamber." It could be a Herculean task, but the medical frontliners who called for a much-needed "time out", regardless of the president's combative reaction, were heeded by the sitting power, anyway. This only shows that the echo chamber is not formidable nor impenetrable. The president's inner circle must generate the "necessary noise" from within unless it wants to deft-tone the administration and pin the blame yet again on the opposition, which include the left and the unaligned among the swelling ranks of student activists amid the pandemic. Duterte, as part of public politics, is inescapable at the moment. But student activists and the political dissent that continue to foster their "necessary noise" cannot be dismissed nor ignored by simply cupping both ears. Medical populism, against the march of science and consensus politics, is never soundproof.

## Recommendations

The experience of student activists in pushing for their advocacies amid the COVID-19 pandemic deserves further study. The researcher suggests involving other non-aligned groups as respondents to gain a broader understanding of the circumstances fronting the student activist movement in the country in relation to the government. For future studies, examining the online platforms used by student activists to engage the public and the government would help develop a more inclusive literature about this emerging area of discourse. 'Slacktivism' or social media activism could be the starting point. It would also augur well to succeed this exploratory study with a research update at least a year from now to track the progress of opinions by both the student activist sector and the government in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Media coverage of student-led protest action and public reaction to these demonstrations can likewise add another dimension to this pandemic-time subject. The tenets of participatory democracy, political dissent, post-truth politics, and new findings on populism and call-out culture can also serve well as explanatory variables to grow the area studies on pandemic-time student activism and how it responded to what it perceived as government incompetence, negligence and excesses at the height of this health crisis.

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## Appendix

<p><b>CENTRAL / CORE ISSUES DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE PANDEMIC RESPONSE</b></p> <p><b>Weight score: 61-100</b></p>	<p><b>MEDICAL POPULISM (ECHO CHAMBER)</b></p>			
	<p><b>Simplification of the Pandemic</b></p> <p><i>“downplaying the virulence or severity of the outbreak (e.g. ‘It’s just like the flu’), promising quick fixes like an effective drug (e.g. hydroxychloroquine) or a forthcoming vaccine, or making simplistic arguments that pit liberty and the economy against public health (Lasco : Curato, 2019b);</i></p>	<p><b>Dramatization of the Crisis</b></p> <p><i>political actors portray the pandemic as an exceptional threat as a pretext to gain ‘emergency powers’, while simultaneously casting dramatic measures of ‘lockdown’ and declarations of ‘war’ and ‘emergency’ as commensurate and valid responses to safeguard public safety</i></p>	<p><b>Forging Divisions</b></p> <p><i>‘dichotomic division of society into two camps – one presenting itself as a part which claims to be the whole,’ pitting ‘the people’ against ‘others’ cast as a public health threat</i></p>	<p><b>Invocation of Knowledge Claims to the Virus</b></p> <p><i>true epidemiology and patho-physiology, proposed cures and solutions, as well as projections of and prognostications about the future. While some of these claims go against established scientific facts and verge on fake news, they may just as likely involve invocations of ‘science’ and ‘public health’</i></p>
<p><b>NECESSARY NOISE (RESPONDENTS REACTIONS)</b></p>				
<p><b>A. MILITARY-LED SOLUTION</b></p>		<p>So they’re treating the pandemic like they are treating a war, like they are attacking insurgents very kita yan sobrang kita yan when it comes to the language they employ kita yan on how they mobilize forces. (100)</p> <p>...yung three main leaders, military leaders of the government’s covid-19 response: Eduardo Ano, Delfin Lorenzana, and all the retired military generals they are trained first of all not to address public health concerns most of their trainings and backgrounds are rooted in counter-insurgency they are rooted in war. (100)</p> <p>...human rights violations in relation to the quarantine since police</p>		<p>...kung sino nalang yung available I think so yun nalang yung mga pinaglead sa mga inter-agency task force natin (100)</p> <p>because of you know sa nangyayari ngayon, it’s quite depressing kasi in spite all of their actions, despite all of their efforts curbing the rise of the cases, hindi magawa kasi those people are not really trained to contain viruses (90)</p> <p>Their experience is to contain what? Activism, crimes,. Those are actually enemies that are seen but this pandemic this is actually an invisible enemy and the only way to combat it is through science (90)</p>

		<p>and military presence in these communities have indeed resulted to instances of police brutality and abusive power (100)</p> <p>...these police presence have only resulted to more blatant forms of police violence so there's the killing of Winston Ragos. He was killed because the police...uhhh, tensions with the police" (95)</p> <p>So I think the military response failed and absent a mass testing policy, the absence of aid, then the scare tactics failed miserably and this is attributed by the rise in case". (90)</p> <p>At the same time, we have seen videos of policemen aggressively punishing violators- hitting them with sticks, forcing them to sit under the sun or illegally detaining them in cages" (90)</p> <p>It's not to curb the pandemic but to further strengthen the architecture of state repression (90)</p>		<p>Another thing that really depresses me or disappoints us, the young people, is the way these officers are saying na 'kaya kayo nagka-COVID kasi ang titigas ng ulo niyo' if you remembered that right palaging ganon ang bukambibig ng mga pulis pag makikita ka sa lansangan, lalabas ka lang naman eh para mahanginan if your house is so small, you need to go outside because if you won't die from COVID, you will die from suffocation and heat kasi summer tumama ang COVID sa atin so lalabas ka lang sa tabing kalsada mo sasabihan kanga ng tigas ng ulo mo magkakaCOVID ka pag nagkaroon ka ng COVID sasabihin ang tigas ng ulo mo (90)</p> <p>So if you will think of it that way, that is actually a social disease part of the social cancer that the Filipinos should be able to heal because if we cannot heal that timeless disease, magpeperpetuate lang siya in a circular motion so in the next pandemics, wag naman sana or in the next crisis, wag naman sana (65)</p>
<p><b>B. PROBLEMATIC DISTRIBUTION OF AID TO AFFECTED FAMILIES</b></p>	<p>My view on this is it's true that the distribution of aid has been problematic. They weren't able to reach their targets. The government in terms of giving away the two hundred billion pesos aid to families affected by the pandemic since March. And they have been granted a fresh mandate in Bayanihan 2 (90)</p>	<p>..they're fake concern for workers who lost their jobs kaya very aggressive sila in pushing for the reopening of.. quote unquote reopening of the economy which is for me a fake concern since ang main target naman nila diyari is to reopen the economy for businesses not exactly for workers (100)</p>		

	<p>They've loaned nine trillion already and yet the budget for 2021 is still so small already in all aspects in terms of aid provided for families affected by the pandemic, in terms of ensuring hospitals and healthcare systems get to have adequate equipment or even salaries for workers. Schools still need to grapple with connectivity especially with schools who are grappling with online classes already (80)</p>	<p>Yung distribution ng social amelioration, first of all very prone yan to corruption since at the barangay level kita naman dito na even in the barangay level na parang uneven yung distribution hindi lahat ng constituent ay nakakatanggap ng ayuda and prone yan to political favors corruption (100)</p> <p>If they genuinely wanted to protect the interests of workers or those who are affected by the unemployment brought by the pandemic uhm in the first place they should have implemented in ahh easily, or they could've implemented earlier the needed public health measures (100)</p>		
<p><b>C. LOCALLY STANDARD INDIVIDUALS SUFFERING</b></p>	<p>It's a reflection of the government's shortsighted policies eh when people they are putting crowds and crowds of people in the stadium and pabalik nila ng probinsya (100)</p> <p>I think that this is a problem that really racked up, that really increased our Covid-19 cases. Seeing that not a lot of them were given proper sleeping quarters, for example. Not even tents in grandstands where they were housed. And a lot of them were forced to sleep on sidewalks, to create make-shift tents, and a lot of them were stranded because a lot of them were hoping to make a life in big cities in Manila</p>			

	<p>or be able to go out of the country and make a living abroad (100)</p> <p>...while the policy to bring them back to the provinces is should be okay if implemented properly but instead we could see how disastrous it was for people and for the provinces since some of the provinces didn't even have cases before the balik-probinsya and now they had cases because of people moving back from urban areas (100)</p> <p>the government has not been proactive they have been reactive that is why all of the existing wounds of the society is being solved one by one ganun lang ang ginagawa but to really ensure the totality of the whole thing (90)</p>			
<p><b>D. QUARANTINE VIOLATIONS</b></p>		<p>You can see a double standard when it comes to government officials and wealthy people who gather in huge numbers while activists who do mobilizations are readily repressed by the government. So it seems that these health protocols are only in place to control and repress people (90)</p> <p>Reflection yan ng double standards ng gobyerno, and reflection yan ng gusto nila mangyare using the quarantine (90)</p> <p>If they are not punishing or prosecuting administration allies and officials for violating the quarantine, while they are arresting the poor;</p>		

		<p>while they are arresting activists, it only goes to show the true motives of the quarantine - it's not to curb the pandemic but to further strengthen the architecture of state repression (90)</p> <p>there are literally workers in jail right now who committed the smallest of quarantine violations like going beyond the curfew or going out without the proper permits or documentation. These quarantine policies are anti- poor at best (90)</p> <p>...yung kay Senator Pimentel lahat tayo na piss off because the government is forcing us to stay at home to be like cavemen na bahala na kung anong mangyayari we're staying at home and we're all scared then we will find out in other news that Senator Pimentel not only violated the quarantine procedures but spread, kinalat niya pa yung virus because nagpunta siya sa ospital at nakakatakot nung panahon na yon kase baka nahawaan niya pa yung misis niya. And then plus the fact na you were saying yung kay police chief pangalan neto Debold Sinas (70)</p>		
<b>E. DISMISSING FRONTLINERS / EXPERTS SUGGESTIONS</b>	Ah and then you some 2 months after you get local transmission you get suddenly an outbreak of cases and then the government found itself panicking because of this outbreak of cases it could no longer contain (100)		<p>Ang request nila kung bakit gusto nila mag-time out is for the government to recalibrate its approach (100)</p> <p>...for the longest time economic and social policies that are geared toward privatization and austerity measures so</p>	

	<p>...yet they continued to dismiss those calls no saying that it's not it's not feasible they can't imagine ahh one country in the world that can test all people and yet they weren't listening to ahh the calls of medical experts (100)</p> <p>...so ayun nga it's incompetent it lacks the plan in order to address the coronavirus.. it's unable to listen to ah science to medical experts to evidences on the ground and and because of this all the the responses will always come too late and too few (100)</p> <p>First in January, even only if the government imposed travel restrictions to countries that are heavily affected by COVID-19 pandemic. Then they wouldn't have to deal with all these months of lockdown, all these rising cases, and all these business operations that have stopped (100)</p> <p>Because late tayo nagsimula syempre late din yung response. Imbis na maging proactive yung response natin, everything is reactive noh pachi-pachi. We will always just try to cover one wound instead of preventing a wound from happening (100)</p> <p>If you remember in the first parts of this pandemic January or February, the president belittled the pandemic. So he belittled the</p>		<p>pagbabawas ng budget on public health, privatization of medical facilities and public hospitals that have all crippled yung public health system dito sa bansa and that have negatively affected yung response natin to the pandemic (100)</p> <p>At the same time, it is also symptomatic that our government cannot hire more health workers with adequate pay and cannot even implement policies since March of giving them special risk allowance or hazard pay, or giving them regular positions (90)</p> <p>Ang ginagawa nila rather than addressing people's legitimate demands, they are vilifying people for speaking up, discrediting yung source and silencing people who are qualified to lead the health sector (65)</p>	
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	<p>threats of the pandemic despite the calls of different agencies or at least of the Vice President na ipasara yung mga gateways ng Pilipinas (90)</p> <p>They are not actually tired of the system because they were born to do it and they should accept the fact that the moment they entered the health sector, they will be swarmed with countless bodies, lifeless and with lives. Sanay sila sa kamatayan sanay silang makakita ng may sakit. Ang hindi sila sanay is yung naghihirap na nga sila and they are not actually complaining. Nag-complain nalang sila when they saw that the government is not doing anything to help them (70)</p>			
<p><b>F. RELYING ON VACCINES FROM CHINA AND RUSSIA</b></p>	<p>It is sad that we have resorted to becoming guinea pigs with residents in some cities accepting clinical trials from these pharmaceutical pharmacies and I hope they get paid. At the same time, the Philippines has become a subservient guinea pig to these super powers racing to get the vaccine but it should be focused in responding to the global call for a people's vaccine where countries have equitable access to the vaccine. Rather than the current scenario where richer countries are currently buying in bulk (90)</p>			<p>We also need to accept it with caution because it's a favor that might lead us to some unwanted effects. There have been news na ganon because the Russian drug I think is still on its infant stages, hindi pa siya fully accepted. I think part ng clinical trials parin yung ibibigay sa Pilipinas or what have you so technically it's not yet a proven vaccine and the world is still looking for a vaccine so for the government (80)</p>

<p><b>G. MOTORCYCLE BARRIERS</b></p>				<p>Generally, I understand where the government is coming from that perspective. But part of it is also illogical since ngayon bigla nilang binawi kung kelan na nakabili yung mga tao ng barriers e. And those barrier's cost what? Thousands sa pagpapagawa? So instead of doing it, nasayang pa yung pera ng tao (80)</p> <p>It is the most useless law. There has been a lot of outrage against this- the uselessness of this, and the weeks after its implementation the Department of Transportation and the DILG would say that it is no longer needed, only to show that there was no plan in the first place and that its just whatever happens, happens for the Philippine government (75)</p> <p>After a week or so, di na raw pwede o parang di na kailangan or parang meron paring questions about the use of the motorcycle barriers because engineers who are better thinkers said that it will actually disrupt the aerodynamics of the motorcycle and will actually imbalance magkakaroon ng problema sa balance yung motorsiklo which is technically true siguro again biglang ano nalang yung government natin gusto lang nila makaisip ng mga bagay (70)</p>
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<p><b>H. DOH ACTION / DATA TRACKING MASS RECOVERIES OF COVID-19 CASES</b></p>				<p>...it's hard to trust the government's figures since pabago-bago din sila ng criteria na ginagamit when it comes to tallying yung cases so nandyan yung biglang massive recovery na very questionable in a time na na-report yung Pilipinas as one of the highest number of cases dito sa region (100)</p> <p>So the cases of mass recovery is also unscientific and provides no assurance to people. At best it is only cosmetic, only for them to save face. Whereas, there have been reports where they were marked as recovered when in fact a lot of them have already been dead. Or they were marked as recovered where swab tests would say otherwise. So it does not give us confidence that our institutions are working overtime to ease us out of this lockdown and protect Filipino families from this pandemic (100)</p> <p>Very questionable yung ganyang data if we're constantly changing yung criteria e. Kasi frankly, para na syang manipulation (90)</p> <p>Of course, may motive ang government for manipulating ang data, lalabas at lalabas sa datos gaano ka-incompetent yung response e, kung gano ka-ineffective (90)</p> <p>When I found out that nagkaroon ng mass recoveries parang thousands</p>
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				<p>of people suddenly recovered in a span of a day, nainis ako para bang ano ba to totoo ba to or what. Then my good friend inexplain niya sakin sabi sakin kasi yung kaibigan ko na yun he works in a hospital but he's not a doctor it's just so that he is in charge of the systems of the hospital and he told me na oo ginagawa talaga yan ng mga ibang bansa o ginagawa rin yan ng mga ibang countries because technically yun yung mandato ng world health siguro sa atin masyado lang nanegative kasi yung nagsasabi ng mass recovery eh medyo mababa na ang integridad (90)</p>
<p><b>I. DISTRACTIONS</b></p>	<p>And I'm sure the president means well you know, siguro at this time, we should not really give all the burden to the president. I'm sure he means well to his people but the thing that makes him worse is that he doesn't know how to delegate and he doesn't really know the situation of his people because he remains blind because of his advisers because of the many ways that the advisers are trying to paint the picture lightly to him (90)</p> <p>...naging hobby ng administration natin na pag merong hot topic, gagawa sila ng medyo maliit na topic para dun magfocus lahat so parang nagkakaroon ng disarray so habang busy sila na gingawa yung mali,</p>			

	<p>tayo naman busy tayo na pinupuna yung mas maliit na mali. So they are able to perpetuate and as well as kill the issues that is hunting them one by one (80)</p> <p>It's not their fault na gusto nila makaisip the thing is minsan sa kakaisip nila, hindi nila napag-isipan ng mabuti or hindi napagisipan nung nag advice the same thing sa nangyari kung bakit bali baliko yung balik probinsya program (70)</p> <p>Although technically di ko naman sinasabi na sila may kasalanan pero aminado naman sila kasi wala na ko nakikita halos na nagmomotorcycle barrier so maybe the only weakness of the government in implementing rules for COVID is that it was so fast, the government is fast in the imposition of rules that they forgot to make sure that all the angles are properly reviewed so yun (70)</p> <p>...the president means well, he needs to choose his advisers very well because it might turn out that yung pinagkatiwalaan niya will be the one who will give him the worst troubles. If you will remember in Rome, the emperor was killed by the imperial guards. So he should not let that happen in our country (65)</p>			
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# Of resilience, radiant smiles and silver linings: COVID-19 and Filipino youth narratives of hope and optimism

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## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has, by far, brought out the best and the worst even among the young . In fact, many of the present regarding the youth in this pandemic highlight the need for emotional and psychological guidance, especially for the adolescents who are going these troubled unprecedented times in their lives. This study anchors itself in an attempt to highlight narratives of resiliency and empowerment of the youth in the face of the pandemic. Particularly, various lived experiences of the Filipino youth served as the focal point of analysis. The study made use of a qualitative research design anchored on phenomenology. A total of five distinct narratives through lived experiences were incorporated. Through understanding narratives harboring on their individual experiences, this paper intends to show the resiliency and empowered spirit of the Filipino youth.

## Keywords

COVID-19, emotional, psychological, youth sector, narratives, resiliency

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has, by far, brought out the best and the worst. The worst can be seen in the fatalities, long arduous lockdowns, and crippled economies, while the best can be gleaned in how the people restored their faith in humanity brought about by this crisis. In fact, Khan (2020) and Duddu (2020) mentioned how the present global ordeal spurred stories of sacrifices, as well as selfless acts by numerous front-liners in various fronts which have been documented and shared in various platforms.

While it is still far from seeing the end to this ordeal, and as the world grapples with problems on how to fight the disease head on and its eventual

effects on societies, one dimension of the society hardly hit by the pandemic emerges is the youth.

The youth sector and its vulnerability has been the base of contentions of numerous studies (Zaharieva, 2015; Sacks, 2020; Miks, & McIlwaine, 2011; & Sanders, 2020). In fact, many of these works highlight the need for emotional and psychological guidance, especially for the adolescents who are going these troubled unprecedented times in their lives.

In fact , Khan (2020) opined that children and teens who are yet emotionally and socially matured to understand the gravity of the situation, and even frontliners such as doctors, other health

care providers, and first responders are mostly vulnerable to the ill effects of the current condition.

At the core of it, humans are social creatures. In lieu, these increasingly stringent social restrictions are put into place, thus, losing these important connections on individuals can come at a high psychological cost. Hence, these have resulted in an increased number of people feeling lonely; that loneliness, in particular, has been linked to a number of adverse health outcomes especially for the young (Douglas, 2020).

The European Public Health Alliance stated that "feelings of loneliness and social isolation, heightened by the current public health crisis, can have severe health consequences for a number of socioeconomic groups; this furthermore limits the access of normal daily activities, not just going to work, but normal social interactions with others provokes mental health issues, and weakens physical health for those who already struggle to maintain good health and wellbeing".

Added to this is the problem brought about by the new normal in education provision. While a shift to online education maybe the best option at this point to counter the threats posed by COVID-19, there are some challenges to online learning. This includes the student perceptions of isolation and lack of community (Cook, 2007; Lyke & Frank, 2012; Rochester & Pradel, 2008; Summers et.al, 2005). In addition , Kilgore et.al (2020) also hinted at the hardships being encountered by the youth when it comes to compliance with academic requirements while on quarantine. The authors also pointed out at the new environment with which the teenagers will

have to get accustomed to. Furthermore, many of them have actually grown apart from their siblings and parents, and are more comfortable with their peers, but are now left with no choice.

Despite the flexibility and commitment shown by schools and teachers in securing educational continuity during school closures, not all students have been able to consistently access education. An OECD study across 59 countries demonstrates that although most countries put in place alternative learning opportunities, just about half of the students were able to access all or most of the curriculum (OECD, 2020). In effect, individuals can surmise that the impact of Digital Divide has been more glaring than ever brought about by the pandemic.

Another impact of the said pandemic to the youth sector can be seen the aspect of Employment. Experience shows that younger workers are often the first to have their working hours cut or to be laid off (ILO, 2020). In fact, it was indicated in a 2008 study by the ILO that economic declines have led to a much faster increase in the youth unemployment rate compared to the rate for adults which brings them at a rather disadvantaged position. Rural young people, especially young women, are highly vulnerable; since most of them are likely to be employed in the informal economy and often have low-paid, less-secured and less-protected jobs.

It should also be noted that rural youth aged 14-17 are, owing to the overall risk of increased poverty, at a greater risk of exploitation of hazardous work and thus child labor, especially in the agricultural sector and manufacturing sector.

In addition, social protection mechanisms that are being implemented in the context of the COVID-19 crisis to safeguard incomes may not be accessed by rural youth or do not take into consideration the specific vulnerabilities they face (fao.org, n.d).

Low-paid and temporary employment in sectors most severely affected by the crisis (e.g. restaurants, hotels and gig industry) are often held by young people, who are now facing a higher risk of job and income loss. 35% of young people (aged 15-29) are employed in low-paid and insecure jobs on average across compared to 15% of middle-aged employees (30-50) and 16% of older workers (aged 51 and above) (OECD, 2020).

In the Philippines, the gloomy picture of youth unemployment because of COVID-19 shows estimates of at least 687,000 Filipino youth to as many as 1.019 million may be rendered jobless by the pandemic. The lower forecast assumes infections are controlled in three months, while more layoffs are expected if it takes six months to manage the situation using various containment measures, including movement restrictions. (cnn.news.org, n.d). This is because the hardest hit sectors in the Philippines are the services sectors which employ mainly the Youth work force.

Despite of these negative effects of the COVID-19 to the youth, it is also worthwhile to understand how the current crisis has been handled by young people. The challenges brought by the pandemic have actually brought out the best in the Filipino youth. In fact, it is notable that young people having more time for themselves, i.e. self-love, perhaps learned a thing or two,

particularly in creative works such as writing poetry or engaging in arts and crafts . There are also inspiring stories of young people who have excelled in their entrepreneurial pursuits by having their own businesses. For many young members of the household, this became an opportune time for them to rekindle lost connections in the family. Indeed, this situation can be seen from different perspectives and one can certainly turn these challenges into opportunities

## **Research Objectives**

This study anchors itself in the attempt to highlight narratives of resiliency and empowerment of the youth in the face of the pandemic. Through the analysis of selected youth experiences in this time of a global health crisis, this study aimed at the following:

1. To demonstrate Filipino youth empowerment in the midst of a pandemic through narratives enunciated in selected cases;
2. To show opportunities that arose out of the current situation highlighting the resilience and tenacity of the Filipino youth;
3. To provide ample avenues of inspiration needed in these trying times.

## **Methodology**

The study made use of a qualitative research design anchored on phenomenology.

In this paper, various lived experiences of the Filipino youth anchored on the pandemic served as the focal point of analysis. Through

understanding narratives harboring on their individual experiences, this paper intends to show the resiliency and empowered spirit of the Filipino youth.

A total of five distinct narratives through lived experiences were incorporated in this paper. The first involves a college student, a son of two former factory workers who both lost their job because of the pandemic. The second is a Grab food driver who is also presently enrolled as a Senior high school student. The third narrative centers around an SK Chairperson from Mariveles, Bataan, the fourth corresponds to the lived experiences of a Mangyan youth leader and the fifth, actually are a selection of viral posts of stories from social media regarding youth empowerment in this time of COVID-19.

### **A new day**

**TRD** is presently completing his college degree in Computer Engineering when the pandemic struck. He lives in Bagong Silang, Caloocan City with 6 of his other siblings and his mother and father. His father used to work in a factory in Valenzuela City as an Inventory clerk while his mother is employed as a packer in a biscuit factory.

The family has been struggling because his mother also has diabetes and must maintain medications while his father has a severe case of arthritis which sometimes renders him unable to go work. All of his five other younger siblings are still studying, 3 of whom are in elementary while the two younger sisters are in Junior High school.

With a combined net monthly income of 21,000 pesos, the family is struggling to make both ends meet with expenses ranging from food, rent, electricity, water and school necessities piling up in addition to loans from the previous month that needs to be settled. The family situation is what can be referred to as ‘hand to mouth existence’. Then the pandemic struck.

TRD is now in his 3rd year of completing his college degree. When news about COVID-19 started to spread, his family immediately took precautions on the premise that being infected with the disease will take a hard toll on their already challenging life. In fact, TRD’s family is what many may call a tightly- knit one. His parents imbued upon them the values of kindness and fear in the Lord. In fact, their strong Catholic orientation and their deep faith in the Almighty is what they believed has been guiding them all these years. Despite of the hardships that they are facing, their family never waned in their belief in God. “ *Sa dami nang pagsubok na nagdaan po sa amin Sir, hindi po pwede na walang kakapitan, mahirap lang po kami pero pinalaki po kami na may matinding pananalig sa Diyos kaya kumbaga po nalalabanan namin lahat ng pagsubok kasi nasa amin ang Panginoon* ( TRD, Interview via FB Messenger, August, 5, 2020).

But when the pandemic struck, it was a very difficult time for the family. When the lockdown was imposed in March of this year, immediately the employers of his parents immediately ordered a work stoppage in compliance with the government directive. Having no savings and also on a No-Work-No-Pay status, the future indeed looked bleak for the family especially that the pandemic is just in its initial stages.

In the interview, TRD narrated how it is to be poor in the midst of a pandemic. The small house that they are renting has very poor ventilation yet they heeded the stay indoors warnings of their local community officials. His mother, who also suffers from hypertension set forth by her diabetes at times, feels suffocation because of the hot summer months of the lockdown. It was also a challenge how to get her medicine since the barangay health center was focused mainly in Covid 19 operations.

He opined; *Ibang klase po yung dagok ng Covid lalo na sa amin na mahihirap. Kasi kung dati nga na may trabaho mga magulang ko, eh hirap na po kami na makaraos, ngayon doble o triple po yung epekto sa amin. Mahirap po talaga, maliit lang bahay naming, napakainit, wala po kami pangkain kundi po magbibigay ng ayuda yung City Hall, wala po kami isasaing.* (TRD, Interview via FB Messenger, August, 5, 2020).

He mentioned also how his father had to brave through long lines even to the point of disregarding social distancing measures just to have his name listed in the Social Amelioration Program of the Department of Social Welfare and Development. His father believed that the 8,000 pesos that he can get from the government can be budgeted at least until lockdown restrictions have been relaxed.

The ECQ proved to be a very challenging phase in the young adult life of TRD. In fact, there are times that he will just break down in tears especially when he sees that his parents are in pain because of their physical conditions and also when his younger siblings complained to him of the hunger that they

are experiencing. For TRD, it was a painful sight that he cannot do anything about. The helplessness of the lockdown rendered himself futile despite of his desire to seek help or anything outside just to get by on a day to day basis.

*Mahirap po kasi Sir kasi kahit gusto ko lumabas at maghanap ng pera para pambili ng pagkain, natatakot din po ako baka mag ka Covid at mahawa ko po mga kapatid ko lalo na mga magulang ko lalo na may sakit po sila. Kaya yun po ang hirap kasi wala ka talaga magawa kundi mag antay at magdasal na sana matapos na itong kalbaryo naming* (TRD, Interview via FB Messenger, August, 5, 2020).

TRD mentioned how the pandemic has imposed great challenges on his mental well-being. He also hinted at the many times that he felt depressed of their condition. But it was his faith in God that kept him going on. He kept on holding on to the belief that God will never give someone something that he or she cannot bear. Being an optimist also paved the way for him to better understand and accept their current predicament. He knew that he must not falter and that he cannot let his family down.

By the month of June, lockdown restrictions were relaxed from and this is when TRD saw a window of opportunity. Being a naturally talented cook, TRD started off a business selling breakfast online. From a meager 500 pesos that he saved from the cash assistance program of the city, he started his food business.

He mentioned: *Ako po kasi, mahilig po talaga ako sa umaga, favorite time of the day ko*



*po yun talaga , kasi parang lagi syang may dala na biyaya, bagong pag asa, kaya naisip ko po na breakfast ang itinda kasi ito po yung unang unang ginagawa ng tao paggising kasi po syempre after matulog nang matagal , sa umaga gutom sila kaya syempre bibili sila ng almusal ( TRD, Interview via FB Messenger, August, 5, 2020).*

TRD sold omelets, pancakes and Silog meals until 10 am. He takes orders online and delivers the food to nearby areas using his bicycle. From 500 pesos, his revolving capital now has grown to 16,000 pesos. His father, who has yet to be recalled back to work, is also helping him in his business. In afternoon until early evening, he attends to his school and in the evening, he prepares the things and ingredients needed for his breakfast business the following morning.

He opined; *Siguro nga po minsan kailangan dumating yung mga pagsubok sa buhay natin para ipakita kung gaano tayo katatag. Itong sitwasyon na 'to, itong pandemic na ito, natuto po ako na maniwala lalo kay God at sa sarili ko na walang mangyayari kung magmukmok lang at madedepress. Mas maganda, magdasal, magpahinga, lumaban kasi lagi naming may bagong umaga ang isang bagong araw. (TRD, Interview via FB Messenger, August, 5, 2020).*

### **A new order**

**FG** is a 19 year old First year college student taking up HRM. Ever since, he grew up to be very independent minded and always wanted to help ease out family financial burden by working at an early age. At the age of 17, he started working at a popular fast chain. When he got enough experience, he tried

to apply as a part time service crew in a restaurant. He started October of 2019 and was actually doing well in his job. It was also at this time that he decided to have a motorcycle that he can use going to and from his work and school.

FG has always been optimistic about life and he believes that when a person knows the value of hard work and possesses the integrity and other positive values of being just and good, success will not be far behind. And even if he grew up in a family that is not well off, his dreams were further buoyed by the desire to be a known chef someday. He believed that all his efforts will pay off and that the struggles he is having at the moment will be replaced with a better life ahead.

In fact, he quipped: *Alam ko naman po sa sarili ko na hindi ako pinanganak na may kaya sa buhay. Maaring hindi man kami sobrang hikahos, hindi rin naman po kami yung masasabi na maayos talaga so ayun po yung ginagamit ko na motivation para po kayanin ang pagod at pyuat sa trabaho at pag aaral kasi naniwala po ako na sipag lang po talaga ang susi para sa lahat ng pangarap natin and syempre prayers (FG, Interview via FB Zoom, August, 15, 2020).*

When the pandemic started and lockdowns were imposed, FG felt immediately that this will have a big impact on his dreams. The restaurant where he works for closed indefinitely and new, part-time employees like him who works is on a No-Work-No Pay scheme was the first to be informed about the lay-off. To him, it was indeed a big set-back in a sense that he lost a source of income that supports his schooling; he also lost the experiences and learning that he is able to obtain from his job on the restaurant.

He added: *Sobrang eager po kasi ako matuto kaya sa kitchen pinapanuod ko po talaga yung mga master at sous chefs naming kasi andami kong pointers at techniques na nakukuha. Ito din po yung dahilan bakit ako lumipat from Mc.Do to a resto... Kasi po mas gusto ko talaga matuto kaya nga po sobrang hinayang ako kasi hindi ko na magagwa poi yon dahil nga po stop operation muna kami so wala na work, wala pa po ako experience kumbaga. Pero ganun po talaga eh. Kumbaga another struggle po para sa akin* (FG, Interview via FB Zoom, August, 15, 2020).

For days, he stayed at home especially during the hard lockdown of the ECQ and this is where he felt that there must be a way that he can get by even in this situation. He was very thankful that he has a very supportive family who stood by him and he was also there always making sure that his parents will not feel anxious about the situation.

*Actually, sobrang nagworry po ako nun sa family ko kasi alam ko medyo nandun talaga yung takot syempre baka mahawa , tapos yung isipin sa mga bills, pagkain , syempre mabigat po talaga lalo na at biglaan. Pero siguro ang maganda po naman nun eh since nasa bahay lang kami most of the time nung ECQ, nakakatuwa din in a way kasi nagkaroon kami ng time magkwentuhan, yung mga kapatid ko, dati halos hindi ko na alam ang ginagawa nila, or kung sino mga kaibigan nila, ngayon parang mas tumibay kami bilang isang pamilya, mas malalim yung unawaan atsaka lagi kaming sumisimba online kaya yung nakatulong ng malaki din yung lockdown* (FG, Interview via FB Zoom, August, 15, 2020).

In the midst of it all, he didn't lose hope. One of his friends advised him to be a Grab food rider. His friend helped him secure all the papers necessary and also gave him tips on how to earn with being a Grab rider. Since he has a motorcycle, it was not hard for him to get into the program. When the quarantine was relaxed sometime in June, that's the time he started with his new work.

He said: *Medyo mahirap po din yung naging adjustment kasi sa Grabe delivery po talagang nasa labas, mainit at exposed sa virus pero nag iingat lang po talaga ako, sinusunod ko lang po maigi yung mga protocols like hugas lagi ng kamay, tapos alcohol, face mask. Mainit lang po talaga pero kailangan* (FG, Interview via FB Zoom, August, 15, 2020).

But the adjustments were also replaced with fulfillment thereafter. In fact, he also mentioned how his outlook in life was affected especially that they are also considered as front-liners to this pandemic.

*Masaya po that yung ibang tao nakikita nila yung value nung ginagawa namin. In a way, nakakatulong kami na maiwasan yung pagkalat ng virus kasi hindi na lumalabas yung mas maraming tao, kumabaga order order na lang sila tapos sobrang thankful naman sila pag naibigay namin ng maayos yung order* (FG, Interview via FB Zoom, August, 15, 2020).

On a daily basis, he is earning more than 1,000 pesos from his current work including tips from customers. This is more than what he earns from his previous job in the restaurant. In between orders, he is also able to study his lessons while waiting for the next delivery. He is happy and

contented with what he is doing now. His optimism and determination never waned down, his desire to succeed proved to be even stronger than this crisis. His firm resolve to follow his dreams and succeed was even more intensified by the pandemic.

Its almost 4 PM, FG had to leave and said goodbye as his app notified him of a customer placing a delivery for 3 boxes of pizza. With a smile, FG prepares himself, heads on to the store as he takes on the new order.

### **A new perspective**

**JP** is a resident of Mariveles, Bataan. She has been an active Youth leader in her hometown and at the age of 18 years became the youngest barangay (community) councilor. Two years ago, she was elected as Sangguniang Kabataan Chairwoman and has been very active in youth governance ever since. JP already obtained her bachelors degree and is presently pursuing her Master's degree in Public Administration.

JP is an epitome of a truly committed youth servant leader. Since the time she ventured into active community service, she has been one of the most active youth leaders of the province of Bataan and a testament to this are her numerous accolades and recognitions for her youth based advocacies.

She believes that it's the passion and the commitment to be of service to her constituents that ignites her dedication towards public service.

But just like any other individual, JP also felt a deep sense of anxiety especially with the onslaught of Covid 19. In fact, she mentioned that

she was indeed fearful of the virus especially that its new and that there is no vaccine for it and from what she saw in various news feed from around the world, the virus is indeed deadly. She also felt some mental and emotional dilemma at the onset of the pandemic because her father has a preexisting condition.

On top of it all , she worried about her constituents and other youth volunteers for their safety. This is in line with the fact that Mariveles, Bataan is the epicenter of Covid 19 infections in the whole province. In fact, the fear of contracting the disease is really there because they are at the front line of service delivery.

She quipped: *Nung mga unang months po ng lockdown, mga March and April, mahirap po talaga kasi dumadami po talaga ang cases namin dito sa Bataan tapos andun po kami sa gitna para pangunahan po yung efforts ng provincial government sa pagsugpo sa virus. So kumbaga, yung ibang tao nasa loob ng bahay pero kami hindi pwede kasi kailangan naming magserbisyo. Maraming meeting , tapos kailangan I finalize at I execute yung mga programa lalo na sa SK level. So ayun po yung mga concerns namin lalo na mga kabataan mostly yung kasama ko sa opisina* (Interview with JP, July 15, 2020 via FB Messenger).

She also mentioned how at she grappled with mental anxieties but also maintained that their coping mechanism has been that of service. She understood the mental stress of the lockdown and as a true leader reminded her council that the best way to beat anxiety is by keeping themselves preoccupied. So she aggressively mobilized her

other co-officers in the SK to think of projects and pursue their meaningful execution in the face of the pandemic.

In fact, she always maintained that this pandemic is truly a challenge to her servant leadership but she always had the firm resolve to take on any challenge. She also mentioned that it is in crisis situations like this that her mettle as a worth leader is being tested and that she want to emerge victorious in the end.

She added, leadership is not about status, and not about the recognition. It is about the desire to make a positive impact and touch other people's lives positively. That has always been her mantra, her perspective.

But this pandemic has set forth many challenges compared to what she faced in the past. Crisis situations like this Covid 19 pandemic necessitates a different kind of perspective, in fact it challenged her to take on a new perspective towards youth governance and leadership.

She added that it is in these times where she really feels the compulsion to serve, to deliver and to deliver well.

The truth of the matter is that she put this vision, this new perspective into action.

She added: *Ang gusto po namin talaga yung sana makita ng mga tao at maramdaman nila na may gobyerno na nakaagapay sa kanila sa ganitong mga panahon. Yung nakikita nila yung mga elected officials nila na tunay na naglilingkod. Mahirap*

*kasi habang ginagawa namin ito , kailanganan din naming alagaan mga sarili namin para hindi kami mahawa , pero sa maghapon masaya kami kahit na pagod dahil alam naming na may nagabayan at natulungan kami, kumbaga , buhay ang presensya ng pamahaalan at nararamdaman iyon ng mga tao (Interview with JP, July 15, 2020 via FB Messenger).*

JP mentioned some of the programs that her SK unit spearheaded. – First of which is the School in a box Program. It is a literacy program wherein kids aged 2-5 year old kids were being taught especially that the classes will open later around October of the year. This is to ensure ample preparation for the school children to educate and familiarize them with Online/ Blended learning. In addition to the educational component of the program, it also has Parental Component in which the parents were also thought of how to better guide and facilitate the learning of their children in this time of pandemic. Partnering with MSWD, 11 volunteer teachers guiding /partnership with Edu Child parenting program webinar about families was regularly provided to equip parents with better knowledge to handle their children especially in this time of pandemic . Lastly, they also have a Feeding component wherein they provided hotmeals to children and teen agers in their barangay for 28 days.

They also started the *Aral- Agapay* program for high school and college students without internet connection so that they can complete their school activities and study modules. They also had the *Kusina sa Barangay* wherein families in the community were regularly fed for a period of one month. In addition, her council has also been very instrumental in providing the needed manpower

and logistic support to the Barangay chairman in these trying times.

For JP and her co officers in the SK ( Youth Council), the Covid 19 pandemic made them look at youth governance with a new hope, a new vision, a new perspective.

### **A new path**

**SG** is a Mangyan youth leader residing in Occidental Mindoro. At a tender age of 20, he has served in various capacities. First as a representative of Mindoro in the Global Youth Governance Summit and also has been elected as SK Chairman until 2017. He has also been an ardent supporter of Indigenous People's Rights movement both at the local and national levels.

He grew up in the hinterlands and saw for himself the gradual transformation of his community. But he believed that his hometown tribe is still far from development and modernity. Life remains hard for his native brethren. They face a multitude of problems ranging from agricultural devastation from calamities and illegal logging, to lack of proper health, education and sanitation in the Indigenous communities. Poverty is still a major concern exacerbated by the lack of means for economic mobility for the people.

For him, being a member of the Indigenous Cultural Community or ICC is a very challenging ordeal especially in the midst of a pandemic. He mentioned some of the realities, challenges and lessons learned from the pandemic.

The first problem that he identified is the proliferation of wrong information among the natives. According to him, false news tend to spread faster because of the lack of education among the many members of the IPs in the area. This is serious because the spread of these hoaxes about Covid 19 and the virus may lead to people becoming infected. Thus, he mobilized an information campaign drive especially in the mountains and maintained seminars in the mountains to educate the people about the right information concerning COVID-19. He also added that Internet Connectivity is a big problem in their area.

Another problem is the lack of facilities and resource mobilization in the course of lockdown. He mentioned at how food and other relief items are not being able to reach the mountains so he alongside other tribe leaders mobilized logistic efforts to bring the relief goods from the LGU's to the IP's in the mountains.

Moreover, another issue goes with how to test and isolate people from the city and other areas where there are rampant cases of infections. There are no testing sites in the hinterlands and that effective efforts at isolation must be maintained. But the problem is compounded by the fact that there are no medical personnel deployed in their area to provide health care and testing. They also do not have isolation facilities which really make it harder to have concrete efforts aimed at addressing the Covid 19 dilemma.

In this regard, SG spearheaded a campaign wherein he solicited alcohol, disinfectants, face masks, and face shields from various mining

companies in the area and the goods that he obtained were given freely to the IP communities. This was a difficult task considering that they are racing against time to contain and prevent any sort of infection in the mountains because it will be a health crisis if this happens.

In addition, it was also a challenge to convince people of the nature of the disease because the IPs possess cultural inclination or a specific set of beliefs about diseases and pandemics.

The existence of the pandemic for SG is truly unprecedented. He has been involved in many efforts in the past but this one is different because they also need to think of their own safety while performing advocacy work. According to him: *Mahirap talaga ang sitwasyon kasi kulang kami sa suporta financial lalo na, mahirap din dahil masyadong malayo ang kapatagan and wala din gamut at testing kits para sa amin kaya talagang sakripisyo para wag mahawa at para hindi sya kumalat sa kabundukan kasi delikado talaga sa hirap ng kalagayan naming mga katutubo.* (Interview with SG, August 15, 2020 via FB Messenger).

He added that sometimes, he just breaks down because of sheer tiredness coupled with lack of sleep. He mentioned that the steep slopes from down the plain up the mountains to distribute safety supplies like soaps and alcohol and food is really a daunting task.

He looks at this condition with utmost optimism and believes that this will also pass. As he looks on his life and how it has been committed to worthwhile service to his native community,

he thinks that this new path has prepared him for better things to come. He knows that this path that has been laid out for him is a thorny and a dangerous one but he is a man that will never back down from any challenge.

He further quipped: *Alam ko kakayanin kasi kailangan naming kayanin, sa mga panahon naman na gaya na ito mas lalong tumitibay ang pagkakaisa naming mga katutubo at ang paniniwala namin sa bawat isa* (Interview with SG, August 15, 2020 via FB Messenger).

### **A new normal**

The pandemic has truly brought the worst in many parts of the world but it has also brought out the best amongst the Youth. The following is a very inspiring story a viral post in Social media. This story will always be living proofs that the Filipino youth possess the resilience and a strong character in the face of this pandemic.

A former flight attendant from Santa Rosa, Laguna who was retrenched from her job due to the COVID-19 pandemic finds hope amid challenges as she diverted her life's flight path into selling liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) to make a living.

On the effectivity date of the second wave of retrenchment in the airline where she works in, Maurice Maureen Avila , 26, spoke up through a Facebook post on Oct. 16 about how difficult it was for her to accept losing her "dream job," and how she manages to cope to continue earning for her family.

*“Gabi-gabi, tinatanong ko ang Diyos, ‘Bakit kailangan mong kunin [yung] pangarap na pinaghirapan ko?’,” Avila wrote. (Every night I ask God, ‘Why did you have to take my dream away? I worked hard for this.)*

*“I am devastated for [two] weeks. Nawalan [ako] ng gana kumain, iyak nang iyak [tuwing] gabi, [at] paggising sa umaga, iiyak na naman. Ang sakit sakit,” she added. (I lost my appetite, I kept crying every night, and I cry again when I wake up in the morning. It is so painful.)*

Despite the heartbreaking job loss, Avila learned to accept life’s challenges and instead became more eager to overcome it. To make ends meet, Avila began selling LPG which was her first business venture, with the help of her boyfriend.

She may have felt like she has failed in life at first, but Avila reminded herself, as well as others who have lost their jobs during these trying times, that they should not be ashamed of being removed from work, and to not lose hope.

*“Na-realize ko sa one-and-a-half month [na wala akong trabaho] na kahit anong gusto natin sa buhay, kung hindi naman talaga yun ang plano ni Lord, kukunin at kukunin niya yun sayo,” Avila said. (In the one-and-a-half months that I was unemployed, I realized that whatever we want in life that is not really within the Lord’s plan for us will eventually be taken away.)*

But Avila still hopes that one day, she will be back on board for her flight-attending job: “Para sa mga gusto pa ring mag-[flight attendant], kita kits tayo sa pila sa grand hiring. Sabay-sabay tayong

mangarap ulit, sabay-sabay tayong lilipad ulit!” (For those who still want to become flight attendants, let us see each other in the grand hiring queue. Let us dream together again, let us fly together again.) “We will have our wings again!” she said.

Avila’s story of determination has inspired netizens and brought her post to go viral, with over 7,400 reactions, 250 comments and 1,300 shares.

Themes	Participant / respondent
1. COVID-19 has been a challenging part of their young lives.	TRD, JP, FG, SG
2. Mental and emotional anxieties are some of the most crucial aspects of this pandemic for the youth.	TRD, JP, FG, SG
3. Family support systems proved to be necessary for the youth in this pandemic.	TRD, JP, FG, SG
4. Optimism and Positivity was never lost in the youth amidst this pandemic	TRD, JP, FG, SG
5. Covid 19 brought out the best among the Youth	TRD, JP, FG, SG
6. Resilience is one character that the youth obtained from this pandemic.	TRD, JP, FG, SG
7. Covid 19 resulted in opportunities for the Youth.	TRD, JP, FG, SG

**Table 1. Thematic results of the lived experiences of the respondents**

It can be deduced from the table above from the data yielded that the COVID-19 has indeed been tumultuous for the Filipino youth, but also showed the strengths of their character and their disposition and firm resolve to rise above the current crisis. This can be a testament to show that the ingenuity and the determination to rise up to any challenge is inherent in the Filipino youth.

## Conclusion

Crises of the magnitude of COVID-19 often deepen the existing societal cleavages, exacerbate the structures of privilege and inequities, and worsen the avenues for social and political mobility. The emergence of such large-scale upheavals disproportionately disadvantage youth who suffer the ravages of declining employment opportunities, social welfare, and other measures meant to confront the pandemic (Khadiagala, 2020).

From the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and life course research (e.g., Elder, 2018) that youth lives are embedded in and shaped by historical events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, the pandemic will leave its mark on youth and their families immediately and for many years and generations to follow. The developmental impact of the pandemic will likely vary depending on youth positions in the life course (Elder, 2018). For example, younger youth will not yet have developed the social and emotional capacities (e.g., emotion regulation, empathy) to fully manage a major crisis, while the older youth participating in the labor force may face additional challenges of unemployment or the need to continue working in “essential” positions (e.g., grocery store workers).

The impact on youth will also vary based on when the pandemic occurs relative to other major life events (Elder, 2018). For example, some youth may be experiencing their first-ever public crisis, whereas other youth may have experienced weathering natural disasters or other large-scale crises. Some youth may also be experiencing a compounding of major life events (e.g., parental divorces, loss of proms and graduation ceremonies, changing family structures, grieving recent losses) and crises in multiple areas within their ecological systems (e.g., parental or personal unemployment, school closures, loss of recreational activities). In short, each youth will experience the pandemic differently, thus, the pandemic will impact each of their lives differently. The researcher therefore end with a call to researchers and practitioners to unite efforts, using scholarly knowledge from youth development research and practical wisdom from youth development programs, to support youth while taking into account their complex and unique experiences. In this context the Filipino youth shall remain steadfast, hopeful and optimistic that a brighter future is in the horizon.

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# QUARANTEEN:

Narratives of the Filipino Youth  
amidst a Pandemic;  
Issues, Challenges and Opportunities