

# Digital Writing Platform of School Publications: Basis for School Online Journalism

Noemi P. Gallardo<sup>1,\*</sup>, Camille Z. Carpio<sup>1</sup>, Leonel C. Mendoza<sup>1</sup>, Ma. Arlyn M. Redublo<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>College of Teacher Education, Mindoro State University, Calapan City Campus

<sup>2</sup>College of Arts and Sciences, Mindoro State University, Calapan City Campus

\*Corresponding author: [noimegallardo115@gmail.com](mailto:noimegallardo115@gmail.com)

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**Abstract** This paper is situational research that aimed to determine the current state, changes, and struggles of different school publications due to the pandemic caused by the Corona Virus-2019 and develop a development plan for online journalism. The data were collected from six respondents composed of different student journalists and school paper advisers from different college campuses with semi-structured interview guides and data collected subjected to context analysis. The data shows the changes that the publication body encountered and the struggles they faced during the pandemic. These two factors lead how the publications address these challenges by engaging and shifting to online journalism.

**Keywords:** *campus journalism, digital platform, online journalism, pandemic, publication*

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## 1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic made the world at a halt. Governments worldwide issued movement-restricting people from going places under quarantine to prevent the spread of the virus. Additionally, people were encouraged to practice personal healthcare measures such as social distancing and self-quarantine. The gathering and dissemination of information specifically related to the pandemic were done through various channels such as social media, news websites, and emails, all sum up to engage online journalism [1]. According to Višňovský and Radošinská [2], 'traditional' press and online journalism are widely acknowledged to have coexisted for more than two decades. However, this age has been marked by publishers' skepticism of digital media and pessimistic predictions for the future of newspapers. Many media professionals have predicted that the 'digital switch' will decrease press readership or even the 'total disappearance' of print newspapers. However, it is valid to be rationally informed by the events globally through digital platforms in the current situation.

In recent years, online journalism has established and occupied a space on the internet where most people spend most of their time. The media within the internet also developed and connected communities of people known as "netizens." During this pandemic, these people expect the digital world to be the source of information, specifically students. According to a survey conducted by Statista in 2020, there are 73 million internet users in the Philippines, with people mostly belonging to the age group of 16 and above. With the face-to-face classes

being suspended and the education system converted into online-based learning, students expect to be more internet-centered when utilizing information. This situation gives way for each school publication to engage their digital platforms in the development of online journalism.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

This study aims to view the current state of school publications in developing their digital writing platform in utilizing scholarly and non-scholarly information during the pandemic. In addition, it will evaluate the practical engagement approaches that the publication is doing to maximize and develop the campus press through online journalism. Specifically, it aimed to answer the following questions: (1) What are the perceived changes in the school publication amidst COVID-19 pandemic, by school paper advisers and student journalists?; (2) What are the perceived challenges in the implementation of online journalism during COVID-19 pandemic?; (3) What are the strategies and initiatives implemented to help address the changes and challenges?; and (4) To what extent the challenges and changes affect the school publication performance as a whole?

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach and used the in-depth interview to foresee how the pandemic has changed

and affected campus journalism. Qualitative interviewing is a convenient and efficient instrument for capturing people's voices and the ways they interpret their experiences [3].

### 3.2. Subject of the Study

The research survey was carried out through an online interview with different campus advisers and student journalists. The total number of participants is 6, five of them will be student journalists (2 females and two males), and the other two are the school paper advisers (1 female and one male). The respondents were individuals from different colleges in the Philippines (Table 1).

**Table 1. Distribution of respondents according**

Name of School and Publication	Participant Code	Number of Participants
Far Eastern University-Manila ( <i>The Advocate</i> )	FEU-(1)	1
Batangas State University ( <i>Ang Lalik</i> )	BSU-(1)	1
Mindoro State College of Agriculture and Technology ( <i>The Builders</i> )	MIN-(1,2.)	2
Divine Word College of Calapan ( <i>The DWCC Gazette</i> )	DIV-(1)	1
Polytechnic University of the Philippines (The Catalyst)	PUP-(1)	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>6</b>

### 3.3. Data Gathering

The interview questions used a semi-structured technique in the data gathering procedure. This will allow the respondents to answer with further explanation, and the questions will be flexible to help the researchers have a deeper look at the study than open-ended questions. In preparation for interview forms, the Research director/adviser reviewed and validated the questionnaires to use and finalized it with few suggestions. It is composed of five semi-structured questions. Google meet will be used as a digital platform for the interview process, as face-to-face is not allowed. Along the interview process, the researchers intend to ask probing questions. They will ask for the participant's permission before recording the online interview using audio and video recording devices. The gathered data will then be converted into text form.

### 3.4. Reliability and Validity of the Instruments

To improve the internal validity of the research, the themes in the content analysis were tried to be as broad as possible to include relevant concepts. All findings will be directly presented as is, without any comments, to enhance the internal validity of the responses further. Furthermore, the research process and interview will be discussed in detail to enhance the internal and external validity of the data. Thus, the model, the data gathering process, analysis, and interpretation of data were all described in a detailed manner. Furthermore, the raw data that were obtained and codes will be kept for others to review.

### 3.5. Analysis and Interpretation of Data

The data gathered were intended for content analysis—an explanatory and naturalistic technique. It is both empirical and narrative and depends less on experimental elements usually related to scientific study. The data are determined through content analysis. The researchers need to evaluate what kind of relationship to examine and the level of analysis once the sample has been selected.

Using the data analyzing process, these procedures were followed: **1-Data Coding:** interview data were evaluated, and the general framework of the coding list was established. **2-Identifying theme:** codes were decided to provide information about each school publication to make data classification and identify theme convenient. Thus, codes represent the school publications, and the relationship between them was established. **3-Organization of codes and theme:** the data were arranged in codes systematically under the theme with association to a specific sub-concept. **4-Identification and interpretation of the findings:** themes and their sub-problem were described, and the results were translated with the assistance of direct quotations.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Status of the Campus Publications and Changes in Their System

The analysis of the participants' views regarding the status of different publication campuses seems to agree that the pandemic had caused the situation now tricky compared to the pre-pandemic time. It resulted in a line of activities being postponed, disseminating information became online, personal meeting became virtual, gathering of information is a challenge, and time compliance became an issue.

*"...a lot has changed in the publication. Although we already have been practicing online journalism even before the pandemic started, it is still necessary for us to do personal meetings, collaborate with the concepts, and design tasks. Also, many activities have been canceled, making the release of news limited..."* (FEU-1)

*"...the current state of the publication, of course, had significant changes, such as in communicating with the tasks, which shifted from personal meet-ups in the office to virtual alternatives. We communicated our tasks and accomplishments via social media sites and messaging apps, or text messages whatever accessible to the members..."* (MIN-1)

Even with the pandemic going on, school publications strive to gather and release information with the help of the internet. Furthermore, activities like recruitment, which allows aspiring journalists, were also conducted through online recruitment.

*"...one of the changes that happened to the publication is the recruitment. So, recruitment of new journalists was done online. Applicants were divided into categories like cartooning, photojournal, feature, news writing, etc. Each of these categories has its group chat*

*to discuss with one another. Also, our meetings were done via Zoom..." (DIV-1)*

The campus journalism line of activities is halted due to the situation. The dissemination of information to the students was also affected and is turned to online using their Facebook page, which entailed a good side of adding up interaction from the student readers.

*"...The operations of The LATHE are still ongoing. However, we temporarily switched to online publishing, which means our editions will be available to our students and readers online via Facebook and Twitter accounts. Last 2020, we also launched The LATHE Online where news stories, University updates, and literary pieces were posted..." (BSU-1)*

*"...Pandayan is striving to attain their duties and responsibilities as a school publication of MinSCAT-Calapan Campus. We experience changes due to the current pandemic through disseminating information and conducting activities—preferably done through online platforms. Some activities mentioned in our action plan were anchored in strengthening our engagement in social media sites using our official page in Facebook..." (MIN-2)*

Some respondents perceive that they have not been in a stable situation yet since the pandemic started.

*"...Actually, we are still in the process of coping up these difficulties now that communication and activities lined up were postponed..." (PUP-1)*

#### **4.2. Extent of Struggles that the Publications Have Faced during the Pandemic**

Internally, the publications struggle mainly in data gathering. Since the journalists cannot gather information, it became more time-consuming for the proceeding processes such as photo gathering, proofreading, and layout editing. Furthermore, conducting interviews online takes much effort to be done.

*"...since we are already into online publishing, one of the struggles we had is the data gathering. Conducting interviews and collecting pictures became a challenge for us. Our school is accustomed to doing personal interviews for our paperback then, and online interviews sound unprofessional for us yet since we had no choice, we are doing it because of the situation we are in..." (FEU-1)*

*"...one of our major struggles is the news section. Just like the other schools, data gathering is hard, as well as collecting pictures. So what we did is I asked the graphic artists to create cartoons as an alternative for the pictures. Proofreading and editing are also a struggle since, most of the time, the staffers cannot send their articles before they due. Checking their work is also hard because we are used to making the whole paper in one room, with all of us collaborating. Since we are apart from one another, it is a struggle to pinpoint what part is missing or needs to be revised..." (DIV-1)*

*"...there are many (struggles). Obtaining information is number one. It is pretty challenging, especially if the article requires personal information and a face-to-face interview. Taking photos is also a problem because health protocols are strictly implemented, so it is not*

*easy to move around, take pictures, and interact with people. Some of our staffers are also losing their motivation to do their tasks..." (BSU-1)*

The struggles of the publications extended up to the communication issues with the staffers. Because of their conflicting schedules, online meetings that should involve collaboration became hard to establish.

*"...primarily, the biggest challenge we faced in the pandemic-struck world and situation is everything we have planned to do for the next few months. We cannot continue with our proposed activities because the restrictions do not allow us to do so. Communication is also a problem, and that one varies from members which we can't reach by any means, and we understand that struggle so well, and as well as conflicting schedules by the staffers..." (MIN-1)*

Aside from the external struggle of the publications, such as the unavailability of the members, some of them do not have the means to produce an article due to the lack of technological tools to be used and a stable internet connection, which is crucial for them as the source of scholarly information.

*"... I have mentioned earlier the internal struggles, such as availability of the staffers themselves or the availability of the communication means. We cannot easily jump from one goal to another because of that, and this pandemic has made it even harder. Now, talking about external struggles, it is just the same actually; not all students have access, let alone ease of access to information during the pandemic. This pandemic brought up connectivity problems that have been thriving within our communication lines for a long time. And, it's not a good sign especially when most students are reliant on us for relevant scholarly information..." (MIN-1)*

The vast majority of the participants find it hard to reach out to the persons they need for the information, and the written output's approvals became difficult.

*"...Some struggles we faced during this pandemic are related to papers—approvals from the admins and advisers. We sometimes struggle in acquiring information through interviews from teachers, students, and personnel—that first-hand information necessary for accuracy of the information we would include in every article to disseminate accurate and precise information..." (MIN- 2)*

The majority of the respondents said that the opportunities to conduct an actual interview were hindered, which is crucial for information gathering and dissemination.

*"...it became harder to reach out to people—to the community or even to our team; conducting interviews and research was also a challenge. Aside from this, the pandemic also limited our opportunities to immerse in communities or things where we can get news and information to disseminate to other people..." (PUP-1)*

#### **4.3. Platform that Helped Campus Journalism Use in Attending the Situation**

Internally, School publications started to switch to online publishing. A variety of digital platforms were used

as a tool for disseminating and gathering data. Some of the most common were social media platforms where many students were active. Also, publications established websites of their own to post their news, features, and other stories.

*"...even before the pandemic, the publication is planning to launch our website, 'the Advocate.' And it turns out to be currently relevant due to the pandemic. Aside from that, we also have our social media pages like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram wherein we also post stories about the events we have a scope on..."* (FEU-1)

Social media, specifically Facebook, has been the platform where students have engaged in news article publishing. Aside from that, artworks, folio-like poeries and stories, and photos keep the college students updated with the current system management of the campus.

*"...we are currently active on Facebook. Our Facebook page is where we post most of our literary works like poems and short stories. It also allows our students to give their opinions about the content of our posts. It is a good thing that we get to share some pieces of the folio content we are publishing before the school year ends..."* (DIV-1)

*"...we tried our best to move on, move forward, and be innovative enough to continue delivering our objectives, goals, and aspirations through one avenue - social media. Since social media became the go-to place for most students as this lockdown lengthened, we thought we could also bring the publication's presence there. Therefore, we beefed up our Facebook page, asked them to produce articles, writings, artworks, and photos and publish them there. ..."* (MIN -1)

*"... as for me, it was Facebook and Twitter. As we all know, in the Philippines, almost everybody has a Facebook account, and it is the platform that Filipinos mostly engage with which makes it a great platform to disseminate information because it will surely reach a large number audience ..."* (PUP-1)

*"... we used Facebook as a sharing platform of news and updates since we have a bigger audience (followers) here. This helped us to have an active interaction not only with the students but as well as with the teachers..."* (MIN -2)

#### 4.4. Ways that the Publications Have Addressed the Changes

When the findings concerning how the publication addressed the changes in the campuses, it is a fact that the pandemic hasn't stopped them from functioning as campus publications. They have acquired new techniques such as publishing e-copies of their tabloid and generally to switch to online publishing, to attend their duty as the source of information.

*"...Unprecedented situations call for unprecedented measures. Because our movement is limited due to the pandemic, we decided to venture into online publishing. Since people mostly rely upon the internet and online platforms, going online was the best possible solution we have seen to address the current situation..."* (BSU-1)

*"...as I mentioned, the Advocate has released its official website wherein all the information and news about the*

*school and its events will be posted. The gathering of data will continue to be done through online interviews and surveys to avoid the physical interactions between the staffers of the publication and the people around them..."* (FEU-1)

*"...When it comes to data gathering, with or without pandemic, the staffers were used to conduct like surveys and interviews online, especially when the person they need to gather information about is not available personally. Therefore, the staffers are practiced to collect data even in a non-face-to-face way. We still plan to release a whole paper this year through a website that allowed us to layout and design an entire digital newspaper. This website is called *issuu.com*, the official platform where the DWCC will release its digital newspaper. The students will get to experience reading a normal newspaper with literally flipping pages on screen. The publication will post the link in our social media pages for them to have access to it..."* (DIV-1)

*"... just like what we've always done before the pandemic occur, we continue accomplishing our task to express, inform and inspire through our newsletter, tabloid, literary folio and page posts—fulfilling our duties and responsibilities as the school publication..."* (MIN-2)

*"...we are planning to reproduce online copies of their releases and these past few days. I am impressed with their folio-esque posts on the official page, not only because of their quality but also because of the engagements generated by all of them. It goes to show that indeed, social media replaces our lost hope and makes us feel like we're connected with our fellow college people again..."* (MIN-1)

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study was carried out to see the current state of campus journalism and its ways of adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many changes occur to the system of school publications. From recruitment of new staffers to the actual publication of news stories, everything is accompanied by the internet and digital devices. For example, applications in campus publication were submitted online, personal meetings turned virtual, and the release of news and updates was in digital form and posted on walls of different social media platforms.

Aside from that, with the health protocols that need to be followed, the standard practices of data gathering such as interviews, live data gathering, taking pictures, and unique collaboration among staffers and advisers became impossible. Thus, these lead to limited resources and output at the beginning. Therefore, the current situation can be seen as an opportunity to pivot to COVID-19 research and collect real-time data on news and journalism in transition and rethink our research enterprise in a much broader and longer-term context [4]. Soon enough, the publications learned to switch from the traditional method to online publishing. This conversion is possible with the internet and different technological tools. The extent to which online journalism uses technological assets such as interactivity, multimedia, and hypertext is frequently used to determine its success [5]. With the help of different online platforms,

specifically social media, another way has been paved for school publications to gather and disseminate information. The successful shift in the way of publishing set a new usual standard of journalism for school publications.

Based on the conclusions, several recommendations were formulated. First, data gathering methods through audio and video calls may be done. Second, the official student publication of schools should practice submitting news articles and literary works online. Third, a group chat and Facebook page where the staffers and adviser can share their insights and plans must be developed. Likewise, a website that is designed for the content of the school publication. Further, the persons concerning the school publication should attend different capacity building activities such as training and seminars. The schools should also provide the students a free and stable internet connection.

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