ONLINE JOURNALISTS’ RESPONSES TO DUTERTE’S ADMINISTRATION ATTACKS ON PRESS FREEDOM

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ABSTRACT

The practice of free journalism in the Philippines is guaranteed under Article 3 of the Philippine Constitution. However, the threats that the Duterte’s administration is carrying out against online journalists that critically report the government’s actions on the war on drugs are weakening that guarantee. In that sense, this study aims to shape the responses that critical online journalists keep on creating in the given context.

Through the existing literature review, this paper has explained online journalism in a whole, which has been later applied to the current situation of the Philippine online journalists in the country. A theoretical approach has also been complemented with in-depth interviews conducted with 8 online journalists based in Manila who indeed report about the government’s measures on the issue. It was scheduled in 8 different face-to-face sessions.

Therefore, in the Philippines, the responses take the form of in-depth reports, which are published in news sites including the name of the author. They contain data from NGOs, public officials, and reliable informants. Regarding the role of online journalists when creating such responses, they normally write about the war on drugs with the intention to control those in power and expose their actions to the general public, as a way to perform the historical “fourth estate” role of the media. The responses could improve their impact if different media outlets came together and collaborated more assiduously.

Further researches could address different types of journalism under the same scope, such as citizen journalism or social media journalism so their type of responses could also be shaped.

KEY WORDS: ONLINE JOURNALISM / ATTACKS ON PRESS FREEDOM / ROLE OF JOURNALISTS / PROFESSIONAL RESPONSES /

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

With the irruption of the Internet in the 1990s, traditional journalism has witnessed how everything that formed it was drastically brought to a new dimension, much more digital oriented; a whole new branch of journalism was about to be born. Scholars generally refer to it as online journalism, which encompasses a whole new reality of characteristics, journalists and platforms (Matheson and Allan, 2004; Deuze, 2001; Deuze and Dimoudi, 2002).

During the last two decades, professionals of journalism on the Internet, or online journalists, as the concept that this study has used from now on, faced new challenges caused by the digitalization of their working environments. It led them to develop new skills or adjust the existing ones in order to create content, among other tasks, and disseminate it through the new online platforms. Besides that, the historical role of the press as the “Fourth Estate” is still present on online journalists’ mind-sets and is reflected through their journalistic work.

In the Philippines, online journalists struggle to keep acting as the “Fourth Estate” when reporting critically the government’ policies on the war on drugs and its outcomes (Inquirer, 2017), something that Rodrigo Duterte hasn’t looked upon on it favourably when going publicly on tirades against those who were being critical to the government decisions on that matter (DW, 2018). For instance, the Duterte administration has threatened certain individuals (Maria Ressa, Rappler CEO) and online news outlets (Rappler, the Philippine Daily Inquirer or Reuters), a phenomenon that has been further explained along the research.

In a country that has been historically considered as the freest country in Asia to practice journalism and that has a strong legal framework to protect it, branding certain online news sites as “fake news” or threatening them to shut down their operational licences seems to be damaging not only for the online journalists’
working environments but for the Philippine democracy, and in parallel, raises press freedom fears among the international community (BBC, 2017; Report Without Borders, 2018). Given that context, we have observed how some online journalists are fearless to capture the reality that surrounds the war on drugs by performing the “Fourth Estate” role so they get to publish content highlighting the measures carried out by the national government despite the consequences.

Having said that, this paper has aimed to expose how online journalists deal with the current phenomenon through the content that they create, which this study has referred to as “responses”. In order to do so, a contextualisation seemed to be needed so this study has been able to get into online journalism through the existing literature to understand it in a whole, with its own characteristics, professionals and platforms where disseminating the information. Later in the study, online journalism has been applied to the reality of the Philippines highlighting the particularities it may face nowadays and lastly, the research has gathered its own data through 8 different interviews that served to compile first-handed testimonies of online journalists that create critical content under the phenomenon researched. The interviews data has been analysed through our conceptual framework to observe how applicable the traditional role of the press could be in the current Philippine context. At the end of the research, a set of conclusions, recommendations and final thoughts have been reflected.

This paper has aspired to fill the gap that exists in the literature about the role of online journalists in the threatening context of the Philippines and has aimed to contribute to expand our general understanding of how online journalists proceed with their journalistic work and how it is despite the current situation.

1.2 Context

As mentioned before, this study has called as “phenomenon” the situation in which Philippine online journalists experience systematic threats and pressures coming from the Duterte administration when they critically report on the government actions on the war on drugs issue. This phenomenon could be understood in a global tendency of authoritarian measures carried out by national governments against not only to online journalists but also to traditional journalists, which are prejudicial
towards a free flow of critical information by independent media outlets. For instance, and as a consequence of the 2019 protests in Hong Kong, the pro-China state-controlled media released altered narratives of the events to the general public (Feng and Cheng, 2019), as a try to avoid protests to reach the mainland. However, this is not a solely Asian phenomenon, in Ukraine, the government of Viktor Yanukovych and his allies tried to shut down independent media outlets as the result of their critical coverage of the Orange Revolution and the violence practised against the protesters (Leshchenko, 2013). More recently, Donald Trump has gone publicly on tirades against journalists who were being critical to his administration, trying to discredit their work by calling them “very unpatriotic” and adding, “Don’t believe the crap you see from these people, the fake news.” (The Nation, 2018), in a similar way to what Rodrigo Duterte has been doing since his appointment. For the American journalist Dan Rather, Trump’s decisions are “authoritarian” and he goes a step further when arguing, “his method is to convince people that the only truth is the truth that comes from [him], the ultimate power.” This has been the context of the study, in which the use of media by state actors is employed for political purposes or for undermining journalists, which constitute not only an attack to the practice of free journalism but also to the whole democratic system.

Sheila Coronel (2003) argues, “Democracy is impossible without a free press”, precisely because the press is supposed to perform a role of the controlling body of those in power in order to keep social and political stability in democratic societies, an idea that encompasses the theory of the press as the “fourth estate of the realm”. So, if a government tries to establish alternative discourses or tell a unique truth, there is a need for the press, as Coronel argues, to act as the watchdog of the democratic society by revealing to the general public what is occurring with “those in power” (Ibid.)

Therefore, the “fourth estate” theory could explain the phenomenon we have studied, as those authoritarian measures, which are aligned to a global tendency, are being carried out by the Duterte administration and endanger the freedom of the press and the Philippine democracy. Precisely, the “fourth estate” has been used as the conceptual framework not only to help shaping the responses in the face of the threats but also to analyse the phenomenon and observe its applicability in it. Should be noted
that this study has focused on online journalists responses, as they are one of the most affected journalism professionals of those attacks against the flow of critical information towards the government’s decisions.

As a relatively new branch within traditional journalism, this study has resorted to the existing literature to shed light on online journalism so the characteristics that define it, its type of journalists with their roles and tasks, and the platforms where they publish the content could be fully understood. Thanks to that, the research has been able to apply it to the Philippines and analyse later the phenomenon through our “fourth estate” lens.

1.3 Research objectives

This study is aimed to contribute and expand our understanding of the phenomenon in which online journalists face threats and pressures by the national government when reporting critically the government’s measures on the war on drugs. In that sense, the created content by online journalists has been considered in this study as “responses”, due to the fact of being dealing with the national government’s threatening actions.

Having said that, the research has gone a step further and is focused essentially on shaping those responses made by online journalists. This research understands the responses not only as a result of the creation process but also as products themselves with their special features intentionally employed by the online journalists. Therefore, this study pursues to identify how the responses are created, the reasons behind their creation and what are the elements that they consist of. By reaching these three objectives, the main objective, which is actually shaping the responses, was accomplished.

In order to tackle the objectives, this study resorts to the existing literature review about online journalism plus the identification of some variables considered by the researcher. However, the main source of information for shaping the responses comes from those who are in charge of their creation: the online journalists. Through the application of phenomenology, eight different interviews have been conducted so
this research has been able to compile the necessary data to shape the responses and accomplish the research goals.

The lens of the “fourth estate” theory has been used as our conceptual framework at the end of the study to analyse the participants’ testimonies based on the original understanding of the role of journalists. In that sense, the contribution of this study to the existing literature could be summarized in providing a new perspective of the work that online journalists create when critically reporting the governments’ actions under the current context. In other words, this paper has aspired to fill the gap of how the critical content is in the Philippines when online journalists perform certain roles in the face of government crackdowns.

1.4 Research questions

1.4.1 In the context of crackdowns, what are the responses of online journalists critically reporting on the Duterte Administration’s war on drugs?
1.4.2 How is the journalistic production of the responses?
1.4.3 What are the special features that these responses have?
1.4.4 What are the challenges, pressures or obstacles that online journalists are facing when creating the responses?

1.5 Conceptual framework

As mentioned in the Context section, the theory of the “fourth estate” greatly encompasses the phenomenon that we study, that’s the reason why it has been used as our conceptual framework, which has been applied in later sections to analyse the current situation in the Philippines through its defining marks and the applicability of the theory.

The origins of the “fourth estate” concept dates back to the 17th century when the term was first coined to Edmund Burke, an Anglo-Irish politician and member of House of Commons of Great Britain (lower house of the British parliament). On his book titled “On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History” (1841), Thomas Carlyle argued that, “Burke said there were Three Estates in
Parliament; but, in the Reporters’ Gallery yonder, there sat a Fourth Estate more important far than they all.” In fact, during his speech at the House of Commons, Burke acknowledged the representation at the British Parliament of the three traditional estates of the realm (clergy, nobility and commoners), however, he pointed out the relevance of the “reporters’ gallery”, a place where journalists would gather to observe and then report the speeches and events to the general public. Aligned to that, Macaulay added “The publication of the debates [...] is now regarded by many persons as a safeguard [of public liberty]” (Macaulay, 1827, cited in Splichal, 2002).

Both Carlyle and Macaulay would eventually label those reporters and the work that they were performing as the “fourth estate”. It has also been named as the “fourth pillar” after the separation of powers in which modern democracies are based on; the press is presented as such alongside the three branches of government: legislative, executive and judicial (Norris, 2007).

The importance of the press as the “fourth estate” or “fourth pillar” resides on the role that journalists develop through the work that they create. Reporting critically about the government’s decisions and actions to the general public makes journalists have the role of watchdogs of the government, which helps them act as a controlling body of those in power and ensure political and social stability in democratic countries (Amodu, 2014; Deuze, 2005; Gill, 2019).

Having a free press through which journalists could fulfil with their watchdog role seems to be essential for democracy. Through her study titled “The role of the free press in promoting democratization, good governance, and human development“ (2006), Pippa Norris proved that countries where the general public has access to a free press usually have better “political stability, rule of law, government efficiency in the policy process, regulatory quality, and the least corruption”. In fact, many authors consider that a free press is needed for establishing democratic regimes (Klein, 2017; Raikes, 2018; D’Arey, 2017; Macaulay, 1827, cited in Splichal, 2002; Coronel, 2003).

Therefore, and as it has been summarized in the following graph, the “fourth estate” concept entitles the press to report critically to the general public about the government’s actions so democracy can be guaranteed in the society in which the press is framed. In order to do that, press freedom needs to be ensured.
* N., C., and C.o. refer to the three estates of the real: nobility, clergy and commoners while J., E. and L. mean Judicial, Executive and Legislative, the three pillars of democratic countries.

**Figure 1.1** The “Fourth Estate” theory

Given that, our study is contemplated under the “fourth estate” concept and once its framework is extrapolated to the situation that is currently happening in the Philippines, a first approach reveals few but relevant differences in relation to the previous graph that need to be explained.
* N., C., and C.o. refer to the three estates of the real: nobility, clergy and commoners while J., E. and L. mean Judicial, Executive and Legislative, the three pillars of democratic countries.

** Ensuring press freedom is a debatable statement that is tackled later in this study

Figure 1.2 The “fourth estate” theory applied to the Philippine context

The unit of analysis in this study corresponds to the main goal of the “fourth estate”, which is “reporting what the government does”. For research purposes, we have called it “responses”, a term that this research refers to throughout its all extension. It is understood as the content created under the crackdown and threats that the government carries out against online journalists.

“Online journalists” is another significant term for the study. They are considered as those who fulfil with the “fourth estate” watchdog role by producing
critical responses on the government actions. As the word “online” implies, they normally publish the content on online platforms. Should be noted that the relation between them and the government in the Philippines is determined by the crackdown and threats carried out by the Duterte’s administration against online journalists no matter the legal status that the freedom of the press enjoys. Online journalists have been chosen as the target group to study, as they are one of the most affected journalism professionals of the threats and pressures carried out by the Duterte administration. For instance, we could exemplify it with the names of María Ressa or Pia Ranada, online journalists who still suffer from pressures and vetoes from the government, or certain media outlets that work on the Internet that also receive threats (Philippine Daily Inquirer, Reuters or even Rappler). In that sense, this research has chosen 7 online journalists, who had previously collaborated with a threatened media outlet, to participate with their testimonies during the data collection step in order to provide this research with significant information about their own experiences and the content that they create under the phenomenon researched.

Therefore, as we have seen, the “fourth estate” framework is understood as the tool through which the current situation is analysed in later sections. By employing a “fourth estate” perspective, this research reflects not only on the responses per se but on the attacks on press freedom and the work of online journalists, with their inner roles and production processes; a type of information that emerges from the interviewees’ testimonies on the issue.

1.6 Scope of the research

This research is focused on the issue of the war on drugs, a context under which online journalists are facing the pressures and threats by the national government when reporting critically the Duterte’s administration policies on the issue. It is, in fact, a situation that has progressively become relevant since Rodrigo Duterte was appointed as the president of The Philippines in May 2016. Therefore, this study is limited to the period between May 2016 and July 2019 on the researched phenomenon.
Regarding the geographical scope, although it is a phenomenon that is currently happening at a national scale, this research focuses on the digital environments of the online journalists that develop their journalistic work in Manila, where the interviews have been held.

1.7 Rationale

The value of the research resides in the importance that the practice of free journalism has to keep democratic societies at bay while guaranteeing democracy. As argued throughout the literature review, many scholars defend that the freedom of the press, in which the responses carried out by online journalists studied in this research have been included, constitutes one of the essential foundations of a democratic society (Khan and Joshi, 2012). Historically considered as the fourth estate, the Press has acted as a controlling body of those in power aiming to keep the social and political system under control while trying to be critical and objective. This sort of watchdog role has been accomplished first by traditional journalists, and now, it is developed by online journalists, both types of professionals who share the idea of “doing it for the public” (Deuze, 2005). In that sense, Coronel (2003) defends the need of having “fearless” and “effective” watchdogs, two attributes that are complemented in online journalism with the need of guiding the audience through the loads of information that exists on the Internet (Boardoel and Deuze, 2011).

In conclusion, the value of this research emerges from the traditional role of journalists that is now in the hands of the Philippine online journalists that we have studied. When reporting critically what the government does, they follow with the historical role of the press and it serves the Philippine society to keep guarantying democracy once the actions of Duterte administration seem to have followed into an authoritarian way of governing regarding press freedom, which is presumably aligned to a global tendency, as reflected in the Context section.
1.8 Limitations

We couldn’t indeed interview every single online journalist in the Philippines; therefore we cannot consider as an absolute study our results about the responses that online journalists produced in the given context. At the end, we have only been able to analyse the responses that the interviewees were willing to share but we need to acknowledge that more types of responses and, therefore, perspectives on the issue may exist. In addition to that, we must be aware that the situation is rapidly evolving so what we have presented in this study now, could be less important in a short period of time and new dimensions of the issue may emerge.

1.9 Ethical considerations

There are two special considerations regarding ethical aspects. First, we consider that 1) interviewees could be at risk just by the fact of being interviewed on this issue. As foreigners, we are never aware of how the real conditions of online journalists look like in The Philippines. There might be more persecution than what we imagine and in consequence, an online journalist might be at risk because of the interviews. Also, the researcher is always being careful about its own safety since these considerations can also be applied to him. Second, we need to clearly 2) establish the difference between confidentiality and anonymity. Before, during and after the interviews, the researcher has always clarified the difference between the two terms to the interviewees, two concepts that were also explained along the consent form that the participants had to sign before starting the interviews.
2.1 Literature review

With the irruption of the Internet in the past century, traditional journalism has progressively observed how every single attribute that defined it had to face this new reality. Although some scholars agree with the idea of existing unchanged elements (Dashti, 2008), it is notorious that the Internet has abruptly entered into the newsrooms, depicting a whole new branch of journalism, with its inner characteristics and developing new platforms and journalists.

Although we are clearly referring to online journalism, this is not our main concept of study. As Domingo (2006) points, most of the researches have focused their analysis on one of the elements that configure online journalism as a phenomenon: the product (new websites), the producers (online journalists), or the consumers (Internet users). Acknowledging that, this study tackles the responses of online journalists as content producers to actually respond to Duterte’s administration crackdowns on online journalism in the Philippines. At first, it is, however, necessary to unveil online journalism as a new reality inside journalism in order to further know their creation of content, in which the creation of responses are also included. Thanks to a revision of the existing literature, we have been able to understand what makes online journalists being considered as online professionals on the Internet as well as it has helped us identify the defining characteristics and platforms that are employed when a piece of particular information is created and disseminated all over the World Wide Web. In other words, previous studies made us able to comprehend online journalism to later understand online journalists and the responses they create.

2.1.1 Online journalism

It seems that the academia has come to a general consensus about the origins of online journalism through two different but related perspectives. Some
scholars point out that its origin comes from an evolution of traditional journalism, stating that the existing factors that already defined traditional journalism have now evolved and shaped what we currently call as “online journalism” (Paine, 2015; Domingo, 2006). In parallel, other scholars support that online journalism has simply added new aspects to the existing ones, creating a mixed reality in which existing elements and new ones live together (Kopper et al., 2000; Deuze, 2003). In any case, we observe how both terms “evolution” and “coexistence” are nouns whose aim is to explain how online journalism has emerged from a traditional journalism.

Although the origin is not going to be our debatable issue, as this study focuses on the responses that online journalists create in the face of Duterte’s government crackdowns. It is important to keep in mind its origin since some of its defining factors that are mentioned later feed off traditional journalism.

Definition

The idea of online journalism is not new for the academia; it has also been called “web journalism” (Xin, 2010) or “cyber journalism” (Dahlgren, 1996), all of which can be considered as synonyms to each other. However, this study refers to it as online journalism due to its wider acceptance among scholars and for having similar translations in other languages (Periodismo online in Spanish, Journalisme en ligne in French).

Prior to reading some scholars’ definitions of the concept, the best way to have a first approach to the term is by consulting the Cambridge dictionary. As formed by two words “online” and “journalism”, the dictionary would come up with the following definitions for each one of the words. “Online” as an adverb is understood as “[something] bought, done, or used on the Internet.” and as an adjective, it is shown as “[something] available or done on the Internet.” Regarding “journalism”, it is considered as “the work of collecting, writing, and publishing or broadcasting news stories and articles.” Therefore, we can all agree with a very initial definition of online journalism as “the work of collecting, writing and publishing or broadcasting news stories and articles on the Internet.” or simply, “journalism on the Internet”. In fact, this basic definition is aligned with the one proposed by Mark Deuze in 2003. In his article “The web and its journalistic: considering the consequences of different types of newsmedia online”, he proposes from a technical perspective to
understand online journalism as “[a] journalism [that] is produced more or less exclusively for the World Wide Web”. Although he downsizes the relation between journalism and the Internet to its lowest level, it is indeed too poor to encompass what the term means in a whole.

Similar to that and employing the same technical approach, Tony Harcup, on his book Oxford Dictionary of Journalism (2014) studies online journalism as “the act of publishing journalistic content and news stories—in all their sorts—on the Internet.” and he adds: “online journalism includes various kinds of news that are disseminated via websites, social media, RSS channels, e-mails, newsletters and other forms of online communication.” Besides linking journalism with the Internet once again, Tony Harcup highlights the forms that information can be shaped in while being spread all over the World Wide Web. It won’t be, however, until Kawamoto (2003), when using the same technical approach, he refers for the first time to a possible audience. In fact, he considers that online journalism as “the uses of digital technologies to research, produce, and deliver (or make accessible) news and information to a growing computer-literate audience.”

If these two previous acceptations are combined, we could then get a much wider definition of what online journalism means nowadays. Basing on the traditional model of communication (Shannon, E, and Weaver, W., 1948), if we take into consideration the speaker (online journalist), the message (content), the mean (internet) and the listener (audience), our understanding of online journalism gets enriched significantly. That’s the reason why this study proposes for the research a new definition that combines the previous authors’ theories while adding one more concept to it; we can thus say that online journalism is: “the production of journalistic content by online journalists for the Internet in order to reach an audience”

A journalism with extra features

If the definition that has just been coined is taken as usable, this study observes how “the production of journalistic content” doesn’t really imply any added value to the perception of a new journalism. It could indeed be used to explain content creation on either traditional or/and online journalism. However, scholars widespread defend the existence of new attributes that may appear in the content –individually or combined– and that configure online journalism as a new
dimension that distinguishes itself from the traditional practice. In fact, Deuze (2003) identifies three core elements that the content creator may take advantage of while producing content, and therefore the responses, in the newsroom, to which further studies agree with. They are: interactivity, multimediality and hypertext.

1) Interactivity.

It is understood as the interaction between the content creator – online journalist, in our case – and those who receive the information. It also enables the user to be an active part in the dissemination process and it is normally linked to the feedback they could provide. With it, the traditional one-to-one interaction becomes expanded and Domingo (2006) contemplates possible interactions based on one-to-many or many-to-many on different online formats. To illustrate that, Rafeeq (2014) highlights the importance of social media as an indicator of the power and role of user when providing interaction, and links it with multimediality as the opportunity to create online content that results to be more attractive, interactive and engaging. In other words, the content would receive interaction if first the platform allows it, but also if the content seems attractive for the audience.

2) Multimediality.

It is a completely new characteristic based on the use of new formats to display or complement the information that is being disseminating. It could take the form of graphics, photographs, animations, audio and video footage (Deuze, 2003). As Dasthi (2008) points “a constant progress in digital technology has helped to reduce multimedia formats into video, audio, text, graphics and pictures”.

3) Hypertext.

It is the way that two or more different information are connected through hyperlinks. They normally have an element in common that would work as the hyperlink (Steensen, 2011). Besides from being the most usual characteristic on online journalism, it provides a range of advantages over traditional journalism about limitation of space or access to sources, among others (Ibid.)

If these three attributes are linked with the figure of the content creator –online journalist– Deuze (2001) asserts that: “The online journalist has to make decisions on which media formats best tell a certain story [multimediality], has to allow room for options for the public to respond, interact or even customize certain
stories [interactivity] and must consider ways to connect the story to other stories, archives, resources and so on through hyperlinks [hypertextuality].”

Besides that, other authors take a step further and debate about the probable evolution of the Hypermedia and Multimedia. In fact, Domingo (2006) assumes that Hypermedia evolves into Immediacy and Multimedia into Convergence, which has been considered as the 4th and 5th attributes of online journalism.

4) Immediacy.

It is the characteristic that allows any information to be constantly updated. As Domingo (2006) believes, “it is produced due to the modular and digital nature of hypertexts, they can be open constructions, easy to update and extend”. Although the audience’s online behaviour can be tracked and measured, it cannot indeed be established as an absolute. Therefore, it necessarily obliges content creators to update online platforms under any special circumstance at any moment due to open access to the site. It is for Stovall (2004) a clear differentiation from traditional journalism in terms of presenting a wider variety of topics, allowing a follow-up of events, in which the most recent information would be the last one to be published, improving mistakes correction, and providing a context filled with background and perspective.

5) Convergence.

Infotendencias Group (2012) defines it, convergence in journalism as “a multidimensional process that, facilitated by the widespread implementation of digital communication technologies, affects the technological, business, professional, and editorial aspects of the media, fostering the integration of tools, spaces, working methods, and languages that were previously separate, in such a way that journalists can write contents to be distributed via multiple platforms, using the language that is appropriate in each medium.” In a nutshell, it is the opportunity to combine and take advantage of intrinsic attributes of those that configure a media dimension [platform(s), business(es), professional(s), or content] in fewer figures or simply one. The authors of Infotendencias relate business convergence with power concentration, platform convergence with offline and online media and content convergence with multimediality, which has already been explained. Therefore, the three of them have been skipped for this study; only
professional convergence is taken into consideration for this study as it really affects content creators’ skills and tasks.

Besides these 5 characteristics, Pavlik (2001) goes further and highlights the user’s need to visit thematic sites according to his or her likings. In parallel, Pack (1993) states the benefits of being a pollution-free way of spreading information and the elimination of geographical limitations.

2.1.2 Online journalists: Their skills, tasks and roles

Once the attributes that online content may contain have been considered, it is necessary to unveil who is behind its creation. If thinking corporately, a newsroom would be the main actor, however, the responsible is always an online journalist regardless the number of them constituting that newsroom during the content creation process (Domingo, 2006). In order to shape the whole dimension of the term, two perspectives dominate the analysis: 1) Online journalists as content creators, among other tasks, and their skills 2) Online journalists as operating figures of the role of journalism on the Internet. Both lenses are necessary to determine what online journalist means in a whole.

Identifying the online journalist profile

Some studies have been carried out to shape the figure of online journalists in different countries. Although it initially may give the impression that profiles could change across the countries, results prove that it doesn’t. Online journalists tend to be young professional men, with university degrees, most of them with previous journalistic experience in traditional journalism, the number of women remains low. (Deuze and Paulussen, 2002; Quandt et. al, 2004; Dashti, 2008). For instance, in the study carried out by Silvana Acosta in 2004 about online journalists in Latin America, she found out that among the 75 participants in the research, 53 men versus 22 women, over 80% of them had superior studies. She also discovered that the age average of the interviewees was 35 years and that 66% of them had had previous working experiences in traditional journalism. Therefore, Acosta’s findings are aligned with the previous statement about the profile of online journalists.
Furthermore, she also proposes a definition for online journalist, understood as “[the] responsible for the Web content’s plan, coordination, production, distribution, and also for the interaction with the users in the Internet version of a daily and generic newspaper [...]” (Ibid.) Accordingly, Domingo (2006) empathises the importance of newsgathering and newswriting as key elements of the production process in the newsrooms. Once the profile of online journalists’ has been shaped, Acosta’s definition allows this research to tackle both perspectives of online journalists, as content creators and as representative figures of the role of journalism on the Internet.

**Online journalists as content creators and their skills**

With the irruption of the Internet and the digitalization of journalism, online journalists’ skills were also redefined within newsrooms. The discussion now is being multi-skilled (Domingo, 2006), considered as the attribute of an online journalist when assuming the whole production process of a news story. Domingo argues that it has been implemented due to an ambitious goal coming from newsroom managers to produce more with the same human resources. In fact, this may be a defining characteristic of online teams in a newsroom; they tend to be small, something that Domingo can confirm through his study of four Spanish media outlets; none of them four were employing more than 7 online journalists in the content creation process despite being leading media outlets in the country.

Deuze and Paulussen (2002) reflected on their study about online journalism in Low Countries that technical skills are necessary for journalists’ production process on the Internet. In addition to that, Deuze (1999) identifies five technical skills for online production: 1) the creation of a storyboarding, whose aim is to encourage the content creator to think and plan on all possible formats to use in a story; 2) non-linear writing, as there is a limited time to gain users’ attention, texts need to be appealing and concise; 3) embracing new linguistic codes as emoticons; 4) knowledge of at least one interactive tools such as email, bulleting board systems, web chart, online surveys questionaries or discussion groups) and 5) adapting the content to the medium that best disseminates it either video, graph, picture, text or audio.
Himma-Kadakas & Palmiste (2018) take a step further and through their research on the actual performance of skills in online journalism, they proved that their interviewed journalists were expected to be multi-skilled and able to produce content for different platforms, aligned with the aforementioned theories. In fact, their starting point of the research is using the Carpenter’s categorization of multi-skilling (2009, cited in Himma-Kadakas and Palmiste, 2018), which is divided into:

- Media multi-skilling (journalists’ skills for producing content for different media)
- Issue multi-skilling (professionals report on news related to different thematic areas)
- Technical multi-skilling (reporters are responsible for performing most of the production tasks)

With the interviews, they have been able to identify concrete skills and list them, however, this research only takes into consideration media multi-skilling and technical multi-skilling as their added value to actually comprehend online journalists’ skills when producing content.

Table 2.1 List of skills of online journalists when creating written pieces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media multi-skilling</th>
<th>Technical multi-skilling</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary content writing</td>
<td>AP style knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-platform writing</td>
<td>Proofreading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blogging</td>
<td>Web content management system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image editing software</td>
<td>Word processor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data visualization</td>
<td>Posting of online content</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As observed, it is notorious that some of the listed skills particularly empathises the writing process, aligned with Deuze (1999) and the use of online platforms, which can reflects that even online journalists contemplate their job as publishing the same story for several platforms, by adapting their writing to the chosen one. (Domingo, 2006) In fact, being multi-skilled are intertwined to the inner characteristics of online journalism content, convergence also means converging
varied skills in just one professional, as it has been shown to be the tendency, but also to the extent that a multi-skilled journalist needs to employ multimediality in order to get his or her writing adapted to the platform (Ibid.) Immediacy, as inner characteristic of online journalism, entails the use of time, which unquestionably influences online journalists’ performances. As Himma-Kadakas and Palmiste (2018) argue, “all of the aforementioned skills were perceived to be important, but only if they were combined with being fast”. They point that “being fast” corresponds to the pressure of producing a large number of written publications and the competition between media outlets to be the first one to publish certain topic. In that sense, Domingo (2006) asserts that the problem of time may lessen other tasks that online journalists are supposed to accomplish such as providing analysis, verification and confirmation to the published content. Furthermore, he proves in his study that reporters couldn’t verify most of the wires, as they didn’t have time to do so, which is related to one of the roles of online journalists that is presented later in this research.

Beyond the content creation

Since this study is focused on online journalistic responses, this section has emphasized the figure of online journalists as content creators and their skills. However, many other tasks can also be considered as part of their daily work. Quandt and his fellow researches (2004) classify online journalists’ tasks in a set of eleven activities: 1) online investigation, 2) writing, 3) news selection, 4) editing news material from news agencies, 5) copying and/or transferring text onto the site, 6) management, 7) offline investigation, 8) editing material from colleagues, 9) user contact, 10) production, and 11) programming. The previous tasks have been considered as a model for numerous journalistic surveys to identify online journalists tasks. Silvana Acosta (2004) adapted them for her study about online journalists in Latin America and concluded that online journalists in that location are more likely to perform more traditional tasks such as 1) investigation, 2) selecting and 3) writing and editing news, as they were still working in traditional journalism environments. However, she also asserts that progressively online journalists are expected to be adding more technical elements into their tasks, so new more online-oriented tasks such as online investigation, content management and user contact may be accomplished.
The role of online journalists

When talking about skills and tasks, this research referred to the list of ideal abilities for online journalists to carry out certain works, it is fundamentally a technical knowledge put into practice. However, there are authors considering that, besides that, journalists in general also provide to the audience a set of values through the work they perform. It is widely considered in the academia as “the roles” of journalists. Although most of studies have had an offline-journalistic perspective of the role of journalists (Deuze, 2005; Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007), many other scholars have later taken their proposals and link them with the online reality. Although Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) define the 9 main principles for a good journalism, Deuze reduces it to 5 roles, which also encompasses the principles that Kovac and Rosenstiel previously explored, they are: 1) public service; 2) gatekeeping; 3) objectivity; 4) autonomy and 5) sense of ethics

Providing a public service

Before the irruption of the Internet and, therefore, online journalism, the role of public service in journalism was linked with the concept of “the press”, understood as a term that only encompassed written publications and those who produced them. Due to the historical context during which this word was coined, it was present on the first debates about rights in emerging democratic systems achieving a widespread recognition in national constitutions abridging, indeed, the freedom of the press (In the First Amendment to the Constitution in United States or The Freedom of the Press Act in Sweden, both launched in S.XVIII). In fact, the press has been considered as controlling body or the “Fourth Estate” (as mentioned earlier in this study) which is the word that academia employs, of democratic states alongside the legislative, judicial and executive ones (Okoro, 2013). Leonard W. Levy argues that (1985 cited in Carroll, 2016) "[A] free press meant the press as the Fourth Estate or [...] an informal or extra-constitutional fourth branch that functioned as part of the intricate system of checks and balances that exposed public mismanagement and kept power fragmented, manageable, and accountable." Nowadays vocabulary and the use of it has evolved, due to the expansive dimension that the Internet brought to journalism, and the press, as a concept, is merely seen now as 1) a term to view newspapers and/or journalists collectively or 2) a word that encompasses the historical
fight for rights. However, its role of public service could be somehow inherited by online journalists in democratic societies as long as they work for guaranteeing political, “ensuring government accountability and the participation of the government in the process of governance” (Amodu, 2014) and social stability, “when working as protector of the status quo and in the name of the people” (Deuze, 2005).

In other words, “the press”, understood as journalists in charged of written publications, is the first example of the journalists’ role of public service and created the path of the freedom of journalistic practices to which journalists can recur to in democratic systems.

Deuze (2005) argues that journalists share a sense of ‘doing it for the public’, of working as some kind of representative watchdog of the society as consumers “vote with their wallets for journalists services when buying a newspaper, watching or listening to a newscast, visiting and returning to a news site”. In fact, Kelley and Donway (1990) share this feeling of responsibility towards society; they consider that the role of watchdogs can prevent-and even keep under control-the state from abusing the rights of its citizens by watching government actions and denouncing them publicly. However, it needs to be a “fearless” and “effective” watchdog, mostly when institutions prove not to be strong enough to develop such a role (Coronel, 2003). In fact, Coronel adds: “when legislatures, judiciaries and other oversight bodies are powerless against the mighty or are themselves corruptible, journalists are often left as the only check against the abuse of power” (Ibid.) Therefore, these situations require journalists to behave as a revealing instrument of excesses and abuses carried out by the government despite the possible risks and consequences.

When talking about online journalism specifically and the large amount of information available on the Internet, online journalists sometimes face the struggle of “offering information about information”. In that sense, Bardoel and Deuze (2001) highlight the need of adapting this role of watchdog into a more guiding figure to the audience called “guide-dog”.

**Gatekeeping**

In traditional media, journalists’ work as gatekeepers deciding which issues should be known to the public and which shouldn’t. As a theory, gatekeeping is considered as the news selection and extraction of news, which then
gets passed through a series of “gates” (the journalists), are also transformed and ends up available for the audience (Groshek & Tandoc, 2016). There are, however, inner factors to the news that help journalist determine such a decision, Harper (2008, cited in Giannakoulopoulos at al., 2012) lists them:

1) The principle of intensity, according to which an event that is very important is more likely to be published.

2) If event is unexpected may attract interest.

3) The socio-cultural values both of society and the gatekeeper.

4) If an event has concerned media once, it is most likely that it will concern them again, a process called continuity.

Therefore, if the information responds to one of the previous factors, the journalist may end up creating news that are going to become part of the public’s social reality.

In online journalism there is not a consensus about the role of gatekeeping. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) consider that the figure of gatekeeper is no longer applicable due to technological advances and loads of information being spread online; In fact, if an online journalist decides not to publish certain information, the audience may easily find it in another one. In that sense, Bruns (2005) states clearly that the process of gatekeeping has been supplemented or in some cases replaced by the gatewatching process. He considers that “[it has been] shifted from the disclosure of important information to the disclosure of any content” (Ibid.). Some authors, on the contrary, acknowledge that, but they emphasize the need for the existence of gatekeeper journalists in order to give credibility to the published content (Singer, 2005). People need help in order to identify news that has some legitimacy because if not, it could be too easy for the audience to rely on fake news, non-journalistic social media pages and clickbait strategies that take up a significant portion in our online media (Tutheridge, 2017). Although it may seem that the role of the gatekeeper remains clearly vital despite technological changes, the discussion is still ongoing.

Achieving objectivity and editorial autonomy

Deuze (2005) considers that objectivity may be unreachable for both offline and online journalist due to the impossibility of being neutral;
however, he argues that although it may not be possible, it doesn’t mean that someone shouldn’t strive for it. Aligned with that, Kovac and Rosenstiel (2001) agrees with the unfeasibility of being 100% objective due to the all decision-makings a journalist must do while performing his or her journalistic work. However, they point that journalistic practices can actually be objective; seeking out multiple witnesses of a particular event, disclosing as much as possible about sources, or asking for comments and feedback, are all signals of such a role.

When referring to the role of autonomy, journalists all over the world voice concerns regarding their freedom to work as they consider. Kovac and Rosenstiel (2001) argue that an autonomous journalist is a professional that is not seduced by sources, intimidated by power, or compromised by self-interest. It is problematic at individual level though, due to the fact of being part of a team within a newsroom. Journalists then have to, at least, learn how to share autonomy and create a collaborative autonomy with their colleague. However, for Deuze (2005), there are still tasks of online journalism that provide autonomy to its journalists, such as the process of content production or the news selection; in fact, it allows them to work almost autonomously with little or any exchange and collaboration with the rest of the professionals in the newsroom.

**Sense of ethics**

Parallel to the history of the professionalization of journalism in the past century, the history of professional codes of ethics also runs. Although journalists worldwide disagree on whether a code of ethical conduct should be taken into place or not (Deuze, 2005), they do share a sense of being ethical. In fact, an ethical journalism strives to ensure the free exchange of information that is accurate, fair and thorough. Many ethics codes have been launched all over the world; however, most of them share the main principles that a code of ethics must have. Some of the common principles are compiled by the Society of Professional Journalists’ code of ethics (SPJ), which is the oldest organization to represent journalists in the United States, and they are:

1) Seek Truth and Report It: Journalism should be accurate and fair and its professionals should be honest and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.
2) Minimize Harm: due to the fact of being treating with human beings that deserve respect.
3) Act Independently: under the idea of serving the public.
4) Be Accountable and Transparent, by taking responsibility for one’s work and explaining one’s decisions to the public.

Aligned with the aforementioned principles, many other countries have developed their own codes of ethics in journalism. It is the case of Spain with FAPE (Spanish journalists’ federation) and the Código Deontológico (Code of ethics) published in 1993, Australia and its the Australian Journalists' Association Code of Ethics, launched in 1994, or at a supranational level, the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), whose code of ethics, launched in 1954, also embraces the core values of journalism –truth, independence and the need to minimise harm–.

“If a comparison of ethics codes between European and Middle Eastern countries was done...” says Hafez (2002, cited in Deuze, 2005), “it would show that even though political and social systems may vary considerably, ethical guidelines reflect a broad intercultural consensus on certain key elements such as a commitment to truth and objectivity”, as happened with the previous examples of Spain and Australia. Although the code of ethics were configured for offline journalists and studies about a new code of ethics for online journalism are slowly encompassing it (Diaz-Campo and Segado-Boj, 2014), there are universities, such as University of South California, who consider that code of ethics in offline journalism are equally applicable to online journalism.

2.1.3 Where do online journalists publish their information? Online platforms

After having studied online journalism and the inner characteristics that distinguish it from offline journalism and its professionals with their roles and skills aiming to perform a variety of tasks; this research tackles now the online platforms where online journalists can actually put into practice everything has been reviewed so far. In that sense, Deuze (2003) establishes a first classification of four types of online
platforms: 1) Mainstream news sites; 2) Index & Category sites; 3) Meta & Comment sites and 4) Share & Discussion sites.

**Mainstream News sites:** It is considered as the most popular form of news media production online that offers a selection of editorial content (produced originally for the Web) and participatory communication. (Ibid.) Some examples that fit in this category are the sites of CNN or BBC, and if we extrapolate to the Philippines, Rappler or ABS-CBN. Deuze (2003) asserts that most of the online newspapers fall into this category.

**Index & Category sites:** These sites are often related to search engines offering news from existing services and links to other external news sites without providing original content. Yahoo, Google or Naver could be considered as examples of index & category sites.

**Meta & Comment sites:** This third category is related to news media and media issues in general, sometimes dealing with the role of online journalists as watchdogs (i.e. Media channel) or as an extended index & category sites (European Journalism Center). The editorial content is produced by a variety of journalists and fundamentally basically discusses other content found elsewhere on the World Wide Web.

**Share & Discussion sites:** It takes advantage of the idea of interactivity as connecting individuals; in fact, these sites facilitate users a common space to exchange ideas on a diverse range of local and global topics. The users have the chance to share their own experiences with others. It could be considered as the origin of what we understand nowadays as “social media” (Dasthi, 2008).

Regarding the current social media sites, the latest Pew Research Center report published in 2018 states that the social media has for the first time surpassed printed newspapers as a preferred source of news for American adults. Although social media is still far behind other new sources, like TV and mainstream news sites, it is indeed relevant enough to ask the following question:
Should social media sites be also considered as platforms where online journalists develop their journalistic work?

As for some studies (Matheson, 2004; Lee, 2015; Alejandro, 2010) and for the inherent characteristics of online journalism that make online journalists develop new skills when producing content for different platforms, the answer would be yes, if agreeing that social media sites are actually platforms where online journalists can produce original content and/or adapt the existing one. Therefore we need to add it to the Deuze’s list as the 5th type of online platforms.

Social Media Sites: Understood as those social media platforms in which online journalists carry out their work as content creator such as Facebook or Twitter. These two are both interactive websites that provide a set of services for managing professional and corporative profiles and enable to connect and share information with others. Greerand and Yan (2011) actually argue that social media has become news platforms due to the constant increase of Internet users worldwide, as showed Pew Research Center on its annual report. Hermida (2012) asserts that Twitter and Facebook constitute opportunities to market and distribute newsrooms content, mostly as an adapted version of the main news sites, which take advantage of the immediacy and interactivity that online journalism provides. For example, as Kalev Leetaru writes on Forbes, the dam collapse that took place in Brumadinho (Brazil) is a case that confirms that traditional journalism needed 6 hours to move to the location to report the issue, get witnesses and transport the equipment when online journalists were doing so within 2 hours on social media. Also, social media serves as a useful tool for promoting newsrooms and journalists, as said by Ahmad (2010). In that sense, Vadim Lavrusik (2011) adds three more functions that social media may have as platforms for online journalism, they are:

1) Content creation and dissemination, through which online journalists can showcase the content they produce to the public no matter what multimedia feature they choose to do so, such as text and short updates, videos, photos or more in-depth pieces.

2) Promotion and building the journalistic brand
3) Breaking news, enabling newsrooms and online journalists to keep their readers updated when news breaks

4) Community-sourced content, the more people who participate in the journalistic process, the better informed we are as a result, for example with polls during elections

5) Insights into readers, thanks to which journalists avoid assumptions and really learn more about who their audiences and communities are. Consequently, they find out not their communities’ needs towards the content but also where the holes in demographics might be

Although five different platforms have been explained in this section, only Mainstream News sites, Share & Discussion sites and Social Media Sites have been taken into consideration for this study due to their relevance and connection to the main topic of the research.

2.1.4 Bringing online journalists’ reality to the Philippines

Once the defining characteristics of online journalism has been studied alongside online journalists, their tasks, roles, skills and the platforms they use to disseminate content, this research aims to extrapolate all this reality to those online journalists that are currently carrying out their work in the Philippines and experiencing the phenomenon that we are studying. As the context is quite complex, this section has been structured into three different parts in order to highlight the particularities that the Philippines presents when online journalism is practised: This section starts with the political context followed by the habits that Philippine society has when consuming social media sites and its importance to be included in our study, and finally, some variables that online journalists may possess when creating their written pieces are reflected, something that has been studied through existing journalistic examples.

**Philippine context**

Right after Rodrigo Duterte was elected as the president of the Philippines in May 2016, he started the programme called “Oplan Tokhang” (Operation Knock and Plead in English), with which he could materialize his promises during the campaign period of cracking down on illegal drug system structure, both
stopping consumers to take drugs and punishing drug dealers. In fact, one of the statements he pronounced before he was elected was very cutting about it: “If I make it to the presidential palace I will do just what I did as mayor. You drug pushers, holdup men, and do-nothings, you better get out because I’ll kill you.” (Human Rights Watch, 2017) His administration didn’t take long to put the strategies into practice and suddenly, a large number of killed bodies started to turn up in dark alleys, under bridges and narrow streets of Manila suburbs, generally known as camavas, which are very poor areas densely populated. These bodies presumably belonged to suspected people of drug dealing and drug consumption as many appeared with a cardboard sign that warned: “I am a drug addict pusher. Do not be like me.” (DW, 2018) This was the beginning of what it has later been called as the war on drugs.

As the operation continued, the number of police anti-drug operations increased, and with it the number of extrajudicial killings. However, the lack of transparency during police raids, that had stopped calling journalists to cover it, and the difficulty in compiling data due to the negative of sharing official numbers of killed people, depicted a very diffuse scenario (Ibid.) In that way, online journalists started to do research on their own and launch studies on their platforms. For instance, Rappler stated in a report launched dated back to July 2017 that a total of 7,080 people were killed under the national programme against drugs. The results were given as a combination of 1) deaths under investigations and 2) killings by unknown masked assailants. The sources that they used came from statistics forwarded to the police beat reporters via the app Viber. (Ibid.) Another effort to denounce and report extrajudicial killings is the list, named as the “Kill List”, started in 2016 by The Philippine Daily Inquirer that compiles the names and circumstances surrounding the death of people under the war on drugs since its beginning it 2014. Moreover, it reflects that most of the victims share the same profile: poor and young men.

However, these two media outlets have not only published reports, they have been constantly covering the war on drugs on their websites denouncing the extrajudicial killings but also the government measures regarding the issue. Lian Buan, Rambo Talabong and Jodesz Gavilan, Rappler online journalists, wrote about the inaction of Duterte’s government when allowing war on drugs crimes to keep unsolved (Rappler, 2019). In that sense, Philippines Daily Inquirer online
Journalists have also highlighted the importance of readdressing the issue to avoid giving the police the license to kill as they please (Inquirer, 2017).

As a response to those journalistic products, Duterte has publicly gone on tirades against those online news sites that were critical to his operations and the government actions. He branded Rappler as “fake news outlets” and shattered its critical practice (BBC, 2017).

In parallel, Maria Ressa, CEO of Rappler, faced charges of tax evasion in 2017 and, more recently, she spent the night in jail over a “cyber-libel” charge. Although both cases are still being processed at the court, Amnesty International has already condemned such charges as marks of an escalation of Duterte’s crackdown on the press, saying that it was “brazenly politically motivated”. In that sense, online journalist Joseph Hincks wrote an article on the American weekly news magazine and news website Time arguing that Rappler and Maria Ressa are paying the price for reporting on Duterte’s regime. Moreover, Duterte himself threatened the Philippine Daily Inquirer with a tax case and flirted with the idea of denying the licence to operate of ABS-CBN, the country’s largest media network, which has likewise reported critically on the drug war (DW, 2018). All of which brought the BBC to write an article titled “Why Rappler is raising Philippine press freedom fears”. In addition to that, Reports Without Borders, an international non-profit and non-governmental organization that conducts political advocacy on issues relating to freedom of information and freedom of the press, showed on its 2018 World Press Freedom Index report that the Philippines was the 133rd country, out of 180, in press freedom after having decreased six notches from the previous year, which states that the environment for any journalist to carry out their journalistic work has gotten unsafe and more difficult.

**Brief outlook at the legal framework of the freedom of the press in the Philippines**

The freedom that ensures and protects both online and offline journalists to accomplish their journalistic work is actually guaranteed on their written law. It is indeed detailed on Article 3, section 4 and section 7 of the Filipino Constitution created in 1987. It presents the freedom of the press, along with speech and expression, as something that cannot be abridged by any other law and recognizes
the right of the people to information on matters of public concern. Moreover, the country ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) on October 1986, an international treaty in which the protection of the freedom of the press is also contemplated.

Although the legal framework shows the Philippines as a free country on journalistic activities, Carlos Conde, a researcher for Human Right Watch, argues on his article on the Globe and Mail in 2018 that the problem arises once something has been published with its immediate consequences.

Importance of online news and social media sites in the Philippines

As this research has studied, online journalists’ work is aimed to be published in one of the platforms we have considered, such as mainstream news sites, share & discussion sites and social media sites. In that sense, this section reflects the numbers of Philippine users and engagement that those platforms have in order to highlight the importance in numbers of reaching audience when certain content is being disseminated. In consequence, we understand how strong the online journalistic work may impact into society’s mind-set when, for example, denouncing extrajudicial killings.

Starting with Internet consumption and according to the 2019 report run by We Are Social, along with Hootsuite, there are 76 million of Internet users in the Philippines, which accounts for 73% of its population; therefore, more than 7 out 10 Philippine citizens have access to the Internet. It is, in fact, aligned with active social media users numbers, which are estimated in 76 million of people. From the previous study launched in 2018, the growth of Internet users represents a 13% more of participants, and it states that number of Internet users in the Philippines are increasing faster than at the global level, in which, as average, there is only a 9% of more Internet users than the previous year.

The study also reflects that among all the Filipino Internet users, 58% of them surf the Web daily, that represents about 44 millions of people, and they spend more than ten hours online through any device (10 hours and 2 minutes specifically). Regarding the use of social media: 100% of the interviewees confessed that they had consulted one of the social media platforms at least once in the last
month spending more than four hours there (4 hours and 12 minutes to be exact). Normally social media users are actively engaged to his or her social media profile, as proved by the report.

Among the social media platforms, Facebook seems to be the most preferred one, 97% of social media users report to use it, followed closely by Youtube (96%), Facebook messenger (89%), Instagram (64%) and finally, Twitter with 54% of preference among social media users in the Philippines. To create a profile of these social media users, it is necessary to extrapolate the global profile data, therefore, it can be say that on average, it would be a female between 18 and 34 years old.

Knowing that the usage of the Internet and social media sites are continuously increasing in the Philippines, it is relevant for our study to consider the number of users that online journalism platforms have. As these numbers are unknown, we can online resort to the number of followers that Facebook pages of the main news sites have. For this, the research considers Rappler, the Philippines Daily Inquirer and ABC-CBN news as the most prominent examples as well as they have been previously mentioned throughout the research. Also, The Philstar has been included due to its popularity among Filipino society.

![Online news FB pages](image)

**Figure 2.1** Number of followers of Philippine media outlets on their Facebook pages (Facebook, 2019)

Thanks to the previous graph, we observe that:
- ABC-CBN News is the Facebook page with the largest number of followers, 15 millions.

- English is the vernacular language for the four of them due to the bilingual status of the country, where English and Filipino are co-official languages.

- The four FB pages accumulate more than 26 million of people following their publications and, if extrapolating it to the number of social media users in the Philippines, we could say that:

  - Almost one out of three Filipino social media users follows one of the four most popular online news media FB pages in the Philippines.

  - It represents a 24% of the Philippine total population, both offline and online citizens.

Therefore, after studying the users’ consumption of the Internet and social media sites, we conclude that there is an increasing desire within them to have access to the Internet and be present on social media sites. Furthermore, as the previous numbers prove, it is indeed an added-value for our study to consider social media sites as online journalism platforms where online journalists can create content and disseminate due to the large audience they can reach posting their works on, for example, Facebook pages of news sites.

### 2.1.5 Researcher’s variables

During the literature review, this research has tried to: 1) Configure a profile of the online journalists; 2) Identify online journalists tasks: as content creators and others; 3) Explore online journalists’ roles when creating content; 4) Define inner attributes of online journalism when online journalists act as content creators and finally, 5) Explain the existing online journalism platforms. In addition to that, this study has also reflected the context in the Philippines, its legal framework for journalists and the importance for our study of the social media sites consumption within the Philippine users for spreading the online journalists’ content. Therefore, and apart from considering the previous information, this section has taken into consideration some other variables that the researcher thinks are relevant to better
configure the responses that online journalists create; they have been explained and, in some cases, analysed through existing examples.

Although the following variables can be intertwined and be categorized according to numerous factors, this study have presented them in only two categories: 1) Variables related to the responses per se, and 2) Variables present on online journalists’ profiles that may influence the creation of the responses.

Variables related to the responses per se: authorship & vocabulary

I. Authorship
The authorship of articles is the hallmark of a journalist, however when he or she creates a critical piece and is aware of future consequences, anonymity is raised as the most obvious way to continue practicing your tasks without, a priori, negative outcomes. I made a sample of 200 articles written on Rappler, from Jan. 25, 2018 to Feb. 25, 2019, in order to verify the authorship in a threatened site, whether it is publicly visible for the reader, and therefore for everyone, or not. The articles had to include the key words “Duterte” & “Drug on war”, which is the nature of the current relation between online journalists and the national government.

Police kill 13 drug suspects on Albayalde's first day as PNP chief

Bulacan police conduct a 'Province-wide Simultaneous Operations on Illegal Drugs' a renamed version of the PNP's One-Time Big-Time Operations

Rambo Talabong

Figure 2.2 Screenshot (SS) of authorship example 1 (Talabong, 2018)
Figure 2.3 Screenshot (SS) of authorship example 1 (Talabong, 2018)

Figure 2.4 Screenshot (SS) of authorship example 3 (Rappler, 2018)

Among the 200 articles analysed, only 23 were not signed by an author, they just included the name of the media agency, either Rappler.com or Agence France-Press. The other 177 articles, 7 of which were opinion pieces, always showed the author’s name and first surname, most of the occasions even a picture of them. It means that 88.5% of the articles showed the author’s identity.

Therefore, authorship can be understood as a key element in responses in a way in which authors sign articles intentionally in order to presumably keep themselves strong against government tirades. In fact, Pia Ranada, a Rappler online journalist banned from covering presidency events, is one of those authors that sign their pieces. She wrote 33 articles in the last year, which accounts for the 16.5% of the total number of articles analysed. However, this analysis has been further explained in later sections taking into consideration what has been reflected here.
II. Vocabulary used

Undoubtedly words have powers and the choice of certain words could give a different intention, sometimes even expressing the contrary, to what an online journalist’s piece tries to demonstrate. In fact, the use of strong and determinant adjectives when referring to Duterte’s war on drugs is quite predominant on online journalists content. Although online journalism, by definition, seeks the objectivity in the writing, not always is achieved. As happens with the previous variable, it has also been contemplated in further parts, which has allowed the study to have a more consistent explanation to whether consider it as important element for the responses or not.
No end to drug war: Duterte can call God and intervene’

By: Nestor Corrales - Reporter / @NCorralesINQ  INQUIRER.net / 08:44 PM February 13, 2019

LAUR, Nueva Ecija — “You can call God and intervene,” President Rodrigo Duterte said on Wednesday, noting that his brutal war on drugs would be unrelenting nevertheless.

Figure 2.7 Screenshot (SS) of vocabulary example 2 (Corrales, 2019)

Variables present on online journalists’ profiles that may influence the responses: gender, age & minor variables

I. Gender

Referring to the previous analysis, we observe how gender is a relevant factor. In fact, among the 200 articles considered, 109 authors were female while 61 were male. The rest (30) were declared unknown, either because they signed with an agency name or because we cannot deduce the author’s gender by the given name. If we turn the results into percentages, more than 50% of the authors were female (54,5%) while 30,5% were male writers and 15% had unknown gender. As a consequence of that, we see how female writers are more prone to reveal their identity as a part of their content than male authors. Assuming that both men and women are working with the same level of opportunities, we observe how gender may be seen as an important variable to be considered. It has also been further explained in further sections.

Support for families of drug war victims crucial in 'long process' for justice

International human rights lawyer Ruben Gavilan says these families face several challenges, including access to any justice they deserve.

Figure 2.8 Screenshot (SS) of gender example 1 (Gavilan, 2018)
II. Age

It is also another factor that may influence online journalists’ responses. As the academia generally assumes, young online journalists, understood as those who started developing their journalistic tasks after the 1990s, are digital natives; therefore, their journalistic performance on online platforms would be presumably more inclusive to embrace characteristics, skills and roles when accomplishing journalistic tasks on the Internet. However, this is not a variable we can prove by looking at responses per se, so whether it is defining for online journalists’ responses or not have depended on the testimonies of the interviewees, which encompasses a wide range of age to validate if age is a factor for creating responses in the face of Duterte’s administration crackdowns on online journalism. As the previous variables, it has been again tackled later in this study.

III. Minor variables

The positions within the media outlets and type of contract (entry level, senior...) or the conception of self-safeness, among others, are also variables that can lead to a specific and distinguishable creation of content. However, it results to be impossible to analyse neither through empirical examples nor secondary sources, therefore we have relied on interviewees’ testimonies.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

3.1 Methodology

This study has been a phenomenological research. It has been applied because of the existence of a phenomenon that affects multiple individuals that have an element in common: their profession as online journalists. As we have previously explained, the phenomenon is understood as the systematic pressures and threats carried out by the national government to online journalists that critically produce pieces about the government’s actions on the war on the drugs issue.

As this study has been focused on shaping the responses (or journalistic pieces) that online journalists create when dealing with the government crackdowns on their journalistic practice, this research has gathered the information through in-depth interviews conducted to seven different online journalists that have experienced or still experience the phenomenon. The way of putting the phenomenological research into practice, which has further detailed in the following paragraphs, has been through the interviews questions. The same questions have been asked to all of the participants (see Appendix B), so this study has been able to apply phenomenology in order to identify certain patterns not only with the goal of shaping the responses but also to reflect their professional behaviours and opinions on the phenomenon, something that, once it has been compiled, compared and validated, has been analysed through the lens of our conceptual framework.

The use of phenomenology is justified due to its suitability to extract the insights from professionals’ experiences that were involved in the context that has been researched. Thanks to it, sufficient data has been built to identify shared elements on their testimonies and proceed with the analysis and conclusions.
3.1.1 Data collection

As we are aware of the extremely importance of the interviews in gathering data, we need to be very careful about its data collection. There has been only one type of mechanism for collecting data, which takes the form of in-depth interviews.

We have selected seven online journalists to interview. Each of them has come from different backgrounds but always under the context of practising online journalism and writing critically about the government’s actions on the war on drugs. The interviews have been prepared and sent to the interviewees in advance in order to make them aware of the questions and its possible answers. The day of the interview they have all signed a consent form, thanks to which they gave their permission to be recorded. All of them accepted the consent form so no manual notes were needed.

As a phenomenological study, the questions were designed to extract the maximum of information to understand the phenomenon that our interviewees were going through, so the goals of the research could be accomplished. In order to do so, the questions were the same for all of the participants so it could facilitate the analysis of the testimonies in later steps of the research. They were mixed open questions with fixed questions so this study ensured that we were focusing on what we specifically wanted to get from them.

Regarding the profile of the interviewees, the researcher has decided that at least 4 of the interviewees had to be women and 2 men, as the variables a priori revealed that women are more prone to write about the war on drugs. Also, among the seven of them, one journalist must be foreigner and another two need to be working or being former workers of one of the threatened mainstream news sites. Therefore, there are 3 essential factors in the process of contacting interviewees: gender, nationality and relation with threatened online news outlets. I also contemplated the option of conducting interviews through Skype calls if needed but, fortunately, no participant opted for that option.

Also, this study has taken the advantage of interviewing a representative of an NGO that advocates for the freedom of the press and expression; in doing so, it has enabled the research to capture a different perspective coming from the civil society, which has enriched the whole understanding of the issue, as appointed in the
objectives. However, this interview is only contemplated as a support of the online journalists’ testimonies, and therefore, it has never been essential for the main purpose of the study.

3.1.2 Data analysis

Although the analysis of the data bases its importance on the participant’s interviews, there is also a preliminary analysis of the variables considered by the researcher. The elements that were studied without -or not only- resorting to the interviewees are: A) Authorship and B) Vocabulary Used, as they both could be proved through the already existing responses in the different platforms that online journalists use. This research has taken into consideration a sample of 200 articles to analyse the relevance of the presence of the author’s name and his vocabulary used on the responses. In addition to that, both elements have also been analysed further in this study.

Coming back to the analysis of the data compiled, the rest of the aspects that this research studies have been only analysed after the participants’ testimonies in the interviews, which followed these steps:

0) Transcript
1) Compile the data
2) Compare the results and validate data
3) Establish similarities that help to create certain patterns
4) Use the patterns to shape the responses, identify their attributes, the social construction and understand the creation process

It has been during those steps also when the researcher has validated the data. There was a two-level validation. First, the answers were compared among them according to their origin, both online journalists and NGO representative were analysed separately. Second, a comparison regardless the origin of the answers was carried out, which allowed the research to establish similarities and continue with the analysis. The researcher is aware that not all of the interviewees have answered to all of the questions, so this has been taken into consideration for the validation process.
Lastly, once the data was analysed through the conceptual framework and, therefore, the responses were shape, this study has come up with several suggestions for future researches on the issue.

3.1.3 Relevance of the participants
In this section, the study has presented briefly those participants who have consented to give their testimonies in the conducted interviews about the topic we are studying. They are 8 different women and men coming from diverse backgrounds but they all have in common that they are reporting the war on drugs in online media platforms.

1) Rambo Talabong
Rambo is an online journalist working for Rappler, a news site that has been in the spotlight due to his critical reporting of the government actions on the war on drugs.

He is in charge of the police beat and has been doing journalism professionally for the last 2 years. He is 21 years old and based in Metro Manila. One example of his pieces on the war on drugs is titled “Duterte gov't allows "drug war" deaths to go unsolved”, which also shares its authorship with the second participant: Lian Buan.

2) Lian Buan
Lian is a female online journalist working for Rappler since 2016, where she covers the justice beat. She is 28 years old and also based in Metro Manila.

3) Ellen Tordesillas
Ellen is a journalist and also the president of Vera Files, a non-profit organization created 9 years ago. She has been part of the “Matrix” list, in which she has been labelled as one of the people trying to oust Duterte from the government. Ellen is based in Metro Manila and her main work is fact-checking the statements made by public officials and relevant personalities.

4) Raffy Lerma
Raffy is a photojournalist in charge of covering the extrajudicial killings as results of the government policies on the war on drugs. At first, he used to work as part of the staff at the Philippine Daily Inquirer but he is now a freelancer. Raffy is the
author of the “Pietà”, a winning-awarded photograph that depicts a woman holding her husband's killed body; it has received the name from the similarities that shares with Michelangelo’s work. He is 41 years old and has been practicing journalism for almost 19 years. Raffy only covers the Metro Manila region.

5) Portia Ladrido
Portia is an assistant editor at CNN Philippines, where she has been part of the staff for almost three years now. She is 27 years old and is based in Metro Manila. “When tokhang takes your children away” is one of the articles she has produced about the war on drugs.

6) Regine Cabato
Regine is the Manila reporter for the Washington Post. She is 24 years old and has been practising journalism professionally for the last three years, two of which as an editor assistant at CNN Philippines. “This is Manila” talks about the war on drugs and is one of her most relevant pieces.

7) Sara Gómez Armas
Sara is a Spanish citizen working as the correspondent in the Philippines for Agencia EFE, the most important news agency in the Spanish language. She is based in Metro Manila although she covers different stories all over the country. Among her articles on the war on drugs “Dos años de Duterte, el presidente filipino que combate las drogas a tiros” stands out.

8) Liza Garcia
Liza is the executive director of Foundation for Media Alternatives (FMA), a non-government organization that seeks to democratize information and communication systems for citizens and communities. FMA office, where she works, is located in Metro Manila although they treat any issue in the country that is related to its field of action.
CHAPTER IV
RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Research findings

Once the interviews were conducted and recorded, this section presents now what the participants answered to the questions made by the researcher. The information reflected below has allowed the study to respond later to the research questions. In order to make everything more comprehensible and clearer, the testimonies have been divided according to each participant and gathered in different topics.

4.1.1 The current context in the Philippines

Rambo and Lian agree that this tense situation began when Rapper started listing the killings under the government policy on the war on drugs. As a consequence of that, Duterte started to refer to Rappler as “fake news” making this news site as one of the most mentioned media outlets in his speeches. Also, the critical reporting that Rappler has been doing also worsened the relation with the government, argues Rambo. In fact, it has brought consequences to him because several times police officials have come to Rappler headquarters asking for personal information about Rambo and other fellow online journalists. Lian considers these visits as systematic intimidation towards Rappler staff. Due to the fact of being young and born after the martial law in the 80s, it took her a while to realize how dangerous and threatening the situation was turning into. In parallel, Rambo is a bit afraid because the public forces know where he lives and works so it might affect his reporting. At the same time Lian thinks that exposing the intimidation they suffer is a mechanism to achieve a security blanket, “If the police come to you, you write about it”, she concludes.
For Regine, the relation between government and online journalists began when journalists started to inform critically about the consequences that the war on drugs had originated. As an online journalist, she considers that this situation is exciting but also scary, as the Philippines is still a dangerous country where practising journalism, for what she takes her own safety measures.

Portia Ladrido, a CNN Philippines online reporter, goes a step further and, although she acknowledges the current situation of the national media landscape and the government, she thinks that the situation had worsened even before Duterte became president. Prior to his appointment, there were already killings and impunity to the perpetrators. However, it has become more relevant now because the president is sort of a manifestation of such impunity. Also, the volume of the killings and the articles criticizing the government’s actions has also made the issue more visible. She feels that the whole context is something we should be talking about.

Sara Gómez has observed that the current situation is essentially the implementation of the promises that Duterte made during his campaign. Although during the first 6 months of his presidency the situation was extreme, with the police officials explaining to journalists how they would bring the same gun for different murdered bodies just to justify their killings; she now believes that the situation has slightly gotten better. It may be a result of the international coverage and repercussion that the issue got and due to the examination of the war on drugs by the International Criminal Court (ICC). “It is still happening but it is less visible”, she adds.

From an NGO perspective, Liza says that everything started when Duterte became president and he continued doing the same harsh pronouncements without realizing the influence and power he had, “it worsened when the rhetoric became real”, she argues. Liza considers that Duterte is critical not only to online journalists that were contrary to him but to the commission of human rights and the commissioners.

4.1.2 The social construction of responses

Sara Gómez normally writes two different types of pieces: 1) “previsiones”, which is what Agencia EFE would call the daily articles (700-800 words) and 2) In-depth reports that reach up to 3,000 words, through these pieces she
has been able to talk about the war on drugs, more specifically about what is left aside after the killings. For instance, she published a story last February about some mothers who had lost their sons and who are meeting to support each other while pressuring the government to give answers to them. She considers that this whole context is relevant to talk about as it entails a violation of human rights which mainly affects the poorest people, those who have no knowledge on how to deal with it or what to do. She aspires to facilitate a platform for those who are voiceless and bring these topics to Spanish-speaking countries that feel so much distance, not only geographically but also mentally, with the Philippines despite the common past.

Rambo and Lian normally produce breaking-news in their own beats (police and legal beats, respectively) and also create in-depth reports that come out thanks to collaborating between different beats within Rappler. In fact, the war on drugs is tackled in both formats. Rambo defends the importance of talking about it because it was actually one of the landmarks of Duterte during his presidential campaign; in that sense, the coverage has been expanded by not looking only at the actions that the government does but also by showing the abuses that it brought up. Lian writes about it because of the human side of it, many people are dying and their families want answers. Lian argues that when killed citizens are involved, it becomes more important to be reported. By doing so, her purpose is to shed light on every single aspect of the war on drugs, “reporters may not be able to stop the killings but at least we could shed light on it which could lead to a change on the state policies eventually”, she adds. In parallel, Rambo aspires to find the truth in it and reveal it. He doesn’t carry over the government press releases automatically and ask questions to both police officers and government officials in order to achieve such purposes. Thanks to the coverage of the war on drugs, Lian wants to believe that Duterte has tempered his tone and Rambo has observed much good feedback from fellow reporters who have also started questioning the government.

If they are asked how Filipino society perceives their work, they both consider that the question should also be “how does Filipino society perceive Duterte?” As Rappler has been labelled as an enemy of the government, the responses from the citizens are really divided. They find people that automatically attack and reject their work, as well as there are people who support them.
Ellen Tordesillas, as Vera Files president, doesn’t create breaking news. Instead, they aim to help in promoting excellence in journalism in the Philippines by providing a truth-based perspective to the daily news. In order to do that, they focus their work on the fact-checking of statements or publications made by government officials or people who are influential to the general public. They normally have the structure of in-depth reports or, in the case of Facebook statements, which they also track, as a regular FB post. She considers that truth is very important and in a digital environment full of disinformation, proving that something is true or false can really have an effect on people as well as to the journalists. Although her work is not only focused on the war on drugs they have tracked statements related to the issue. For instance, Duterte said, “The Philippines is a narco state”, something that Vera Files could prove it was wrong: after going to the PNP (Philippine National Police), they confirmed that the data they were managing showed that it was 1.8 million of drug addicts. In a country with more than 103 million of citizens, “you cannot consider it as a narco state” she claims. Even though there is no mechanism to measure Vera Files’ impact, since the fact-checking on FB started more than 100 posts have been taken down. Ellen agrees with Rambo and Lian, as she thinks that the response from the Filipino society is mixed, there are both good and bad reactions to the Vera Files’ work.

Due to his profession, Raffy Lerma only takes photographs. Through them, he tries to raise awareness of the killings that occur under the war on drugs policy and show that the murdered people are also human beings. He aspires to create emotional connections between those who are depicted in the pictures and those who see them. Also, he wants people to realize that there should be more ways to stop the drug problem rather than killing people, who are normally the poorest and voiceless. Notwithstanding he first thought that his pictures might change the mind-set of the people and eventually change policies, he saw that there was no direct effect on them so he continued documenting the issue, as it may serve as memories too; “one day we could see at my work and realize the danger that has been done so it won’t repeat again", he says. The reaction he receives from the general public is mixed, some agree with what he is trying to portrait and others don’t. For him, it is really hard to convince
people that someone doesn’t deserve to die unless it happens to you. He saw many people changing their thoughts after suffering this tragedy first-hand.

Regine produces breaking news and in-depth reports, however, the war on drugs takes usually the shape of the latter. She considers that the problem deserves to be discussed as it has been proved that the approach done by the government has ended unsuccessfullly. She argues that it was a drug problem that has now turned out to be a health and humanitarian problem. Her main purpose when talking about it is “to make the comfortable ones feel uncomfortable”, such as the middle-class readers or people who don’t know anything about it; people that after reading her pieces can be more aware of the situation. She is not sure about the implication that her work has, but as long as someone who has read it becomes more conscious about the issue, she considers that her goals are accomplished. Regine’s work at Washington Post is mainly focused on western audiences so she is not really aware of how Filipino society perceives it; she even doubts that Filipino citizens read it.

Portia Ladrido also creates breaking news and in-depth reports for CNN. She thinks that the war on drugs is necessary to be tackled on her pieces because, despite the killings that are still happening, there are more people who suffer the consequences, such as widows or orphaned children. As she only presents the problem through her pieces, she hopes the readers to be wise enough to understand not only the issue but also the complexity of it. In that sense, the feedback she gets from the Filipino society is divided and it normally depends on the readers’ beliefs. If someone was supportive to the government, he or she would label Portia’s articles as biased or, on the contrary, if someone didn’t particularly like the government’s decisions, he or she would tend to consider Portia’s article as not being critical enough. According to Portia, Filipino people tend to read an article just to reinforce their own primary ideas and as her purpose is to do neutral journalism, she will always receive divided feedback.

Foundation of Media Alternatives normally releases statements which are related to their fields of action, such as press freedom or digital rights, and that are produced as a consequence of something that the government officials or the president himself have done. The purpose when coming up with a statement is to take a clear position in a controversial issue that affects us all. Although FMA is not really
involved in the coverage of the war on drugs issue, they show support for those who are suffering the consequences of reporting it critically. In fact, by giving their public support to Maria Ressa they wanted to help to preserve the press freedom, because “if you curtail it, then you are curtailing the democracy and we want to preserve whatever freedom we still ha.”

4.1.3 The role of journalists

Lian Buan doesn’t distinguish between traditional journalists and online journalists when talking about the role a journalist must have; she considers that their role should be seeking the truth in the power, which she fulfils it by maintaining the pressure to the government and constantly reminding them that someone is watching them. Rambo agrees with her but goes a step further and refers to the concept of “the fourth estate”, in which the press is seen as the controlling body for those in power. In fact, he mentions that in the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte controls every single pillar of the country so journalists need to remain fully independent in order to report everything, “Especially when the government crosses the line”, he adds. In that sense, Raffy Lerma defends that journalists cannot agree with everything that the government does or says; he points out that the role must expose the government actions to the general public and question it. He also refers to the concept of the “fourth estate” as a way to be critical to the government so journalists can keep it at bay.

Portia’s opinion on the role of journalists is also aligned to Lian’s statement. She argues that journalists must speak the truth to the power because if the government is not checked, then there is a free path for tyranny. She gets to accomplish such a role through continuously questioning about certain actions carried out by the government, on policies that are not being effective or that are not working for the interest of the people.

Ellen Tordesillas believes that there is no just one role for journalists. Apart from considering that journalist must tell the truth to the people, she also thinks that journalists are supposed to hold those in power accountable and give voice to the voiceless. When talking about the fact-checking, she considers that their role is to inform people as accurate as possible.
Regine and Liza agree in the expected role of journalists, they both consider that they are the watchdogs of our democracy, which check and keep the government at bay but also provide a space to debate on controversial issues. In that sense, Liza also considers that NGOs, or at least FMA, are somehow watchdogs of the government because they stay vigilant to whatever Rodrigo Duterte does or says, which at the same time has a big impact on the society. She exemplifies her statement by saying that the Philippines takes the lead in Asia in gender equality, a situation that has been reached thanks to feminist movements, however, when he comes up with misogynist or rape jokes, it seems that everything that had been reached it is now fading. “Do we need to start all over again? We need to be vigilantes and activists again.”

Sara believes that journalists must act as vigilantes and tell whatever the power doesn’t want to be told. Nowadays, she explains, governments are expecting to have a unilateral communication with journalists, in which they are only informed about what the government wants, as it happens with her and the Philippine News Agency. In that sense, the role of journalists must be asking not only for the government’s version of the issue that is being told but also about what they are skipping. Sara points out the need for avoiding “comfortable journalism” by always questioning what it is happening and trying to reflect as many perspectives of the issue as it may have.

4.1.4 Journalistic production

For Ellen Tordesillas at Vera Files, the criteria to choose a topic for fact-checking are the virality, “if it is viral and false, we need to stop it”. They normally track statements or publications made by officials or personalities and if they spot a mistake, they come up with the factual evidence: they prove that what has been said it is false. In the case of FB fact-checking, they classify the information into three categories: false, misleading or true. In the case of being false or misleading, they provide an explanation about it and then denounce it, which leads to a decrease of its virality by 80%. However, they don’t block or delete, if the statement has been proved as false, there would be an announcement that shows up warning the reader.
Technology is really important for Vera Files, as one of their main tasks is focused on social media. Also, different multimedia formats such as video, audio or even apps, (which can trace the posts and the reach) are used by them to fight back the misinformation. Time also plays a very important role in their work. As virality is the main criteria to choose a topic, they need to be alert for those posts that are false and become quickly viral. Normally, they fact check four or five posts per week and each post takes a couple of days to get the research done and prove its veracity.

As Raffy has been working as a photojournalist, his criteria were always based on covering the killings that appeared under the context of the war on drugs. During his work at Inquirer, he would stay at the press office of the police headquarters during night time with more fellow photojournalists waiting for crime scenes to document; in the morning, he would just go to submit his pieces to the newspaper. As a consequence of the gatherings at the police station, they created a network to share information and tips. For him, technology has a very peculiar role. It allowed him to spread his work easily and collaborated with more online media by raising awareness of what is happening but, on the flip side, there is a bombardment of much information, some of which are fake news. He defends that it is not a question of credibility anymore; it is more of how many times it has been shared. “A Fake news shared a million of times becomes real”.

Regine chooses her topic according to the relevance and impact they may have. As working for a foreign media outlet, she should take into account that her stories will be read by western readers, therefore, she will try to find stories that interest them. She says that normally stories that have a relation with the United States work well. When she pitches a story, she does the preliminary research and waits for the approval of her editor. If it is a short story, it takes less than a week, however, if it is a longer story that will be presented in multimedia format, it could easily take her more than two months.

Technology is essential for her work; in fact, she considers that the most interesting aspect of her piece titled “This is Manila” about the war on drugs was the visual elements. “It is much more immersing when using a multimedia format, it really attracts the reader’s attention”. She normally checks other foreign media outlets to
see what her competitors are doing and check if the story she is going to work on hasn’t been recently covered by any other online journalists.

Portia usually pursues stories that have been pushed on the side but are still happening because she thinks, "there is always a reason for not being addressed". These stories are normally linked with social justice issues. She conducts editorial meetings in which she brings the topics she could talk about. Once it has been approved by her supervisor, she carries out the research, the interviews to sources and organizations that may have better information than what she has and finally, she starts writing the report. Technology has allowed her to produce pieces that otherwise it couldn’t have been possible; Facebook and other social media networks have helped her in reaching out very helpful people for her work that weren’t in the same location where she was. The news reflects what is actually new, so time is very important, mostly for daily articles and breaking news. However, when doing reports she has the time to go deeper in certain issues no matter time pressures. She normally checks more sources in case they have information or a perspective that she is missing.

Despite the tragedy of the war on drugs, its international repercussion has increased the interest of readers in knowing more about the Philippines and it has enabled Sara to share with the audience new narratives. She considers that there are in the country countless social stories that deserved to be told, however, and apart from the social pieces, she also covers geopolitical issues and topics focused on the Spanish legacy: traditions and language that Spanish-speaking countries and the Philippines still have in common. Technology and time are fundamental for her work, as any information needs to be shared immediately. The problem that she mentions is that journalists need to inform with accuracy and it is sometimes lost as a consequence of the immediacy, therefore, a journalist must accomplish with his or her work in a fast way but taking into consideration the accuracy and the reliability of his reporting.

As Rambo and Lian already mentioned, they normally work individually on the breaking news for their own beats. However, when a topic goes beyond their field, the tendency in Rappler is to collaborate between them. Technology helps them to visualize the data better, as it happened with the list of killings they compiled. Also, technology plays an important role in developing their own security measures, for instance by having apps for safe messaging, which is encrypted. On the flip side,
technology also limits the Filipino society to get informed on Rappler, as not every single Filipino has Internet on their homes or on their mobile phones. Time is crucial for breaking news, as it would be published within a day, while for in-depth reports may be adjustable. Lian usually not only checks other news sites but also cites them; she even creates hyperlinks to the original story since she aspires to create collaboration between news sites.

4.1.5 Responses’ attributes and online platforms

All of the interviewees declared that they always sign their pieces no matter if they are about the war on drugs or another topic. Lian considers that signing her articles is a way to show accountability on what she writes. “If you want to hold the government accountable, you should also hold yourself”. Raffy argues that he includes his name so he can prove that is a credible journalist. Although Regine also adds her by-line to the pieces she produces, there were occasions when she didn’t. “When I was working for CNN Philippines, if the issue was a bit sensitive, we would sign it as “CNN staff” to avoid threats”. Portia also signs the pieces she creates as she is regularly looking for grants so the stories she pursues can be funded.

For Sara, the situation is different. As she works for an agency, she produces content that will be held in a news depository, which any media subscribed to the agency can have access to and publish it. Ideally, they should respect the authorship and reflect it when publishing the news, however, it doesn’t always happen, she says. In that sense, she tries to monitor her pieces on the Internet and complain through Twitter in case they don’t respect it.

Regarding the gender and the age of the online journalists, the interviewees share the same opinions. On one hand, they don’t consider that gender is a factor that influences the reporting of the war on drugs issue. “If there would be more female online journalists rather than their male counterparts is because generally there are more female journalists in total numbers in the Philippines”, explains Lian. In that sense, Sara and Portia also agree with Lian’s statement. “In general, there are more women working in journalism, it is something that I have noticed since I was at university”, says Sara. Regine agrees with the previous thoughts and goes a step further. She thinks that there are more women than men in positions of
power in media outlets but she doesn’t consider gender as a defining factor when reporting the issue. In photojournalism, Raffy admits that it is still a sector widely dominated by men even though he knows some female photojournalists who are really good.

On the other hand, the interviewees do consider age as a factor that influences the coverage of the war on drugs. In fact, their opinions are generally based on the newness of the digital platforms, which are understood more likely by the youngest generations of online journalists, as Ellen says, “Vera Files is mostly composed of young people as they are all digital natives and I might be too old to understand the algorithms and its particularities”. Regine considers that older generations of online journalists, such as Maria Ressa or Ellen Tordesillas, have already covered other chapters of Filipino history when they were younger. Sara Gómez defends that youth gives you energy and willingness, while experience provides you with savoir-faire. Ideally, digital newsroom should combine both profiles of online journalists but she understands that the youngest generations are those who are taking the lead to cover the war on drugs. For Raffy, age definitely plays an important role in covering the killings through the photojournalist lens because of the working shifts, which take place during the night and the early morning. “Senior photojournalists wouldn’t it”, he argues.

Vocabulary and how you write your pieces is something that the interviewees also reflected. For Lian, language and words are crucial when writing about the war on drugs. She tries to be always as blunt as possible, if she informs about a guy who has been killed, she would say “killed” (or even “murdered”) instead of “ended up dead” and she would later add the explanation. Rambo doesn’t avoid controversial terms either, while human rights groups wouldn’t use the term “slums” as they would employ “involuntary resettlements”, he would name the things as they are. In that sense, he published a report titled “Duterte gov’t allows ‘drug war’ deaths to go unsolved” and everyone seemed to be shocked, however, he later explained that the government had only investigated 76 cases out of the 20,000, so the title was just responding to what the numbers had said. Portia resorts to a vocabulary that is appealing for the reader but at the same time, it depends on the reader. “If there is a source with good information the story is done, I am just typing it”. Sara observes that
although journalists always aspire to reach full objectivity through the words employed, it is not always achievable. “Sometimes journalists, and I include myself, we use flamboyant words just to catch readers’ attention”.

The pieces that the interviewees produce, and that may include the attributes previously mentioned, are published in different digital sites. Lian and Rambo, as being part of a news media site, publish their articles and in-depth reports on Rappler website. Although it can be shared on Rappler’s social media network, they are not in charge of doing that; Rappler has its own media unit for Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, who adjust the created content, if needed. When he was part of Inquirer, Raffy used to publish their photographs in both offline and online branches of Inquirer. However, he is now just showing his work on his own private social media channels, among which Instagram is his preferred option. “I am trying to find new ways to make my pieces public”, he adds. Regine shows the content she creates on the website of the Washington Post and usually plugs it into Facebook and Twitter profiles of the WP by sharing it with a hyperlink, she never adjusts or creates new content for the same piece.

In that sense, Portia also gets her work published on CNN Philippines website and when it comes to the social media networks of CNN Philippines, it is just shared through a hyperlink.

As Sara Gómez works for an agency, she could see her reports on any website or social media channels of those sites that are subscribed to EFE agency. In fact, the way she has to monitor that is by searching in Google her name and the title of her pieces, so she can be aware of how it has performed and how many times it has been duplicated. Also, it is a way to check if her authorship has been respected, as mentioned before.

Vera Files works on a two-ways fact-checking: through their own website and on their Facebook page. They show “Vera Files” as the author of the pieces in both media when analysing and giving explanations about certain publications.

Foundation of Media Alternatives always publishes the statements on their social media accounts: Twitter and Facebook and only the most relevant ones are shown on their website. However, their goal in the future is to reflect the same
information on both sites. All public statements that they produce are always signed with the name of the organization.

4.1.6 Freedom of the press

Lian and Rambo consider that journalism is under attack and therefore the journalistic practice. They give the example of Rappler, which has so far faced 11 cases as a consequence of being critical to the government; most of the cases are still ongoing at the court. Lian also highlights the situation of ABS-CBN, which has been threatened or Inquirer that has been attacked on the business side. Given such a context, she still feels safe to keep on practising journalism although the conditions to ensure safety for online journalists could be better improved. Rambo resorts to the need for more united media outlets, through which they could support each other.

Ellen Tordesillas claims that the freedom of the press is endangered. However, she admits that online journalists can still be doing their work and still be critical to the government. “They just need to be aware of the negative consequences that their work leads to”. In that sense, she points that they would need to have their own safety measures in order to feel really safe because “the government will not provide that security”, she concludes. For her, there are different ways to improve the situation of the press in the Philippines: 1) All the media should gather and unite against any attack on the press by practising a good journalism. 2) Improving the collaboration between different media outlets, and 3) Regaining the trust of the people; In a country whose president is demonizing critical media, journalists need to get the support of the public and make them know the importance of a free press. However, she admits that the circumstances of the people in the country are far from being optimal so when they don’t have food or access to basic education, the freedom of the press is considered as a luxury only for the elites. Ellen also thinks that social media sites play an important role in improving the situation of such freedom by being accountable for the news that they allow being published on them. “They should be more active in combatting misinformation and collaborate more with organizations that fight against fake news”, she adds.
Raffy agrees with the previous reflections on the situation of the press and argues that if you are going to be critical through your pieces, you are going to be labelled as destabilizing of the government, among other labels. However, he still considers that the Philippines is still a safe country where performing journalism. As part of the Photojournalists’ centre of the Philippines (PCP), they conduct workshops, involving human rights, and specially focused on the photojournalists in the provinces in order to improve not only their own situations but also the status of the freedom of the press. In that sense, social media platforms should develop certain measures to improve media literacy and try to educate the users when facing fake news.

Although Regine defends that the situation of the freedom of the press is vulnerable, she considers that it is still safe to practice journalism unless you work in the provinces, where a journalist may be facing more risks than those working in Manila. She finds media literacy as the way to improve the situation of the freedom; in fact, Regine, alongside some classmates, organizes seminars in public and private schools to talk about the importance of the freedom of the press to the youngest generations. Also, she considers that online journalists should keep on doing their work and shouldn’t allow intimidation or harassment stops them from doing so.

Portia thinks that the Philippines is still a safe country to practice journalism despite the vulnerable situation of the press due to the amount of disinformation in social media. Although she claims that collaboration between media outlets should be the solution to overcome such a situation, she admits that it is still a business and it is not likely to happen in a nearer future. “The only thing we can do to improve the situation of journalism is being self-responsible with our own work”. However, when talking about the social media sites role on the freedom of the press, she believes that we should demand more accountability on how they allow the flow of such disinformation.

As a foreign journalist that writes in Spanish for Spanish-speaking audiences, Sara feels very safe, as she doesn’t think that she is the under the interest of the government or any group. She believes that the freedom of the press is still healthy no matter the negative consequences that online media outlets face. In that sense, she has noticed how the level of criticism has decreased in general, which doesn’t mean that news sites are now pleasing the government, they have just moderated their
critical reporting. For her, the way to improve the situation of such a right is by practising a responsible journalism and holding accountability to the social media sites that allow the spread of fake news. Besides that, she also points the need for improving media literacy among the Philippine citizens, as stands out as one of the countries in the world that spends the most time in social media. “A society that is not really well educated in the use of the Internet can believe anything”.

Liza García observes how the freedom of the press is being repressed, however, Foundation of Media Alternatives along with journalists keep on fighting for a free press. She considers that they can still be free in expressing themselves and being critical to the government and aspires to create more collaboration not only between journalists but also with NGOs that defend the same issues, “a cross-sectorial cooperation”. Social media sites could help to improve the situation if we start looking at them as news sites rather than merely social media sites, as they are posed as the main source of information for the Philippine society.

### 4.1.7 Collaboration with external agents

Lian and Rambo have occasionally worked with NGOs mostly when they needed sources on certain topics, “When you are writing about a specific issue, the data usually comes from small NGOs”, says Lian. Rambo also highlights the role that the church has played in helping them; “they would call us asking if we want to write a story on this or that” and points that when they write a story about someone in particular and that person needs help, they would try to connect him to some priests or NGOs they trust on.

In that sense, both Portia and Sara admit that they have only collaborated with NGOs or human rights defenders when they needed statistics and information about the war on drugs so they went straight to them as they see them as the most reliable source to talk to. Raffy has worked with some churches, where he showed his photographs in order to raise awareness among the attendees about the killings. In fact, he remembers a very notorious event in which he displayed his pictures across a church during the Christmas season. He has also exhibited his work at universities, such as Ateneo de Manila or La Salle and collaborated with NGOs by putting them in contact with victims that needed help.
Foundation of Media Alternatives has actively worked with NGOs on issues such as privacy, surveillance and digital rights. In parallel, they belong to the Disinformation and Democracy consortium, a group of journalists, non-profit organizations and media outlets created in 2018 that organizes annual conferences to talk about the increase of fake news and its relation with social media, democracy and security.

4.1.8 Challenges, pressures and obstacles

As being part of Rappler and reporting the war on drugs, Lian and Rambo have both received anonymous threats via Facebook and email, which has become a habit in their daily life. Besides that, Lian highlights the treatment of some government officials to journalists; once they see that you belong to Rappler they wouldn’t talk to you and that is one of the worst things to happen to a journalist. She also hopes the media to become more profitable so journalists can be provided with anything that they need in order to pursue a story. “When reporting about the war on drugs and the extrajudicial killings I still had to take the public transport”, she adds. For both Lian and Rambo, there would be nothing that stops them from doing what it is their passion and vocation.

Self-censorship is one of the most common consequences of the current situation. Although they don’t consider that they censor themselves, they know colleagues who have lowered their criticism in order to avoid problems. As mentioned earlier, Lian argues that if someone is ever intimidated, he or she needs to expose the intimidation, as this could be your security blanket.

Ellen Tordesillas has been included in the Matrix, a list of people considered as enemies of the administration and who apparently planned to oust Rodrigo Duterte. Ellen considers the fact of being part of such a list as “unfair” and declares that this is, along with online threats, just an example of the pressures that they are constantly receiving. Vera Files tries to practice a good journalism and follow the existing law as its own way of protection against the government pressures. Ellen claims that there would be nothing that stops her from doing her work.

Raffy has suffered how anonymous people have tried to discredit him and the work he was doing. As the previous interviewees, he has also received threats, which have only been online, nothing beyond that. For him, one of the main
challenges is how frustrating the situation is when “despite what you are doing, society stills agrees with the government policies on the war on drugs”, “it is exhausting, both emotionally and physically”, he concludes. Although he doesn’t enjoy doing this and couldn’t be doing this forever, the situation calls for it so some photojournalists are actively covering the situation as they feel it is what they have to.

Regine thinks she is very privileged because she hasn’t received any serious threat. She thinks it may be a result of working for foreign readers based in the United States. However, when she published the story called “This is Manila” the Filipino embassy in the US came out with a statement considering the story as misleading information. She has also witnessed internal pressures when working for CNN Philippines. In fact, Regine observed how there were many stories that didn’t make the cut or had to be rephrased in order to seem less antagonizing to certain politicians or public officials, otherwise, they could boycott your media outlets and make things even more difficult.

Although Sara is aware of the threatening situation for local journalists, especially for those who work at the provinces, she has never felt any pressure or obstacle when reporting not only about the war on drugs but also about any topic regarding the Philippines. She explains that it may be linked to the fact of being a foreigner working in Spanish language. Sara still considers that the main obstacle for producing a piece in the country is having access to an official source. However, she finds multiple alternative versions and people who dare to speak out. In her case, if herself or someone in her environment is endangered, she would step back and stop from doing what is putting her in that situation.

Foundation of Media Alternatives has also received bad feedback after publishing certain statements as a response to the government actions on different issues. It quickly escalated and online attacks and threats joined the bad comments. However, they haven’t experienced anything else than that. Liza understands that pressures, influential people and intimidation can lead a journalist to practice self-censorship because sometimes it is either that or suffering the ire of the wrong person.
4.2 Analysis

Once we have observed what the interviewees have answered, we now refer again to the concept of the “fourth estate” to frame the analysis. In fact, we reuse the graph of the conceptual framework but the one applied to the Philippines, which allows us to follow its structure when analysing the interviews’ findings through this particular lens.

* N., C., and C.o. refer to the three estates of the real: nobility, clergy and commoners while J., E. and L. mean Judicial, Executive and Legislative, the three pillars of democratic countries.
** Ensuring press freedom is a debatable statement that is tackled later in this study

**Figure 4.1** The “fourth estate” theory applied to the Philippine context

Given that Rodrigo Duterte is now the face of the government in the Philippines, the “fourth estate” concept gives the idea that the government has to
ensure press freedom as a requisite for acting as such. However, it is not accomplished to the extent that online journalists consider that the press is being attacked by the government, therefore, the practice of the “fourth estate” seems to be more endangered than in other democratic countries. Although the legal protection of such freedom is acknowledged and the Philippines is posed as one of the most protecting countries on press freedom in Southeast Asia, the application is quite different from what it has been written on papers. In fact, when Rodrigo Duterte goes publicly on tirades against online journalists or when he simply labels Rappler as “fake news site”, the government is not ensuring press freedom but demonizing it, which is something against what the “fourth estate” needs as a basis for being developed as such. Another sign of not guarantying press freedom is all the threats and menaces that online journalists constantly are receiving with no help from the government or the blockage from public officials when online journalists from certain media outlets try to get information from them and they don’t access to provide it. Despite the facts presented here, as the press being endangered, this study admits that there is still press freedom that allows analytical voices to report critically against the government; otherwise this research couldn’t have been done. Also, online journalists still consider that they are safe to develop their work in Metro Manila region, where they are all based in.

Despite the status of press freedom, the “fourth estate” does exist in the Philippines, and in this study it takes the form of online journalists, media professionals who resort to the role of acting as watchdogs of the government when creating content. Even though it is not always named as “watchdogs” per se, “speaking truth to the power” or “hold the government accountable” also reflect how their work respond to that relation with the government, putting into practice the “fourth estate” idea of working as the controlling body of those in power. This role answers to an imperative need of showing the negative consequences that the government’s actions are producing to the poorest and voiceless people under the context of the war on drugs.

Once it comes to the responses that online journalists produce, which should “report what the government does” according to the “fourth estate” idea, this research has found out that all of the participants reflect in their pieces the
government’s measures in the war on drugs. Although the extent varies, they have all reported at least twice about government’s actions on the issue.

Responses are not produced at the reporter’s gallery and printed afterwards anymore, as the initial idea of the “fourth estate” was born with. In fact, they are now breaking news and in-depth reports published on news sites’ websites and contain certain attributes that illustrate “what the government does”. In digital environment, online journalists always include on their pieces their name as the author and a particular vocabulary, which tends to be as descriptive and real as possible. The responses are not influenced by the gender of the author but by their age. As digital content, technology and time play a very important role on the creation of the responses. Technology in terms of platforms used and presentation of the content, and time based on the immediacy that rules online journalism nowadays.

“The fourth estate” understands that the general public is the recipient of “reporting critically about the government’s actions”. In this study, it would be the Philippine society connected to the Internet, who are way larger than the general public reached in the S. XVIII when the “fourth estate” concept was first coined; therefore, their perception of the responses doesn’t follow a common tendency, they are mixed and divided, as it depends on their perception of the government. Those who tend to dislike Duterte’s administration will be prone to read, react and believe in critical reporting to his decisions while those in favour to him won’t.

By the role of being a watchdog of the government, the “fourth estate” tries to guarantee democracy. However, this idea should cohabite with a previous protection that should be continuously sought by the government and journalists. In the case of the Philippines, where press freedom, and, therefore, democracy is under attacked according to the participants, the “fourth estate” could improve alternatives to strengthen both realities that go beyond the responses per se.

- Encourage or improve collaborations between media outlets
- Regain the trust of the people by only revealing the truth of different issues
- Make people aware of the importance of press freedom through conducting workshops on democracy and press freedom
- Push the government and social media sites to improve media literacy in society
- Keep on practising a responsible journalism and continue critically reporting government actions on different issues
- Demand more accountability on social media sites that spread disinformation

Despite being a term coined in the S. XVIII for the first time, the “fourth estate” stays relevant and enabled the research to look into the interviews’ findings, and therefore the phenomenon that we are studying, by applying the defining marks of the concept into the issue. In that sense, this research has been able to 1) explain the status of press freedom in the Philippines, 2) describe how the “fourth estate” role is now performed in the country, by who and their motivations to do so in order to reach the general public, 3) present the responses that online journalists produce when reporting critically about the government, and 4) identify possible ways to improve not only the freedom of the press but democracy in the Philippines. Having mentioned that, we conclude by saying that the “fourth estate” concept has been able to expand the understanding of the current phenomenon once it has been used for the analysis, extrapolate the landmarks of the theory to the interviewees’ testimonies and present some improvements that could be done by either the government or the online journalists to get a better situation regarding freedom of the press and the Philippine democracy.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

5.1 Conclusion

This study sought to shed light on the situation that online journalists are facing in the Philippines when creating content that presents the government’s measures on the war on drugs. In order to that, it is also necessary to compile the research questions and get them answered.

This section starts now answering the second research question, which is 2) “How is the journalistic production of the responses?”, the first one is tackled later in this part since it compiles information already detailed in the other three questions. The second one encompasses not only the journalistic content but also the social construction of the responses on the particular issue of the war on drugs, which is also complemented with the role that online journalists have when doing so.

The data gathered in the study revealed that the responses that address the war on drugs take the form of in-depth reports as the most common type of pieces, which normally highlight the social side of the issue as the most frequent reason to write about. While there is neither consensus in the purpose of producing content of the war on drugs nor clear effects of their work on it, the perception of the Philippine society is seen homogeneously as a mixed and divided opinion about the pieces. It will depend on the particular point of view on the government and its actions when handling the war on drugs.

The creation of in-depth reports doesn’t really respond to a pattern within the newsrooms, as the steps and strategies adopted vary according to the different news sites studied. However, technology and time gain an extreme importance during the production phase; both of them are considered as two essential elements at this stage.

In order to complement the pieces that online journalists are creating, the authors consult other sources and tend to collaborate with other fellow journalists and
external parties, such as NGOs, human activists or churches, to enrich the final product with other perspectives and missing information, if needed.

The journalistic production of in-depth reports responds to the role of the “fourth estate”, in which they are seen as the controlling body of those in power, which has analysed in sections.

Once the question on journalistic production of responses is answered, this part now looks into the responses themselves, with the attributes that they present and factors that influence them, a set of insights that answers the third research question of the research: “What are the special features that these responses have?” The study has identified many patterns on them. In fact, should be stated that the responses on the war on drugs always present the name of the author on them and employ a type of vocabulary that tends to be as descriptive and blunt as possible. While gender is not a factor that influences the responses, the age of the author does, as many senior online journalists wouldn’t be willing to face the challenges and pressures that this type of pieces entails. As being aimed for online platforms, the responses are always published on the main website of news sites.

When creating or publishing the responses, online journalists suffer certain challenges, pressures and obstacles that might affect their work. This paragraph answers now the fourth research question: “What are the challenges, pressures or obstacles that online journalists are facing when creating the responses”. This study has observed how online threats is the most common type of pressures that online journalists receive, while self-censorship is the most frequent challenge in the newsrooms. In fact, it is an outcome of having a press freedom under attacked even though online journalists still feel safe when practicing journalism in Metro Manila.

They contemplate different ways to improve the status of press freedom, while individually they opt for still performing a responsible journalism, they consider that collaboration between media outlets could also help improve the situation of the aforementioned freedom. Also, they argue that social media sites that contribute to spread disinformation should hold accountability on the information that they allow to publish.
As mentioned before, once we had the answers from the previous research questions compiled and explained in detail, we are able to answer the first research question. Hence, if we ask: “In the context of crackdowns, what are the responses of online journalists critically reporting on the Duterte Administration’s war on drugs?” the answer to that serves as a summary of the previous questions, as this one encompasses what it has already been seen.

In that sense, we can say that the responses take the shape of in-depth reports that are published in news sites including always the name of the author. Online journalists normally write about social stories, which are produced after consulting other media sources and including informants’ testimonies and data from reliable NGOs (collaboration). The content is developed by following the newsroom’s own steps of creation and are published as fast as possible (time) using different types of multimedia formats (technology) while having a blunt and descriptive type of vocabulary.

Moreover, the responses under the perspective of the war on drugs are created as a consequence of the need for talking about the social aspect of it, without a clear purpose during its creation or effects on the issue. In parallel, the way that Filipino society perceives them is really divided.

The responses are born with the intention to control those in power and even though they are not affected by the gender of the author, they are determined by the age of the online journalist that produces them. The pieces are created under the umbrella of a press freedom that is currently attacked; however, its status could be improved by the collaboration between media outlets and by holding accountability to the social media sites that spread disinformation. Although online journalists that create such responses still feel safe when performing their work, they have suffered from online threats and might fall into censoring themselves to avoid possible negative consequences from the “those in power” when online journalists report critically about their actions.

Having said that, from a theoretical perspective, online journalism in the Philippines doesn’t differ from that in other parts of the globe; it presents the same inner characteristics, the platforms to disseminate the content and the profile of professionals. In that sense, the data gathered for this study has revealed a healthful
condition no matter the boundaries and challenges that online journalists face when performing their work. Six online journalists, one photojournalist and one NGO representative have provided enough evidences to portray some behaviours in creating such responses, as well as the reasons and motivations to do so. The results have contributed to establishing certain patterns in the responses and it has allowed the researcher to make a closer overview of the journalistic practice in digital environments when the freedom that is supposed to protect their work is endangered.

If taking that into consideration, and although the study was mainly a journalistic-based research, it also aimed to emphasize the need for strengthening the freedom of the press as an essential right for democratic states. Through a human rights-based approach, this study continuously highlighted the importance of a press to act as “the fourth estate”, a controlling pillar of governments while keeping political and social stability, which have been repeatedly mentioned along the study through the literature review or the analysis of the findings.

Overall, this study has presented the reality of online journalists in Metro Manila through the content that they create. However, much remains to be learned about it.

It would be significant to conduct a deeper study on how journalists deal with the war in drugs in the provinces of the country, where the practice of online journalism seems to be riskier so other patterns and responses may emerge. As a participant of the interviews mentioned, there are as many online journalism as online journalists are, so it would be really relevant to analyse this issue through the lens of journalism professionals in the provinces. In addition to that, this study hasn’t taken into consideration pro-government journalists, an insight that could be also tackled in following studies. Nevertheless, and as mentioned in the limitations of the study section, it cannot be understood as an absolute research as what we have reflected only corresponds to the opinions of those who participated in the interviews. Therefore, we need to acknowledge that more type of responses may exist.

Moreover, to understand this phenomenon better, further researches could address different types of journalism under the same scope, such as citizen journalism or social media journalism, or could look into the skills that journalists must posses for reporting this kind of situations. Also, a more extensive human rights-based approach
could be employed to analyse the government crackdowns and threats on online journalists.

In conclusion, the Philippines is experiencing tough times when it comes to reporting on the government’s actions on the war on drugs. The responses of online journalists leave a bitter feeling. Although there are still very inspiring voices that keep on doing their work no matter the negative consequences they may face, it is the government who doesn’t stop demonizing those who are critical to it and failing in the protection, fulfilment and respect of the freedom of the press, which invalidates the discourse of being one of the most protective countries in Asia on the aforementioned freedom and showing the Philippine Constitution as a mere paper with no practical guarantees, at least for online journalists.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR ONLINE JOURNALISTS

A) Introductory Questions
0. How are you? Are you having a good day?
1. What are your name, gender, age and occupation? How long have you been practising journalism?
2. What is your position in the company? JUNIOR/SENIOR
3. Could you explain briefly, in your opinion, what it is actually happening in the Philippines between the government and certain online journalists under the context of the war on drugs? How does it make you feel as an online journalist?

B) Questions about the construction of the responses and challenges
4. Why do you think it is necessary to talk about the government’s actions on the war of drugs? What are the criteria that you follow to decide to whether write about it or not?
5. What is your purpose when writing about such a topic?
6. How can you actually reflect it on the work that you produce? What is the kind of pieces do you produce? Why those specific pieces?
7. How do you think Filipino society perceives your work? Why?
8. What do you think it is the effect/implication of your work in the issue?
9. What do you think is the role of online journalists/journalists in a democracy? Why do you think so? How do you and your work fulfil with such a role in the given context?
10. What are the obstacles that you face when doing so? Is there any other challenge that you would like to point out when reporting the government’s actions on the war on drugs? Would there be anything that could make you stop working on this?
C) Questions about the production of the responses
11. What are the steps or strategies that you or your team follow when creating an article about it? Does it differ from the creation of another type of articles? How?
12. To what extend is technology important during the creation process? How do you notice it?
13. What is the importance of time in your work? How much time does it take you normally to get an article done?
14. Do you normally check any other sources -news sites- before creating a piece?

D) Questions about the special features of the responses
15. Do you always sign your articles about the war on drugs? Why wouldn’t you do it?
16. There are generally more female journalists writing about this issue rather than male journalists, do you think gender is a factor that influences the creation of this type of content? What about the age of the online journalist?
17. What type of vocabulary you use when writing about the government actions on the war on drugs?
18. Where do you actually publish the content you create? Is it on news sites, social media sites or others? Do you think your content, although it talks about the same issue, adapts to the platforms that you use to disseminate it?

E) Questions on safeness and human rights
19. Do you think is safe to work as a critical online journalist in the Philippines nowadays?
20. According to your own experience, what is the current situation of the freedom of the press in the Philippines despite the legal framework?
21. How can online journalists individually or collectively help to improve the situation of the freedom of the press in the Philippines?
22. What is the responsibility of social media sites in spreading misinformation and how they could improve the situation of the freedom in the press in the country?
23. Have you ever collaborated with NGOs that advocate for the freedom of the Expression, Speech or Press, and/or human rights agents? What was your purpose in doing so?
24. Would you like to add something else?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR NGOs

A) Introductory Questions
0. How are you? Are you having a good day?
1. What are your name, gender, age and occupation?
2. What is the NGO that you work for and what is its main field of action? Do you work at a local, national or international level?
3. Could you explain briefly, in your opinion, what it is actually happening in The Philippines between the government and certain online journalists under the context of the war on drugs?
4. What is the role of your NGOs in such a context?
5. What is your motivation to address this issue?

B) Questions about their particular responses on the issue and human rights concerns
6. As human rights advocates, what is the type of responses/mechanisms that you develop when observing another assault on the freedom of the press or expression?
7. What kind of steps or strategies you follow when creating such materials?
8. What are the goals you pursue in doing so?
9. Is there any kind of collaboration with more NGOs that advocate for the same purpose?
10. Have you ever tried to lobby the national government regarding the war on drugs its consequences on the freedom of the press? What was the response?
11. What about reaching supranational human rights bodies? How?
12. Assuming that you are in constant contact with online journalists, what are the insights you receive from them? Is there any patter on the testimonies?
13. How do you think is the situation of the freedom of the press now in the Philippines? What can NGO and journalists do in order to improve it?
14. What is the responsibility of social media sites in spreading misinformation and how they could improve the situation of the freedom in the press in the country?
15. What are the challenges that an NGO that advocates for the freedom of the press is facing?
APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORMS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

1) Raffy Lerma

Consent Form

Date: [Date]

My name is [NAME], aged [Age] years old, now living at the address [Address].

Province: [Province], Postal code: [Postal Code], Tel. No.: [Phone Number]

I hereby express my consent to participate as a subject in the research project entitled "Online Journalist's responses to Duterte's administration attacks on press freedom". In so doing, I am informed of the research project's origin and purposes; its procedural details to carry out or to be carried out; its expected benefits and risks that may occur to the subjects, including methods to prevent and handle harmful consequences; and remuneration, and expense. I thoroughly read the detailed statements in the information sheet given to the research subjects. I was also given explanations and my questions were answered by the head of the research project.

I am aware of my right to further information concerning benefits and risks from the participation in the research project and my right to withdraw or refrain from the participation anytime without any consequence on the service or health care I am to receive in the future.

I consent to the researchers' use of my private information obtained in this research, but do not consent to an individual disclosure of private information. The information must be presented as part of the research results as a whole.

I thoroughly understand the statements in the information sheet for the research subjects and in this consent form. I hereby give my signature.

Signature: [Signature]

Date: [Date]
2) Ellen Tordesillas

Consent Form

Date: 22/05/2019

My name is Ellen Tordesillas, aged 30 years old, now living at the address:
[Address Information]
Province: [Province] Postal code: [Postal Code] Tel No.: [Tel No.]

I hereby express my consent to participate as a subject in the research project entitled “Online Journalist’s responses to Duterte’s administration attacks on press freedom.”

In so doing, I am informed of the research project’s origin and purposes; its procedural details to carry out or to be carried out; its expected benefits and risks that may occur to the subjects, including methods to prevent and handle harmful consequences; and remuneration, and expense. I thoroughly read the detailed statements in the information sheet given to the research subjects. I was also given explanations and my questions were answered by the head of the research project.

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I thoroughly understand the statements in the information sheet for the research subjects and in this consent form. I hereby give my signature.

Signature: [Signature]
Date: 22/05/2019
3) Lian Buan

Consent Form

Date: May 1, 2019

My name is Lian Buan, aged 28 years old, now living at the address No. 123,投行 Road, Street. Province. Postal code. Tel. No. 09123456789

I hereby express my consent to participate as a subject in the research project entitled “Online Journalist’s responses to Duterte’s administration attacks on press freedom”

In so doing, I am informed of the research project’s origin and purpose; its procedural details to carry out or to be carried out; its expected benefits and risks that may occur to the subjects, including methods to prevent and handle harmful consequences and remuneration, and expense. I thoroughly read the detailed statements in the information sheet given to the research subjects. I was also given explanations and my questions were answered by the head of the research project.

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I thoroughly understand the statements in the information sheet for the research subjects and in this consent form. I hereby give my signature.

Signature: Lian Buan
Date: May 1, 2019
4) Rambo Talabong

Consent Form

Date: August 20, 2019

My name is Rambo Talabong, aged 22 years old, now living at the address no. 123, Mapa Road/Street, Johnny Saae, Province. Postal code 1234 Tel. No. 09123456789

I hereby express my consent to participate as a subject in the research project entitled “Online Journalist’s responses to Duterte’s administration attacks on press freedom”.

In so doing, I am informed of the research project’s origin and purposes; its procedural details to carry out or to be carried out; its expected benefits and risks that may occur to the subjects, including methods to prevent and handle harmful consequences; and remuneration, and expense. I thoroughly read the detailed statements in the information sheet given to the research subjects. I was also given explanations and my questions were answered by the head of the research project.

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I thoroughly understand the statements in the information sheet for the research subjects and in this consent form. I hereby give my signature.

Signature: ____________________________

Date: August 20, 2019
5) Liza Garcia

Consent Form

Date: 06/10/2019

My name is Liza Garcia. I am aged 35 years old, now living at the address: 123 Main Street, Anytown, USA. Postal code: 12345. Tel. No: 123-456-7890.

I hereby express my consent to participate as a subject in the research project entitled “Online Journalist’s responses to Duter’s administration attacks on press freedom”.

In so doing, I am informed of the research project’s origin and purposes; its procedural details to carry out or to be carried out; its expected benefits and risks that may occur to the subjects, including methods to prevent and handle harmful consequences; and remuneration, and expense. I thoroughly read the detailed statements in the information sheet given to the research subjects. I was also given explanations and my questions were answered by the head of the research project.

I am aware of my right to further information concerning benefits and risks from the participation in the research project and my right to withdraw or refrain from the participation anytime without any consequence on the service or health care I am to receive in the future.

I consent to the researchers’ use of my private information obtained in this research, but do not consent to an individual disclosure of private information. The information must be presented as part of the research results as a whole.

I thoroughly understand the statements in the information sheet for the research subjects and in this consent form. I hereby give my signature.

Signature: [Signature]

Date: 06/10/2019
6) Regine Cabato

Consent Form

Date: 23/1/2019

My name is Regine Cabato, aged 24 years old, now living at
the address no., Road/Street. Postal code. Tel. No.

I hereby express my consent to participate as a subject in the research project entitled “Online Journalist’s responses to Duterte’s administration attacks on press freedom”.

In doing so, I am informed of the research project’s origin and purpose; its procedural details to carry out or to be carried out; its expected benefits and risks that may occur to the subjects, including methods to prevent and handle harmful consequences, and remuneration, and expense. I thoroughly read the detailed statements in the information sheet given to the research subjects. I was also given explanations and my questions were answered by the head of the research project.

I am aware of my right to further information concerning benefits and risks from the participation in the research project and my right to withdraw or refrain from the participation anytime without any consequence on the service or health care I am to receive in the future.

I consent to the researchers’ use of my private information obtained in this research, but do not consent to an individual disclosure of private information. The information must be presented as part of the research results as a whole.

I thoroughly understand the statements in the information sheet for the research subjects and in this consent form. I hereby give my signature.

Signature: __________________________
Date: 23/1/2019
7) Portia Ladrído

Consent Form

Date: 24/05/2019

My name is Portia Ladrído, aged X years old, now living at X Address: X Road/Street, X Province. X Postal code: X Tel. No.: X

I hereby express my consent to participate as a subject in the research project entitled “Online Journalists’ responses to Duterte’s administration attacks on press freedom.”

In so doing, I am informed of the research project’s origin and purpose; its procedural details to carry out or to be carried out; its expected benefits and risks that may occur to the subjects, including methods to prevent and handle harmful consequences; and remuneration, and expense. I thoroughly read the detailed statements in the information sheet given to the research subjects. I was also given explanations and my questions were answered by the head of the research project.

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I consent to the researchers’ use of my private information obtained in this research, but do not consent to an individual disclosure of private information. The information must be presented as part of the research results as a whole.

I thoroughly understand the statements in the information sheet for the research subjects and in this consent form. I hereby give my signature.

Signature: 
Date: 24/05/2019
8) Sara Gómez

Consent Form

Date: 27 / 5 / 2019

My name is Sara Gómez, aged 32 years old, now living at the address No. 8010, Road/Street, Manila, Metro Manila, Postal code 1014, Tel. No. 09184614285.

I hereby express my consent to participate as a subject in the research project entitled "Online Journalist's responses to Duterte's administration attacks on press freedom".

In so doing, I am informed of the research project's origin and purposes; its procedural details to carry out or to be carried out; its expected benefits and risks that may occur to the subjects, including methods to prevent and handle harmful consequences; and remuneration, and expense. I thoroughly read the detailed statements in the information sheet given to the research subjects. I was also given explanations and my questions were answered by the head of the research project.

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I consent to the researchers' use of my private information obtained in this research, but do not consent to an individual disclosure of private information. The information must be presented as part of the research results as a whole.

I thoroughly understand the statements in the information sheet for the research subjects and in this consent form, I hereby give my signature.

Signature: __________________________

Date: 27 / 5 / 2019
**NAME**  
Jesús Manuel Valverde Carnerero

**DATE OF BIRTH**  
18 November 1992

**PLACE OF BIRTH**  
Seville, Spain

**INSTITUTIONS ATTENDED**  
Universidad de Sevilla, 2011-2017  
- Bachelors of Communications (Audio-visual Communications)  
Mahidol University, 2018-2019  
- Masters of Arts in Human Rights and Democratization

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