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**MEDIA PRACTITIONERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL MEDIA  
PRESSURE IN MONITORING GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS FOR  
ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY, AND RELIABILITY**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examined the lived experiences of media practitioners in Iloilo City as they navigate social media pressure while monitoring government programs, with a focus on accountability, transparency, and reliability. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through Focus Group Discussions and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that journalism has shifted to a reactive, fast-paced practice driven by viral public discourse. Media practitioners experience dual pressure from the public and the government, as well as emotional strain from constant scrutiny and criticism. They face challenges such as misinformation, time pressure, and information overload, which complicate the verification process and affect reporting reliability. Despite these challenges, practitioners uphold professional integrity through strict verification, ethical discipline, emotional regulation, and collaborative practices. The study highlights their resilience and their critical role as intermediaries, ensuring credible, accurate, and accountable governance reporting in an increasingly complex digital environment.

**Keywords:** *Media Practitioners, Social Media Pressure, Monitoring, Government Programs, Accountability*

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## INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed the global communication landscape, with social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube enabling faster and more interactive exchanges of information. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), these platforms enable open, immediate communication, reshaping how individuals and institutions interact. In the Philippines, this shift has empowered citizens to become active participants in governance. As noted by David (2014), social media enables the public to monitor government programs and demand accountability in real time.

This transformation is evident in Iloilo City, where a digitally engaged population actively uses social media to raise concerns about traffic, waste management, flooding, public utilities, and healthcare services. These platforms serve as spaces where citizens share experiences and expectations, creating a continuous stream of public feedback directed at government institutions.

Within this digital environment, media practitioners play a crucial role as intermediaries between the public and government. They bridge grassroots concerns and formal governance processes by verifying and translating social media content into structured news reports and inquiries. As gatekeepers, they distinguish between legitimate concerns and misinformation, ensuring that public discourse remains accurate and reliable.

The impact of social media becomes more pronounced during crises. For instance, during the power outages on Panay Island in January 2024, residents used social media to

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share real-time updates and frustrations. Similarly, the April 2024 water shortage in Iloilo City prompted widespread online reporting from affected communities. In both cases, media practitioners verified information, clarified conflicting narratives, and raised critical questions to government authorities, thereby promoting accountability and transparency.

Local agencies such as the Traffic and Transportation Management Office (TTMO) are also subject to continuous digital scrutiny. Concerns raised online often lead to media coverage, which pressures officials to respond through public statements and policy actions. This demonstrates how social media can influence governance and decision-making processes.

Despite its advantages, social media also presents challenges. The demand for immediate responses may lead to “performative governance,” where officials prioritize visibility over long-term solutions. Additionally, the spread of misinformation, including manipulated content, complicates media practitioners' work, requiring them to balance speed with accuracy.

Moreover, constant exposure to digital discourse places significant professional and psychological pressure on media practitioners. Bertot et al. (2012) note that increased digital engagement intensifies information intermediaries' responsibility to continuously monitor and verify content. These challenges emphasize the importance of the ART framework—Accountability, Reliability, and Transparency—in evaluating governance in the digital age.

Accountability refers to the obligation of public officials to justify their actions (Bovens, 2007), while transparency ensures openness in government processes, and reliability focuses

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on the accuracy of information shared with the public. Together, these principles are essential for maintaining trust and effective governance.

Given these developments, it is important to examine how media practitioners navigate social media pressure while fulfilling their roles.

Ultimately, this study aimed to explore the lived experiences of media practitioners in Iloilo City as they manage social media pressure in monitoring government programs, particularly in relation to accountability, transparency, and reliability.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Research Methodology

Chapter 3 presents the research method, research design, participants of the study, sampling design, research instrument and its validity, data gathering procedure, and data analysis.

### Research Method

This chapter outlines the systematic approach used to investigate the lived experiences of media practitioners in Iloilo City. It details the research design, participant selection, data collection instruments, and the thematic analysis used to interpret the digital friction between the public and the state.

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, using a phenomenological approach, to explore the lived experiences of media practitioners in Iloilo City regarding social

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media pressure while monitoring government programs. A phenomenological design is appropriate for this study because it focuses on understanding the essence of participants' lived experiences, including their perceptions, challenges, and responses to a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Through this approach, the researcher seeks to capture how media practitioners interpret and manage social media pressure while fulfilling their professional role in monitoring government activities, particularly in relation to accountability, transparency, and reliability.

Data were primarily collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to allow participants to share individual experiences while also reflecting on shared professional realities within the local media environment. The collective discussion format enabled participants to interact and build on one another's insights, yielding richer qualitative data.

To enhance the credibility and depth of the findings, data triangulation was employed through key informant insights and document analysis, including publicly available media reports and government communications related to the issues discussed in the interviews. Triangulating multiple sources of information strengthened the data's trustworthiness and enabled the researcher to compare perspectives across different forms of evidence (Denzin, 1978; Carter et al., 2014).

## Research Locale

The study was conducted in Iloilo City, Western Visayas, Philippines. Iloilo City serves as a regional hub for governance, media, and public communication in Western Visayas. The

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city has an active media sector, comprising radio stations, news organizations, and digital news platforms, that regularly cover local governance and public service issues.

In recent years, Iloilo City has faced several public concerns—such as power outages in Panay, water supply shortages, and urban traffic management issues—that have been widely discussed on social media platforms. These circumstances make Iloilo City an appropriate setting for examining how social media pressure influences media practitioners and governance monitoring practices.

### Participants of the Study

The participants consisted of six (6) media practitioners who were actively engaged in Iloilo City. This sample size aligned with phenomenological standards, which prioritized the depth of experience over numerical breadth. The participants included a diverse mix of veteran radio anchors, beat reporters, and digital news editors who served as the primary "bridge" between the Ilonggo citizenry and government officials. By engaging six (6) key informants, the researcher ensured an intensive, high-quality dialogue that captured the specific professional burdens of handling "viral" digital scrutiny.

### Sampling Design

This study used purposive sampling to select respondents with the most relevant knowledge and experience. Participants were chosen based on the following criteria: (1) They were active media practitioners based in Iloilo City; (2) They had at least three years of experience covering local government units (LGUs) or public-interest stories; and (3) They

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actively utilize social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, X, or YouTube) as part of their professional feedback loop or news dissemination.

## Research Instrument

The primary research instrument used in this study was a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide. The guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore the core variables of Accountability, Transparency, and Reliability (ART). While an FGD guide does not strictly require formal validation due to its flexible, exploratory nature, the researcher sought expert validation to strengthen the credibility of the questions and incorporate informed opinions. Thus, the instrument underwent review by faculty advisers and media professionals to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study's objectives.

### Validity of the Research Instrument

To ensure the rigor and credibility of the research instrument, the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide underwent a systematic validation process through expert evaluation. Content validity was established by consulting subject-matter experts, including faculty members in Public Administration and experienced media practitioners, who assessed the instrument for clarity, relevance, coherence, and alignment with the study's objectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

As part of the validation process, an Instrument Validation Rating Sheet was used to facilitate a structured, objective evaluation of each interview question. The validators rated each item according to predefined criteria, allowing for a systematic assessment of the instrument's quality and suitability for the study.

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The validation process aimed to determine whether the interview questions effectively captured the key constructs of the study, particularly the lived experiences of media practitioners and the dimensions of accountability, transparency, and reliability (ART). Based on the ratings and feedback provided by the experts, necessary revisions were made to improve the wording, sequencing, and overall clarity of the questions.

Furthermore, face validity was ensured by confirming that the questions were understandable and appropriate for the participants, enabling them to clearly express their experiences. The use of open-ended questions aligns with qualitative and phenomenological research approaches, which emphasize depth and richness of responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher followed a systematic process to ensure data integrity:

The researcher secured written voluntary participation and confidentiality agreements from the selected practitioners, ensuring they understood the study's purpose.

Participants were invited to an FGD (5–7 participants per group) lasting 60–90 minutes. This session explored collective challenges, such as shared strategies for verifying spliced media, managing "coordinated troll attacks," and sharing personal experiences.

All recordings were transcribed verbatim. Field notes regarding non-verbal cues and group dynamics were incorporated to enrich the final narrative.

Strict ethical protocols were observed to protect the participants' professional standing. Informed Consent was obtained, and Anonymity was maintained through the use of

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pseudonyms. All digital data were stored in encrypted files, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any professional repercussions.

## Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involved six phases:

- First, familiarization with the transcribed data;
- Second, generating initial codes (e.g., "Reactive Reporting" or "Digital Friction");
- Third, searching for themes related to the ART pillars;
- Fourth, reviewing potential themes against the raw data;
- Fifth, defining and naming themes (e.g., "The Performance of Transparency"); and
- Finally, producing the final report supported by direct participant quotes.

To ensure the validity of the findings, the researcher employed Member Checking, in which preliminary themes were shared with participants to verify that the interpretations accurately reflected their lived experiences.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study revealed that media practitioners' lived experiences are deeply shaped by the pervasive influence of social media, transforming journalism into a continuous, high-pressure, and emotionally demanding practice. These experiences are not merely operational but are embedded in how practitioners think, feel, and act within a rapidly evolving digital environment.

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Media practitioners experience a fundamental shift in their professional routines, where journalism becomes reactive and driven by viral public discourse. Their daily work is no longer structured around planned coverage but is dictated by trending issues that require immediate attention. This creates a constant state of alertness, where practitioners must monitor social media continuously and respond quickly, often while dealing with incomplete information.

At the same time, their lived experience is defined by occupying an intermediary position between the public and government institutions. They experience simultaneous pressure from audiences demanding immediate updates and from institutions expected to respond to issues. This dual positioning intensifies their sense of responsibility, as they are required to translate public concerns into structured reports while maintaining professional standards.

Emotionally, media practitioners experience significant psychological strain. Continuous exposure to criticism, public scrutiny, and the expectation of constant responsiveness can lead to stress and emotional exhaustion. Many participants described their work as emotionally draining, particularly when feedback becomes personal or when issues go viral. Despite this, they develop coping strategies such as emotional detachment and focusing on professional processes, allowing them to continue functioning effectively.

Their experiences also reflect a strong sense of reflective professionalism. Social media pressure prompts them to constantly evaluate their work, question their decisions, and reaffirm their commitment to ethical standards. They navigate the tension between speed and accuracy by consciously prioritizing verification, even under pressure. This reflective practice

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strengthens their professional identity and reinforces their role as credible information providers.

In relation to governance, media practitioners experience social media as both enabling and constraining. They observe that accountability becomes more immediate, as public officials are compelled to respond quickly to issues raised online. However, they also recognize that some responses are performative and focused on managing public perception. Transparency is experienced as more visible and accessible, yet often incomplete or controlled, requiring further verification. Reliability is the most challenging dimension, as practitioners must navigate misinformation, inconsistencies, and evolving information while maintaining accuracy.

The challenges encountered by media practitioners are interconnected and deeply embedded in their lived experiences. They struggle with time pressure, misinformation, information overload, and public scrutiny. These challenges create both cognitive and emotional demands, requiring practitioners to process large volumes of information while managing expectations and maintaining credibility.

To cope with these pressures, media practitioners rely on ethical discipline, emotional regulation, and collaborative practices. Verification, objectivity, and adherence to journalistic standards serve as guiding principles that help them navigate uncertainty. At the same time, they manage stress by setting personal boundaries, avoiding emotional involvement in public criticism, and seeking support from colleagues. These coping mechanisms reflect both individual resilience and collective professional practice.

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The lived experiences of media practitioners demonstrate that social media pressure has transformed journalism into a demanding, ongoing practice that extends beyond technical reporting. It is experienced as a dynamic interplay of professional responsibility, emotional strain, and ethical decision-making.

Media practitioners experience journalism as increasingly reactive and shaped by public discourse. This transformation enhances their responsiveness to societal concerns but also exposes them to constant pressure and uncertainty. Their role evolves from traditional gatekeeping to active mediation, requiring them to interpret, verify, and respond to rapidly changing information.

The experience of dual pressure from the public and government highlights the complexity of their position in the digital public sphere. Media practitioners are not only information providers but also accountability facilitators, balancing competing expectations while maintaining credibility. This position intensifies both their professional and emotional burden.

Emotional labor emerges as a central aspect of their lived experience. The need to manage criticism, maintain composure, and sustain performance under continuous scrutiny requires resilience and self-regulation. These experiences underscore the human dimension of journalism, where emotional strength becomes as important as technical skill.

Reflective professionalism is strengthened under social media pressure. Rather than compromising standards, media practitioners reinforce their commitment to verification,

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objectivity, and ethical responsibility. Their experiences show that integrity is actively maintained through conscious and continuous effort.

In terms of governance, media practitioners experience social media as a force that accelerates accountability, expands transparency, and challenges reliability. While it enhances public participation and institutional responsiveness, it also introduces complexities that require careful navigation. Media practitioners play a critical role in managing these dynamics, ensuring that information remains credible and meaningful.

Overall, the lived experiences of media practitioners highlight their adaptability and resilience in a high-pressure digital environment. Their ability to navigate social media pressure while upholding professional standards underscores their essential role in sustaining accountability, transparency, and reliability in governance.

The findings of this study have significant implications when viewed through the lens of lived experience.

For media practitioners, the study highlights the importance of recognizing emotional labor as a core component of their profession. Addressing psychological well-being and developing coping strategies are essential for sustaining long-term performance and maintaining professional integrity.

For media organizations, there is a need to create supportive environments that acknowledge the pressures of digital journalism. Providing institutional support, including mental health resources and training in managing misinformation, can help practitioners navigate their roles more effectively.

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For government institutions, the study underscores the importance of improving communication practices. While social media enhances visibility, incomplete or performative responses may undermine trust. Strengthening transparency and consistency can reduce pressure on both media practitioners and the public.

For the public, the findings highlight the impact of online behavior on media practitioners. Responsible engagement and awareness of the verification process can contribute to a more constructive digital environment.

## Conclusion

Based on the lived experiences of media practitioners, the following recommendations are proposed.

Media organizations should implement structured support systems that address both professional and emotional challenges. This includes training in digital verification, workload management, and psychological resilience.

Media practitioners are encouraged to continue strengthening ethical practices, particularly in verification and responsible reporting. Maintaining discipline under pressure is essential to preserving credibility.

Government agencies should adopt proactive communication strategies that provide clear, complete, and timely information. Reducing ambiguity in official statements can help minimize misinformation and support reliable reporting.

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Capacity-building programs should be developed to enhance collaboration among media practitioners, enabling more efficient verification and information-sharing processes.

Future research should explore the lived experiences of other stakeholders, such as public officials and citizens, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of social media pressure in governance.

The lived experiences of media practitioners reveal that social media pressure is not merely an external influence but an internalized, ongoing condition that shapes how journalism is practiced. It transforms reporting into a responsive, emotionally demanding, and ethically grounded process. Despite the challenges, media practitioners demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and a strong commitment to truth, reinforcing their vital role in bridging the public and government in the digital age.

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