

# See- Know- Log: The Sinulog Festival Through the Lenses of the Cebuano Journalists

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*Abstract* — The Sinulog Festival is considered the Best Festival in the country, awarded by the first Choose Philippines Awards last 2016 and tagged as the "Mother of all festivals." Journalists are the first to observe, inform, and be updated with the latest developments of the said prestigious event. This study documents the insights and experiences of the Cebuano journalists during their Sinulog coverage experiences. Using the purposive sampling method, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with the respondents. Results show that the Sinulog festival is one of the most tiring and challenging media coverages of the Cebuano journos. Journalists observed many unethical things that must be addressed in the said festivity. These results emphasize that journalism is essential in this kind of event.

*Keywords* — *Sinulog festival, Cebuano journalist, media coverages, journalism*

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## I. Introduction

Sinulog is considered the best festival in the Philippines, as awarded by First Choose Philippines Awards in 2016 (Fernandez, 2016). Most Filipinos also tag it as the mother of all festivals in the country (Lorenciana, 2014). With this kind of festivity, journalists are the first people to know, observe, and inform the public about further development and progress of the celebration. Although there are a lot of studies already conducted about Sinulog- examining auto-ethnography and performance of the festivity (Maiquez, 2013), links between the festivity and political behavior (Magalzo et al., 2014), and cultural parallelism of faith to education curriculum (Manasa & Canasa, 2018), there are no study documenting the insights and experiences of the Cebuano journalists. This study aims to establish the insights and experiences of Cebuano journalists in their Sinulog festival coverage.

According to Landy (2018), the Sinulog Festival is one of the most significant annual events in the Roman Catholic world. Over the years, it has been documented by Oracion (2012) that Sinulog Festivity has been conducted in different overseas locales. Since Filipinos are spread across the globe, this tradition and culture were also practiced by Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) and immigrants.

Filipinos believe that the Santo Niño is their protector and has the power to grant and answer their prayers (Landy, 2018). They believed that Santo Nino gave them triumphs and miracles in life. These miracles intensify their faith and result in a more positive vision in life (Alvarado & Largo, 2018).

Evident in most of the studies that there is much research on the Sinulog festival- the study of the "Bato Balani sa Gugma" (Manasa & Canasa, 2018), Fluvial Parade (Ibones et al., 2016), and Dance Festival (Inocian, 2017). However, these studies needed to document the experiences of local watchdogs of society towards the festivity.

The researcher posits that journalists' experiences must also be covered as they are the people who are updated with the different Sinulog festival events. These insights will be explored in the study.

### **Statement of Objectives:**

The study documents the insights and experiences of the Cebuano journalists in their Sinulog Festival coverage. This study will also explore the things for improvement and development in Sinulog Festival.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Sinulog Festival is one of the most significant annual events in the Catholic world (Landy, 2018). It is celebrated yearly to showcase the distinct and unique culture of the Cebuanos (Ibones, 2016). It is an annual festivity in Cebu City that will happen every third Sunday in January. It is a nine-day celebration; however, the festival's highlight is on Sunday with a colorful Sinulog Grand Parade that includes contests, art, cultural performances, and a procession (PDI, 2013).

According to Cebuano Studies Center, "Sinulog" refers to a dance ritual in honor of the miraculous image of "Santo Nino," or Holy Child of Jesus. The dance moves to the drums' sound, which resembles the current (Sinulog) of what was then known as the Pahina River in Cebu City.

Alvarado & Largo (2018) revealed in their study that devotees believe Sto. Nino provides them with miracles in life. It also concludes that their faith resulted in their positive visions in life. This finding may be the very essence of this festivity; however, it is also given that this is an avenue where local establishments can boost their businesses, wherein more than 1.5 million tourists are estimated in the latest Sinulog 2019, a higher figure than the previous years. According to Manticanjon (2019), the said celebration attracted commercial interest. Former Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) President Nestor Jardin said that festivals like the Sinulog had contributed so much to the city's economic development and the country (Bunachita, 2017).

Moreover, Sembrano (2015) emphasized that the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) conducted dance performances to preserve cultural heritage in the country. One of these dances is the presentation and competition at every Sinulog festival. On the other hand, former Cebu City Mayor Michael Rama stressed the importance of Sinulog dances as cultural heritage preservation that contributed to human development of the people. Meanwhile, a doctoral dissertation mentioned by Manticanjon (2019) described the dances as "informing the

understanding of such cultural terms as 'lihok' (movement), 'kinasingkasing' (sincerity), and 'halad' (sacrifice)," which refer to indigenous practice in Cebuano lifestyle (Ness, 1987).

On the other hand, journalists and the press are essential in this activity. They are considered to be the 'fourth estate of the realm.' Anglo-Irish political theorist and statesman Edmund Burke saw the importance of the press during the medieval era. According to Hirst (2013), the idea of the fourth estate describes journalists' roles in representing people's interests. They keep the national interest from the citizens, but the public interest is all about disclosure and the people's right to know. The Fourth Estate is the watchdog of our society (Coetzee, 2016).

## II. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative phenomenological design. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with the respondents to extract the common themes about their insights and experiences in Sinulog Festival coverage. Phenomenology refers to comprehending a significant phenomenon by gathering the views and ideas of the people who experienced it (Mananay & Canasa, 2018).

Using purposive sampling, the researcher chose the participants of this study. They are four Cebuano journalists who have covered the Sinulog festival for how many years: a Communication professor who was a veteran journalist of Cebu Daily News and a commentator of DyRC, a law student and a former journalist of The Freeman, a journalist and a radio broadcaster from ABS-CBN's DyAB, and an active journo from Cebu Daily News.

After the face-to-face interview, the researcher transcribed, coded, and categorized the participants' responses as they came up with the emergent themes. The saturated responses of the participants were used as bases for the thematic analysis.

## III. Results and Discussion

Based on the participants' ideas and experiences in the face-to-face interview conducted by the researcher, the following themes were identified following the researcher's descriptive analysis of transcripts.

Theme 1: Challenge

Theme 2: Perks

Theme 3: Unethical practices

Theme 4: Essential to inform

**Challenge.** Cebuano journalists see the Sinulog festival as their challenge. It is noted that the respondents came up with different challenges in the said celebration. The following challenges were (1) the Challenge to inform, (2) the Challenge to control the crowd, and (3) the challenge in preparations.

Challenge to inform. For Cebuano journalists, there are significant obligations and responsibilities that they need to fulfill despite the festive atmosphere in Cebu City during the Sinulog festival. It is challenging for them to inform and educate society about what happened in the said celebration. As having a role as the purveyor of information, Cebuano journalists are required to do their best despite the struggles of finding a piece of relevant information during the celebration.

Respondents said that it is always a challenge and opportunity for them to remind the public of the real essence of the festivity- the celebration in honor of the Holy Child Jesus.

*"Ipahinumdom nimo sa mga tao nga ang essence gud niya is ang kapistahan ni Sr. Sto. Niño"* (You need to remind the public the real essence of the festivity of Senior Sto. Nino). (Participant 1)

*"It is also an opportunity for us journalists to share and inform the public of what Sinulog is"* (Participant 3)

*"It is all about giving importance to what we have here in Cebu- the culture, the tradition, and of course the practices from the different walks of life."* (Participant 3)

Aside from knowing the real essence of the celebration, it is a challenge for journalists to gather stories for the public. Participants explained their experiences in walking kilometers to get stories and access to reporting events.

*"Gituyok na nako tibuok ruta alang sa paghatag ug kanang update ug balita kay kinahanglan bag.o na sad nga story mga highlights nga ipakita or imong ibalita nga wala na usually mabantayi sa mga tao nga naa sa kadalanan"* (I went around the route in order to get updates to the public because the stories must be fresh and you need to portray the news that the public haven't noticed at the streets). (Participant 1)

*"It is very challenging sad, and memorable for me because naglakaw ko for 4 kilometers just to get the signals sponsored by a Telecommunication"* (It is very challenging and memorable for me because I walked for almost four kilometers to get signals) (Participant 2)

Challenge to control the crowd. It is noted that the Sinulog festival gathered thousands, if not millions, of people together in celebration of the Holy Child. Even if they are journalists, they do not have passes to be with the crowd.

*“challenge kay siya kay bisan ug media ka, naa kay ID di ka ka control sa mga tao nga naas imong palibot”* (It is a challenge because even if you are a media practitioner and you have identification, you can’t control the crowd in your surroundings) (Participant 1)

*“kanang naipit ka sa sud sa Basilica magguol ka, maglisod kag hunong ug tabi lisod ka ug ginhawa”* (It is when you are stuck at the church and it is difficult to stop and breathe) (Participant 1)

*“You need to pass by pagud ug a huge crowd then nga listed bitaw I control, so that was for me maybe the best coverage so far.”* (You need to pass- by the vast crowd and it is difficult to control, so that was for me maybe the best coverage so far) (Participant 2)

Challenge in preparations. Like typical coverages, journalists must first know first-hand information such as the background of the contingents, where the route is, the celebration before, having radios, condition for a day-long walk, and whatnot. Since it is a day-long coverage, journalists must be prepared for the information before the coverage.

*“Kinahanglan gyud prepared kay ka sa Sinulog nga coverage.”* (You really need to be prepared in Sinulog coverage) (Participant 1)

*“challenge nimo nga makahibaw ka unsay bag.o karon og challenge pod nimo nga makahibaw ka unsa toy nahitabo kani adto aron maka deliver pud ka og ma compare pud nimo unsay nakalahi sa celebration the other year og sa coverage na imong gihimo karung tuiga.”* (The challenge is to know what is new this year in order to create a comparison to the previous years) (Participant 1)

*“a journalist needs to have an internet connection, the communication but it was disrupted because for security purposes”* (Participant 2)

*“That was the best coverage because we go back all to the basics, so we used radios.”* (Participant 2)

**Perks.** As the fourth estate, Cebuano journalists also enjoy some of the perks of Sinulog coverage. As journalists, you can meet or greet many people, mainly tourists, that want to see the beauty of the festivity. You can also enjoy free passes for all the Sinulog activities, especially at the Grand Parade, where stars and artists are coming out, and colorful presentations from the different contingents presenting their culture and tradition are performing. It is noted that the Sinulog coverage is an opportunity to have fun while working.

*“An opportunity to have fun and at the same time work.”* (Participant 4)

*“In relation to fulfillment of this job, enjoys some degree of perks like to be able to go near the contingent, interview the winners and the front seat at the grandstand for the entire presentation.”* (Participant 4)

*“The best gud siguro is nga makaila ka sa mga traditions sa lain-lain nga mga lungsod through their presentations from the contingency, makaila-ila ka sa unsa ka unique ang tagsa taga ka mga presentations gikan sa atong mga lain-laing lungsod.”* (The best moment is to see the traditions of the different presentations of the contingents. You will get to know how unique their presentations were) (Participant 3)

*“Naa kay makaila, naa kay ma interview sad an, nay uban nga first time nimong makita, naay “uy ikaw man to last year ang nagampo pud diri” so nindot siya kay interactive og mas naa kay communication”* (I meet with people in interviews, there are people that you are first time to get along, there are people who use to know you already, so it is nice because it is interactive and you can have good communication) (Participant 1)

*“Sa Sinulog, we get to see the lighter side sa society. Unsa ang kanang dapat ipakita nga murag not just mga issue nga societal issues but we also considered na dinhi sa Sinulog nga naay nindot ang Cebu gawas sa kanang mga problema sa katilimban naay sense of happiness gihapon, sense of preserve ang kanang kalipay sa mga tao nga na preserved jud ni nga tradition or culture.”* (In Sinulog, we get to see the lighter side of the society. You can not just see news about societal issues but we also consider that in Sinulog, there is a good sense aside from the problems in our society. There is a sense of happiness, sense of preservation of tradition and culture) (Participant 3)

*“Dili ra kaayo heavy ang coverage kay tungod naay entertainment factor nga gikan sa atong mga presentations”* (The coverage is not that heavy because of the entertainment factor of the presentations) (Participant 3)

**Unethical practices.** This study also documented the insights of the Cebuano journalists about the unethical practices done by the public or their fellow journalists during Sinulog coverage.

As the first people to know, they are more knowledgeable than others about it. It is said that there are three standard unethical practices during the festivity- Parties, Crowds, and Waste Disposal.

Parties. Even though traditionally, parties and revelries are already associated with the Sinulog festival, Cebuano journalists believe that it must be lessened and minimized because the real essence of the celebration is in honor of Sto. Nino.

*“Sinulog is not really about the party, unta. Dapat kana unta is convergence of all the devotees gikan sa lain laing probinsiya toda sa faith nila sa Sto. Nino but in today’s generation murag na distort iyang essence.”* (Sinulog is not just about the party. It should be about the convergence of all the devotees in the different provinces in their faith of Sto Nino. However, in this generation, the essence was distorted.) (Participant 3)

*“Sobra kaayo nga party. Okay raman siguro na kay part man na sa, ibutang nalang na nga part na sa culture na naandan nga nay kalingawan pero usahay sobra na gud kaayo especially karon diri sa Cebu.”* (The parties are overwhelming. I think it is okay because it maybe part of the culture already to have parties but it is already more than enough) (Respondent 1)

It is considered unethical by the Cebuano journalists because of the lack of discipline of the revelers when they get drunk. Journalists documented the revelers by disturbing tourists, sleeping on the streets, and having inappropriate actions. Even if former Cebu City Mayor Tommy Osmena implemented stricter rules about parties, it is said that the revelers still do wrong actions.

*“People would tend to become rowdy Kung sila they get drunk. Mag party sa kalsada which would compromise or disturb sa atong mga Turista nga gikan pa intawn nag lain laing Lugar.”* (People would tend to become rowdy if they got drunk. There were parties at the streets which would compromise or disturb the tourists) (Participant 3)

*“This year was kinda different compared to the previous kay mas strict and in terms of security, but naa gihapoy problem in terms of kay tungod sa mga parties nga there were reported stampede”* (This year was different compared to the previous years because of stricter rules in terms of security, but there are still problems in terms of parties and there were reported stampede last 2017) (Participant 2)

*“For the last several years, street parties were resulted into many problems, especially the youth, wasted, drunk, and sometimes sleeping on the ground also, so perhaps one of the problems there is the inconsistent way of celebrating a religious activity”* (Participant 4)

*"So it is not also proper that companies, especially restaurants, bars would make money out of the celebration by tolerating indecent actions and especially selling liquors to minors."* (Participant 4)

Crowd. Journalists observed that many people need more discipline in terms of crowd control. It is also said that crowd control is so hard to address by the local government, especially in this event.

*"Out of control especially if naay daghan mga artista so gubot gud that time."* (The crowd is out of control, especially if there are many celebrities so it is rowdy during that time) (Participant 2)

*"Naa gihapoy uban nga dili gihapon disiplinado bisag klaro na nga di ka pwede labang, mu pugos gud."* (There are still people that do not have discipline with themselves. It is clear that they do not allowed to go to the other side of the street yet they still forcing themselves) (Participant 1)

*"The traffic also because I was expecting that traffic would lessen, however, wala"* (The traffic also because I was expecting it to lessen or go, however, it is not being addressed yet local government promised it) (Respondent 2)

Waste Disposal. Lastly, journalists observed the devotees' unethical practices regarding proper waste disposal. They noted that there are few garbage in the trash bins compared to the streets, where you can see garbage everywhere. People for them should be more disciplined in this celebration in honor of the Holy Child Jesus. Moreover, journalists also see that Cebu's city government should address this concern by providing big receptacles in the surroundings.

*"I observed that murag Gamay a gud ang mga garbage nga kuan adto mga basurahan ba."* (I observed that there are few pieces of garbages in the trash bins) (Participant 2)

*"Unta disiplinado kay Sinulog should be supposedly a solemn celebration so nganong daghan man ug basura."* (Hopefully, people should be disciplined because Sinulog should be supposedly a solemn celebration, so why is there much trash in the streets) (Participant 3)

*"Garbage after the Sinulog, so perhaps the city government would improve on that. City government can anticipate and put big receptacles along the way so that garbage receptacles so that there is no reason for the people to throw their garbage anywhere."* (Participant 4)



**Essential to informing.** It is noted in this study that journalism is vital in one of the most prestigious events and grandest events in the country. Journalists need to do their obligation and responsibility to society to inform and educate them with truthful information about the said festivity. With the generation of disinformation, it is essential to have journalism presence.

*“Di man tanan and nakatambong or naa sa lugar gi pahigayon ang mga activities or session religious mana or cultural aspects sa mao nga celebration”* (There are many people who did not attend the activities or session of religious or cultural aspects in the celebration) (Participant 1)

*“kinahanglan gihapon ang journalism bisag naa naka ni suds a imong area because wa man nimo nakita tanan aspects sa mao nga celebration og kami nga mga journalist maoy maghatag nimo sa kung kongrekto, verified na information.”* (It is still important to have journalism because we journalists will provide concrete and verified information) (Participant 1)

*“ang nagsilbing mo balansi sa tanan kay mao man nang gi ingon nila na dili tanan nakita tinuod, kami ang mu himo ug pamaagi nga mag pahibaw ninyo unsay kamatuoran.”* (We balance everything because not all we see is true and through us, they can find the truth) (Participant 1)

*“Our main role is to inform, educate, not just entertain”* (Participant 3)

*“information ato gyud nang ipakita sa mga journalist unsa gyud kini ni nga event. Unsa ang relevance ani adtos katawhan.”* (Through information that a journalists can present to the public the relevance of this event) (Participant 3)

*“Journalists still have a job to do because whatever happens, positive or negative, during the Sinulog, it is still worth the page of the newspaper.”* (Participant 4)

Journalists also encourage their colleagues to do their job well. It is noted that they must stick to their first obligation- to the truth. It also caters a vital role in molding the youth in our society.

*“Hopefully sa akong mga kauban, kamatuoran pud jud ang mu gawas so that makatawag og makaingonon gyud sa tao nga ang journalism necessary gyud during this time.”* (I am hopeful that the truth will always come out and people can see the necessity of journalism especially during this event) (Participant 1)

*“Mao nang journalist kay a vital role in molding or informing the especially the youth sector.”* (The vital role of journalist is to mold and inform especially the youth sector) (Participant 3)

*“Pag educate kung unsay angay buhaton, kung ingani na mga activities na dili dapat lang puros parties”* (To educate what are the appropriate things to do not just having parties) (Participant 3)

#### IV. Conclusion

Journalism is essential in our lives because it is a tool of information for the public that shapes individuals' opinions. Moreover, it secures our lives as journalists provide their role as the fourth estate in our realm. Journalists educate us to have a critical mindset on what we need to know. Sinulog coverage of the Cebuano journalists is one of the most tiring yet fulfilling coverages in their experiences. They may put much effort into gathering news for the public, but at the end of the day, these experiences are worth reminiscing about. With this, it is recommended in to have allowances and insurance for the journalists to enjoy during the festivity. Media organizations should note that Sinulog is not just ordinary coverage for Cebuanos but is considered the most tiring of all.

The researcher recommends that the city government of Cebu reduce unethical practices stated in this study. Indeed, Sinulog Festival is one of the most prestigious festivities in the country. The researcher urges the local government to put more effort into crowd control and security measures during the festivity, knowing the large population they could get yearly. They should put significant receptacles everywhere, especially where the route and most people are into. They should vigorously implement a total liquor ban and party ban inside the city of Cebu. This way, it junks the notion that Sinulog is a revelry more than a solemn celebration of the Holy Child Jesus.

The change that we can give to our society starts within ourselves. People must also be disciplined, especially the tourist who are present for Sto. Nino. Journalists must do their job well. They must stick to their ethical standards in telling and finding the truth.

However, the public must also trust and know the role of journalists. By this, we can empower and support them with their job as the fourth estate and purveyor of information.

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