Express Or Suppress: School Administrators' understanding Of Campus Journalists' freedom Of Expression

Ariel R. Valeza	Pedrito Jose V. Bermudo	Antonio R. Yango
avaleza@feu.edu.ph	*bermudo.pedrito@uphsl.edu.ph*	*yango.antonio@uphsl.edu.ph*

Abstract: *The right to free expression of the press is inviolable and protected by the Philippine constitution, and educational institutions in the country are required to respect, promote and fulfill this right in the exercise of campus journalism; thus, school administrators' concept of freedom of expression amongst campus journalists must be studied.*

In this study, the researcher explored the understanding that school administrators have of the protection and promotion of the campus journalists' right to freedom of expression in schools. It also aimed at exploring and understanding how they face the challenges in understanding these rights among campus journalists. A qualitative design, specifically employing phenomenological approach was employed.

The study revealed that school administrators have slight differences in their views of freedom of expression and they also assume multitasking roles; they face challenges involving various issues from balancing funds to balancing their administrative roles; they all acknowledge that managing and/or advising school papers require expansive knowledge in journalism. The study also revealed that school administrators recognize that they have to continually upgrade themselves, together with the campus writers, to the growing relevance and importance of the internet especially the social media, in the field of campus journalism.

In essence the results yield that in view of the evolving landscape of journalism, school administrators who handle school papers must continuously find ways to stay atop of their fields even if they face demanding multitasking roles and balancing acts; they concede that freedom of expression amongst campus journalists should be continually upheld by all stakeholders, even if challenges and difficulties are ever present.

Keywords*: campus journalism, freedom of expression, qualitative design, phenomenological approach, school administrators.*

I.   INTRODUCTION

In the Philippines, the 1987 Constitution of the Republic, specifically Article 3, Section 4 states that "no law shall be passed abridging the freedom of speech, of expression, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and petition the government for redress of grievances. To strengthen this law, Republic Act No. 7079, otherwise known as the Campus Journalism Act of 1991 (CJA), was enacted to supposedly uphold and protect the freedom of the press at the campus level and to promote the development and growth of campus journalism, as stated in its declaration of policies. While CJA undeniably gave impact to the lives of the student writers – either by giving them opportunities to hone their journalistic skills, or by attending press conferences and meet other aspiring writers, or by joining competitions to give their hard work a sense of validation, etc., unfortunately, in line with the changing of times, campus journalism has faced numerous challenges (Asperga, 2017).

Tomacruz (2018), wrote that CJA was enacted in recognition of the State policy to uphold and protect press freedom even at the campus level. However, up to this date, CJA still compromises press freedom citing the dearth on funding, lack of material provisions on editorial independence, and infringement on school's right to discipline the learners. But, despite these issues, it was emphasized that the student writers can still invoke CJA's declaration of principles to safeguard their rights. While free speech gives everyone the opportunity to scrutinize and express their views on societal issues and the administration's exercise of power; still, it presumes observance of mutual respect between state agents and citizens as well as personal responsibility since it is highly dependent on social and cultural contexts. Hence, the recommendation to develop various symposia on

citizen's media and information literacy; likewise, the examination and revision of policies and legal frameworks to accommodate digital realities and to guarantee the right to privacy (Carlsson and Weibull, 2018).

Further, even though campus journalism promotes sovereignty on press freedom, students are still guarded by their school administration through their advisers. These professionals serve as the catalyst for student development in the newsroom (Dennis, 2016). Cervantes (2020), indicated that school administrators also have their fair share of responsibilities in campus journalism. In fact, since the academic institution is the primary avenue to make editorial policies happen, the executives have the authority to execute the mandate on school papers' operations and management, editorial board selection, editorial board duties and security of tenure. On the other hand, as major responsibilities are accounted to school heads, only a few understand the existence and importance of campus journalism as most of them consider it as an extension of their public relations office. They also face controversies and criticisms since their managements are scrutinized by the student writers (Ramachandran, 2019).

The research focused on questionnaire responses of the participants on the following two central questions: what are their lived experiences in understanding campus journalist's rights to freedom of expression and how they face the challenges in understanding the campus journalist's rights to freedom of expression. In essence, the administrators' understanding of the journalists' rights to freedom of expression and the protection, promotion, limitation and the fulfillment of this rights will reduce incidents of both the administrators' and journalists' rights violations. Of primal consequence to this study is that school administrators will be able to craft policies, regulations and guidelines regarding campus media engagements, especially on issues that may either harm or promote their reputation and the school where they belong.

From the above-mentioned premises, it can be deduced that *freedom of expression* refers to the liberty of an individual to give opinions and perceptions on social issues through network stations, social media platforms, news outlets, etc. However, Ulusoy (2013), Chitidze (2015), DuMont (2016), and Carlsson & Weibull (2018), revealed that this freedom is not absolute in Turkey, Georgia, USA, and Russia due to the right to privacy, rampant spread of hate speech, and insufficient knowledge in assessing the violation of this basic human rights online.

Meanwhile, campus journalism undeniably gave impact to the lives of the student writers – by giving them opportunities to hone their journalistic skills, attend press conferences and meet other aspiring writers, etc. Caparaz (2012), Auxier (2012), Daniels (2012), and Dube (2013) have exposed that students are engaged in campus journalism in the Philippines, University of Maryland, North Texas, and South Africa as proven by their contributed articles and anticipation on its new volumes and articles. This was however opposed by Reed (2018), who disclosed that campus journalism isn't tolerated in US due to articles about the sexual harassment incidents in the institution.

Even though campus journalism promotes sovereignty on press freedom, students are still guarded by their school administration through their advisers. These professionals serve as the catalyst for student development in the newsroom. Unfortunately, Estella (2015 & 2018), Dennis (2016), Steelman (2016), Bañez & Latido (2018), and Vogts (2018) found out that paper advisers in Los Baños & Bay, Laguna, Georgia, US, and Canton-Galva Highschool only have basic knowledge in journalism, have mediocre skills, and are lacking in experiences in advisory, formal training, and joining press conferences that should've enhance their journalistic skills. On the other hand, Auxier (2012), Tuttle (2012), Exby (2014), Uy & Echaure (2017), and Cervantes (2020), indicated that school administrators have the authority to execute the mandate on school papers' operations and management, editorial board selection, editorial board duties and security of tenure.

Consequently, Xu (2015) and Bayram (2017), claimed that school administrators in China and Turkey are knowledgeable in the integration of internet in the journalism field; while, Krueger (2015) and Wilkins (2020) exposed that the executives in Minnesota and Virginia are uninformed about the roles of media specialists and do not believe that their formal preparations in mentorship programs have prepared them in supervising campus papers and journalists. In addition, Radoli (2011) and Bedanie (2011), both unveiled the problems associated in journalism such as the limited coverage, censorship to media, lack of resources, etc. in Kenya and in Ethiopia.

The related literatures and studies above reveal that there are no studies yet conducted focusing on the lived experiences of school administrators in understanding the freedom of expression of campus journalists and their way of facing the challenges in understanding the freedom of expression of campus journalists. In view of the gaps identified, the study aimed to focus on 1) the lived experiences of school administrators in

understanding the freedom of expression of campus journalists and 2) how they face the challenges they encounter in understanding this freedom.

II. METHODS

In this study, a qualitative design, specifically employing phenomenological approach, which focuses on the study of an individual's lived experiences within the world, was used to determine the extent of understanding amongst school administrators regarding freedom of expression in campus journalism and how they face the challenges in understanding this freedom.

The researcher followed the procedures, which consist of identifying a phenomenon to study and collecting data from several persons who have experienced the same phenomenon. Moreover, the researcher analyzed the findings by reducing the information into significant statements or quotes and then combining them into themes. The researcher also formulated textural and structural descriptions which is summed by the overall essence.

The primary data were collected through questionnaires using a predesigned research protocol that contains research questions which are general and open-ended with ten (10) school administrators including principals, school superintendents/directors, and university heads of various posts such as deans and vice presidents as respondents. They come from various parts of the country such as Bicol, Palawan, NCR, Laguna, Pangasinan and Isabela. As part of the strategic process, the researcher selected the participants through Purposeful Criterion Sampling because the research requires participants that have sufficiently understood the research problem and the phenomenon targeted by the study. To ensure proper protocol, the researcher secured a letter of endorsement from the Dean of the Graduate School of UPHSL to conduct the study and by employing the electronic mail, the researcher went through the process of finding the participants. To establish rapport and familiarity with them, the researcher stated the central purpose of the study and the procedures which will be used in the data collection; statements about protecting the confidentiality of the respondents; a statement about known risks associated with the participation in the study; the expected benefits of the participants in the study; and the signature of the participants. Upon the composition of the draft transcription of the responses in the questionnaire, the participants were provided a copy of the transcriptions through electronic mails. This was to verify the verbatim information they shared in the questionnaire.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides the results and discussions of the lived experiences of selected school administrators in understanding freedom of expression in campus journalism and how they face challenges they encounter in understanding this freedom.

1. **As to what are the school administrators' lived experiences in understanding freedom of expression of campus journalists?**

Theme 1 – Concepts may vary but applications are similar

The participants' responses revealed , and the researcher noted that the concept or meaning of freedom of expression may vary and depends on whether the school administrator belongs to a secondary or tertiary level. While the campus journalists in college are relatively free to write about issues they choose themselves, those in high school are given more restrictions. However, both school administrators from high school to college recognize that freedom of expression is never absolute. In the school context, this freedom of expression is limited or guided by not only the laws of the land but also the schools' policies and guidelines. The campus journalists are made to understand that not only will they be guided on the technical aspects of writing such as grammar and style of writing, the content of their writing will be subjected to scrutiny to see if it is libelous, obscene, incendiary or otherwise damaging to the writer or to the public image of the school.

Theme 2 – Multitasking Roles

The participants revealed that school administrators assume multiple roles. Some of them not only handle the school paper but they are also school directors, principals, vice presidents or deans which in turn requires them to play even more sub-roles. It can be deduced from their responses that school paper management would seem to be in their priority list but being in charge of the school paper is an added task which may be high on advocacy merits but does not actually come with an added financial incentive. Not a single one of the respondents mentioned that there is a corresponding non-teaching unit load or credits which may be turned into monetary compensations in the end.

Theme 3 – Challenges and Balancing Acts

The participants shared that the limited availability of funds and equipment are challenges that are present to school administrators of both the private and public and secondary or tertiary schools. The presence of the social media though is seen both as a bane and a boon for campus journalism as while it has the capability of spreading the word to a greater audience, the school paper's physically printed existence is however threatened because the actual number of readers may continually dissipate as the competition for their attention becomes very stiff owing to the numerous online pages of a substantial number of school organizations which also publish their own latest updates about school issues, affairs and events. The policing of this social media sites involving students, presumed to be no longer in the scope of the school administrators' job specification, calls for a serious balancing act too. This is especially true when individuals such as students and faculty members are targeted with malice online. Prior to the existence of the social media, drawing the line between an actual school affair inside the physical campus, an online affair and where the school admin place themselves in between, is heretofore have never been experienced and was never a critical issue.

The balancing acts also involve incidents in which a writer's point of view is different from that of the school administration. This is more apparent when the management of the school funds for campus paper is involved. The school administrator who handles the campus paper is torn between the demands of the school management who employs/pays them and the need of the students voices to be represented or heard.

Theme 4 – Professionalism and Expansive Know-how

The participants believed that in an ideal setup, a school paper manager/adviser should have the credentials suited for the job. Here lies one of the most fundamental issues when school administrators, whose specialties are other than journalism and are assigned to manage the school paper. How are they supposed to train and guide writers when they have no previous background on journalistic writing at all? Fortunately for our respondents, they either have a degree in Communications or have undergone multiple trainings, workshops and conferences to enhance and update their knowledge on journalism.

2. **As to how do the school administrators face the challenges in understanding freedom of expression of campus journalists?**

Theme 5 – Adopting/adapting to emerging concepts and new realities

The participants acknowledged that the Social Media are a 21st century phenomena and as such they require a 21st Century paradigm shift in campus journalism. Educational systems in the Philippines have to accept the fact that the social media are a very powerful tool for campus engagements amongst students. And this power, this very potent tool that connects people from all walks of life, or students pursuing different and differing course specialties, must be harnessed and tamed by universities as it has a potential to either harm or protect the very fabric that holds and binds the students' and the school administrators' dynamic connection together. As well, the Covid19 virus, a pandemic that has dramatically changed the educational landscape especially in the teaching and learning modalities, not only in the country but the world all over, should be treated as a precursor to the "new normal" in the field of education, in the decades ahead. As such, school administrators who handle campus papers will be well-advised to adopt and adapt to these new and challenging landscape. The immediate answer to this recent phenomenon has been here for a good two decades now- appreciate the power of the social media in their school paper. The fact is clear- it is cheap to maintain and it widens their reach a thousandfold. And by shifting their paradigm to accommodate social media as a tool to enhance their students learning, universities must then formulate policies and guidelines that would protect everyone's rights, especially the rights of free expression of everyone in the school context.

Theme 6 – Troubleshooting by dialogue with all stakeholders

When resolving issues are at called for, the participants recommend that dialogue with the school administrators, students and campus writers remains critically important. Voices and angles from all concerned must be heard or acknowledged in order to arrive at resolutions that are acceptable and beneficial to all concerned. The participants believe that constant communication is key in overcoming all differences and obstacles. This is to avoid circumstances that may result to legal ramifications which everyone involved wants to avoid.

Theme 7– Honing journalistic excellence by training, planning and execution

On the question on what can be done to make the students to freely but responsibly express themselves, the participants suggest to properly hone them through trainings, workshops, conferences and by exposing them to established journalists through lectures and seminars. Afterwards, having them compete with other schools

not only will further hone their writing skills but will also expose them to differing and multiple opinions and worldviews even when tackling a single idea or theme.

Theme 8 – Appreciating the value of teamwork

Ideally, the participants said, school policies, especially those that involve the students' freedom to be heard, are crafted with the involvement and contributions of all stakeholders, primarily the students, faculty and the school administrators. Teamwork is essential as all points of view must be heard and they recognize that when the students are made to feel that their voices are valued as critical to the betterment of the school, the students feel that they are given the opportunity to express themselves which gives them a sense of being co-equal entities in the school, and not just a second-class constituents, which inspires in them as well a sense of responsibility. The participants believe that schools exist because of students, and school administrators along with faculty, are there to guide and hone them to become better versions of themselves and for them to be given a huge advantage in surviving the world inside or outside the school during their studies, and even ultimately, after they graduate. They also believe that teamwork among all stakeholders in a school should not have a short-term goal – students are not educated to survive school, they are educated to survive life.

Textural Description. The participants' lived experiences in understanding the freedom of expression of campus journalists exposes four thematic concepts of their shared reality. They are highlighted in the following: **Theme 1: Concepts may vary but applications are similar; Theme 2: Assuming Multitasking Roles; Theme 3: Challenges and Balancing Acts; and Theme 4: Professionalism and Expansive Know-how**. These themes reveal that school administrators have slight differences in their views of freedom of expression as they come from various levels of education – from secondary to tertiary and whether their institutions are public or private. They also assume multitasking roles which make handling school papers and dealing with campus writers somewhat of a burden as it is seen as added work. The challenges vary from balancing funds to balancing their roles as part of the school administration and managing the school paper and issues that may or may not be harmful to the students and the school as a whole. They all acknowledge that managing and/or advising school papers require expansive knowledge on journalism and laws and that a good background in communication arts and/or journalism is a necessary tool for the job.

Structural Description. After an analysis of the participants' viewpoints and shared reality on how they cope with the challenges and demands in understanding the freedom of expression of campus journalists, four insightful themes have been developed. They are highlighted in the following: **Theme 5: Adopting/adapting to emerging concepts and new realities; Theme 6: Troubleshooting by dialogue with all stakeholders; Theme 7: Honing journalistic excellence by strategic training, planning and execution; and Theme 8: Appreciating the value of teamwork.** The challenge of restricted funds and limited reach is addressed by adapting social media and utilizing the internet's power to reach a much wider number of readers. The continuous dialogue with all stakeholders in the school community is seen as the primary means of deflecting issues that may be harmful to one or all. The participants realize that continuous update/upgrade by way of trainings, workshops, lectures, etc. is one of the primary keys in which they can survive and compete for a wider readership. Ultimately, all participants realize that teamwork amongst all stakeholders is the key to reach their individual or common goals.

Essence. The participants' statements, on their experience as both school paper managers/advisers and school administrators as well, signify that even if they have slightly differing concepts on the meaning of freedom of expression in the context of campus journalism, their difficulties in assuming multiple roles as they face challenging conflicts and issues of varying complexities, or even mundane technical difficulties such as shortages of funds and equipment, are experiences common to all. They widely recognize that they have to continually and gradually update and upgrade themselves, together with the campus writers, to the continuing relevance and utmost importance of the internet and social media as a collective pursuit for their professional growth. The themes which emerged from the responses suggest that in view of the ever-evolving nature and landscape of journalism, school administrators who handle school papers must continuously find ways to stay atop of their fields by integrating themselves in the relevant and present nature of campus journalism management even if it challenges their own present concepts. While they recognize that handling campus journalism is a demanding, and at most exhausting and even at times an unrewarding venture, the statements provided by the participants expose a prevalent mindset and a focal objective – freedom of expression amongst campus journalists should be continually upheld by all stakeholders, even if challenges and difficulties are ever present.

IV.   CONCLUSIONS

School administrators who belong to different levels and institutions may have slight differences in their concepts of "freedom of expression" but they all agree that freedom of expressions, in all its mediums and forms, is not absolute. School administrators who handle the school papers have multiple roles, and more often than not, the school paper demands attention away from their other major roles and it takes professionalism and dedication to manage school papers. Their everyday challenge is how to make the financial support of the paper sustained even as they realize that the perennial lack of funds is ever-endangering the school papers' physical/printed existence. The limited or controlled financial support from the higher administration, both from the concerned government agencies or the school management/owners, requires the school administrator/paper adviser to balance the needs of the students to express their voices, and the financial constraint being imposed by either. As well, to be able to train and guide the student writers, it is expected that the school administrators who manage the paper has the requisite journalistic knowledge and know-how as it is assumed that those with sufficient related background in communication arts are better suited to this job. Because of the persistent problem with finances, the school paper has no other recourse but to find ways to stay afloat. It is acknowledged by the participants that the presence of the internet and the social media help as they are cheap to maintain, do not require too much manpower, and have a much larger readership.

The participants also appreciate that the best way to avoid serious conflicts that may result to undesired legal ramifications is to have a constant dialogue between the students, campus writers and the school administrators especially on issues that may jeopardize their legal rights. The participants recognize too, that diplomacy works between co-dependent entities when all parties recognize their individual significance but that their existence depends on not just one, but everyone. They too appreciate that attendance in trainings, workshops, lectures, etc., that are facilitated by experts in the field of journalism, is a must not just for the student writers but also for school administrators and members of the faculty as well. These trainings and exercises help the school community in reaching a common goal even amidst differences in ideas on how achieve it. Too, the participants recognize that teamwork unites and helps everyone grow and realize their goals although it has to be emphasized here that they view teamwork with an acknowledgment that in a school community that is composed of diverse individuals with specific roles and goals, unity can be achieved even in the presence of diversity.

V.   RECOMMENDATIONS

The participants respect their campus journalists right to freedom of expression and reveal and **express** their desire to support the continued existence of campus papers and sustain the growth and development of campus writers in the field of journalism, but the numerous challenges they face as handlers of campus papers and their other administrative functions suppress them from proficiently guiding their campus writers' journalistic endeavor.

It is recommended that the School Administrators and School Paper Advisers should create an environment in which the editorial content of the school paper will not be threatened by the financial management of the school administration. They should respect that school fees are collected to ensure the sustained physical existence of campus writers and school papers. They should also revisit and update the editorial policies of the campus paper and work with the editorial staff in determining these updates in editorial policies. They must provide the needs of the student publication by upgrading the equipment used by the campus writers by giving them an appropriate facility and updated computer soft-wares. They too must ensure that the campus writers have attended lectures, seminars and workshops on journalism, related laws and basic media literacy necessary to hone their skills, before and while they are members of the school paper staff. They should prepare for big paradigm shifts in learning modalities in view of the emerging "New Normal", provide the resources needed, and integrate updated technology on teaching and application of approaches on journalism. They must review and revise the curriculum of Mass Communication programs with faculty members and campus writers to make it "attuned-with-the-times". Most importantly, they must also allow a dialogue with all stakeholders about social and new media policies, instructions, and integration to the campus news field.

It is recommended for the Campus Journalists and Journalism Professors to recognize that freedom of expression is not absolute and responsibilities come with the job of campus journalists. They must attend trainings, workshops, lecture, conferences facilitated by experts in the field of journalism and related laws. Also, they must update and upgrade with the current and new advancements on journalism specially in the internet. Campus writers must improve competence by joining competitions sponsored by local or international

journalism entities to learn the value of relevant and current technical writing know-how, critical thinking and appreciating differing views and ideas amongst peers, both local and foreign.

It is recommended for the Future Researchers to study further the concept of "freedom of expression" amongst school administrators and campus journalists. They should focus on their engagement in the social media such as Youtube, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. They must identify too, in further researches the pros and cons, the limitations and allowances, the wrongs and the rights, in the usage of the internet when freedom of expression amongst students is concerned. They must acknowledge that this research was done in the height of a pandemic and find updated modalities in doing research during the "New Normal" era in the Philippine school system context. They should replicate this study by involving a larger number of participants, with a wider access to resources, through the internet. Ultimately, they must adopt a "New Normal" paradigm shift in the field of research.

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