# A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON HOW SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE THE PERCEPTIONS OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ON COVID-19 DISEASE

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## ABSTRACT

*Social media helps many people in coping especially in the situation of having a pandemic called the "Coronavirus disease (COVID 19)." Not everything in social media contains credible and reliable sources. Misinformation affects those citizens who actively use social media to keep themselves updated about what is currently happening. This research will discuss how social media shapes the fears of senior high school students regarding COVID-19. Therefore, the researchers aimed to determine the following: 1) Perceptions of Senior High School students on "social media panic" in relation to COVID-19; 2) Roles of social media especially during the COVID-19; and 3) How social media can influence the way Senior High School students perceive issues regarding the COVID-19. The researchers used 6 participants from the senior high school students of Colegio de San Juan de Letran from Abucay, Bataan. This study will know and raise awareness on how the social media shapes the fears of many.*

***Keywords:*** *Coronavirus, social media, fear, panic, misinformation*

## INTRODUCTION

As the 21st century continues to move forward, many advancements in technology has took place and it has made communicating in many ways much easier to people. Technological enhancement and media proliferation have also been happening in the world today and one of the great contributions of technological enhancement is the social media. Social media is defined as websites and applications that allow users to create and share content to different people. It had created vast effects to the daily living of many people.

According to the study of Thomas (2016), which highlighted the impacts of social media to the lives of some people, it was revealed that social media have made the lives of many digitized and tracked. Through social media, information becomes power, and anyone becomes empowered because of the unlimited information that they gain and share (Amedie, 2015). Since social media is increasingly used as an information source, it contributes in shaping the way of thinking of many people regarding different societal or global issues due to the kind of information being fed to them through the social media (Westerman, 2013). In relation to this, global issues and how people perceived them before could be likened to the current outbreak of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) which has created a global crisis. On January 30, 2020, the Word Health Organization (WHO), declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern due to the COVID-19 which mainly originated from Wuhan, China. The most common

symptoms of the said disease within 2 to 14 days include fever, dry cough, fatigue, myalgia, and dyspnea (Wang et al, 2020).

Through various social media platforms, people became informed or updated about the COVID-19. Social media users were able to post what are their thoughts about the COVID-19, and how do they perceive this issue. Many news and reports online have also published articles about positive COVID-19 patients who used social media as an instrument to express what their experiences with the Coronavirus disease has been like.

Recently, a Filipino who has tested positive for COVID-19 shared his experience through social media in battling the said disease. The patient was labeled as the first Filipino who has tested positive with the disease (CNN Philippines, 2020). After two weeks, the patient has eventually recovered. He shared to his Facebook post about what his journey through recovering has been like. According to what he said, ignorance and inaction will cause the virus to spread fast. He also stated that the physical pain he felt with the disease is not what is frightening, it was the psychological effect of the disease that made it more difficult (Limpot, 2020). This has raised awareness to many about how deadly this virus could be and has encouraged a lot of people to rebuild strength and faith.

Social media has also been a great deal of usage especially to those people who are seeking for medical or health information. Different health workers have also been using social media to engage with the public directly. Despite numerous people who were trying to share information accurately, there are also thousands of users spreading rumors and fake news regarding the COVID-19. Hence, it has allowed overemphasis and misinformation to spread as well. Furthermore, the unequaled level of information that many people are producing can possibly result to people getting anxious about what is to come, as what experts have said (De la Garza, 2020).

According to Edelman (2020), the only trusted sources that they have are the experts, but there are still people who are getting information primarily from media organizations and social media platforms with questionable sources. In addition to that, he reported that 56% of people from 18 to 30 years of age, turn to social media easily for information purposes. Fischer (2020) explained further that these young people place more responsibility on these platforms to limit the spread of misinformation. According to her, social media platforms could make efforts in elevating more the government agencies, local health authorities, and traditional media. With the misinformation about COVID-19, disinformation experts say it's more important that those people who have accurate information to be heard.

According to a study, "*infodemic*" or overabundance of information makes it difficult for many to identify credible sources from misleading ones (Godfrey, 2020). Thus, the term "social media panic" was used to address this. This was also supported by the study of Jorgensen in 2020 about how media coverage of epidemic affects people in different aspects. It was mainly stated that new contagious diseases cause many to worry since they are unpredictable or unknown and the uncertainty amidst the pandemic can easily instill fear to people. While one experiences fear, it could be passed from one individual to another. Furthermore, it becomes a shared and social emotion that shapes the reaction of people to ongoing events.

Her study also suggested that fear has played a vital role in the coverage of the COVID-19. Reports about the COVID-19 have been circulating online and most of them uses frightening languages. Examples are from some articles which uses the phrase "killer virus" to address the said disease. Some articles from newspapers were typical to use fear-inducing language in describing scenes on the ground in Wuhan, China which was shared on social media. Different tabloid newspapers were also likely to refer the virus as a "deadly disease" (Jorgensen, 2020).

The emergence of the COVID-19 and its pandemic nature has also created a stigma in some cases. This correlates to the issue of discrimination especially to the Chinese people. Chinese restaurants, Chinese products, and Chinese tourists were criticized due to spreading of false theories about them, resulting to the outburst of racism. Manchester Evening News have reported 50% drop in custom since the COVID-19 outbreak and many Chinese people are suffering racial abuse.

This issue was addressed by the WHO's Director General, Dr. Tedros, who stated that this was a call to fight trolls and conspiracy theories which cause confusion and fear to many. In addition to that, he stated that social media intelligence is one possible way of helping in enhancing the quarantine procedures of different communities. It can also make way to decrease the rapid spread of worry and uncertainty and it can enhance public trust in different public health measures (Tedros, 2020).

Since the COVID-19 is a new disease, further study on how social media shapes the fears of Senior High School students on the said disease are needed. The previous related studies and literature have been focused about how social media is convenient in sharing knowledge about the COVID-19 and how it has made an impact on how people react towards the said issue. However, there were no phenomenological studies published particularly about how social media shapes the fears of Senior High School students on COVID-19 yet.

Therefore, the researchers aim to determine the following: 1) Perceptions of Senior High School students on "social media panic" in relation to COVID-19; 2) The roles of social media especially during the COVID-19; and 3) How social media can influence the way Senior High School students perceive issues regarding the COVID-19.

The researchers will have six (6) participants that were randomly selected from the Senior High School students of Colegio De San Juan De Letran-Bataan. The interview's duration will only take two (2) days. This study mainly aims to know how social media shapes the fears of the participants which is why it is included that the researchers would ask if their participants have their own social media accounts. Aside from that, they are prohibited to ask more personal questions as it may lead to hacking and stealing of personal information.

This study would provide an understanding on how social media influence the way Senior High School students perceive COVID-19. Furthermore, this study will provide insights about the advantages and disadvantages of social media in raising awareness about COVID-19.

## METHODOLOGY

*Research Design*

The researchers used phenomenological approach as a research design for their study. Phenomenological approach studies the commonality of a lived experience or event of an individual or a group (Creswell, 2013). It is mostly conducted within a group or an individual that talks about certain events, situations, or experiences (Moustakas, 1994). In relation to that, the researchers have come up with a phenomenological approach to be able to gather participants that have similarities on their social media life which enabled them to relate it to this study which is about COVID-19. The researchers have gathered information on how social media shapes the fears of senior high school students on COVID-19.

*Sample Size*

This study identified the participants as "homogenous". Homogenous participants are commonly used when the study aims to understand and describe a group or individual (Cohen et al, 2006). The researchers have categorized their participants which qualified them for this study. These are the following included categories:

- He/she is an active user of at least one (1) social media (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, and/or Twitter) and owns at least one (1) social media account as these suggested that he/she is informed about the COVID-19 to some extent.
- He/she has any gadget (e.g., laptop, smartphones, and/or tablet) and a stable internet connection as the interview was conducted through audio recording online.

The researchers have also excluded some categories that might affect the data gathering of this study. Students who have an unstable internet connection or students that do not own any account on any type of social are unable to participate in the interview. The researchers have finalized their sample size into six (6) participants in which all are Senior High School students.

*Instrument*

This study used verbal procedure in collecting data. The researchers used interview as their instrument. Interview

is a systematic way of talking and listening to the participants and another way of collecting data between the researchers and the participants. The duration of the interview lasted from a minimum of forty (40) minutes and maximum of one (1) hour.

The researchers used structured interview for their data gathering. Structured interview is a type of interview where the interviewer has already prepared a set of fixed questions. The questions were planned and created in advance, which allowed the interview to be more aligned and related to the topic. All participants were asked the same questions and in the same order. With this technique, the flow of the interview was more organized and guided (Zojceska, 2018). The purpose why the researchers used a structured interview is to gather consistent and comparable data from the participants since the set of questions were pre-determined. This is to ensure that the answers gathered can be aggregated accordingly to the objectives of this study. This provided uniformity in the answers which enables the comparison of data among the participants (Rashidi, 2014).

The sampling technique of this study was purposive sampling since the participants have been classified as homogenous. The researchers already have categorizations; thus, they already have pre-determined the list of participants who were willing to participate in the interview, making it time efficient. The researchers also used field notes in taking down important details.

*Interview Process*

Due to the declaration of the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) and lockdown, one-on-one interviews have been cancelled. People were prohibited to go outside of their houses and engage in any social interaction to avoid the spread of COVID-19. The interview happened through the usage of any gadget/s that enabled the participants and the researchers to communicate online. Aside from the researchers, the facilitators/research advisers were also included whom facilitated and guided the interview process.

*Ethical Considerations*

The researchers secured forms and permit from their affiliation, Colegio De San Juan De Letran-Bataan. The researchers undergo a legal process which was supervised by the school. The researchers submitted parental consent forms which informed the parents of the participants of minor age that their child will undergo an interview for research purposes. School permit was submitted before the process of interview. The researchers assured the participants that their personal information would be kept confidential since the researchers don't have any reason to get some private/personal information of the participants' social media accounts even if it is related to the research, for the reason that it may lead to hacking and stealing of personal information. The researchers also asked if the participants have their own social media accounts since it was part of the interview questions.

The participants have their own rights about their anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy. In relation to this is the Belmont's Report. Belmont's Report is one of the major works that covers the participant's rights. This report consists of three (3) principles which are the beneficence, justice, and respect for the person (Sims, 2010). The researchers do not have the right to expose the answers of the participants, especially if it is not for research purposes.

*Data Analysis*

The researchers documented the interview through an audio record and transcribe it word for word. Transcription is an act of making a written account from the voice interview. Transcription's basis would be from the conducted individual or group interview and it is written word for word (Lorenza, 2007). The researchers provided a written translation of the audio interview. After the transcribing process, the researchers validated the papers containing the written translation of the conducted interview. This ensured that filtered/paraphrased words and statements were avoided. This process made sure that the interpreted answers and statements of the participants were legitimate. After the researchers undergone the transcribing process, the study proceeded to content analysis.

The researchers used the Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method as a basis. The descriptive

phenomenology helps to extract all essence and essential structures of the phenomenon that is under the investigation. The Colaizzi method has seven distinct steps that helps the researchers to extract relevant data (Morrow et al, 2015). This method helped the researchers in enhancing their data gathering and coding process.

Indicated in Figure 1. are the steps of Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method:

| | |
|---|---|
| 1.Familiarization<br><br>The researchers should get familiarized with the data collected from the participants | 2.Identifying Significant Statements<br><br>The researchers should identify the statements that are relevant to the study |
| 3.Formulating Meanings<br><br>The researchers should identify meanings that are relevant to the study which would uplift the significance of the study | 4.Clustering Themes<br><br>The researchers will identify the meanings that are common in all the participants' accounts or statements |
| 5. Developing an Exhaustive Description<br><br>The researchers will narrow down all the inclusive description that is related to the phenomenon which incorporates all themes extracted in step 4 | 6. Producing the Fundamental Structure<br><br>The researchers will summarize the Exhaustive description to produce what is only essential for the structure of the phenomenon |

| |
|---|
| 7. Seeking Verification of the Fundamental Structure<br><br>This step is the process of validating the fundamental structure statement to all participants. This is the process of checking if the researchers captured their experience |

*Figure 1.* Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method

The researchers used conventional content analysis in categorizing the essential structures and statements of the participants. Conventional content analysis is mostly used in the studying of phenomenon and when the resources of theories and literature are limited (Hsieh, 2005).

These are the following categories used in categorizing the essential structures and statements of the participants.

- The most and least used social media platforms by the participants in getting information about the Coronavirus disease or COVID-19;
- The effect of legitimate and fake news online which gives information about COVID 19 to the participants;
- The perception of participants toward "social media panic" amidst the COVID-19;
- The effect of the different manners of approach of social media to the participants regarding the COVID-19.

This process was done after the validation of the written accounts of the participants' statements or the seventh (7th) step of the Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method. The two types of process, the Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method and conventional content analysis, helped in producing the significance/essence of this study. It allowed the researchers to narrow down important details which helped them in answering the main research questions of this study.

**FINDINGS**

This study explored how social media affects the Senior High School students regarding the Coronavirus or COVID-19 using phenomenological approach. The participants were labeled as P1, P2, P3, and so on for reassurance of their anonymity. The researchers found four (4) themes which were incorporated by the first statement of their problem and three (3) themes incorporated by their second statement of the problem. These are summarized below. Exemplar evidences for each theme are displayed in Tables 1 and 2.

***Statement of the problem #1***: *How do social media influence the way Senior High School students perceive issues regarding COVID-19?*

**Table 1. Transcribed and Coded Answers from the Interview (SOP#1)**

| Themes | Description | Quotations |
|---|---|---|
| **Benefits of social media during the pandemic** | The students gain more knowledge | *P1:* "Through these accounts, mas dumadami pa yung mga information na nalalaman ko sa mga current issues na kinakaharap ng bansa |

| Themes | Description | Quotations |
|---|---|---|
|  | about COVID-19 and the danger it poses, be updated and cautious about the disease, become open-minded citizens, and can easily cope during this pandemic. | natin ngayon. Dahil sa mga ito, mas nagiging open minded citizen ako ng bansa natin." *P2:* "Dito nakakakuha ng mga balita kung ano yung nangyayari sa paligid mo." *P3:* "Madaming nakalagay dito na posts about sa COVID-19 kung. ano nang balita dito at kung pano makakaiwas sa sakit na 'to." *P4:* "It helps us students cope especially in this time of quarantine." *P6:* "We gather information about the COVID-19 which may help everyone when it comes to our safety and most especially to be updated." |
| **Roles of social media during the pandemic** | Social media is informative in spreading awareness about COVID-19 and it also reassures privacy and anonymity to netizens when posting online. It also facilitates the opinion expressions of many through different social media platforms. | *P1:* "Puno siya ng facts, and updates minute per minute kung ano yung nangyayari sa mga patients, frontliners, and ways kung pano mareduce yung risk ng COVID-19 and para hindi tayo mainfect. Andon din yung mga ginagawa ng government, both national and LGU kung paano maprevent yung pagtaas ng amount ng mga positive patients and kung paano maprotect yung each and every one through Enhanced Community Quarantine." "Everyone has a right... to say kung ano yung opinion nila lalo na kung alam mo na nasa tama ka and wala ka namang mahuhurt na ibang tao." *P4:* "They are informative, and they use various infographics and pictures to hook the readers." "Social media gives people a sort of anonymity to hide behind" "People are more free to speak up, which they can use in a good way or in a bad way." |
| **Effects of COVID-19 misinformation** | Misinformation are more rampant on Facebook. It does not help people in thinking positively and may cause confusion to many. | *P5:* "There are lots of fake news on Facebook." *P1:* "Hindi naman siya nakakahelp sa pagiisip ng mga tao." *P6:* "Some news may contain wrong information or fake news that might spread to everyone and will cause a confusion." |
| **Effects of online news about COVID-19** | Online news about COVID-19 affects them mentally and emotionally by overthinking and being sad/worried. It also brings them a lesson about how humanity is evident in their situation. | *P1:* "So far puro negative lang yung dala niya ngayon kasi, hanggang ngayon walang cure and mag ooverthink ka." "Malulungkot ka kung bakit kailangan natin kaharapin yung situation natin ngayon" "At the same time positive kasi… iisipin mo na lesson 'to para sa ating lahat at makikita mo yung improvement ng "humanity" na nagtutulungan sila dahil sa pandemic na 'to." *P3:* "Kinakabahan din kasi nalalaman ko na dumadami na yung nagkakaro'n ng sakit na 'to." *P5:* "I have to be positive. I need to think positively." |

*Statement of the problem #2: What are the senior high school students' conception about "social media panic" in relation to the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)?*

**Table 2. Transcribed and Coded Answers from the Interview (SOP#2)**

| Themes | Description | Quotations |
|---|---|---|
| **Misinformation as the main cause of social media panic** | Based on their insights about social media panic, it happens when people read online news/articles/journals/posts which do not have credible and reliable sources. | *P1:* "Ito yung nangyayari kapag may mga sources na nagkakalat ng mga rumors na hindi naman totoo." |
|  |  | *P1:* "Nagc-cause siya ng negative thoughts |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Effects of social media panic** | Social media panic causes people to have negative thoughts. They tend to be worried/annoyed/angry and feel unsafe. Some were affected financially. Some people tend to overreact in the comment section. | and emotions sa iba't ibang tao." "Nalulungkot ako and at the same time nagugulat ako" "May mga taong nagsusuffer dahil sa panic, malaki yung epekto sa kanila." "Not good for them financially." *P3*: "Naiinis naman ako. Kasi yung ibang posts, ginagawa nilang loko at yung iba hindi na... totoo." *P2:* "Most of the time I feel unsafe." *P4*: "I think social media panic is when a certain information causes people to worry." "They spread worry when it comes to supplies like the shortage of facemasks and alcohol." *P5*: "There are some people who overreacts in the comment section on posts regarding COVID-19." "You can tell from their comments that they have not understand what the article is trying to say." |
| **Dealing with social media panic during the pandemic** | The students advised many people to stay calm in their situation and to not spread the panic more. Simply following the rules would help many people to be safe and to lessen the panic. They also said to spread more positivity to people instead of panic. | *P6*: "It is somehow normal for every one of us to be in a situation of which most people is to feel panic about the COVID-19." "We should not spread the panic to everyone for.." "it may cause problem." "Just follow the rules to avoid the virus and stop the panic." *P3*: "Dapat 'wag silang magpanic" "Kasi hindi lahat ng nakalagay sa social media totoo." |

*P4*: "We should be spreading hope and positivity not panic."

1. The influence of social media on how students perceive issues regarding COVID-19.

*1.1 Benefits of using social media during the pandemic*

This theme encapsulates the participants' most to least used social media platforms and their reasons for actively using them. Their answers come up with Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as their most used social media platforms. The participants said that using these social media platforms help them to be updated and cautious about the current issues happening around them. As they read posts, articles, news, and journals, they become open-minded citizens as well. They also gain more knowledge about the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) about how the disease originated and how it continually spreads. They become more aware of the danger that the disease poses which helps them also when it comes to their safety.

In addition to that, their social awareness strengthens through these social media platforms. It helps them in coping during the pandemic by using these platforms for many purposes such as for entertainment and leisure.

In relation to this, there were studies which highlighted some benefits of social media to people. According to the study of Alexander (2014) which talks about the social media in disaster risk and crisis management, social media monitors situations, integration to emergency planting and crisis management, crowd sourcing, and collaborative development which creates social cohesion and therapeutic

initiatives. It also contributes in the furtherance of causes and research. It was also stated that social media is a broad platform for getting some information. It is easy to access, low cost, and it has the trait of rapid dissemination of information for the users to read and share it. These benefits were found in the findings of their study.

*1.2 Roles of social media during the pandemic*

This theme captures the participant's observation on what roles do social media play during the pandemic. Participants believed that social media's roles during the pandemic is to be informative and to be a platform for expression of opinions about COVID-19, providing them with privacy and anonymity. These observations were based on social media's manner of giving information to the netizens about COVID-19 and based on the participant's experiences in expressing/commenting their opinions on different posts, articles, news, and journals found online. Different information about COVID-19 were delivered online through various infographics to hook many readers. The common information that they encounter online were mostly about the condition of the COVID-19 patients and front liners, number of confirmed cases, recoveries of patients, and the immediate actions that the national government and local government units (LGUs) make to lessen the spread of the virus through the implemented Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ). These could be related to the study of Alexander (2014) which also discussed what are the vital roles of social media to people. It was stated that the social media serves as a listening function.

*1.3 Effects of COVID-19 misinformation*

Since various information are accessible online, the students encounter many posts, articles, news, and journals which do not contain reliable sources. This theme identifies what are the effects of COVID-19 misinformation according to the students.

All the participants shared a common observation on which social media platform do rampant misinformation circulate the most. Their answers similarly come up with Facebook. The participants have shared why misinformation do not help people in different aspects. According to them, COVID-19 misinformation does not help other people in thinking positively during the situation on pandemic that they're facing. It also causes confusion to a lot of people when these COVID-19 misinformation spreads from one people to another.

*1.4 Effects of online news about COVID-19.*

This theme discusses how online news regarding COVID-19 affect the students. It was found that these news affects them emotionally and mentally, in both positive and negative aspects. They tend to overthink most of the time due to the reason that the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has no treatment yet and the amount of confirmed cases of the disease are increasing every day. The students were also affected emotionally by seeing online news about the current situation of different COVID-19 patients and front liners which makes them sad and worried about their conditions. Despite the negative emotions that they feel towards these news, they still try to think positively as they have observed how "humanity" is evident in the midst of the pandemic crisis that many people are facing.

## 2. Perceptions of Senior High School Students on social media panic amidst COVID-19.

*2.1 Misinformation as the main cause of social media panic.*

All the participants have shared similar thoughts on social media panic. Students spend most of their time browsing/surfing the internet especially during the pandemic. As what have been stated on the previous themes, they tend to see posts, articles, news, and journals which are not credible and does not have reliable sources. According to them, these types of posts, news, articles, and journals, are the main reasons for causing social media panic among people.

One study also stated that social media mainly enables the spread of misinformation contents widely through any social media platform. These fake news and misinformation negatively affect the individual who reads it (Shu et al, 2017).

*2.2 Effects of social media panic*

This theme mainly discusses how social media panic generates negative thoughts among the students. The posts, news, articles, and journals which contain unreliable sources mainly spread worry to them and it also makes them feel unsafe. One participant cited an example on how social media panic affects many financially. People have been spreading news about the shortage of supplies and because of this, many people tend to resort to panic buying. Some participants also shared their feelings of annoyance and anger by how online posts, news, articles, and journals spread misinformation which people mostly took as a joke. Because of misinformation, some people who use different social media platforms for expressing their opinions tend to overreact especially on the comment sections of these platforms.

In relation to this, some says that humans take cues from other humans, and they may be more likely to panic-buy if they see other people posting about their panic-buying (Vijaykumar, 2020).

*2.3 Dealing with social media panic during the pandemic*

This theme highlights the perceptions of the students on how to deal with social media panic amidst the pandemic. The students shared similar thoughts about normalizing panic in their type of situation. In addition to that, they gave/shared advices to others on how to lessen the panic that misinformation causes through posts, news, articles, and journals circulating online. They suggested that people should stay calm in their situation since not all information uploaded online are credible which makes it hard to trust them easily. According to them, people should learn to follow simple rules to keep them safe and to lessen the spread of panic. They also suggested to spread hope and positivity to many amidst the pandemic.

According to Hancock's study (2020) which shared the similar idea of the participants' answers, he explained that in the midst of the pandemic, it's not necessarily a problem for many people to be nervous, as long as that anxiety motivates people to prepare and remain safe, and they don't cross to full-blown panic. People often think that anxiety is a bad thing, but sometimes, it's an appropriate response which means that people are paying more attention.

## DISCUSSIONS

This study found out the effects of social media to Senior High School students on how they perceive and cope with COVID-19. It also produced insights on how social media takes part in raising awareness about COVID-19. The findings proposed that social media platforms are responsible in keeping the public updated and aware about COVID-19, also considering that it may bring both advantages and disadvantages to them. It also suggested that reading misinformation on posts, news, articles, and journals and having the lack of knowledge about this pandemic may affect the students mentally and emotionally in both positive and negative aspects.

This study also suggested that misinformation make things worse. A study about combatting COVID-19 misinformation on social media investigated why people still share and believe in false and misleading news about COVID-19. One of their results have indicated that people find it hard in terms of discerning false information between real information which may lead the situation to become worse (Carnahan, 2020). This made the participants confused and unsure of sharing information due to the reason that some of them contains questionable sources. Somehow, there were participants who have scientific knowledge and critical thinking skills. They examine the credibility and reliability of the sources from the posts, news, articles, and journals before they share it with others. The study suggested that, if the public give more attention on inspecting the reliability of the posts, news, articles, and journals that they read before sharing it to others, it can avoid the spreading of information with misleading contents (Pennycook et al, 2020). The posts, news, articles, and journals that did not undergo proper scrutinizing can spread through any type of social media platform that commonly leads to confusion and misinformation to the people reading it. The students' response to how social media take part in their type of situation is that, it was influential since they were highly informative. It also keeps them updated and makes many people gain more knowledge about the disease, but some comments of negative responses pertaining to the posts,

news, articles, and journals contain misinformation. Some of our participants (n=5) stated that they do not make actions on warning others about misinformation, especially when they use different social media platforms to express their opinions. One of the participants responded on posts that can make others confused and misinformed about COVID-19.

In relation to this, a study about social media surveillance that talks about the assessment of public attention, risk perception, and emotional and behavioral responses to the COVID-19 outbreak was conducted in China (Hou, 2020). It focuses about public attention and awareness to COVID-19, public risk perception, and emotional and behavioral responses of Chinese citizens. The researchers monitored the increase of posts on Weibo after the public knew about the news on COVID-19. Its number of 'searches' decreased for how many days, but it increased again after the National Health Commission confirmed that the disease is possibly transmitted through human contact. Posts on social media platforms affect the readers and users emotionally and mentally. The delayed release of information gets negative feedback from the users and readers. Some of the public experience anxiety and it gets worse when they were informed about how the disease gets transmitted and when containment was declared. They also noticed that the public is updated with the actions of the government. Most of them are following the rules but in addition to that, misinformation about fake herbals and medicine makes the public curious and leads many citizens to irrational panic buying (Hou et al, 2020). The effect of reading misinformation on any social media platforms affects some people undesirably. These experiences affect many people emotionally and mentally, that some might feel unsafe, sad, and worried. It causes negative thoughts and lead them to overthink most of the time but not everyone feels the same. Some of the students try to keep themselves calm amidst the pandemic crisis. They were also capable in coping with their situation and in avoiding misinformation by choosing and reading contents online with credible and reliable sources only. The students also spread positivity in their situation amidst the pandemic. Some of them said that COVID-19 is alarming, but people should make actions to lessen the panic because it makes the situation worse. Some of them also said that spreading positivity is needed mostly during the pandemic crisis they are facing. This also taught them lessons about humanity is strengthened.

A study about the caregivers who spend most of their time taking care of those positive patients of COVID-19 showed its effects on the emotional and mental well-being of the nurses from the Hospital of Henan University of Science and Technology (Sun et al, 2020). The nurses experience negative emotions relating to fatigue, discomfort, and helplessness that were made worse because of sadness, fear, anxiety, and worries about their families. These did not make them lose hope and they found growth under pressure that helps to develop their gratefulness, professional responsibility, and self-reflection more. The fear and anxiety that the nurses experience is almost the same as how the public feel towards COVID- 19, and the social media can make it worse. This study proposed that the misinformation and false content about COVID-19 that have been read by the users on any social media platforms build the concept of the "social media panic". One of the evidences that this study gathered is the irrational panic buying of people. This was supported by the statement of one participant about news and posts about the shortage of supplies of the necessities of humans are becoming out of stock. This led to the panic buying of many people. This study also suggested that spreading misinformation through posts, news, articles, and journals also led many people to overthink. To support these evidences, this study also examined the experiences of the students. Most of them feel unsafe, sad, and worried. Some of them also feel panic, anxiety. These emotions and feelings contributed in shaping the fears of the senior high school students regarding COVID-19.

**CONCLUSION**

This study provided a comprehensive understanding about the perceptions of the Senior High School students on "social media panic" in relation to COVID-19, the roles of social media during the pandemic, and how social media influence the way the students perceive and cope up with issues regarding COVID-19. This study also

showed the importance of social media in raising awareness about COVID-19.

Coming up with the results of this study, the researchers were able to identify the influence of social media on how students perceive issues regarding COVID-19. It was found that misinformation is the main cause of social media panic which leads to confusion and fear to many. It has affected people emotionally and mentally. It was stated from the data that the vital role that social media play during the pandemic is being an instrument that spreads information and awareness to a lot of people, which helped them to be cautious on the issues happening around them, and being a platform for expressing their opinions about COVID-19. It was also found that, due to the numerous information being fed to them through social media, their social awareness becomes strengthened and helped them to cope during the pandemic. Despite many unreliable information about COVID-19 circulation online, the students have suggested to spread hope and positivity to many amidst the pandemic instead of causing panic to people.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Due to the characteristics of qualitative researches, this study was only limited to six (6) participants – senior high school students of Colegio de San Juan de Letran – Bataan. This study could still improve by using other types of participants such as experienced persons or professionals to have an in-depth understanding on how social media affect them on different aspects during the pandemic. The study may also be enhanced by applying the focus of the study, which is the effect of social media, to other situations, experiences, or events like other global or social issues. This enables future studies to compare and monitor the changes of the behaviors of social media users and the effects of the social media to them depending on a given situation. Other experiences could still be explored. It can also improve by using other techniques and research approach related to the focus of the study. Due to the outbreak prevention of COVID-19, the researchers were not able to conduct one-on-one interviews and were only able to collect data online. This could still be improved if data has been collected with the

possibilities that one-on-one interviews would be prohibited. Other types of interview would also surely help to improve the data collection and gathering of more consistent answers from the participants. This could also be improved more by focusing on the other parameters of social media and by exploring some parts or variables of this study.

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