

Assessing Filipino Sentiments on Traditional Christmas Celebrations Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2023

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Abstract:

This study focuses on Filipinos' perspectives toward traditional Christmas celebrations during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing the significance of cultural values and resilience. Using a descriptive study approach, 100 respondents of Kensington 21, Lancaster New City, were polled online using quota sampling. The data show how Filipinos altered cultural traditions like *Simbang Gabi*, *caroling*, and family reunions in the midst of pandemic limitations such as social separation, travel prohibitions, and limited gathering capacity. Financial difficulties (35%), family problem (20%), health worries (15%), and mental and emotional health issues (5%) were common challenges encountered, however respondents shown exceptional inventiveness in celebrating through the means of virtual alternatives and small-scale meetings. Vaccination had an important role, with 74% fully vaccinated and preferences for Pfizer (50%), Sinovac (35%), and Moderna 15%. The study emphasizes Filipino communities' resilience in retaining traditions while exploring new methods to connect and enjoy. The study also shows the need of preserving cultural identity, encouraging vaccination, and developing communal togetherness. Recommendations include creating inclusive legislation, employing technology for festivities, and improving community resilience during times of crisis to ensure the future viability of Filipino Christmas customs.

Keywords — Filipino Christmas Traditions, COVID-19 Pandemic, Cultural Practices, Family Reunion, Virtual Celebrations.

I. INTRODUCTION

Popular religiosity, including customs, traditions, and rituals, is impossible in Filipino society without it. Its religious activities are strongly linked to a diverse spectrum of religious spirituality that evolves during the process of Filipino spirituality. This combination of religious beliefs and culture creates the unique Filipino Christmas celebration. *Pasko sa Pilipinas* or Christmas in the Philippines, is a gospel-based religious and cultural celebration of Filipinos' honor and gratitude for the Child Jesus, who has not been forgotten (Carbayas & del Castillo, 2020).

According to Malindog-Uy (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the Philippines' Christmas celebrations, which are recognized for their bright and extended nature. Iconic rituals like attending *simbang gabi*, caroling, and the joyous Noche Buena have been reduced in order to promote safety. Restrictions on gatherings, curfews, and economic problems imposed by the pandemic and natural calamities have tempered the season's normal enthusiasm. In fact, Christmas is the most consumed event of the year, with many traditions, particularly

family ones, that are highly important. This approach is aimed to determine the significance of traditions at times and examine their ramifications for family businesses. The Christmas traditions scale is made up of four factors: (1) family traditions on Christmas Eve, (2) features associated with the Christmas spirit, (3) changes in Christmas habits due to the COVID-19 epidemic, and (4) traditions of attending Christmas events with family. Cod and octopus are the most popular dishes on Christmas Eve. The most popular sweets or desserts on Christmas Eve are king cake, rabanadas, vermicelli, children's bread, and sponge cake (Santos et al., 2020).

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on traditional Christmas celebrations, reducing family gatherings, church services, and communal festivities to minimize viral transmission of the virus. Many people are attending masses remotely, and social events such as caroling Christmas parties have been canceled or conducted in a virtual setting. Economic challenges and health concerns have further dampened the Christmas enthusiasm (Carvalho, 2020). Despite the obstacles of the COVID-19 pandemic and movement restrictions, Filipinos have devised innovative methods to celebrate Christmas while adhering to health rules. They intend to use current communication tools such as Zoom, Facebook Live, and Google Meet to interact electronically with loved ones, replacing conventional meetings with virtual reunions (Nepomuceno, 2020). Filipinos remain resilient, adjusting to obstacles with practical solutions such as virtual reunions and small-scale festivities at home. Despite their limits, they celebrate with eagerness, hope, and determination to maintain the spirit of Christmas, looking forward to better days (Malindog-Uy, 2020). As a result, this study explored Filipinos' perspectives of traditional Christmas celebrations during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized descriptive research design. It is a scientific method which involves observing and describing the behavior of a subject without influencing it in any way. The researchers used descriptive method and quantitative analysis to determine the level of satisfaction of the respondents towards their Christmas experience during the pandemic.

Descriptive research design is a valid method for researching specific subjects and as a precursor to

more quantitative studies. This research design will be carefully used to determine the perceptions of Filipinos regarding the traditional Christmas celebration during and after COVID-19 pandemic. The respondents of this study is composed of 100 selected residents of Kensington 21 in Lancaster New City. The researchers utilized quota sampling on this study. By using quota sampling, the researchers selected individuals according to specific traits or qualities. Researchers decide and create quotas so that the market research samples can be useful in collecting data. The Primary data collection tool was an online survey, designed with a closed-ended questionnaire comprising five sections. This structured approach enabled the researchers to gather relevant data efficiently and ensure its validity to the study. The first part of the questionnaire asked for the profile of each respondents. it determined the age, gender, and COVID-19 vaccination status. Part II determined the respondents' perception regarding traditional Christmas celebration such as *Simbang Gabi*, Christmas Carols, Noche Buena, Family Reunions, Christmas Parties, and Christmas shopping. Part III showed the respondents' views on celebrating Christmas with an ongoing pandemic and its effects on how they celebrate the holiday. The next part is the respondents' insights on the severity of the restriction of COVID-19 protocols towards Christmas season in terms of social distancing, church capacity, shopping mall capacity, and travel requirements, and the last part determined the respondents' challenges encountered in Christmas season amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The research instruments were validated by the panel members consists of research professionals.

Additionally, the researchers utilized related literatures and studies coming from reliable sources to support the study, as this helped establish a solid foundation for developing the online research questionnaire. During the survey period, the researchers distributed the questionnaires to the target respondents. The selected respondents were part of the sample and were chosen based on their willingness to participate in answering the survey.

Ultimately, the study used Google Docs as the platform to organize and administer online survey. A brief description of the study and its purpose was provided at the top of the online survey prior to answering the questionnaires, giving respondents an

introduction and idea on the topic and goals of the research. The researchers then analyzed the collected data, which served as the foundation for the study’s summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter represents the statistical results obtained from the respondents on the research survey.

Part I. The profile of the respondents in terms of:

Figure 1.1 Profile of the respondents in terms of Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	55	55%
Female	45	45%
Total	100	100%

Figure 1.1 shows the data tabulation of gender of the respondents. Most of the respondents are male which are the 55% of the total respondents, 45% are female.

Figure 1.2 Profile of the respondents in terms of Age

Age Bracket	Frequency	Percentage
18 - 22	15	15%
23 - 27	18	18%
28 - 32	20	20%
33 - 37	15	15%
38 - 42	10	10%
43 - above	22	22%
Total	100	100%

Figure 1.2 shows the data tabulation of the respondents age where in most belong to the age of 43-above which is equivalent to 22% then followed by the age of 28-32 or 20%, 23-27 or 18%, age between 18-22 and 33-37 with same percentage of 15% and lastly with the age of 38-42 with a percentage of 10%. All age bracket has an interval of 5.

Figure 1.3 Profile of the respondents in terms of Civil Status

Civil Status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	25	25%
Married	30	30%
Widow	15	15%
Widower	18	18%
Not Mention	12	12%
Total	100	100%

Figure 1.3 shows the profile of the respondents in terms of their civil status where in the results reveal that 30 or

30% of the respondents were married followed by single with a 25%, third is widower with 18 or 18%, fourth widow with 15 or 15%, fifth is 12 or 12% which is the respondents did not include their civil status.

Part II. COVID-19 Vaccination Status.

Figure 2.1 Tabulation of data of COVID-19 vaccination status of the respondents

Vaccination Status	Percentage
First Dose	13%
Fully Vaccinated	13%
Unvaccinated	74%
Total	100%

Figure 2.1 shows the tabulation of data of COVID-19 vaccination status of the respondents. Majority of the respondents are fully vaccinated which are the 74% of the total population or 74 respondents. 13% or 13 respondents got their first dose only at the time of survey, and 13% or 13 are unvaccinated.

Figure 2.2 Tabulation of Data of COVID 19 Vaccination Brand

Vaccination Brand	Frequency	Percentage
Pfizer	50	50%
Sinovac	35	35%
Moderna	15	15%
AstraZeneca	0	0
Johnson & Johnson	0	0
Sputnik V	0	0
Other:_____	0	0
Total	100	100%

Figure 2.2 shows that the vaccination brand that the residents prefer to be vaccinated to them is Pfizer which has a total of 50 or 50%, followed by Sinovac with 35 or 35% and lastly is Moderna with 15 or 15%.

Part III. Activities or Events you attended during COVID-19 pandemic in traditional celebration of Christmas:

Activities / Events	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Misa de Gallo</i> or <i>Simbang Gabi</i>	40	40%
Christmas carols	10	10%
Family Reunions;	30	30%
Christmas Parties	5	5%
Christmas Shopping	15	15%
Total	100	100%

Figure 3 shows the activity or events that the respondents attended during COVID-19 pandemic in traditional celebration of Christmas where in majority attended *Misa de Gallo* or *Simbang Gabi* with a score of 40 or 40%, then family Reunions with a score of 30 or 30%, Christmas shopping with a score of 15 or 15% Christmas Carols a score of 10 or 10% and lastly attending Christmas Party with a score of 5 or 5%.

Part IV. Restriction of implementations of COVID-19 protocols with regards on Christmas season in terms of:

Restriction Implementation	Frequency	Percentage
Social Distancing	50	50%
Church Capacity	10	10%
Shopping Mall Capacity	15	15%
Travel Requirements	25	25%
Total	100	100%

Figure 4 shows the restriction protocols during Christmas season amidst pandemic where most of the respondents answered Social Distancing with a score of 50 or 50%, followed by Travel Requirements with 25 or 25%, next is Shopping Mall Capacity with 15 or 15% and lastly Church Capacity with 10 or 10%.

Part V. Challenges encountered in Christmas season amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Challenges Encountered	Percentage
Financial Problem	35%
Mental & Emotional Health Issues	5%
COVID-19 Infection	10%
Distance from Family	5%
Family Problem	20%
Health Problem	15%
Travel Bans and Restrictions	10%
Total	100%

Figure V shows the Challenges Encounter by the residents during COVID-19 Pandemic in Celebrating Christmas were in majority encounters having a Financial Problem that is 35% of the total respondents, then followed by having a Family Problem with a 20% score, then Health Problem with a 15%, Travel Bans & Restrictions and COVID-19 Infection tied with a score of 15% and lastly Mental & Emotional Health and Distance from Family tied with a score of 5%.

Part VI. Perspective on Celebrating Christmas in 2023 Compared to Pandemic Experiences.

Figure 6.1 Tabulation of data of responses of survey question “Despite the pandemic, Christmas in the Philippines remains exiting this year”.

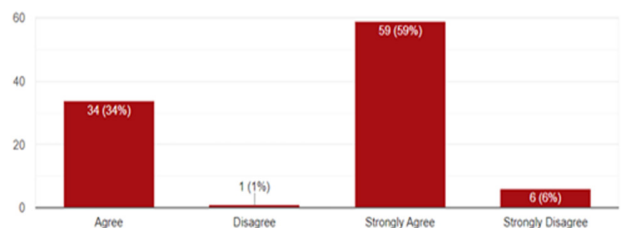


Figure 5.1 shows the tabulation of data of survey question “Despite the pandemic, Christmas in the Philippines remains existing this year”. Majority of the respondents strongly agreed (59%), 34% agreed, 6% strongly disagreed and 1% disagreed.

Figure 6.2 Tabulation of data of responses of survey question “*I continue to prioritize Christmas over other celebrations*”.

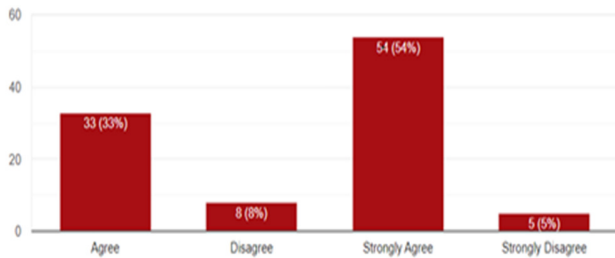


Figure 6.2 represents the tabulation of data of survey question “*I continue to prioritize Christmas over other celebrations*”. Majority of the respondents strongly agreed (54%), 33% agreed, 5% strongly disagreed and 8% disagreed on the said survey question.

Figure 6.3 Data tabulation of responses of survey question “*Christmas still holds memorable significance for me, even after the pandemic*”.

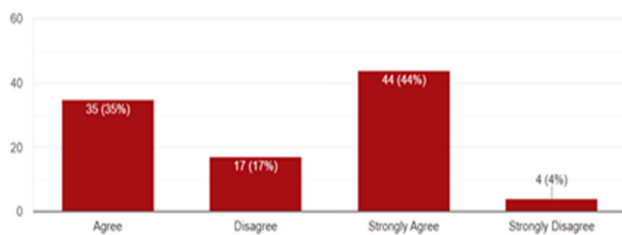


Figure 6.3 shows the data tabulation of survey question “*Christmas still holds memorable significance for me, even after the pandemic*”. Majority of the respondents strongly agreed (44%), 35% agreed, 17% disagreed, and 4% strongly disagreed.

Figure 6.4 Data tabulation of responses of survey question “*The Christmas season continues to inspire hope and uplift my spirit despite the pandemic*”.

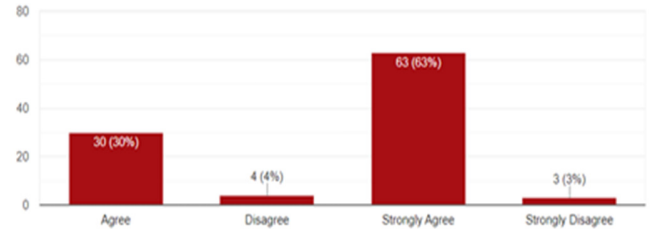


Figure 6.4 shows the data tabulation of survey question “*The Christmas season continues to inspire hope and uplift my spirit despite the pandemic*”. Majority of the respondents strongly agreed (63%), 30% agreed, 4% disagreed, and 3% strongly disagreed.

Figure 6.5 Data tabulation of responses of survey question “*I find joy in celebrating Christmas, even considering the pandemic’s impact*”.

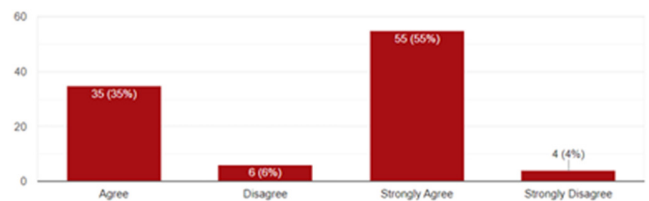


Figure 6.5 shows the data tabulation of responses of survey question “*I find joy in celebrating Christmas, even considering the pandemic’s impact*”. Majority of the respondents strongly agreed (55%), 35% agreed, 6% disagreed, and 4% strongly disagreed.

Figure 6.6 Data tabulation of responses of survey question “*The Philippines still boasts the best Christmas celebrations in the world, regardless of the pandemic*”.

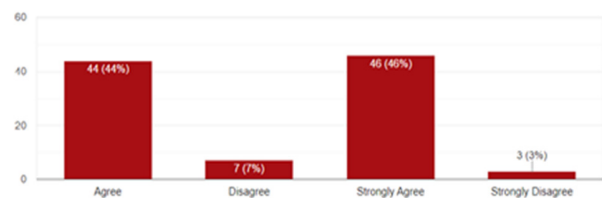


Figure 6.6 represents the tabulation of data of responses of survey question “*The Philippines still boasts the best Christmas celebrations in the world, regardless of the pandemic*”.

Christmas celebrations in the world, regardless of the pandemic". Majority of the respondents strongly agreed (46%), 44% agreed, 7% disagreed, and 3% strongly disagreed.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research is to identify the insights of Filipinos regarding traditional Christmas celebration during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. *With the current pandemic, how do Filipinos see Christmas now?* Based on the findings and analysis conducted, the researchers concludes that most of Filipinos are still satisfied and happy on their Christmas celebration during and after pandemic. They still have the chance to attend masses via online regardless of there is still a pandemic or not. The respondents still would like to attend Christmas carols, family reunions, *Simbang Gabi* and Christmas shopping. Additionally, the researchers conclude that majority of Filipinos believe that Philippines has very strict COVID-19 protocols and restrictions in church, malls, and travel requirements. On the other hand, most of Filipinos experienced financial problem, travel bans, distance from the family, family problem and lastly, mental, and emotional health issues in spite of the pandemic.

Therefore, the study recommends preserving and embracing Filipino Christian traditions, particularly during the Christmas season, as they are deeply rooted in the culture. It highlights the resilience of Filipinos in celebrating Christmas with loved ones, even amidst challenging times such as the pandemic. The researchers encourage the Philippine government to implement more inclusive and pro-poor COVID-19 protocols to support the population. It also suggests utilizing technology and social media platforms, such as Facebook Messenger, Skype, and Zoom, to stay connected with distant loved ones during the holidays. The study emphasizes the importance of COVID-19 vaccination for all family members to ensure protection and access to public spaces, such as malls and restaurants. Lastly, seeking professional help from guidance counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists is encouraged to address mental and emotional health needs encountered during this difficult times were everyone is forced to adjust and be resilient.

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