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Equipping Evangelizers in the Digital Age: Bridging Competency Gaps of Parish Social Communicators in the Diocese of Malolos

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on Franz-Josef Eilers' seven-competency framework, this explanatory sequential logic study adopted a quantitative-dominant mixed-methods design to identify formation gaps among 734 parish social-communication volunteers in the Diocese of Malolos, Bulacan, Philippines. Survey data indicate strong ethical and professional confidence, but lower self-ratings in theological literacy and back-end digital analytics. Three focus-group discussions (n = 32) explain these patterns, unveiling (1) a "craft–content–connection" synergy model, (2) a front-end/back-end skills divide, (3) an anxiety-driven strategy of comment-thread closure during online controversy, and (4) volunteers' perception of training as both pastoral empowerment and career capital. Synthesizing quantitative and qualitative strands, the article proposes an integrated "SOCCOM Academy" that braids theology, analytics, crisis drills, and creative labs. The findings extend Eilers' competence paradigm and supply empirical grounding for an Asian diocesan pastoral-communication plan.

Keywords: *Catholic social communication; training-needs assessment; Eilers competency framework; Diocese of Malolos; parish media ministry*

1. Background of the Study

When the Catholic Church convened the Second Vatican Council or Vatican II in 1962 to "revitalize the Christian faith in an increasingly secularized world" (Vatican News 2022), the second document it promulgated was *Inter Mirifica* or the Decree on the Media of Social Communication. *Inter Mirifica* primarily emphasizes the importance of using the various modern means of communication responsibly, for the common good, and for the apostolic ministry of the Church (Vatican II on Social Communication n.d.).

The decree defined social communication to include all forms and ways of communicating in human society, from traditional forms like storytelling, rumor, drama, dance, and music to the Internet and cyberspace (Eilers 2002). It also mandated that priests, religious, and laity be trained immediately to acquire the competence needed to use the different means of social communication for the apostolate.

The subsequent pastoral instruction *Communio et Progressio,* issued almost ten years after *Inter Mirifica*, and is considered the '*magna carta*' of Catholic communication, re-emphasized the need for training the communicators of the Church:

> Many are the communicators who handle well the tools of their profession, but lack a deep understanding of the art of communicating with all it implies. It is obvious that the communicators in the media who wish to excel need a serious and specialized training in every aspect of their work. The growing trend to found faculties of social communication in institutions of higher learning, and these with authority to confer degrees, is a welcome development. For if communicators are to meet their professional obligations, they must have sound knowledge as well as experience. (*Communio et Progressio*, #71)

Marking the document's 20th anniversary, *Aetatis Novae* (1992) required every episcopal conference and diocese to draft an integrated pastoral communication plan, produced in consultation with Catholic media organizations and linked to wider pastoral strategies in education, social service, and evangelization. Its appendix begins with a research phase—needs assessment, information gathering, and model exploration—specifically recommending needs assessments to pinpoint areas of the social communications ministry that demand focused attention.

1.1. Formation Programs for Social Communicators in the Diocese of Malolos

Social communication in the Diocese of Malolos is overseen by a priest-led Diocesan Commission, supported by vicariate priest-representatives and lay volunteers. Since 2021, the Commission has implemented a year-long formation cycle: FOCUS (Formation and Orientation towards a Catholic Understanding of Social Communications), VISIT (Vicarial Integration, Sharing of Insights and

Thoughts), PROCLAIM (Proclaiming the Charisms, Life, Achievements, and Inspirations in the Ministry), DEEPEN (Desiring, Encountering, and Entrusting God's Presence in Evangelization), and SHARPEN (Skills Harnessing for Pastoral Ministry and Evangelization).

These were conceptualized by the Commission in consultation with diocesan clergy and experienced lay practitioners, and delivered by a mix of priest-mentors and invited media professionals. Evaluations are conducted at the close of each activity, with recommendations noted for implementation in the next cycle. While the five-part cycle has been repeated annually since its launch, the design largely follows a "one-size-fits-all" approach: orientation, dialogue, celebration, spirituality, and skills workshops recur in the same sequence, without significant scaffolding for volunteers who have already completed previous cycles. As a result, the cycle provides valuable exposure and fellowship but lacks a structured progression pathway that develops beginner, intermediate, and advanced competencies over time. This gap strengthens the argument for an integrated pastoral plan—one that moves beyond event-based sessions toward a systematic curriculum where volunteers can build on prior learning and grow in responsibility and expertise within the ministry.

In consonance with the mandate of the pastoral instruction *Aetatis Novae,* there is a need to develop an integrated pastoral plan for social communications that is based on research, which may include training needs assessment, communication audit, and resource inventory. Having such a plan that is rooted in research will ensure that it is relevant, responsive, and tailored to the local situation in the Diocese of Malolos.

Moreover, the communication landscape today presents challenges unforeseen by Vatican II. Digital evangelization now unfolds in a climate marked by infodemics, hypersensitivity, atypical media cycles, and misinformation (Navas 2022). Social media has likewise become not merely a support but a permanent pastoral environment (Le Duc 2022), while pandemic-driven experiences revealed both creativity and vulnerability in Asian churches' digital outreach (*Church Communication in the New Normal* 2022). In the Philippines, Tenedero's (2025) Figured World study highlights how a parish Facebook page functions as a discursive space for negotiating faith and community identity.

In this context, the Diocese of Malolos' social-communication ministry is largely youth-led: nearly half of the volunteers are below 20 years old, and almost half have less than one year of ministry experience. While this youthful profile suggests energy and creativity, it also highlights barriers to fulfilling the Church's mandate for trained communicators—limited theological grounding, uneven digital literacy, and short ministerial tenure. Moreover, access to reliable internet, digital subscriptions, and back-end analytics tools varies across parishes, reflecting disparities shaped by location and resources. These demographic and infrastructural realities underscore why a systematic training-needs assessment is necessary:

competence in social communication cannot be presumed, but must be supported by research-based formation tailored to local conditions.

1.2. Training Needs Assessment for Communicators

Effective communication is not merely message transmission but "the process of being understood," where what the receiver grasps matches the sender's intent (Arnold and McClure 2023). Training-needs assessment pinpoints the knowledge or skill gaps that hinder this match, enabling organizations to design targeted programs for optimal performance (Kaufman and English 1979; Gupta 2011).

In communication work, those gaps appear when practitioners fall short of established standards—rules that govern what, when, and how to convey messages across media. By measuring current ability against required competence, a communication needs assessment reveals discrepancies; training then focuses on closing them, ensuring practitioners meet standards and their messages are understood exactly as intended.

2. Literature Review

Building on the digital-age challenges outlined earlier, the next step is to review training needs assessment (TNA) literature, which offers structured approaches that can be adapted to parish social-communication contexts. Literature on TNA provides a structured framework that could be applied to assess the capacities of Church communicators. Kura and Kaur (2021) compile common TNA methods such as task analysis, competency-based assessment, and strategic gap analysis. They emphasize that an enabling learning environment is vital to enhance organizational performance and credibility.

Sector-specific studies demonstrate the breadth of TNA applications. Education studies in the Philippines, Greece, Nigeria, Sudan, and Iran consistently reveal gaps between mandated curricula and teachers' self-rated skills (Liwanag, Padohinog, and Balsicas 2023; Pavlou, Anagnou, and Fragkoulis 2021; Ogba, Ugodulunwa, and Igu 2020; Yousif, Ahmed, and Osman 2019; Koohi et al. 2016). Health-care audits—from Ethiopian laboratories to Malawi's paediatric ICUs and U.S. military clinics—flag shortages in digital analytics and crisis response (Gebregzabher et al. 2023; Renning et al. 2022; Lennon et al. 2023), findings echoed in Europe-wide reviews (Czabanowska and Feria 2024; Lanza et al. 2023). Service and corporate TNAs underline mismatches between managers and frontline staff on communication skills (Streuli et al. 2024a; Hyasat, Al-Weshah, and Kakeesh 2022; Hawkins, Ehsan, and Burkitt 2023; Gyeltshen et al. 2021; Cigularov and Dillulio 2020), while public-sector reports—from Canada's food regulators to the U.S. National Park Service and Saskatchewan's urban

workforce—stress stakeholder-driven diagnostics (Streuli et al. 2024b; Powell, Depper, and Wright 2017; Saskatchewan Institute 2003). Government toolkits such as *South African Management Development Institute (SAMDI) Training Manual* (2007) further codify process norms.

Despite abundant TNA research in secular fields, virtually none targets Catholic social-communication ministers, leaving the Church without evidence-based training tools tailored to their needs. Empirical, locally grounded studies using structured assessments are therefore essential to shape formation in today's fast-evolving media landscape.

3. Statement of the Problem and Objectives

Given the persistent digital-age challenges facing parish social communication ministries, and the limited research documenting the competencies and formation needs of volunteers at the parish level, this study sought to examine these realities in the Diocese of Malolos.

This study aimed to answer the following research question: *How do parish social communication volunteers in the Diocese of Malolos perceive their competencies, formation gaps, and training needs for digital evangelization?*

The following are the objectives of this study:

- To assess the self-perceived competency levels of parish social communication volunteers using Eilers' seven-competency framework (technical, critical, creative, ethical, cultural, theological, and professional).
- To identify formation gaps and training needs that hinder volunteers in carrying out their parish communication work effectively.
- To analyze how volunteers experience and navigate these gaps in practice, with attention to the interplay of craft, content, and connection in their ministry.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the seven communication competencies proposed by Fr. Franz-Josef Eilers (2014), which collectively form a holistic model for the formation of Catholic social communicators. Eilers emphasizes that social communication training should go beyond technical or media skills and instead foster well-rounded communicators who are spiritually grounded, critically aware, and professionally competent. His framework encourages individuals to become responsible communicators—capable of making ethical and contextually appropriate decisions in their use of media and communication tools.

The central concept in this framework is communication competence, which is understood across seven dimensions:

- Technical Competence – skills in operating digital tools and media platforms;
- Critical Competence – the ability to analyze and assess media content and its impact;
- Creative Competence – capacity for innovation in content creation and storytelling;
- Ethical Competence – sensitivity to moral, doctrinal, and Church values in communication;
- Cultural Competence – respect and awareness for diverse cultural contexts in messaging;
- Theological Competence – grounding in the Church's teachings, mission, and prayer life;
- Professional Competence – adherence to standards of teamwork, research, and lifelong learning.

This study applied Eilers' framework to assess the current levels of competence among social communication volunteers in the Diocese of Malolos and to identify training needs that would support their ministry more effectively. The framework assumes that gaps in any of the seven areas indicate specific needs for capacity building.

In this study, each of Eilers' seven competencies was translated into concrete indicators that reflect the skills and attitudes parish social communicators are expected to demonstrate. Technical competence was measured through abilities such as using livestream equipment, operating cameras, editing photos and videos, and managing parish social media pages. Critical competence involved assessing the credibility of sources, recognizing misinformation, and evaluating the impact of online content. Creative competence included skills in layout and design, writing captions and scripts, and producing original media for evangelization. Ethical competence focused on following Church and copyright guidelines, ensuring respectful communication, and exercising responsibility in digital spaces. Cultural competence was gauged through sensitivity to language, inclusivity, and the capacity to adapt messages for different parish and community contexts. Theological competence included familiarity with the Bible, Catholic teachings, papal messages, and the liturgical calendar as applied in communication work. Finally, professional competence encompassed collaboration within parish teams, coordination with clergy, fulfilling assigned roles, and pursuing ongoing training. These operationalized indicators became the benchmarks for analyzing volunteers' self-assessed competencies and identifying priority gaps in formation.

5. Methodology

Following Creswell's (2014) explanatory sequential logic, the study adopted a quantitative-dominant mixed-methods design. A researcher-made, self-administered Google Forms survey—framed by Eilers' (2014) seven competencies—was distributed through purposive sampling to 734 active social communication volunteers drawn from the 118 parishes of the Diocese of Malolos. Because no official registry of parish volunteers exists, the population size was unknown; hence, the strategy was to invite all parishes to nominate their active SOCCOM volunteers, resulting in the achieved sample. This ensured that respondents were directly engaged in parish media work. The instrument underwent expert validation by a priest to help establish content validity and was pilot tested with 20 parish volunteers, resulting in minor revisions for clarity. To deepen and contextualize the survey trends, three follow-up focus-group discussions (FGDs) were held with 32 survey volunteers. Participants for each FGD were first purposively selected for role diversity, then augmented through snowball referrals to capture additional voices within each district and vicariate.

Quantitative data were processed with descriptive statistics, means, frequencies, and percentages, yielding a competence profile across technical, critical, creative, ethical, cultural, theological, and professional domains. Qualitative data from the FGDs were transcribed verbatim and coded solely by the researcher, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework for thematic analysis. Codes were generated inductively, refined into categories, and clustered into themes through iterative review. Since no additional coders were involved, inter-coder reliability was not computed; instead, consistency was ensured through an audit trail, transcript rechecking, and triangulation with survey results.

The research protocol was not subject to formal ethics board review but adhered to standard ethical practices in communication research (all participants gave written informed consent, were assured of anonymity, and retained the right to withdraw). Data were stored securely and reported in aggregate form. As a member of the diocesan communications commission, the researcher enjoyed insider access yet maintained reflexivity through journaling and anonymization practices to avoid bias.

6. Results

The presentation of results follows the study's three objectives to ensure coherence between the research aims and findings. First, the competency levels of parish social communicators are examined across Eilers' seven key areas of pastoral communication. Second, training needs and gaps are identified, highlighting skills that require further capacity-building for more effective parish

communication work. Finally, the communication challenges and formation experiences of parish volunteers are explored through thematic analysis, providing deeper insight into the realities and opportunities of pastoral media ministry.

6.1. Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents

A total of 734 respondents participated in the Training Needs Analysis survey for Catholic social communicators in the Diocese of Malolos. The demographic profile reflects a dynamic, youth-led ministry grounded in diverse experiences and educational backgrounds across the ecclesiastical territory.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	377	51.4%
	Male	357	48.6%
Age	Under 20	362	49.3%
	21–30	296	40.3%
	31–40	52	7.1%
	41–50	17	2.3%
	51–60	5	0.7%
	60+	2	0.3%
Education	Undergraduate degree	337	45.9%
	High school graduate	247	33.7%
	Graduate degree	118	16.1%
	Doctorate	30	4.1%
	Others (vocational, technical training)	2	0.3%
Years in Ministry	< 1 year	349	47.6%
	1–3 years	185	25.2%
	4–6 years	156	21.3%
	7+ years	44	6.0%
District	Western	220	30.0%
	Northern	195	26.6%
	Eastern	195	26.6%

Variable	Category	n	%
	Southern	124	16.9%
Role in Ministry	General member	250	34.1%
	Photographer/Videographer	108	14.7%
	Finance/Admin	94	12.8%
	Livestream/AV Operator	87	11.9%
	Leadership	78	10.6%
	Other (e.g. graphic design, parish website maintenance, radio program coordination, parish bulletin layout editing)	73	9.9%
	Layout/Design	41	5.6%
	No Answer	3	0.4%

The table above presents the demographic profile of respondents. The ministry is strikingly youthful, with 49% under 20 years old. In terms of experience, nearly half have less than one year in service, compared with only 6% with more than seven years. District distribution is fairly balanced, but the Southern District had the lowest participation (17%). Functionally, plurality serves as general members (34%), while layout/design roles are the least common (6%). These extremes suggest a dynamic yet inexperienced volunteer base, reinforcing the need for structured mentoring and capacity-building.

6.2. Competency Levels Based on Eilers' Seven Key Areas: Self-Assessment of Communication Competencies

This section presents the results of the self-assessment portion of the survey anchored on the seven competencies for Church communicators as proposed by Fr. Franz-Josef Eilers: technical, critical, creative, ethical, cultural, theological, and professional. Each competency was assessed through targeted statements designed to measure the respondents' perceived knowledge, skills, and practices. The survey included 24 items classified under these seven domains, allowing for an evaluation of strengths and gaps in communication competence among ministry workers.

The 4-point Likert scale responses (1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree) were analyzed using the weighted mean. To aid interpretation, the resulting scores were categorized into descriptive ranges: 3.26–4.00 (High), 2.51–3.25 (Moderate), 1.76–2.50 (Low), and 1.00–1.75 (Very Low). A higher mean score

indicates stronger agreement and greater confidence in the competency, while lower scores reflect weaker agreement and highlight areas of formation gaps or training needs. This interpretive scale provides a clearer understanding of how parish social communication volunteers perceive their competencies across the seven domains.

6.2.1. Technical competence

The mean scores for items under technical competence ranged from 3.02 to 3.34, yielding an overall average of 3.19, indicating a generally agreeable level of proficiency among respondents. Church communicators show confidence in using digital tools such as social media platforms and multimedia editing software. However, slightly lower scores were observed in areas requiring analytical skills, particularly in using data analytics to assess communication impact (M = 3.02).

Table 02: Technical competence

Indicator	*Mean*	*Verbal Interpretation*
I can effectively use multimedia (videos, photos, graphics) in my communication efforts.	3.34	High
I have experience in managing online communities (e.g., church social media, forums).	3.25	Moderate
I can analyze the effectiveness of different types of media used in communication.	3.24	Moderate
I am proficient in using digital tools such as social media platforms, video editing software, and audio tools.	3.22	Moderate
I am confident in my ability to use basic web design tools for creating engaging content.	3.13	Moderate
I can produce and edit video content for social media platforms.	3.13	Moderate
I am proficient in using data analytics to assess the reach and impact of my communication efforts.	3.02	Moderate

6.2.2. Critical competence

With a mean score of 3.20, respondents showed a healthy level of agreement regarding their ability to critically assess content and context in communication. This reflects a foundational strength in discernment and judgment—critical traits

in Church communication, where messages often intersect with doctrinal, pastoral, and societal concerns.

Table 03: Critical competence

Indicator	*Mean*	*Verbal Interpretation*
I am able to think critically about the content and context of my communication, making sound judgments.	3.2	High

6.2.3. Creative competence

Respondents rated themselves positively on creative competence, with a mean score of 3.31. They agreed that they regularly use innovative strategies to engage audiences and navigate communication challenges. This suggests a growing adaptability among Church communicators to appeal to evolving audience preferences, particularly in digital environments.

Table 4: Creative competence

Indicator	*Mean*	*Verbal Interpretation*
I make sure that my communications respect the dignity of all people involved.	3.44	High
I am aware of the ethical challenges faced in my communication work and strive to address them.	3.32	High
I am familiar with the ethical guidelines for online and digital communication.	3.30	High
I regularly reflect on the ethical implications of my communication.	3.26	High
I regularly consider ethical implications when creating multimedia content.	3.24	Moderate

6.2.4. Ethical competence

Scoring the highest among all competencies at 3.31, ethical competence emerged as a well-developed area among respondents. Church communicators demonstrated consistent awareness of ethical considerations, including digital guidelines, respect for dignity, and the moral implications of multimedia content. This strong ethical grounding is vital, particularly in light of the Church's role as a moral compass in public discourse. The findings affirm that respondents are

mindful of their responsibilities when communicating sensitive or faith-based messages.

Table 5: Ethical competence

Indicator	*Mean*	*Verbal Interpretation*
I make sure that my communications respect the dignity of all people involved.	3.44	High
I am aware of the ethical challenges faced in my communication work and strive to address them.	3.32	High
I am familiar with the ethical guidelines for online and digital communication.	3.30	High
I regularly reflect on the ethical implications of my communication.	3.26	High
I regularly consider ethical implications when creating multimedia content.	3.24	Moderate

6.2.6. Cultural competence

With a competence mean of 3.24, cultural sensitivity appears to be a priority for Church communicators. Respondents affirmed their ability to adapt messages to diverse audiences and cultural settings, and to respect religious and cultural nuances in media. The data suggests a commendable level of intercultural awareness, crucial for an inclusive and dialogical communication approach in the multicultural contexts often encountered in Church ministries.

Table 6: Cultural competence

Indicator	*Mean*	*Verbal Interpretation*
I ensure that all media used respects the cultural and religious sensitivities of the audience.	3.39	High
I am able to adapt my communication style to different audiences or contexts.	3.31	High
I feel confident in creating and presenting messages that are culturally sensitive.	3.16	Moderate
I can create content that resonates with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.	3.12	Moderate

6.2.7. Theological competence

Theological competence received the lowest mean score at 3.13, pointing to a relatively modest self-assessment of the ability to integrate theological grounding into communication work. While respondents recognize the importance of this area, their lower confidence levels suggest a potential gap in theological literacy or application in real-world contexts.

Table 7: Theological competence

Indicator	*Mean*	*Verbal Interpretation*
I am able to integrate theological principles into my communication efforts.	3.15	Moderate
I can assess the theological grounding of my communication in pastoral and community contexts.	3.10	Moderate

6.2.8. Professional competence

Tied with ethical competence at 3.31, professional competence is a notable strength. Respondents expressed strong agreement in applying communication standards and expressing ideas effectively. These results highlight a professional discipline among Church communicators, which may be attributed to formal training or experience in journalism, media, or organizational communication.

Table 8: Professional competence

Indicator	*Mean*	*Verbal Interpretation*
I apply professional standards to manage and organize communication resources effectively.	3.36	High
I understand and apply professional standards in communication, including the use of proper methods and tools.	3.35	High
I am able to express ideas clearly and persuasively in both written and spoken forms.	3.21	Moderate

Overall, the results indicate that Church communicators view themselves as generally competent across all seven domains proposed by Eilers. The highest-rated areas, ethical and professional competence, point to a strong sense of responsibility and discipline, while relatively lower scores in theological and technical (analytics-focused) domains indicate areas for development. These findings suggest that while Church communicators are adapting well to

contemporary demands, continuous capacity building, particularly in theological grounding and evidence-based media practice, will further strengthen their effectiveness. An integrated training program that reinforces these competencies holistically can equip communicators to respond more faithfully and creatively to the Church's mission in a digital world.

6.3. Training Needs and Gaps in Parish Communication Work: Scenario-Based Evaluation of Competency Application

This section presents the results of the scenario-based evaluation of the survey, which reveals that Catholic social communicators across the Diocese of Malolos exhibit a consistently high level of confidence in applying their communication skills to real-life pastoral and professional contexts.

For this section, a 4-point Likert scale was used to assess competency application in scenario-based situations. The scale was reversed: 1 = highest and 4 = lowest. Interpretation ranges were: 1.00–1.49 (Very High), 1.50–2.49 (High), 2.50–3.49 (Moderate), and 3.50–4.00 (Low). Lower mean scores indicate stronger competency application, while higher scores point to gaps needing further training.

Although none of the mean scores for the six assessed competencies reached the "Very High" benchmark (mean ≤ 1.49 on the reverse Likert scale), all items scored within the "High" range (1.50–2.49). This suggests that practical competence is broadly developed among respondents.

For critical competence (M=1.92), participants showed sound judgment in addressing misinformation but would benefit from real-world case workshops to sharpen responses under pressure. In terms of cultural competence (M=1.95), there is basic awareness of intercultural sensitivity, yet deeper training in inclusive messaging and content review is recommended. Creative competence (M=2.02) showed functional skills in visual storytelling, suggesting a need to cultivate greater creativity through design labs and mentoring. Ethical competence (M=2.21) revealed a thoughtful but tentative approach in handling controversial issues, highlighting the value of role-play and ethical dialogue sessions. For theological competence (M=2.14), respondents showed doctrinal familiarity but need more practice in applying Church teachings spontaneously—this may be addressed through "Theology in Action" modules. Lastly, professional competence (M=1.91) indicated a strong sense of inclusive communication, though still needing reinforcement through training on feedback systems, inclusive language, and parish communication tools.

Table 9: Scenario-based evaluation of competency

Question	*Competence*	*Mean Score*	*Interpretation*
You are tasked with designing a church event flyer. How creatively do you incorporate visual elements to capture attention?	Creative	2.02	High
A colleague shares a message online with false information about a community event. How do you critically assess the situation and respond?	Critical	1.92	High
You are planning a social media post about a new church initiative. How well can you assess the cultural sensitivities of the message for your audience?	Cultural	1.95	High
During a pastoral visit, you are asked about a controversial issue. How confident are you in using ethical guidelines to address the issue?	Ethical	2.21	High
A community member complains that the communication in your church is not clear or inclusive. How confident are you that you can professionally assess and address the feedback?	Professional	1.91	High
You need to give a talk on the importance of community outreach. How well do you connect the message to Church teachings and Scripture?	Theological	2.14	High

Note: 4-point Likert scale: 1 = Highest application to 4 = Lowest application

The scenario-based evaluation affirms the practical readiness of many social communicators while highlighting the need for practical, immersive, and ministry-aligned training approaches. To build on existing strengths, parishes and vicariates may integrate practice-based formation through simulations, real-life scenarios, and regular reflection exercises. Including scenario-based assessments in future evaluations will also ensure that theoretical knowledge is consistently translated into ethical, inclusive, and context-sensitive communication practices.

6.3.1. Technical skills assessment

The survey also assessed the technical skills of the respondents. The assessment of specific technical skills among parish social communicators revealed a

wide range of proficiency levels across commonly used digital tools. Notably, participants demonstrated high comfort in designing visual content using platforms such as Canva and Adobe Photoshop, with a mean score of 3.07. This suggests that visual communication is a strength for many respondents, supporting the growing demand for engaging graphic materials in parish events and catechetical campaigns.

Most of the remaining tools yielded moderate proficiency scores. These include video editing tools (M = 2.41), email marketing platforms (M = 2.29), social media management systems (M = 2.05), presentation software (M = 2.96), analytics platforms (M = 2.59), podcasting tools (M = 2.02), and SEO knowledge (M = 2.54). These results indicate a working familiarity with essential tools, but they also point to opportunities for upskilling.

Two areas stood out with low proficiency: content management systems (CMS) for website maintenance (M = 1.97) and collaboration via project management tools such as Trello or Asana (M = 1.73). These findings highlight critical gaps in long-term content planning and team coordination—functions essential for scaling communication ministries at the parish and diocesan levels. The low scores may reflect limited access to training, underutilization of digital workflows, or lack of integration into regular ministry operations.

Table 10: Technical skills assessment

Technical Skill	*Mean Score*	*Interpretation*
How proficient are you in using content management systems (CMS) (e.g., WordPress, Joomla)?	1.97	Low
How comfortable are you with designing visual content (e.g., Canva, Photoshop)?	3.07	High
How familiar are you with video editing tools (e.g., Premiere Pro, Final Cut)?	2.41	Moderate
How often do you use social media management platforms (e.g., Hootsuite)?	2.05	Moderate
How confident are you in managing email marketing campaigns (e.g., MailChimp)?	2.29	Moderate
How proficient are you in using analytics tools (e.g., Google Analytics, Facebook Insights)?	2.59	Moderate
How skilled are you with presentation software (e.g., PowerPoint, Google Slides)?	2.96	Moderate
How familiar are you with podcasting tools (e.g., Audacity, Anchor)?	2.02	Moderate

How well do you understand the basics of SEO (Search Engine Optimization)?	2.54	Moderate
How often do you collaborate with a team using project management tools (e.g., Trello, Asana)?	1.73	Low

The findings emphasize the need for a structured digital upskilling program. Workshops focused on video editing, analytics, podcasting, and SEO could elevate current competencies, while targeted training in CMS and project management would address the most pressing gaps. Encouraging peer mentoring and resource-sharing at the vicariate level may also foster collaborative growth and long-term capacity building. These efforts are vital in empowering social communicators to meet the evolving digital demands of pastoral communication in a post-pandemic Church context.

6.3.2. Training needs

The training-needs analysis shows that the Diocese of Malolos parish volunteers urgently seek upskilling in several domains, with mean scores of 3.50–4.00 signalling strong motivation to learn. Highest priorities are professional competence (research skills and academic grounding) and technical competence (multimedia production), followed by a clear call to sharpen creative competence in message design and theological competence for clearer articulation of Church teaching.

Competencies rated slightly lower (3.00–3.49), cultural, critical, and ethical, still merit attention through case-based, intercultural, and moral-decision modules. The findings point to modular, hands-on training: university partnerships for research, vicariate-level multimedia workshops, creative storytelling labs, and contextual-theology sessions, collectively closing gaps while sustaining volunteers' evident enthusiasm.

Table 11: Training needs analysis

Training Needs Question	*Competence*	*Mean Score*	*Interpretation*
I could benefit from learning more about recent academic or Church-related research in social communication.	Professional	3.52	Very High
I believe the Church would benefit from investing more in communication research and academic programs.	Professional	3.51	Very High

I would like to deepen my understanding of how to communicate the teachings of the Church more effectively.	Theological	3.51	Very High
I am interested in developing my ability to express my message in more creative and engaging ways.	Creative	3.5	Very High
I need more training to strengthen my academic foundation in communication theory, media studies, or related disciplines.	Professional	3.5	Very High
I need more training in using multimedia tools effectively for church communication.	Technical	3.5	Very High
I would appreciate more resources on how to engage with different cultures respectfully through communication.	Cultural	3.49	High
I am interested in contributing to research on Church communication if given the opportunity and support.	Professional	3.49	High
I would benefit from practical exercises in critical thinking and evaluating communication messages.	Critical	3.48	High
I would benefit from workshops on ethical issues in digital communication (e.g., privacy, misinformation).	Ethical	3.48	High
I need guidance on how to apply professional communication standards in the context of pastoral work.	Professional	3.46	High
I need more support and encouragement from my institution to engage in professional research in Church or social communication.	Professional	3.45	High

These findings show a strong commitment among communicators to grow in their ministry. Prioritizing immediate training in theology, media tools, and research, alongside structured ongoing formation, will ensure a more professional, ethical, and effective communication ministry across the diocese.

6.4. Communication Challenges and Formation Experiences

The survey of 734 parish volunteers supplied a broad statistical profile of the Diocese of Malolos' social-communication ministry, revealing (a) high self-

ratings in ethical and professional competence, (b) conspicuously lower confidence in theological and analytics-related skills, and (c) pronounced training demand in the same weak areas. To probe the "why" behind these numerical patterns and to surface context-specific solutions, a qualitative follow-up was undertaken.

Three district-level focus-group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with 32 survey respondents who met the same inclusion criteria of active ministry service. Each session, lasting 90–110 minutes, was audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic approach.

Analysis began with repeated readings of transcripts to capture participants' experiences with digital tools, parish structures, and formation activities. Open coding generated 68 initial codes, reflecting patterns such as "technical struggles," "gaps in theological grounding," and "creative workarounds." These were clustered into 17 conceptual categories and reviewed across the dataset to ensure they represented both commonalities and contrasts across parishes. Categories were then refined into six clearly defined themes that highlighted volunteers' competencies and formation gaps in relation to the study's objectives.

The six themes, distilled through this iterative process, both confirm and nuance the survey results: they affirm volunteers' strengths in visual and ethical work, reveal deeper theological and infrastructural challenges, and articulate concrete training preferences. The next section presents and discusses these themes in detail.

6.4.1. Competence as a dynamic synergy of craft, content, and connection

Across all districts, volunteers defined competence as a triangle of technical craft (eye-catching visuals and livestream skills), doctrinally faithful content (theologically sound, pastorally tuned messaging), and relational connection (collaborative ties with teammates and clergy). The model mirrors survey results: ethical-professional scores top the scale (connection), technical–creative sit in the middle, and theological competence, the "content" corner, remains the weakest point.

Participants stressed that neglecting any side of the triangle hollows out communication. Slick graphics without doctrine, they warned, mimic "aesthetic-first influencers who rarely catechize;" true credibility arises only when polished media, accurate teaching, and ecclesial collaboration converge.

> "When I compare our parish's posts with others, I see we can keep pace—especially in layout—but it lands differently when you know the feast-day color is correct and the parish priest has approved it."

> "As SOCCOM head I can't rely only on my own skill; I make it a point to listen to the team's ideas and the priest's guidance. That's where real collaboration happens—because craft, content, and relationship make the formula."

The model works as a checks-and-balances triangle craft draws attention but is tempered by doctrine, doctrine gains clarity through relational feedback, and connection is sustained by mutual respect—yet if any vertex, especially theology, weakens, the whole structure tilts and teams resort to delays or templated posts.

6.4.2. Visual production and live-streaming as an accessible, but surface-heavy, centre of excellence

Participants consistently portrayed visual production and live-streaming as the ministry's most mature competence, a claim that dovetails with the survey's technical ($\bar{M} = 3.19$) and creative ($\bar{M} = 3.24$) means and the scenario-based creative score of 2.02 ("High"). Thematic analysis, however, shows that this strength is largely front-end and pandemic-driven: volunteers mastered cameras, overlays, and layout software because weekly online Masses became a non-negotiable pastoral service during lockdowns. Skill acquisition was therefore experiential ("we learned on the fly"), peer-mentored, and tightly focused on visual delivery rather than strategic management or evaluation.

> "We're confident the Sunday livestream will always happen—because without it, we can't reach seniors and the bedridden."
>
> "During the pandemic, I had only a desktop; now I can set up multi-camera, overlays, and audio—as long as the parish provides internet and power."

This competence cluster rests on three traits: parish teams favor free, accessible tools like Canva and OBS, explaining their high design scores but low ratings for costlier CMS and project-management apps; skills spread peer-to-peer, producing rapid uptake yet patchy depth across vicariates; and performance is judged by visible output, "Did the stream start on time?", not by back-end metrics.

While this equipment-light model secures a reliable digital presence and meets parishioner expectations for online worship, the lack of analytic literacy blocks data-driven improvement; livestreams air, are archived, and rarely reviewed, leaving the ministry technically competent but strategically shallow.

6.4.3. Theological competence as the ministry's structural Achilles heel

While survey respondents rated themselves "Agree" or "High" on most competency dimensions, their lowest quantitative mean ($\bar{M} = 3.13$), and the only item to earn repeated "Neutral" self-ratings—was theological competence. The focus groups clarify that this deficit is not a lack of goodwill but a structural

weakness produced by three interacting forces: (a) fragmented reference sources, (b) asymmetric clerical guidance, and (c) fear of doctrinal error.

Participants described an "information patchwork" in which each parish invents its own cheat-sheets for liturgical colors, feast-day rubrics, and scriptural captions. Without a diocesan style guide, teams rely on Google searches—sometimes landing on non-Catholic sites—or ask priests ad hoc, reinforcing inconsistency. "Once we used green, only to learn it should have been red; there's no official color list for each feast."

However, clergy involvement varies widely: some priests pre-approve every post; others give blanket trust. Volunteers caught in the middle hesitate, delaying uploads and dampening creative initiative. "If Father is busy, the post stays pending; we don't want mistakes, another priest might call us out."

The combined effect of patchy resources and uneven oversight is a pervasive fear of saying the wrong thing. Volunteers describe "walking on eggshells" when drafting captions about controversial teachings or liturgical norms. This fear drives the default strategy of copying diocesan graphics verbatim, limiting contextualization and parish voice. "I'm afraid to quote the Catechism incompletely; it might be misinterpreted, so I just copy-paste from the Diocese page."

In Eilers' craft–content–connection triangle, theology anchors the content vertex; when that point weakens, output may be visually polished yet catechetically thin, and relational goodwill turns into cautious silence, confirming Bock's (2014) claim that communication falters without a shared theological grammar. This gap surfaces quantitatively in the low scenario score for "linking Scripture to outreach" (M = 2.14) and qualitatively in stalled posts, color mistakes, and copy-pasted captions, underscoring theology as the keystone competence on which all others hinge.

6.4.4. Strategic digital capacity: front-end fluency sitting on a back-end vacuum

Survey scores expose a sharp split in technical competence: volunteers excel with free, front-end tools like Canva/Photoshop (M = 3.07) yet struggle with costlier, back-end systems: CMS (1.97), project-management apps (1.73), analytics (2.59), podcasting (2.02). Focus groups attributed this gap to three reinforcing constraints:

- Capital: "OBS is free; Canva is free. But how can you use a CMS if there's no budget for the domain and hosting?"
- Time: "Even if we want to run analytics, time is the enemy; the next event is done before the data gets reviewed."
- Capability: "Someone teaches layout, but no one teaches project management; if nobody's doing it, we can't even imagine it."

The cycle of limited funds, few mentors, and volunteer time pressures leaves the ministry strong in creative execution but weak in the strategic planning and measurement Eiler classifies as professional competence.

6.4.5. Controversy and misinformation: a double bind of moral duty and reputational risk

Although the critical-competence scenario on handling misinformation scored "High" (M = 1.92), focus groups show volunteers toggle between deleting or locking comments and posting clarifications, guided by a risk calculus that weighs parish reputation, priestly advice and their own digital know-how. Most coordinators favor defensive silence, preferring a quiet page to a potential flame war. "When the bashers swarmed, I turned the comments off to kill the issue—I didn't want it to grow and drag the parish in."

High ethical scores mask a crisis gap: most volunteers, fearing reputational damage and lacking a dialogue protocol, default to shutting comments, an expedient that shields the "parish brand" but reveals thin crisis skills. A smaller group contends silence cedes the field, insisting, "If you know the truth, you have to answer misinformation to correct people—that's our duty as communicators."

However, they act only after informal priestly vetting, highlighting a policy vacuum. The result is a structural tension in which theoretical critical competence collides with backlash anxiety and uneven clerical support, reinforcing the theological shortfall noted earlier.

6.4.6. Training as empowerment, identity-building, and social capital

The Training-Needs Index shows an across-the-board hunger for formation—professional (3.66), technical (3.54), creative (3.47), and even theological (3.44) all score "Very High." Focus-group volunteers treat training not as remediation but as pastoral empowerment, identity building, and career capital, requesting four content streams: caption writing, social-media strategy, visual-craft upgrades, and a doctrinal track to close their theology gap—an agenda that answers Eilers' call for integrated, not siloed, formation.

They favor project-based, peer-mentored workshops, for instance, an Advent reel critiqued for design, doctrine, and analytics, delivered as full-day, rotating vicariate sessions with meal-and-data stipends to offset student budgets. As one participant put it, "Interest in training is very high because the skills are useful not only in church but also professionally," capturing the dual payoff that drives sustained volunteer engagement.

The six themes portray a ministry of dynamic partial maturity: volunteers anchor their identity in a craft–content–connection triangle that reflects high ethical and professional scores, excel in low-cost visual production and livestreaming, yet operate atop a back-end vacuum where analytics, CMS, and project workflows are absent, preventing reach assessment or content reuse. The

content vertex, theological competence, remains the structural Achilles' heel; patchy references, uneven clerical oversight, and fear of error slow posting and amplify a controversy-misinformation bind, leaving teams toggling between comment shutdown and timid corrections. Consequently, a technically polished but strategically shallow ecosystem emerges, unable to convert ethical zeal into doctrinally confident, data-driven, scalable evangelization.

7. Discussion

The quantitative strand sketched a ministry that is ethically motivated (Ethical = 3.31; Professional = 3.31), technically competent at the surface (Technical = 3.19; Creative = 3.24), but least confident in theological grounding (Theological = 3.13) and analytics-oriented skills (CMS = 1.97; project management = 1.73).

The qualitative strand explains the why behind these numbers. Focus-group participants described competence as a three-part synergy of craft, content, and connection; celebrated their pandemic-honed strengths in live-streaming and layout; and voiced anxiety about doctrinal error and back-end workflows. The same volunteers who rated themselves "High" in ethics admitted disabling comment threads when trolls appeared, illustrating how moral intent can be undermined by missing crisis protocols. Likewise, their solid creative self-ratings were undercut by confessions that homilies are posted but never tagged or analyzed. In short, the qualitative data reveal a ministry that is front-end fluent yet back-end blind, confirming and contextualizing the survey pattern.

When the survey means, scenario scores, and six qualitative themes are arrayed against Eilers' (2014) framework, three clusters emerge:

Table 12. Competency spectrum of parish social communicators: strengths, vulnerabilities, and structural gaps

High or Emerging Strengths	*Moderate but Fragile*	*Structural Weaknesses*
Ethical and Professional	Technical (front-end) and Creative	Theological • Technical (back-end) • Critical*

**Critical competence is acceptable in principle but focus group data show it collapses under public controversy.*

Survey metrics and focus-group narratives highlight four priorities for diocesan action. First, front-end fluent but back-end blind: livestreams abound, yet reach is unknown; quarterly "analytics Sundays" and shared CMS hosting would turn the show into measurable impact. Second, ethics without crisis muscle: volunteers close comment threads when trolled; a crisis-communication playbook

drilled in simulations could shift them to confident, charitable engagement. Third, theology as a bottleneck: a diocesan style guide and rapid clergy hotline would cut approval delays and boost doctrinal confidence. Fourth, formation must braid craft, content, and connection: pair Photoshop with liturgical color theory and YouTube analytics with Gospel storytelling. Meeting these needs would advance the ministry from pandemic-era visibility to analytically informed, theologically grounded, crisis-ready evangelization.

Navas' call for "empathic communication" (2022) aligns with the high ethical scores and the volunteers' instinct to rewrite a meme "baka ma-offend ang elderly," (the elderly might be offended) but the three-day wait for priestly approval of its Marian quote illustrates Bock's warning that aesthetics without theology quickly stall (2014). The livestream boom praised in *Church Communication in the New Normal* (2022) explains the volunteers' front-end prowess, yet the absence of retention analytics and hash tagged archives confirms Le Duc's caution that mere "content pushing" risks "preaching into the void" (2022), echoed by a volunteer who admitted, "I don't know who's still watching once it's Communion time." Thus, the literature predicts Malolos' ethical zeal and digital agility but overlooks the friction between empathy, doctrinal rigor, and analytics that this study exposes, signalling the need to braid theological and data literacy into post-pandemic Church media practice.

The study advances Church-communication theory in four ways. First, it introduces a triangular synergy model—competence emerges where craft, content, and connection intersect—offering a workshop-friendly alternative to Eiler's full seven-item grid. Second, it uncovers a front-end/back-end divide: teams fluent in Canva and OBS cannot track retention funnels or tag homilies, revealing that livestream polish can mask a strategic vacuum. Third, it documents a risk calculus in online controversy; ethical zeal is blunted by reputational anxiety, pushing volunteers to disable comments unless rapid doctrinal guidance is available. Fourth, it shows that training is valued as dual capital, prized for both pastoral service and career mobility.

These insights point to an integrated formation pipeline, a diocesan "SOCCOM Academy," where motion-graphics labs are paired with theology-in-media modules, livestream rehearsals open Creator-Studio dashboards, and caption clinics end with misinformation drills. Such braided curricula connect the ministry's ethical and creative high ground to its theological and analytical lowlands, converting front-end fluency into data-driven, doctrinally confident practice. Interpreted within the SOCCOM Academy framework, this approach embodies the triangular synergy of content, craft, and connection as essential dimensions of pastoral communication. The study revealed that parish social communicators demonstrate moderate competencies in technical and creative aspects (craft), while encountering gaps in theological grounding and ethical discernment (content), and in sustaining collaboration and engagement with audiences (connection). This imbalance reflects the dynamics of the triangular

synergy model, where deficiencies in one dimension constrain the effectiveness of the others, underscoring the need for capacity-building programs that holistically strengthen all three areas in digital evangelization.

Future research can test the triangular model in other dioceses and use pre-post designs to gauge whether integrated training lifts weaker Eiler competencies over time. For the Diocese of Malolos, the task now is to evolve a visually polished, ethically mindful cohort into an ecosystem that is analytically informed, theologically rooted, and crisis-ready.

8. Conclusion

This study asked: How do parish social communication volunteers in the Diocese of Malolos perceive their competencies, formation gaps, and training needs for digital evangelization? The findings suggest that while volunteers exhibit moderate confidence in technical and creative skills, they struggle with theological grounding, ethical discernment, and sustained digital engagement—areas that directly affect their ability to serve as credible evangelizers in the digital age. More than a list of training deficits, these patterns make sense when viewed through the lens of the SOCCOM Academy's triangular synergy model: without balance across content, craft, and connection, ministry efforts remain fragmented and less impactful. The study, therefore, underscores the need for a holistic, diocesan-led formation pipeline that not only upskills volunteers but also integrates theological reflection, ethical responsibility, and collaborative practice into their digital work. In doing so, parish communicators are better positioned to bridge the gap between Church teaching and digital culture, and to carry forward the mission of evangelization with both competence and conviction.

9. Limitations of the Study

Several constraints temper the generalizability of these conclusions. First, all quantitative indicators relied on self-reported competence, a methodology vulnerable to social-desirability bias, especially in ecclesial settings where humility is a virtue and overstatement a sin. Second, the study is cross-sectional; it captures a post-pandemic snapshot rather than longitudinal change, so causal inferences about skill acquisition over time remain speculative. Third, the focus-group sample (N = 32), though purposively drawn from survey respondents, may not capture the full diversity of parish contexts, particularly the smallest or most resource-constrained communities that could not spare volunteers for a 90-minute session. Finally, the research is geographically bounded to one diocese; Malolos' proximity to Metro Manila and its relatively robust digital infrastructure may not mirror rural or mission territories elsewhere in the Philippines.

Future studies could employ objective skill audits, follow cohorts over multiple liturgical cycles, and replicate the triangular synergy model in contrasting diocesan contexts to validate the transferability of the present recommendations.

Statements and Declarations

This manuscript used ChatGPT (GPT-5.1, OpenAI) and Grammarly solely for language editing and clarity enhancement; all intellectual content is entirely the author's original work.

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