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**INTERROGATING AGRICULTURAL e-EXTENSION: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF
AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION WORKERS IN THE VISAYAS DURING A
CRISIS OR PUBLIC EMERGENCY**

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Acceptance Page

This dissertation titled INTERROGATING AGRICULTURAL e-EXTENSION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION WORKERS IN THE VISAYAS DURING A CRISIS OR PUBLIC EMERGENCY is hereby accepted by the Faculty of Information and Communication Studies, U.P. Open University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Communication (DCOMM).

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Biographical Sketch

Liezel Margie Lou Sumande Bastian-Ocheda, fondly called "Thatha," is a digital media advocate and a development communication practitioner. She was born in Culasi, Antique, Philippines, but grew up in the humble town of Pandan in the same province. She completed her high school education at Pandan Bay Institute, Inc. in 2010, received her bachelor's degree in Communication and Media Studies from the University of the Philippines Visayas in Miagao, Iloilo, in 2014, and earned her Master of Development Communication from the University of the Philippines Open University in 2019. She works as a Media Production Specialist II at Agricultural Training Institute – Regional Training Center VI (Banga, Aklan, Panay Island, Western Visayas, Philippines). She is a seasoned resource speaker specializing in agricultural extension communication, presentation skills, facilitation skills, and social media marketing. She serves as the Regional Focal Person of the Digital Farmers Program, a joint project of ATI and PLDT-Smart Communications, Inc., which is an Information and Communications Technologies-based ladderized training program focusing on essential digital tools to help small-scale farmers in their daily farming activities, offer them livelihood opportunities, and increase their income eventually.

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After all the roller coaster happenings in my life - from being locked down during the pandemic, getting married and pregnant, undergoing a major ear surgery, and the challenges of being a development communication practitioner and extensionist, finally I have made it! To God be the Highest Glory!

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Dedicated to:

My husband, Luis Jr.

and

My daughter, Vica Louvelle

Whom my strength and courage were drawn from.

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ABSTRACT

The sociological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic forced government and private agencies to cease operations, including agricultural extension practices. On the other hand, as the catalyst, capacity-builder, and knowledge bank of the Philippine Agriculture and Fisheries Extension System, the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), under the Department of Agriculture (DA), launched the e-Extension in the late 2000s, which is an electronic delivery of extension services through its e-Learning and e-Farming components. Set in the Western Visayas Region, Philippines, this research aims to interrogate the e-Extension through the lived experiences of the Agricultural Extension Workers (AEWs) during crises or public emergencies. The qualitative research study was rooted in an interpretivist design using thematic analysis to interpret the lived experience of twelve (12) AEWs, which was determined using specific criteria. It revealed that AEWs perceived e-Extension as “extension beyond boundaries,” social media, particularly Messenger, as alert systems, and mobile phones as an extension delivery tool. Participants defined e-Extension as not confined to a single technology outlet. While embracing “communicating at a distance”, AEWs present themselves as soldiers of agriculture who surmount the boundless space of the crisis. The definition of e-Extension widened beyond its mandated program. The program became incorporated into everyday work, signifying a structural reconfiguration of agricultural services that was embedded during and beyond the crisis.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, e-Extension, e-Learning, e-Farming, Agricultural Extension Workers

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Rationale and Background of the Study

Communication is an integral part of the field of extension. It is the "heart and soul of the extension process" (Hassan, n.d.). Agricultural Extension Workers (AEWs) communicate in most agricultural extension activities. Sharing agricultural information, ideas, advice, and technologies with their clients, mostly farmers in their areas, entails communication. AEWs influence farmers' decisions throughout the process, a factor that is crucial for extension services. This effect may affect their production, yield, and possible income and profit (Manoharbai Patel College of Agriculture, n.d.).

Extension activities and initiatives bring about rural development. They can achieve this through knowledge transfer and handover of agricultural and community development ideas. The communication process becomes effective when farmers are motivated to adopt such knowledge and practices. Therefore, AEWs must know the fundamentals of the communication process to influence the farmers successfully. Additionally, Mula & Mula (2020) found that communication is imperative in extension. It informs, motivates, persuades, teaches new skills, changes or adopts new practices, fosters understanding, and entertains the recipients. It also encourages feedback.

Farmers are known to be highly experienced in agricultural techniques, methods, and activities acquired over the years. However, extension brings up-to-date and scientifically-based information that they need to develop, considering numerous environmental changes, specifically in the climate. Due to these transformations, the agricultural sector gradually shifts toward integrating digital and new media

technologies into the delivery of extension services. This reality is inevitable because these digital technologies are emerging in agriculture and other industries.

New digital tools, including smartphones, the Internet, data analytics, and sensor-based devices, provide opportunities for the agricultural sector to enable open-line communication, data-driven farming decisions, and easy access to knowledge resources. These technologies significantly impact AEWs and farmers in bringing and receiving extension services and increase productivity and sustainability (Singh et al., 2023, p. 964). Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) have been used in agricultural extension and advisory services. Recently, social media has been added. Research shows that the use of social media in the agricultural industry is still flourishing yet faces challenges. Still, in developed countries, farmers can already see its effective use in the field compared to developing and underdeveloped countries, which are still establishing their rapport (Bhattacharjee & Raj, 2016).

On the other hand, COVID-19, identified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a pandemic and among the most devastating health crises in the world, entered the Philippines in March 2020, prompting the closure and lockdown of national and regional borders. Due to its highly infectious nature, the government also decided to suspend operations of various industries, including malls, public transportation, churches, schools, and private and government agencies.

The Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), as the catalyst, capacity-builder, and knowledge bank of the Philippine Agriculture and Fisheries Extension System, with 16 regional training centers spread throughout the country, is mandated to provide dynamic extension service to its clientele composed of AEWs, farmers, rural women, and youth. One of its dynamic regional training centers is in Region 6 – Western

Visayas. The agency's primary workload concerns training and demonstration services about agricultural technologies, techniques, and production. Moreover, Department Order No. 3 Series of 2007 of the Department of Agriculture (DA) designates ATI "as the lead in the development of a comprehensive program for the provision of the e-Extension services in collaboration with various agencies, bureaus, and organizational units of the DA." This order integrates and harmonizes an ICT-based extension delivery system for agriculture and fishery, specifically, the "development and content build-up of knowledge and database management in the provision of e-learning courses and farm and business advisory services."

Additionally, ATI's Information Services Division (ISD) in the Central Office and Information Services Section (ISS) in the Regional Training Centers are not merely auxiliary tools but are strategic interventions designed to bridge the gap between agricultural innovation and grassroots implementation. Through its Information Officers, Media Production Specialists, and Agriculturists, combined with the multi-media and digital platforms, ATI operationalizes its mandate by transforming complex technical knowledge into accessible knowledge products. This is achieved through a robust partnership ecosystem with various agencies that amplify the reach of agricultural extension. By leading the management of these digital frontiers, ATI ensures that ISD and ISS serve as knowledge banks for a more informed, modern, and climate-resilient Philippine agricultural sector, especially during the pandemic. They are responsible for the Institute's e-Extension programs.

During the COVID-19 crisis, e-Extension strengthened through the agency's adaptation to the government's policies, which are dubbed the "new normal." It also shifted to some alternative extension modalities. Like other higher educational institutions, ATI offers synchronous online classes via video conferencing platforms

such as Google Meet and Zoom. This practice is commonly known as a "webinar." It is a neologism that combines the words "web" and "seminar." It "involves a presentation, discussion, demonstration, or any other instructional event" (Rao, 2019). It occurs online and enables participants, facilitators, and students to communicate via webcams, phone cameras, device speakers, and microphones. Both ends must have a stable internet connection to maintain continuous, interactive computer-mediated communication. Aside from this, the agency became more aggressive in using various ICTs, such as smartphones, laptops, computers, and the Internet, to fulfill its mandate.

These digital innovations are not only an adjustment on the agency's part but especially for its clients. Among the various stakeholders mentioned earlier, AEWs are mostly invited to join in such extension activities and endeavors because they serve as the primary voice of ATI in spreading agricultural information and technologies to the grassroots – the farmers. Aside from that, AEWs have the knowledge, skills, and access to new technologies such as laptops, smartphones, earphones, and the Internet. During crises and public emergencies, while following government protocols, AEWs' use of ICTs exemplifies their future endeavors to deliver extension services to farmers.

ATI has been the primary driving force behind connecting its stakeholders, especially the AEWs, to access and distribute information, even before the pandemic. Furthermore, the researcher, who works at the said agency and serves as a Media Production Specialist, observes the solidification and expansion of such a role during a crisis and a public emergency. Hence, this research seeks to explore the lived experiences of AEWs during a public health emergency while delivering agricultural extension services in light of new media technologies.

Statement of the Problem

As a phenomenological study of communication, this research examines the experiences and lived world of AEWs in agricultural extension communication processes, particularly in the presence of new media platforms such as the Internet, most especially during crises or public emergencies. Hence, the research problem asks, "How do Agricultural Extension Workers (AEWs) in Western Visayas define agricultural e-Extension during a crisis or public emergency?"

Specifically, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the meaning of e-Extension for AEWs in Western Visayas based on their experiences during a crisis or public emergency?
2. How do AEWs interpret their roles based on their experiences communicating agricultural extension during a crisis or public emergency?
3. How do they feel about using e-Extension based on their experiences during a crisis or public emergency?

Importance of the Study

AEWs serve ATI's extension in distributing knowledge and information about agriculture in their respective areas of concern. This study highlights their lived experiences as tools for communicating agricultural extension initiatives via the Internet, especially during a crisis or public emergency.

Moreover, the results of the study may provide an impact assessment of the e-Extension program to the concerned agencies, namely ATI-RTC VI, other RTCs, its Central Office, its mother agency – the Department of Agriculture, and other National Government Agencies related to agri-fishery extension industries.

Generally, this study may also reference other researchers and the academe interested in studying extension communication and in understanding the potential of new media platforms, such as the Internet and information and communications technology (ICT), for community development.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This study provides a literature review covering agricultural extension initiatives before and during a health crisis, and the use of new media platforms as channels for information delivery. These statements, concepts, and research results will contribute to the study's analysis and definition of agricultural e-Extension during a crisis or public emergency.

About the e-Extension Program of ATI

ATI defines e-Extension as the electronic delivery of extension services. The program started in the late 2000s. Furthermore, it maximizes the use of information and communication technology to achieve a modernized agriculture and fisheries sector. It focuses on creating an electronic, interactive platform where farmers, fishers, and other stakeholders meet and transact to enhance productivity, profitability, and global competitiveness. There are two components in this program, namely, e-Farming and e-Learning.

The e-Farming component houses the Farmers' Contact Center, a support center for the Department of Agriculture's clients, delivering farm and business advisory services through ICT. Its main features are services via voice (calls) and short messaging system (text) modes through a predefined toll-free number available across the country, and online communication such as chat, online forums, and email.

Another component is e-Learning, an online portal that offers free online courses in agricultural technologies, designed explicitly for agricultural extension workers (AEWs), farmers/fishers, students, and agriculture enthusiasts, in collaboration with other government agencies, SUCs, and non-government

organizations. Anyone can enroll as long as they have an internet connection. Once learners have finished and passed the course, they can download their e-certificate.

Challenges in the delivery of extension

Agricultural Extension Workers (AEWs) can shift communication modalities to achieve effective behavioral change among farmers. Before determining a novel definition of this process amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the study by Sulandjari et al. (2022) enumerated some obstacles. There is an apparent lack of resilience among farmers to serve as direct agents of agricultural production, contributing to their socio-cultural and socio-economic factors. Farmers find it difficult to adapt quickly, which may influence decision-making regarding selecting technology for production. Regardless, they are forced to adopt new habits. Also, the struggle of AEWs is that their beneficiaries rely more on their appeal than on the content they relay. There is varying availability on the platform used by AEWs. In the article by Ibe, Edet, Ajaero, and Godson-Ibeji (2023), the available electronic extension tools used based on the purposive sampling are the Internet (93.1%), Zoom (96.1%), YouTube (92.3%), mobile phones, television, and radio (100%). In terms of frequently used electronic tools, they are Zoom (92.0%), video/films and cameras (84.6%), WhatsApp (90.9%), and Mobile phones (98.4%). They struggle to use these tools due to low bandwidth (98.4%), acquiring software cost (84.6%), and the speed of changes in computer technology (96.1%). The work-life balance impacted extension workers as COVID-19 struck the community. According to Diehl, Israel, Nelson, and Galindo (2023), extension professionals with young children in their households experienced a significant increase in work interference in their personal lives. Work-life balance does not impact gender or marital status. Unfortunately, younger respondents who had more direct

contact with the public showed that they experienced a more significant increase in personal life interference with work.

The Pandemic and Changes in Teaching Methods

Due to the presence of COVID-19 that locks everyone into their homes, school administrators, faculty, and staff "shifted to alternative or remote teaching modalities, both synchronous and asynchronous, where students and teachers had access to electronic devices and reliable Internet connections, the learning management systems such as Canva, Moodle, Blackboard, and applications like Google Hangouts, Zoom, and Skype were used" (Simbulan, 2020).

Inclusivity of Online Learning

According to Mohalik and Poddar (2020), a massive shift in knowledge sharing occurred due to the pandemic. They reported that educational institutions in India utilize YouTube, Google Meet, Facebook Live, and Zoom applications to conduct and organize online workshops and webinars. For a successful and influential online workshop and webinar, participants, resource persons, and facilitators must have prior knowledge of the platform and a reliable internet connection to ensure continuous, uninterrupted knowledge-sharing among the parties. They also emphasized that online learning must be inclusive through proper planning.

The Internet and Social Media in Agribusiness and Marketing

Madonna and Sovianti (2023) pointed out that internet-based digital communication tools may appeal to people who want to participate in the agricultural industry. In Indonesia, social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram are means of communication to improve production and marketing through

e-commerce. This process can be beneficial to attain sustainable development goals (SDGs). It is a contract between AEWs and farmers who innovate, build marketing networks, and obtain farming supplies. The study aims to optimize these platforms for the participation of AEWs and farmers in agricultural businesses. Also, it demonstrates the importance of these internet platforms as a non-learning tool for people interested in agribusiness. This research redefines social media as a medium of communication and extension. It was found that AEWs and farmers use WhatsApp to socialize, debate, and consult to enhance product output and marketing.

Moreover, according to Singh et al. (2023), the Department of Agriculture in the Philippines partnered with social media influencers to promote new agricultural information to audiences. The younger generation, including agricultural enthusiasts, was reached and informed through engaging, relatable content. These "influencers" share their true-to-life experiences, success stories, and tips about farming. This study demonstrates the power of digital technologies, especially social media, to shape the audience's perception of agriculture.

Cyber extension during the pandemic

The study by Pascual (2022) found that extension workers experience challenges due to implementation problems, such as gaps between the research and extension system and between the extension system and farmers. Other issues are the need for professional leadership and management, and overloaded extension staff. The researcher suggested addressing these problems through harmonization, innovation, professionalization, and cultural immersion. AEWs face challenges in how information and innovation are utilized with sustainability because AEWs are burdened with limited information. The development programs are unfamiliar with the local

problems and needs. The COVID-19 pandemic amplified these challenges. The paper by Dharmawan et al. (2021) stated that these are addressed by providing updates in readiness for AEWs that have limitations in visiting farms. Such procedures utilize cyber extensions and other digital information media as outlets to convey information and perform their duties. It was found that farmers needed this digital information in the form of messages and platforms, which made them more conducive to agricultural development. Results showed positive outcomes for extension agents, motivating them to prepare for the new normal.

AEWs' Performance amidst COVID-19

Extension workers are influenced by two factors: individual personal characteristics and performance. Performance highlights strategies and management of AEWs. According to Jamil et al. (2023), 68.19% of performance is not affected in carrying out target areas during the pandemic. These results show activities are still running amidst the COVID-19 outbreak. In the same study, the difference between pre-pandemic and during the pandemic is more on the timing of the activities and the number of visits of AEWs and farmers. For example, the AEWs of Bulukumba Regency carried out activities to accompany farmers during the pandemic. However, before COVID-19, group visitation occurred monthly, which changed to once every two months. These activities limit direct contact to follow the policy. This modality gradually changes to have direct contact while adhering to protocols. It may improve depending on the availability of technology.

In terms of farmers' perspectives on the performance of AEWs on utilizing the new media, the study of Prasetya, Aji, and Subekti (2022) found that agriculture extension activities in Indonesia during the pandemic were carried out through online

media such as WhatsApp groups, YouTube, and radio. Activities involving large groups are halted temporarily. Results showed that farmers were satisfied and that satisfaction was influenced by the frequency of activities, the level of participation, and the farmers' knowledge. However, farming experience, group class, and land tenure do not significantly affect farmers' perceptions. The article highlighted that farmers are satisfied with AEWs' performance and are confident in their commitment and functioning despite the drastic changes brought about by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Digital Platforms in Extension Services

Digital technologies offer farmers various platforms to acquire and share knowledge. They can now learn the latest agricultural information, techniques, methods, best practices, and innovations through various training platforms via digital technologies. These tools include instructional videos, webinars, and e-learning modules delivered via virtual training platforms. With these, they can now quickly adapt to the continuous change in agriculture and farming. Aside from this, these platforms assist the AEWs in acquiring skills in the latest agricultural advancements and practices. In general, the impact of enhanced agricultural practices and the possible adoption of sustainability in farming.

Synchronous Learning

The term "synchronicity," as defined by Ebner and Gegenfurtner (2019), refers to the "timing of the interaction between students and their lecturers," while "modality" refers to the "mode of delivery used in learning environments." In the online environment, technologies such as the Internet, computers, and mobile devices are used to enhance the learning experience for students and participants. Webinars observe synchronous online learning. It "uses video-conferencing technologies that

enable direct interaction between participants and their lecturers without needing them to be in the same physical location." This setup enables the participants to immediately communicate their concerns, queries, and questions to whoever shares the knowledge. Likewise, they can collaborate with other students or participants in the virtual setup. Gegenfurtner et al. (2020) mentioned that webinars "offer synchronous online contexts that trainees can access ubiquitously from anywhere with internet connectivity. For example, Harned and Colleagues (2014) evaluated webinars in the context of mental health training. Their findings suggested that participants were most satisfied with consultations with the facilitator and with the ability to ask questions. Kanter et al. (2013) used webinars to simulate and train therapy situations. Participants reported being most satisfied with the synchronous interaction, feedback, and support from facilitators and peer trainees.

Challenges in Digital Platforms

In some rural areas, agricultural recipients suffer from digital illiteracy and poor internet connectivity, hindering their ability to access new agricultural information. In the study by Singh et al. (2023), it is recommended that government agencies, the private sector, and NGOs work together to address the identified challenges and gaps and to ensure equal access to digital agricultural extension services for all.

Chapter III

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

The Hermeneutic Phenomenology anchors this study. Miles et al. (2013) defined it as "individual people are as unique as their life stories." It considers individuals' complex worlds and cultural backgrounds when finding and interpreting deeper meanings in those lived experiences. Moreover, Friesen et al. (2012) stressed that "this type of phenomenology is open to revision and reinterpretation. It is about an openness to meaning and possible experiences. Hermeneutic phenomenology, in short, is as much a disposition and attitude as it is a distinct method or program for inquiry."

One of the key persons of hermeneutic phenomenology is Martin Heidegger, who fixated himself on "Daisen," a German word meaning "the mode of being a human" or "the situated meaning of a human in the world." He sees humans as individuals concerned about their "fate in an alien world" (Annells, 1996; Jones, 1975 in Laverty, 2003). Furthermore, in his view, people's consciousness and understanding of the world are shaped by their backgrounds, histories, and cultures.

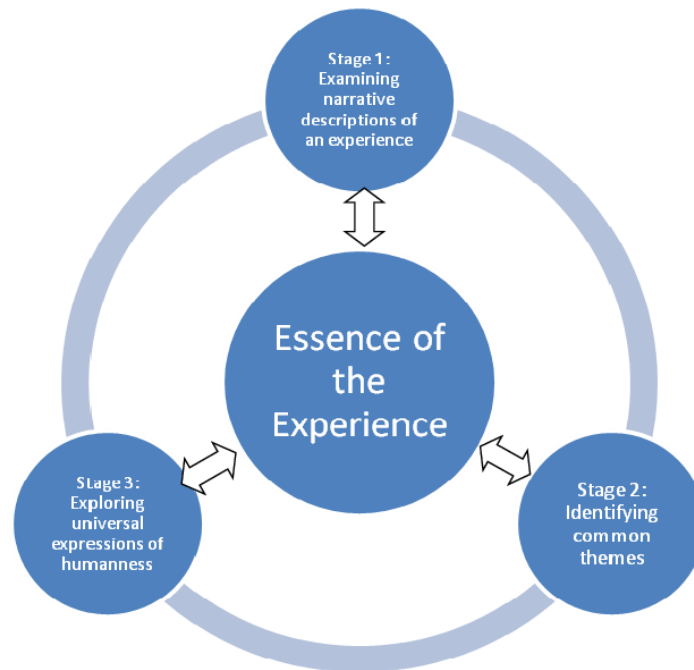
In this type of phenomenology, the researcher's personal biases and even assumptions are embedded in the interpretation process. Additionally, their experiences are highly considered as well as to "explicitly claim how their position or experience relates to the issues being researched" (Laverty, 2003). The study includes their assumptions and other philosophical bases.

Compared with phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on understanding individuals' lived experiences within a particular phenomenon.

However, they differ in the inclusion of researchers' biases and assumptions, as the former identify and even observe the bracketing of biases.

Figure 1

Illustration of Martin Heidegger's hermeneutic circle



Note. This is the concept of Martin Heidegger in illustrating the hermeneutic circle. Adapted from "A 'lost life': Coming to terms with haemodialysis," by S. Monaro, G. Stewart, & J. Gullick, 2014, *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 23(21-22), p. 3262-3273 (<https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.12577>). Copyright 2014 by the Journal of Clinical Nursing.

Martin Heidegger's concept of hermeneutic circle attempts to explain the process of discovering the "shared meaning." This idea allows the researcher to find the "essence" of the experience, which is a "sense of shared, essential meaning that underpins the nature of being for the participants in the situation" (Monaro et al., 2014). With the essence as the primary point of the interpretation, there is a "backward and

forward movement," as identified by Heidegger, "between individual participant quotations held against the person's larger narrative, the stories of other participants, and the researchers' prior understandings of the phenomenon" (Monaro et al., 2014). The researchers' engagement in reading, rereading, writing, and reflecting on the concepts evolving from the data leads to the study's detailed description and interpretation of the shared meanings of the experience.

In this study, the researcher seeks to uncover the lived world of AEWs during a crisis or public emergency while engaged in agricultural extension, in light of new media platforms such as the Internet. While leaving the assumptions, the researcher wants to examine the deeper meaning of those experiences and get answers about how AEWs define agricultural e-Extension.

THE ONTOLOGICAL, EPISTEMOLOGICAL, AND PRAXEOLOGICAL STANCES

The ***study's ontological stand*** is to understand the experiences of AEWs conducting agricultural extension activities in light of new media platforms during a crisis, which are subjective and multiple. Furthermore, the ***epistemological stance*** of the study is the contextual explanation - the meaning behind the action – of the definition of agricultural extension communication in light of the new media platforms during a health crisis. The knowledge that will come from these, which can only be found in the lived world of the AEWs, exists only from them as the researched community. Lastly, the ***praxeological stance*** emerges when AEWs share their experiences of agricultural extension during a health crisis.

THE PLAUSIBILITY

In terms of plausibility, this serves as a credible reference for research on agricultural extension communication on new media platforms. For empirical plausibility, the credibility of the findings and interpretations was verified through exit interviews and discussions with the ATI Central Office Management and Information Services Division and Section staff, who have handled and conceptualized the Institute's e-Extension program. They were also allowed to give their interpretations, comments, and suggestions during the presentation of data and results. This collaborative review process ensured that the analysis was not merely a subjective account but a verified reflection of the program's operational landscape.

On the other hand, theoretical plausibility was ensured by aligning the results with contemporary research and peer-reviewed journals specializing in agricultural extension and communication. By situating the analysis within the broader discourse of new media platforms and crisis communication, the study demonstrates that its interpretations are consistent with—or provide meaningful extensions to—existing theoretical frameworks. This alignment confirms that the generated insights are plausible within the broader academic and professional field of agricultural extension.

Chapter IV

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research is a qualitative study rooted in interpretivism, or the interpretivist design, as it focuses on generating meaning and utilizes various methods to present diverse perspectives on the situation. According to Myers (2008), as cited by Business Research Methodology (n.d.), "interpretive researchers assume that access to reality (given or socially constructed) is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments." Furthermore, they integrate human interest into a study.

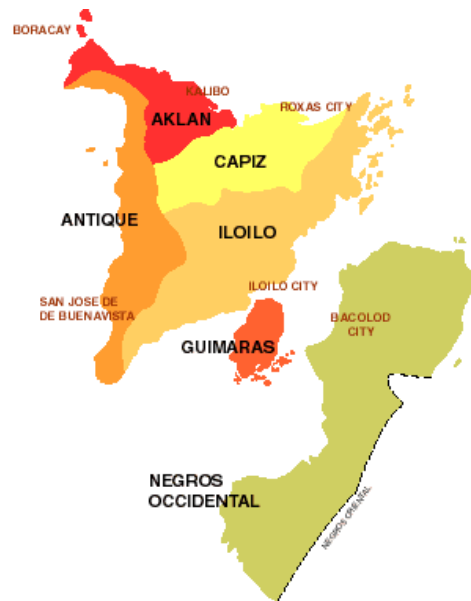
In this methodology, an interpretivist uses a naturalistic approach in collecting data, employing interviews and observations. The nature of reality is socially constructed and multiple, while its research interests are specific, unique, and deviant. One of its most significant and well-known variations is hermeneutics, which this study is also grounded on, emphasizing interpretation and understanding.

LOCALE OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted in the Region of Western Visayas, Philippines.

Figure 2

Map of Western Visayas, Philippines



Note. This is the map of Western Visayas region, Philippines showcasing the six provinces with its capital cities and/or municipalities. Adapted from “Cost overruns and the proposed Panay-guimaras-Negros inter-island bridge project,” by N. R. Roxas, Jr., A. M., Fillone, & S. Chalermpong, 2015, *Journal of Traffic and Logistics Engineering*, 3(1), p. 82 (<https://doi.org/10.12720/jtle.3.1.81-86>). Copyright 2015 by the Journal of Traffic and Logistics Engineering.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The participants of this study are agricultural extension workers (AEWs) in Western Visayas who carried out agricultural extension initiatives with the presence of new media platforms from 2020 to 2021.

The table below shows the characteristics of the participants. Participants are assigned a number to use whenever they are mentioned in the discussion, to maintain confidentiality.

Table 1. Profile of Participants

Participant (P)	Gender	Position	Years of Experience in Extension
1	Male	Agriculturist II	4 years
2	Male	Agricultural Technologist	13 years
3	Male	Agricultural Technologist	15 years
4	Male	Agricultural Technologist	7 years
5	Female	Agricultural Technologist	4 years
6	Female	Agricultural Technologist	10 years
7	Female	Agricultural Technologist	10 years
8	Female	Agricultural Technologist	21 years
9	Female	Agriculturist II	28 years
10	Female	Municipal Agriculture Officer	17 years
11	Male	Agricultural Technologist	7 years
12	Male	Agricultural Technologist	6 years

There were 12 participants in the study. The majority of the participants are college graduates, while one-third ($\frac{1}{3}$) completed their master's degree. Half of them

had specific barangays as the coverage for their assignments, while one-third ($\frac{1}{3}$) handled municipality-wide coverage, and a few handled province-wide coverage. Some degree holders major in animal science, while master's degree holders major in crop science or plant science. There is one case where they had their master's in public management.

SELECTION OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

In both phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology, data can include the researcher's personal reflections on the topic, information gathered from research participants, and depictions of the experience from outside the research project itself, such as in the arts, such as poetry and painting (Polkinghorne, 1989). Participants for research projects are generally selected based on the criteria. The aim of participant selection in phenomenological and hermeneutic phenomenological research is to select participants who have lived experience that is the focus of the study, who are willing to talk about their experience, and who are diverse enough from one another to enhance possibilities of rich and unique stories of the particular experience (Polkinghorne; van Manen, 1997). The number of participants necessary for studies of this type will vary depending on the nature of the research and the data collected. Researchers may, for example, continue interviewing participants until they believe they have reached saturation, at which point a clearer understanding of the experience will not be found through further discussion (Sandelowski, 1986).

For this study, the researcher set specific criteria, which are composed of AEWs who have conducted agricultural extension initiatives using new media platforms during the pandemic. Then, the researcher retrieved the AEW database from the Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Unit (PMEU) of ATI-RTC VI, sent a letter of

request to the participants for their availability, and set a date for conducting the interview. After this, the collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

DATA GATHERING PROCEDURE AND INSTRUMENT

Participants were generally asked to describe in detail their experience with the topic under investigation. The specific question is generally very open-ended, with follow-up discussion led not so much by the researcher as by the participant. Openness is critical, and the exchange may be entirely open, with few direct questions asked (Koch, 1996). The reason for this is to keep the interview process as close as possible to the lived experience. Geertz (1973) described this process as getting at what participants experienced from the inside out, not simulations of what they thought they experienced. However, Kvale (1996) cautioned that it is important to look for what is 'said' and what is said 'between the lines.' Hence, verbatim does not necessarily capture all of what is 'really said' in interviews. As well, van Manen (1997) supported the importance of paying attention to silence, the absence of speaking, the silence of the unspeakable, and the silence of being or life itself, as it is herein that one may find the taken for granted or the self-evident.

The researcher prepared a two-part questionnaire guide. The first part covered the participants' demographic data, including name, gender, position/designation, place of assignment, educational attainment, and years in service. The next part comprised semi-structured, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions to elicit participants' experiences, perceptions, and observations for defining agricultural e-Extension during the pandemic. The researcher sent a request letter to the participants before the interview. Next, the participants were asked about their availability. Then, they were interviewed face-to-face at a location of their choice. After each interview,

the researcher noted the main ideas from the participants' answers. Lastly, tokens for use during their official business travel were distributed.

Risks such as time pressure, mental fatigue, embarrassment, and lack of confidence in speaking English were foreseen by the researcher as consequences of conducting the interview. However, the researcher also anticipated some advantages, such as a free platform for expressing their views on agricultural extension and increased self-confidence among the participants. Lastly, data collection was conducted in June 2025.

DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis was utilized in this study. It is a "systematic method of breaking down and organizing rich data from qualitative research by tagging individual observations and quotations with appropriate codes to facilitate the discovery of significant themes" (Rosala, 2019). Furthermore, it is considered a suitable analytical method for understanding experiences, thoughts, or behaviors across the dataset. Themes derived are often constructed from patterns (or meanings) found in data collected from participants, who answered the research questions. The researcher used the typical six-step process in thematic analysis: Data Familiarization, Generation of Initial Codes, Searching for Themes, Reviewing of Themes, Defining Themes, and Producing the Final Themes.

Chapter V

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The section presents the lived experiences of Agricultural Extension Workers (AEWs) and how they came to understand themselves as stewards of agricultural e-Extension amid the public crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. It explores AEWs' experiences with e-Extension practices, including their awareness, perceptions, and emotional responses when using this mode of service delivery.

Lived Experiences of AEWs in Agricultural e-Extension Practices

The e-Extension shaped the duties and responsibilities of the twelve (12) AEWs. Ranging from four (4) to twenty-eight (28) years in service, their accounts showed how this program influenced their lives, ultimately shaping how they fulfill their roles as extension workers.

e-Extension in “Extension Beyond Boundaries”

The progress of technology and the drastic COVID-19 pandemic have interwoven to reshape the traditional agricultural practices into e-Extension. This program is being explored through AEWs and how it is lived out from their experiences. e-Extension is proclaimed as a new media technology. It is an electronic delivery that introduced e-Learning and the Farmers Contact Center (FCC). The novelty of the program sparked different narratives by AEWs. Some are introduced by proper institutions. In the case of Participant 2, e-Extension was encountered from his training in the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI). One AEW who heard about e-Extension through Farmers Information and Technology Services (FITS). Those leading and implementing within institutions and agencies shape the workplace reality of AEWs.

Creating awareness of the new setting for workers fostered a new brand of identity in how they provide service to their clients.

“For me, e-Extension is another tool to give extension workers a way to convey technologies from research to bring it forward to the farmer. Even in the middle of the pandemic that you have no chance to see each other due to the situation, still the farmer is accustomed to cellphone(s), like those Nokia. So, they are more in terms of calling the technician. It’s hard because there are time(s) information is loading. Unlike in e-Extension, you can research it, see picture(s), additional document(s), and so on. So, farmer is more satisfied, even if you don’t see each other” (Participant 2)

The AEW revealed that e-Extension emerged as a more convenient approach in distributing information to the farmers. It is thought that the program is the easiest way to reach farmers, yet you may have to wait a day to receive a response, as one participant claimed. It is perceived that e-Extension is an intangible tool for providing assistance. Their identity as workers is like grabbing a hammer or another tool to fix discrepancies with the farmer.

e-Extension is a form of “communicating at a distance” with farmers while imparting and transferring knowledge to them from research that serves as the AEWs’ mandate, not merely conducting meetings. Not only referring to physical distance, but rather reaching hands in a boundless space that is being hindered by the crisis. The term describes surmounting the boundaries between the AEW and the farmer. The program fulfilled its responsibilities amidst the pandemic, demonstrating that, despite the absence of personal interaction between the AEW and the farmer, the necessities were met. In their perception of their professional identity, that space separating them

is being neglected for the sake of service. Hence, the Institute even dubbed e-Extension as extending its services beyond boundaries even before the pandemic.

AEWs are relentless in providing services to clients at the expense of their health, only to satisfy in minimizing uncertainty of problems encountered in farming. There are cases where farmers rely on the AEWs' agricultural knowledge to the point that constant communication is necessary, despite the distance between them.

"I closed the other offices, like the SP, and the accounting. So, sometimes it's like I don't have a hard time on the transactions and papers. Before I had them (accounting) as roommates and for me I also experienced that even though I got sick there was someone messaging me. It's like that every now and then, if the farmer greets what happened of course, I respond. Then (eventually) gave me a bonus question. Because in the office, I identify... I'm (Horticulture), so there is a part of botanical. So, there are students that sometimes let me identify specimens so sometimes farmers know that: let's go to Sir and ask regarding the plant because he may answer it. It's that I'm not perfect. But the farmer insisted: Sir, you can do it, you can answer it with an explanation. So, there are also pictures, and screenshots I deliver to them." (Participant 2)

For the sake of accommodation, AEWs are willing to sacrifice time as a sign of their commitment to fulfilling their duties and responsibilities. There are cases where some are unlucky to be quarantined twice, like Participant 4, to the point of closing the office for two weeks. Regardless of unfortunate events, meeting their needs was what mattered to them. Extension still continues through gadgets. However, not all sacrifices met with satisfying results. A participant claimed that e-Extension is usually handled by phone calls, which led to not completing e-Learning due to overlapping

work at that time. To compromise, they go to the farm while adhering to health protocols, only to receive the bare minimum of service from e-Extension. Extension workers are sometimes exempted from restrictions by the authorities that made the visits possible. AEWs acted on temporality. They exist for farmers regardless of time and place. Regardless of distance or availability, they are more present due to e-Extension.

There are various strategies beyond physically visiting farmers and accommodating them outside work hours. Other AEWs depend on delegating tasks to maintain the service. They tend to advise farmers to research for themselves through self-learning and to follow up with agricultural technicians on their research to expand their learning. Some only assisted project leaders in their work, giving leverage to the AEWs' work system. Most of the time, interaction with clients is too limited, so that only calls are available. During communication, some farmers are unaccustomed to gadgets, and at times, their children or spouses contact the AEWs. Zoom and Viber are ways to use e-Extension, but AEWs don't usually use these platforms because farmers have limited access to gadgets. Some places for farmers have limited signal to contact. There are representatives, or a "president," who contact the AEWs. Farmers rely on them for their needs and advice. Amid the difficulty of the job, their Local Farmer Technicians (LFTs) are active on social media to help ease the workload. Being confined by pandemic restrictions has reshaped AEWs, making them more adaptable to the situations they face in their lived experiences.

Mobile Phones as an Extension Delivery Tool

e-Extension is seen in various facets of communication. It can be seen from the simplest to the most sophisticated technology. Regardless of whether it uses modern

or outdated tools, this practice persists even in texting and calling. e-Extension uses gadgets to facilitate interaction between AEWs and farmers, including older model phones. Handling the responsibilities province-wide, Participant 5 mainly conducts Zoom meetings with their clients to compromise from gathering prohibitions. In general, AEWs perceived e-Extension as the use of social media, especially Messenger. When there are times of inconvenience with Messenger, cellular calls are made to reach the farmer and thoroughly communicate the farmer's concerns. e-Extension by AEWs is not confined to a single technology outlet. It continued to surmount the potential disruption that COVID-19 may bring to the livelihoods of farmers and the work-life balance of AEWs. In carrying out their identities, AEWs witnessed that e-Extension was beyond form and was not fixated on one outlet.

The benefactors of e-Extension are AEWs, who can remain consistent and navigate unfamiliar client concerns. The program is evident in the welfare not only of the service providers but also of the recipients.

“For me, e-Extension is another way of learning, not only for technicians but also for our farmers because we can promote it to our farmers... something specifically what they wanted to learn for example (is the) high value crops or even (our) rice.”
(Participant 4)

The farmers are not left behind but rather are being uplifted from the new mode of service provided by the AEWs. Most farmers have mobile phones they can use to research and gather information. e-Extension is perceived as a high-tech practice because it uses cellphones to access applications. It is fast and easy to learn and helps farmers' lives. Agricultural Technologists enhance clarity for farmers through their research, using just a mobile phone. Farmers and AEWs may be separated by

distance, but are connected through e-Extension without the farmer having to go to the office. Some participants provide information to farmers via text and chat by relaying contacts to relevant agencies based on their concerns, specifically the regional office, the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist (OPA), and other relevant agencies that can help with their problems. By being formless, e-Extension, as a tool, helps increase extension for AEWs in their work, thereby signifying them as flexible workers. They perceive what they can provide beyond their capacity due to the leverage from e-Extension.

The problems and concerns of farmers are complex. AEWs need to be articulate about the task, yet the pandemic's hindrances make it more hectic. e-Extension plays a role in troubleshooting particular cases, yet has apparent limitations, according to testimonies from some AEWs.

“For me, the e-Extension somewhat still provides technical (support) to farmers, only specific to their problems and concerns... They ask questions, describing only what disease is inflicted from their pigs (livestock)... Okay just give them medicine... Based (solely) on their description” (Participant 1)

Farmers ask questions about how to treat their livestock. However, technicians can't see the farmer's holistic problems and can only rely on what they observe. To address this, one participant said that at the time, the only permissible way to contact farmers was to send a link. In some cases, despite the restrictions in place at the time, they visit farmers with concerns, so they don't need to go to the office. They claimed they are permitted to go out. This led the AEWs to compromise amid COVID-19 restrictions to ensure the concerned farmers are given solutions. Apparently, not all

leverage from e-Extension can address issues with existing limitations. AEWs thought that a different mode of service transmission has trade-offs.

Indeed, not all had the same experience with e-Extension. Some are not even familiar with the concept of this program, whether they are already practicing it without knowing, or simply did not perform. One participant did not practice e-Extension as he entered the industry and did not focus on it due to different management. Some heard about e-Extension but did not venture into it, which led to not mastering the mode of practice. To accommodate farmers, they usually call them as a means of contact. Some are not familiar with the FCC, yet consider e-Extension a useful tool they are more aware of through e-Learning programs. On the other hand, AEWs encourage On-the-Job (OJTs) trainees to utilize e-Extension and e-Learning. It revealed that e-Extension may thrive even in the presence of unfamiliarity. That is, without needing the consciousness to drive the program as if it were already automated and embedded in the workplace of AEWs. It does not diminish the professional identity of AEWs if extension was not fully embedded in their minds.

Messenger and Social Media as AEWs' Alert Systems

e-Extension, as a program, may perform differently across different AEWs. It may be a matter of interpretation, of how e-Extension is handled, or of the resources available and how they shape circumstances. The program is used by AEWs staying online, using Messenger to communicate with farmers. e-Extension is operating the FCC and contacting the Department of Agriculture-Philippine Rice Research Institute (DA-PhilRice) Text Center by texting or communicating, such as one instance asking about crop varieties to plant. In some cases, it is through a call to address technical concerns. Farmers send pictures to help the AEW identify issues with their crops or

livestock. Some AEWs leveraged technology to better serve their clients. In e-Learning, information is conveyed through lectures and activities. In general, e-Extension focuses more on using social media and messaging platforms to provide further explanation. Thus, messenger and other social media platforms serve as alert systems. When they logged on to social media, specifically Messenger, they suddenly became vigilant, which equates to “there is another problem to serve for today.” In essence, AEWs are elastic in compromising, bridging the gap with their clients.

“For me, the new way of e-Extension (I prefer). That one is faster because you will just know new sites or what sites to visit on the internet as you click, the information is provided based on your need in farming. The traditional (extension) especially from earlier times of no internet and it’s mostly visits in the office or gathering reading materials in FITS center. Especially when the farmer has no fare, they don’t get information. So right now, in e-Extension, you can read even inside of your bedroom. You can watch videos related to farming. (Participant 3)

Embracing change is endured and adopted for AEWs that continue their work amid the altered landscape. Although other extension workers preferred traditional practices, they sought new ways to serve farmers. Understanding is reshaped so that, even with gaps, the positive aspect helps recognize the program's purpose. AEWs live out between two modes of practice in which tension arises as they serve to care. e-Extension in communication becomes structured in text, and Messenger emerged that there is no need to share physical space when exchanging messages. Time is experienced differently within e-Extension in one case, when catering to the younger generation of farmers.

Internet and Mobile Applications as AEWs' Virtual Highway

“So, during the time of the pandemic, we (usually) can’t go out. It is only through the internet to get by to directly consult, (that) problems are (being) answered already. That’s why I open up content related to farming, so the people are entertained to watch YouTube, Facebook, TikTok related to farming. For example, I just search for vegetable farming. Automatically (it) gives videos that can answer (their) questions. Also you can text, visit accredited sites that can give added information on farming.” (Participant 3).

The internet thrives in content generation, which the AEW utilizes effectively to expand the farmer’s knowledge on farming. This is to aid ongoing work due to the prohibition of mass gatherings, during which some participants chose to stay home to work. As a result, they didn’t conduct face-to-face meetings. Not everything in e-Extension relies solely on the usual social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube for the mode of practice to function. AEWs encourage farmers to install applications such as the *Binhi Palay app* and *eDamuhan*, both developed by the DA-PhilRice. The internet and applications served as a virtual highway for AEWs. They gradually establish a system beyond the platform’s intended function.

There are hindrances in e-Extension. Miscommunications are inevitable and are amplified by weak signals and difficulty understanding each other due to distance. This may result in being admonished by authorities for potential violations of COVID-19 restrictions, as evidenced by a case involving one participant.

“I remember at that time before (at the height of the pandemic) that we needed to pass the fertilizer for the fertilizer voucher and then at that time the farmers needed to deliver their fertilizer to the merchant. There is some miscommunication during the

time where we were quarantined but we were not inflicted (from the disease) however it was strict at that time that you should adhere quarantine (protocols) and what we did was going out for a short while and then got scolded by the police because all the farmers are present to get the fertilizer... and then the farmers, when you say it, if you text to one (farmer), they all followed. That's why if there's available fertilizer in the office that once you text one farmer, even the ones not included or not attending the program, they go. They text through... we created a page for the FITS center of Culasi. The farmers text through it (FITS). (Participant 10)

Sometimes, problems arise in conducting services due to unexpected circumstances. Despite the fact that mistakes are unavoidable, it just goes to show that AEWs are delivering their duties to the best of their ability. At the same time, trying their best to minimize conflicts. One instance of conflict that arose was that existing projects by the AEWs and farmers were hit at the start of the pandemic. The routine was conflicted and an unexpected struggle unfolds. They compromise to make major adjustments to facilitate crop management until the projects are managed and completed. Resiliency from unfamiliar platforms aids in achieving goals. Another issue is that some farmers are usually older and use outdated gadgets, which makes it hard to communicate. It may be due to low-end devices with high latency affecting communication. There are situations where communication is via text, but the usual option when the farmer does not clearly understand the instruction is to call the AEW. Follow-up calls are common to gather relevant data from the AEW. Knowledge can be transmitted via gadgets, but it is limited by internet connection issues or weak signals. On rare occasions, if no cellphones are available to farmers, one participant organizes small gatherings to accommodate them. These are times when they still adhere to health protocols. e-Extension, as a program, tests the AEW to be flexible and to face

the risks to provide effective service. It ensures capability even though restrictions may overwhelm the worker. AEWs are committed in clearing out the digital fog plagued from e-Extension that are previously mentioned in their experiences. However, it is not a one-sided action that farmers and clients are also participating in reducing the digital fog. This digital fog, or simply anxiety, is the obstacle that diminishes the service of AEWs.

AEWs as Soldiers of e-Extension

Through the experience, AEWs developed a sense of identity and purpose to contribute to agriculture as they practiced e-Extension. There is a commitment to their role in supporting the pillars of agriculture during unfamiliar times of public crisis. They are likely aware that they need to uphold themselves, which e-Extension amplifies their purpose.

“It’s their (AEWs) helpful tools, aside from they have gadget(s), you as a soldier of agriculture if face-to-face your heart is on the farmer so even you are far from them there’s a gap in distance and you are not present there but still the value or just your target or passion that you want them to change even the situation was very strict. Still, they can get the normal activities face-to-face. Meaning the pandemic is not a hindrance in terms of delivery and services in agriculture.” (Participant 2)

AEWs interpret themselves as the frontliners or as someone who is “one call away” for the farmer. They emphasized that the pandemic is not a hindrance to delivering agricultural services. They may disregard the strictness of the situation and remain consistent as the “heart” or supporter of agriculture. By consistently sustaining their roles as workers who persevere. AEWs are indeed aware of the limitations

brought out by the pandemic. They are usually mindful and health-conscious, according to some AEWs' insights.

To properly interpret one's role, AEWs have their own titles in their service for farmers. In most cases, AEWs consider themselves "advisers" to farmers. It is because they are the ones providing guidance on overcoming problems, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Such problems include pest control affecting the farmer's livestock and crops. Another is the diseases that some farmers are overwhelmed by, complex classifications, or underlying conditions that only Agricultural Technologists can diagnose. In the usual scenario in Philippine Agriculture, AEWs are good advisers in determining rice varieties and in guiding good preferences for which crop to plant. With specific knowledge in their work, AEWs also uphold the responsibility for disseminating information. The purpose of these technicians is to bring clarity and avoid confusion, considering it a vital role in helping farmers. Not only do they provide information, but they are also keen observers of the constant change of circumstances surrounding the farmer's livelihood and agriculture. They see themselves as fixers for the farmers. From a point of view, you see AEWs as the ones who pointed out the clear path among the unfamiliar possibilities the farmer should decide on for their crops and livestock.

"As much as possible we can give quality service to the farmers and to answer their questions, under layman's terms to easily understand because it could go nowhere when it is too technical." (Participant 11)

There are cases where they encounter unfamiliar agricultural platforms to the point that they need to go on the ground, such as meeting clients face-to-face or visiting them. As AEWs manage their roles in agriculture, they also make them realize

the importance of cellphones due to the lack of personal interaction with their farmers. There are some obstacles that get in the way.

“It’s like... because if you only text and call sometimes you cannot be understood. If only the farmer comprehended what you said but it is better to follow-up by visiting them if there is time.” (Participant 10)

If the situation is favorable for the AEW, they would rather use their time and effort to clarify the misconceptions the farmer has faced. In the end, most AEWs treat extension as a job only to carry out what is needed. One participant, for instance, simply supports the project leader. The AEWs thought their role in the pandemic was significant, believing that the community might suffer and that food production would be affected without their guidance. These various descriptions of AEWs imply a holistic approach to their roles in providing services to farmers. Despite their different self-interpretations, they shared the same purpose: to fulfill their duties and responsibilities. The various hindrances surfaced proved that e-Extension is not the sole solution to solve the farmer’s problems. Going on the ground is one way to maintain a holistic approach when helping clients. In the perception of AEWs, e-Extension was not disregarded when they were short-handed in troubleshooting, but it revealed to them that some tools function on a case-by-case basis.

e-Extension as a mixture of Convenience and Uncertainty

The lived experience of AEWs made them express different emotions towards the e-Extension. Indeed, there are still difficulties facing everyday work. Overall, most AEWs are happy in the workplace. They acknowledge that the process moves quickly, as quickly as communication is delivered to their clients. However, they also tend to consider whether the farmer fully understands their advice. Agricultural technicians

sometimes have doubts about how they deliver services, leading to frequent follow-ups when they feel they lack information. They are also concerned that the effectiveness of services plummets due to frequent instances in which AEWs receive only descriptions of problems in crops and livestock. Work may be slightly easier, but there are apparent limitations in not seeing the situation as a whole. The inability to identify nuances led them to the point of having to attend to the farmer in person to check on the crops or livestock. This action is one way to establish proper troubleshooting procedures. There is growing difficulty in providing proper explanations because most AEWs are accustomed to delivering information to farmers face-to-face. They acknowledge that e-Extension provided convenience at work during the pandemic, but are perturbed by the inability to take action in their work environment. e-Extension reaffirmed the positive expressions among AEWs in their everyday experiences while sustaining their consciousness of the limitations in delivering service.

Having managed at least 40 barangays for 15 years, Participant 3 observed that e-Extension greatly helps by providing information to support food production. Communicating with physical restrictions, with the help of e-Extension, eases their feelings for some AEWs. At least for them, being able to continue working is what matters. However, there are cases where AEWs identified the lapses from convenience.

“Easy for me but difficult for the farmer. Easy for me because it’s easy to contact anytime but difficult for them because not all farmers have access to the internet or smartphone and not all are literate to use smartphones. Sometimes they don’t have loads, that’s why it’s hard to reach them.” (Participant 12)

It revealed that AEWs are concerned about whether the information is fully comprehended by the farmer. They want to ensure everything is received properly amid the new service platform in the digital space. Participant 12 is aware of the complications on the farmers' end. Having convenience in e-Extension still has considerations on their clients.

"Maybe in our part for AEWs it is easier (e-Extension) because many of us have access to communicate. However, on the part of the farmers, especially to those who have no cellphones it's quite difficult for them because they don't have gadgets to communicate with us (AEWs). But there are some farmers that had friends of other farmers that had cellphones, through them (to communicate). (Participant 11)

Participant 11 also had similar insights into the farmer's struggle to communicate with extension workers. He added that despite the lack of means to communicate, they had connections and networks to compensate for the absence of tools for e-Extension. It revealed that not only AEWs but also farmers are deliberate in finding their own solutions to their problems. Even though there is a feeling of relief, problems may still exist that reshape the perspective that everything has benefits and drawbacks, even in e-Extension. Uncertainty is inevitable for AEWs and farmers, but being rigorous in the face of obstacles is what keeps their enthusiasm for continuing to serve.

Navigating AEWs' Hybridity of Service

e-Extension became a new normal woven from the drastic force of the COVID-19 pandemic, which the AEW overwhelmed with its dramatic shift. Given the practice's integration into the lived experiences of AEWs, encountering e-Extension is inevitable, given the previous practices of traditional extension work. One AEW finishing a degree

in Bachelor's in Agriculture Major in Horticulture preferred extension service as face-to-face because they can witness the emotion of the farmer. Also, transmitting follow-up information in traditional extension service compared to e-Learning. While extensively using e-Extension, they observed some lapses.

“The only negative feedback is sometimes we don’t have good hearing ability, then the signal sometimes is choppy. So, it’s like 25% of your conversation there is interruption or noise. You are not sure if the gathering of information was right.”
(Participant 2)

There is doubt as to whether the communication comes across as a proper understanding on the client's side. AEWs embrace the new strategies and network provided by e-Extension, while acknowledging the gaps. However, if given the choice between programs, they prefer the old ways for its holistic approach to their farmers and clients. They can witness how their efforts come to fruition when the interaction is personal, in terms of the farmer's reaction and emotion. When catering to farmers in the older generation, traditional extension had the assets to deliver effective services. Some AEWs are confined to tradition while accepting the constant change in their lived experiences. It may be unfamiliar yet welcoming, which broadens approaches.

The introduction of e-Extension presents itself differently, as it invites AEWs to stand for change. Participant 3 weighed the positive aspects of e-Extension for reshaping service in troubleshooting. Knowledge travels without form, significant that distance doesn't defy the benefit for farmers.

“Can I choose both (e-Extension and traditional extension)? The e-Extension for me is good in a way for information dissemination, it is urgent. Then the other one is the usual like during meetings when there's a meetup. It is still needed to approach

the farmers personally like what are the updates in agriculture. So, they need your updates.” (Participant 12)

While AEWs had ideas on the positive aspects of e-Extension, they also signified traditional extension. Some preferred to be near the farmers to give advice on their crops and livestock. It gives a whole different experience if you witness the problem and situation first-hand. They outweighed traditional extension in the sense that, despite the hassle of needing to travel to interact with the clients. One participant believed that face-to-face interaction is integral to the lived experience of an extension worker. It is because relying on social media limits the ability to give advice and increases the likelihood of misinterpretation. While they prefer both practices, traditional extension makes the farmer feel important, especially when the AEW is physically present. Each program offers different possibilities for engaging with farmers, indicating that e-Extension is malleable through experience. In the end, the extension unfolds that both traditional and technologically mediated practices shaped how agricultural service is recognized in time. Perception of e-Extension unfolds differently as each insight is unique among AEWs' encounters in the workplace. Reluctance surfaced due to uncertainty about readiness, given its bare foundation. e-Extension revealed for wider transformation in the field of established programs. Extension workers who are confronted with their professional identity as generalists demand specificity. In response to the crisis, e-Extension settled and gradually became part of agriculture. Navigating unfamiliar possibilities, extension work is continually present, reshaping the practice of AEWs as they fulfill their duties and responsibilities.

Chapter VI

RESEARCH SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic and gradual technological progress transformed the traditional agricultural program into e-Extension. The program was introduced to Agricultural Extension Workers (AEWs) through DA-ATI. The said institution created a bridge for AEWs awareness of new platforms to ease the uncertainty in the crisis that shaped the workplace reality. e-Extension is “extension beyond boundaries,” which created awareness of the new work environment and fostered a new brand identity in how they provide service to their clients. The program's existence ensured continued service during the pandemic. The existing platforms transform beyond their function as communication providers to become an extra hand for AEWs in extending their services to farmers. e-Extension is seen as an intangible tool to extend assistance. AEW's identity is like holding a hammer to aid from discrepancies. As it is branded as “communicating at a distance,” it transcends physical constraints in reaching hands in a boundless space, hindered by the crisis. Even though there is no personal interaction, the service is fulfilled as long as one has a mobile phone, which serves as a tool in an extension service. In the case of professional identity, the separated space between the farmer and AEW is neglected. It has been observed that e-Extension is not fixed at one outlet. Also, it helps navigate unfamiliar situations, which benefits both parties. However, there are limitations in the program: AEWs rely on the farmer's description for assessment. Some AEWs were unfamiliar with

e-Extension yet thrived beyond unfamiliarity. Regardless, e-Extension as a program is embedded in the practice of AEWs alongside traditional extension.

The e-Extension program is being implemented variably across AEWs depending on circumstances. Most of them equated Messenger and social media with alert systems, which made them vigilant and signaled that a problem needed to be addressed immediately. Beyond the accredited platforms of e-Extension, it is also transmitted through Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok, and, in some cases, through agricultural content. Amid the pandemic, there was a drastic change for AEWs, which led them to conduct online consultations with farmers due to ongoing restrictions. They utilize available technology to help improve. It goes to show that AEWs are elastic, bridging the gap with their clients. These platforms became a virtual highway that gradually established a system beyond their intended functions. AEWs acted on temporality. They exist for farmers regardless of time and place. They are not absent due to e-Extension in the agricultural space, regardless of distance or availability. Work is extended just to accommodate clients. Farmers are sometimes assisted by their children and spouses when using gadgets. In terms of relaying information, there are representatives and leaders. However, there are underlying limitations in e-Extension. There are instances of internet connections and weak signals that hinder proper communication. AEWs work all they can to fulfill their duties, showing resilience as they navigate unfamiliar platforms to achieve their goals. e-Extension tested AEWs to face risk in providing effective service that solidifies their capability amid restrictions. They are committed to minimizing the digital fog created by e-Extension. Fortunately, farmers are also participating in efforts to reduce the digital fog, which is anxiety caused by hindrance. Overall, e-Extension continues to provide services through gadgets that demonstrate flexibility and adaptability by shifting strategies. The only

concern is the service's effectiveness due to apparent limitations. Being confined by pandemic restrictions has reshaped AEWs, making them more adaptable to the situations they face in their lived experiences.

As AEWs experience everyday work, it reveals a sense of identity and purpose in agriculture during the pandemic through e-Extension. They viewed themselves as (1) “Soldiers of Agriculture, (2) Frontliners, (3) “One Call Away”, (4) Advisers. Their roles are to advise on rice varieties, crops, pest and disease control. They cater to farmers to diagnose complex agricultural problems. They lead in information dissemination by providing technical knowledge in a digestible form for farmers. Generally, they are observers in the agricultural landscape. It enabled them to sustain agricultural services and maintain proper service delivery through e-Extension, even amid crisis-related restrictions for their goal to support food production and the community for the farmers. The roles were evident in their provision of clear explanations, quality service, and guidance for farmers. However, there are limitations in their role as AEWs in e-Extension. Misunderstandings may arise during calls, leading to the need for visits, which they prefer to be face-to-face in complex cases. Some AEWs treat extension as a job or as a supporting role for project leaders. AEWs shared a common goal in fulfilling their duties.

Sentiments are present in AEWs as they experienced e-Extension while navigating the hybridity of their services. AEWs are happy with their work because they have job satisfaction in the workplace. It is because of fast communication and the convenience of delivering services to farmers in the present setting. There are still concerns, such as doubts about whether the farmers understood the advice, and cannot holistically assess the circumstances of the farmer, because AEWs are only reliant on the farmer’s description of the problem. Limitations are apparent, such as a

lack of identification of nuances in crop and livestock issues. e-Extension to some AEWs helped facilitate continued feedback mechanisms, and they felt relieved because they were able to work even through lockdowns. There are cases that affected farmers due to a lack of gadgets, limited internet access, and weak signals in the area. Farmers compensate for the struggle to communicate by having community networks.

The e-Extension program became part of the AEWs' practice and reshaped traditional extension practices. Generally, AEWs are preferred in traditional extension because they can observe farmers' emotions and read the situation holistically, as face-to-face interaction reduces misinterpretation. It is evident that e-Extension had challenges such as choppy signals and audio interruptions. Doubts arose about whether the information was transmitted accurately, and the farmer felt uncertain whether he fully understood the advice or instructions. Despite limitations, AEWs adapted to the conditions and continued to deliver services, recognizing the speed and convenience of the current setting. The advantages of e-Extension are fast access to agricultural information through websites, which tends to reduce reliance on physical travel and office visits. AEWs also preferred both programs for e-Extension aids in the urgency of information dissemination, while traditional extension provides personal interaction with farmers. Concerns about e-Extension include the risk of misinterpretation and uncertainty about the program's foundation. Traditional extension has its assets, including its personal and relational approach to farmers, which they value. As time goes by, e-Extension gradually integrates into agricultural practice, where both traditional and e-Extension services coexist and shape agricultural services.

Conclusion

The introduction of e-Extension to Agricultural Extension Workers (AEWs) expanded beyond its institutional mandate to assist farmers and became embedded in everyday practice. It ceased to be merely a tool and became instead a living environment inhabited by AEWs. The program was integrated into the structure of extension work for AEWs, shaping information and institutional expectations. It emerged as a transformative shift in how agricultural extension is practiced and is proof that extension services are practiced beyond boundaries. The definition of agricultural e-Extension expanded beyond its mandated program of the Agricultural Training Institute, as AEWs reinterpreted social media platforms, particularly Messenger, as alert systems, and cellular communication as legitimate extension spaces and delivery tools. It turned into a boundless workplace that had no definite territory to be distinguished. In exercising resilience, AEWs exposed technological and infrastructural limitations of e-Extension, which in turn gave rise to adaptive strategies in engagement.

As “Soldiers of Agriculture,” the use of e-Extension is a symbol of ethical care that transcends physical barriers to provide service continuity during and beyond the institutional mandate. Traditional face-to-face extension persisted alongside the e-Extension program, layering in the existing practices and operating through integration rather than substitution. The preference for traditional practices is not mere nostalgia when using e-Extension, but a professional commitment to ensuring holistic and nuanced service. The presence of the digital fog among farmers and AEWs, due to the novelty of the program, created a bond of shared struggle that fostered resilience and strategy. Overall, AEWs articulated a sustained commitment to their role, positioning service continuity as a central core to their professional being. The

coexistence of two programs reflects the evolutionary nature of agricultural extension, in which innovation restructures its institutional practices. Across varying lengths of service of AEWs, they had expressed satisfaction with e-Extension. While they acknowledge the infrastructural constraints and digital miscommunication, their emotional response emphasized the irreplaceable relational depth of face-to-face interaction. The incorporation of e-Extension into everyday practice signifies a structural reconfiguration of agricultural services that has become inherent to extension work beyond the crisis. Today, the country is facing another crisis due to violent conflicts in some countries and disruptions in the global market, which have led the government to implement energy-saving conservation measures that limit mobility across most of its services. Hence, using the new media technologies, including e-Extension, is relevant and promotes cost-effective measures while still delivering quality services to the clients.

Implications and Recommendations

Policy of Recognition of Informal Digital Extension Spaces

The findings revealed a lack of institutional recognition of social media, particularly Messenger, as alert systems and as legitimate extension channels, resulting in ambiguity in service validation. Institutions should formally validate their presence on these platforms to strengthen farmers' trust and to recognize these digital engagement channels.

Institutional Strengthening of Digital Infrastructure

Institutional investment in digital infrastructure resources is necessary to maximize the services of Agricultural Extension Workers (AEWs) to their clients. The constraints on infrastructures should be addressed through strengthening connectivity

in agricultural areas through collaboration between telecommunications providers and the Department of Agriculture (DA). Standardizing officially sanctioned digital platforms may further ensure credibility and continuity of service by legitimizing available platforms introduced by the DA.

Hybrid Extension Framework Development

Integrating digital and face-to-face practices is recommended to develop a formal hybrid extension framework. Recognizing hybrid extension models widens extension workers' resources to blend services, minimizing limitations apparent in a single modality, even in adversity, especially nowadays that we are facing another crisis due to violent conflicts and disruptions in the global market. Also, create operational guidelines for blended delivery to improve workflow efficiency in extension work.

Further Study

Based on the results of the study, future research may explore a comparative study across regions to assess the variations of locations and impact in contrast to resources and access to digital infrastructure. It is also worth investigating the lived experience and perspectives of farmers in e-Extension. Lastly, longitudinal studies on hybrid extension practice further enlighten its long-term institutional and professional implications.

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er-Mediated Communication

APPENDIX A

Letter Request to ATI-RTC VI Management

June 6, 2025

THE TRAINING CENTER SUPERINTENDENT II/CENTER DIRECTOR

Attention: THE PLANNING OFFICER

Dear Dir:

I am a graduate student in the Doctor of Communication program at the University of the Philippines Open University. I am currently conducting my dissertation, which focuses on the lived experience of Agricultural Extension Workers (AEWs) in Western Visayas during a crisis or a public emergency. By the end of the research study, I aim to redefine e-Extension, one of the agency's programs, which involves the electronic delivery of extension services.

As the study's locale, may I request the list of AEWs in the Region and collect their basic data from your Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Unit (PMEU)? Please be assured that strict ethical standards and protocols, including those related to confidentiality and anonymity, will be strictly adhered to throughout the study.

If you have questions regarding the study, please don't hesitate to contact me at [mobile number] or via email at [email address].

I look forward to your most positive response. Thank you very much.

Very truly yours,

LIEZEL MARGIE LOU S. BASTIAN-OCHEDA

Student

APPENDIX B

Letter Request to Interview Participant

June 6, 2025

THE AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION WORKER

Dear Sir/Ma'am:

I am a graduate student in the Doctor of Communication program at the University of the Philippines Open University. I am currently conducting my dissertation, which focuses on the lived experience of Agricultural Extension Workers (AEWs) in Western Visayas during a crisis or a public emergency. By the end of the research study, I aim to redefine e-Extension, one of the Agricultural Training Institute's (ATI) programs, which involves the electronic delivery of extension services.

This research will involve your participation in a one-hour interview, which will take place within the month. You are identified as one of the study's participants. However, your participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and I will not provide any compensation. The choice that you make will have no bearing on your job or any work-related evaluations or reports. Please be assured that strict ethical standards and protocols, including those related to confidentiality and anonymity, will be strictly upheld throughout the study. If you are willing to join, I will discuss the Informed Consent Form with you before the interview

For your confirmation and other questions about the study, please don't hesitate to contact me at [mobile number] or via email at [email address].

I look forward to your most positive response. Thank you very much.

Very truly yours,

LIEZEL MARGIE LOU S. BASTIAN-OCHEDA

Student

APPENDIX C

Sample Signed Informed Consent Form and Non-Disclosure Agreement

Informed Consent Form for Agricultural Extension Workers (AEWs)

(Adapted from the University of the Philippines Open University Open University Institutional Research Ethics Committee's Informed Consent Form Template for Surveys, Interviews, and Focus Group Discussions)

Informed Consent Form for Agricultural Extension Workers (AEWs) as participants of the research study entitled, "**Redefining Agricultural e-Extension: A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of Agricultural Extension Workers in Western Visayas during a Crisis or Public Emergency.**"

Principal Investigator/Researcher: Liezel Margie Lou S. Bastian-Ocheda

Name of Organization: University of the Philippines Open University

PART I: INFORMATION SHEET

INTRODUCTION

I am Liezel Margie Lou S. Bastian-Ocheda, a graduate student in the Doctor of Communication program at the University of the Philippines Open University. I am currently conducting my dissertation, which focuses on the lived experience of Agricultural Extension Workers (AEWs) in Western Visayas during a crisis or a public emergency.

I invite you to participate in this study, and I am giving you the opportunity to reflect on whether you wish to participate or not. Furthermore, there may be some words or concepts that you do not understand, but I assure you that these will be explained, and you can ask questions at any time.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

By the end of the research study, I aim to redefine e-Extension, one of the Agricultural Training Institute's (ATI) programs, which involves the electronic delivery of extension services during a crisis or a public emergency.

TYPE OF RESEARCH INTERVENTION

The research involves a two-part instrument guide. The first part covers your demographic data, including position or designation, place of assignment, educational attainment, and years of service. The next part comprises semi-structured, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions to gather your experiences, perceptions, and observations on redefining agricultural extension communication during the pandemic. This interview is face-to-face.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION

You are chosen because the population criterion that the researcher selected is Agricultural Extension Workers (AEWs) who have implemented agricultural extension initiatives using new media platforms during a crisis, such as the pandemic. Aside from that, you are included in the AEWs' database of the Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Unit (PMEU) at the Agricultural Training Institute – Regional Training Center VI (ATI-RTC VI).

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

As stated in the letter previously sent to you, your participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and I will not provide any compensation. The choice that you make will have no bearing on your job or any work-related evaluations or reports.

PROCEDURES

- A. As a phenomenological study of communication, this research is interested in your experiences and lived worlds as AEWs in agricultural extension communication processes, particularly in the presence of new media platforms such as the Internet, most notably during crises or public emergencies, as in the case of the pandemic.
- B. As mentioned earlier, the interview questions cover your demographic data, including your position or designation, place of assignment, educational attainment, and years of service. The next part comprises semi-structured, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions to gather your experiences, perceptions, and observations on redefining agricultural extension communication during the pandemic.
- C. During the interview, I will sit down with you in the most comfortable place you choose, either in your office, at home, in an enclosed café, or elsewhere. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions during the interview, I will move on to the next question. No one else will be present except me unless you would like someone else to be there. The information recorded is treated as confidential, and only I, my adviser, Dr. Melinda P. Bandalaria, and my panel members, Dr. Alexander Flor and Dr. Benjamina Paula Flor, will have access to the information documented during your interview. I will digitally record the entire interview, and you will not be identified by name on the record. I will keep a copy of the recording on my laptop, and all the information recorded will be treated as highly confidential. I will destroy it right after I complete the research manuscript.

DURATION

This interview may take anywhere from 30 minutes to one hour of your time.

RISKS

You may feel pressured by the time allotment or become embarrassed at some point during the interview. Additionally, you may not have to answer any question(s) that you feel are too personal or if discussing these question(s) makes you uncomfortable.

BENEFITS

The interview provides a free platform for you to express your views regarding the agricultural extension and may increase your self-confidence and morale as an AEW.

REIMBURSEMENTS

As mentioned in the letter sent to you earlier, you will not receive any payments beyond reimbursements for expenses incurred as a result of your participation in this interview.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Please be assured that strict ethical standards and protocols, including those related to confidentiality and anonymity, will be strictly upheld throughout the interview and study. Aside from the demographic profile stated earlier, no other personal or sensitive information will be collected or shared in this study.

PART II: CERTIFICATE OF CONSENT

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it, and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

Print Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date:

STATEMENT BY THE RESEARCHER OR PERSON TAKING CONSENT

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant and, to the best of my ability, made sure that the participant understands that the following will be done:

1. Record the interview. The recording shall be destroyed after the manuscript has been completed.
2. Participation is voluntary, and participants will not receive any monetary compensation.
3. The participants' confidentiality and anonymity shall be highly protected.

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent and that the consent was given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Print Name of Researcher or person taking the consent _____

Signature of Researcher or person taking the consent _____

Date:

APPENDIX D

Questions for the Interview Participants

I. PART A (Demographics)

1. What is your position/designation in the LGU?
2. Where is/are your place/s of assignment?
3. What is your educational attainment?
4. How many years have you been in extension work?

II. PART B (Semi-structured interview)

1. Have you heard about e-Extension of ATI? Do you practice e-Extension in your work?
2. How do you practice e-Extension during the pandemic?
3. Based on your experience during the pandemic, what is e-Extension for you?
4. How do you interpret your roles in communicating agricultural extension during the pandemic?
5. How do you feel about using e-Extension based on your experiences during the pandemic?