

# ISRG JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND CULTURAL STUDIES (ISRGJHCS)



**ISRG PUBLISHERS**

Abbreviated Key Title: ISRG J Humanit Cult Stud

**ISSN: 3048-5436 (Online)**

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/gjhcs/>

Volume – III Issue- I (January- February) 2026

Frequency: Bimonthly



## The Lived Experiences of *Maniniyot* in Basilica Minore del Sto. Nino, Cebu City

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| **Received:** 06.01.2026 | **Accepted:** 10.01.2026 | **Published:** 13.01.2026

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### Abstract

*This study interpreted the lived experiences of the maniniyot, or traditional analog photographers, stationed at the Basilica Minore del Sto. Niño in Cebu City, highlighting how they preserve their craft amid digital transformation. To find the meaning of their work across five existential dimensions, which are the; lived space, lived body, lived time, lived human relations, and lived things, the researchers employed semi-structured interviews and field observations using the hermeneutic-phenomenological technique. According to the results, the maniniyot see the Basilica Minore del Sto. Niño as their home, their craft as a source of income and cultural legacy, and their resilience as a result of their kinship, faith, and sense of belonging. By converting photography into a means of devotion and memory preservation, they continue to represent Cebuano identity in spite of the proliferation of smartphones and digital media. The study concluded that the maniniyot served as cultural custodians who preserve tangible expressions of faith and tradition in a digital age, and it recommended integrating their practice into education, tourism, and cultural heritage programs to ensure the continuity of this living tradition.*

**Keywords:** *maniniyot, lived experience, phenomenology, cultural heritage, Cebu, traditional photography*

### INTRODUCTION

The *maniniyot*, or the traditional analog photographers of Basilica Minore del Sto. Niño, for many years and even decades, the photographers have delivered locals and tourists physical photos as souvenirs that had documented memorable occasions reminding us of faith, devotion and family reunions. But because of the rapid emergence of digital photography and smartphones considerably

lessened the demand for them threatening to exterminate their livelihood and craftsmanship from extinction (Chalfen, 2014). But the *maniniyot*'s ongoing survival bodes well for the timeless value of physical photos as sentimental souvenirs connecting people to the religious and the cultural past (Gonzales, 2020). This study aims to interpret the *maniniyot*'s lived experiences and keep their

histories from oblivion through documenting their personal histories, opportunities, challenges and contributions to Cebu's cultural heritage. It also emphasizes the value of old professions to keep community memory in the digital world.

These analog photographers of Basilica Minore del. Sto. Niño, have served well their purpose for a long time as on-call photographers of the devotees who wish to have physical souvenirs of their travels. They have belonged to the history of the church, religious and cultural life for more than 40 years, keeping Cebu's most valuable traditions (Martinez, 2024). During vast festivals such as the Sinulog Festival, they are particularly noticeable as they not only document people and their faces, but also the spirited display of faith and devotion (Alcazaren, 2019). According to Edward (2009), their photographs are more than simple pictures, but they are also tangible reminders that link the past, the present, and the future. This makes the *maniniyot* more than just service providers but storytellers of people's faith, and historians who capture Cebu's religious and cultural memory. The study of Gonzales (2020) states that by documenting sacred moments like novenas, processions and even an individual's faith, they turn these passing moments for people, into tangible memories that will last for a long time. In this context, their craft reminds us that photography is more than just taking images but also requires representing, sharing, and remembering identity, faith, and memory, as their art reminds us.

Even with their cultural importance, the *maniniyot* now find it harder to keep their craft alive in today's digital world. Since almost everyone carries a smartphone, and can instantly share photos, fewer people bother to seek or hire professional photographers. This challenge is not quite new to them as many traditional media industries have also felt the weight of this rapid digital change. For example, newspapers and magazines that once dominated the spreading of information, now face declining readership and ads as people now tend to prefer and shift to online platforms (Rasyid & Kumalasari, 2023). Similarly, cable TV has been losing viewers to streaming services such as Netflix and YouTube, which attract people with on-demand and ad-free shows (Li, 2022). Photography, too, has been reshaped by these transitions. As Yang (2018) notes, smartphones have transformed picture-taking into an everyday habit, making it easy for anyone to capture and share moments. For the *maniniyot*, this change has been especially hard. Many people now rely on their own devices rather than seeking out a professional.

As Reyes and Cruz (2021) explain, the result is a sharp decline in demand, leaving the livelihood of the *maniniyot* at risk and their once-vital craft in danger of being forgotten. The rise of social media platforms has further shifted how people engage with photographs, prioritizing transient digital content over lasting physical prints. The ongoing technological transformation has not only reshaped how people capture and share images but also how they perceive the value of photographs. According to Chalfen (2014), the proliferation of smartphones has led to a shift in photographic practices, favoring instant, disposable digital images over printed photographs. Despite this trend, the continued presence of the *maniniyot* at the basilica highlights the resilience of tangible photographs in a digital world. Unlike digital images that can easily be deleted or forgotten, physical photographs serve as enduring artifacts that anchor memories and emotions (Van Dijck, 2008). This enduring appeal suggests that traditional photography

remains relevant, particularly in settings where religious devotion and cultural heritage converge.

On the other hand, nostalgia and tourism have significantly contributed to the resurgence of traditional crafts and old media, fostering cultural preservation and economic opportunities. In Doi village, Vietnam, the revival of bamboo and rattan weaving, spearheaded by artisan Poloong Churóch, has thrived due to tourists seeking authentic, handcrafted items, effectively sustaining local heritage and livelihoods (Moitruongdulich, 2024). Similarly, Japan's Wajima-nuri lacquerware artisans have leveraged tourism partnerships, such as the Ichigo Ichie program, to rebuild their craft industry after the 2024 earthquake (Cullen, 2024). In media, analog photography has witnessed a renaissance, with enthusiasts valuing the tactile, authentic experience of film, paralleling the vinyl record revival trend (Williams, 2024). Additionally, vintage digital cameras or "digicams" have gained popularity among young creatives, who appreciate the imperfect, nostalgic aesthetic reminiscent of early 2000s photography (Chen, 2023).

Collectively, these examples demonstrate how nostalgia and tourism-driven interest have revitalized both traditional crafts and dated media technologies. The renewed interest of traditional photographs, brought by the resurgence of analog media, opened a door of opportunity for the *maniniyot* to thrive once again. As Batchen (2004) explains, nostalgia plays a key role in this revival, since printed photos often carry a sense of authenticity and permanence that digital images cannot fully give. Younger generations' preference for instant cameras like Polaroid and Fujifilm Instax is indicated by this cultural shift (Brown, 2020). With products that meet the rising demand of unique, tactile momentos, the *maniniyot* have a rare chance to reclaim their place in modern visual culture thanks to the global resurgence of analog photography. Rivera (2023) further notes that holding a printed photograph creates a stronger emotional connection than simply viewing an image on a screen, showing how physical photos continue to play an important role in preserving both personal and collective memories. At the same time, the story of Kodak reminds us what can happen when adaptation is delayed.

Although Kodak invented the first digital camera in 1975, it resisted embracing the technology out of fear of diminishing its film business, a decision that eventually led to its bankruptcy (Mui, 2012). The *maniniyot* or the traditional analog photographers of Basilica Minore del Sto. Niño. The *maniniyot* of Basilica Minore del Sto is among the few lessons that can be drawn from this cautionary tale both for traditional and freelance photographers. For survival, the *maniniyot* have to learn to balance tradition and innovation. As digital photography and mobile use expand, these local photographers are faced with peculiar challenges in sustaining their living and viability in a rapidly changing visual culture.

While earlier research has already discussed the downfall of traditional media industries and crafts during digitalization (Yang, 2018; Villena, 2023; Rasyid & Kumalasari, 2023), specific study on the lived experiences and adaptive measures of the *maniniyot* of Basilica Minore del Sto. Niño in Cebu City is needed. Previous research on photography and technological developments tends to highlight large industry patterns or shifts in consumer behavior (Chalfen, 2014; Van Dijck, 2008) rather than the micro-level, human factors involved in how specific practitioners adapt to them. Furthermore, although there is some new scholarship on the resurgence of crafts inspired by tourism and nostalgia

(Moitruongdulich, 2024), little research exists on whether and how such cultural and economic phenomena are influencing marginalized occupations within the Philippine context. In particular, no in-depth study yet exists on how Cebu's maniniyot have adapted to or used these changes, and how their function continues to influence religious and social practices in the face of contemporary pressures. The *maniniyot* are not mere scraping a living for the work they do; they are symbolic images whose work represents cultural, spiritual and communal values. To them, photography as means of communicating faith, remembrance and identity is more than taking pictures. These photographers are a representation of a living and evolving heritage that is shaped by commitment, nostalgia, and the needs of a changing public, rather than being fixed or unchanging. Over how many years of practice stationed at the church has given them a deep insight into how people preserve memories while also adapting to modern times, their craft shows us about keeping meaning alive as much as creating images.

This study aims to interpret the lived experience of *maniniyot* in Basilica Minore del Sto. Niño, Cebu City, and how their histories, accounts, and how they adapt to the digital shifts over time. It also correlated with their experiences to the broad debates surrounding the preservation of culture, showing how the traditional practice still pervades and yet finds a fresh sense of purpose within today's digitalized world. The practice of the *maniniyot* is presently threatened with being lost, this study becomes a remembering of their continuing value and indicates the significance of preserving traditional practice to preserve a culture in the face of swift technological shift.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed a hermeneutic-phenomenological qualitative design to examine the maniniyots' lived experiences in Basilica Minore del Sto. Niño in Cebu City. Hermeneutic phenomenology of Heidegger's work expresses and captures human experiences in their own world (Guillén, 2019). This method is suitable to analyze and uncover the meaningful experiences of maniniyots' as they experience their vocation in a religious and cultural setting (Bynum & Varpio, 2018).

### Participants and Sampling Technique

The participants of this study were the active *maniniyot* stationed at Basilica Minore del Sto. Niño who were selected using the purposive sampling method with the criteria: the *maniniyot* should be an active practitioner within Basilica Minore del Sto. Niño in Cebu City and should have a minimum of two years practical experience in the field. Data collection went on until data saturation will be applied, in other words if no new ideas, themes, or perspective came out of the interviews, attesting to the depth and adequacy of the data gathered.

### Research Locale

The research is conducted in Cebu City, Philippines, with participants selected solely from the vicinity around the Basilica Minore del Sto. Niño, where maniniyot are widely available. The location was selected because it is the central meeting place for these photographers, which provides direct contact with the people relevant to the research.

### Research Instrument

The main tool for collecting data in this study are the researchers themselves. They interviewed maniniyots with one researcher-constructed question to gain insight into their lived experience. A semi-structured interview guide is applied, incorporating flexibility and consistency among participants. This method enabled a better understanding of the maniniyots' experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews will provide comprehensive information while adopting a structured but adaptive approach (Kallio et al., 2016).

### Data Gathering Procedure

#### Before

Before collecting data, the initial process is participant recruitment using clearly defined selection processes. The selected participants have also been offered a kind of consent to ensure confidentiality and ethics in research. To reduce biases and preliminary assumptions, epoche was used by the researcher. A semi-structured interview is then scheduled on a date convenient for the participant within the timeframe of collecting data.

#### During

Participants have been duly reminded of the confidentiality of their responses and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage. Semi-structured interviews are conducted in a comfortable setting, allowing participants to share their experiences freely. Interviews are audio-recorded (with consent) and supplemented with field notes. Additionally, field observations have captured their daily routines, interactions, and challenges. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal to minimize bias and ensure an authentic interpretation of data.

#### After

The researchers verified the responses acquired from participants and all interviews have been transcribed verbatim for Interpretive Phenomenological Data Analysis. As a token of appreciation for their sincere participation, the participants are provided with an honorarium. To ensure credibility, member checks are conducted, allowing participants to validate the findings. The study provides a thorough understanding of the maniniyots' experiences at the Basilica Minore del Sto. Niño through final interpretation and presentation.

### Data Analysis

This study uses Interpretive Phenomenological Data Analysis (IPA). This technique is both phenomenological, emphasizing the lived experiences, and interpretive, requiring the researcher to interact with the data actively (Smith et al., 2008). The procedure begins with data immersion, which is followed by early coding to detect relevant trends. Emergent topics are then created, refined through organization, and correlated among individuals. Finally, the data are analyzed and contextualized in relation to current research, while participants' viewpoints are preserved. IPA stresses descriptive and interpretive interaction throughout the process, resulting in a comprehensive knowledge of human experience (Noon, 2018).

### Rigor of Study

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is defined as credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). Credibility provides accuracy by complete population sampling using predefined criteria (McManus, 2024). Maniniyots' experiences at Basilica Minore del Sto. Niño demonstrates data consistency and dependability (Sallan & Mohamed, 2023). Transferability evaluates applicability to other contexts, using thick description in notes, journals, and data

analysis (Maher et al., 2018). Confirmability prevents bias through rigorous analysis, bracketing (Ahern, 1999), and thematic data verification, ensuring authenticity and reliability.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researchers strictly adhered to ethical demands throughout the study, which was formally initiated only after having secured approval by the university's Ethics Review Committee (ERC). Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, ensuring their voluntary participation and complete awareness of the study's objective, procedures, risk, and benefit. Confidentiality was assured for the participants, pseudonyms being taken for reports and recordings by opening them to access only by the researcher. Experts reviewed interview queries to rule out bias or offensive terms, and correct source accreditation was made to maintain scholarly integrity. Personal information of participants as well as their responses were strictly kept confidential under the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173). The participants were also informed of their right of withdrawing and that there would be no penalty. Counseling assistance for potential distress was made available, and each participant would be given ₱500 as a token of appreciation for their participation. The researcher also proclaimed no conflict of interest, ensuring transparency and ethical integrity of all research procedures being conducted.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The lived experiences of *maniniyot* in Basilica Minore del Sto. Niño, Cebu City, were described through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), wherein it reveals the five existential themes: Lived Space (Spatiality), Lived Body (Corporeality), Live Time (Temporality), Lived Human Relation (Rationality), and Lived Things (Materiality). These five themes embody the essence of *maniniyot* lived experiences, each theme emphasizes how these traditional photographers make meaning of their lives that deals with questions of their identity and challenges in adapting to change and consistency.

### **A PORTRAIT OF A PLACE WE CALL HOME (Spatiality)**

This theme explored how the *maniniyot* of Basilica Minore del Sto. Niño connects to their working area. The environment where they are currently stationed serves more than just a place for them in practicing their craft, it is a place that they can call a home, a place that shapes their identity, and a place where they truly feel they belong.

#### ***A Welcome Mat; An Open Door***

The everyday space of *maniniyot* is an existential base for them that embedded their identity and continuity. A participant stated, "*Sukad sa gipangnak ko, diri nami mag istambay*" (Since I was born, this is where we hang out). Its influence shows how pride of ownership and belonging are maintained by social inheritance. Another participant added, "*Bawal man mi mag apply lain diri dapat ang katong old member, mga family ra ang mo puli*" (Only old members or family can replace us in this job). This shows us that inherited limits maintain what Gray (2022) refers to as "autobiographical insideness", where long participation in a place generates a strong sense of belonging that is governed by mutual norms.

With what Van Manen (2016) claims on lived space as a "felt quality", each corner of the *maniniyot's* station carries stories of kinship and continuity. For them, their station is not only a work environment, but rather a symbolic home that shapes their identity and sense of belonging. Sustained through routine and shared

experience, their craft becomes not only as a livelihood but also a cultural inheritance that grounds them in a sense of communal permanence.

### ***A Quiet Place; A Fuller House***

While the *maniniyot* does have a place of belonging, it is constantly influenced by changes and disruptions. Crowded events like the Sinulog Festival demonstrate both positive and challenging sides. A participant said, "*Inig sinulog na puno naman diri, wa naman gani lugar... Sa karon gani nga sinulog di naman ko mo ari*" (When Sinulog's here, it's too crowded here... I don't go anymore), shows how hue events can create an overwhelming space that pushes people out. Another participant recalled, "*Aw maka lusot mi kay naa man mi ID*" (We can pass through because we have an ID), emphasizing how rules and privileges can decide who gets access and who feels excluded.

Both Galarpe (2018) and Rivera (2023) noted that religio-cultural festivals can turn public spaces into social scale which included some people but also excluded others. Therefore, Basilica Minore del Sto. Niño functions not only as a religious site of faith but also an economic hub, where opportunities may come and go depending on the liturgical calendar. As a *maniniyot* shared, "*Karon 5:30 man mag sirado... Sauna alas 8 man to magsira among studio*" (Now they close at 5:30, before it was 8), this shows how the pandemic pinched their working hours and limited their movements.

The feeling of home has constantly changed due to these transitions between belonging and being separated, between continuation and interruption. In the *maniniyot's* workspace, continuity and change coincide. A place where the idea of home is endlessly redefined through faith, time and the texture of their everyday lives.

This theme called "A Portrait of a Place We Call Home" explores Basilica Minore del Sto. Niño, the space of *maniniyot*, where it serves as not merely a workspace but a place they can call "home". A home which brings a sense of belonging to these photographers and their workspace. Whatever place the *maniniyots* serve, to them it's a home which determines their identity and livelihood. A place passed down to generations that mirrors Gray (2022) has been described as "autobiographical insideness", a vivid relation described from long experience of a place. Their sense of home to their place has been challenged with changes most particularly during crowded events like the Sinulog Festival and the pandemic which limited their access to their place and their income. But still, the *maniniyot* have learned to adapt through the changing time, and showed resilience and persistence. These stories of theirs highlight that a place you call "home" is not merely a fixed location, but a lived space where identity and survival collides.

### **THE SELF-PORTRAIT OF A PHOTOGRAPHER (Corporeality)**

This theme explores the physical body of the *maniniyot* and how important it is that ties their experiences in their craft. It examines their personal choices to stay outside for hours patiently waiting for customers, and the very process of doing their craft. Through their active participation and perseverance, it clearly shows how the *maniniyot* and their corporal autonomy shaped their experiences, examining what it means to part among them in Basilica Minore del Sto. Niño.

#### ***Jack Of All Trades***

The statement from a participant, “*Akoy tig kudak, akoy tig develop... black and white paman to sauna... ako man gani mag timpla atong mga chemical*” (I was the one taking photos, I was the one developing it back then it was still black and white. I was even the one mixing chemicals.), mirrors the highly embodied technical know-how which is crucial to older photography, amongst darkroom practices. Use of the darkroom constitutes a tactile activity based upon seeing, touching, and deliberate movement. It is not just required to bring about good results but to make up the rapport photographers have towards practice too. As Dominici (2021) and Pollen (2024) chart, this kind of practice brings a deeper, more sensuous rapport between photographer and medium. They also illuminate that analogue photography requires a somatic choreography, choosing chemicals, guessing exposures, and feeling textures that fosters embodied understanding. As Edwards (2009) says, this too belongs to the “material performance of memory,” that material practice passes from generations. Such material know-how makes the *mananiyot* perceive that photography isn’t merely taught but intuitively known in the body.

### **Passion of a lifetime**

For the *mananiyot*, their work is more than just a job, it has become part of who they are. One even said, “*Wala ko ka huna huna anang mo undang... Og mo matay nako ahw mo undang na*” (I never thought of stopping... I will only stop when I die), showing that to stop working would feel like losing themselves. Photography, for them, is not only a source of income but also a way of life. Lear (2023) explains that work can give people a sense of purpose, while Dominici (2023) notes that the physical and hands-on nature of analogue photography can improve well-being and bring personal meaning.. One *mananiyot* even shared that taking photos helps him exercise and ease his high blood pressure: “*Kining pagpangodak nako... maka pa-exercise siya nga maka pawagtang sa highblood.*” (Taking photos is like exercise for me, it even helps keep my high blood pressure away.) Van Dijck (2007) similarly argues that photography functions as a medium of therapeutic memory, sustaining both health and identity. In this sense, their work is not only about earning money but also about staying healthy, finding comfort, and continuing their identity.

This theme entitled “The Self-Portrait of a Photographer” looks not only into the *mananiyot*’s physical well-being, but also how their body, skills and identity is deeply connected to their work. Their craft demonstrates hands-on mastery that is developed through years of practice. From manually mixing photo chemicals into developing each printed photograph in the darkroom. This skill resembles what scholars call as the “material performance of memory”, wherein knowledge and skills are passed on through the sense of touch, repetition, and experience. Beyond these skills and techniques, photography has become a lifelong passion, source of comfort and purpose for the *mananiyot*. For many, it is more than just a way to make a living, but an expression of who they are, emphasizing how their body, movement, and even their emotions, are closely connected to their craft.

### **THROUGH THE LENS OF TIME (Temporality)**

The theme revolves around the *mananiyot* and how they were able to manage their time in both short and long term phases and how they adapt to change that is continually changing over time. This theme focuses on how their skill has transformed over the years, from the traditional ways to the digitalized phase where smartphones, new models of camera such as DSLR, and other

advanced modern technologies compete against the need for their craft.

### **Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow**

The *mananiyot*’s stories demonstrate their decades-long commitment and sense of belonging to the community and the place they serve. Statements that highlight enduring dedication and intergenerational relationships include “*Naa nako diri sukad 1965 almost mga 50-60 years*” and “*Nangodak nako diri 1980s pa.*” (I’ve been here since 1965, that’s almost 50–60 years already). In the lived temporality of their art, migration experiences, as portrayed in “*Niabot kog Cebu, ni skwela... gikan ko Mindanao... nag kodak gihapon hangtud karun*” (I came to Cebu to study...I’m from Mindanao and I’ve been doing photography ever since, even up to now.) demonstrate the intersection of mobility and continuity. Rising fees, from “*tag P10*” in the 1970s to “*tag P50*” today, and dwindling demand because of smartphones. One attendee remarked, “*Ni os-os ug mga 50 percent*” (It went down by around 50 percent), these are other indicators of socioeconomic trends.

Gonzales (2017) noted that Cebu’s cultural workers have gone through big changes over time, adjusting to new economic conditions and technologies. In the same way, De Leon (2021) showed how Cebuano studio photographers managed the shift from film to digital while still holding on to their social and cultural roles. These studies highlight that the work of the *mananiyot* is more than just a source of income, it also serves as a cultural anchor, closely tied to Cebuano faith, festivals, and everyday life. On the other hand, Chalfen (2014) also argued that digital photography changed how people view photos that instead of preferring to technical mastery, they now rely on the importance of the convenience and speed of online sharing. Asia Pacific Journal of Education, Arts and Sciences (2017) also pointed out that these changes have pushed the *mananiyot* to adjust or the risk of being left behind. The *mananiyot*’s own stories reflect these studies, showing how mobile photography has made it easier for people to use in taking pictures, but at the same time, it has weakened the demand for their traditional livelihood.

### **The Highs, The Lows, and In-Betweens**

The craft of the *mananiyot* follows certain cycles, often shaped by events like the Sinulog Festival. Ironically, the event that should be their busiest season turned into a lean period, as one photographer shared, “*Pinaka low season... Sinulog. Kay wala mi... kay puro tao, walay ka posing-an.*” (The lowest season for us is during Sinulog. We can’t work then it’s just packed with people, no space at all for taking photos.) Maiquez (2016) described this same situation, noting how large crowds give cultural meaning to the festival but also limit the earning opportunities of those who said they had no choice. Their struggles grew worse during the pandemic, when many said they had no choice but to stay in their homes because their area was closed stating, “*Niadtong pandemic, sirado mani diri.. Mao tong diha rakos balay.*” (During the pandemic, this place was closed... so I just stayed at home.) Rivera (2023) documented similar challenges for cultural workers, showing how those in informal jobs are hit the hardest during the crisis. Still, some found new opportunities through online exposure, as one participant shared how being featured online opened a door for them and attracted customers, even from Manila, he said, “*Pagkahuman nga na-feature mi... daghan kaayong mga kustomer gikan sa Manila*” This reflects Van Dijck’s (2007) claim that digital platforms can help preserve memory practices and open

fresh opportunities in markets. Overall, these experiences of the *maniniyot* show that their livelihood moves in cycles of highs and lows, shaped by festivals, crisis, and rise of digital media.

With this theme entitled “Through the Lens of Time”, it highlights the lives and work of the *maniniyot* and how it reflects decades of change, framing their devotion, resilience and adaptability. Their stories that has been rooted in faith, family relationships and years of experiences, highlights that their craft had not only been a provider for financial needs but also a part of the Cebuano culture, tradition and religious celebration. However, with rapid technology advances, most especially with smartphones and digital media, the demand for their craft and services reduces, leaving most of them to adapt just to survive. Their income usually depends on major events such as the Sinulog Festival and crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, which limits their access to the site and makes it harder for them to do their craft. But despite the challenges, they remained resilient and some even found new ways to promote their craft through online exposures on digital platforms, proving that their ability is not only limited to their craft but also their endurance in the modern digital age.

### **THE FRAME OF TIES THAT KEEP US TOGETHER (Rationality)**

This theme explores the experiences of *maniniyot* in their various social interactions throughout their enduring tradition. The photography practiced by the *maniniyot* has been recognized not only as a business endeavor but also as a vessel for conveying emotions among friends, family members, and even tourists or casual visitors to the Basilica. The *maniniyot* managed to continue their art because of these interactions and relationships, inspiring it with great importance.

#### ***Pocket Powered Kindness***

Craft functions as a household economy that supports relatives’ education and mobility. As one *maniniyot* expressed, “*Nakatabang nako makapaskwela ko sakong mga pag-umangkon*” (I helped send my nephews/nieces to school). This illustrates how income from photography extends beyond individual survival to kinship obligations, making the craft a rational practice of care. Batchen (2004) argues that photography has always functioned as a medium for sustaining family unity, creating both keepsakes and economic opportunities. Beyond kinship, mediated publics also serve as ad-hoc patrons. One *maniniyot* recalled, “*Ang mga naminaw magpadala og kwarta... niabot kini og ₱10,600... among gi-apod-apod sa akong mga kauban*” (Listeners would send money... it reached ₱10,600... We divided it among my companions) showing how radio and Facebook broadcasts mobilized collective generosity. Rivera (2023) notes that cultural laborers increasingly rely on mediated publics for survival, particularly during crises, as digital platforms enable resource-sharing among dispersed networks. In this sense, rationality in human relations is grounded in both familial reciprocity and mediated solidarity, enabling *maniniyot* to persist despite declining markets.

#### ***Picture Perfect Relationships***

Clergy relationships operate as forms of social capital and gatekeeping mechanisms. One photographer recalled, “*Suod ko sauna sa mga pari diri... sila Father Domingo... ug si Father Suarez.*” (I was close to the priests here before... Father Domingo... Father Suarez), illustrating how ties with the clergy shaped access and legitimacy in their practice. Rivera (2023) explains that cultural traditions survive through such relational continuities, where authority figures and institutions act as patrons

or mediators. Work-related encounters also led to intimate and life-changing bonds. A *maniniyot* narrated, “*Ako ra pong customer... naminyo ko*” (It was my customer... I married her), showing how occupational interactions may cross into personal lives. Edwards (2009) similarly highlights that photography is not just a technical practice but a “social performance” embedded in networks of intimacy, trust, and exchange. Furthermore, Gonzales (2017) observed that Cebuano cultural workers often draw legitimacy from relationships with both religious and lay publics, underscoring how ties to clergy and clients alike are critical to sustaining practice. These accounts affirm that for the *maniniyot*, relationality is as central as technical skill.

In summary, relationships between others is an important aspect to how the *maniniyot* continue to thrive in their practice. These relationships could be pre-made, such as the inspiration and drive to continue the craft because it earns them the income to deliver the needs of their families, to strengthening ties with others; even finding their significant other through their practice. Support goes both ways; they receive support or motivation from their kinship ties to continue their practice, and the *maniniyot*, along with their families and loved ones, from the fruit of their unique culturally-attached labor—even simple customers sending out their gratuitous offerings out of appreciation. The friendships and relations they have made through the years have made them more comfortable and appreciative of their practice; having been appreciated by important individuals (such as the clergy), as well. Ultimately, these reveal that the survival of their craft is also motivated by the great connections and interactions they have made with the people they meet.

### **A COMPANION THAT REMEMBERS WITH US (Materiality)**

This theme emphasizes the relationship between the *maniniyot* and the materials that they use to dedicate their craft. Their material companions, which are the cameras that they employ and the actual prints that they develop, co-define their experience, and as a result, a significant factor in deciphering these individuals’ lived experiences. Their broken cameras, procuring new ones, even the affective attachments to these, and the differing means of having their own prints developed throughout the years, have their impacts over the lived reality of the *maniniyot*.

#### ***My Humble Companion in Memory***

Equipment of history reads as a biography tool that is mediated to identify and practice. As one *maniniyot* remembered: “*US Tourist Junior Six, Agfa, Minota, Nikon, and Canon EOS 60D memory card*”. This statement demonstrates how cameras represent both personal and professional continuity.” This statement demonstrates how cameras convey both professional and personal continuity, depicting life transitions and technological eras. According to Edwards (2009) photographic equipment serves as a “material performance of memory”, wherein tools serve as both practice and biography vessels. Additionally, Pollen (2004) points out that cameras are not just merely technical devices but a symbolic companion that conveys tactile histories of work and identity. Every piece of gear, from digital memory cards to film-based cameras, is a timeline of adaptation, survival, and belonging for the *maniniyots*.

#### ***A Frozen Moment in Time***

The tactile durability of the physical prints makes it valuable, making it a tangible memory anchor. As one photographer stated

*"Inig print kay baga siya..dili basta basta ma-papa"* (When printed, it's thick and it cannot be easily erased).

This supports Van Dijck's (2007) opinion that the actual pictures have proven their natural permanence in distinction to the ever-increasing electronic data, subjected to loss or deletion. Furthermore the article of Batchen (2004) elucidates the theories that the prints are the monuments to cultural memory, given that they are the tangible symbols in the family and community most life. The prints are of sentimental and pecuniary value not merely to the maniniyot who regard them as sacrosanct objects, but particularly as material evidence of existence.

The materiality in this theme shows that not only are the maniniyots instruments for work, but that their cameras, printed photos and all else used are vessels of memory, a part of identity, and continuity among people. Each camera is such a one either film or digital and carries the tales of peoples and of places, for they do not only contain images of people in them but are the recorded stories of those people for instance, of people being resilient surviving when technology changed, The printed photographs being used are time vaults as they contain the emotions and the monetary value, of pictures once printed and moments of time once equiposed. This in conjunction gives the materiality of it to this aspect the fact that the maniniyots have this inseparable closest continuity of a relationship, of gluing in history that what they do in photography has but no mere professional aspects, but memory, survival, significance upon which hence is founded a cultural history through them, their lived environments which keeps the history to increase through the generations.

In summary, the stories and histories of the *maniniyot* reveals that their craft is more that just a way to make a living. It serves as a way in shaping their identity, relationships and sense of belonging. While their bodies reflect technical skills and a form of therapy for them, their workspace represents their stability amidst change, and their sense of time follows the uncertainties brought by technology, big events such as festivals, and crises. Their cameras and printed photographs as vessels of memory and history is a human connection, through the foundation of kinship and fellowship, that truly sustains their craft. The *maniniyot* prove adaptability and resilience in the face of modernization and cultural change, revealing that photography is not just a mere art of taking pictures, but also the art of preserving memory, faith, and identity.

## CONCLUSION

This study reveals that rather than being only a source of income, the maniniyot of Basilica Minore del Santo Niño's lived experiences reveal a vocation that is intricately entwined with culture, identity, and faith. Their lived time at the basilica depicts resilience through decades of technological and social change; their lived space at the basilica symbolizes a home and identity that firmly grounds their sense of belonging; their lived things—cameras and photographs—serve as repositories of memory and cultural continuity; and their lived space at the basilica represents a home and identity that firmly establishes their sense of belonging. When taken as a whole, these dimensions demonstrate that the Maniniyot are not only photographers but also cultural keepers who use their art to preserve Cebu's spiritual and visual heritage. They demonstrate how tradition and modernity can coexist.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study identifies that the *maniniyot* practice at Basilica Minore del Sto. Niño, despite its minor resurgence due to momentary

exposures, continues to dwindle down to an extent that it warrants efforts to sustainably popularize means for their preservation and continue their identification by the broader public and successive generations. First, curriculum integration is to be incorporated by having the *maniniyot* practice included in local culture, arts, and social studies courses. This should involve fieldwork for students and oral-history projects for purposes of fostering awareness and appreciation of local heritage. Secondly, visibility and promotion are to be intensified by collaboratively engaging with the Basilica, tourism, and cultural bodies for purposes of showcasing maniniyots during local festivities, heritage walks, social-media initiatives, and museum/photo exhibitions. Thirdly, rights and support are to be acquired by having the *maniniyot* formally recognized as cultural diplomats, ensuring they are provided with secure workspaces, appropriate permits, healthcare/livelihood programs, and policies for maintaining successive familial apprenticeships.

The maniniyot are a weak yet priceless connection between Cebu's past and its present. By incorporating their heritage into education, raising their visibility, and safeguarding their rights and welfare, their custom may continue to endure as a rich component of Cebu's shared cultural heritage. In doing so, it becomes more than a task of preserving the past—it turns into an act of empowering the people who continue to embody and cherish this living tradition today.

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