Death Immortalized: The Phenomenology of Social Media Mourning among Filipino Millennials

SALVACION VILLAFUERTE¹, Virlyn Dula², Roni Mae Lumberio², Merian Helena Garay², and Alaiza Mea Sioson²

¹Bicol University
²Affiliation not available

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Abstract

Death is a universal concept which influences all human beings. Through generations, the process of grieving and mourning which accompany death, has evolved from traditional to digital, aligned with the changes of time. In varying age groups, this grieving process is expressed in diverse ways, and existing literature shows a lack of this exploration, especially in the Filipino context. This phenomenological research aims to describe the participants’ digitalized mourning by utilizing social media platforms to process their grief. The participants will be from the Millennials or ages 24-42 years old, from Legazpi City, the capital of Albay. Using an interview guide, this study seeks to answer: “How do millennials give meaning to their social media mourning?” The narratives will be analyzed through thematic analysis via a repertory grid. This research hopes to contribute to the growing Filipino research literature on death and dying, specific in age groups, which is most beneficial in gerontological psychology, developmental psychology, and clinical psychology. The study resulted in the formulation of the H.E.R.O. model of social media mourning, representing the following themes: Helping and Hurting, Enriching and Encroaching, Relieving and Reliving, and Obtaining and Obscuring; categorizing the various forms of mourning demonstrated by Filipino millennials online. These findings have important implications for individuals, families, and communities as they navigate the challenges of grief and loss in the digital age. This study sheds light on previously unexplored aspects of bereavement by examining the ways in which Filipino millennials use social media to cope with loss.
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Virlyn S. Dula, Merian Helena A. Garay, Roni Mae E. Lumberio, Alaiza Mea S. Sioson and *Salvacion Laguilles-Villafuerte [https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4640-0555](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4640-0555)

Psychology Department, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy
Bicol University, Albay, Philippines

* Corresponding author: lallyvillafuerte0705@gmail.com, slvillafuerte@bicol-u.edu.ph
Bicol University College of Social Sciences and Philosophy Psychology Department, Daraga, Albay, Philippines

**Abstract**

Death is a universal concept which influences all human beings. Through generations, the process of grieving and mourning which accompany death, has evolved from traditional to digital, aligned with the changes of time. In varying age groups, this grieving process is expressed in diverse ways, and existing literature shows a lack of this exploration, especially in the Filipino context. This phenomenological research aims to describe the participants’ digitalized mourning by utilizing social media platforms to process their grief. The participants will be from the Millennials or ages 24-42 years old, from Legazpi City, the capital of Albay. Using an interview guide, this study seeks to answer: “How do millennials give meaning to their social media mourning?” The narratives will be analyzed through thematic analysis via a repertory grid. This research hopes to contribute to the growing Filipino research literature on death and dying, specific in age groups, which is most beneficial in gerontological psychology, developmental psychology, and clinical psychology. The study resulted in the formulation of the H.E.R.O. model of social media mourning, representing the following themes: Helping and Hurting, Enriching and Encroaching, Relieving and Reliving, and Obtaining and Obscuring; categorizing the various forms of mourning demonstrated by Filipino millennials online. These findings have important implications for individuals, families, and communities as they navigate the challenges of grief and loss in the digital age. This study sheds light on previously unexplored aspects of bereavement by examining the ways in which Filipino millennials use social media to cope with loss.

**Keywords:** death, digital mourning, Filipino millennials, phenomenology, social media

**Introduction**

Life being uncertain is a lived truth for most people (Bottesi et al., Edwards, 2012, Masel et al., 2012; 2019;). However, the notion of birth and death undermines this uncertainty. Birth and death are universal concepts that influence all human beings - the death of oneself and a loved one; thus, grief and its accompanying mourning affect everyone at some time in their life. Frankl et al. (2006) state that suffering and death are unavoidable and must be `accepted because life is meaningless without them. In popular discourse, a person's death is the object of grief, grieving, and mourning. As a result, the traditional definition of mourning is based on grief after losing a loved one. Mulemi (2017) defines mourning as “the outward social and emotional expressions of grief.” These
expressions include weeping, social and religious performances, and thoughtful reflections about deceased individuals or entities associated with perceived loss. Each death has a hierarchy of grievers who are given priority and how to give others grieving credibility (Yeager, 2021). Due to the nature of human attachments (Stiller & Dunbar, 2007, as cited from Robson & Walter, 2013), there are usually only a small number of people who are overwrought by the passing of a loved one, a significantly more prominent number of people experience lesser feelings of distress, and those who attend the funeral or writing condolence cards.

Social media users can share their experiences and emotions with friends and strangers depending on their privacy settings. Mark Zuckerberg created Facebook, which opened to Harvard University students in 2004. Facebook changed how individuals engage with one another for all time when it opened to anybody with an email address in 2006 (Phillips, 2007). Even though people on a Facebook user's "friends list" are often people they have met in real life (RL), the list also frequently includes people they have never met. Additionally, Facebook has been configured such that users can see when their friends post on the walls of people they may or may not be related to, even if those people are not on their "friends" list. Facebook has ingrained itself into users' daily life in the short time since its introduction. Facebook is where people may share aspects of their lives, from the insignificant to the momentous, in addition to creating online profiles and connecting with other users. The practices around death have also started to emerge as Facebook has become more and more integrated into both minor and important events in people’s lives, as well as its user base has grown and become more diverse (Brubaker et al., 2013).

People can communicate with their friends and extended family using social media. Using different social media platforms, some people can network and locate job possibilities, interact with people around the world who share their interests, and publish their ideas, sentiments, and thoughts online; people can communicate and connect through it. Also, it can be described as “environment[s] built on the very idea of social interaction and sharing of effect” (Harju, 2014, as cited in Wagner, 2018). Certainly, it is possible to use these tools to inform people about events, activities, and news, but that is only one use. The remaining part is spent socializing. Social media's "social" aspect portrayed mourning as a traditionally private emotional process. However, since the popularization of social media in the early 2000s, it has then started to take public forms, explaining why the mediatization of mourning is relatively imminent. The practice of mourning on social media is known as digital mourning, which according to Babis (2020), has become a worldwide phenomenon in the last few years. Giaxoglou (2014, as cited in Wagner, 2018) considers the act of mourning on social media a reconfigured form of what is known as traditional mourning. The use of social media has enabled individuals to communicate with loved ones and strangers across the globe because it provides a platform for communication between them. Embracing the process of grieving can help people cope with bereavement and loss.

As social media sites play an increasingly important role in the social lives of their users, they are also gaining a place within a broader ecology of practices related to experiences with grief, mourning, and death. As a result, they provide a new form of engagement with grief for the bereaved, which is situated within their daily lives, making it a socially situated activity (Brubaker, 2013). Death is an inevitable transition that affects individuals and families alike. Social media websites, such as Facebook, have played an important role in the social management of grief. They
may assist their users in maintaining post-death bonds with the deceased and facilitating their lives despite the loss (carrol & Enck, 2018).

In the same manner, as most studies, this present study aims to fill the gaps in the previous related literature on mourning, specifically social media mourning. Basinger and associates (2016) suggested investigating the grief communication experiences of individuals in other phases of life, and the present study fulfills this suggestion by having millennials as participants. Moreover, Willis and Ferucci (2017) suggested that future research should use in-depth interviews to question why friends of deceased users post on the deceased’s Facebook page. Individuals can recall their grief with considerable accuracy; however, current grief symptoms may color one’s memories of past grief (Safer et al., 2001, as cited in Basinger et al., 2016). In order to uncover how frequently these expressions occur in grief studies, Egnoto and associates (2014) suggested a need to investigate how social media can be used as meaningful discourse locations for grief-based communication. Furthermore, by analyzing textual messages, future research can determine the status of the grief cycle by extending the investigation of online grief. Scholars (Fournier & Clarke, 2011, as cited in Groth et al., 2017, Glassman, 2012) assert that by studying social media, the academe would benefit from understanding how social media affects students' behavior and assessing the behaviors caused by posts on social media. Despite the research imperative of underscoring the social significance of digital mourning, there is a current lack of studies on this topic in the Filipino context, which Moyer and Enck (2018) for their part, emphasized giving importance to, conducting similar studies in diverse cultures would provide a better understanding of the cultural differences in social media mourning.

By analyzing data from a semi-structured interview, this study understood the notion of social media grieving among Filipino millennials by contextualizing their perspectives on social media mourning, therefore providing an understanding of how and why people use Facebook to grieve for friends and family, and how they feel about the general public posts of mourning on social media. Its main objective is to answer this central question: How do millennials define or give meaning to their social media mourning?

Methods

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative approach, employing a phenomenological design to give an in-depth understanding of the participants' narratives. Compared to other qualitative research designs, phenomenology provides a unique perspective of meaning-making of their lived experiences. In addition to elucidating the deeper human aspects of a situation, it also pays attention to moods, sensations, and emotions. A primary objective of this research design was to examine what the experience is like for individuals, what it means to them, and what personal implications this has. This research brought forth the experiences and perspectives of the social media mourners to be understood; to gain insight into people's subjective actions and motivations behind their social media mourning.

Selection and Study Site
This study targeted the selection of ten Millennial participants born between the years 1981 to 1997, ages 24-42 years old (Kruz et al., 2019), as the main criterion of this study. In this study, participants were drawn from Legazpi City, the capital of Albay. Millennials constitute 48,537 of the population of Legazpi City, based on a survey conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) in 2015. The rest of the inclusion criteria were: (1) there should be a recent death in their family at least six months before the conduct of the research because normal grief will most likely lessen within this time period (PDQ Supportive and Palliative Care Editorial Board, 2022) and; (2) the participants used their main account to publicly post about the death of their family or friends on Facebook both on their wall and the deceased person’s wall. Excluded from this study were the participants who: (1) posted grieving/mourning posts in another app: (2) who only changed their profile picture to a lighted candle photo; (3) who used a dummy/gaming/troll account upon posting, and if they posted in the comment section or shared a post only; (4) and those with clinical diagnosis/mental health issues.

[Place Table 1 about here]

**Data Measures**

To collect the necessary data, a series of interviews were conducted, and audio recorded. An interview guide was established using *a priori codes* obtained from pre-existing studies on social media mourning. This study conducted one-on-one interviews using a semi-structured interview guide to answer the research question: “How do millennials define or give meaning to their social media mourning?” The interview questions were presented in English and Filipino (Table 1) for easy understanding of the participants during the actual interviews. Two strategies were employed to ensure validity for this study, namely, correspondence and member-checking techniques. Alongside the considerable amount of existing literature, these strategies were applied with the intent of providing appropriate information to resolve the primary research question.

[Place Table 2 about here]

**Data Collection Procedure**

After securing the approval to conduct the data-gathering of this research, the researchers recruited the participants through purposive sampling, guided closely by the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The data collection started by discussing the participants on schedules for interviews. The interviews took place in either a face-to-face or virtual setting, based on the availability and convenience of the participants. The participants were oriented regarding the nature and purpose of the research, and securing of the informed consent forms, and only after this the interview officially took place. There is a section in the informed consent forms intended to request permission for the interview to be recorded for transcription purposes; it is necessary to emphasize that this was completely non-mandatory. Transcribing and coding began immediately after each interview with participants to ensure that pertinent information was preserved and to serve as a guide for subsequent interviews. A thorough review of the transcription was conducted before "codes" were created based on the passages that are deemed relevant to the research question. Once
this process has been completed, the remaining data were subjected to non-linear interpretation (in which the codes are subject to change) and cataloged into patterns, which were now considered themes.

**Ethical Consideration**

Informed consent forms were prepared and presented to the chosen participants, aged 24-42 years old adults. A psychologist assisted the researchers during the entire debriefing procedure. The researchers also provided the participants of this study with complete anonymity and confidentiality. An additional consent form was secured prior to the audio recording.

**Mode of Analysis**

The data gathered were interpreted using thematic analysis via a repertory grid. A cross-case analysis was accomplished to observe the recurring themes and establish collective descriptions. These were needed to investigate the experiences of Filipino millennials during mourning and understand why they used social media in the process. Data analysis started with the transcription process, focusing primarily on producing a 'complete' record of the spoken words, including partial words or stutters, along with some other features. Accordingly, the passages from the transcribed responses of the participants were organized into "codes," each focusing on a single idea that is supported by the meaning unit of the participant’s response. The categorization process was then performed, which was necessary for grouping together the previously coded data. These code clusters were thoroughly analyzed, and the patterns that they formed were categorized into themes. A brief description of each theme was provided, wherein equally brief and direct quotations from the transcript was used to illustrate how the patterns emerge from the raw data. This process was repeated throughout the interpretation of each participant’s responses which was referred to as the “within-participant” analysis. Lastly, all themes are integrated from all participants in the “across-participants” analysis, that shows the general themes found across all the data. To ensure validation for the gathered data, correspondence and member-checking techniques were employed. Correspondence technique guaranteed that the data was effectively examined by providing a comprehensible justification of the themes developed, therefore presenting a more valid interpretation. Member-checking technique, meanwhile, secures the credibility of the responses by checking the accuracy and resonance of their experiences.

**Findings**

From the interview of a select group of Filipino Millennials aged 24-41, this study presents the phenomenology of social media mourning experiences. Similar to the saying "Not all heroes wear capes," human experiences dealing with their loss and pain after losing a loved one is an interesting phenomenon to study, as and how particular people or social media platforms take on heroic characteristics for them as they go through this period of mourning. The H.E.R.O Model of Social Media Mourning (See Table 3) presents the extent to which millennials put meaning to their social media grief. Like many of our heroes, it is found from the narratives that Filipino millennials also
allow themselves to vent, divert, and personify various things such as social media for their grieving. Segregated into four themes: Helping and Hurting, Enriching and Encroaching, Relieving and Reliving, Obtaining and Obscuring, the terms describe the dichotomy of Filipino millennials' feelings and viewpoints about themselves and those around them.

[Place Table 3 about here]

Helping and Hurting

Upon the interpretation of the answers of participants, the first identified theme is "Helping and Hurting." Helping is defined as the act of providing assistance to make a task or situation easier for someone, while hurting refers to causing mental anguish or distress to the bereaved. The findings suggest that individuals who receive adequate support during the grieving process are more likely to experience positive outcomes. Conversely, those who are subjected to heavy grief may struggle to cope with their loss and may experience prolonged emotional distress. Interestingly, social media platforms like Facebook have become a popular outlet for individuals to express their sentiments to their departed loved ones without feeling ashamed: (Camila) “Para sa akin, nakakatulong ang platapormang ito dahil nailalabas mo ang saloobin mo lalo na yung mga gusto mong sabihin lalo na kung nahihiya kang magkwento.” Also, participants noted that posting on Facebook allowed them to open up and share their feelings more comfortably than in person, (Winona) “Lahat nung feelings ko talagang nilalabas ko through Facebook.” Some even found it easier to express themselves online than face-to-face. As per the same participant, “Di na kailangan lumabas diba nasa bahay ka lang tapos may kausap ka na.” These statements reflect a desire to express oneself without reservation or hesitation. It suggests a confidence, unencumbered by shyness or self-doubt. One effective way to vent is to talk to a trusted friend or family member who can provide support and offer a different perspective.

Interestingly, for the participants, Facebook served as a platform for venting their frustrations. (Nova) said “Pag sa Facebook kasi mas mabilis siya. Mas naoopen up ko ang feeling ko through Facebook. Lahat nung feelings ko talagang nilalabas ko through Facebook.” Some participants utilized Facebook as a means of self-reflection. (Alma) “Ang dami baga sa Facebook nun mga group na may mga prayers... makikita niyo sa mga post ko sa myday may everyday akong prayer na nilalagay tas pag nagbabasa ako ng prayer, yun nakakahelp yun.” Many participants find support in using Facebook as a means of effortless interaction during times of mourning. (Winona) said “Facebook na ang easiest platform na magcommunicate. Dahil sa taong nagmomourn, kailangan mo talaga ng kausap kaya mapapadali yung pagmove forward.” Many individuals find reassurance in specific online posts that help alleviate their emotional pain, and in some cases, even transform it into a source of resilience. (Camila) mentioned watching relatable videos to help her cope with their grief: “Pag nakakakita ako ng [relatable videos] pinapanood ko na lang. Kasi yung sakit na nararamdaman ko, yun din yung sakit na makakapagpagaling sa akin.” On the
other hand, some participants experienced distress due to relatable posts that could potentially affect their grieving process. Additionally, some individuals may refuse to accept the reality of the situation, leading to further emotional chaos. (Jack) “Hindi ko na masyado naiisip yung tao na nasa paligid ko during that time na naglululuksa ako.” (Winona) “Eto yung pinakapainful kasi first kasi siya na nawala sa immediate family. Actually nung kahtih ibuburol nung pandemic, so talagang niyakap ko siya nung ano sa kabaong niya, kasi hindi ko, parang hindi ko matanggap yung pagkawala ng kuya ko.”

Distress can often lead to a range of emotional responses, including depression and mixed feelings, when someone attempts to reach out for help. (Portia) “Yung eldest daughter ko, nag-underwent din siya ng depression.” (Camila) “Masaya pero maiiyak din dahil sa mga sinasabi nila na patatagin yung loob natin. Imbis na tumatag tayo, lalo na iyong iyak.” As to some participants, social media does not provide them with the same level of comfort as it does for others: (Portia) “Sa social media kasi hindi naman talaga mafefeel na naglulusa ka... sa social media is sharing lang naman ng mga infos about doon sa patay”. This is due to the absence of physical presence, which can be a source of comfort for many individuals.

**Enriching and Encroaching**

The second theme identified is “Enriching and Encroaching”. Enriching refers to the process of improving or enhancing the quality or value of something from within. On the other hand, Encroaching is the act of intruding on someone's life or activities. By enriching oneself or a particular aspect of life, one can experience growth and progress. Encroaching, alternately, is a negative concept that involves invading someone's personal space or interfering with their activities. This can be done intentionally or unintentionally and can cause discomfort or harm to the person being infringed upon. The finding suggests that those individuals who have undergone enrichment after posting are more likely to benefit from the experience which demonstrates a hint of optimism: As Alma stated, “Ang gaan sa loob na marami sayong nakikiramay na mga tao, hindi sila aalis.”

These findings have important implications for individuals because actively seeking enriching experiences can enhance their overall well-being and satisfaction with life. The impact of Encroaching on the other hand can be significant (Camila) “May times din na medyo negative kasi nagsasabi yung iba na ‘ba’t ganun’ pero di kasi nila nararamdaman yung saloobin na gusto natin ipahayag.”, to which Portia shared the same sentiment, “Hindi nga lang natin sometimes maitiwasa na may mga negative na comments pero depende po sa ipopost mo.”. (Winona) “Kaya ang ganda nung meron nito na platform diba na parang automatic may libangan na browse browse ka lang so, somehow nakakatulong siya ‘no. Pansamantalang makakalimutan mo yung pinagdadaanan mo na pain.”, (Jack) “Facebook, pwede mong maexpress lahat yung saloobin mo. But minsan, hindi natin alam kung ano yung magiging reaction ng ibang tao regarding dun sa shineshare natin.” In some cases, encroachment can also have emotional or psychological effects, as individuals may feel a sense of violation or loss of control. Therefore, individuals and communities need to be aware of the potential risks and take steps to mitigate them even if receiving encouragement will temporarily stop the pain for some: (Winona) “Kaya ang ganda nung meron nito na platform diba na parang automatic may libangan na browse browse ka lang
so, somehow nakakatulong siya ‘no. Pansamantala ang magkalimutan mo yung pinagdadaanan mo na pain.” Some participants feel comfortable and empathetic in the presence of others, while others are inspired to summon their courage for the sake of their loved ones.

Some may find solace in the support of their peers, while others may draw strength from their connections and relationships. It is heartening to note that some participants were fortunate enough to receive both financial and moral support, which undoubtedly played a crucial role in boosting their morale: (Emma) “Marami rin samin tumulong in the form of financial support”, (Jack) “Some of my friends and classmates abroad, parang gumawa sila ng group chat nila.” Sympathetic messages also played a vital role in providing comfort and encouragement, such as the words of Alma, “During that time that I posted on Facebook, syempre maraming magcocondolence sayo and everything so ang heart whelming.” However, it is essential to acknowledge that negative comments are an inevitable part of any journey. From there, the individuals who provide encouragement and support become the HERO, as the acronym suggests. These everyday heroes play a crucial role in helping someone navigate the grieving process. They can include immediate family members, close friends, relatives, or even strangers who have seen a post or message about the person's loss. It's important to recognize the impact that these heroes can have on someone who is grieving. Their words and actions can provide comfort, strength, and hope during a difficult time. Whether it's a simple message of condolence or a heartfelt gesture, these acts of kindness can make all the difference.

**Relieving and Reliving**

The third identified theme is called “Relieving and Reliving”. Relieving pertains to the way of appeasing pain, distress, or difficulty. While Reliving pertains to living again in one’s imagination or memory. Participants found solace in receiving gestures of support to alleviate the distress they experienced while mourning the loss of their loved ones. As one participant stated, (Jaclyn) “Marami silang nagcomfort kasi pag nawala talaga ang mahal mo sa buhay, hindi mo talaga alam yung mafeel mo.” In addition, receiving comforting messages shortens the length of mourning process as said by the participant, (Winona) “Syempre pag nagmomourn ka, yung very very down ka, tapos kapag madaming nagmemeessage, mas napapabilis ang mourning.”

Another way participants found relief was by remembering the last moments they shared with their loved ones. For example, one participant shared, (Jaclyn) “Nakatingala siya sakin, yun na pala yung last breath niya kaya grabe yung sakit na naramdaman ko nung time na yun hinintay niya talaga ako.” A participant, also said that (Camila) “Mas lalo akong nasasaktan sa mga pinapafeel nila pero nakaka-overwhelm din kasi nandyan sila para sakin, para alalayan ako at patatagin yung nararamdaman ko kahit na sobrang sakit sa una.” overwhelmed by the moral support that was given by other people. Finally, some participants expressed regret for not making the most of their time together, as Tonia mentioned, (Jack) “Kaya dapat habang nandyan buhay pa siya, dapat talaga maipakita mo sakanya kung gaano siya kahalaga sa buhay mo.” Overall, this theme highlights the importance of finding ways to cope with the pain of losing a loved one. Whether it's through receiving support from others, reliving memories, or expressing gratitude for the time spent together, it's essential to find healthy ways to grieve and move forward.
Obtaining and Obscuring

The last identified theme is called “Obtaining and Obscuring” to which obtaining pertains to the way of disseminating information to be prevalent, customary, or established. All the participants stated that they use Facebook as a means to inform people regarding the death of a loved one. However, they still showed a demonstration of obscurity which means concealing or keeping from being seen by many. Every single one of the participants is aware of the distance the information they put online will reach in an instant: (Jaclyn) “Parang seconds nga lang, madali nang nakakaalam then madami din nagshe-share kaya mas magandang platform yung Facebook kasi maraming tao yung nakakaalam.” It was mentioned that the reach is unpredictable due to the fact that it is non-discriminatory and can be shared. (Emma) said “Ngayon, isang post mo lang, whether they care for you or not, nasta nagpost ka. At least kung sino man nakakita nun at least informed sila.” Since they saw Facebook as non-limiting, they used it as an avenue to gain attention and garner new possible connections, regardless of how good or bad they may be. (Emma) “Well Facebook, hindi niya nililimit ka lang sa mga kakilala mo, but it also helps you connect with other people like yung mga workmates mo, colleagues, yung mga important persons around your work na kailangan mong icontact.” One participant mentioned that even just a change in profile picture proved to be an effective way for people to reach out. With just one post, lots of people who have seen it have offered help, even those from other countries. (Emma) “Nung nagchange profile lang ako, marami na silang nag-ask kung ano talaga ang reason pati yung mga students niya nan asai bang bang hasa nangpaabot din ng tulong.” Nevertheless, because of the knowledge that not every connection will be good, they have developed a sense of obscurity and made sure to still maintain their privacy, as (Alma) stated, “Hindi naman kailangan ipost kasi minsan masyado na nating inoopen yung buhay natin sa public, minsan [may] nakikialam na, ayoko lang kasi ganon mangyari.” Per the participant, some people tend to meddle in other people’s business so it is better to not put everything on social media to still keep one’s peace.

According to another participant, some problems are better to be managed independently. Meaning, not everyone has to know what the other person is up to because everyone has their own businesses to attend to also. As (Rhea) said, “May mga tao rin talaga, meron tayong mga problema na hindi natin sinasabi sa lahat na parang saatin lang, na parang saakin lang to. Kaya ko tong solusyonan. Pero meron naman ding pwede ishare.” Most of the participants have agreed that while it is fine to post, the responsible use of social media is essential to avoid trouble. (Alma) “Basta ang responsible use of this media lang talaga para at least yung makukuha mong response is yung okay din kasi minsan may nambabash, nambabastos. So, responsible use of social media is essential in anything or event sa buhay.”

Discussion

This research aimed to analyze and contextualize Filipino millennials’ perspectives on social media mourning through a series of interviews. Based on the answers, it is found that posting on Facebook while grieving has given them a dichotomy of experiences that either assist or hinder their moving on process. The H.E.R.O. model of social media mourning is therefore developed from this study, encompassing the following themes: helping and hurting, enriching and encroaching, relieving and reliving, and lastly obtaining and obscuring. These themes explain the
causes as to why they post during bereavement and the outcomes after they post. These themes were synthesized and analyzed alongside the Social Media Mourning model to answer the central question: How do millennials give meaning to their social media mourning?

**Helping and Hurting**

Noticeably, based on the findings, individuals who are under the theme of helping were able to express themselves more effectively through social media. It is found that they use Facebook as a platform to connect, vent, and express feelings, especially with those like-minded individuals with the same experiences as them in online groups, allowing them to gain support. Additionally, social media serves as a means for them to engage in meaningful interactions with others. This is similar to the (Kasperowski & Segerstad 2015) study stating that by sharing their experiences with other bereaved individuals, the members can learn how to cope and adapt to their losses. It appears that constant and instant access to the community through digital and mobile media is an essential resource for bereaved individuals. The paramount importance is the assurance that someone is always available to connect with, regardless of the time or place, day or night. On the other hand, hurting is also identified. Participants are subjected to heavy grief and may struggle to cope with their loss.

The more they express and release their emotions, the more they may experience prolonged emotional distress and a depressive state. This is similar to the (Babis, 2020) study saying that while some people take consolation in seeing what they view as personal expressions of loss, others express distress and may even doubt the veracity of individuals' words given the platform on which they are conveyed. Many challenging grief-related activities, such as reconstructing a narrative about the connection, re-situating their relationship with the departed person, and creating a new sense of self after loss, are necessary when close relationship partners pass away. When individuals receive emotional support through social media during times of mourning, it positively impacts their overall well-being. However, responding to such support can also evoke pain and sadness. Specifically, the researchers explored the impact of emotional support received through social media during mourning. While such support can positively affect an individual's life, it can also elicit feelings of pain and sadness when responding to it.

**Enriching and Encroaching**

After sharing their thoughts and experiences on social media, it is found that the participants’ feel a sense of comfort and connection with others, which lead to various forms of support, including financial and emotional assistance. Also, those who actively seek out positive experiences are more likely to experience greater well-being and overall satisfaction with life. This is the same as the study stating that many individuals are able to manage the challenges of life by seeking support from their loved ones and discovering a path towards a fulfilling and purposeful existence. (Shear, 2012). It is also supported by a similar study which states that being physically surrounded by others and receiving verbal and nonverbal forms of social support is critical for survivors adjusting to their loss and taking care of their essential needs (Rubin, 2014). Encroaching can leave individuals with a sense of violation and loss of control.
In a separate article, the four types of expansions in regards to mourning was discussed under the light that it impacts norms which then leads to formation of new ones, therefore posing possible problems to social media users (Wagner, 2018). Indeed, social media platforms' lack of norms on mourning became apparent in some cases. The findings imply that Facebook communication for bereaved users is both advantageous and difficult, which may result in a coping dilemma. (Rosetto et al. 2019). The concept of positive and negative experiences can enrich our lives, but it can also encroach upon our well-being. It is important to find a balance between the two and learn from both types of experiences. By embracing the positive and learning from the negative, we can grow and develop as individuals.

**Relieving and Reliving**

Relieving refers to the act of releasing or alleviating stress, tension or discomfort from within oneself, while reliving involves recalling past experiences in order to recreate the emotions felt during those moments. Both processes require introspection and self-awareness, as individuals must analyze their own thoughts and feelings to fully engage in either activity. Relieving and reliving can be challenging, they offer valuable opportunities for personal growth and emotional healing. Their emotional responses to different situations and how they can gain greater understanding of themselves. According to recent research, individuals tend to express their grief in a way that is visible to others. They may share their emotions through social media posts, and receive sympathy and comforting words from their peers.

This further explains the idea that linguistic style can represent feelings of distress as applied to social media posts with grieving content (Brubaker et al., 2021). As cited in the study of Rusu (2017) the deceased gains a reputational blessing. **Relieving** the memories that they have with the deceased. Furthermore, using Facebook, users can interact with death and preserve the presence of deceased members through computer-mediated content (Hess, 2007, as cited in Willis, 2017) as they relive through the memory lane. This shows how Facebook helps us to relieve and relive the memories that we have with the deceased. Social media can serve as a valuable tool for individuals to express their grief and maintain a connection with deceased loved ones. By understanding the language and behavior patterns associated with post-mortem social media content, we can gain insight into the grieving process and provide support to those who are experiencing loss.

**Obtaining and Obscuring**

Obtaining and obscuring are two opposite processes that play a crucial role in the capabilities of human beings. In order to acquire new knowledge, individuals must obtain information through various means like experiencing. However, obscuring is necessary in certain situations to protect confidentiality or sensitive details that could be harmful if shared publicly. In today's digital age, it is becoming increasingly common for personal information to be shared online, often without the individual's consent. Like the way of disseminating information to be prevalent, customary, or established which is called **obtaining**. However, it is important to remember that non-digital methods can also lead to private information becoming public. This can have serious
consequences, particularly for those who have passed away and are no longer able to defend themselves against any negative scrutiny. Selfridge & Mitchell (2020) stated that social media allows news of a death to disseminate twice as quickly as any non-digital means, private lives to become public, and the deceased’s reputation to be scrutinized, as the words and actions of other young people who are still trying to survive.

This can also affect the words and actions of Filipino millennials who are still trying to navigate their way through life. Obscuring the things or information that they want to keep to themselves. It's crucial to be mindful of the information we share, both online and offline, and to respect the privacy of others. It is imperative to remain cognizant of the potential ramifications of one's actions, as they possess the ability to leave a lasting impression on both oneself and those in the immediate vicinity. By assuming accountability for one's conduct both online and offline, it is possible to cultivate a more secure and courteous atmosphere for all individuals involved.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Filipino millennials by examining their posting behavior during the mourning process. The central question of the study, "How do millennials define or give meaning to their social media mourning?", served as a guide to formulate the H.E.R.O. model of social media mourning. This model categorizes the various forms of mourning demonstrated by Filipino millennials on the popular social media platform, Facebook. The H.E.R.O. model is an innovative approach that sheds light on the complex ways in which individuals grieve and express their emotions online. By analyzing the different variations of mourning, we can gain a deeper understanding of how social media is changing the way we mourn and cope with loss.

Helping and Hurting are contextualized through the understanding that people either interpret others' sympathy as encouraging or discouraging. Enriching refers to the process of improving or enhancing the quality or value of something from within. On the other hand, Encroaching is the act of intruding on someone's life or activities. By enriching oneself or a particular aspect of life, one can experience growth and progress. Encroaching, alternatively, is a negative concept that involves invading someone's personal space or interfering with their activities. This can be done intentionally or unintentionally and can cause discomfort or harm to the person being infringed upon. The term Relieving describes a process of alleviating internal discomfort, whereas Reliving involves mentally revisiting a past experience. While relieving pertains to the present moment, reliving involves recalling events from the past and experiencing them again in one's imagination or memory. Lastly, Obtaining and Obscuring are contextualized with the former being the voluntary dissemination of information, while the latter is the obscuration or concealing of information.

In conclusion, social media has become a valuable tool for individuals to express their grief and receive support during the grieving process. However, it is important to recognize that it may not be the best outlet for everyone, due to the fact that physical presence can also be a source of comfort. Throughout this study, it has been found that some participants feel comfortable and empathetic in the presence of others, while others are inspired to summon their courage for the
sake of their loved ones. Some may find solace in the support of their peers, while others may draw strength from their connections and relationships. Some of the themes highlight the importance of finding healthy ways to cope with the pain of losing a loved one. Whether it's through receiving support from others, reliving memories, or expressing gratitude for the time spent together, it's essential to find ways to grieve and move forward. Lastly, these themes underscore the importance of striking a balance between the benefits and risks of social media usage. By being mindful of their actions and taking steps to protect their privacy, individuals can reap the benefits of social media while minimizing the potential disadvantages. In essence, they saw social media as a two-edged sword. Even with the knowledge that they can get hurt by posting, they still did it because they believed it would help.

Although some individuals may find it intrusive when others pry into their personal affairs, they still derive value from the insights and perspectives that these interactions provide. They still felt relieved by posts that make them relive their past experiences. Lastly, all of the participants knew that there are some things not worth sharing, however, they still post their grievances. They still share various pieces of information on Facebook despite knowing that it can reach a vast number of accounts. Through this study, the researchers hope to provide valuable insights into the unique ways in which Filipino millennials use social media to mourn and commemorate their loved ones. Furthermore, this study aims to make a valuable contribution to the field of bereavement and loss, with a particular focus on thanatology through the lens of the Filipino people. These findings have important implications for individuals, families, and communities as they navigate the challenges of grief and loss in the digital age.

In relation to the Social Media Mourning, also known as the SMM theory, by Moore, this research added more evidence of the causal conditions, actions, and consequences of social media mourning. The H.E.R.O. model did not only discuss the communication process unlike the SMM model. Instead, it utilized the SMM model to further dissect the reason behind the mourners’ posts up to the feelings they gain from posting. Throughout this research, it is found that mourners want to actively work through their loss and seek answers, share memories of the deceased, and communicate with others about the deceased. Due to this, they made use of social media to satisfy their need to vent and find people to relate to. The participants’ awareness of the consequences after they posted is what created the dichotomies which the H.E.R.O. model showcased. These dichotomies further explained the feelings, motivations, and individual processes the millennials go through during their bereavement process in the context of Filipino culture.

Due to the fact that the interview questions were formulated around the central question, the data gathered were also only limited to answering it. As a result, the H.E.R.O model was made on the premise that there are Filipino millennials who prefer grieving with the help of social media, especially Facebook. This research also mainly focused on the mourners’ reasons for using social media sites during their bereavement process, and did not give much attention to the relationship, type and reason for the death of the deceased they posted about. In addition, only a small number of millennial participants from a certain city in the Philippines named Legazpi City, Albay were interviewed which limited the reach of the study. Therefore, this research is not globally and statistically represented, and is extremely reliant only on the participants’ answers. Consequently, this study has gained an understanding of the underlying patterns in the posting behavior of
Filipino millennials as they handle their grief. It has also explored the advantages and disadvantages of publicly sharing one’s mourning experience.

Additionally, by examining the opinions and beliefs of the participants regarding Facebook posting practices, it is possible to comprehend the impact of public grieving on both the individual and their audience. Furthermore, assessing the cultural norms and values that shape Filipino millennials’ online behavior can provide valuable insights for individuals and organizations seeking to engage with this demographic. This study aims to make a significant contribution to the expanding research on the intersection of technology and culture. It seeks to provide valuable insights into the ways in which social media is transforming the process of grieving and mourning. By examining the impact of social media on our mourning practices, this study will shed light on the evolving role of technology in our lives and its influence on our cultural norms. Ultimately, this research will help us better understand the complex relationship between technology and culture and its implications for our society.

References


PDQ Supportive and Palliative Care Editorial Board. (2022). Grief, Bereavement, and Coping With Loss (PDQ®). https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK66052/?fbclid=IwAR2Ev5SZePFwN9M2EdjX9YynFii7V4ak9cjFxXVOd1PWmndER8gmfpDbek
Table 1. Demographic profile of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Jack</td>
<td>Nova</td>
<td>Tonia</td>
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<td>P7</td>
<td>P8</td>
<td>P9</td>
<td>P10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile</td>
<td>Jaclyn</td>
<td>Rhea</td>
<td>Winona</td>
<td>Portia</td>
<td>Alma</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Type of Question</td>
<td>Sample Interview Questions in English</td>
<td>Filipino Translation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Introductory</td>
<td>What do you think of Facebook as a platform for sharing your thoughts and life events?</td>
<td>Ano ang iyong masasabi sa ideya na ang Facebook ay nagsisilbing plataforma para sa pagbabahagi ng iyong mga saloobin at mga pangyayari sa buhay?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitory</td>
<td>What are the different forms of social support you received from social media?</td>
<td>Ano ang iba't ibang klase ng suporta mula sa ibang tao ang natanggap mo sa social media?</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Key/Core</td>
<td>How did Facebook help or assist in your mourning?</td>
<td>Paano nakatulong o tumulong ang Facebook sa iyong pagluluksa?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>How does Facebook make it easier for you to disclose the news to other people?</td>
<td>Paano ginagawang mas madali ng Facebook ang pagbabahagi ang balita sa ibang tao?</td>
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### Table 3. H.E.R.O. Model of Social Media Mourning: Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>CMU Interpretations of Underlying Meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helping and Hurting</td>
<td>Helping is defined as a way of making it easier for someone to do something. Hurting is to cause mental pain or distress to the mourner.</td>
<td>Self-expression, Vent, Self-reflection, Effortless interaction, Distress, Solitude</td>
<td>Freely express without feeling shame, Feels more comfort opening up on Facebook than in real life, Looking for people with same experiences as them to have someone to relate to (joining FB groups), and gaining motivation from people who had greater adverse experiences than they have. Facebook allows him/her to have someone to talk to while mourning in the comfort of their house. Desensitized during mourning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enriching and Encroaching</td>
<td>Enriching is the way of improving or enhancing the quality or value of something. Encroaching is to intrude on one’s life/doing.</td>
<td>Hint of optimism, Tangible support, Diversion, Hint of pessimism, Messages</td>
<td>Feel at ease in the company and sympathies of others, Received financial support, Facebook provides entertainment to forget unfortunate experiences. Receiving encouragement will temporarily stop the pain. Unease on posting due to others’ critiques. People who want to express sympathy commonly send condolences as their initial engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relieving and Reliving</td>
<td>Relieving pertains to the act of appeasing pain, distress, or difficulty. Reliving is to live through again in</td>
<td>Solace, Remembering, Regrets</td>
<td>Comforted by relatives and surrounding people, Remembering the last moments of the deceased.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining and Obscuring</td>
<td>one’s imagination or memory.</td>
<td>Inability to not make the most of their time together</td>
<td></td>
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<td>-------------------------</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining is disseminating information to be prevalent, customary, or established.</td>
<td>Reach of information</td>
<td>Facebook is easily accessible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obscuring is to conceal, keep from being seen.</td>
<td>Speed of reach</td>
<td>Fast dissemination of information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attention</td>
<td>Social media posts garner not only attention but possible connections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maintaining privacy</td>
<td>Sometimes, posting is not necessary</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>