

“You are Dead, but You are Not”: Social medium (Facebook) is the message in grieving and continuing bonds

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ABSTRACT

Today, one may no longer be alive but his social networking sites (SNS) account will still live on. Empirical studies on death and SNS started since 2004 covering issues on grief, bereavement, mourning, relational continuity functions of SNS, and digital legacy. Majority of them applied content and discourse analyses on SNS messages directed to or related to the deceased. Applying McLuhan's aphorism medium is the message, researcher focused on the interplay among forms and functions of Facebook (FB) as a medium and message that mediates grief and the bereaved persons who are communicators that decided to grieve on FB. This research adopts grounded theory approach where in-depth interviews with 10 bereaved persons who maintain relational continuity with their deceased loved ones through FB were conducted. The conclusions are drawn to prove that bereaved users preferred to engage in a transcorporeal mediated communication with deceased for continuing bonds due to four main reasons – the deceased are perceived “dead but they are not”; maintaining relational continuity via FB is essential to “finish their unfinished business”; they felt aided and embraced when adopting “FB the Public Platform for Private Grief”; and they imagined a mutual communication based on “past experience and religious belief”. The mediated transcorporeal communication (TcC) is enabled because the social medium (FB) is the message.

Keywords: Facebook, Medium is the Message, Grieving, Transcorporeal Communication, Continuing Bonds

INTRODUCTION

Birth and death are parts of the natural life-cycle. They are inescapable experiences to every individual. At one end, birth is welcomed naturally with laughter and happiness, celebrating an addition of a new member and the beginning of a relationship. Comparatively, death on the other end is accompanied with sadness, discomfort, and anxiety (Henderson & Thompson, 2010). It is difficult for death to be accepted as a natural process when it equates a separation, perish, and that a relationship has reached its end. Nevertheless, a biological death does not mean one is sociologically dead too because it is common that the bereaved would be yearning to continue the relationship.

There have been many clinical and psychological publications ranging from bereavement to resilience since several decades ago. A variety of studies pertaining bereavement and grief targeting at all age-group were conducted, from the elderly (Malkinson & Bar-Tur, 2005; Rubin, 1990), parents (Papadatou, 1997; Rando, 1986; Rees, 1997) to adolescents (Corr, Nabe, & Corr, 1997; Kandt, 1994), and children (Baker, Sedney, & Gross, 1992; Crehen, 2004; Davies, 1999). Though it is impossible to predict the length of grief, there are developments of multiple instruments and mechanism to assess bereavement. Generally, the traditional model (Bowlby, 1980; Freud, 1917; Kübler-Ross, 1969; Parkes, 1970; Parkes & Weiss, 1983) were dominating with the stages of grief and suggestions that the effective ways of coping with bereavement and loss are to know, accept, face, and eventually to let go or disconnect the relationship in order to move on or achieve recovery. However, more recent researchers preferred to emphasize on maintenance or continuity of bonds with the deceased (Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996; Worden, 2002).

In the era proliferated with information communication technology, the SNS has taken the lead in enabling and maintaining social relationships. According to the statistics as of July 16, 2020 by We Are Social, more than half of the world's population or

some 3.96 billion people are social media users. Among which, the FB continues to lead as the world's most-used social media platform with a total of 2,609 million users. Ability of SNS in shaping relations is creating new sphere that had altered bereavement and grieving phenomenon (William & Merten, 2008, 2009). The most popular SNS worldwide – FB has been targeted ever since its establishment, by researchers of various fields, such as the communication, information and computer science, health sciences, and psychology, to find out their roles and functions in bereavement (Brubaker, Hayes, & Dourish, 2013; Carroll & Landry, 2010; DeGroot, 2012; Pennington, 2013; Rossetto, Lannutti, & Strauman, 2014). Additionally, O'hman & Watson (2019) via their analysis applying the big data approach, concluded that the dead will outnumber the living on FB before the end of the century and they claimed digital remains or profiles of the dead may become invaluable collective historical records of present societies for future generations.

With addition of keen thanatechnological development, researches encircling the dead and SNS account such as FB profile are mushrooming. Based on existing literature, related scholarly researches of various social science fields including the psychology, sociology, and communication have concentrated on exploration and explanation of the new grieving or mourning culture and various impact of the new phenomenon on bereaved users. Little was mentioned though about features of the medium that enabled the entire process. Medium was the Message was a theory by Marshall McLuhan included in his renowned book, *Understanding Media* published in 1964. Though "Medium is the Message" was not approved by traditional sociologists and communication scholars such as Wilbur Schramm (1973), James Morrow (1980), and Jeffrey Scheuer (1999) who argued that McLuhan's metaphoric methods contradicted their expectations. Today's scholars such as Levinson (1990), Meyrowitz (2001), McKenzie (2013) and

many others have brought McLuhan back to media studies of the new millennium to prove the highly relevance and prophetic nature of his theories,

Inventions of Internet and other digital technologies brought along overwhelming affirmation and complimentary on McLuhanism; many were impressed with the splendid of the theory. Levinson (1999) claimed the evolution and rapid growth of media in the millennium have made McLuhan even more important. According to him, McLuhan attempted to shift the focus from content to medium when he claimed medium is the message; he asserted that a medium will make a strong and intense effect when it contains another medium as "content". In other words, a new medium is stronger because the message of the new medium is always another or the other media that were of earlier inventions. Therefore, in regards of Internet and FB, what concerned is not one, but various media, for Internet and FB have taken as their content the written words, in forms ranging from messages, passages to articles, sketches, photos, moving images, audio and video files, and etc.

Understand the theory, this paper is aiming at filling up the gap through making argument that it is the form and nature of the medium that had impressed or made bereaved users to maintain bonds with deceased loved ones on FB, basing on application of McLuhan's aphorism – Medium is the message. Nevertheless, instead of merely identifying the medium's forms and functions from the technical perspective, researcher opted to investigate through bereaved users' stories to identify their affirmation of forms and functions of FB and how their engagement with the deceased would not be possible or as effective if they were held on other media platforms. The researcher would argue that, a new way of grieving, a new leaf in bereavement studies are enabled and thus academic and philosophically speaking, the various fields of studies are and will continue to be enhanced and expanded with the medium is

the message.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although death is normal and grieving is unavoidable experience in life, grief could be a ubiquitous traumatic experience (Falconer, Sachsenweger, Gibson, & Norman, 2011) because every grief begins with love and emotion. Grief means the price we pay for love, and a natural consequence of forming emotional bonds to people, projects and possessions (Hall, 2011) and it also means what awaits happiness of every birth is grievances of death separation.

It has been proven through clinical and psychological studies that grief and bereavement can yield negative psychological, physiological, physical and social consequences (Buckley et al., 2012, Mash, Fullerton, & Ursano, 2013; Stroebe, 2009). In fact, theoretical study on grief has started as early as 1917 by Sigmund Freud through his work, *Mourning and Melancholia*. Freud's work is where the traditional belief that a survivor needs to break the ties with the deceased to attain recovery began. In which he said, "...when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again." (Freud, 1917/1957, 245) This means the bereaved self needs to be set free to enable a new relationship.

The Freudian theory dominated the field over half a century until the introduction of several models that explained grief in stages and phases (Bowlby, 1980; Kübler-Ross, 1969; Parkes & Weiss, 1983). Among all, Kübler-Ross's model of five stages of grief is the most popular, which it successfully prolonged the domination of the traditional belief for nearly another three decades. The widely known stages of death and dying – denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, is one of the most accepted models among medical and mental health professionals as well as the general public, though this model too, has been widely criticized in fact (Bolden, 2005; Friedman & James, 2008; Hall, 2011).

Nevertheless, there were signs that researchers began to confront the adaptive

grieving conceptualization around 1980s (Stroebe & Schut, 1999) and the traditional belief of grief was openly challenged by Klass, Silverman, & Nickman through publication of their book, *“Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief”* in 1996. In which, they highlighted how a bereaved child, spouse and parent resolved their grief through developed set of memories, feelings and actions to sustain their ‘connection’ with the deceased. More studies and models in supportive to the new perspective of grief were developed after that. For instance, Stroebe & Schut (1999) introduced the dual process model that puts forward the loss-and restoration-stressors, which performs as a taxonomy to describe everyday life experience of the bereaved selves in coping with their loss. Additionally, Worden’s (2008) four task of mourning that mentioned “to find an enduring connection with the deceased while embarking in a new life” as task number four in a mourning process is a self-explanatory confrontation to theories that promote on detachment and closure of a relationship due to death.

The name ‘Internet’ that was termed on October 24, 1995 (Leiner, et al., 2012), the social media and blogging sites that were introduced in 1997 and 1999 respectively, have altered the way people communicate, disseminate information, and interact. Inventions of these media that are having other media as their “contents” allowed and empowered displays of text, graphics, animations, and other search and navigation tools. The new media with such abilities have built new spaces where many bereaved users adopted to grief their loss. Rituals of grief have gone online too as early as 1996 in the form of virtual cemeteries with features such as Web memorials and guestbook for obituaries (Roberts, 2004, 2006). There were also concern showed by websites developers regarding issues related to ethics and legal dilemmas, challenges and difficulties in designing and evaluations on sites related to grieving and loss (Clark, Burgess, Laven, Bull, & Marker, 2004).

Scholarly research on online grieving

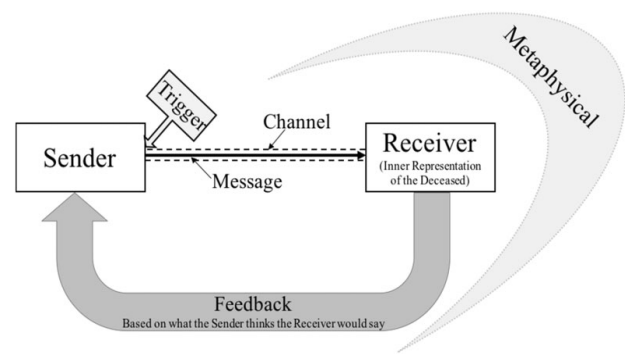
gained more attention recently with proliferation of the SNS. SNS is a platform that enables one to own a personal account or an online site and post personal profiles and communicate with others. Users are also able to upload photos and videos, interact with other members by posting on their profiles’ walls or by creating and joining online groups. With afore-mentioned abilities, researchers have identified and recognized that SNS has extended functions in facilitating activities of mourning, grieving, bereaving, and virtually memorializing the dead (Brubaker & Vertesi, 2010; Brubaker, Kivran-Swaine; Mitchell, Stephenson, Cadell, & MacDonald, 2012; Smartwood, McCarthy, Kuhne, Lee, & Ji, 2011; Taber, & Hayes, 2012; William & Merten, 2008, 2009). The significant role and capabilities of the SNS were evident where online funerals were held when physical funerals were restricted due to the Covid-19 pandemic in order to minimize the spread of the coronavirus. In line with this, ongoing breakthrough inventions of smartphones is another important factor contributing towards overwhelming adoption of online grieving.

FB is the most mentioned sites besides Myspace in online grief-related studies. Many have adopted content and discourse analysis of messages posted on FB memorial page or the deceased’s and bereaved users’ personal profile walls. Others conducted online asynchronous interviews with people who wrote on the FB walls as well as the bereaved users. In general, results thus far have acknowledged FB’s functions in continuing bonds and confirmed that SNS has altered ordinary grieving rituals, norms, and communication settings, such as the offline and online, the personal and shared, and the private and public grieves. Besides that, FB was said had also helped to strengthen existing relationships among survivors, which it creates new communities of the bereaved and grief-supportive groups on cyberspace (Egnoto, Sirianni, Ortega, & Stefanone, 2014; Giaxoglou, 2015; Kasket, E., 2012; Kern, Forman, & Gil-Egui, 2013).

In further details, Carroll & Landry (2010)

highlighted how SNS has altered the process of mourning by blurring and blending of interpersonal communication and mass communication in grieving process and how it has also changed the norms of mourning by empowering marginalized bereaved to express their grieves on the online public sphere. Pennington (2013) affirmed the FB's role in continuing bonds with assertion that FB users do not 'de-friend' the dead. Besides, Brubaker, Hayes, & Dourish (2013) provided further clarification and expansion about FB's function; they identified FB as a new social setting that expands public mourning in temporally, spatially and socially aspects. Another clarification of FB's functions was presented by Rosetto, Lanutti, & Strauman, (2014) who said though FB does help in news dissemination about death, preservation of memories with the dead, and establishment of grief community across time and space, it could be beneficial and challenging at the same time for it may cause coping paradox among bereaved users.

To further the study on continuation of bonds, DeGroot's (2009, 2012, and 2018) took the first step toward describing the communication between the living and dead; his transcorporeal communication (TcC) model was established and confirmed in 2018. Comparing DeGroot's model with the ordinary interpersonal communication model, both models have similar components - sender, message, "receiver" and "feedback". DeGroot has in her model additional elements such as, the "triggering factor" that prompted bereaved users to initiate a communication session with the deceased and the "metaphysical" element that means the deceased's non-physical "presence" is determined based on bereaved users' religious or spiritual beliefs. In other words, existence of "receiver" and "feedback" in the TcC model is based mainly on "inner representation" of the deceased and what the sender believes the deceased would say.



Source: DeGroot, J. (2018). A model of transcorporeal communication: Communication toward/with/to the deceased. *Omega—Journal of Death and Dying*, 78(1), 50, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222816683195>

Understand DeGroot's model of post-death communication that she established with reference to the interpersonal communication model. Researcher explores FB from the perspective that it is a medium and message that contains other media as the messages and explains its constructive functions toward continuation of bonds between bereaved users and their deceased loved ones. To date, though the structure of FB's functions and communication settings are clear, qualitative research about continuation of bonds with someone who has passed away via FB that addresses the forms and functions of the social media apart from revealing bereaved user's actual feelings and experiences remains rare. This paper thus, looks into filling the literature gap through discussing pivotal roles played by FB as the medium and the message in the metaphysical inter-realm communication or TcC process.

METHODS

Researcher has conducted in-depth interview with ten individuals (six males and four females). The participants were recruited via personal networks and snowball sampling. Participants identified were individuals aged between 18-29 years, who reported to have experienced death of loved ones, either a close friend or a family member whom s/he is still or has experience interacting with through FB. The interviews

were conducted in person; each of them lasted between 30 to 90 minutes and all interviews were voice-recorded.

The interviews were semi-structured with several open-ended questions forming a general focus of the research to encourage participants to share their experience about their “interactions” with the deceased through either the deceased’s or participant’s own FB profile or both. The open-ended questions were designed with reference to the seven mediators of mourning highlighted by Worden (2008), McLuhan’s (1964) medium is the message, and DeGroot’s (2009) transcopereal communication which are critical to understand the bereaved user’s experience and usage of FB in grieving and TcC. The participants were asked about (1) who was the deceased, (2) the nature of their attachment to the deceased before s/he passed away and how they used FB in their TcC, (3) how the deceased died and their feelings on the passing of the deceased, (4) moments and memories they shared with the deceased, (5) how and why they chose FB to have TcC with the deceased and what did they believe in or hope to achieve via the communications, (6) whether they managed to gain social supports via using FB and whether their family, ethnic and religious beliefs helped to determine ways or patterns the usage, (7) what they had gained through the TcC and how did they describe FB’s forms and functions in their bereavement. These questions served as prompts to explore the forms and functions of FB in the TcC process besides also evoked stories and experiences from the participants.

Inductive analysis was used to analyse the interview data. The recorded data were played and listened to closely and repeatedly on Nvivo 11 Plus. Timespan within which meaningful codes were located were identified and recorded. The conversation within the identified timespan were then transcribed. Based on the transcriptions, the data was reduced into nine main nodes, which are (1) Cause of death, (2) Bereaved feeling of the death, (3) Grieving process, (4) Attachment with deceased before

death, (5) “Interaction” with deceased via FB, (6) Reasons behind “interacting” with deceased via FB, (7) Factors determining the nature of “interaction”, (8) Belief and hopes of the bereaved, and (9) Effects of the “interaction”. There were sub-nodes under most of the main nodes. Details of main nodes and corresponding sub-nodes is shown in table below. Upon close analysis to identify connections among the main nodes and sub-nodes, four major themes were revealed. The themes were reported where pseudonyms were used to protect the participants’ identity.

| No | Main Node | Sub-node |
|----|---|--|
| 1 | Cause of Death | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normal • Sudden/Traumatic |
| 2 | Bereaved feeling of death | N/A |
| 3 | Grieving Process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bereaved experience and encounter • Private grief • Public grief |
| 4 | Attachment with deceased before death | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflicting • Depending |
| 5 | “Interaction” with deceased via FB | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency • Nature and activity |
| 6 | Reasons behind “interacting” with deceased via FB | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continual of bond • Remembrance • Unresolved matter • Convenient and safe |
| 7 | Factors determining the nature of “interaction” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deceased’s view (thought by the bereaved) • Concern of other FB friends’ view • Cultural and/or religious belief • Functions and Features of FB |
| 8 | Belief and hopes of the bereaved | N/A |
| 9 | Effects of the “interaction” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caught in dilemma (should/shouldn’t continue) • Grief reduced • Gained social support |

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the qualitative data revealed four dominant themes. They are (1) The deceased is dead, but is not in the perception of the participants and on FB, (2) Participants hoped to finish the unfinished and not finishable business with the deceased through FB, (3) The Participants' imaginations of the deceased was based on their past experiences and religious belief, and (4) Participants perceived FB as a suitable "public platform for private grief". Each of the themes is connected to the central idea that bereaved users are always yearning for continuation of bonds with their deceased loved ones and it is due to the fact that medium is the message that they preferred to use FB for the said purposes. All participants agreed unanimously that though their loved ones were dead biologically, on and through "interactions" via FB, they are somehow still "alive" sociologically. Therefore, the respondents appreciate FB for it is a very user friendly medium that contains other media – written texts, audios, videos, and other FB's features as messages, which they could engage in and use them to prolong or continue their bonds with the deceased because those media and messages functioned by returning sentimental recalls of their loved ones.

You are Dead but You are Not

Being in a relationship means to be attached to someone and having a closer bond means to have stronger attachment and dependency between the parties involved. Meanwhile, a great part of human emotions are caused by alteration or changes in human relationships. Grief is the emotional suffering one feels when a relationship is forced to end or when a loved one is taken away, and among all grieves, loss due to death is the greatest due to its irrevocable fact. Death is a forced permanent separation that those affected need to live their life different form how it was before. At one hand, it is the loss and unwillingness to be separated that cause the pain. On the other, it is the overwhelming worries and fright to

move on with life in absence of the deceased. Hence, bereavement is indefinitely critical and challenging to attachment that was dependant in nature and death that was due to accident or unexpected causes.

Participants of this research tried to continue and expand their bonds with their deceased loved ones with the help of FB. This is an obvious unilateral dedication but the participants deliberately hoped, imagined, and believed that to be interactive. On FB, a dead person's account remains active and immortal as long as there is no report to deactivate, close down or turn it into a memorial page. FB applications such as flashback, new friend suggestion, birthday notification for examples, are among the elixir of immortality. These are among the reasons why participants turned to FB to mourn and grief. The ten participants of this research "interact" with their deceased loved ones in five ways – (1) they browse albums and posts on the deceased's FB profile in quiet, (2) they "like" or react to the deceased's photos, which include those shared on deceased's profile and which the deceased was being tagged, (3) they post text messages, pictures, and videos on the deceased's FB profile, (4) they post about the deceased on their own FB profile, and (5) they share songs and videos on the deceased's FB profile.

One participant, Sue, who admitted to be dependent on her deceased friend very much before her death six years ago in a road accident, expressed that she visited and posted on the deceased's FB wall two to three times a week in the first two years. Her posts encircled messages like, "I missed you badly", "Life has been incomplete without you" and reports on daily happenings. She posted those words mainly to express her emotions because the deceased was whom she shared everything before. Sue said,

"Then, I didn't know who else I could count on after her death, I felt like I have no more friends...Ha ha ha... I had done something very silly too, you know Steve Jobs passed away, and there were comics about him developing communication networks in heaven...you know, I asked

my deceased friend to look for Steve Jobs. I was insane... too much longing to get in touch with her again."

It is obvious that for the participant, FB enabled her deceased's friend to continue playing her roles as a listener, inspirer, and friend forever. To her, interactions are "logical" because she believes that she could really direct all messages to reach the deceased's friend because it is the friend's personal and private account, which the account is like the deceased's location that akin the corresponding address to which letters could be posted.

Similarly, Vince, a participant who lost a childhood friend whose role was like a brother roughly two years ago, said he has feeling that is rather confusing at times that his brother is still alive and is working in the hospital as usual. On top of that, it seems to him that the brother continues to play his role through FB, his pictures and statuses are always functioning. When he viewed them and imagined there were direct conversations with the brother, he sometimes felt inspired and enlightened and they provided him meaningful messages and ideas to solve problem at different times. According to him, "I don't say that I would definitely get an answer, but it is what I expected to find when I read his profile."

A Chinese poem reads, "Some people have died, but they are still alive; some people are still alive, but they are already dead." The main difference between the two sentences is whether a deceased is being remembered. To remember means to keep in heart, to recall in mind. All participants complimented that FB is very helpful for memorializing the deceased. FB is an archive of photos, stories and memories with the deceased. Participants are thankful to FB for its excellent storage service. Yong, a participant said, "Keeping of photos and videos requires time and space besides they may be misplaced, damaged or turned yellow. But placing them on FB is totally different; it is very reliable, safe, user friendly, and convenient... you can retrieve them wherever and whenever you wished. FB also contributes in keeping memory of

the deceased as a person because comments that the deceased made and captions he had written are something very real. Thus, Vince claimed, "Even though he is dead, memory of him is still very much alive on FB."

Evidently, FB plays pivotal roles in making the dead to sociological and metaphysically live on; this is very important to bereaved users because they gained self-comfort via the metaphysical interaction besides they are being very reluctant to forget their deceased loved ones. There are different degrees of reluctance shared by the participants. The first opinion said being given the opportunity to meet and build strong bond with another person is commendable fate. Therefore, they keep the deceased in mind because they are worthy people to remember. Secondly, three participants expressed their worries that they might forget the deceased one day, and one of them had blamed herself for failing to recall the death date of her deceased friend. She admitted that as time passes, she has accepted that her close friend has gone and the frequency of she posting messages on the deceased's FB profile is reducing too. However, she never missed to greet her deceased friend on her birthday and during festivals; she claimed it would be unforgiving if she forgets her deceased friend; she thinks maintaining bonds on FB is the best evident that their friendship still alive. Besides, Vince's statement "I guess it was more of a selfish reason that I go through his (the deceased) FB... I am doing it because I need a form of comfort or companion when I am lonely" is worth ponder; especially how FB – the medium and message served in bereavement process.

Finish the Unfinished and Not Finishable Business

Generally, therapists use the term "unfinished business" to refer to unresolved emotional experience with significant others. Death is a permanent separation in life; cases of unfinished business where the feeling of bereaved users is fully processed yet are easily obtainable, especially when

it comes to stigmatized, traumatized, and unexpected death. There are several unfinished businesses identified from the participants. They include a traumatized death where the bereaved user failed to save a drowning friend; an accident that claimed the life of a close friend before a conflict between them was resolved; an accident that denied a chance to meet a long lost friend whom the bereaved user just got into contact again; an unexpected death a close friend on Christmas eve that deprived bereaved user from chances to create more happy moments studying and graduating together; a granddaughter who was denied a chance to say goodbye to her beloved grandmother whom she has been taking care of for years. All afore-mentioned are unresolved events, they linger in the background of those participants minds and hearts. In order to have their fear, anger, sadness, grief, anxiety and emotion expressed, all participants had chosen FB unanimously.

Understand there is no hope to finish the unfinished businesses, yet the participants continue to hope, at least on FB – the medium containing other media. Gant who failed to save his friend from drowning at a waterfall described that the deceased was pulling and scratching his arms; the scratched scars are on this arms and the disturbing memory of that last moment may be lifelong. Gant explained that traumatic incident has determined his mode of using FB when interacting with the deceased friend. He would repeat the same action – visit the deceased's FB profile, click on his photo, enlarge it to look at his face and recalling the incident. Meanwhile, he would utter and type, "I am sorry bro., I didn't save you." He is longing for forgiveness that he transfers his message, which medium of communication are words onto FB and hoping that FB, being a more advanced medium, could deliver his thoughts and word message to the deceased; he is serious in seeking forgiveness. Below is a self-explanatory remarks by him.

"Because I can't save him, I feel guilty. Maybe if I go to see his profile and somehow relationship between me

and him, some kind of extraordinary relationship and I must engage with him through FB. Maybe he is up there, he sees me down here that I am seeing and writing in his FB, maybe he will forgive me."

Judith who lost a childhood friend she perceived as a brother and remarked as "family" under the feature "relationship" in FB, expressed her disappointment over a road accident that took away her brother's life. "I look at it (deceased's FB profile) and recall that one chance (of meeting the deceased) that I never got, so it hurts me so much". Besides, as they became intimate mainly because of their love of the same music genre, Judith tried to finish the unfinished business using the "listen with friends" feature on FB; the feature allows her to play music from Youtube in a shared space of their FB profiles that enables them to listen "together". Interestingly, the music is a medium of communication that is stored in another medium – Youtube that was being transferred to FB and it played the role of message in the TcC between Judith and her deceased brother. The last sentence of her description below reveals her intention very obviously.

"I would say, 'You know what, today I feel like want to listen to this music.' So I will go to Youtube to find the music, and I will let it play, so it will be the same genre, just moving on and on and on, and it will just be like I will keep listening to it until that, I am done and I feel better and I believe that, Samuel (the deceased) also will feel better."

Additionally, when being asked a fictitious question - "Imagined that you are dead and the deceased is alive and is grieving for your death, what would you tell him/her?" Answers given by the participants inferred that they entrusted the very critical task to FB and were hopeful to hear positive reply and achieve a closure to the unfinished business though they understood that it is a mission impossible.

"It's OK bro., you have tried your best. You be safe down there, take care of your family, take care of yourself. You please be alright." (Gant)

"Stop clinging on sadness, let go of the past conflict, I have left you for so long, you just let go and move on." (Sue)

"Hope we could start everything all over again. Let's begin to know each other again, study together, do assignment together, pass exams and graduate together." (Ben)

"If there were a next life, I hope we could be friend again." (Joon)

"I should have gone out with you; I should have seen you and gone to concert with you." (Judith)

FB – The Public Platform for Private Grief

Psychologically speaking, there is no one-size-fit-all model for grief coping, which means grief is unique and personal. Along the advancement of Internet and social media, it is undoubted that FB has altered perceptions on grief and how one grieves. Online public grief becomes a common contemporary phenomenon. There are newly created grief-related terms such as online, cyber and virtual grieve; public and community grieve; group and online supportive grief, and others. Nevertheless, Vince and Gant showed their preference of private grief over the public. They said, "Grieve is something private" and "...Communication with the deceased should be spiritual rather than electronic and public".

Similarly, Sue, Grace and Judith expressed their worries of being watched and judged for what they did on FB, particularly the messages they posted directly on the deceased's FB profile. They felt bothered and pressured by the invisible eyes that are stalking and scrutinizing them. Those people may be their own friends, the deceased's friends, or friends of their friends who may be some related or unrelated persons. Consequentially, Sue reduced the frequency

of message-posting on the deceased's FB wall. Besides, she would not forget to apply the FB's "select privacy" feature to decide the authorised readers of her posts by choosing either "public", "friends", "specific friends", "acquaintance", "close friend" or "only me". As for Judith, she avoided from initiating a post on her deceased friend's wall; she said, "Online, you are always being watched and continue being judged. So people would wonder; who is this girl who writes for Samuel (deceased)?" But she felt safer if she posted in a thread initiated by Samuel's friends. Afore-mentioned findings suggested that the participants did not give up or leave FB totally though they felt a certain degree of privacy violation. Rather, they have appropriated the use of FB in ways that best suit their emotional needs.

From another perspective, Jane explained her intentions of posting a photograph of her grandmother and a lengthy FB status was to inform people of her death, but more importantly, she wanted the people to know that she was grieving and hoping to be respected and given some personal space. Hence, a FB status does carry forms of power to shut down other conversations and physical contacts. Nevertheless, she said it was ironic that "No matter how much I deny human contact, I needed human contact." Her expectation of FB grieving as stated below showed how she grieved privately using FB and was benefiting from public nature of the medium too. Evidently, it is the FB via its forms and functions that Jane grieved privately and gained public supports concurrently. All the words, photos, videos and FB are media, and they too are messages.

"I think FB is great, if you don't want to be around people but you want people to still be around you, like virtually be around you. ... So for me, I felt that at that moment, I don't want to be around anybody, physically I didn't want to answer anyone, I didn't want to hug anyone, I didn't want physical contact, I didn't want to look at anyone, so by posting it online, I am putting a piece of myself out there, so that people can

come to embrace me virtually and that makes me feel better."

Assumptions and Hopes based on Past Experience and Religious Belief

Death and hope are two variables that are always correlated in a negative relationship. Death shattered one's faith that eventually needs to be strengthened with hope. Death is a one-way journey due to the fact that no one who has experienced it managed to make a comeback and share their stories. There is no credible reference about the afterlife journey except those stated in religious scriptures. Therefore, bereavement and grieving are processes filled with beliefs, hopes, imaginations, and speculations.

Some participants denied that they were influenced by religious belief in the way they grieve but religious influence was traceable in their answers. They believed their deceased friends are placed in beautiful heaven because they were good and kind people. In the aspect of the past experience, Ben said as his deceased friend is now freed, she should be touring around because she always loved travelling. Besides, Vince explained that both he and his dead friend used to despise those who posted for deceased; they used to give comment like, "trying to be drama or what?" Hence Vince would not write on the FB's wall of his deceased friend, he said, "I don't think he wants this kind of publicity after his death."

Subjected to religious influence, Gant who is a Hindu always looked at the deceased's photo on FB, closed his eyes and prayed to God besides writing on the FB wall. He believes that one would have a better chance to get connected with a soul if a spiritual method is adopted too. Besides, Jane who is a Christian said she believes that good person would go to heaven when they die. Thus, she always writes on FB with the belief that her grandmother is living happily with their relatives in heaven and she admitted that such thought comforts her much. On the other hand, two Buddhist participants, Joon and Ken believe in fate and karma; Joon

described his friendship with the deceased as a destined fate and both of them believed that their deceased friend, who was very kind-hearted should be living without suffering and worries at another realm. Thus, religious faith have potential influence in easing grief and dealing with loss. Complementarily, participants of this research affirmed the auxiliary role of FB in this regard.

Findings of this research reaffirmed DeGroot's continuing bonds and remembrance through the TcC. All the four themes generated from participants' responses confirmed that bereaved users desired for continuing bonds rather than ending them; this may due to their reluctance to let go, unfinished business, or the deceased's significant role-play though s/he has gone physically. Besides, DeGroot's opinion that the intended recipient of message in TcC was the inner representation of deceased is agreeable too. In fact, apart from identifying the deceased via representational objects, bereaved users also imagined reception of message and feedback by the deceased based on their past experiences and religious belief.

Additionally, researcher would like to negotiate with DeGroot on her explanations that "message in TcC includes what is said, the context in which it is said, and the medium used to send it" (DeGroot, 2018: 51). She only focused on messages that are originated from bereaved users that are conveyed using limited channels such as spoken aloud, written or typed, or internal. In other words, DeGroot did not take into account media like photos, audios, videos, features, apps, and other online resources that are linkable to FB. Based on findings of this research that echoed McLuhan's medium is the message, the researcher suggests that meanings for the elements, "medium" and "message" in TcC model should not be as limited. FB for instance, plays its roles by being a medium and the message within the Internet; it also contains other media as the messages in it at the same time. In fact, FB is the medium preferred as a helpful consolation tool for grieving and continuing bonds because of its

ability as a medium as well as the message.

Evidently, bereaved users feel that their loved ones are dead but they are not and there is a possibility to finish the unfinished business because of the forms and functions of FB. Among others, the active deceased's FB account, flashback and notification on deceased's birthday, and bereaved users have an intended addressee to their message (DeGroot, 2018: 54) with deceased's FB account be the perfect destination. They could direct their messages confidently and is rest assured that they will reach the receiver safely. Next, media such as words message, photos, and videos that were posted earlier by the deceased on her/his own, bereaved's or their common friends' FB walls for instance, are storage and memory in chronological timeline. These media are the messages that could continue to guide, inspire, motivate, and provide ideas and suggestions to bereaved users at different times and contexts.

Another breakthrough finding of this research is the identification of a phenomenon that sees a combination of private and public grieves. In this case, a bereaved is making use of the public platform to gain public support but meanwhile continue to grieve in private. In details, FB is used for information dissemination purposes that help the bereaved users to avoid direct dealing with FB friends and yet obtains comfort through virtual company and be in the spirit through online social support. Such encounter shows a link between virtual and actual intentions of the bereaved users. Bereaved users who understand her/his mental and physical desire and needs when grieving and have adequate knowledge about FB and SNS's forms and functions, may be benefited from the creative usage of the media.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, it is already a common belief to many that one is dead but one is not, a human beings live on bonds as persons and many continue to be bonded even they are dead. Grieving over death on social media, especially FB is getting more common today among bereaved users who

aims not at achieving a closure of bonds, rather is to cope with the loss through continuing bonds because grief caused by death can never finished. Hence, it is indeed necessary for psychologists and sociologists to expand the literature with research and knowledge on this metaphysical inter-realm communication. The outcomes would certainly be valuable references and suggestions for a more comfortable bereavement experience. On top of that, it is also recommended for future researchers to be alert of significant roles played by the media that are the messages apart from being the mediating tools merely. Finally, it is definitely worthy too to extend research about grieving on social media to include various religious perspectives and studies of social, psychological, communication, and media impact of continuing bonds through TcC communication.

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