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ABSTRACT

In this grounded study, I aimed to understand the role social media plays in the disclosures of university students diagnosed with clinical depression. Using triangulation mixed-method design in gathering, analyzing and interpreting data, I extracted the following: (1) the reasons why university students diagnosed with clinical depression disclose online, (2) the characteristics of social media that entice them to use it, and (3) how social media as a communication platform became a common ground for disclosures. The Uses and Gratifications Theory was used as a lens in understanding and explaining integrated findings from the gathered data.

It was found that university students diagnosed with clinical depression use and disclose on social media because of the following motivations: (1) social interaction, (2) identity-seeking, (3) information-seeking and sharing, and (4) escapism.

On the other hand, the characteristics and features of social media platforms that entice them to disclose them are the following: (1) Social Media Strengthens Different Expressions of Oneself, (2) Social Media Supports Creation of a Safe Online Environment/Space, (3) Social Media Allows Compartmentalization of Personalities, (4) Social Media Bridges Distance and Promotes Building of Communities, (5) Social Media Helps Make Online Help/Support Available Instantly, Immediately, and 24/7, (6) Social Media Encourages Content Brevity, (7) Social Media Promotes Understanding of Others, (8) Social Media Allows Audience to React on Posts, and (9) Social Media Encourages Promotion of Various Advocacies.

Through social media content analysis, the following findings also emerged: (1) Photos with Captions dominate post in Instagram with the use of emoticons, (2) Majority of the Facebook posts are photos and memes which are shared from other users' posts, and (3) Most Engagements Happen Through Replies and Retweets on Twitter.

In the analysis of the contents shared on all the platforms, four themes emerged. These are advocacies, personal struggles, popular culture, and relationships. Another one emerged in Instagram: the emotions and feelings of introversion and isolation. Of all these, popular culture is the most frequent subject of the participants' posts in all three platforms.

Another finding is the participants' consumption of memes. Memes have become a new format of addressing issues that rarely get talked about, in a funny way. While Instagram offers a more filtered but a more creative expression of oneself and Twitter is for the authentic and uncensored postings, Facebook is a mixture of both, and memes are becoming tools in balancing authentic but less dramatic and more fun disclosures.

This study further showed the need for social media as a communication space to be kept safe and conducive for healing and recovery. It is recommended that all stakeholders and

all active social media users be mindful of our and other people's online behavior so we can respond well to those who are suffering and in need of our help.