VIRTUAL BEREAVEMENT: HOW THE LEBANESE USE FACEBOOK TO EXPRESS
GRIEF

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Abstract

Facebook profiles of the departed who were once active Facebook users are today being used as virtual space by family and friends to express their grief, connect with the deceased and engage in active memorials. The aim of this thesis is to explore how social network sites (SNS) such as Facebook are being used as a platform for grieving practices in Lebanon. It reveals through research how the Lebanese death rituals are being translated into the virtual world. It also discovers virtual bereavement behaviour and its effects on the stages of grief through the lens of Bowlby's Attachment Theory. In-depth semi structured interviews were conducted and analysed with ten selected Lebanese Facebook users who had experienced grief online. Findings showed that SNS such as Facebook helped the participants deal with the pain of the loss, the guilt they felt and the missed interaction they had with the deceased. They see it as a platform of sharing expressions and emotions with others in order to get rid of a load of pain felt vis-à-vis dealing with these issues on their own. It would comfort them to talk to the deceased by sending wall messages or private messages even though they knew that the person is not really there. A second finding showed that the continued virtual presence of the deceased through their profile on Facebook gave them comfort and lessened the amount of restless energy that Bowlby (1980) spoke about in the grief theory. The language that people use on social networks is very similar to the language we might hear at a gravesite. A third finding showed that many posts on Facebook by Lebanese people in specific may be exaggerated forms of grieving. Some people post not to lessen their distress but to get attention. It was discovered that some people post

exaggerated posts and overly dramatized quotes on the deceased's page which in turn harms the

person in a bereavement process.

Lebanese people express grief on Facebook – their new comfort zone. A place where they let go

of their pain while grieving and find the deceased they are searching for.

Keywords: Facebook, virtual bereavement, Attachment Theory, grief, memorials

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Loss of a Loved One

Sadly, each and every one of us ends up experiencing the loss of a loved one, whether it is a family member, a dear friend or a lover. Losing someone who has passed away leaves a person with feelings of despair, confusion, depression, and avoidance depending on closeness of the relationship with the deceased and on the stage of grief that the person is going through. The process of grief is a very important process that should pass smoothly in order for a person to overcome the loss with the least damage possible. Grief is a process that, if not expressed properly, will create psychological distress and long-term depression. Social media today is not only being used as a space to share birthday wishes, photo albums or food suggestions; social media is a platform for expression as well including the expression of loss whether the loss was in death, relationship or even friendship. Many people find comfort in expressing their inner thoughts in a written manner and having followers on their social media pages following up and reading their inspirational writings or feelings.

When feelings are shared, the weight of sadness lessens within the person because they feel that someone is sharing their load of sadness with them – even if that sharing is done on an online platform. This thesis investigates the shifting levels of traditional death rituals when it comes to expressing grief on social network sites (SNS) – specifically Facebook in Lebanon. Many studies (Granek, 2012; Borrins, 2013; Scott, 2013) have

investigated the process of grief and mourning on SNS but none of the studies investigated grieving on SNS in Lebanon except for one thesis study by a former student at Notre Dame University (Araman, 2013). To investigate this topic this thesis uses Elizabeth Kubler Ross's Grief Theory and Bowlby's Attachment Theory to understand the steps people go through while grieving, their attachment to the deceased and how these relate to reactions and expressions on SNS. Another theory that will be highlighted is the Dual Process Model of Grief Theory by Stroebe and Schut which came to rise due to shortcomings in traditional theorizing about effective ways of coping with bereavement, most notably, with respect to the so - called "grief work hypothesis."

1.2 Thesis Overview

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter introduces the study and identifies the main topic explored in the thesis which is the movement of traditional death rituals in Lebanon to virtual expression on Facebook and how the grieving process stages and cycles are affected and expressed in this process.

The second chapter reviews the literature, first by defining loss and grief; and second by understanding the stages of grief that were theorized by Elizabeth Kubler Ross and third exploring expression of grief online from the psychological perspective. Last but not least, the literature highlights the common death rituals and traditions that take place in Lebanon and finally it reviews the SNS (specifically Facebook) penetration in Lebanon and virtual memorial groups.

The third chapter discusses the theoretical framework which explores several grief theories (Lindermann, 1944; Kubler-Ross, 1969; Parkes, 1975; Bowlby, 1980; Worden, 1991; Stroebe and Schut, 1995)

The fourth chapter deals with the methodology by identifying the research method used, in this case a qualitative research method in the form of one-on-one in-depth interviews of a sample of ten persons; five of which are Christians and five are Muslims.

The fifth chapter on findings and analysis details the findings of the study and how they relate to the literature review. It is then that we are able to see how the person in grief is able to process that the person close to their hearts is really gone while being connected with their online identities and other mourners virtually.

The sixth chapter includes implications of the findings as well as the limitations of the research and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

　　This thesis will focus on the use of social network sites as a new place in which people have been expressing their grief and death rituals. In order to fully understand this behaviour of sharing a traditional mourning ritual on virtual memorial groups, the literature review will first define grief and then look at the grieving process. Second, grief theories proposed by Ross (1969), Bowbly (1986), and Parkes (1980) will be reviewed. Third, chapter looks at Attachment Theory, and the importance and habits of using social networking sites as venues of expression. Lastly it will examine the creations of memorial groups on Facebook: the new virtual mourning space.

2.1 Loss and Grief

　　Bereavement is to be robbed or deprived of something valuable; the loss usually refers to the death of a significant person. Bereavement can be expressed in various acts of mourning such as funeral ceremonies or the withdrawing from public activities (Mental Health America, 2019). Grieving is the psychological component of bereavement, the feelings provoked by a significant loss; specifically the suffering provoked when a loved one dies (Harcourt, 2016). Grief is the normal process of reacting to a loss. The loss may be physical such as a death, social such as divorce, or occupational such as a job. Emotional reactions to grief can include anger, guilt, anxiety, sadness, and despair. Physical reactions of grief can include sleeping problems, changes in appetite, physical problems, or illness (Mental Health America, 2019). The feeling of grief is common to people and it is and upon the death of a loved one; it is expressed in mourning. Mourning is the action and manner of expressing grief and such expressions are contingent upon and differ with every culture (Harcourt, 2016).

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2.2 Stages of Grief

Grief has long been studied by psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists, identifying the cultural ramifications and ongoing process of mourning (Bowlby, 1980; Kübler-Ross, 1969; Parkes, 1986). Grief differs depending on the history of the individual as well as the manner of death and relationship to the individual. (Fearon, 2011, p.15) In her book *On Death and Dying*, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross proposes a number of stages for grief. Kubler-Ross' (1969) first stage is denial. In this stage, grieving people are unable or unwilling to accept that the loss has taken or will shortly take place. After people have passed through denial and accepted that the loss has occurred or will shortly occur, they may begin to feel anger at the loss and its unfairness. They may become angry at the person who has been lost or is dying. Feelings of abandonment may also occur. Next comes bargaining; in this stage, people beg their higher power to undo the loss, saying things along the lines of; "I'll change if you bring her or him back to me." During the bargaining phase there are promises involved between the bereaved person and God, in which the bereaved promises God of better behaviour and certain life changes if he/she were to get the lost person back. When the loss is not to be reserved and it becomes clear to the bereaved that bargaining is not very effective, the person then enters into a depression whenever they start confronting the reality of the loss and nothing is to be done about it. During this period, the bereaved person may cry continuously, undergo changes in sleeping and eating habits, or withdraw from relationships and activities. Some bereavers even believe and blame themselves for being behind the reason of the loss, whether or not this is justified (DeGroot, 2009).

Finally, if all the stages follow according to Kubler-Ross's theory, people enter a stage of acceptance in which they are able to accept that the loss has occurred and cannot be undone, and are once again able to plan for their futures and re-engage in daily life (Fearon, 2011).

Development of Stage Theory grew out of psychoanalysis. Freud wrote *Mourning and Melancholia* in1917, in which he explored grief as he experienced it. The Freudian understanding of grief, then, is based on the understanding of the relationship with the deceased person recognizing which aspects of yourself you had located in the now dead person, taking these back into yourself and so being able to both know better what is you and to know what attributes really belong with the dead person (Small, 2001, p. 25).

Since Freud, grieving and mourning have been conceived as the processes whereby the bereaved person adjusts to the reality of their loss, enabling them to disengage from the deceased and reinvest in new relationships (Madison, 2005). Each person reacts differently to their specific loss. Hence, the concepts of theory regarding the matter of bereavement can help predict a greater risk of complicated bereavement and even diagnosis of pathological, unresolved grief. Bad case scenarios are people who remain in denial and that can be detected when they continue in a state in which they can see, hear and even confer with the deceased. These occurrences are natural reactions that take place to comfort the bereaved. Over the years other theories have emerged, many of which have transitioned from the concept of stages to the concept of tasks.

William Worden (1982), a theorist who described the four tasks of mourning in his book *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy*, suggests that there are four tasks a bereaved person must accomplish for the process of mourning to be completed and for equilibrium to be re-established. Worden (1982) makes it clear that there is no specific order for the tasks, yet there is some kind of natural order in the completion of some tasks that assist in the completion of another task. He

acknowledges that a bereaved person may have the need to revisit certain tasks over time; the process of grief is not a linear process, and that it is difficult to determine a timeline for completing the grief tasks. Worden's tasks of mourning read as follows: to accept the reality of the loss, to work through the pain of grief, to adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing, and finally to find an enduring connection with the deceased while embarking on a new life.

The first task can be both simple and complex. There are basic ways one can accept the reality of a loss: the person undergoing bereavement begins to speak about the deceased in past tense while also undergoing completely all the rituals of the funerals and memorials. On a more complex level, there is accepting the reality of the significance of the loss. For example, one may speak of someone in the past tense and accept their death, but may restrain the importance of their relationship with that person, denying the impact the loss will have. On a basic level, a bereaved may accept the reality of the loss, but on a deeper level they haven't really fulfilled the task until they have fully accepted the depth of the relationship and its associating impact. Another common struggle is around accepting the mechanism of the death. A death that occurred due to suicide, overdose or any other intended death mechanism may result in harder challenges for the bereaved to accomplish.

Task two is working through the pain of grief; Worden's model acknowledges that each person and every loss will mean working through a range of different emotions. There are many emotions that a bereaved person can go through, from sadness, fear, loneliness, despair, hopelessness, and anger to guilt, blame, shame, relief, and countless others. The importance of this task is the understanding of these emotions, accepting them and working through them. The danger in it is when the bereaved denies his/her own feelings and avoids them. This tendency can

be intensified by society's discomfort with the feelings that accompany grief, for this reason the griever may feel like they shouldn't feel or even accept these difficult emotions.

Task three is adjusting to the environment in which now the deceased is not a part of. Worden (1982) highlights that this task means very different things to people depending on the relationship to the person who has died, as well as the roles that are impacted by the loss. This big change and readjustment will take place over an extended period of time and will require internal, external and spiritual adjustments. It will take a certain amount of time to realize the different roles the loved one performed and the internal and spiritual adjustments that are required. Widows for example, find this task extremely difficult because they may need to learn a wide array of new skills and tasks, ranging from bill payments, to sole parenting, and taking care of the home, to environmental changes such as living alone and doing things completely alone and most importantly redefining the self without the other person. This can also mean adjusting to a new spiritual environment, which may have been changed by the experience of the death. This task requires developing the necessary skills to move confidently forward in the changed environments – internet, external and spiritual.

Finally, task four is to find an enduring connection with the deceased while embarking on a new life. Worden (1982) emphasizes the importance of this task by explaining that the bereaved needs to find an appropriate, ongoing connection in his/her emotional life with the person who passed away, while allowing them to continue living. Like the other tasks, this can mean various things to various grievers. It often should mean something in common for all the grievers which is allowing for thoughts and memories while starting to have new engagements that bring happiness and pleasure; new relationships for example. According to Worden, not accomplishing this task is to not live. It is the idea that life stopped being meaningful, with a

different sense of connection to the person who has died. This last task can take a long time and be one of the hardest tasks to accomplish. In conclusion, for Worden, mourning is successfully completed when one has completed all four of these tasks.

Another theorist who discussed grief is Erich Lindermann (1940) a psychiatrist who coined the term 'grief work' after doing research on grieving survivors of the Coconut Grove tragedy. The Coconut Grove tragedy is a gunfire that took place in one of the big nightclubs in USA specifically Boston in which 492 people killed and 130 people injured (November 28, 1942) (Bostonfirehistory.org). Lindermann's study revealed the long term impact of grief and trauma. Lindermann focused his research around understanding the symptomology of grief. The common symptoms that he established are: 1) somatic distress 2) preoccupation with images of the deceased 3) guilt 4) hostile reactions 5) loss of pattern of conduct and 6) a common reaction in which traits of the deceased would appear in the bereaved person:

- In somatic distress, Lindermann explained that the bereaved undergoes difficulty in breathing, loss of appetite, loss of motivation among other symptoms.

- On the preoccupation with images of the deceased, Lindermann emphasized the fixation of images of the person who died. The bereaved would look at images of the deceased to either have difficult or positive memories. This could also mean continuously talking to or seeing the deceased.

- When it comes to feeling of guilt, Lindermann explained that the bereaved perceived that they could or should have done something to prevent the death from happening.

- Hostile reaction to others happen as Lindermann highlighted because even when grievers are being thoughtful and supportive, bereaved people feel irritable and hostile toward others (whatsyourgrief.com).

- 'Loss of pattern of conduct' is the most common symptom or reaction that grievers relate to and it is when bereaved people start feeling as though activities and tasks are chores. Grievers are often restless and don't feel like completing everyday activities.

- Finally, the sixth reaction Lindermann explored is when resemblance of the deceased start showing in the bereaved person; such as resemblance in the way they walk or in their appearance and even in the interest of hobbies. Lindermann concluded that these symptoms can be taken in immediately, be delayed, exaggerated or even be absent and that psychologists can get the bereaved person on track of a normal grief reaction (whatsyourgrief.com).

2.3 Previous Studies Behind Expressing Grief Online

Facebook today is frequently being used as a platform to pay tributes to loved ones and share memories online. What exactly is behind the psychological reasons of expressing these emotions on a virtual site?

Dr. Leeat Granek, (2013) a health psychologist who studies grief, explains that it is categorized in the minds of people in two manners: a) psychological and b) it is seen as something being expressed too short, too long, intense, not intense or not intense enough.

Granek (2013) believes that the impulse to share grief emotions is nothing new, it has always existed in people but the new trend is to express this impulse online. She mentioned how, previously, people would go over to other people's house and take with them a casserole to share emotions during loss but today the online community has taken over the physical space. Social media is replacing real community when it comes to many aspects of life, one of which is the mourning space. People find comfort in paying tributes and sharing emotions online because it is

their new found comfort zone and they have their new identities online that they feel comfortable behind screens.

Granek (2013) referred to the different types of support that mourners had received after their major loss and the study supported the hypothesis of social media being a platform that breaks the barriers of intense grief that is expressed in person. Her study explored people receiving condolences in person vs. emails, text messages, messages online and phone calls. The study confirmed that mourners appreciated the electronic support rather than the offline in person support and wanted the constant contact.

Sygrid Robert Araman (2013) submitted a thesis in Notre Dame University under the title of *The Grieving Process on Facebook in Lebanon and its Impact on the 5 Stages of Grief.* Qualitative and quantitative research was done for the thesis. For the qualitative research, a sample of six people was carefully chosen for the one-on-one interviews. As for the quantitative research, an online survey was done for 103 users ages ranging between 18 and 40. The results of the study showed that in Lebanon, Facebook is mostly an outlet to share and think out loud with your network of family, friends and acquaintances. Grieving people felt sad when exposed to a sudden appearance of a deceased friend on Facebook, so it's a platform capable of altering the feelings of the grieving person negatively. Araman (2013) found that visiting and interacting with the deceased loved one's profile page on Facebook did not affect the five stages of grief – denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

In conclusion, Araman's (2013) study describes how Facebook platform is used in the grieving practices in Lebanon, including updating a status mentioning the deceased one's name, posting words, songs, pictures or videos on their wall and sometimes sending private inbox messages. The research did not support the notion that Facebook soothes the five

stages of grief introduced by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1969), instead Facebook was capable of extending the denial phase which helped the tragic news sink in before actually facing it. The study deduced that a Lebanese virtual grieving outlet on Facebook is actually present but not as effective as it should be.

Hence, this thesis will be expanding on the study of Araman (2013) as it looks through a different theoretical lens, that of Bowlby, at the psychological aspects behind the use of Facebook as a grieving outlet. Also, it explores the shift from traditional Lebanese death rituals to electronic virtual death rituals.

In *Expressions of Grief on Facebook: Navigating Discomfort, Persistent Identity and Public Memorialization*, Molly Kalan (2013) was able to explore through in-depth interviews and theories the importance of grief on Facebook and how online communities have changed the grief and mourning rituals in 20 young adults. Kalan's choice of the Thana Technology theory alongside the grief and social media theories allowed for a comprehensive investigation of the topic. Yet, when it came to the young adult interviews, Kalan could have better picked out the respondents. More factors must be taken into consideration other than that they lost a Facebook friend; they should be able to compare between losing someone who does not have Facebook to losing someone who has Facebook; for example in my case losing my Grandma who did not have Facebook and losing a close friend who has Facebook. This can help draw important differences. Another limitation of Kalan's study is that the sample was confined to young adult college students; it did not deal with the older adults who know how it feels to mourn traditionally and how it is to mourn online. Yet, Kalan (2013) discovered the main feelings behind grieving on Facebook, which are common between all respondents – the concepts of comfort and discomfort. The idea that having communal grieving as soon as a person

dies created comfort in understanding that the person is really long gone yet as time goes by and people keep posting and reminding the Facebook viewer that the person died then causes discomfort – which is a new area to be explored.

In *The Technology of Grief: Social Networking Site as a Modern Death Ritual* by Jordan C. Fearon (2011), results indicate that creators of memorial groups are heavily invested in the technology, using the group to support the bereavement process. Using Thematic analysis, Fearon (2011) identified six themes within the personal narratives including in memoriam, connection to others, connection to the deceased, personal mourning, and culture of technology as well as a number of concerns associated with the memorial group. Surveying 68 individuals through an online questionnaire consisting of open and closed-ended questions; Fearon (2011) uncovered that 98.5 % of the study's respondents recommended the creation of a memorial group to others. Further, 59% of the respondents rated the memorial group as more helpful than other traditional death rituals. This study suggests that individuals who actively utilize technology appear to identify significant personal benefit. Facebook Memorial Groups include the necessary components of traditional rituals, as well as several advantages such as accessibility and continuity, combining to create a modern death ritual that is embraced by popular culture. The results and analyses were well interpreted yet the only lack that could have been addressed was to look at or explore a theory different from just Bowlby's because both the attachment and the grief theory discussed in this story outgrew from Bowbly's research.

2.4 Lebanese Mourning Rituals by Religion

Home to 18 religious sects, Lebanon is the most religiously diverse country in the Middle-East. The three main religions in Lebanon are as follows: Islam 60% (Sunni and Shiites)

5% of the 60% are Druze and Christianity 40% (Catholics and Orthodox) (Living-lebanon.com). The funerary traditions of the two largest religious groups will be discussed in this study, namely the traditions of the Christian Catholics and the Muslims – overlooking their funerary traditions in details would provide an idea of the processes involved in their death rituals and funerary ceremonies.

Lebanese funeral rituals may have slight differences or traditions from one area to the other, but they, in general share a number of common characteristics. Upon the death of a beloved, the immediate family members wear black. The period for wearing black depends on how close the deceased person is to the person grieving. On average, family members wear black for 40 days. In general, regardless of the religion type, Lebanese funerals are in general emotionally draining since there is crying, stress, depression, emotional behaviour and much more being shared between family members and friends. It is not an easy experience at all. Mourning is a natural process of grief but some people cannot physically handle emotions as well as others. In general, when the funeral takes place, many people overreact in front of others near the deceased body and this causes a lot of pain and emotions. It is described that most (not all) of Lebanese funerals are overly dramatic and expose too much feelings in front of elderly and children (Funeralwise.com). Of course, if the deceased is a child or a young person [they say in Lebanese terms: first years of his life] the funeral is done in a manner as if it is a wedding – with songs and shaking of coffin and sometimes even shooting depending on the village where the deceased is from. In Lebanon, a lot of media opened this as a topic of discussion that "shooting in certain villages when someone dies should be completely banned since it is dangerous and a number of people died because of this. "The laws over celebratory gunfire -

which has led to a number of accidental deaths in Lebanon - changed last year [in 2016] following public anger about the dangerous tradition" (Cusack, 2017).

Christianity, which regards death as the separation of the soul from the body, considers the body sacred because it is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Plus, the body shares in the final restoration of all creation. When one dies, friends of the deceased can call or visit the family prior to the funeral to offer condolences and memories of the deceased. The family may be greeted with the phrase "May his [or her] memory be eternal." (God have mercy on his/her soul or May he/she rest in peace). The funeral service is held at the church of the deceased with open casket, although viewing is optional. When viewing the body, Christians may kiss the cross or icon resting on the casket. After the funeral service, members of the congregation offer their farewell to the deceased. Following the funeral service, the mourners share a meal to celebrate the life of the one who died. The meal is a chance for the relatives and friends to remember their loved one in an informal setting. The memorial service is repeated, either at the church or at the grave throughout the first year: usually at the fortieth day (the official mourning period) and at the one year anniversary (Paskin, 2013).

Specifically in Lebanon the Christian funeral is as follows: The funeral consists of prayers for the dead person's soul to rest in peace. The family can choose to have the usual daily mass beforehand but this is getting out of custom these days. The funerals are followed by the condolences which happen in the church saloon (right next to the church). Depending on the age of the deceased and socio-economic situation of the family, food may or may not be offered there, but coffee is always offered to those who come give their condolences. (Reddit, 2017)

In Christianity, the deceased person needs constant prayers of family and friends that can help the soul get closer to the kingdom of eternal afterlife. For this reason funerals are followed

by the one week, forty day, and one year mass, in which family and friends go to church for mass and offer condolences in remembrance of the deceased's soul. Traditionally there are two main Sundays that happen once a year each in which the people close to the deceased can visit the grave remembering of the dead (Reddit, 2017). Details of the ceremony are as follows: when person passes over, the funeral is held on the same day, the next day or the deceased is put in a fridge in the hospital until the family decides to do the funeral in case there are family members who are abroad. The funeral begins with a mass where the deceased body is placed in church and the family and friends pray that the deceased has a peaceful transition. Once the mass is finished they take the coffin to the graveyard. After that, the family and friends receive condolences usually in the church hall. 40 days later, another mass is held to pray for the deceased's soul and condolences take place at the church hall after the mass where there is also a tradition of offering food for the guests and a small souvenir gift usually a small religious icon. During the condolences, small tiny traditions differ depending on the village or city a person is from in Lebanon. Some villages such as "Zahle" which is located in Bekaa of Lebanon, the men sit on one side of the hall and the women sit on the other side but many other villages they are mixed together when receiving condolences. The people that are at the funeral and at the 40 day memorial usually all wear black but the ones who aren't that close to the deceased might add a white colour to the clothing. Many men shake hands with women when they are offering condolences and others just place their hand on their chest.

Muslims view death as a transition from one state of being to another, not as an end. They believe that actions follow you to the afterlife. So, if you follow the law of the *Koran* and live a good life you will be rewarded in the afterlife. In death, you will be separated from the ugliness

in the world. But if you live a dishonest and bad life, you will be separated from all the beauty of the world (Funeralwise.com).

Islamic customs require the following (Funeralwise.com): The body is turned to face Mecca, the holy centre of Islam. Guests of the same sex should greet each other with a handshake and hug. A person sitting next to the body reads from the *Koran.* An Imam presides over the service. The deceased's eyes and mouth are closed. There is rarely an open casket. Guests should not take photos or use recording devices. The arms, legs, and hands of the body are stretched out in alignment with the body. The death is immediately announced to all friends and relatives. The body is bathed and covered in white cotton. Within two days following death, the body is carried to the graveyard by four men. A procession of friends and relatives follow. In Lebanon, it is preferable and common to be buried on the same day of his death. No discussion takes place at the time of burial, but all guests pray for the soul of the departed. After the body is buried, all guests go to the house of the family of the deceased. A meal is prepared and guests usually stay for the entire day. Family members may stay for the whole week. During this time, the family members socialize. It is believed that socializing helps to ease suffering. If arriving late, guests should simply join in. The mourning period officially lasts for 40 days. During that time, family members wear only black clothing. For one full year, the wife of the deceased continues to wear black, but the anniversary of the death is not observed (Paskin, 2013).

In the Islamic culture death is accepted and viewed as a natural part of life. The belief that the deceased has moved on to a pleasant afterlife is an important belief and helps the bereaved cope with their suffering (Funeralwise.com). According to Islamic law or the Shariah, the body should be buried as soon as possible from the time of death, which means that funeral planning and preparations begin immediately. A local Islamic community organization is

contacted, and they help make arrangements for the funeral service and burial, assist the family in identifying an appropriate funeral home, and coordinate with the funeral home (Everplans.com). The funeral ceremony in Lebanon for Muslims is as follows: when someone passes away the funeral can be done same day if the deceased is gone before prayer time – if the deceased is gone at night they wait for the next day or in two days maximum in case of emergency. The deceased's body is taken to a ceramic room in the grave yard where a sheikh washes the body with a piece of cloth in a specific manner and this piece of cloth is called "kafan". The body is then taken to the house or straight to the graveyard where the body is to be buried. Women pray the "fetha" alone whilst men pray when the women leave to prepare the meal. The body is placed underground with only the "kafan" covering the body and the face. The body is surrounded by rocks so the soil doesn't touch the body and then the rocks are covered with soil. At the house of the deceased in some villages mourners sit down for a meal while others only offer dark coffee and recite prayers from the "Kur'an". Condolences continue for three days or one week also depending on the village traditions. After 40 days, they pray at the deceased home or at the mosque and then offer coffee and "maamoul".

Traditionally funeral systems have been created to pay respects and condolences for family members of the deceased and pray for their souls to rest in peace. Yet as years go by it is starting to look more like a social gathering where people find the opportunity to discuss business, show off their branded clothes, and even meet new people. Every culture has its share of traditions; from what is mainly observed, the reactions that accompany Lebanese funerary rites, whether Moslem or Christian, have a dramatic element to them as people, especially those closely related to the deceased, are, at times, very vocal in their expressions which are accompanied by crying and wailing. Also, as previously mentioned, the death of a young person

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is, at times, accompanied by music, the shaking of the coffin, loud expressions of loss and incessant crying.

2.5 SNS in the Arab World

Since this thesis deals with the online expression of grief, it is important to review the use and perception of online social networking sites in the Arab world in general and in Lebanon, in particular. The 2015 Arab Social Media Report issued by Arab Social Media Summit is the first and largest research study of its kind in the Arab world aimed at determining the perceptions of the users in the Arab world vis-à-vis social media, as well as describing their social media usage/ habits. The study identifies the impact of social networking sites (SNS) on society, the economy and businesses. The report relied on both qualitative and quantitative methodology. The qualitative research module was conducted on a regional level in the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries, Yemen, the Levant, Iraq and North Africa. Focus Group Discussions with active users of social media as well as in-depth interviews with experts in relevant fields such as media / communications, economics, and government officials were conducted.

The quantitative survey was conducted through telephone interviews with a sample of more than 7000 users of social media spread evenly across 18 Arab countries. The target groups were:

- Active users of social media: Individuals aged 15+ years that currently use at least one social media channel on regular basis.

- Experts in the fields of communication media

The results showed that up to 81% believed that social media made it easier for people to connect with each other, 70% believed that social media brought people closer together, 67% found social media important to keep following up on the latest news and 41% believed that

social media help in preserving traditions and habits. More than half the users in the Arab World use social media primarily to connect with people. Gaining information, watching videos, listening to music and sharing photos came as the second top main reason for using social media. UAE was the number one Arab country in using Facebook followed by Lebanon in second place where usage was 95% whether it was accessed through a computer or any other device. 89% of all Facebook subscribers logged unto Facebook on a daily basis.

The report found that the Arab world improves connections among people by offering them a means to communicate clearly without any hassles as it reduces cross cultural and geographical boundaries. (Arab Social Media Report, 2015). Social media is a platform for many of the Arab youth to express their points of view, their creativity and their genius. Without it, other more direct forms of expression (e.g. face-to-face) would feel overwhelming for certain young Arab individuals. The importance of freedom of expression is seen to be more salient in the Levant countries than in the remaining regions (Arab Social Media Report, 2015).

Perhaps the most worrying consequences of the excessive use of social media are ironically social. Social media lowers the frequency of personal meetings and visits, hence leading to weaker connections and relations in society, even among family members. Another worrying aspect is that nowadays the Arab youth - across all regions and countries - are 'living in an illusionary world, a virtual reality' (Arab Social Media Report, 2015). This reinforces the need for escapism from society instead of enabling these individuals to become more sociable. These individuals spend more time with virtual friends than with family and real friends. Excessive use of social media also causes addiction across the Arab World. Obsession with social media is seen to distance people from performing basic duties such as prayer, outing with

parents, and others. As such, this is considered detrimental to the culture and family values (Arab Social Media Report, 2015).

Sygrid Robert Araman (2013) performed an online survey with Lebanese Facebook users aged 18-40. The results read as follows: Most users experienced grieving on Facebook through a family member or a friend (67%). Other people's comments provided them with support (36%), affection (19%), and attention [the regarding of someone as interesting or important] (17%). When any content related to the deceased was viewed on Facebook such as a picture, activity or post about a deceased friend or family member on his/her newsfeed or on the side of the panel, 64% felt sad whereas 33% had answers such as "happy to remember good times, curious, weird, disgusted, agonized, compassionate, inappropriate, uncomfortable, affected or mad by seeing other people still thinking about this person". None of the participants felt scared when viewing these posts, only 1% felt better and around 12% were shocked. 62% never wrote on the Facebook profile page of a deceased loved one. When asked about what types of comments they usually wrote when commenting on a Facebook's profile page of a deceased loved one, almost 36% replied that they never did, followed by expressing grief and loss (23%) and sharing memories (22%).

The most common tool used to grieve according to Araman's online survey (2013) is status updates mentioning the deceased loved one's name (41%), and then posting on the deceased person's wall (31%). Yet, 65% stated that Facebook does not aid in the grieving process and 80% did not feel closer to the deceased when in contact with him/her on Facebook. 85% did not feel a positive mood shift when sharing their grief on Facebook

All these previous results come into the conclusion that grieving people or users do not see Facebook as a substitute or a supplement for counseling or group comforting sessions. Only a few confirm that during grieving time (Araman, 2013).

2.6 Virtual Memorial Groups and Types of Virtual Mourning

The Internet world stats – usage and population statistics reported in its latest study in June 2017 that in Lebanon which has a population of 6,039,277, there are 3,100,000 Facebook users or almost half the population. Facebook is indeed a popular social media website in the Lebanese society (Internet users in the Middle East, 2017). Yet how the Lebanese use Facebook as a virtual memorial cite has only been studied by Araman in 2013.

Brubaker (2013) found that Facebook creates a new setting for death and grieving – one that is broadly public with an ongoing integration into daily life. As Facebook has become a common site for connecting with friends and reaching out to others for a sense of support and connection, it is understandable that it has also become a site to express grief and bereavement (Fearon, 2011, p. 39). The practice of developing a memorial group for friends and family members who have passed away has gained popularity recently. The creation of Facebook memorial groups can have many purposes including providing a common space to share information, connect with other individuals who are grieving, and maintain connections with the deceased (Roberts, 2004). While memorial groups differ depending on the creator's intention, most memorial groups involve a combination of information about the deceased including pictures, prayers, and comments by members. The groups can be open to the general Facebook public or closed to members of the group depending on preference settings. Additionally, members can be active participants within the group or simply establish their connection to the

deceased through membership. Memorial groups appear to allow multiple users to share feelings and experiences, expressing grief in ways that may not be possible in face to face interaction (Roberts, 2004).

Writing to the deceased and seeing that others experience the same emotions can be beneficial within the grieving process (DeGoot, 2009). The mourning individual continues to share life events in line with habits established before the loss, which maintains relational continuity between the user and the deceased. The creation and membership of an SNS memorial group represents a new mourning ritual within the bereavement process. Socially prescribed rituals or grief scripts are "dynamic and adapted according to changes in the social environment" (Howarth, 2007, p. 25). As society incorporates new media as a component of social relationships, the advent of online grieving becomes more relevant. SNS Memorial Groups become another act that brings wholeness and meaning following death.

It is estimated that there are around one million Facebook users that have profiles still open on Facebook but they are no longer alive. Facebook is now working on "Facebook ghosts" in which after the death of a certain individual the personal page is then turned into a memorial page, a space for family and friends to express their condolences. These pages also allow for the Facebook friends of the deceased to receive notifications of the deceased activity such as memories of photos, statuses and other posts (Wernick, 2014).

"People have talked to the deceased for as long as we can remember, it's just that we never before listened in. Social network memorials have allowed us to do this," says Candi Cann (2014), a religion professor at Baylor University. "It's not the conversation that's different; it's the fact that it is now public." The language that people use on social networks is very similar to the language we might hear at a gravesite, Cann (2014) says. Mourners speak as though there is

an audience: the deceased person. On social media "people address the deceased as if he or she is continuing to live and is continuing to be the recipient of these messages." Facebook also has an option in which a person can memorialize a page. "You can contact the company and have it shut down, and it basically just becomes frozen in time," Cann (2014) says. What is happening is that in most cases, the page isn't getting shut down and family and friends continue to constantly post messages. This social media reality is mending the traditional social norms regarding grief and mourning, Cann (2014) says that "Funerals and weddings always reflect the hierarchy of the relationships of that particular person. Now, everyone is equal. Everyone has equal access to the deceased."

When people have open access to post as they like and as freely as how they feel for the individual or family closest to the deceased, this can create some sort of social awkwardness and maybe even upset them. Cann (2014) gives an example about a woman whose husband died and she found it disturbing because a lot of his friends were posting online condolences to him and not her. "She felt that she was the one who was grieving the most – shouldn't they be addressing her?" Cann (2014) says. People weren't sending her letters; instead they were communing together on her husband's Facebook page. That was bothersome to her since she was the one suffering from his loss the most.

Another kind of new social media mourning ritual that been expressed is what Cann calls "visual rthetoric." This is comprised of photos of the deceased person with the griever; this automatically makes the person posting the photo symbolize their right to grieve and expresses closeness with the deceased. Sometimes it even goes farther when people post photos of the deceased in their casket – "funeral selfies" are absurd and hold a whole different discussion, Cann (2014) says. Still, Cann (2014) believes funeral selfies are just a kind of replication of the

arm band or the mourning clothing. They express a desire to be recognized as someone who is grieving. Even though funeral selfies appear strange and something new, Cann (2014) feels that they have existed in other traditional forms therefore they are not really out of context, just a virtual way of expression. Even when it comes to the concept of photography Cann (2014) points out, death photography has been happening since 150 years ago – the difference is that now the platform is changing from a traditional frame to a posted photo on Facebook or Twitter.

2.7 Information and Internet Support Groups

There are numerous websites that deal with grief and loss which provide fundamental information about the mourning process, message boards, and books about grief and chat rooms which offer the opportunity for online discussions between people who have experienced similar losses (Pearlman, 2014). The unique characteristic about these groups is that they offer anonymity and a variety of other reasons that may be difficult for a survivor to find elsewhere. Gilbert and Horsley point out that discussion over the internet is important for grievers who do not feel comfortable in social situations. They give the example of a person whose loved one committed suicide, since one of the reasons during their mourning process is blaming themselves, they are uncomfortable facing someone in person to discuss their feelings therefore the internet provides a comfortable space to do so (Pearlman, 2014). Mourners that have lost someone in a similar manner as other mourners somehow can find each other and set each other at ease by communicating and sharing their experiences. This can put the griever at ease since it shows that he/she is not the only one passing through this experience, there are many others.

An increasingly important source of support for the bereaved is information found through the Internet. As Stroebe, van der Houwen and Schut (2008) noted, there is a diverse number of Internet sources that offer support for the grievers. Many clients find the internet as a

source of treatment to seek information on how to heal before going to a psychologist. Sofka and colleagues (2012) argue that modern technology has a deep and positive influence on how bereavers look at grief and how they will try to come to terms with it. There are two broad categories of internet sources that can provide support and relief for bereaved individuals: sites providing information about grief or online support groups, and sites serving primarily to memorialize or pray tribute to the deceased (Pearlman, 2014).

This literature provided some main findings that are to be taken into consideration for this study. Kubler-Ross (1997) 5 stages of grief identify that a bereaved person undergoes specific stages consecutively to be able to cope with loss and reach the ultimate healthy state of acceptance. At first a bereaved person denies the loss of the deceased later entering into a bargaining phase in which he/she promises God of good behaviour or life changes in exchange to get the loss back. Later, when the bargaining is obviously not met the bereaved person undergoes depression and lastly according to Kubler-Ross (1969) the bereaved person makess peace with the deceased and accepts that loss is a part of life. Worden (1982) suggests that there are four tasks a bereaved person must accomplish for the process of mourning to be completed and get back to equilibrium. Worden believes that the process of grief is not a linear process - there is no specific order of the tasks, and some people may have the need to revisit certain tasks several times in order to reach a healthy state. The four tasks read as follows: to accept the reality of the loss, to work through the pain of grief, to adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing, and finally to find an enduring connection with the deceased while embarking on a new life.

The study of Granek (2013) confirmed that mourners appreciated the electronic support rather than the offline in person support and wanted the constant contact. Granek (2013)

emphasized that people find comfort in paying tributes and sharing emotions online because it is their new found comfort zone and they have their new identities online that they feel comfortable behind screens. Araman (2013) analysed that Facebook platform is used in the grieving practices in Lebanon including updating a status mentioning the deceased loved one's name, posting words, songs, pictures or videos on their wall and sometimes sending private inbox messages. In addition, support of other users in the Facebook community helps the grieving person by showing love and affection. However, Araman's (2013) research does not support that Facebook soothes the 5 stages of grief instead she discovered in her study that Facebook was capable of extending the denial phase which helped the tragic news sink in before actually facing it. Araman (2013) deduced that a Lebanese virtual grieving outlet on Facebook is actually present but not as effective as it should be. Kalan (2013) discovered the main feelings behind grieving on Facebook; which are common between all respondents – the concepts of comfort and discomfort. The idea that having communal grieving as soon as a person dies created comfort in understanding that the person is really long gone yet as time goes by and people keep posting and reminding the Facebook viewer that the person died then causes discomfort. Fearon's (2011) research suggests that individuals who actively utilize technology appear to identify significant personal benefit. Facebook Memorial Groups include the necessary components of traditional rituals, as well as several advantages such as accessibility and continuity, combining to create a modern death ritual that is embraced by popular culture.

The literature provided details of Lebanese funeral rituals and ceremony for both of the largest religious groups in Lebanon: Christians and Moslem. The rituals have many things in common yet several details that differ. The ceremony and rituals demand a lot of effort, emotions, and constant dramatic exposures.

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According to the Arab Media Report (2015), Lebanon takes second place in the Arab region for Facebook users - where usage is 95% whether it was accessed through a computer or any other device. Social media is a shield and an enabler of expression and creativity: Without it, other more direct forms of expression (e.g. face-to-face) would feel overwhelming for certain young Arab individuals.

Last but not least, according to Cann (2014), social media reality is mending the traditional social norms regarding grief and mourning. The language that people use on social networks is very similar to the language we might hear at a gravesite. And finally Pearlman (2014) pointed out that there are numerous websites that deal with grief and loss which provide fundamental information about the mourning process, message boards, and books about grief and chat rooms which offer the opportunity for online discussions between people who have experienced similar losses.

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Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Many theorists have explored Grief and its different stages (Lindemann 1944, Kübler-Ross 1969, Parkes 1975, Bowlby 1980, Worden 1982, Stroebe and Schut, 1995). Erich Lindermann, a psychiatrist who coined the words 'grief work' is one of the earliest researchers to reveal the long term impact of trauma and grief. Influenced by Lindermann, the rest of the theorists expanded research around grief; this includes Kubler's stages of grief, and Bowlby's Attachment Theory. This chapter first explains grief theory and how it was developed from Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory. After many theorists worked on the 'grief work' theory and the idea of stages and tasks; Stroebe and Schut (1995) criticized the grief work theories stating that they had imprecise definitions, they worked on western-based cultures, they didn't take into consideration the difference between females and males way of expression.

3.1 Grief Theory

Bowlby (1961) developed a theory of grief from his research on attachment and separation. Bowlby defines grief in terms of the loss of attachment figures whereas the "rupture leads to separation anxiety and grief and sets in train processes of mourning" (Bowlby, 1961, p. 317). Initially, he proposed three stages of grief, which outline the work of grief, including: (a) yearning and searching, (b) disorganization and despair, and (c) reorganization. An additional phase, numbness, which became the first phase of the model, was introduced at a later date (Bowlby, 1980). Bowlby's research was further illustrated by Parkes (1986) who formalized his research and described the stages in-depth:

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Numbness: Numbness represents the first phase of grief, categorized by a blunting of feelings and state of shock (Parkes, 1970). When an individual goes through rapid changes without understanding what is happening around him/her, the person is then in a state of shock. Too many emotions, expectations, behaviours, and requirements are experienced simultaneously (Fearon, 2011, p.19). When a griever can't handle the harshness of loss, he/she undergoes a sense of numbness in order to filter out all the distressing input (Bowlby, 1980). While this disbelief and disregard for the loss cannot be sustained over time, it allows the individual time to emotionally accept the consequences of the situation and begin to understand the meaning associated with the loss (DeGroot, 2009). The feelings of shock and numbness typically last up to a week; however, they may return at other points within the grieving process (Parkes, 1970). Numbness is a stage that is best defined by a temporary coping phase that helps the individual process the loss in an emotional and cognitive manner with time (Fearon, 2011, p.19).

Yearning, Searching and Anger: After the individual undergoes the harsh feeling of loss, he/she then undergoes a phase of disequilibrium. The person is starting to integrate the meaning of loss as well as feeling it and it can last for months or years. Wishing for the deceased to come back to life and experiencing impossibility of the wish leads to anger and crying. A study conducted by Parkes (1970) following twenty-two widows noted the presence of motor-hyperactivity, being drawn to places associated with their husbands, and a conscious urge to search for their husbands during this time period. The grieving individual may move toward possible locations of the lost attachment figure in an attempt to reduce the sense of distress. For example, sitting in corners of the house in which the deceased used to sit or visiting common places that the bereaved understands these places were the deceased favourite places to be and might find this lost soul there. This searching behaviour might seem illogical or irrational but it

is defended by a biological purpose. When the individual is in continuous search for the lost

loved one it then creates exhausting energy as well as continuous disappointment when the

deceased is not to be found. The act of searching is recognized as a motor act, perceptual

mechanisms are also available. (Bowlby, 1980)

Disorganization and despair. When acceptance of loss and distress occur, the third phase

of grief is then represented. When an individual experiences loss of another, this results in

personal shifts and changes and the person starts to redefine himself/herself. This is often

accompanied by a sense of hopelessness and despair. Bowlby (1980) notes that this phase is

important to the development of new patterns. Routines and past behaviours are no longer useful

and the individual should accept the loss of the deceased before he/she is able to reorganize

his/her life. It is extremely difficult for the individual to maintain actions, routines, and

expectations and will therefore create dysfunction and uneasiness in engaging with the world.

The grieving individual's life will be filled with void which causes inner despair and a sense of

isolation. (Fearon 2011, p.21)

Reorganization. Reorganization and recovery is the final stage of grief according to

Bowlby (1980). This final phase is defined as a transitional phase between a tangible connection

with the individual and an abstract sense of the individual. Bowlby (1980) suggested that the

individual during this stage is able to create a new personal narrative by making sense of the loss.

The bereaved learned to manage the pain of the loss and is now able to able to adapt to life

without the attachment figure. The feeling of loss has altered the individual's emotional,

cognitive, psychological, social and spiritual characteristics (DeGroot, 2009). Bowlby (1980)

noted that "the resolution of grief is not to sever bonds but to establish a changed bond with the

dead person" (p. 399). The resolution of grief is not to remove the connection with the deceased, but rather, to maintain the bond in a new and reorganized manner.

3.2 Attachment Theory

The Attachment Theory was first suggested by Bowlby in 1969, who described attachment as "lasting psychological connected news between human beings." Bowlby (1980) believed that there are four distinguishing characteristics of attachment: Proximity Maintenance, Safe Haven, Secure Base and Separation Distress:

- Proximity maintenance is the desire to be near the people we are attached to.

- Safe Haven is the idea of returning to the attachment for comfort and safety in the face of fear or threat.

- Secure base is the attachment figure that acts as a base of security from which the child can explore the surrounding environment.

- Separation distress is the anxiety that occurs in the absence of the attachment figure.

Whether an individual exposes a healthy or problematic progress during the process of grief depends on the way his/her attachment system has been organized over the course of development. Bowlby (1980) argues that attachments develop early in life and offer security as well as survival for the individual. When affection attachments are broken or lost, individuals experience distress and emotional disturbances such as anxiety, crying and anger.

3.3 Dual Process Model of Grief Theory

The Dual Process Model of grief theory is a dynamic model in which the person oscillates between loss, orientation and restoration. This theory suggests that the person in grief will focus on restoring himself/herself through certain plans and activities because focusing on the loss becomes too much to tolerate. Both directions are sources of stress, are burdensome and

are associated with distress and anxiety. The coping task may not be to return to previous levels of functioning but to negotiate meaningful life without the deceased. In 1995 Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut presented "The Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement" paper that outlined their theory at the meeting of the International Work Group on Death, Dying and Bereavement. This theory encouraged grief academics to put it to the test and observe its real life application when working with grievers. Stroebe and Schut (1995) criticized other grief work theories in their paper by stating that they had imprecise definitions, failure to presents characteristics of grieving, lack of empirical evidence and validation across cultures as well as a limited focus on intrapersonal processes and on health outcomes (whatsyourgrief.com).

In Dual Process Model (DPM), one main point is questioning the way that the grief work theories deal with avoidance, denial and repression. In the Grief Work Theory model, it is stated that a griever must face his/her own pain, yet this is emotionally and physically exhausting. A healthy way to grieve is to avoid, deny or suppress the certain aspects of grieving. Stroebe and Schut (1995) also point out in their paper that the grief work theory mainly focuses on the female experience rather than the male experience; the female is more expressive and has a higher will to confront difficult situations.

Compared to the grief work theory, DPM is more inclusive and complete since it does not only focus on the western medical model. Stroebe and Schut's paper critiques the grief work theories in that they fail to specify the stressors of bereavement. The Dual Process Model as suggested by its authors has two types of stressors that are related to grieving: loss-oriented stressors and restoration-oriented stressors; DPM defines loss-oriented stressors as stressors that originate from processing and focusing on the loss of bereaved as well as the relationship a person had with him/her. These stressors include reminiscing, looking at old photographs, and

yearning, going through memories and imagining what a loved one would say or do in certain situations. On the other hand, restoration-oriented is concerned with secondary sources of stress and the idea of coping. Therefore, unlike other grief theories, DPM theory reflects the stress of feelings that come from isolation and understanding the stress of having to fulfill the tasks that the bereaved used to do such as managing finances, cooking, doing house chores and other activities. This is the same as the concept of dealing with secondary losses that occur after someone dies yet in a more complete manner. A fundamental point of the DPM is the idea of oscillation. Grieving in a healthy manner means undergoing an active process of fluctuating between loss-oriented and restoration oriented coping meaning a griever will oscillate between facing loss and avoiding the loss. The main idea around the Dual Process Model of Grief is that it is okay to experience grief in doses. There are times when a bereaved person will face his/her loss head-on, other times they will focus on fulfilling practical needs and life tasks, once in a while they will need to take a break or find relief. This is why self-care in a grief process is most talked about.

Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement

FIGURE 1 A dual process model of coping with bereavement.

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3.4 Hypotheses and Research Questions

To better understand the grieving experience process that people go through and how it has shifted from offline to an online behaviour for people to mourn the late on social media pages, two research questions and two hypotheses were formulated:

Research Question 1:

After the death of a family member or a friend, people close to the deceased create (or maintain) Facebook pages that give the feeling as if the person is still alive by posting photos and commenting back to peers. Do the online social media memorials bring comfort to the family and peers of the deceased?

H1: An active Facebook profile of deceased is more likely to create high levels of healing comfort.

Research Question 2:

There are certain people in the stages of their mourning process who stay in a long time at the yearning and searching phase. Memorial groups online provide a platform for constant sharing of memories, notifications of the deceased's birthday date and other information as well as constant sharing of emotions and condolences between peers; do they help the bereaved become more accepting towards the idea that death has really occurred or do they keep them stuck in the yearning and searching phase?

H2: Memorial groups lead to the strengthening of the yearning and searching stage of a mourning person.

Research Question 3:

Since the young generation have created their online identities and shifted to a virtual world when it comes to spending most of their time on social media networks as well as

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communicating and socializing online, have their traditional death rituals which were partly

shifted from an offline behaviour to that of an electronic one helped them express their grief in a

healthy manner?

H3: Electronic death rituals lead to unrealistic expressions of grief and hence do not aid in

reaching the restoration-oriented factors.

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Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter describes why qualitative research method was chosen for this thesis. It discusses the research method, the concepts chosen for this thesis as well as the research sample and research tool. The chapter finally discusses research analysis.

4.1 Research Method

The research design method chosen for the subject under study is a qualitative research design. Qualitative research emphasizes understanding process through the eyes of a participant, gathering meaning through the course of research (Creswell, 2009, p. 175). A study that demands an in-depth understanding of reasons behind certain actions and how these actions manipulated both thoughts and certain habits; in this case grieving online and how it made the bereaved person feel, think as well as create change in ritual habits – this psychographic information is in need of a fundamental qualitative method. Qualitative research will help develop deep psychological understanding of why and how grieving on Facebook happens. Qualitative analysis entails detailed interviews and in-depth comprehensive observations meanwhile quantitative research is statistical, enjoying both words and numbers (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.8). Qualitative research studies can provide details about human behaviours, emotion, and personality characteristics that quantitative studies cannot match. Qualitative data includes information about user behaviours, needs, desires, routines, and a variety of other essential information. For the research using a qualitative method to be fully credible, depends on the ability and efforts of the researcher to bring out as many correct and honest in-depth answers as possible, and to have an art and science behind asking the questions and observing in ways without manipulating any setting or answer. Hence, in-depth interviews have been completed with specific Lebanese Facebook users who have experience grief on their platforms.

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4.2 Conceptualization

Three main concepts of the theories that will be used in this study are:

- The stages of grief developed by Bowlby which were derived from the attachment theory: (a) yearning and searching, (b) disorganization and despair, and (c) reorganization The in-depth explanation formulated by Parkes (1970) is going to be basic grounds for the research under study

- The Dual Process Model by Stroebe and Schut also provides a main concept for this study - the idea of oscillation between restoration-oriented factors and loss-oriented factors. The research will highlight the concept of DPM that tries to understand the fluctuation between reminiscing by looking at old photographs, sharing memories and etc. and the idea of coping.

- The third main concept is looking at the traditional death rituals reviewed in the literature vis-à-vis the practices of online death rituals performed so understand if this shift is a providing a platform to grieve in an unrealistic manner.

4.3 Research Sample

Ten in-depth interviews were conducted with Lebanese people who had previously experienced the death of a Facebook friend or family member. Five of the Lebanese respondents were Muslims and the other five were Christians. Lebanese people from the two biggest religious groups in Lebanon were chosen to be able to look at the different mourning rituals that these two religions have and whether these rituals change or are the same online. The sample under study includes people who have already passed through the experience of grieving, both in reality and virtually, over a deceased family member or friend. The interviewees would provide the in-depth explanations behind their actions – what made them undergo the behaviour of grieving online

and how it made them feel. The interview questions were aimed at understanding how and why rituals of a certain culture, in this case, grief rituals in a Lebanese culture, are moved to the digital world. Might it be more comfortable for the person to share his/her grief behind the screen than at a funeral site? Might it be emotionally disturbing for some to keep reading posts on Facebook after the deceased has been long gone? It is then that we are able to see how the person in grief is able to really contemplate and accept that the person close to their hearts is really far gone while being connected with their online identities and other mourners virtually. Interview subjects were voluntary participants for this research project, willing to speak about their experiences with grief and memorialization on Facebook.

The interviewee was selected due to having experienced a death loss to someone very close to them whether a family or a friend and they are active on SNS sites. I approached them face-to-face with a brief summary about the thesis study and the reason behind my research (Brief found in Appendix). Every interview took around thirty to forty-five minutes. The interviews took place locally, in a somewhat private setting. Interviews were held at my work office in a quiet setting or at university premises in quiet settings such as an empty classroom. The interviews were conducted in 2017 between the months of May and June with classmates aged between 24 and 40; they were easy to approach and supportive since they were able to appreciate the importance of research for this. The questionnaires were done individually, not part of a focus group; they were recorded and the interviewee was notified of the recording and asked for confirmation of what they said or expressed. There was a paper-based interview guide that was followed. Since semi-structured interviews often contain open-ended questions and discussions which may diverge from the interview guide; it was generally best to tape-record the interviews and later transcript these tapes for analysis. [Interview Guide found in Appendix]

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4.4 Research Tool

An in-depth semi structured interview is a form of interview in which the interviewer has a set of questions ready yet they tend not to be so specific allowing for a range of possible responses (Cohen, 2006). Hence, verbal interchanges occur when the interview attempts to elicit information from the interviewee (Patton, 2002). So even though the questions seem to be prepared they are asked in a conversational manner in order to widen the opportunities to pursue issues the interviewer feels are important. A semi-structured interview is seen to be the most beneficial research tool for a qualitative method since it allows the participants to express their views in their own terms and widens new topics of discussions. Its flexibility in open-ended questions makes the interviewee feel comfort in answering questions without limitations or borders to their answers (Cohen, 2006). Semi-structured interviews can provide reliable, comparable qualitative date. The interview was divided into a number of sections; the first dealt with the demographics, with questions, for instance, about a person's religious belief and their gender. The second section of the interview dealt with grief expression on SNS to question whether SNS are the proper media for grief vs. real life grief processes and finally the last section of the interview dealt with the value of the experience to examine how they have grieved previously through memorial groups and what they gained.

4.5 Data Analysis

As mentioned above, one type of research technique was used to understand whether there is a behavioural shift from offline memorial to online memorials and how it made people feel during their mourning phase; this type of research technique is a qualitative one. The data provided was analysed thematically using the three main concepts mentioned. The answers are then analysed and compared and contrasted with the studies found in the literature. Results

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would either support or not support the hypothetical assumptions as stated in the three

hypotheses.

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Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis

The responses from respondents allowed an understanding of their in-depth thoughts on grieving online vs. offline. These responses are explored in relation to the literature review and theories explored in this thesis. Many theorists such as Bowlby and Parkes have theorized on grief stages that a person who lost a loved one goes through and the answers of the respondents corresponded to many of those stages yet it is important to note that not all respondents undergo the same stages as each other depending on the character, history, religion and culture of the respondents as well as on the closeness to the deceased. The findings in this chapter are divided into three main sections: Expression of Grief on a SNS, Online Mourning Comfort and Reality Rituals vs. Online Rituals.

5.1 Use of Facebook as a Medium to Express Grief

Most interviewees found that grieving on social networking sites helped them deal with the pain of the loss, the guilt they felt and the missed interaction they could have and should have had with the deceased. They see it as a platform of sharing expressions and emotions with others in order to get rid of a load of pain felt vis-à-vis dealing with these issues on their own. Many believe it is an effective platform for people who live abroad and have the need to share condolences, memories and thoughts to close family and friends of the deceased. Many also see it as an effective tool to show people that duties have been paid and a condolence had been offered if there is no time to attend a funeral and go through the traditional rituals – online is an easier access and relieves the guilt.

JB, a 34-year-old female, married with three children; lost her brother, a martyr in the Lebanese army. She checks Facebook daily, usually for around 5 minutes several times a day; in

which she checks the news feed, post birthday wishes, and comments/likes on friends or family's posts. JB explained that she felt comfort when she expresses herself on Facebook. It takes off of her a heavy load to write her feelings online. When JB is in pain and she's sharing her pain online, it feels easier for her to cope with her feelings. She understands that social media is a platform where you can share and communicate with a big number of people in a short time. She said that a person does not know the blessing or appreciate the value in life before he/she loses that blessing; hence, when her brother was alive she never had the chance to talk to him as much as she does now. She read a quote to me that said: "Dead people receive more flowers than the living ones." She explains that people are regretful not grateful. She feels guilty that she talks to him about things now while he is dead and that she should have talked to him the same amount of subjects and conversations and topics when he was alive. Now she does it more often and through Facebook. Her answers express how Facebook gives her the feeling of a comforting platform for her times of grief because she feels less pain when she shares her thoughts – knowing that her Facebook friends are connected and reading what she is writing.

PK, a 35-year-old married woman who lost an old friend; was asked about how she personally experienced interacting with someone's profile after they died and the types of emotions she expressed on Facebook. She answered that this is the good part about Facebook - you can actually screen whatever information you want to expose. She wrote down and deleted many posts, and then finally chose to post something brief. But through this process, she felt like she let out her feelings through the writings. "At the end we all take out our feelings in different ways, some choose to write, whilst some prefer to expose them out loud or through actions", she said. She explained that when they are alive you don't always tell them how we feel about them or reflect on memories as often. When they pass away you feel like you have a last chance to

speak out your feelings towards that person. She believes that SNS allows for expression through writing and when you write it relaxes you and takes out some of the pain in you. It is as if it's your last chance to express your feelings since they are gone. Then she was asked "How do you feel about someone's Facebook profile remaining online or taken offline after they die?" and answered "I am with the idea of it forever existing. Somehow it's like a tombstone or a graveyard that you can visit at any time you would like to", she said "Especially for the people abroad." SNS are also a place of expression for people living abroad since they can't be back home to express what they feel with their loved ones. She was also asked to describe the way she interacts with other friends or family members of the deceased person on their Facebook profile and she answered that simply by clicking the button "like" on their posts regarding the deceased she is letting them know that their feelings are being heard and seen and someone out there is feeling with them too. It's as simple as consoling them when you listen to them face to face.

DM, a 27-year-old who lost a friend a couple of years ago and he was a priest who is part of her network at work. She was not in Lebanon when she went on Facebook to find out the news that he had passed away. She shared a picture of her with him on Facebook with caption writing about him. She explained that when she is overloaded it is an "easy access" way to send out condolences online and pay duties. She also explains that it is a beneficial platform for a memorial group – she likes the idea of being able to go to a deceased person's page and check their timeline from time to time which includes their previous posts and common photos.

5.2 Comfort of Online Mourning

A second finding derived in this thesis is that people feel that in mourning virtually they are spared the negative emotional journey that they can go through when mourning during the

traditional funerary rituals. . Many of the interviewees explained that the comfort is in going through less emotional stress when it is dealt with online than in a tangible setting. Many of the interviewees also believe that it gives them comfort to mourn online because they get the feeling that the person was really reading the posts they wrote although they know for a fact that they were not.. In Bowlby's stages of grief it is stated that that one of the stages is yearning and searching which is a stage where disequilibrium is experienced following a loss. During this stage Bowlby explains that the individual begs for the deceased to come back and searches for the deceased in certain areas and the deceased is not to be found for this reason it created restless energy especially when they get their wishes broken. The following respondents pointed out that when mourning on social media they feel they are actually texting the long gone person; they know that a reply would not happen but they felt that when they write on their pages the person is actually receiving every word and this comforts or eases the pain during that specific stage of grief. It gives comfort to people to be able to provide condolences behind a screen than to see the family members face to face and talk to them. In reality when searching for the deceased vs. through their Facebook profile, they could still find the deceased, their photos, their posts and still see people communicating with them but in reality the person does not exist. The psychological fact that virtually the person still exists and people other than the person himself or herself were still communicating with the deceased profile gives rest during that stage of grief and seem to lessen the amount of restless energy that Bowlby spoke about in the grief theory.

RC, a 26-year-old single male who works in the digital industry and spends hours on social media, lost one of his closest friends. RC mentioned he would rather visit the deceased Facebook page instead of visiting their grave because when going to someone's grave there is a lot of emotional trauma happening there. He added that when seeing a photo there would be

some emotional distress but visiting a grave has a much higher sense of death whereas online it is less stressful .

AH, a 28-year-old male who had deactivated Facebook but had been a very active user, lost a very close friend. AH believes SNS has changed everything and people's interactions are getting less emotional. They are becoming less close to each other so expressing online becomes less attentive and easier for people therefore there is less distress and drama. AH provided a practical view of mourning on Facebook – to him it was not about people avoiding a stressful experience but about people's lessened interaction with each other. In this case, Facebook becomes a more practical tool that saves people the time, energy and perhaps the emotional stress required to pay one's condolences.

JB believes that people are aware of the virtual world being unrealistic yet they still find comfort in making it seem real. For instance she explained that the week before the interview she had played a game on Facebook which mentions the following: "if you want to receive a message from Heaven choose the person and they will send you a message" she explained that she shared the post. She said "I know it's just a game but just imagining that these are my brother's words for me makes me feel better – I miss him!" "For a second I believed it was him even though deep inside I know it is not! Yet I feel that if he had the chance to say something to me he would say those exact words."

CM, is a 26-year-old who experienced grief online after someone he knew passed away (prefers to keep the relation to the deceased anonymous). As soon as that person passed away, CM checked Facebook and wanted to post something for him – as soon as he saw other people posting he felt confident and posted. He said that he attended the funeral yet shared feelings on Facebook. CM explains that he feels more confident communicating online than face-to-face

especially when it comes to a first encounter type of communication or exposing of feelings. He said that in real life during the grieve period he had a lot of sad emotions and wasn't able to express himself to the maximum but online he can write whatever he thinks about comfortably.

5.3 Value of Traditional Mourning vs. Online Mourning

A third finding is that mourning on Facebook may not be sincere. There are individuals who pretend to be grieving on Facebook just for the fact of showing "I used to know this person". Virtual bereavement therefore was found to be a less serious way of grieving in Lebanon.. Some people posted on Facebook not to lessen their distress yet to get a large amount of likes and attention. The Dual Process Model of Grief theory by Stroebe and Schut states that a person oscillates between less orientation and restoration. During this phase the person in grief is finding meaning in loss and focusing on the restoration plans. The individual seeks to find a meaningful life without the deceased. Yet that process may be disrupted if the posts on the memorial group keep being posted in an exaggerated manner; this slows down the process of restoration. People post exaggerated posts and meaningless dramatized quotes and sayings on the deceased photos which in turn harms the person in a bereavement process.

EM, a 39-year-old, experienced grief online due to a loss of a friend. His deceased friend still has an active page on Facebook. EM explained that the Facebook profile does not reflect who a person is. In a profile, people show the best and positive parts of them. When they look sad or have a bad day and they want to post something, they use filters and post happy statuses. EM thinks what you see on Facebook is only 25% of the reality of the person. EM added that the value of grieving is when you feel sad and you feel hurt, you go to the family and the relatives of this person and stand by their side during the tough times. Everyone feels sad when someone passes away yet the real value lies in being there with the people in grief during

harsh circumstances. "I'm an old-school person and I remember few weeks ago I took a picture of this Leaflet announcing the death of the Lebanese novelist – Emily Nusrallah – I saw the leaflet around the American University on the wall and I felt that this is something that maybe we are witnessing before it perishes it is fading away." "Yes it has a meaning and it has an impact it shocks you and sometimes it becomes more like a wake up alert when you see the black and white paper declaring the death of someone and it shakes you." He explains that the tangible leaflet gives more meaning than a post online of someone passing away. "Online it doesn't, it just passes like any other post." he said. EM also feels that people grieve online differently than they grieve offline. He believes that online everyone seems active when it comes to memorialization, but in real life he doesn't think everyone attends the funeral or any other memorial event. "Everyone just comments but in a funeral only the close people come" he explained. Finally, he said that what people post are not always so true maybe someone isn't so close to the deceased but they comment as if he/she is a best friend.

AM believes people exaggerate on social media especially when it comes to announcing someone's death or offering condolences. Yet all of that may be done without them actually participating in the funerary services. So the emotions expressed do not translate in real life – but are a mere exaggeration of how they actually feel.

ND a 29-year-old lost a friend last year. ND does not believe in interacting virtually. She finds that such forms of interaction are not real; she does not believe in virtual communication. She added that interacting physically has more meaning. "When the person is in front of you they can't hide feelings but when they are behind a screen and they type something they might be laughing or lying to you but it is not transparent. When he's in front of you, you can tell" she explained.

DM stressed on exaggeration when it comes to memorialization – she believes it's the trend to go with the flow. People post even if they don't know the person. They over-post for celebrities even if they haven't heard much about them.

JD thinks grieving is very personal. No one grieves like the other person; everyone has their own way but she has a general point of view that most of the Lebanese people when someone dies and they know him they start posting pictures and talking about them just to say that "we know this person" but deep inside she doesn't know how much they really miss that person or how sad they really are, they might be sad but they exaggerate. "Even online they grieve for two or three days and then five days later they post a picture dancing in the club so you see that it's not grieving …" she said.

AN, 23-year old who lost his cousin during a war experienced grief online. AN said that after his cousin passed away, his family changed his Facebook name from "Mohammad" to "Al-Shaheed Mohammad" pointing out that he is now a martyr. AN constantly went to visit his grave. He felt he was so close to his cousin to a point that he was like his brother. He said that he looks at his pictures on his phone and not on Facebook. His family posts about him on Facebook to inform of the memorial dates, they do memorials on Facebook and family gatherings. AN explained that through Facebook he doesn't remember his cousin as he does through family gatherings. Family gatherings are more emotional and feel more real than the memorial sessions happening on Facebook. "Online everyone seems active when it comes to rituals and duties but in person I don't think everyone comes when it is a funeral or a memorial event" he said. AN also believes that SNS changed everything. People's interactions are getting less emotional. People are becoming less close to each other, less attentive. People aren't performing the usual traditions, duties and rituals because they feel that posting a picture on

Facebook is enough. "Close people to the deceased wouldn't send leaflets online or do anything online, they prefer visiting his grave and seeing his family – I prefer the traditional rituals as well!" he said.

Many of the interviewees had similar answers regarding exaggerated expressions of feelings online. Most still believe rituals are more meaningful traditionally than virtually. The death leaflet that we see in black and white feels more tangible than the one we see online – many expressed it as 'weird' to see such traditions online and what is even more 'weird' for them is when they see 'likes' on the leaflet photo. Rituals are meant to be practiced in tradition and this is how most of the participants feel. Virtual rituals were seen to be exaggerated and awkward yet the young generation runs to social media to do their duties and to express and this is quite similar to the Arab Media Report (2015) found in the literature which stated that only 41% believe that social media preserves traditions and habits. Also, Arab Social Media Report (2015) related to the findings in that it states that social media is a platform for many of the Arab youth to express their points of view, their creativity and their genius. Without it, other more direct forms of expression (e.g. face-to-face) would feel overwhelming for certain young Arab individuals.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

To begin with, it is important to note that the answers varied depending on every participant's character and beliefs regarding their relationship with the deceased and their general view on death. Findings suggest that in Lebanon, Facebook is a platform for sharing thoughts, feelings, memories and even an important tool for the most updated newsfeed. In Chapter 2 (section 3), Granek (2013) in her research on Grieving on Facebook, concluded that people are

finding comfort in paying tributes and sharing emotions online because it is their new found comfort zone and they have their new identities online that they feel comfortable behind screens. Granek's (2013) study confirmed that mourners appreciated the electronic support rather than the offline in person support and wanted the constant contact. In comparison with the interviews conducted for this research paper, the results were quite similar. The results of the interviews show that grieving on social networking sites helped the participants deal with the pain of the loss, the guilt they felt and the missed interaction they should have had with the deceased. They see it as a platform for sharing expressions and emotions with others in order to get rid of a load of pain felt vis-à-vis dealing with these issues on their own. It would comfort them to talk to the deceased by sending wall messages or private messages even though they knew that the person is not really there. Hypothesis one is supported clearly.

Hypothesis two is refuted: In the attachment theory, Parkes (1986) defines Bowlby's (1980) 'yearning and searching' stage as a stage of disequilibrium; after the individual undergoes the harsh feeling of loss. The person is starting to fully integrate the meaning of loss as well as feeling it and it can last for months or years. Wishing for the deceased to come back to life and experiencing impossibility of the wish leads to anger and crying. The individual starts to search for places and objects of the deceased person. When the individual is in continuous search for the lost loved one it then creates exhausting energy as well as continuous disappointment when the deceased is not to be found. Hypothesis two states that grieving online increases this stage in the person's mourning phase. Yet, results showed the opposite. Participants explained that on Facebook, when you search you still find the person, you find their photos, their posts and still see people communicating with them but in reality the person does not exist. The psychological fact that virtually the person still exists and people other than the person himself or herself are

still communicating with the deceased profile gives rest during that stage of grief and lessens the

amount of restless energy that Bowlby spoke about in the grief theory. This finding is quite

similar to Cann's (2014) who explained that people have talked to the deceased for as long as we

can remember, it's just that we never before listened in. Social network memorials have allowed

us to do this. The language that people use on social networks is very similar to the language we

might hear at a gravesite, Cann says. Mourners speak as though there is an audience: the

deceased person. On social media "people address the deceased as if he or she is continuing to

live and is continuing to be the recipient of these messages."

Hypothesis three is supported. Findings showed that many posts on Facebook by Lebanese

people in specific are not expressed in a real manner and they are exaggerated. There are

individuals who "pretend" to be grieving on Facebook just for the fact of showing "I used to

know this person". Virtual bereavement therefore is found to be a less serious way of grieving in

Lebanon due to this fact. Some people are posting not to lessen their distress but to get a large

amount of likes and attention. In the Dual Process Model of Grief theory done by Stroebe and

Schut (1995) it states that a person oscillates between loss orientation and restoration. During

this phase the person in grief is finding meaning in loss and focusing on the restoration plans.

The individual seeks to find a meaningful life without the deceased yet if posts on the memorial

group keep being posted in an exaggerated manner this slows down the process of restoration.

People post exaggerated posts and meaningless dramatized quotes and sayings on the deceased's

photos which in turn harm the person in a bereavement process.

There were many other interesting findings explored from the interviews one of which is

the expression of grief online in regards to different religions. Muslims and Christians both use

same terms in English when offering condolences such as "Rest in Peace". Yet in Arabic

languages the written condolences differ. Muslims type down "الله يجعل مثواه الجنة" or "عظم الله اجركم. البقاء

لله" or "تكون نفسو بالسما" while Christian's type down "عوض بسلامتكن".

Both religions do share the memorial leaflet online but the content in the leaflets differ. My

findings showed that Muslims appreciate the offline leaflet and find it more respectful offline

than online. Muslims do not mention the names of the deceased's family meanwhile Christians

do mention the names of the family.

Another finding explored in the religious differences when it comes to grieving online is that the

answers of my Muslim respondents seemed to be more attached to the traditional value than that

of the online transition than the Christian participants. Muslims do grieve online yet they would

never miss out their traditional duties no matter what because it is seen very rude and

unacceptable to miss. Christians do grieve both offline and online but they did not express as

much as the Muslims that it is a must to undergo the traditional funeral system.

Other findings that are of a must to be highlighted yet open another area of study is the age

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differences and their opinions of the tradition to online shift that differs as well as the gender and different characteristic mentalities. Different age groups and their opinions in the interviews express different views. The participants that were around the ages of 20 all felt that the online world is taking over the offline world and it is normalized in their minds, yet the participants aged 30 or 40 all felt that nothing can ever replace the traditional rituals and online did not feel sentimental at all. It is very important to note that since grieving is a very emotional issue – there is no way that all grieving people may be going through the exact same stages. Findings showed that the participants, after all, have their own sets of values, attitudes, emotions and their own different ways of dealing with grief. Women in general, express grief with higher intensity than a man. In the interviewees, many of my male participants did not express emotions while answering questions about how they felt yet the answers of the female participants were full of emotions and this again opens up a whole other area or field of study. All in all, the findings concluded that online expression did somehow unify the Religion in manners of condolences – both Muslims and Christians are seen to be expressing their mourning rituals online and interchangeably between each other. There are memorial leaflets for a deceased Muslim with comments from all religions with unified English comments expressing sincere condolences.

In Conclusion, the results of the study suggest significant personal benefit experienced by individuals actively utilizing Memorial Groups. The creation of Facebook and other SNS has developed an online site that allows for the expression of grief in line with traditional rituals. Further, the nature of Lebanese cultures, mainly the over-exaggeration of public mourning, has fashioned specific benefits of the modern outlet. Individuals are able to access the Memorial Group as needed over an extended period, receiving support from others and expressing the sense of loss experienced simultaneously. It is the initiation of the technology, which has both

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created and popularized the practice. One of the important findings is that the internet became a second world for individuals where they share nearly everything online; from clothing to ideas and even their feelings (one of which is grieving). Sharing feelings online (which is an inter-connected world for them) became an initial psychological reaction that helps people overcome a lot of emotional distress. Another important finding is that Lebanese culture is a show-off culture; unfortunately this negative point intruded itself even around the subject of mourning. Many answered that most people are not as close to the deceased as they seemed to be but they like to show others that they know the person who has passed away, for some odd reason it makes them feel included and important to be involved in everything that is happening around them; and in my opinion this happens because Lebanon is a very small country and people's opinions always matter. Understanding this importance remains an imperative territory for the practice of psychology. It is my hope that this study moves the discussion forward, further establishing the impact of our adoption of SNS. It is not simply a pop culture phenomenon, but rather a testament to the ever-changing nature of social development. We have become a global, self-directed, interactive, and user-constructed society due to our communication tools and the influence of media, which shapes both identity and the development of relationships. This study tackles the Attachment & Grief theory and supports it with qualitative study adding to these theories the importance of the means people use while expressing attachment and grief and how different means can result in different bereavement reactions for the person to be able to heal over time

6.1 Limitations and Further Suggestions

It is important to note that there are certain unavoidable limitations to this study that have occurred, starting with the sample size. If additional users were to be interviewed, there

would have been more in-depth understanding and wider diversified answers. Other limitations that are important to note are that some people are unaware of their behavior or their psychological case they do not understand on their own what stage of acceptance or mourning they are currently in; in this case most answers to the in-depth questions might be what they believe more than what is actually true. It might be that they are aware in many cases, but because the topic is a sensitive topic, many participants do not know how to express in words how they truly feel. Last but not least, the literature review lacks in-depth studies on social media usage or specifically memorial group and online grief in Lebanon.

6.2 Recommendations for future research

In this research, one of the new explored findings in the Lebanese online grieving process was that many people 'expose' to be something they are not on social media; this is seen in exaggerations with posts and comments. The Arab Media Report (2015) found that social media is a shield and an enabler of expression and creativity: Without it, other more direct forms of expression (e.g. face-to-face) would feel overwhelming for certain young Arab individuals. I believe this is a new area to be explored; doing a study on the psychological reasons behind the way young Arabs express themselves online and explanations behind their way of exaggeration in post and comment formulation. Also, in this research the focus was not on gender or certain age groups; hence, it would be interesting for future researchers in Lebanon to go further into understanding the grieving process throughout difference age generations and different gender characteristics.

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Appendices: Interview Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Today we'll be talking about how Facebook users

express grief online after someone has died, and ways that people are memorialized on

Facebook. Your participation is voluntary, so if you feel uncomfortable at any time or wish to

stop the interview, please let me know. Before we get started, I also wanted to let you know that

I will be recording this interview and all the information will remain confidential in my research.

Introduction and use of Facebook

 a. Name, Age, Address

 b. When did you start using Facebook?

c. Describe your experience of logging onto Facebook - what do you do? How long do you think

you might typically spend on the site at a time?

 d. What types of things do you typically post or share on the profiles of your Facebook friends?

Qualities of Facebook

 a. Describe how you interact with a person on Facebook. i. How is interacting or communicating

with a person on Facebook similar to interacting or communicating with them in person? ii. How

is it different?

 b. How do you typically use Facebook to interact with people? What kind of things do you do?

(post? like? share?)

 c. How do you think a Facebook profile reflects who that person is?

Death & Grief on Facebook

 a. Can you think of a close friend, an acquaintance or a family member who has passed away

recently? How did this person's Facebook profile change (or stay the same) after their death?

What's happening on someone's profile after they die?

b. How did you hear that this person had died?

c. How did you react?

d. Did you feel the need to share anything on Facebook? e. Did you visit his/her Facebook profile? (How soon after? How regularly?)

f. How do you feel when you visit it? How do you feel after visiting it?

g. Might you choose to visit this Facebook profile rather than go to a grave or funeral? If Yes, why?

h. Did you ever reach out to this person after they died in any other ways? (a phone call to a family member, grave, funeral, etc) i. How does this feel compared to viewing their Facebook profile? ii. How do you think interacting virtually compares to interacting physically?

i. How did you personally experience interacting with someone's profile after they died? i. What types of emotions have you expressed on Facebook after someone has died? ii. How did talking to or reaching out to someone on Facebook after they died feel compared to when they were alive?

j. What other types of interactions did you observe occurring on their profile?

k. How did you witness their profile being used by others?

Memorialization carrying a Lebanese Identity

a. How long after someone has died would you say you continue to interact with their profile (look at it, post on it, talk with other people who are active on the profile)?

b. Did you witness or contribute to any online memorialization of this person on Facebook?

c. Do you feel Lebanese people grieve online in the same manner they grieve offline? Do the rituals apply virtually?

 d. How do you feel about someone's Facebook profile remaining online or taken offline after they die?

 e. How would you describe the way you interact with other friends or family members of this person on their Facebook profile?

f. Do you think people in Lebanon exaggerate when it comes to memorialization on Facebook. If Yes how and why?

g. How do you think the way we use Facebook may change the traditional rituals of grieving over time? (Funeral Leaflet details, Traditional Duties…)

Is there anything else you'd like to mention?

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