

THE GRIEVING PROCESS ON FACEBOOK IN LEBANON AND
ITS IMPACT ON THE 5 STAGE OF GRIEF

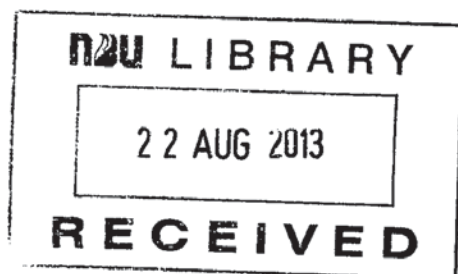
A thesis
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Masters of Art in Media Studies/Advertising

by

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Spring, 2013



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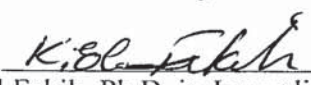
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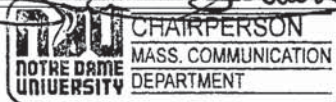
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Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore how Facebook's platform is used in the grieving practices in Lebanon. In addition, it is supposed to reveal whether or not it soothes the five stages of grief, introduced by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1997): 1) Denial, 2) Anger, 3) Bargaining, 4) Depression, and 5) Acceptance, by incorporating the support of others. Results will show if a Lebanese virtual grieving outlet on Facebook is actually present and effective. Using variables such as feelings, the five stages of grief and gratification of human needs, two methods of research were used for this study, qualitative and quantitative, both based on a purposive sampling. First, one-on-one interviews were conducted and analyzed with six selected Lebanese Facebook users, who personally shared their grief on Facebook. Second, an online questionnaire was answered by 103 active Lebanese Facebook users, which helped in having some statistical frequencies of people and their usage of Facebook in times of grief. Ages of both interviewees and subjects ranged between 18 and 40.

Findings described first how Facebook's platform is used in the grieving practices in Lebanon: grieving people directed the messages to the deceased then to his/her family through mostly updating their status mentioning their name (41%), posting on the deceased wall (30%) and finally tagging him/her on pictures or videos (29%). They expressed grief and loss (23%), shared memories (22%) and also few mentioned frustration over death and important dates (such as the death anniversary, his/her birthday, etc.). The interviews confirm similar results. In addition, other Facebook users helped the grieving person by showing support, love and affection after commenting on the grieving person's post or sharing their own feelings on the deceased's wall. However, even though these findings were important, the survey has revealed that Facebook does not help much in soothing the five stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance) (65%). Interviewees stated that it mostly helped sharing and thinking out loud and two have had their denial stage extended,

which was surprisingly helpful as soon as the tragic event happened. However, it did not accelerate the process to get to the stage of acceptance. Hypothesis one is supported in survey 2: grieving people felt sad (64%) when exposed to a sudden appearance of a deceased friend such an old picture or their birthday date on Facebook. Hence, It is a platform capable of altering the feelings of the grieving person negatively. Hypothesis two is refuted:

interviewees confirmed that visiting and interacting with the deceased loved one's profile page on Facebook does not affect the five stages of grief - denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance - in the sense of speeding up the grieving process and getting to the acceptance phase. However, surprisingly, two one-on-one interviewees claimed that it slowed down the five stages of grief, by extending the denial phase and allowing the tragic news to sink in slowly before actually facing it.

In addition, four out of six of the interviewees and 56% of the subjects disagreed that when grieving on Facebook, friendships can develop, moving from shallow to intimate or more personal ones. Consequently, the six degrees of separation and the social penetration theory do not play a role in times of grief on Facebook in Lebanon. Hypothesis three is partially supported in both surveys: in grieving time, Facebook gratifies needs such as affection, support and love. It backs up the uses and gratification theory by Blumler and Katz (1974), which suggests that media users seek out a medium that best fulfills the needs of the user. On another hand, results showed that Facebook is not seen as a substitute or a supplement for counseling or group comforting sessions. A Lebanese virtual grieving outlet on Facebook is actually present but not as effective as it should be, the way it is described by western Facebook users in their testimonials.

Keywords: Facebook, five stages of grief, uses and gratification, feelings, virtual outlet, exposure.

I. Introduction

A loved one's online presence is now available after his/her death to ease away the pain of grief and virtually stay in touch with them. As people spend more time on keyboards, pieces of our lives that we put online can feel as eternal as the Internet itself (Faure, 2009). Social networks provide users with a transitional object, creating a place to adapt the relationship with the deceased without losing the sense of connection (DeGroot, 2009). A recent statement spread online saying that “after 100 years from now, Facebook will have 500 million accounts of dead people” (Information facts, 2012) because profiles of many deceased people have not been either deactivated or memorialized. Academic researchers have discussed online grieving and memorialization, especially in western communities, giving examples of families and friends mourning online after the loss of a beloved one. However, no research about grief on Facebook has been conducted within the Lebanese society. There is a need to fill this gap in the social electronic media studies literature. Thus, this thesis explores how Facebook platform is used in the grieving practices in Lebanon, such as soothing the five stages of grief introduced by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1997): 1) Denial, 2) Anger, 3) Bargaining, 4) Depression, and 5) Acceptance (known by the acronym DABDA) by incorporating the support of other users in the Facebook community. The purpose of this study is to reveal, whether or not, a Lebanese virtual grieving outlet on Facebook is actually existing and effective.

II. Literature Review

This literature reviews what is already present in the academic literature about Facebook and grieving, the characteristics that relates Facebook platform to the grieving practices and the variables involved in this practice. It starts with the information and communication revolution. Second, it explains Facebook and symbol manipulation. Third it explores grief on

Facebook through all applications and online testimonials and finally specifies the usage of Facebook in Lebanon.

1. The Information and Communication revolution

A. The evolution of technology

“I think it's fair to say that personal computers have become the most empowering tool we have ever created. They are tools of communication, they are tools of creativity, and they can be shaped by their user” (Coley, 2009). Computers helped designing tools that facilitate and improve our daily life such as cars, planes, traffic signals, medical tools and space explorations. They have been acting as mechanical brains, which has made a huge impact on our society. Today, some argue that visualizing a world without computers would be quite impossible because technology is everywhere and societies depend on it. If it vanishes, we would experience an episode of pandemonium. Computers are used in digital alarm clocks, cars, ATM machines, book keeping logs, communications, hospitals, movies and space explorations (Wolfe, 2009). Some say that as much as the Internet helped us in boosting and upgrading anything that might make our life easier, “online people often forget who they are in real life, and become who they would like to be or can't otherwise be”(Cohen, 2008).

An online debate was published to see whether the Internet had more of a positive or negative impact on media consumers by asking its 44,926 members if advanced technology is invading our freedom to think and work. 34% agreed while 64% disagreed. On one hand, the agreeing members wrote that technology has eradicated the need for us to use our brains. It dulled our basic skills math, spelling, and even telling the time. Games, social media and mobile texting provide constant distraction when we need to focus, think or work. In other words, “people are being highly controlled in today's world”. On the other hand, those who disagree wrote that advanced technology is the next logical step in our evolution as humans because we are visionaries and creators at heart so we will always strive for the next great

invention. “Advanced technology isn't at fault, as it has no impact on our freedom to think or work. Technology can only invade our freedom and work if we let it”. Technology is just a by-product of our social structure so saying that it controls people's life is a misperception” (Technology opinions, 2012).

In reference to Lev Manovich (2001), the computer that used to read a row of numbers has now become a medium that reads pixel values. “It is no longer an analytical engine, suitable only for crunching numbers; it's a media synthesizer and manipulator” (p. 48).

With one billion consumers who are now using Internet-based technologies to receive news, information and entertainment, we can state that digital media have found their way into all parts of modern life (Miniwatts marketing group, 2009). Leigh Goessl (2010) states that “ever since the Internet was born, the world has been changing at a rapid rate. As a result of this technology, society is undergoing a constant transformation and has had a dramatic impact on how we exist”. For instance, Marc Prensky (2001) explains the effect of technology on education stating that students have changed radically and are “no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach”. He calls “singularity”, “the arrival and rapid dissemination of digital technology in the last decades of the 20th century, an event which changes things so fundamentally that there is absolutely no going back”. Out of observation on today's U.S students, students have changed their slang, clothes, body adornments, or styles, from those of the past. They grew up with technology and spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age. Prensky (2001) compares “today's average college grads have spent less than 5,000 hours of their lives reading, but over 10,000 hours playing video games (not to mention 20,000 hours watching TV). Computer games, email, the Internet, cell phones and instant messaging are integral parts of their lives”.

He deduces that “today’s students (also called “digital native” because they are all “native speakers” of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet) think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors”. Also in Prensky’s (2001) article, Dr. Bruce D. Perry of Baylor College of Medicine affirms that “different kinds of experiences lead to different brain structures” so students using technological devices have had their brain physically change and are different from the previous generation “with certainty that their thinking patterns have changed”. In contrast, those who were not born into this digital world but have eventually “become fascinated by and adopted many or most aspects of the new technology are, and always will be compared to them, as digital immigrants”: they learn to adapt to their environment but “they always retain, to some degree, their “accent”, that is, their foot in the past”. For example, they use the Internet as a second choice for information or print an online written document to edit it instead of doing it on the screen.

The problem today is that digital immigrant instructors who speak an outdated language, the pre-digital one, are responsible of educating the new generation so they are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language (pp. 1-2). The evolution of technology created what is largely known now as social networks. They go back to 1930 when a self-published psychologist named Dr. Jacob Levi Moreno developed the first sociogram, a graphic representation of social links a person has, that study interpersonal relationships. “These approaches were mathematically formalized in the 1950s and theories or methods of social networks became pervasive in the social and behavioral sciences by the 1980s” (Wasserman & Faust, 1994) to eventually create in 1997, the first online social network service SixDegrees.com followed by Friendster, MySpace and more (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). As Robert Young (2006) said, “social networks are architected to help scale self-expression to new heights, both in terms of the extent of self-expression as well as the

reach of distribution”.

B. The screen, the user and illusionism

Social media immerse users in an imaginary fictional universe similar to traditional fiction giving users important access to a body of information. With the help of the contemporary human-computer interfaces (HCI), social networks may look like media, but this is only the appearance achieved by a screen. The screen offers radical new possibilities for art and communication by traveling through non-existent three-dimensional spaces. Manovich (2001) asserts that the user looks at the screen, a flat, rectangular surface positioned at some distance from the eyes and experiences the illusion of navigating through virtual spaces, of being physically present somewhere else or of being hailed by the computer itself (p. 99). Illusionism itself is universally defined by Pierce (1902) as “an attempt to represent physical appearances” whereas virtuality denotes a power, a potentiality, and an embodiment or essence as a certain kind of substituted greater-or-lesser reality. Pierce (1902) defines the "proper meaning" of virtual "a virtual X (where X is a common noun) is something, not an X, which has the efficiency (virtus) of an X. A virtual X is a potential X in a universe that empowers potential Xs to become actual Xs". Additionally, in the context of scholastic realism, virtuality constitutes a linking process of reasoning because every thought contains an actual and virtual dimension, the virtual dimension serving as a vehicle or link to further actualization of thought (pp.261-262).

The human mind sees virtual on screen as real; an e-book replaces the traditional printed book, a digital image is the reflection of a person or an event, online articles are printed newspapers and so on. These digital objects are all over the Internet, especially on social media such as Facebook, which as previously stated, gathers all types of applications to make it user friendly and as close as reality. All physical and tangible “objects” are immersed into a screen.

2. Facebook and symbolism

A. The reconstructed reality on Facebook

There are no rules for the Internet governing our interpersonal contact. The privacy and anonymity give people the chance to say almost anything even if what is said might be dangerous. In addition, the Internet gives us access to any information; some academicians think that the Internet will erode our traditional societies; that is, people choose to participate in cyberspace rather than in real life. Furthermore, the Internet has enlarged our societies through emails and social networks such as Facebook on which people from different cultures and lands can easily connect and share mutual things. The Internet plays a main role in shaping and reshaping society now and in the future (Edmonds, 2010).

In February 2004, Mark Zuckerberg, a Harvard student, launched “The Facebook” as an online social network for the university students at the beginning and catered afterwards to other universities and high school students. In August 2005, Facebook became open for everybody to join for free and enjoy the social network (Philips, 2007). A recent study done on the 14th of September 2012 reveals that Facebook, the number one social network, reached 1 billion monthly active users. Since the launching of the “like” button in February 2009, Facebook gathered 1.13 trillion clicks, 140.3 billion friend connections and 219 billion photos uploaded since 2005. The top five countries using Facebook since its launch vary between Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, the United States, Turkey, Chile, France, United Kingdom, Australia and Canada with the median age of users that varies between 22 to 26 years old, having an average of 305 to 334 friends (Zuckerberg, 2012). This number is a proof that Facebook has gained major popularity within a very short period of time extending its audience to include various ages, races, and backgrounds. Facebook is a social network that groups people and identities through images and detailed self description, religious views, rituals, events, language, currency, positions, jobs, timeline, location, friend requests,

feelings through messages, word sharing, etc. Everyone has the possibility to participate in any application provided, selects (or not) any language or religion that suits him/her, define the landmark in which he/she lives in. Automatically, these specific details will be part of one's own identity and will reframe the user in a certain category following certain characteristics. The digital profile page is a reflection of the real person itself. Manovich (2001) states that "new media objects (which may be still digital image, digitally composited films, virtual 3D environments, computer games, self-contained hypermedia DVDs, hypermedia Web sites, or the Web as a whole) are cultural objects; thus any media new object can be said to represent, as well as help construct, some outside referent: a physically existing object, historical information presented in other documents, a system of categories currently employed by culture as a whole or by particular social groups. They represent/construct some features of physical reality at the expense of others, one worldview among many, one possible system of categories among numerous others" (p. 40).

Objects and people are now being taken by the computer to immerse the viewer within a virtual universe of information and knowledge. Thus, Facebook becomes an example of a one's real life object turned into a representation of its self since it has the capability of holding any raw or even emotional material used in our daily life in its social platform interface. In the *Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord (1967) writes "in societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles.

Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation".

Moreover, not only Facebook is a representation of people and objects living among us but a virtual connection is preserved between the living and the non living: family or friends fill out a form, providing a link to an obituary or other information confirming a user's death, so that the profile is officially preserved and memorialized. (Fletcher, 2009).

B. The computational theory of mind

In philosophy, the computational theory of mind (CTM), proposed in its modern form by Hilary Putnam in 1961 and developed by Jerry Fodor in the 60s and 70s, poses that the human mind is best conceived as an information processing system. According to Sunita (2012), "the philosophical concept of computational theory of mind is that the mind functions as a computer or symbol manipulator. The mind computes input from the natural world to create output in the form of further mental or physical states". In other terms, it conveys representations of the world.

Facebook presents an example, which involves an application created specially for the commemoration of tragic events such as death. Just days ahead the 10th anniversary of the tragic attacks of September 11th 2001 on America, Facebook and Involver team released the 9/11 Memorial application, in collaboration with The National September 11 Memorial & Museum. It asks its members to update their profile photos or post their statuses in memorial of the victims of September 11. It allowed users to tell their family and friends that they are remembering and honoring victims. Senior Vice President of Marketing Jascha Kaykas-Wolff at Involver's says that it will "honor and remember victims of this devastating attack on America, 10 years later". There are 3000 victims from the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, the passengers of Flight 93 and the six people killed in the February 1993 World Trade Center bombing. After donating a status, the application dedicates it to each single victim or a specific one that the user selected. Since Facebook reached 1 billion members, "the social media memorial and tribute is bound to reverberate throughout the social network". Online statuses and digital photos are a representation of the deceased people and tragic event. They support family and friends to overcome grief even after many years have passed by (Van Grove, 2011).

C. Facebook in Lebanon

According to the Internet World Stats (2012), the number of Internet users in Lebanon is 2,152,950. An online data collection done between 1st and 24th August 2011, with the objective of tracking the Internet usage habits and attitudes in Middle East And North Africa (MENA) between adults and females aged 16 and above, showed that Lebanon is one of the most connected and savvy in the MENA. The total number of MENA respondents achieved was 8,981, with 196 replies from Lebanese Internet users. Results in Lebanon suggested that 92% of Internet users are connected from home, with 72% of them using Facebook daily, which places the country in second position of MENA behind Tunisia (76%). In addition, Lebanon has the lowest percentage of people spending less than 30 minutes on Facebook (8% for 15% total) and one of the highest score of people (27%) signing to their account, several times a day. 42% of the total respondents claim they use social networking websites at work. However, 22% have the sites banned by the employer (Gregoire, 2011). Another study revealed that the number of users connected to Facebook from Lebanon is 1,444,200 in March 2012 (Miniwatts marketing group, 2012). Two months later, socialbakers - the most popular provider of social media analytic tools, statistics and metrics for Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, YouTube and LinkedIn - monitored Facebook usage in Lebanon. The result was 1,568,100 users, which is number 72 in the ranking of all Facebook statistics by Country. Facebook penetration in Lebanon is 38.01% compared to the country's population and 156.81% in relation to number of Internet users. The 1,568,100 users grew by more than 161,960 in the last 6 months. In addition, they monitored Lebanon's Facebook demographics and found out that the largest age group is currently 18 to 24 with total of 517,473 users, followed by the users in the age of 25 – 34. Note that 55% are male users and 45% are female users (socialbakers, 2012).

The most updated tracking website is Alexa.com, the web information company.

The sites in the top sites lists are ordered by their one month traffic rank, which is calculated using a combination of average daily visitors and page views over the past month. Obviously, the site ranked number 1 has the highest combination of visitors and page views. In Lebanon, the 3 tops sites are: 1) Facebook, with an audience ranged between 18 and 34, in which females are using it more than males; 2) Google with an audience ranging between 25 and 55, in which the percentage of males using it equals that of females; 3) google.com.lb with an audience ranged between 18-34 and 65+ in which mostly females are using it (Alexa, 2013). The 3 top Facebook pages from Lebanon are the following: in first place is Sayfco Holding real estate with 1,658,439 likes; in second place is Nokia Lebanon mobile communication with 95,389 likes and in third place Patchi, a confectionery business industry, having 85,957 likes (Social watchlist,2013).

3. Grief on Facebook

A. Definition of grief

Grief is one of the most painful human feelings. It is defined as a natural response to loss, which is the emotional suffering felt when something or someone is gone. Loss has two different categories: physical and symbolic (or abstract). Physical can be touched where as symbolic (or abstract) cannot be touched and is derived from aspects of a person's social interactions (Rando, 1991). Individuals experience different types of grief in life: a relationship breakup, the loss of health, a job, a financial stability, a miscarriage, a pet, a cherished dream, a friendship, etc. Above all, death often causes the most intense grief and consequently grief is automatically associated with it (Smith & Segal, 2012)

B. Memorial groups

According to Fearon (2011), Facebook became a site to express grief and bereavement through the creation of memorial groups. There are a range of benefits, uses, and applications of this new death ritual. A memorial group on Facebook gathers elements within a variety of

rituals, including sharing information regarding arrangements, supporting others, expressing loss, and remaining connected to the deceased. Part of the success of memorial groups is the easiness of its usage that conforms to the desires of grieving individuals, the connection with others which is a primary element. Participants believe that connecting with others is a primary element within the memorial group. Plus, the online practice provides the benefits of both the social support and the privacy needed to display emotion.

Fearon (para.2) states that "through the sharing of photos and videos within memorial groups, members are able to adopt a macro perspective, beginning the process of meaning making.

Further, the memorial group becomes a place to both commemorate the life and ensure remembrance of the deceased. The outpouring of support and love acts as proof of the impact and importance of the individual". Note that memorial groups are not limited by time or space, which allows individuals to access services when necessary (ibid).

Fearon (para.4) conducted an online questionnaire, consisting of open and closed-ended questions. 68 individuals completed it. Results indicate that creators of Memorial Groups are heavily invested in the technology, using the group to support the bereavement process.

98.5 % of responders recommend the creation of a Memorial Group to others. Furthermore, 59% of responders rated the Memorial Group as more helpful than other traditional death rituals. As a conclusion, this study suggests that "individuals who actively utilize the 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, combined to create a modern death ritual that has been embraced by popular culture".

Writing to the deceased and seeing that others experience the same emotions can be beneficial within the grieving process" (DeGoot, p.1). 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.

However, Facebook does not only keep a virtual connection with the recent deceased users. It also “regenerates” the historic lives of the ones who went through tragic events and might be forgotten today.

The Associated Press (2010) writes about one of the most famous memorial profile pictures on Facebook Henio Zytomirski's. He is a 6-year-old boy captured in black and white, posing in an old-fashioned buttoned-up shirt and shorts. Henio has 3,000 friends. The photograph was shot in 1939 before he was murdered in the Holocaust. Facebook’s memorial page is used by a group of boys in Lublin, Poland, in order “to breathe virtual life into Henio's stolen childhood and give people around the world the chance to get to know him as well as mourn the millions of others killed by Nazi Germany”. His profile page starts with "Forty-thousand names and faces ... cannot be memorized. Remember just one of them" (para.1-2).

“It is one of the most striking examples of a new phenomenon in which people are setting up Facebook memorials for the victims of the past century's greatest tragedies”. For example, an Italian Facebook "friend" posts on his wall: "Little Henio, I think about you often. I consider your presence on Facebook a great opportunity to reflect, more real than many friendships granted to real people. Thank you, Henio. I hope you can have many friends". In addition, a project in Belgium attempts to create Facebook pages for each of the 27,594 allied soldiers who were killed in Belgium during WWII. A memorial page for Anne Frank (with 61,860 members) and Auschwitz (with 73,002 members) is also present, both referring to the Holocaust victims. It is true that Facebook users have been creating memorial pages for friends and families, but these aim to “rekindle lives of the more distant dead who might otherwise be forgotten” (para.5-6).

Reviews about the use of social media in war remembrance tragedies like Holocaust state that it might trivialize those tragedies and “that postings like those in Henio's name could blur the boundaries between fact and fiction” (ibid).

Also in *The Associated Press* (2010), Joy Sather-Wagstaff, a cultural anthropologist at North Dakota State University claims that virtual gifts are posted on his page and they represent a virtual version of what people would leave on his monument if it ever existed: "I bet they would leave little notes and toys - the physical material version of what you see them leaving on Facebook". Henio's phenomenon on Facebook is one way of showing how today's people might cope with death and tragedies such as September 11 or the 2008 earthquake in Haiti (para.15-16-17-18).

Anthropologist Mark Auslander (*The Associated Press*, 2010), a Brandeis University professor specializing in the use of ritual and art in commemorating the dead, believes that thousands of people log on to Facebook to enter in to some sort of symbolic exchange with the Dead and engage in an act of nurturing directed towards the other world." In an interview with *The Associated Press* he states, "the phenomenon is very fascinating because it tells us something profound about our deep desire around the world to be linked to one another through these fragile traces of memory. And this is potentially a very wonderful and beautiful thing" (para.20).

An important statement by Piotr Kadlcik (*The Associated Press*, 2010), the leader of Poland's Jewish community, says that "absolutely all forms that help us spread information about the past should be used and encouraged... These are not times for honoring people with huge marble monuments and official ceremonies" (para.33-34).

A fascinating similar project entitled "Live and Remember" is also being researched regarding the 27,594 allied soldiers, who were killed in Belgium during WWII and are buried in Belgian cemeteries. They are men from from the U.S., Britain, France and Australia. The lives and battles of a chosen soldier will produce a Facebook page with photos, audio and video. Relatives of the dead soldiers are asked to submit documents or any other material they might have. The first Facebook page created honors Lance Cpl. Thomas Leslie

Cartwright of High Wycombe, England who was killed in fighting in 1944. The purpose of this plan is to have each soldier documented on Facebook by 2014 in which the country will mark the 70th anniversary of Belgium's liberation (ibid, para.35).

The launcher of the project Pol Van Den Driessche, a Belgian senator states "you are only dead if no one talks about you anymore" (Fox news, 2010).

Note that today, in 2013, Henio Zytomirski's page has 7,490 likes (Facebook, 2013).

C. "My memorials" application

"My Memorials" is a free Facebook application that provides an easy way to pay tribute to family members, friends, and favorite celebrities which includes creating a Memorial Page with a photo gallery, selected guest book entries, search and remember obituaries from more than 800 newspapers worldwide, get news feed updates and notifications if any updates occurred and finally invite friends to use the application and share or view the memorial pages created. The page starts with "Pay tribute. Remember forever" which reflects how Facebook's platform helps the user crave a memory or recall a deceased person whenever he needs to (My memorials, 2013).

D. The profile page

Study:

In a research on Grief Communication and Facebook, Natalie Pennington (2012) investigates how members of a deceased individual's social network on the social networking site Facebook (FB) interacted with the FB profile page of the deceased after that individual has passed away. A content analysis of the wall posts (N = 352) of 14 FB profile pages of users who had since passed was conducted to answer this question. The results suggest that, Facebook users write messages directly to the deceased as if they will read it, regardless of time that has passed since the user died. Individuals will also post on the deceased's wall important dates and messages that will contain a combination of (a) memories, (b)

expressions of loss, and (c) frustration over their death.

She writes that this research is important because human beings seek to cope with changing patterns in grief communication in a digital world. She starts with the following 2 research questions: the first is, “when writing on the FB profile page of a deceased friend, who are users directing the message to? The second is, “what do users write about when commenting on the FB profile page of a deceased friend?

The method used is a qualitative content analysis of the most recent messages left on the FB profile page of the deceased user to understand how FB friends speak about and towards the deceased on the profile page. Six topics resulted from the analysis of the posts: the total number of posts (352), profiles of deceased people (14) aged 16 to 45, the average number of posts per profile (25), the cause of death (varied from suicide, homicide, car accidents, and complications from recent or long term illness) and finally time passed since death (1 month to 3+ years).

Starting with results regarding the first research question, it shows a **continued conversation with the deceased**. Every single message on the profile is directed towards the deceased followed by comments to wall posts involving a conversation between members of the social network. For example, one user writes: “thinking about youuuuu, again. And when I come home for Christmas I am coming to see you no matter what! Even if there's a foot of snow, I will be there...”. Note that, the coming to see the deceased over Christmas refers to visiting their grave. If the message is read without knowing that the user is talking to a deceased person, it would be definitely thought of as a regular real message in which one is promising the other of a visit.

Another example illustrates a message in which the user writes about calling the deceased’s phone not long after they passed away, hoping that they might answer: “I just called you and it actually rang as if your phone was on. It usually goes straight to voicemail...I actually

thought you were going to pick up. I miss you so much it is unbelievable. You were so perfect and everyone knew it. Ill see you soon.” Those two messages show how FB profile page is becoming an outlet that helps one communicate with the deceased and maintain a bond even though they cannot respond.

Another result involved **acknowledging the social network**, meaning that some messages, apart from directing it towards the deceased, it referenced directly to/for other members of the social network such as close friends and family. For example, one user writes: “hey mama, I have been avoiding this wall, because seeing your face makes it harder not to cry than drafting text messages to your phone, but I missed knowing other people love you so much they have to talk to you too...”

The message is directed towards the deceased to whom the daughter is admitting the difficulty of going to her wall. However, the user is reassured knowing that other individuals “love her and talk to her too”. It helps her cope with the loss.

Another example shows how the user knew about someone’s death accidentally from friends and family’s posts, when visiting her profile to post a greeting message. She comments under the deceased profile picture:

“Hey Corinne, I was just browsing through Facebook and stumbled on your profile. I instantly wanted to send you a message to catch up, until I looked at all of the loving messages left by your friends and family and realized you are no longer with us. It pains me to think that someone with so much love and sunshine to offer to the world had to leave so soon, you were such a beautiful person. Although I only knew you for a short period of time, I’ll always remember that summer. I hope wherever you are, you are still smiling and radiant”. The user acknowledges how much the deceased person was loved and how important she had been in their lives through other posts made. Hence, just by being part of the social network and no matter how close the relationship is, the death of a Facebook friend

can have a strong impact on the user.

The second research question answers what users write about when they comment on the profile page of a deceased friend. The first subject is **expressing grief and loss** with the most common post “I miss you”.

The second subject is **sharing memories** prior to their passing or events they lived together.

The third subject users write about on the deceased’s wall is **important dates** such as their birthday, holidays or anniversary of their death, which renew grief for members of the social network. An example would be “it’ll be two years tomorrow and you are still thought about and talked about almost everyday...”.

Frustration and anger over death is the fourth subject users might write on the deceased’s wall. Some cases such as suicide, sudden or accidental death make Facebook users express anger with themselves and with the deceased. For example, a frustration directed to the deceased would sound like “where have you gone... I need you in my life... We all do dude... why did you have to go?” However, the frustration directed at the self would look as such: “days are flying by so quickly, but I still think about you constantly. It might not be healthy, but I do. You really touched my life in ways others wish they could. I’m just so angry with myself for never really expressing how much I really appreciated you...”

To conclude, these findings show how the continued presence of a profile can act as an outlet for conversations between the deceased and their friends in a social network. The content analysis of wall posts cannot define the reasons behind writing on the wall of the deceased friend but the content of messages prove that it is just a way that friends adopted to be able to cope with the grief they are feeling (Pennington, pp.1-2)

Pennington (2012) states “unlike memorial pages created for the deceased, the profile page becomes a specific location for users to write to the deceased much like picking up a phone and calling them or texting them would have been a way to communicate when they were

still alive". She compares the profile page of the deceased on Facebook to his personal number since it is a way to contact them when needed. Plus, phone numbers are given to someone else post-death but the profile page remains the property of the deceased. It is an outlet for Facebook users to go and express their thoughts and feelings to the deceased as if there will be a reply.

Testimonial:

The New York Times published an article about Jacqueline Moore who lost her son in a car accident in 2008. She still tries ways to keep in touch with him in any way possible such as checking his e-mails and Facebook messages because they made her smile no matter how banal they were: using these new forms of communication made everything seem virtual. Jacqueline's own Facebook page lay dormant until Jordan died. She says "I have now become a voyeur in my late son's world". Messages left by Jordan's friends after his death have comforted her. This virtual activity gratifies her and allows her to create virtual emotional support with Jordan's friends. When she is on his profile page, she reads with heartbreaking beauty that he is missed too and that he has not been forgotten. Hours after Jordan died, his younger brother Merrick posted "a plaintive message on Facebook that was the virtual equivalent of a wail". It said, "Merrick is lifeless. A piece of him died." Jacqueline did not want to spread the news virtually but at the same time, "in two sentences were the echoes of grief that Merrick had been unable to verbalize directly to his parents. With some keystrokes he could reach out".

This tragic event was announced and spread virtually with most of the grieving done digitally. Friends sent out mass e-mail messages and two of his friends created a public R.I.P page on Facebook, which had information about the memorial service.

As for his profile page, it was filled with friendly expressions of shock and disbelief: "I don't know how or why this happened to you. You were one of the nicest people I've ever met and

your smile could light up any room. You will be missed”, “this is crazy rest in peace man”... Jacqueline read the messages hoping that everyone gets to read all messages left on his wall. She states, “I needed them to know that they weren’t alone in their grief. Virtual, perhaps, but not alone”. Jacqueline kept on posting messages on Jordan's wall in order to update him with the latest thought she had about him because it continuously comforted her. Virtual messages on Jordan's wall made him closer to his mom and friends. She expresses her fear that he will be forgotten one day and when it overwhelms her, she visits his Facebook page: "see you in the later" is one of the many virtual messages posted by his friends that brings back hope in seeing him again (Belkin, 2010).

Hernandez (2008) discusses virtual death versus reality in the *Journal of Education, Community and Values*. It says that the Internet provides a separate reality and a sort of immortality based on the permanence of content posted online. A person's memories can outlive him/her, as long as there are browsers visiting their blogs or their memorial pages and websites. The bounds of communication via the Internet are limitless so users “are immersed in a separate cyber reality where death may not seem truly final”.

A person's identity is partly social and he/she identifies the self the way others see him/her. The University of Twente in the Netherlands’ communications webpage posted The Social Identity Theory which states that apart from the "level of self", an individual has multiple "social identities" which are the "the individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership of social groups”: people's self is defined in terms of “we” rather than the “I” hence the “deceased is remembered by the “we” of the society. They explain this idea by stating that "people seek out “we”'s within the reader and blogging sphere to create a place to share thoughts so that they can be known to others, and therefore hold a reality of having existed. When they die, this is the part that lives on”. The Internet provides people with virtual shrines so “just as other cultures use different techniques to remember their dead, the

Internet culture can be as sacred as a gravesite and resting place for the deceased's soul to continue contact with the world even after they are gone” (p.2).

Online traces of deceased people can give an insight into their lives and an aid of remembrance. One may have trouble imagining they are dead after reading their words because they lend a sort of vitality as well as immortality to the person's image.

One could carve out a memory for him/herself in case he/she will lose his own life.

Everyday, death is more and more openly discussed and mourned by online communities so as “a separate reality is created, an epitaph of sorts”. What remains online after someone's death is the final and lasting virtual image of a person and their life because “the Internet can blur the boundaries of reality as we are given a permanent reminder of those who have succumbed to a mortal death, though perhaps not so mortal after all” (p.3).

Adrienne, a young freelancer, experienced the process that happens on Facebook after the loss of her mother. Technically speaking, social media helped her deal with the practical aspect of notifying others of the death and funeral. However, psychologically, it aided in the grieving process by offering support and serving as a reminder of the life of a loved one.

She describes how as soon as her mother passed away late at night, nothing was announced directly to people. Her brother just posted a Facebook status that allowed friends and family to find out almost immediately. The next morning, people wrote on her Facebook wall, sent her messages, e-mails, texts and called her to offer their condolences. She claims “it was extremely touching and helped tremendously during that sensitive time...social media, specifically Facebook, helped with the process... It would have been far too hard to say the words out loud each time” (Miles, 2011).

Adrienne declares that posting addresses and details of the funeral and posting them on their Facebook pages made the whole process easier whereas using the primary communication media before social media such as phone calls and regular e-mail, would be far more tedious

and time-consuming. However, Facebook was not only a comforting zone when death took place, Adrienne describes how during her grief, she updated her Twitter feed or Facebook status with how she felt. She said “it’s comforting to hear kind words from others who have experienced the same thing. People can choose to respond to my updates if they want to, but if they prefer not to, there is no pressure.” That serves as a passive and indirect way to alert those in her social circles to be aware of how she is feeling. She compares it to a saying between two friends: “I’m going through rough times so please, kindly, leave me alone and have patience with me” (Miles, p.2).

With time, looking through the photos her mother posted on Facebook, messages they posted on each other’s wall, their common interests in television shows, movies, music, and celebrities, was a way to remember their connection in a different way. Her mother’s friends, family, co-workers and acquaintances also posted on her wall in her memorial, “it consoles and it helps with the grief”. She ends up her article describing social media as a very positive tool to use during the difficult time of grieving the death of a loved one. It can help with practical matters, personal concerns and simply remembering the loved ones by looking back at their photos, messages/posts and interests” (ibid).

Her mother embraced technology and social media whole-heartedly so she is sure she would be happy with the role social media and technology has served in helping her loved ones cope with her passing and to celebrate her life. Adrienne thinks that a connection is being built between the mother and herself through Facebook and a fake “spiritual” relationship is created. The spiritual connection and emotional comfort are digitally transmitted for instant emotional gratification and everlasting presence of the deceased person (ibid).

III. Theoretical framework

1. Theory of the Five Stages of Grief

According to Elizabeth Kübler-Ross (1997), there are five stages of grief that help us cope with loss: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance (also known as DABDA). She states, "they never meant to help tuck messy emotions into neat packages". They are responses and behaviors that people lived after having to face death or the loss of a loved one, even though there is not typical way of handling these situations: "our grief is as individual as our lives". The five stages are tools that help the grieving person to frame and identify whatever feeling they might have. Note that not everyone goes through all of them or follow the same order. They just make us cope with life and loss (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Kübler's theory derived from the lack of curriculum in medical schools, that addressed death and dying, which was needed to be able to work with 200 terminally ill patients. Eventually, she became an instructor at the University of Chicago's medical school and started a project about death followed by series of seminars, which contributed to the material for her book. Her work helped in dealing with terminally ill people and her five stages of grief have now become widely accepted. The following describes the five stages of grief and it can apply to the dying or to the individuals facing a loss.

Denial comes first, after hearing any bad news: the loss of someone or being diagnosed with a certain disease. It includes two primal emotions, the shock and numbness. Pain, sadness and guilt can be associated with this stage after the initial shock fades away (p51).

Anger is the second but most difficult stage to manage. It occurs when the concerned realizes that denial is no longer an option. People in this stage may attack anyone who is providing support either verbally or physically. They want to blame someone or something. "Why me?" is often asked (p.63).

Bargaining is the stage that is more common in a person diagnosed with a terminal illness

than with someone who has experienced a death in the family. However, according to Kübler-Ross, it is still part of the grieving process and typically follows a stage of anger. Bargaining almost always involves a conversation with a higher power in which it takes the form of a temporary truce such as “What if I devote the rest of my life to helping others. Then can I wake up and realize this has all been a bad dream?”. The reason is simply because the grieving person wants life returned to what it was with the loved one restored (p.93).

Depression is the fourth stage that includes emotions such as despair, emptiness, feelings of isolation and extreme sadness. It is important to realize the distinction between normal sadness due to a loss and clinical depression. This type of depression comes later than people think it should and may last longer but it is a normal stage in the grieving process (p.97).

Acceptance, the last stage of grieving, is the place that everyone experiencing grief strives to reach. Individuals will make peace with the deceased and accept the loss as a part of life.

They will move on with their life although it may be in a different way (p.123).

2. Six Degrees of Separation

Frigyes Karinthy (1929), a Hungarian author, published a volume of short stories entitled *Everything is Different* in which one was titled "Chains," or "Chain-Links." It presented an important hypothesis: despite great physical distances between the globe's individuals, the growing density of human networks and technological advances in communications and travel made the actual social distance far smaller. So the modern world was 'shrinking' due to this ever-increasing connectedness of human beings. As a result, Karinthy (p.2) believed that “any two individuals could be connected through at most five acquaintances”. He writes in his story, “a fascinating game grew out of this discussion. One of us suggested performing the following experiment to prove that the population of the Earth is closer together now than they have ever been before. We should select any person from the 1.5 billion inhabitants of the Earth – anyone, anywhere at all”. He bet us that, using no more

than five individuals, one of whom is a personal acquaintance, he could contact the selected individual using nothing except the network of personal acquaintances (ibid).

Social networks were largely connected to this idea and “Karinthy has been regarded as the originator of the notion of six degrees of separation” (Rouse, 2006, p.1).

In 1967, American sociologist Stanley Milgram (1969) devised a new way to test the theory, which he called "the small-world problem" by randomly selecting people in the mid-West to send packages to a stranger located in Massachusetts. The senders knew basic details such as the recipient's name, occupation, and general location and they were "instructed to send the package to a person they knew on a first-name basis who they thought was most likely, out of all their friends, to know the target personally". That person would do the same, and so on, the test goes as a chain, until the package was personally delivered to its target recipient.

"Although the participants expected the chain to include at least a hundred intermediaries, it only took (on average) between five and seven intermediaries to get each package delivered". (Travers, Jeffery & Milgram, 1969)

In 2001, Duncan Watts, a professor at Columbia University, conducted another test after Milgram's. He recreated his experiment using the Internet. The package was replaced by an e-mail message that needed to be delivered. The data collected by 48,000 senders and 19 targets (in 157 countries) showed that the average number of intermediaries was six. "Watts' research, and the advent of the computer age, has opened up new areas of inquiry related to six degrees of separation in diverse areas of network theory such as power grid analysis, disease transmission, graph theory, corporate communication, and computer circuitry"

(Rouse, p.1).

The notion of six degrees has become part of the collective consciousness. Social networking websites such as Facebook and others “have greatly increased the connectivity of the online space through the application of social networking concepts” (Andrews, 1984).

Lateral diffusion

Andrews (1984) introduced the term lateral diffusion in his book *The IRG Solution*. It advocated the usage of personal computers and the process of "information being spread from one node in a social network to another". Senders are usually selective because they tend to pass on information to those who they know would be interested or need to know. This information can rapidly traverse an entire population. While they're traveling, they are also subject to query and modification. "In this way it has been shown that typically no more than 6 intermediaries are likely to link the most extreme chain of lateral diffusion" which brings back the notion of the six degrees of separation (Roebuck, 2011). Hence, we can see how much the Internet and social network services are boosting this action and being premium actors in this "shrinking world" phenomenon.

Three degrees of separation on Facebook

A recent study proved that Facebook reduces the six degrees of separation to only four making the world even figuratively smaller. The study was conducted by Facebook and Università degli Studi di Milano and it showed that "the number of "hops" separating any two persons on Facebook is in fact smaller than six: "99.6% of all pairs of users are connected by paths with five degrees (6 hops), 92% are connected by only four degrees (five hops)". Plus, it points out that the average distance between users is getting smaller over time. If the analysis is limited to a single country, the "four degrees of separation" theory shrinks even further, with most pairs of people being only separated by 3.74 degrees (Schroeder, 2011).

3. The Uses and Gratification theory

Blumler and Katz (1974) look at the media use in a more humanistic approach by suggesting that media users seek out a medium that best fulfills the needs of the user who also have alternate choices to satisfy those needs: on Facebook, fulfilled needs would be

popularity, exposure, making friends, being alerted, having everyday updates of whatever is happening in the world, belonging, receiving compliments, debating, boosting self-esteem and so on; the list is long. Blumler and Katz (1974) also stress that the media serve the functions of surveillance, correlation, entertainment and cultural transmission for both society and individuals (pp. 15, 17). Facebook has been proven as being a source of gratification and an outlet for pain relief when a user is grieving.

For example, human feelings are converted to digital messages. Facebook uses the status box that asks users “what’s on your mind” as an emotional or state of mind deliverer. The status is automatically turned into a piece of information shared universally. It has become so powerful that online pages have released a collection of Facebook statuses divided into different categories (e.g. funny, sad, loving, evil and more) for people to use and apply on their personal pages (Facebookstatus123, 2012). Feelings, those pieces of information became so easily exposed to a lot of people and apparently are very rewarding for the brain after being shared. Three major human needs, very often sought, are gratified on Facebook: affection, likeness, attention and love. They put the human being in a very positive confident state of mind. That mentioned, could this imply the idea that Facebook is the referent of comfort and soothing emotions substituting counseling, therapies or group comforting sessions in real life?

Positive emotions on Facebook

An online study showed that being on Facebook triggers a response that indicates a positive mood shift. The author links that to the “broaden and built theory”, or the theory of positive emotions. Positive emotions lead to creativity and social bonds that in turn build personal resources. These resources can be drawn on later for coping and survival.

“Facebook's activities lead to a positive emotional experience that people appreciate and seek again” (Roan, 2012). Today, with the introduction of timeline, every activity, status or

message is saved. With a simple click on any previous year, one can go back to his past events, connections and statements. When an emotional withdrawal or loneliness occur, clicking on the previous posts and reading them give the self positive feedbacks and gratifies the user with a better mood.

The social penetration theory

Altman and Taylor (1973) states that as relationships develop, communication moves from relatively shallow, non-intimate levels to deeper, more personal ones. Facebook has proven that no matter what the bases for a relationship are, the friendship can grow further on the network by using its different applications.

Facebook is the escape or outlet that may gratify emotional or social needs.

Facebook Addiction Disorder

Since Facebook had fulfilled the needs and gratification of many users, it integrated itself to the lives of countless people and in a way has become a part of their daily routine and lifestyle: a natural drive pushes the member to visit the site and check out the updates of this social network. Statistics showed that daily active users reached 665 million in March 2013 (Newsroom Keyfacts, 2013). Users are willingly seeking this platform and making use of its various functions as a form of popular communication, satisfying some kind of a need. An American psychologist wrote about FAD (Facebook Addiction Disorder), that it is “a condition that is defined by hours spent on Facebook, so much time in fact that the healthy balance of the individual’s life is affected” (Summers, 2011, p.1).

An online blog discussed the reasons behind this Facebook addiction, it is mainly to gratify a human need. Some suggested that Facebook provides constant stimulation and fills empty voids. It gives us something to do, keeps us updated with daily activities and enlarges our social network by making more friends (Eckrote, 2010).

4. Hypotheses

By definition, a hypothesis is a tentative generalization about the relationship between two or more variables that predicts an outcome. The following are three hypotheses based on variables that were used in the theoretical framework (III).

Hypothesis 1

A sudden appearance of a deceased loved one on Facebook alters the feelings of the grieving person positively or negatively (see below in operational definitions I).

Hypothesis 2

Visiting and interacting with the deceased loved one's profile page on Facebook affects the five stages of grief by either reducing or amplifying any of the stages (see theoretical framework 1 and 2).

Hypothesis 3

When grieving, using or visiting the profile page of a deceased loved one gratifies needs such as affection, support and love and substitutes counseling, therapies or group comforting sessions in real life (see theoretical framework 3).

5. Operational definitions of variables

Hypothesis 1 refers to the independent variable which is the sudden appearance of any content related to a deceased Facebook loved one (such as pictures, posts, most recent activity before death) on the newsfeed of a grieving person and its effects in creating either positive feelings such as happiness, good memories and relief or negative feelings such as sadness, anger and heartache. "Feelings" is the dependent variable.

Hypothesis 2 reviews how visiting or interacting with the deceased loved one's profile page on Facebook (the independent variable) such as posting on his wall, commenting on his/her photos, liking other people's posts and replying back to them affects the five stages of grief (the dependent variable) by either reducing or amplifying any of the following stages:

denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. In addition, as mentioned previously, it has been shown that people on Facebook are only separated by 3.74 degrees, so interacting with the deceased person's profile page might shrink the "distance" between the user and the lost loved one (see theoretical framework 2).

Hypothesis 3 studies if the usage of Facebook or the exposure to any type of content of a deceased Facebook friend (the independent variable) gratifies the user's needs (the dependent variable) such as giving him/her affection, support and love, hence providing him/her with positive mood shift which will help him/her cope and survive the grieving phase. Updating a status with one's sad feeling and receiving comments from others supporting and helping the user can decrease the negative effects of grieving. Also, visiting the deceased friend's page, looking at his/her pictures, sharing feelings with families and friends was proven to be a source of comfort to the user when grieving. Therefore, Facebook could replace counseling, therapies and group comforting sessions in real life when it provides the user with the same gratification.

IV. Methodology

1. Type of research

The method of research used in this study is both qualitative and quantitative. Two methods were conducted using the following variables: 1) feelings, 2) the five stages of grief and 3) gratification of human needs. First, a one-on-one interview have been completed with specific Lebanese Facebook users whom I personally witnessed having shared their grief on Facebook. This qualitative research aims at gathering an in-depth understanding of how and why Facebook is an outlet for grieving (Appendix A). Second, a quantitative survey was conducted in order to examine the similar phenomenon through observations in numerical representations and through statistical analysis. An online questionnaire was sent to active Lebanese Facebook users in order to have some statistical data of people who might have

experienced grief on Facebook and its impact on feelings, the five stages of grief and on human needs. The online survey guaranteed anonymity, which will reduce any embarrassment or inhibition that people might feel in personal interviews thus resulting in dishonest or inaccurate answers (Appendix B). Attached in the appendices are the one-on-one interview and the online questionnaire.

2. The Sampling Procedure & Sample Size

A sample that represents the Lebanese population was used to draw inferences and gather data and information. There are several types and ways of choosing a sample from a population and they fall under two categories, probability sampling and nonprobability sampling.

A purposive sampling (from the nonprobability sampling) has been selected for both types of research (interview and online survey), which is based on the knowledge of a population and the nature of the study. Those being interviewed fit a specific purpose or description related to the subject matter (Crossman, 2013).

A sample of six people was carefully chosen for the one-on-one interviews: they are Facebook users, ages ranging between 18 and 40, with a definite experience of grief on Facebook, that I personally witnessed (Appendix A). As for the sample of the online survey, it was also based on certain specific characteristics: participants should be Lebanese active users on Facebook, ages ranging between 18 and 40, so 103 users were carefully selected from the author's list of friends to fit these descriptions (Appendix B). Note that, for both samples, the age bracket was being used since as mentioned in section four, Facebook is the number one site with an audience ranged between 18 and 34.

In purposive sampling, the researcher employs his or her own "expert" judgment about who to include in the sample frame.

The subject studied, Facebook's platform used in the grieving practices in Lebanon, has never been tackled before so the research is still fresh and must be developed further in the future, on a larger probability sampling procedure. The results of this exploration show the current state of the subject discussed. Nonprobability samples tend to be less complicated and less time consuming than probability samples and the intention is not to necessarily generalize beyond the sample (Fairfax, p.3).

In this research, the aim is first to explore whether Facebook's platform soothes the five stages of grief in Lebanon and second, to reveal whether or not a Lebanese virtual grieving outlet on Facebook is actually present and effective.

V. Results and analysis

As mentioned above, two types of research techniques, qualitative and quantitative, were used to understand whether or not a Lebanese virtual grieving outlet on Facebook is actually present and effective and how Facebook platform is used in the grieving practices in Lebanon, soothing the five stages of grief. The theoretical framework in chapter III limits the scope of the relevant data by focusing on specific dependent and independent variables incorporated in both techniques. They will be taken into consideration when analyzing and interpreting the data gathered from respondents. Results will support or not the hypothetical assumptions as stated in the three hypotheses.

A. One-on-one interviews analysis (Appendix A)

Starting **interview No. One** with Maha Kuzbar, a 40-year-old woman who lost her friend Mrs. Bouez, about three years ago. She was not a relative but someone who helped her overcome problems in life. It was the only time Maha used Facebook for grieving through messages posted on Mrs. Bouez' profile page, directed to the deceased person herself stating that she missed her. She spent little time on her profile page because it was just a brief moment to express her feelings. Facebook did not help her pass the five stages of grief. Other

people's messages made her feel sad. When she grieved on Facebook she got comfort and support but no relationship was developed. She did not feel close to the deceased person through Facebook and she doesn't believe that Facebook or any social media can provide us with such feelings. "If there is no other means, Facebook could be a substitute or supplement for counseling but it wouldn't be as efficient and effective as real sessions. Maha is not currently using Facebook as "a commemorative outlet", she says. I feel addicted to Facebook but not only in hard times. I have to check it everyday (Appendix A - Interview One).

Interview No. Two was conducted with Maria, a 24-year-old woman, who lost a close male friend a few years ago. She started using Facebook for grieving right after her loss, by posting their special song on the wall of the deceased and some pictures his mom requested. They were related to special occasions spent together such as Christmas, his birthday, etc. When she first lost her friend, she visited his profile page every hour, then twice a week and now she barely checks it. As for the effect on the five stages of grief, Facebook increased her anger whenever she had to visit her friend's profile page to update his parent with any new posts on his wall. Whenever she saw other people's posts, she felt disgusted. She tries to get some affection, love or comfort when grieving on Facebook but it never works. For a while, she developed some friendly connections but then everything went back to normal. She doesn't feel any closer to the deceased. Maria states that some people might find Facebook as a substitute for counseling but not in her case. She stopped using Facebook as a commemorative outlet for the deceased loved ones. She ended the interview saying that she feels addicted to Facebook in hard times and in other situations (Appendix A – Interview Two).

Interview No. Three was done with C.H, a 36-year-old woman, who lost her lover on the 18th of February 2012. She started using Facebook for grieving the next day by posting pictures with few personal messages or poetry by other writers or by the deceased himself.

She even created an artistic event as a memorial for the loved one. He did not have an account on Facebook so she only posted on her own page but stayed discrete: she never mentioned him directly and no one could know how close they were. She spent a lot of time looking for nice pictures to post, reading comments, etc. Facebook helped her express with others positive memories about her boyfriend and it postponed his disappearance, so extended the first stage of grief, denial. She felt love and care from other people's posts. C.H got friendly responses from strangers but never developed any friendship. C.H considers that Facebook represents a circle of human beings, so it helped her talk to others about her lover and hence, helped her keep him around. She felt closer to the deceased one. She states that grieving on Facebook doesn't replace any counseling or therapy. It just helps you share feelings, praise the deceased person and think about him with a certain group. She still uses Facebook from time to time as a commemorative outlet by posting a new picture of him or re-sharing an old one. C.H is planning to create another event in few months related to her deceased lover and she will use Facebook to announce it. She ends the interview saying that she never felt addicted to Facebook (Appendix A – Interview Three).

Interview No. Four was conducted with Zeina Mouawad, a 28-year-old woman, who lost her father in December 2010. Her dad had a profile page so she posted messages and pictures on his wall posts and even sent him private messages to his inbox. She directed the messages to him and mentioned some members of his family such as her brother or mother. She posted special songs he liked and sentences expressing her love to him. The first two months after the death of her father, she spent at least 10 minutes per day on his page but it didn't help her ease or speed any of the five stages of grief. When she saw other people's posts, she felt better because they cared about him, her messages or family's messages. She thinks that when grieving on Facebook, we get affection, love, comfort and support. Plus, some relationships could develop with some people. She feels closer to her dad when she visits his

page as if he is still alive. According to her experience with Facebook, she considers that it's a platform that could be a substitute for counseling or group comforting sessions. She is still using it as a commemorative outlet for her deceased father and she affirms being addicted to Facebook especially in hard times (Appendix A - Interview Four).

Interview No. Five was conducted with Ghassan, a 25-year-old male, who lost a very close friend in September 2012. He never used Facebook before as a means for grieving. When his friend passed away, he found it shameful and disrespectful to post anything on Facebook but then he felt like he had to do it or else he would feel like an outlier. Being close friends, people expected him to write something about his death so the only message after 3 days was, "September 2012". The message was directed to him of course since it is his profile page but indirectly to his family and friends. Few days later, he wrote an apology for not being around when he needed him. The first days when he passed away, "I spent a lot of time on his profile page looking back at some pictures together and all the messages exchanged", he says. As for the five stages of grief, Ghassan does not really agree with this theory since the sequence of stages might vary so it cannot be generalized on all grieving people. He did only experience the first stage, denial, and a lot of sadness when he read other people's posts, but did not go through depression. Facebook helped in easing up things and facing the tragic event through sharing information and feelings. Ghassan states "Some of people's comments made me cry, some other shocked me and some disgusted me because they look like they have been overdoing it and were not perhaps coming from the heart. People start caring on Facebook, but actually they do it just because they get more "likes". They can even become poetic when in fact they may have never been like this. Facebook can provide support to the person grieving and some reconnection with old common friends but doesn't necessarily develop them to any further stage". He does not feel closer to the deceased person when in contact with him on Facebook and this feels horrible and weird. He

despises seeing people writing on his wall and he believes that the page should be deleted when the user is deceased. Facebook cannot be a substitute or supplement for counseling or group comforting session and he never used it as a commemorative outlet for the deceased loved one except for this case and very little. "I never felt addicted to Facebook but I cannot deny a certain attachment to it", he says see (Appendix A - Interview Five).

Interview No. Six was conducted with Sabine Tabbah, a 29 year-old-woman, who lost her aunt in June 2011 and started using Facebook the same day. She posted messages and pictures on her wall, sent her private inbox messages and created a memorial page for her. All posts were targeted to the deceased person and she used to post everything, anything she would feel, how much she misses her, how angry at God she is, how much she needs her, how many things she has to tell her, etc. It all depended on the mood she was in but she wrote her daily since she checked her page everyday. Sometimes she visited it more than once a day. At times, she would check it once a week. Facebook is not a tool that helps in overcoming the five stages of grief or get through the process. "It is just a new age tool to think out loud", says Sabine. It slows down the grieving process, like making her stay in denial sometimes so it does not help in getting done with the five grieving stages any faster.

Other people's posts made her even sadder than she already was and whenever she grieved on Facebook it was only to attain support. Few relationships developed while using Facebook for grieving. Definitely, Facebook cannot be a substitute or supplement or counseling or group sessions but she still uses it as a remembrance outlet for the deceased loved ones. She ends her interview confirming that she was a Facebook addict since she started using it and still is, in hard or in good times (Appendix A – Interview Six).

Results from the interviews revealed that Facebook users who experienced grief mostly post on the deceased wall (or theirs if the deceased has no profile page) messages or pictures directed first to the deceased and then to his family. Two of the six sent private inbox

messages. The type of messages varied between expressing grief and loss, sharing memories through songs, poems or past events and conveying love and important dates such as the deceased loved one's birthday or death anniversary. As soon as the news is announced, they started spending time on the messages or pictures exchanged but decreased with time. When grieving people saw other people's posts, most of them felt better because they provided mainly support and comfort. They all confirm that Facebook did not help in overcoming the five stages of grief but it just helped sharing and thinking out loud. One person admitted that Facebook was increasing her anger and two others have had their denial stage extended, which was surprisingly helpful as soon as the tragic event happened. However, it did not accelerate the process to get to the stage of acceptance. Three out of six stated that Facebook gets the grieving person closer to the deceased, which is absurd since friendships with other users are not certainly developed (four out of six did not have any friendship developed). Three out of six of interviewees believed that Facebook might be a substitute or supplement for counseling or group sessions. Finally, almost all interviewees admitted that they were addicted to Facebook in bad times as well as in other situations.

B. Online survey with Facebook users aged 18-40: Analysis (Appendix B)

Starting with graph one, even though interviewees in our sample were between 18-40, 58% percent of them were between 25 and 30 and 24% were between 35 and 40. They are mostly females (63% - graph two) but results were not affected by the gender. Most users experienced grieving on Facebook through a family member or a friend (67% - graph three). Other people's comments provided them with support (36%), affection (19%) and attention (which means the regarding of someone as interesting or important) (17%) (graph four). Graph five describes the user's feeling when any content such as a picture, activity or post about a deceased friend appears on his/her newsfeed or on the side of the panel. Sixty-four percent felt sad whereas 33%, which is the "other" category, gave answers such as "happy to

remember good times, curious, weird, disturbed, agonized, compassionate, inappropriate, uncomfortable, affected or mad by seeing other people still thinking about this person". None felt scared, only 1% felt better and around 12% were shocked. Graph six shows that 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%).

Moving on to graph eight, the most common tool used to grieve is status updates mentioning the deceased loved one's name (41%), then posting on the deceased person's wall (31%). Not only 65% stated that Facebook does not aid in the grieving process throughout the five stages of grief (graph nine) but also 80% did not feel closer to the deceased loved one when in contact with him/her on Facebook (graph ten). Eighty-five percent do not feel a positive mood shift when sharing their grief on Facebook (graph 11).

Fifty-six percent disagree that friendships can develop, moving from shallow to intimate or more personal ones (graph 12). All these previous results would logically come into the conclusion that grieving people or users (70%) do not see Facebook as a substitute or a supplement for counseling or group comforting sessions (graph 13). Only 16% confirm that during grieving time, they tend to use Facebook more often and finally most of the users (82%) affirmed that sometimes they considered themselves addicted to Facebook with only 8% saying that they are addicted to it no matter what the circumstances are.

VI. Discussion and conclusion

A. Implications of findings

To start with, it is clear that answers varied depending on each one's character and beliefs regarding the subject of death and on their relationship with the deceased one. Findings suggest that in Lebanon, Facebook is mostly an outlet to share and think out loud with your

network of family, friends and acquaintances.

In section 3-D (studies), Pennington (2012) in her research Grief Communication and Facebook, concluded that messages written on the deceased profile's page were either a continued conversation with the loved one or a way to acknowledge the social network, meaning that some messages, apart from directing it towards the deceased, referenced directly to/for other members of the social network such as close friends and family. Plus, she discovered that messages were either expressing grief or loss, sharing memories or important dates with the deceased loved one and frustration over death. Also in section 3-D (testimonials outside Lebanon), grieving people posted on the deceased page messages addressed to him/her or to the family. In addition, they also expressed grief, loss, memories and frustration over death.

In comparison with both the interviews and the survey conducted for this research paper, the results were quite similar. The interviewees (see Appendix A) show that grieving people directed the messages to the deceased then to the family and what they wrote about was expressing love, remembering the date of the loss, reviving moments through poems, pictures or song. The result of the survey (see Appendix B - graphs) also project that when users expressed their grief on Facebook, it was directed first to the deceased then to his/her family (graph six). They mostly expressed grief and loss (23%), shared memories (22%) and few mentioned frustration over death (10%) and important dates (9%) (graph seven – Appendix two) through mostly updating their status mentioning the deceased one's name (41%), posting on the deceased wall (30%) and finally tagging him/her on pictures or videos (29%) (graph eight). Private inbox messages were also sent to the deceased loved one.

Hypothesis one is answered clearly in survey two: grieving people felt sad (graph five) 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.

Hypothesis two is refuted in both: interviewees confirmed 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 the sense of speeding up the grieving process and getting to the acceptance phase. However, surprisingly, in two of the one-on-one interviews, it slowed down the five stages of grief, by extending the denial phase and allowing the tragic news to sink in slowly before actually facing it. Feeling close to the deceased helped extending the denial phase as well (only three out of six agreed, see interviews three, four and six – Appendix A). However, the survey results claim the opposite, with 80% not feeling closer to the deceased loved one when in contact with him on Facebook as if he/she is still living (graph 10 – Appendix B). These results contradicted testimonials from outside Lebanon (see 3-D), in which grieving people stated that a spiritual relationship is created when they spend time on their deceased loved one's page. In addition, four out of six interviewees and 56% in the survey (graph ten) disagreed that when grieving on Facebook, friendships can develop, moving from shallow to intimate or more personal ones. Consequently, the six degrees of separation and the social penetration theory does not really seem to apply in times of grief in Lebanon but it seems to do outside Lebanon.

Hypothesis three is not fully supported. In grieving time, Facebook gratifies needs such as affection, support and love (as mentioned in replies to question ten, Appendix A and in graph 4, appendix B). It supports the Uses and Gratification theory by Blumler and Katz (1974), which suggests that media users seek out a medium that best fulfills the needs of the user. Also, Facebook triggers a response that indicates a mood shift at a specific moment (Roan, 2012). So when an emotional withdrawal or loneliness occurs, clicking on the previous posts and reading them gives the self positive feedbacks and gratifies the user with a better mood (See III - 3). However, when interviewees were asked if they felt a sudden mood shift (Appendix B - graph 11), eighty-five percent rejected the idea. Hence, replies from

interviewees are sometimes contradictory. Regardless of the fact that Facebook provides a positive mood shift, the one-on-one interviews indicate that three out of six approved it as a substitute for counseling, therapies and group sessions in real life. Only 30% agreed in Graph 13 (Appendix B).

To conclude, the findings described how 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 support, love and affection. However, even though these two elements are useful and valuable, this research does not support that Facebook soothes the five stages of grief, introduced by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1997), which are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (known by the acronym DABDA). Note that Facebook was capable of extending the denial phase which helped the tragic news sink in before actually facing it. We can deduce that a Lebanese virtual grieving outlet on Facebook is actually present but not as effective as it should be.

B. Limitations of the study

Some unavoidable limitations occurred while assembling this research, starting with the sample size and the sampling procedure. Surely, additional users should be interviewed to diversify answers. Having only six subjects agreeing to tackle this subject in a one-on-one interview and 103 online subjects, of whom 13% had never experienced grief on Facebook, means that the sampling error is relatively high, which may influence the result's validity. Therefore, in order to get more valid results, a future study should be done on a larger sample size.

Second limitation lies within the use of an online survey to have faster answers but respondents weren't physically present so the study might lack truthfulness of answers

especially that they were asked sensitive information about a very delicate subject. Even though anonymity was assured, they might have been influenced by their emotional involvement and reported inaccurate data.

Third, section V in the literature review confirms the lack of in-depth studies regarding social media usage or specifically online grief in Lebanon.

Although, this research has launched the subject, a follow up or even a wider study about the usage of Facebook in Lebanon will surely yield to bigger and more accurate and interesting results in the future.

C. Recommendations for future research

In this research, the focus was not on gender. However, it would be interesting for future researchers in Lebanon to actually study grief on Facebook in relationship to gender in order to see the difference between men and women in dealing with negative emotions. Many previous studies stated that men and women grieve differently so it would be interesting to observe their behavior on an online platform such as Facebook. Bonanno and Kaltman (2001) state that “men and women cope with loss and express their grief differently. While there are significant differences in how and when men and women show their feelings, they do not differ in the amount of personal suffering they experience after a loss”.

Anderson (2001) conducted a study in which he observed men for eighteen months. He concluded that they are more likely to be socially conditioned to repress feelings associated with loss, and not to tell their stories in order to avoid the feelings associated with the person they lost. Furthermore, it will be also interesting to compare with older grieving groups, if perhaps with time, an age range of 40 years old and above of Lebanese Facebook users, amply existed. In addition, it was discussed previously in the implications of finding that Facebook aids in the extension of the denial phase and helps the tragic news sink in before actually facing it. This research was about Facebook soothing the five stages of grief

but future researchers might narrow down the study and focus on the effect of Facebook on soothing any of the five stages, starting with first stage, denial.

Finally, an observation of Lebanese Facebook groups opened particularly for deceased people could help determine grieving people's online activity and how they express their feelings. Although it requires more time and research to select reliable memorial pages, it would be interesting to analyze the evolution of the number of visits and comments on the page of some specific users, be it family or friends, for a certain period of time starting with the day of death.

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Appendix A

One-on-one interviews with selected people who experienced grief on Facebook

I'm Sygrid Araman, an NDU student working on my MA thesis, and would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The questionnaire is related to the number one social media platform, Facebook, and grieving practices on this outlet which nowadays have become a common practice. I will try to find out whether Facebook soothes the five stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance) by satisfying human needs in times of grief.

Please answer all of the items. You need not identify yourself. Completion of the interview should take less than 15 minutes. If you would like to receive a copy of the results, please contact Sygrid Araman at sygrid.araman@gmail.com

Your input is highly appreciated since you personally experienced grief on Facebook.

- 1. Name (optional):**

- 2. Age:**

- 3. Gender:**

- 4. When did you lose your beloved one and what is your relationship to him/her?**

- 5. When did you start using Facebook to express your grief?**

6. What tools or applications on Facebook's platform did you use? (You may choose one, more or all)

- wall posts, personal messages
- pictures/videos
- creating events
- memorial pages
- launching a group in their memory

7. When writing on the Facebook profile page of the deceased person, to whom is the message directed? (to the deceased loved one, to friends, to their family, etc. You may choose one, more or all)

8. What do you write about when commenting on the FB profile page of the deceased person? (you miss him/her, you share memories, you ask why he/she is gone or where he/she is, etc. You may choose one, more or all)

9. How much time per day or week did you (or do you) spend on their profile page?

10. The 5 stages of grief are denial, anger, bargaining (the negotiation for an extended life in case of a serious disease: I will ... if I'm cured), depression and acceptance. Did Facebook help you in easing or speeding any of these stages. Explain please.

11. How do you react or feel towards other people's posts regarding the deceased person (felt better, shocked, scared, sad, etc.)?

12. When grieving on Facebook, do you feel that any of these human needs - affection, attention, love, comfort or support - is attained?

13. Did any of your relationships develop, (ex: friendships moving from shallow to intimate ones or became closer to the deceased family members) while using Facebook for grieving?

14. Do you feel closer when in contact with the deceased person on Facebook as if he is still living? Explain please.

15. Based on your experience, do you agree that Facebook can be a substitute or supplement for counseling or group comforting sessions?

16. Are you still using Facebook as a commemorative outlet for the deceased loved ones?

17. Have you ever felt addicted to Facebook in hard times such as grieving or in other situations? (ex: relationship break ups, divorce, etc.)

Appendix A - Interview 1

1. Name (optional):

Maha Kuzbar

2. Age:

40 years old

3. Gender:

Female

4. When did you lose your beloved one and what is your relationship to him/her?

Mrs Bouez passed away about three years ago. She was not family related but she was someone who helped me and stood by me to overcome problems in my life. She was (and still is) spiritually related.

5. When did you start using Facebook to express your grief?

I believe that was the only time I used Facebook for grieving.

6. What tools or applications on Facebook's platform did you use? (wall posts, personal messages, pictures/videos, creating events, memorial pages, launching a group in their memory, etc. You may choose one, more or all)

I used wall posts on her profile page.

7. When writing on the Facebook profile page of the deceased person, to whom is the message directed? (to the deceased loved one, to friends, to their family, etc. You may choose one, more or all)

It is directed to the deceased person herself and to her family.

8. What do you write about when commenting on the FB profile page of the deceased person? (you miss him/her, you share memories, you ask why he/she is gone or where he/she is, etc. You may choose one, more or all)

I miss her.

9. How much time per day or week did you (or do you) spend on their profile page?

I spent a maximum of 10 minutes per day.

10. The 5 stages of grief are denial, anger, bargaining (the negotiation for an extended life in case of a serious disease: I will ... if I'm cured), depression and acceptance. Did Facebook help you in easing or speeding any of these stages. Explain please.

It did not really help in easing or speeding these stages. It was just a way to express my feelings.

11. How do you react or feel towards other people's posts regarding the deceased person (felt better, shocked/surprised, scared, sadder, etc.)?

I felt sadder.

12. When grieving on Facebook, do you feel that any of these human needs - affection, attention, love, comfort or support - is attained?

I see that comfort and support are attained.

13. Did any of your relationships develop, (ex: friendships moving from shallow to intimate ones or personally became closer to the deceased's family members) while using Facebook for grieving?

None of my relationship have developed while using Facebook for grieving.

14. Do you feel closer when in contact with the deceased person on Facebook as if he/she is still living? Explain please.

I do feel close to the deceased person sometimes but not through Facebook. Actually, I don't believe Facebook or any other social media could provide me with such feelings.

15. Based on your experience, do you agree that Facebook can be a substitute or supplement for counseling or group comforting sessions?

No I don't, I believe human interaction is essential for such sessions but if there is no other means then yes, it could be but it wouldn't be as efficient and effective as real sessions.

16. Are you still using Facebook as a commemorative outlet for the deceased loved ones?

No.

17. Have you ever felt addicted to Facebook in hard times such as grieving or other situations? (ex: relationship break ups, divorce, etc.)

Not in hard times but in general maybe yes. I have to check Facebook every single day.

Appendix A – Interview 2

1. Name (optional):

Maria Saba

2. Age:

24 years old

3. Gender:

Female

4. When did you lose your beloved one and what is your relationship to him/her?

My close friend passed away some years ago.

5. When did you start using Facebook to express your grief?

I started using Facebook for grieving as soon as I heard the tragic news.

6. What tools or applications on Facebook's platform did you use? (wall posts, personal messages, pictures/videos, creating events, memorial pages, launching a group in their memory, etc. You may choose one, more, or all)

I used wall posts on his profile page, specifically images and videos.

7. When writing on the Facebook profile page of the deceased person, to whom is the message directed? (to the deceased loved one, to friends, to their family, etc. You may choose one, more, or all)

It is directed mostly to the family.

8. What do you write about when commenting on the FB profile page of the deceased person? (you miss him/her, you share memories, you ask why he/she is gone or where he/she is, etc. You may choose one, more or all)

I posted our special songs and his parent's pictures related to special occasions such as his birthday, Christmas, etc.

9. How much time per day or week did you (or do you) spend on their profile page?

At the beginning, I checked his page every hour, then a couple of weeks later it was reduced to twice a week. Now, I barely visit his profile page.

10. The 5 stages of grief are denial, anger, bargaining (the negotiation for an extended life in case of a serious disease: I will ... if I'm cured), depression and acceptance. Did Facebook help you in easing or speeding any of these stages. Explain please.

It only increased my anger but I had to check Facebook just to update his parents about new activity on his profile page.

11. How do you react or feel towards other people's posts regarding the deceased person (felt better, shocked/surprised, scared, sadder, etc.)?

I felt disgusted when I saw other people's posts on his profile page because I find it weird to post on deceased person's profile page since he is not part of this world anymore. Regardless of his parent's requests. I would not have done it. Plus, a lot of people do not know him that much in real life but virtually, acted as if they did.

12. When grieving on Facebook, do you feel that any of these human needs - affection, attention, love, comfort or support - is attained?

I try to get all these human needs but it does not really work. It only wastes time which is not bad in a grieving state.

13. Did any of your relationships develop, (ex: friendships moving from shallow to intimate ones or personally became closer to the deceased family members) while using Facebook for grieving?

Yes, some of relationships have developed for a while but then everything went back to normal.

14. Do you feel closer when in contact with the deceased person on Facebook as if he is still living? Explain please.

I tried to feel closer to the deceased person on Facebook but it did not work.

15. Based on your experience, do you agree that Facebook can be a substitute or supplement for counseling or group comforting sessions?

Facebook can be a substitute or supplement for counseling or group comforting sessions.

16. Are you still using Facebook as a commemorative outlet for the deceased loved ones?

No.

17. Have you ever felt addicted to Facebook in hard times such as grieving or other situations? (ex: relationship break ups, divorce, etc.)

Yes, I already felt addicted to Facebook in hard times.

Appendix A – Interview 3

1. Name (optional):

C.H

2. Age:

36 years old

3. Gender:

Female

4. When did you lose your beloved one and what is your relationship to him/her?

I lost my lover, on the 18th of February 2012.

5. When did you start using Facebook to express your grief?

I started using Facebook to express my grief the next day.

6. What tools or applications on Facebook's platform did you use? (wall posts, personal messages, pictures/videos, creating events, memorial pages, launching a group in their memory, etc. You may choose one, more, or all)

I posted on my own profile page pictures with some of my personal lines, his poems or a variety of poetry. I even created an artistic event on Facebook for his memorial.

7. When writing on the Facebook profile page of the deceased person, to whom is the message directed? (to the deceased loved one, to friends, to their family, etc. You may choose one, more, or all)

He had no Facebook profile page.

8. What do you write about when commenting on the FB profile page of the deceased person? (you miss him/her, you share memories, you ask why he/she is gone or where he/she is, etc. You may choose one, more, or all)

As I mentioned previously, he had no profile page so I only posted on mine. I was very discrete and never mentioned him directly so no one would have guessed, except really close friends who knew about our relationship.

9. How much time per day or week did you (or do you) spend on their profile page?

I spent a lot of time looking for nice pictures, reading comments, etc.

10. The 5 stages of grief are denial, anger, bargaining (the negotiation for an extended life in case of a serious disease: I will... if I'm cured), depression and acceptance. Did Facebook help you in easing or speeding any of these stages? Explain please.

Facebook helped me share with people what I needed them to see the most: my boyfriend's beauty. It also extended the denial phase, which made accept his disappearance gradually.

11. How do you react or feel towards other people's posts regarding the deceased person (felt better, shocked/surprised, scared, sadder, etc.)?

Their reactions were full of love, which made me feel better.

12. When grieving on Facebook, do you feel that any of these human needs - affection, attention, love, comfort or support - is attained?

Yes, I feel comforted and people provide me with some support when they share their feelings regarding the death of my loved one.

13. Did any of your relationships develop, (ex: friendships moving from shallow to intimate ones or personally became closer to the deceased family members) while using Facebook for grieving?

Yes, I got very intimate reactions from strangers but I never developed these relationships.

14. Do you feel closer when in contact with the deceased person on Facebook as if he is still living? Explain please.

I realized that Facebook was playing the role of "community of men", or humankind, or group, or whatever; that it helped me talk to others about my lover, and hence, helped me keep him around.

15. Based on your experience, do you agree that Facebook can be a substitute or supplement for counseling or group comforting sessions?

Facebook can be a substitute or supplement for counseling or group comforting sessions.

16. Are you still using Facebook as a commemorative outlet for the deceased loved ones?

No.

17. Have you ever felt addicted to Facebook in hard times such as grieving or other situations? (ex: relationship break ups, divorce, etc.)

Yes, I already felt addicted to Facebook in hard times.

Appendix A - Interview 4

1. Name (optional):

Zeina Mouawad

2. Age:

28 year old

3. Gender:

Female

4. When did you lose your beloved one and what is your relationship to him/her?

My father passed away in September 2010.

5. When did you start using Facebook to express your grief?

I started using Facebook for grieving in September of 2010.

6. What tools or applications on Facebook's platform did you use? (wall posts, personal messages, pictures/videos, creating events, memorial pages, launching a group in their memory, etc. You may choose one, more, or all)

I used wall posts on his profile page and private inbox messages.

7. When writing on the Facebook profile page of the deceased person, to whom is the message directed? (to the deceased loved one, to friends, to their family, etc. You may choose one, more, or all)

It is directed to my father and my family.

8. What do you write about when commenting on the FB profile page of the deceased person? (you miss him/her, you share memories, you ask why he/she is gone or where he/she is, etc. You may choose one, more, or all)

I posted love and messages that expressed how much I love him.

9. How much time per day or week did you (or do you) spend on their profile page?

Everyday, I spent 10 minutes and it lasted two months after his death.

10. The 5 stages of grief are denial, anger, bargaining (the negotiation for an extended life in case of a serious disease: I will ... if I'm cured), depression and acceptance. Did Facebook help you in easing or speeding any of these stages. Explain please.

No, it did not really help in easing or speeding these stages.

11. How do you react or feel towards other people's posts regarding the deceased person (felt better, shocked/surprised, scared, sadder, etc.)?

I felt better when I saw other people's posts.

12. When grieving on Facebook, do you feel that any of these human needs - affection, attention, love, comfort or support - is attained?

I see that all these human needs are attained.

13. Did any of your relationships develop, (ex: friendships moving from shallow to intimate ones or personally became closer to the deceased family members) while using Facebook for grieving?

Yes, some of relationships have developed while using Facebook for grieving.

14. Do you feel closer when in contact with the deceased person on Facebook as if he is still living? Explain please.

Yes, I do feel closer to the deceased person on Facebook. I check his page as if he is still living.

15. Based on your experience, do you agree that Facebook can be a substitute or supplement for counseling or group comforting sessions?

Yes, Facebook can be a substitute or supplement for counseling or group comforting sessions.

16. Are you still using Facebook as a commemorative outlet for the deceased loved ones?

Yes.

17. Have you ever felt addicted to Facebook in hard times such as grieving or other situations? (ex: relationship break ups, divorce, etc.)

Yes, I already felt addicted to Facebook in hard times.

Appendix A - Interview 5

1. Name (optional):

Ghassan

2. Age:

25 years old

3. Gender:

Male

4. When did you lose your beloved one and what is your relationship to him/her?

A very close friend passed away in September of 2012.

5. When did you start using Facebook to express your grief?

I never used Facebook as a mean for grieving. Even after my friend's death, I still found it shameful or disrespectful but I felt that I should post anything, because I did not want to feel as an outlier. I guess people were expecting me to write something since we were close. "September 2012. I apologize when I was not around when you needed me" was my first and last post.

6. What tools or applications on Facebook's platform did you use? (wall posts, personal messages, pictures/videos, creating events, memorial pages, launching a group in their memory, etc. You may choose one, more, or all)

I used only one wall post on his profile page and after three days.

7. When writing on the Facebook profile page of the deceased person, to whom is the message directed? (to the deceased loved one, to friends, to their family, etc. You may choose one, more, or all)

It is directed to the deceased loved one since it is his own profile page but it indirectly targeted to his family and friends.

8. What do you write about when commenting on the FB profile page of the deceased person? (you miss him/her, you share memories, you ask why he/she is gone or where he/she is, etc. You may choose one, more, or all)

I wrote the day of his decease and I apologized for not being around when he needed me.

9. How much time per day or week did you (or do you) spend on their profile page?

The first day when I received the tragic news, I spent a lot of time on his Facebook profile page and I went on reading everyone's post. I even spent time going through our pictures and previous emails and message exchange.

10. The 5 stages of grief are denial, anger, bargaining (the negotiation for an extended life in case of a serious disease: I will ... if I'm cured), depression and acceptance. Did Facebook help you in easing or speeding any of these stages. Explain please.

To start with, I do not support much this theory, as the sequence of the stages may vary with people, and cannot be generalized. Personally, I did not experience such stages when it came to Facebook and grieving. I was in denial for a while, but mostly sad whenever I read different people's posts. Yes Facebook could have helped easing up things but I believe it is more about sharing with others in times of grief.

11. How do you react or feel towards other people's posts regarding the deceased person (felt better, shocked/surprised, scared, sadder, etc.)?

Some made me cry, some shocked me while others disgusted me because I felt that they are overdoing it and it is not coming from the heart. I think people just care about showing that they care to get attention and more "likes". Some people suddenly became poetic.

12. When grieving on Facebook, do you feel that any of these human needs - affection, attention, love, comfort or support - is attained?

Facebook might give some support when grieving.

13. Did any of your relationships develop, (ex: friendships moving from shallow to intimate ones or personally became closer to the deceased family members) while using Facebook for grieving?

Some old common friends have contacted me again after a long time of separation but it did not substantially develop any relationship.

14. Do you feel closer when in contact with the deceased person on Facebook as if he is still living? Explain please.

No, I do not feel closer when in contact with the deceased person on Facebook as if he is still living. It feels horrible and weird, and I still despise people who are writing on his wall.

Facebook should deactivate the deceased one's page.

15. Based on your experience, do you agree that Facebook can be a substitute or supplement for counseling or group comforting sessions?

No.

16. Are you still using Facebook as a commemorative outlet for the deceased loved ones?

No and fortunately I used only once.

17. Have you ever felt addicted to Facebook in hard times such as grieving or other situations? (ex: relationship break ups, divorce, etc.)

I do not consider myself addicted but I do feel attached.

Appendix A - Interview 6

1. Name (optional):

Sabine Tabbah

2. Age:

29 years old

3. Gender:

Female

4. When did you lose your beloved one and what is your relationship to him/her?

I lost my aunt on the 8th of June 2008.

5. When did you start using Facebook to express your grief?

I started using Facebook for grieving as soon as it happened, 8th of June 2008.

6. What tools or applications on Facebook's platform did you use? (wall posts, personal messages, pictures/videos, creating events, memorial pages, launching a group in their memory, etc. You may choose one, more, or all).

Wall posts, personal messages, pictures and a memorial page.

7. When writing on the Facebook profile page of the deceased person, to whom is the message directed? (to the deceased loved one, to friends, to their family, etc. You may choose one, more, or all).

I wrote many messages. They are directed to my aunt.

8. What do you write about when commenting on the FB profile page of the deceased person? (you miss him/her, you share memories, you ask why he/she is gone or where he/she is, etc. You may choose one, more or all)

Everything. I express what I feel. How much I miss her. How angry with God I am. How much I need her. How many things I want to tell her... it really depends on the day. But I write her everyday.

9. How much time per day or week did you (or do you) spend on their profile page?

Sometimes I checked her page daily, even more than once per day. I could check it once a week also. But the least is once a week. I never ever miss a week without connecting with her.

10. The 5 stages of grief are denial, anger, bargaining (the negotiation for an extended life in case of a serious disease: I will ... if I'm cured), depression and acceptance. Did Facebook help you in easing or speeding any of these stages. Explain please.

No, it did not help. I even find this whole thesis/survey topic strange. Facebook does not even help in the process. It's just a new age tool to think out loud.

11. How do you react or feel towards other people's posts regarding the deceased person (felt better, shocked/surprised, scared, sadder, etc.)?

Their posts made me yearn more and made me feel even sadder.

12. When grieving on Facebook, do you feel that any of these human needs - affection, attention, love, comfort or support - is attained?

When grieving on Facebook, support is attained.

13. Did any of your relationships develop, (ex: friendships moving from shallow to intimate ones or personally became closer to the deceased family members) while using Facebook for grieving?

Slightly. I would say 2/10.

14. Do you feel closer when in contact with the deceased person on Facebook as if he is still living? Explain please.

Yes I do feel closer. I guess it slows down the grieving process: it makes me stay in denial sometimes. So that is why it does not help in grieving.

15. Based on your experience, do you agree that Facebook can be a substitute or supplement for counseling or group comforting sessions?

Of course it cannot be a substitute or supplement for counseling or group comforting sessions.

16. Are you still using Facebook as a commemorative outlet for the deceased loved ones?

Yes.

17. Have you ever felt addicted to Facebook in hard times such as grieving or other situations? (ex: relationship break ups, divorce, etc.)

Yes, I am addicted to Facebook at any time, including hard times.

Appendix B

Online survey with Facebook users aged 18-40

Hello,

I'm Sygrid Araman, an NDU student working on my MA thesis, and would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. The questionnaire is related to the number one social media platform, Facebook, and grieving practices on this outlet which nowadays have become a common practice. I will try to find out whether Facebook soothes the five stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance) by satisfying human needs in times of grief.

Participation is voluntary. Completion of the survey should take less than 10 minutes. Please answer all of the items. You need not identify yourself. If you would like to receive a copy of the results, please contact Sygrid Araman at sygrid.araman@gmail.com

Your input is highly appreciated.

1. Age?

- 18-24
- 25-30
- 31-35
- 36-40

2. Gender?

- Male
- Female

3. How did you experience grief on Facebook?

- I personally grieved on Facebook
- I witnessed grieving on Facebook through a family member or a friend
- Both of the above
- I never experienced or witnessed grieving on Facebook

4. When I personally grieved on Facebook (or witnessed someone else grieving on Facebook), comments of other users were mostly providing me (or the other person grieving) with (you may answer more than one choice):

- Affection
- Attention
- Love
- Support
- Comfort

5. When any content (such as a picture, activity or post) about a deceased friend on Facebook appears on my news feed or on the side of the panel, I mostly feel:

- Better
- Shocked/surprised
- Scared
- Sadder
- Other. Please specify:

6. When you write on the Facebook profile page of a deceased loved one, to whom the message is mostly directed (you may answer more than one choice):

- To the deceased
- To friends and family
- I have never written on a deceased person's wall
- Other. Please specify:

7. What do you write about when you comment on a Facebook profile page of a deceased loved one? (You may answer more than one choice)

- Expressing grief and loss (ex: I miss you)
- Sharing memories (ex: events lived together)
- Important dates (ex: birthdays or death anniversary)
- Frustration over death (ex: where or why did you go)
- Other. Please specify:

8. What is the tool you or the person you witnessed grieving have used (You may answer more than one choice):

- Posting on the deceased person's wall
- Pictures or videos tagging the deceased person
- Status updates mentioning the deceased loved one's name

9. The 5 stages of grief are denial, anger, bargaining (the negotiation for an extended life, ex: I will ... if I'm cured), depression and acceptance. I believe that Facebook aids in the grieving process throughout these stages.

- Yes
- No

10. I feel closer to the deceased loved one when in contact with him on Facebook as if he/she is still living.

- Yes
- No

11. I feel a mood shift and as a result become positive when I share my grief on Facebook.

- Yes
- No

12. When grieving on Facebook, friendships with other people expressing their grief on this outlet can develop, moving from shallow to intimate or more personal ones.

- I agree
- I disagree

13. Facebook can be a substitute or a supplement for counseling or group comforting sessions.

- Yes
- No

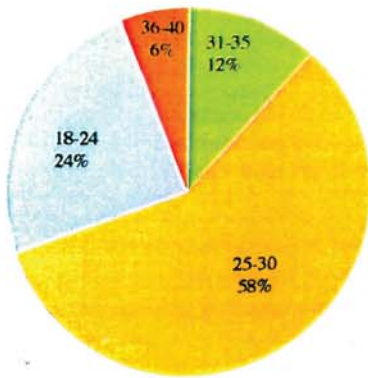
14. During grieving time, I tend to use Facebook more often than usual.

- Yes
- No

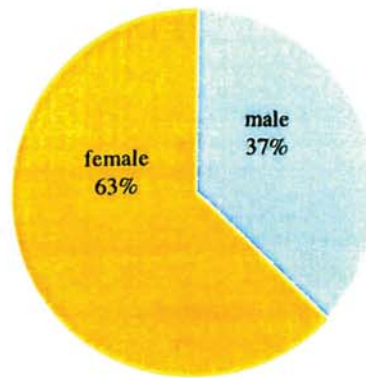
15. I consider myself addicted to Facebook.

- Always
- In hard times
- Never

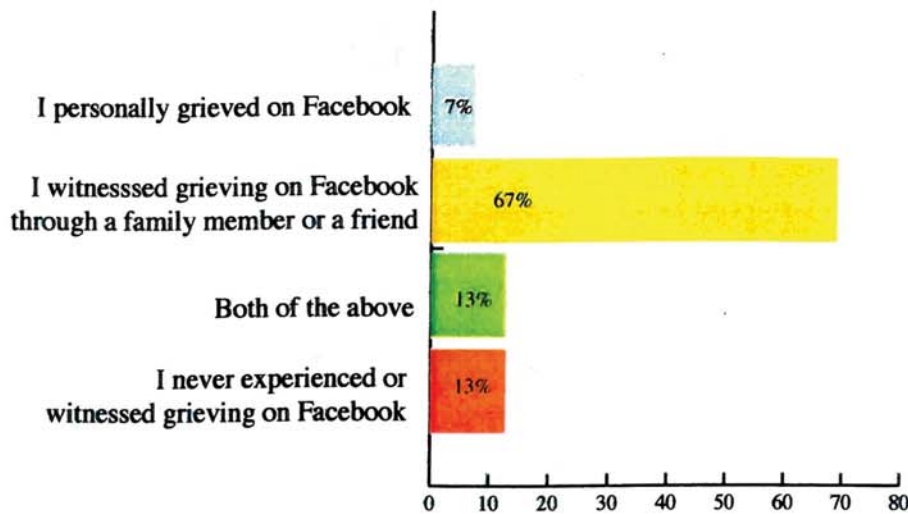
1. Age



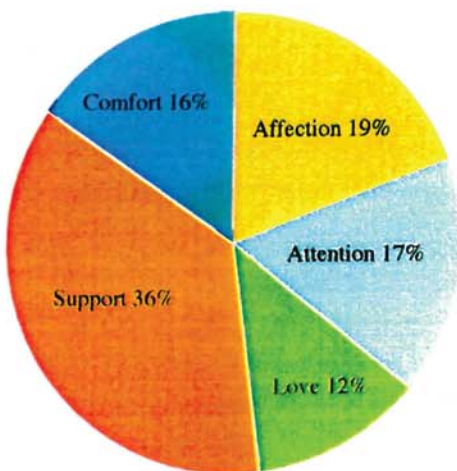
2. Gender



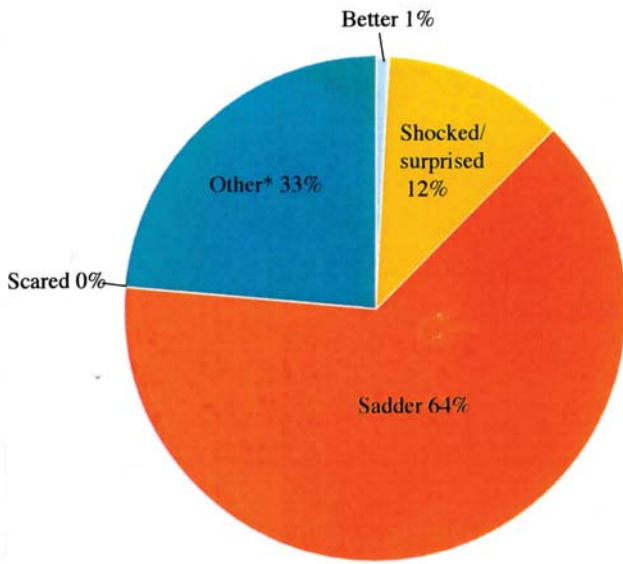
3. How did you experience grief on Facebook?



4. When I personally grieved on Facebook (or witnessed someone else grieving in Facebook), comments of other users were mostly providing me (or the other person grieving) with (you may answer more than one choice):

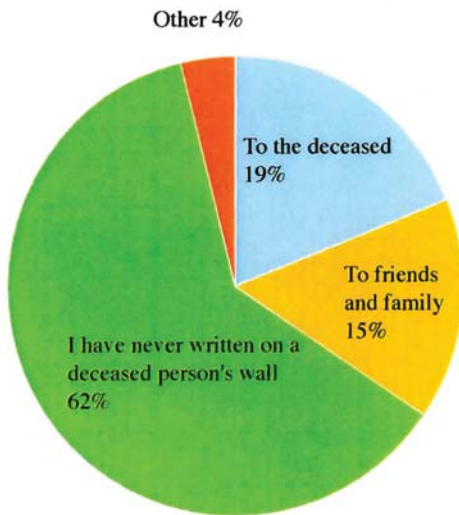


5. When any content (such as a picture, an activity or a post) about a deceased friend on Facebook appears on my news feed or on the side of the panel, I mostly feel:



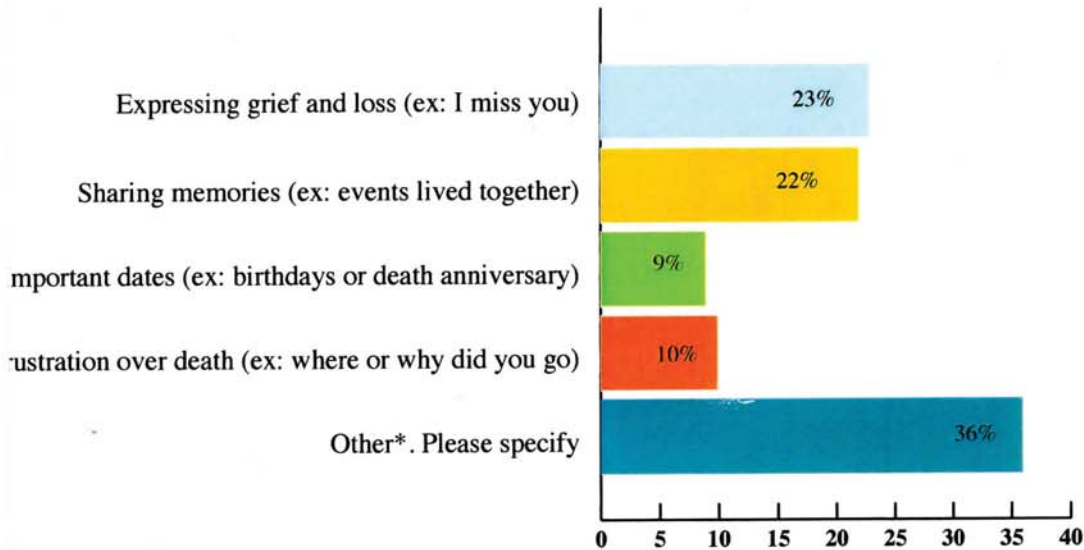
*Other received the following answers:
 Depends on my relationship with the deceased.
 Usually sad, but sometimes happy to remember good times. Curious. Weird
 Informed if i seldom check my account. Disturbed. Bothered. I learned the news.
 Agonized. Depends on what the content is. Funny. Never noticed this type of posts.
 Aware. The post is out of place. Compassionate. That it shouldn't be on facebook.
 Uncomfortable. Rest in peace. Touched by seeing other people still thinking about this person. Mad.

6. When you write on the Facebook profile page of a deceased loved one, to whom the message is mostly directed? (you may answer more than one choice)



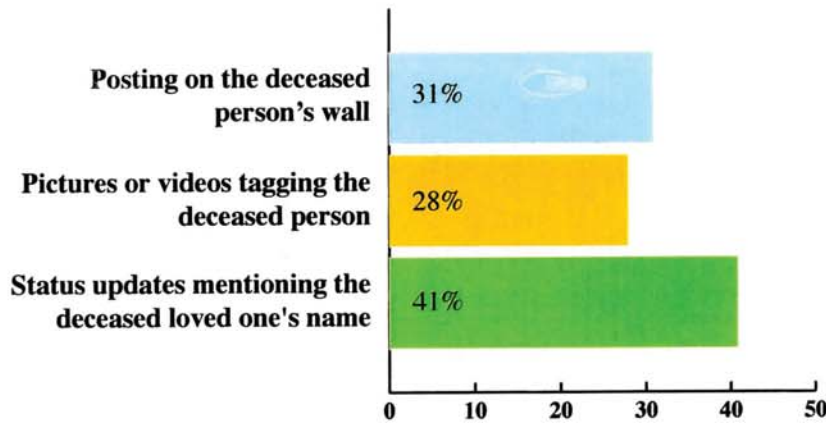
*Others mentioned answers such as:
 I never wrote and I would never write on a deceased person's wall.

7. What do you write about when you comment on a Facebook profile page of a deceased loved one? (you may answer more than one choice)

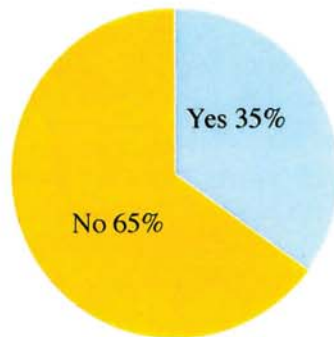


Others included mostly "I don't write on the deceased loved one's page".
Two replies had RIP as an answer.

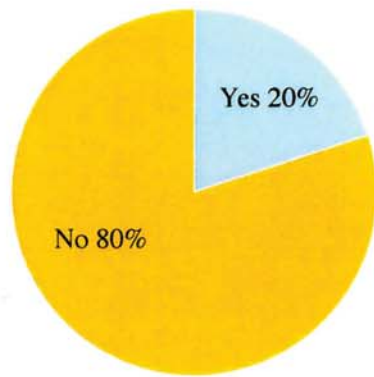
8. What is the tool you or the person you witnessed grieving have used (you may answer more than one choice):



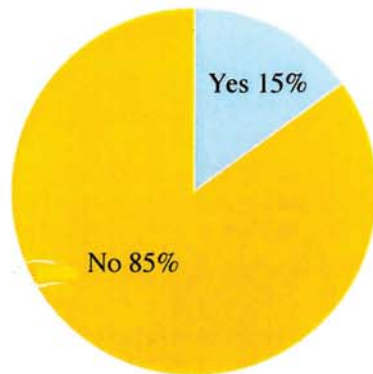
9. The 5 stages of grief are denial, anger, bargaining (the negotiation for an extended life, ex: I will ... if I'm cured), depression and acceptance. I believe that Facebook aids in the grieving process throughout these stages.



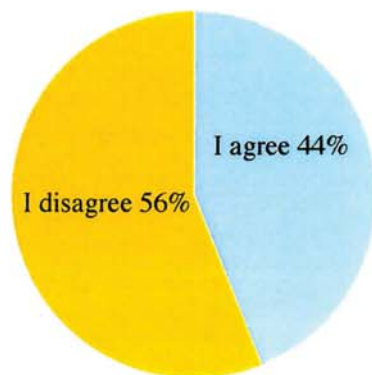
10. I feel closer to the deceased loved one when in contact with him on Facebook as if he/she is still living.



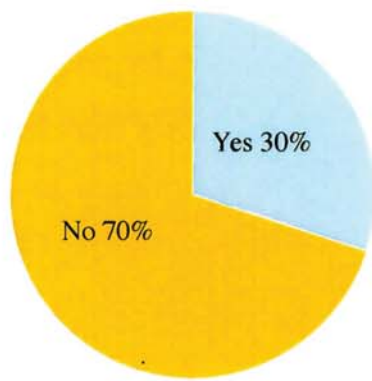
11. I feel a mood shift and as a result become positive when I share my grief on Facebook.



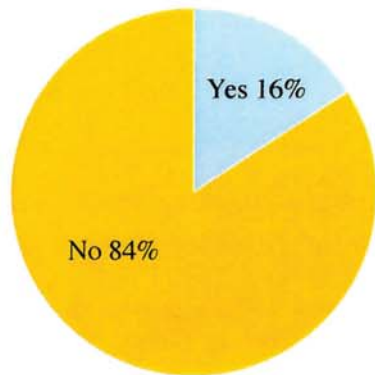
12. When grieving on Facebook, friendships with other people expressing their grief on this outlet can develop, moving from shallow to intimate or more personal ones.



13. Facebook can be a substitute or a supplement for counseling or group comforting sessions.



14. During grieving time, I tend to use Facebook more often than usual.



15. I consider myself addicted to Facebook.

