

Digitally Depressed: The Effects of Digital Media Usage in regard to Depression and Approaches for Alleviation for Individuals and the Society

Pritta Chasombat and Warat Karuchit

Pritta Chasombat (pr3tzy@gmail.com) is a Ph.D candidate of National Institute of Development Administration, Thailand. and Warat Karuchit, (warat.ka@hotmail.com) is an Assistant professor of National Institute of Development Administration, Thailand.

Article Info

Received 24 February 2019

Revised 11 June 2019

Accepted 10 September 2019

Abstract

With the growing usage of technology, mass media has adapted itself into digital media alongside with digital platforms or, as known as, social networking sites. The innovation has changed humans' life style and communication, such as, the way users consume and access to information, including virtual socializing. With the change in human interactions online, many organizations are using online channels to distribute information and raise awareness, promoting campaigns, and one of the most popular subjects is depression. Depression is one of the most severe health conditions that affects its victim in every aspect of his or her life. In an extension of the Internet's ability to create content, users not only educate themselves from online information and seek for self-help but are more likely to disclose "their" stories and feelings. Although there were numerous studies in the past decade which proved that the Internet can cause 'Internet or Facebook Addiction,' which may lead to mental illnesses like depression. Recently, several research studies questioned such a statement and found that, actually, Facebook is beneficial to mental health, such as, reducing depression and anxiety. Facebook and social media provide opportunity to develop social relationships for those who suffer from social anxiety. Also, the online connection has been acting as a substitute to face-to-face interactions which evidently reduce depression with increased life satisfaction. Therefore, it is possible to say that digital media, like, Facebook and YouTube have become one of the tools that help society to educate and have a better understanding in regard to depression, or a virtual place to find their own help community.

Keywords:

Depression,
Digital Media depression,
Facebook depression

Background

In the past decade, technologies have advanced in a way that affect individuals' ways of living which includes how information is being distributed, perceived and responded to, and definitely, the way people communicate. Since then, many media industries have adapted the digitized communication platforms and produced the final product called digital media.

According to the Centre For Digital Media (2016) from Vancouver, digital is a technical definition and relates to the use of computers. Digital media can be text, audio, video, graphics, and photo transmitted over the internet or computer networks. Digitized news and television networks that present online are also considered as digital media. With the presence of the Internet, individuals and organizations are distributing and/or consuming information to, for, or from the government, commercial, educational and social purposes. Digital media is content that is stored in digital formats and usually distributed online. The world we live in today is populated by digital media products, and the shift from traditional media has taken place in many industries, including industries that are not typically associated with digital media—such as health, government, and education (Smith, 2013).

Digital media networks allow one to send the same message to many people, with or without expectations of receiving feedbacks from the audience, but can also have interaction from friends and others (Smith, 2013). Another feature stated by the Centre

for Digital Media (2016) is the networked digital media where people participating in the network can organize themselves into ad-hoc and arbitrary groups. This is most obviously seen in Facebook, where one can instantly and easily create a new group around any sort of topic. These "group forming" networks have enormous value since they help us coordinate, communicate, and collaborate on projects large and small – from parties to promotion of brands. In this way, the most important parts of digital media are not simply the conversion of regular media to digital formats. The part that unleashes tremendous value for society – is taking advantage of these new capabilities relating to interactivity and group forming.

The Internet and digital media allow users to connect to our peers and families and to participate in virtual communities that include friends, connections, updates, events, and status updates. One can even attend a party even if he or she is not physically at the party. Obviously, the Internet has been beneficial and used as another tool for human to communicate with one another, but what affects does it have on our mentality?

With the growing numbers of users, health concerns are also rising from researchers. There have been arguments and mixed findings whether digital media and social networking sites are affecting or alleviating depression condition. There are also studies that claim a negative impact to the users due to excessive usage and twisted reality that

the users perceive from the online friends and communities. While there is numerous research in medical and scientific arenas, there is very little and limited research conducted in the communication field of study. This might be due to the recent phenomena caused by digital media and social networking sites, that have changed our lifestyles and communication methods.

Statistics

Main reasons for 2018's growth in internet users are more affordable smartphones and mobile data plans, so more users are to enjoy the internet experience wherever they are (Kemp, 2018). As result, social media use

continues to grow rapidly too. More than three billion across the globe are using social media, with nine in ten of those users accessing their social media platforms via mobile devices. The below information are the updated global statistics from We Are Social 2018:

- The number of internet users in 2018 is 4.021 billion, up 7 percent year-on-year
- The number of social media users in 2018 is 3.196 billion, up 13 percent year-on-year

The number of mobile phone users in 2018 is 5.135 billion, up 4 percent year-on-year



Picture 1: Digital around the world in 2018

Source: We are social. Retrieved April 8, 2019.

<https://wearesocial.com/blog/2018/01/global-digital-report-2018>

For Thailand, the country has the total population of 69.11 million with 57 million active internet and social media users or 82% of the population (Kemp, 2018). Thai users spent an average of nine hours and thirty-eight minutes daily on social media

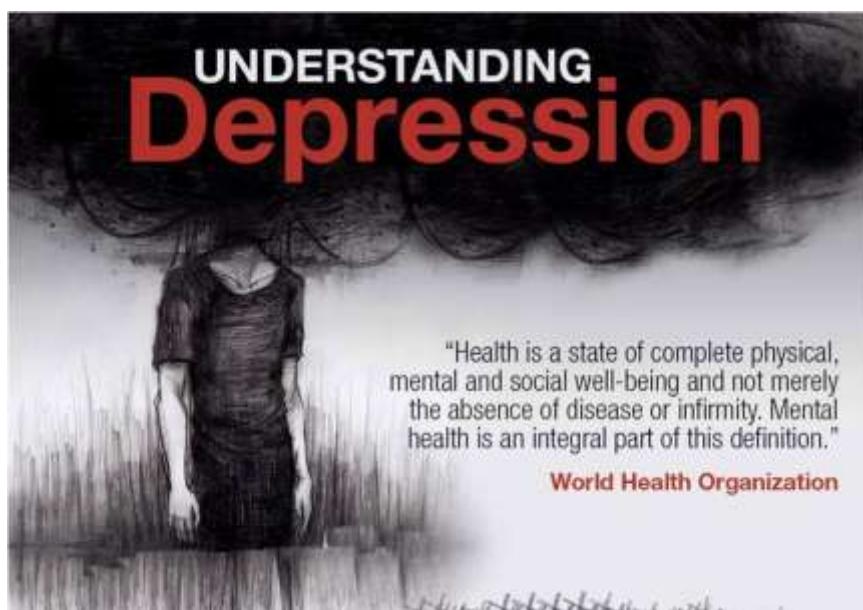
via any device. The highest rankings of social platforms are Facebook, Line and Facebook Messenger respectively. We Are Social (2018), has summarized the latest statistics of Thai users in January 2018, as follows:

- Bangkok, Thailand ranked as the first of city that has the most Facebook users.
- Top Social Media platforms are Facebook, YouTube, Line, Facebook Messenger and Instagram.
- There are active 51 million Thai Facebook users, with 49% declared as Female and 51% declared as male users.
- There are 13 million active Instagram users, equal to 19% of the total population;



Picture 2: Digital in Thailand

Source: We are social. Retrieved April 8, 2019,
<https://wearesocial.com/blog/2018/01/global-digital-report-2018>



Picture 3: Understanding Depression

Source: Nieh, E. (2014, November 10). An Infographic to Help You Understand Depression. Retrieved June 27, 2019, <https://www.lifehack.org/articles/lifestyle/infographic-help-you-understand-depression.html>

However, even with effective treatments and other therapies, fewer than 10% receive treatment or even report their illness. WHO have stated that this is due to the lack of understanding, education and healthcare involvement. In addition, not only it was misunderstood and overlooked, “in countries of all income levels, people who are depressed are often not correctly diagnosed, and others who do not have the disorder are too often misdiagnosed and prescribed antidepressants” (WHO, 2016).

Depression is the most common mental health condition in the world (WHO 2016). Depression can affect every part of one's life, from their moods to the way they see the world. The world can look bleak; life stops feeling interesting or enjoyable; and they might even believe that life is no longer worth living. Depression affects different people in different ways, but there are some general patterns (Preston and Kirk, 2010):

- Mood changes (sadness, intense irritability, feeling easily frustrated)
- Extremely negative thinking, including pessimism, a bleak view of the future, thoughts of hopelessness, fretting, worrying, brooding, and thoughts about suicide
- A loss of interest in most of life's activities; a profound lack of vitality
- Marked changes in physical functioning including sleep disturbances, fatigue and low energy, loss of sex drive, and changes in appetite and weight
- Along with reduced energy, it is common for depressed people to experience reduced mental speed

- Socially isolated and loss of interest in interacting with others

Why is depression so serious? The World Health Organization estimates that depression is the world's leading cause of disability (WHO, 2016). It has serious effects on one's health, work, thoughts and feelings, as well as one's relationships.

Like most mental illnesses, depression is a combination of genetics and environment that involves both biological and psychological factors. These factors usually involve how one thinks or feels about significant stressful events in one's life. Most of the time, it's a reaction to stressful life experiences, such as the loss of a loved one to death or divorce, ongoing familial stresses. In addition to normal life stresses, certain biological changes can also trigger depression. These include a number of physical diseases. Some medical conditions change body chemistry and ultimately affect the delicate chemical balance of the brain (Coleman, 2012).

According to the Department of Mental Health (DMH), Ministry of Public Health (Thailand), there are 284,399 reported depressed patients (2017) – these are the ones that sought and received professional help. Thais committ suicide, averaging around 300 a month or 4,000 cases a year, says, Public Health Ministry spokesman and psychiatrist Dr. Yongyuth Wongpiromsan (Konthong, 2016). Yongyuth, also the chief adviser to the DMH, said the most suicides were committed by men (77%) compared to

women (23%) and commonly used methods were hanging (70%), poisoning (20%) and shooting (10%), respectively. Health issues such as depression or chronic illness were one of the main reasons. DMH also released that there are 284,399 reported depressed patients that have access to treatment in Thailand (Amattayakong 2018).

In addition, Dr. Nattavudh Powdthavee, Ph. D, Professor of Behavioral Science Warwick Business School, University of Warwick, has analyzed that in the past, Thailand and its people have a negative mindset regarding mental illnesses including depression, the most common mental illness, to some extent (2015). He also mentioned that majority of Thai people are unable to distinguish the differences between each type of mental illnesses, for example, psychopaths and depressed patients. When one talks about mental illnesses or mood disorders, Thais have misconceptualized that it is the term to call those unwanted human behaviors. Most Thais assumed that depressed patients faked their emotions to seek attention from others and have very little understanding and knowledge regarding the symptoms and treatments. Therefore, a number of people with at-risk mental illnesses refused to seek help and patients usually avoid disclosing themselves from their loved ones and the public. Powdthavee (2015) mentioned how there is very little education and knowledge floating around the society, not to mention

that it has been overlooked for years by the health-related organizations in Thailand.

Depression in digital era

With today's connection and digital platforms, there have been changes in society that have created social changes. The online platforms have made relatively small groups of people to get together to make a statement to the public and eventually, hopefully, change the world to a better place. Technology bridge geography connects communities and transforms societies. People can connect to one another halfway around the world.

The networks that are forming through social media are quite powerful. Information spreads fast and the potential for social action is quite high. Increasingly, society is seeing more and more "awareness" campaigns that spread information rapidly with little consideration for how people interpret what they encounter. People regularly use Facebook and Twitter to share links and tell stories.

Several research studies (Cottle, 2016; Pantic, 2014) have confirmed that Facebook has been beneficial to mental health, such as, reducing depression and anxiety. Facebook and social media provide the opportunity to develop social relationships for those who suffer from social anxiety. Also, the online connection has been acting as a substitute of face-to-face interactions which evidently reduce depression with increased life satisfaction.



Picture 4: Digital Dependence: The Effects of Social Media on Teens

Source: Infographics for Health. (2018, December 04). Retrieved June 27, 2019, <https://www.pinterest.com/HealthCentral/infographics-for-health/>

In contrast, a number of studies found that Facebook and other social media or digital media have increased negative consequences. Some of the major findings include (Cottle, 2016):

- Cyberbullying increases risk of depression and anxiety in children.
- Facebook can cause depression if the user makes negative comparisons between him or herself and others.
- Facebook can cause envy, which can lead to depression.

Excessive Facebook use can be detrimental to both a person's health and their social relationships. Individuals who delay or disrupt their sleep to engage with others on Facebook may not get the rest they need. A lack of sleep can provoke malaise, but it also can result in behavioral changes. The time spent social networking can detract from other social relationships or responsibilities. Couples, families, households, and even workplace relationships can suffer when a person seems to be as excessively focused on Facebook, as the matter at hand.

“Facebook depression” is the phrase originated in a report by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) detailing the potential problems associated with social networking sites, gaming sites, virtual worlds, YouTube, and blogs (Van Pelt). The AAP report has generated controversy among other pediatric researchers and mental health professionals who believe the studies cited in the report were inaccurately interpreted and other studies supporting the benefits of social networking sites, such as relationship formation or online therapy, were not considered. The ongoing debate regarding the report has brought to light the potential positive and negative aspects of social networking sites for children and teens who now spend a substantial amount of time online and whose communication with their peers relies heavily on social media.

More than 70% of adolescents use social networking sites, most commonly Facebook, which the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) suggested that Facebook could lead to depression among children and adolescents (Jenlenclick et al., 2013). Amelia Strickland (2014) has reviewed a literature by Pantic et al. (2012) and found that the time spent on Facebook by high school students was positively correlated with depression which is aligned with another study that indicates participants who spent more time online, and those who posted more pictures show more clinical symptoms of major depression. O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson (2011) have reviewed previous work and summarized that the phenomenon described “Facebook

depression,” as depression that develops when preteens and teens spend an extensive amount of time on social networking sites and then begin to reveal clinical symptoms of depression.

The ‘social’ network has been linked to a surprising number of undesirable mental health consequences: Depression, low self-esteem, and bitter jealousy among them. Now, a new study in the Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology finds that not only do Facebook and depressive symptoms go hand-in-hand, but the mediating factor seems to be a well-established psychological phenomenon: “Social comparison” (Pantic, 2014).

In a study from the University of Houston, researchers queried people about their Facebook use, how likely they were to make social comparisons, and how often they experienced depressive symptoms. It turned out that people who used Facebook tended to have more depressive symptoms. “It doesn’t mean Facebook causes depression, but that depressed feelings and lots of time on Facebook and comparing oneself to others tend to go hand in hand,” said study author and doctoral candidate Mai-Ly Steers (2014).

Despite the negative effects, Facebook and other social media sites invite people to engage with one another. Users can stay in touch with friends and loved ones that they do not get to see as much as they would like, as well as opportunities to meet new people with whom they might have interests,

concerns, or experiences in common. Such activities may contribute to an overall sense of connection and well-being. The research warns of the mental health risks related to excessive Facebook use, and the pursuit of Facebook activities as a means to compensate for a lack of meaningful connections offline (Cottle, 2016).

Nowadays, many health-related organizations are distributing knowledge online to educate and build awareness of common depression symptoms, for example, the DMH in Thailand. The department has created a Facebook Fanpage to communicate with non-patients and create a self-support community for depressed and mental health patients. The information usually comes in the form of infographics, animations, and blog posts. Many depressed users were able to identify themselves to seek for formal treatment and help. Not only formal information was

distributed, more and more users disclosed their symptoms of depression and started to share their stories online to educate others regarding their depressive episodes and feelings. These blogs are seemingly receiving more positive feedback and support, also bloggers are trying to provide information to educate others regarding depression, i.e. Sart-Jak-Poo-Puay or in English, *Letter from Depression* (<https://www.facebook.com/letter.from.depression/>), the Fanpage, that created both educational content and online support group, claimed to have a group of professional psychiatrists monitoring the closed group. While most of these blogs on Facebook Fanpage and other online platforms, like Pantip.com, remain anonymous, Inthira Charoenpura, one of the well-known actress in Thailand, has presented herself as one of the depressed patients and provided much information through interviews and her own Facebook about her conditions.



Picture 5: Warning Signs of Depression

Source: 10 Warning Signs of Depression You Shouldn't Ignore. Retrieved June 30, 2019, <http://www.top10homeremedies.com/news-facts/10-warning-signs-of-depression-you-shouldnt-ignore.html>



Picture 6: Anonymous online users sharing his/her depression experience via Pantip.com

Source: Pantip: Learn, Share & Fun. (2015, August 23). Retrieved June 30, 2019, <https://pantip.com/topic/34093655>



Picture 7: Jomtian Jansomrag regulary shares her experience with depression on her Facebook

Source: Jomtian Jansomrag. (2016, September 28). Retrieved June 30, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1251305474997519&set=a.577328639061876&type=3&theater>

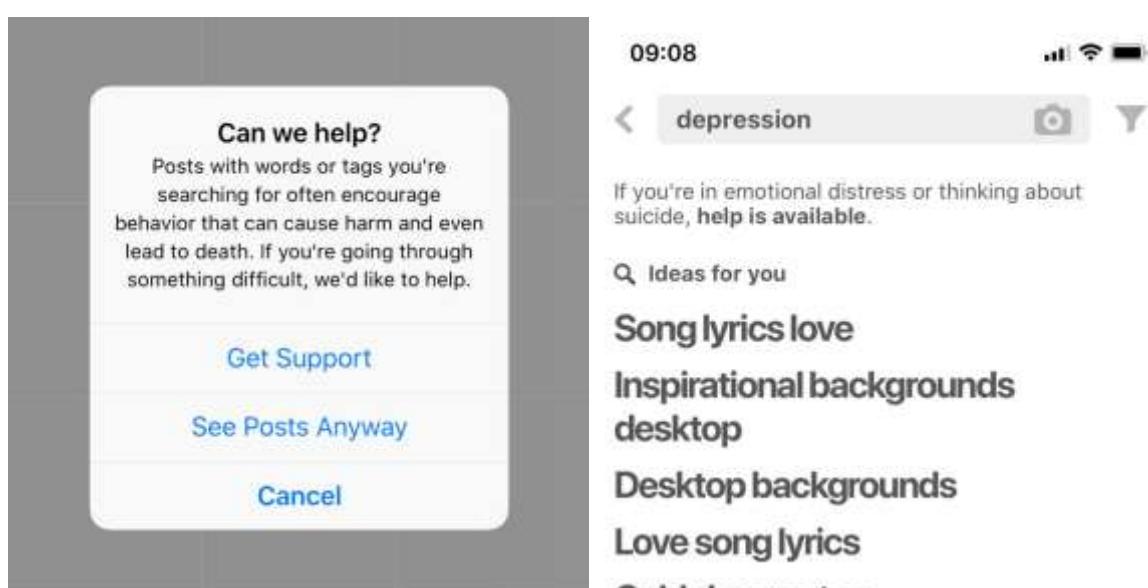


Picture 8: An online author have received '2018 Best Blogs (for) Depression'

Source: Coote, D. (2018, July 11). Best Depression Blog Three Years Running. Retrieved June 30, 2019, <http://douglascoote.com/2018/07/best-depression-blog-three-years-running.html>

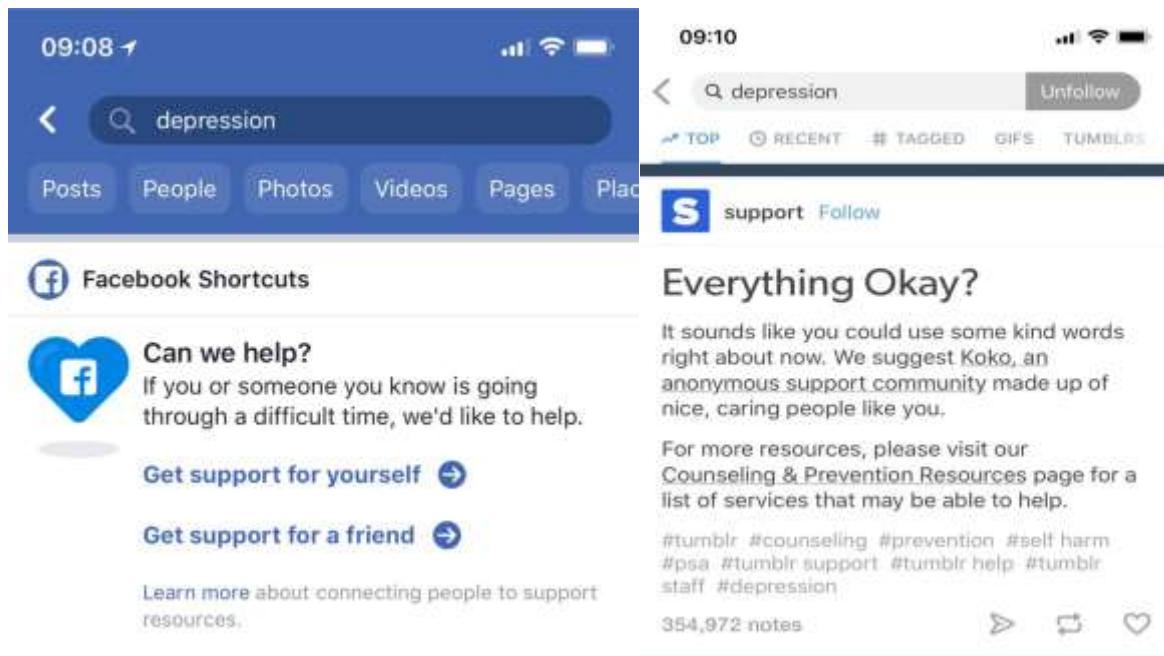
Nevertheless, different online digital platforms, Facebook, Tumblr, Instagram and Pinterest, provide search engines service and have created an algorithm, that provides initial screening with people with high-risk of having depression, which show a 'Help'

screen that asks users if they need help while providing different channels for users to connect with psychologist or consulting service, before users proceed with their search.



Picture 9-10: 'Can we help?' from digital platforms

Source from left to right: Instagram, Pinterest.



Picture 11-12: 'Can we help?' from digital platforms

Source from left to right: Facebook, and Tumblr

Related Communication and Depression Theories

Uses and Gratification Theory

The users and gratifications approach indicate that people use the media for many purposes. This approach suggests that the user of mass communication is in control. Despite mixed results, the uses and gratifications approach may make a significant contribution to understand as we move further into digital age and media users are confronted with more and more choices. The theory has three basic theoretical and methodological assumptions, the below are two of the three assumptions (Karuchit, 2013):

1. The audience of mass communication is active, and goal orientated. Audience is not passive but takes proactive role in deciding how to use media in their lives.
2. The audience member is largely responsible for choosing media to meet their

needs. Audiences know their needs and seek out various ways to meet their needs.

Perse and Dunn (1995) looked particularly at the use of computers to communicate with others through information services and the Internet or, as they called it, computer connectivity. People using computers for electronic communication were satisfying the following needs: learning, entertainment, social interaction, escapism, passing the time, the out of habit. The four basic needs of digital media are the following: information, entertainment, personal identity (reinforcement and reassurance for personal values), and personal relationships or social interaction. The approach may be very useful in helping us understand how people use the World Wide Web, email, and other aspects' cyberspace.

Some users are sharing "their" stories online, such as daily blog posts and other personal 'status update' on their private profile. Other users may not disclose their identity, but they rather seek self-help online by searching for experts and online psychologists. Stories and experiences during therapy and follow-up sessions were shared to encourage others to seek help and to help others identify depression symptoms.

Technological Determinism

Technological Determinism is the doctrine that social change is determined by technological invention. All social, political, economic and cultural change is inevitably based on development and diffusion of technology. Originally, the idea of technological determinism was the first introduced by Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929) in 1921, stating that human invent new technologies for a better (and predictable) future, which determines (the future of) human behaviors. He believed that technology is the prime mover in civilization and other social changes. The theory explained how technology advances impact every aspect of society, including method of delivering messages (Baran and Davis, 2006). The scholars from this field of study (Hently et al., 2002) are interested in how technology drives the changes in communication which impacted social change. Marshall McLuhan has given the definition of technology as the extension of man. He reasoned, when humans encounter a problematic situation, humans will recreate a new knowledge to invent new technology to find a solution (Baran and Davis, 2006).

With today's connection and digital platforms, there have been changes in the society that have created social changes. The online platforms have made relatively small groups of people get together to make a statement to the public and eventually, hopefully, change the world to a better place. Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport (2011), the authors of *Digitally Enabled Social Change*, have pointed out that Internet Communication Technology (ICT) provides "affordances" that individuals and groups alike can leverage to achieve a goal. In this digital era, then, challenges to authorities by virtual communities. The movement's use of ICT improves those communication barriers for participants by providing a variety of ways in which individuals can support movement goals. ICT can be used to connect people across space and time. New technology is simply another tool available for activists.

The theory then explains the shifted behaviors of today's humans are communication methods in various ways. With Internet enabled tools and devices have allowed the 'audience' to communicate and extend one's voice to the public which the virtual networked community can share, respond and interact with the distributor or the author directly. The technology has created another channel for individuals to communicate, share and express their own experiences. Anyone can produce and consume content as they would like to whereas, before, there were few channels to choose from, especially during the mass media era (one-to-many

communication) which does not require or allow the mass to response or interact.

Digital Literacy

The use of digital (computer-enabled) technologies to access, understand, produce and to communicate to others (i.e., to publish) textual, audio-visual and narrative methods as an autonomous means of communication, along with the social technologies (hardware, software, codes, social networks) to make this communication possible. Digital literacy is important because it extends the social base of creative productivity and the cultural/economic impact of creative ideas.

Digital literacy is not simply an individual skill but also a feature of digital system to allow a communicative relationship to be established in the first place. Thus, digital literacy is impossible without both producers (author, writer, senders) and consumers (audiences, readers, receivers) – who can both read and write (or publish) digitally generated materials. Thus, digital literacy is a feature of large-scale, computer-enabled social networking.

Since the 1950s, the communication and entertainment media have grown to unprecedented power and pervasiveness. They have also extended well beyond print media, first to broadcasting and cinema, then to digital (online and mobile) platforms. The asymmetry between few writers and masses of readers has changed radically in the author, designer, publisher, journalist and media producer.

Now, commentators are remarking on the extent to which user and consumer are leading the way in finding innovative uses for interactive media. Teenagers invented SMS or short message service texting, users built Linux and the open-source movement, fans make YouTube videos and co-create computer games, whole communities play ‘massive multi-user games’, citizens practice DIY online journalism, bloggers and other amateurs produce billions of pages of new information and ideas on the web, millions of consumers populate social network like MySpace and Facebook with their own creative content, and anyone can write-up Wikipedia. People are making and sharing their own digital stories. Increasingly technology is migrating out of organizations and even homes; now people are using mobile devices to read and write. Furthermore, these activities are not only a boost to consumption and entertainment, but they are also at the forefront of innovation. The challenge for education is to encourage general access, understanding and creation, enabling emergent uses, so that everyone can benefit from digital literacy, and by their uses of it contribute to the growth of knowledge.

Interpersonal Theory of Depression

James Coyne's (1976) interpersonal theory of depression has been studied extensively (Zhu, 2011). According to the theory, a person with depression has negative interpersonal behaviors that cause other people to reject them. It is a process of interaction by depressed disclosers and non-depressed disclosure

recipients. Depressed patients tend to excessively seek self-assurance from the non-depressed others through negative self-disclosure.

At the beginning of the interaction, the non-depressed interactants may respond positively. As depressed people would start to make an increasing number of requests for reassurance and excessive self-disclosure continues, a negative mood is highly likely to be aroused on the non-depressed others. The non-depressed would then start to negatively think about, avoid, and reject the people with depression or become depressed themselves, which appears to be a rejection for the depressed patients. The symptoms of the people with depression then start to get worse as a result of other people's rejection and avoidance of them (Zhu, 2011).

The Interpersonal Theory of Depression has been tested in college roommates (Joiner & Metalsky, 1995), youth psychiatric inpatients (Joiner, 1999), and significant others (Joiner & Barnett, 1994; Katz & Beach, 1997). Generally, it is supported that depressed subjects tend to engage in more reassurance seeking than non-depressed subjects through self-disclosure and that the self-disclosure results in rejection effects (Joiner, 1999; Joiner & Metalsky, 1995; Joiner, Metalsky, & Katz, 1999; Joiner & Barnett, 1994). Joiner and Barnett (1994) found that this depression-rejection effect was mediated by reliance on others. In other words, the depressed subjects who rely more on non-depressed others are more likely to be rejected by the non-depressed others than

those who depend less on the non-depressed others. Some other studies have also demonstrated that people who disclose depression matters are negatively evaluated by significant others, only if they engage in excessive reassurance seeking (Katz & Beach, 1997).

Depression contagion (i.e., depressive feelings can be diffused and spread from one person to another) and negative emotional avoidance (i.e., to avoid depressive feelings spread from the depressed) are found to be responsible for the depression-rejection effect, even in close relationships (Joiner, Metalsky, & Katz, 1999). The continual negative self-disclosure from the depressed interactants increases the level of depressed feelings of the non-depressed interactants. 28 People are generally alert to and avoidant of negative feelings, which leads to the nondepressed interactant's withdrawal from further interaction with the depressed individuals. Studies adopting the interpersonal communication approach to studying self-disclosure manifests that self-disclosure of depressed people is a dynamic process that unfolds while disclosers interacting with disclosure recipients (Harris, Dersch, & Mittal, 1999). Based on the literature review above, rejection from non-depressed interactants plays an essential role in the development of the interpersonal communication process of self-disclosure by people living with depression. As symbolic interactionism states, people develop the meanings that a thing has for them based on how others react toward the thing in social interaction (Blumer, 1969). What self-

disclosure means to depressed people may thus be shaped by the rejection effect.

Online Depression Disclosure

According to Moreno et al. (2011), the research has “suggest that 2.5% of profile displayed depression symptoms consistent with our proxy defined symptom DSM (Diagnosed and Statistical Manual) diagnosis of a MDE (Major Depression Episode), including timing and symptom category,” which the result also align with previous researches. The researchers claim that Facebook may present a way to investigate patterns of depression disclosure. The displayed information may allow friends and family to identify mild symptoms of depression by using Facebook status and prompt their loved ones, for further clinical evaluation.

The researchers claim that Facebook may present a way to investigate patterns of depression disclosure. The displayed information may allow friends and family to identify mild symptoms of depression by using their Facebook status and prompt their loved ones for further clinical evaluation. Also, those who receive reinforcement to a depression disclosure from their friends (online) would be more likely to discuss their symptoms publicly, like on social media. Previous study claim that older adolescents who receive positive feedback online “reported enhanced self-esteem and sense of well-being” (Moreno et al., 2011). Students who involved more online are likely to feel comfortable to disclose their

symptoms on their profiles. Moreno et al. (2011) have claimed that “Facebook may present an innovative opportunity to identify students at risk for depression because Facebook is a peer communication tool, their peers may be able to motivate to identify at-risk students using Facebook.” Meanwhile, social networking sites may provide opportunities and increase self-help or help-seeking behavior: 24% of the students entered into an online counselor, 19% later attended an in-person session, and 14% have entered a treatment program. Lastly, Moreno et al. (2011) indicated that it is possible that social networking has impact on students’ views about depression. “Given the frequency of depression symptom displays on public profiles, SNSs could be an innovative avenue for raising self-awareness and combating stigma surrounding mental health conditions. We found responses to displayed symptoms were frequent, positive, and supportive” (Moreno et al. 2011). Previous research has found that people may be more likely to open up or report feelings online versus in person. “It is possible that if a teen displayed depression symptoms online, he or she may receive a rapid response of support online from friends, which may help that teen to feel supported,” says Moreno (2011).

Although scholars have looked into the links between Facebook use and depression among college students, the findings and results are still inconsistent. Wright et al. (2012) conducted a survey of 361 students to “test an elaborate model examining paths leading to depression,” and found that the

numbers of hours that students spent using Facebook correlated with depression. They found that both face-to-face and Facebook support network satisfaction reduced self-reported depression scores (Wright et al., 2012). O'Keefe et al. (2012) suggest that adolescents are using the Internet to educate themselves about their health concerns. It has been proven that the mobile technologies that teens use daily have already produced multiple improvements in their healthcare, such as a better understanding of depression and other mental illness. The intensity of the online world is one of the factors that may trigger depression among adolescents (O'Keefe et al., 2012).

Previous research has found that people may be more likely to open up or report feelings online versus in person. "It is possible that if a teen displayed depression symptoms online, he or she may receive a rapid response of support online from friends, which may help that teen to feel supported," says Moreno (2011). Brent L. Fletcher, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, an outpatient mental health therapist, added on that while Facebook and other social media can amplify bullying, it can also increase the likelihood that a troubled child or teen will receive much-needed help from friends and family (Van Pelt, 2011).

People with more depression symptoms are less likely to disclose themselves to others than those with less or no depression symptoms in their daily life (Garrison & Kahn, 2010; Horesh & Apter, 2006; Kahn &

Hessling, 2001; Kahn & Garrison, 2009; Rude & McCarthy, 2003).

Considering disclosure of depression matter is a way of managing concealable stigmas, Garcia and Crocker (2008) investigated motivations for self-disclosure by people with depression. They categorized motivation into two groups, "egosystem motivations" and "ecosystem motivations." Ecosystem motivations refer to the motivations toward the self which prioritize self-satisfaction, whereas ecosystem motivations refer to the motivations toward others which consider and prioritize others' needs and wellbeing. Garcia and Crocker's (2008) survey results showed that ecosystem motivations included seeking approval and acknowledgement, avoiding rejection and criticism, testing the others, and catharsis. The ecosystem motivations included educating others and connecting with the others. Ecosystem motivations were found to facilitate disclosure, whereas people with ecosystem goals tended to conceal their depression matters and related personal thoughts and feelings.

Findings of Garcia and Crocker's (2008) study indicate that self-disclosure by people living with depression involves complicated concerns with regard to the self and others. It furthers our understanding of self-disclosure by depressed people as an individual decision, rather than an attribute of being depressed.

According to symbolic interactionism, meanings of a thing for a person arising

from former interaction guide and form his or her action toward the thing in the forthcoming interaction. Self-disclosure in depressed individuals' offline social interaction may hence influence depressed individuals' self-disclosure in online support groups. Interacting with non-depressed others is a major component of the daily social encounters of people living with depression, as most of them still live and work with non-depressed others unless they are considered to pose a risk to themselves or others (Carson, 2000). Self-disclosure of depressed people therefore often occurs while they are interacting with non-depressed others in their daily life.

Royal Society for Public Health (2017) conducted a survey and concluded that Britains' users between the age of fourteen and twenty-four, believe that Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter have negative effects on both of their mental and physical wellbeing. They reported that the platforms gave them room for self-expression and community-building, but at the same time, can exacerbate anxiety and depression, deprived them of sleep, exposure of cyberbullying, worried about their body images and 'FOMO' (fear of missing out). Academic studies have found that these problems tend to be particularly severe among frequent users.

An experiment by five neuroscientists in 2014 (Turel et al., 2014) concluded that Facebook can create same impulsive part of the brain like gambling and substance addiction. Yet it is difficult to prove that

obsessing over likes and comments causes mental illness, rather than the other way around. The most convincing effort was a survey that tracked a group of 5,208 Americans between 2013 and 2015. It found that an increase in Facebook activity was associated with a future decrease in reported mental health.

Discussion and Conclusion

With the growing statistics and increasing penetration of digital media, many organizations have adapted themselves through the digital platforms to reach the virtual mass audience. News and campaigns are being shared in the online world or, as known as, social networking sites. These news and campaigns have focused on the niche audience and stories that were not captured by the mass media, such as, raising awareness of depression. Health organizations are now using digital platforms to raise awareness and distribute information and by doing so, many have educated themselves and later, seek out for help. Social networking sites may provide opportunities and increase self-help or help-seeking behavior. The research indicated that it is possible that social networking sites have impact on students' views about depression.

The related theories presented above have shown why depressed patients have the stigma of disclosing one's feelings in the offline world and choose to disclose their conditions and stories online, seeking help, forming help group for one another. They used digital media, social networking sites

and the online connection as a substitute to undesired face-to-face interactions which evidently reduce depression with increased life satisfaction.

Specifically, Technological Determinism theory, technology and digital media has changed the way we communicate with and to each other. It has become one of the channels that we can express ourselves and disclose personal feelings to the public. In addition, to link with Uses and Gratification theory, more users are now using online platforms, like digital media and social networking sites to fulfill their needs, like, to educate, seek professional and/or self-help group, and disclose their symptoms online. Some uses different platforms for different purposes, i.e. Twitter for venting, YouTube for inspirational stories and persons, or a blog to write their stories for sharing and educating others. Up to this point, several studies have confirmed that those who receive reinforcement to a depression disclosure from their friends (online) would be more likely to discuss their symptoms publicly, like on social media (Moreno et al., 2011).

Therefore, the author strongly believe that digital media has become one of the tools that help society to educate and have a better understanding regarding depression, or a virtual place for depressed patients to find their own help community. The more positive feedback from the virtual communities, the more likely one would share their depressive episodes online. Facebook and social media provide the opportunity to develop social

relationships for those who suffer from social anxiety and mental illnesses. Digital platforms have created a virtual community for patients. Also, the online connection has been acting as a substitute to face-to-face interactions which evidently reduce depression with increased life satisfaction. In short, many studies have confirmed that digital media and/or social networking sites alleviate depressive symptoms and help the society to understand more about the illness.

With this initial findings and conclusion from selected previous studies, the author also believes that non-profit or governmental organizations could turn angles of the findings into a guideline to change and adapt conventional treatment and access to patients and users with a high risk for depression.

1. As mentioned above, users and/or patients use digital media or platforms to self-disclose their depression conditions, for example, personal online blogs. Therefore, professionals in this field can identify high-risk users for depression and provide help when it is deemed necessary. Psychiatrists can use the messages and self-disclosure patterns to analyze the root cause for further discussion and treatment plans.

2. Because many users are willing to disclose themselves online, but not offline, each private self-help group or virtual community should have professionals in mental health field to monitor and provide practical advices to users. If possible, non-profit and health organizations should develop and improve the existing mobile applications or hotline (online and offline)

that users or patients can access without having to expose themselves to the offline world.

Considering limitations from previous studies, future studies should explore society's view of depression and move towards one's depressive personal posts and how society

perceives depression from online sources. Lastly, more digital platforms are using tools that analyze users' language to be able to identify those at high-risk for depression which can be included in future study for scholars in communication or other related fields of studies.

References

Amattayakong, A. (2018). *Psychiatric Patients Report*. Retrieved December 2, 2018. from <https://www.dmh.go.th/report/datacenter/map/>

Baran, Stanley J., and Dennis K. Davis. (2006). *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment, and Future*. 4th ed. Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth.

Coconuts Bangkok. (2016). "Cases of Depression and Suicide on the Rise in Thailand." . Retrieved September 10, 2016. from <http://bangkok.coconuts.co/2016/09/07/cases-depression-and-suicide-rise-thailand>.

Coleman, Lee H. (2012). *Depression: A Guide for the Newly Diagnosed*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Cootey, D. (2018). Best Depression Blog Three Years Running. Retrieved June 30, 2019, from <http://douglascootey.com/2018/07/best-depression-blog-three-years-running.html>

Cottle, Julia. (2016). *Facebook and Mental Health: Is Social Media Hurting or Helping?* Retrieved September 09, 2016, from <https://www.mentalhelp.net/articles/facebook-and-mental-health-is-social-media-hurting-or-helping/>

dailynews. (2016). จิตแพทย์ห่วงคนไทยมีความดีด้วยสูงขึ้น. Retrieved September 10, 2016, from <http://www.dailynews.co.th/regional/522021>.

Earl, Jennifer, and Katrina Kimport. (2011). *Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Garcia, J. A., & Crocker, J. (2008). Reasons for disclosing depression matter: the consequences of having ecosystem and ecosystem goals. *Social Science & Medicine*, 67(3), 453-462.

Jelenchick, Lauren A., Jens C. Eickhoff, and Megan A. Moreno. (2013). 'Facebook Depression?' Social Networking Site Use and Depression in Older Adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 52(1), 128-30.

Joiner, T., E., Metalsky, G., I., Katz, J., & Beach, S., R. H.. (1999). Depression and excessive reassurance-seeking. *Psychological Inquiry*, 10(3), 269- 278.

Jomtian Jansomrag. (2016). *Status*. Retrieved June 30, 2019, from <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1251305474997519&set=a.577328639061876&type=3&theater>

Karuchit, Warat. (2013). *Media Effects Theories*. Lecture, National Institute of Development Administration, Bangkok.

Kemp, Simon. (2018). *Digital in 2018 in Southeast Asia Part 1 - North-West*. Retrieved December 1, 2018, from https://www.slideshare.net/wearesocial/digital-in-2018-in-southeast-asia-part-1-northwest-86866386?from_action=save

Kemp, Simon. (2018). *Digital in 2018: World's internet users pass the 4 billion mark*. Retrieved December 1, 2018, from <https://wearesocial.com/blog/2018/01/global-digital-report-2018>

Konthong, P. (2016). *4,000 Thais take their own lives every year, Public Health Ministry says*. Retrieved December 2, 2018, from <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/national/4000-Thais-take-their-own-lives-every-year-Public--30280354.html>

Moreno, Megan A., Lauren A. Jelenchick, Katie G. Egan, Elizabeth Cox, Henry Young, Kerry E. Gannon, and Tara Becker. (2011). Feeling Bad on Facebook: Depression Disclosures by College Students on a Social Networking Site. *Depression and Anxiety Depress. Anxiety*, 28(6), 447-55. DOI:10.1002/da.20805.

Nieh, E. (2014). *An Infographic to Help You Understand Depression*. Retrieved June 27, 2019, from <https://www.lifehack.org/articles/lifestyle/infographic-help-you-understand-depression.html>

O'Keefe, G. S., and K. Clarke-Pearson. (2011). The Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents, and Families. *Pediatrics*, 127(4), 800-04. DOI:10.1542/peds.2011-0054.

Pantic, Igor, Aleksandar Damjanovic, Jovana Todorovic, Dubravka Todorovic, Dragana Bojovic-Jovic, Sinisa Ristic, and Senka Pantic. (2012). Association between Online Social Networking and Depression in High School Students: Behavioral Physiology Viewpoint. *Research Gate*, 24(1), 90-3.

Pantic, Igor. (2014). Online Social Networking and Mental Health. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking*, 17(10), 652-657.

Pantip: Learn, Share & Fun. (2015). ໝໍ່ປະສົງການຝຶ່ງ.....ເປັນໂຮກສື່ນເກົ່າຍໍ່າົ້າຄືດຍໍ່າທ່າ ແລ້ວຮັກຍາຫາຍ ກະງູ້ໃຫ້ກໍາລັງໃຈ. Retrieved June 30, 2019, from <https://pantip.com/topic/34093655>

Pinterest (2018). *Infographics for Health*. Retrieved June 27, 2019, from <https://www.pinterest.com/HealthCentral/infographics-for-health/>

Preston, John, and Melissa Kirk. (2010). *Depression 101: A Practical Guide to Treatments, Self-help Strategies, and Preventing Relapse*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Royal Society for Public Health. (2018). *#StatusOfMind*. Retrieved December 1, 2018, from <https://www.rspn.org.uk/uploads/assets/uploaded/62be270a-a55f-4719-ad668c2ec7a74c2a.pdf>

Smith, Richard. (2013). *What Is Digital Media?*. Retrieved September 23, 2016. from <https://thecdm.ca/news/faculty.news/2013/10/15/what-is-digital-media>.

Strickland, Amelia C. (2014). *Exploring the Effects of Social Media Use on the Mental Health of Young Adults*. Retrieved September 12, 2016, from <http://stars.library.ucf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2683&context=honortheses1990-2015>.

Top10HomeRemedies Team. (2019). *10 Warning Signs of Depression You Shouldn't Ignore*. Retrieved June 30, 2019, from <http://www.top10homemedicines.com/news-facts/10-warning-signs-of-depression-you-shouldnt-ignore.html>.

Turel, O., He, Q., Xue, G., Xiao, L., & Bechara, A. (2014). Examination of Neural Systems Sub-Serving Facebook “Addiction”. *Psychological Reports*, 115(3), 675-695. DOI:10.2466/18.pr0.115c31z8

Van Pelt, J. (2011). *Is ‘Facebook Depression’ For Real?*. Social Network Today. Retrieved February 22, 2019, from https://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/exc_080811.shtml

World Health Organization. (2016). *Depression*. Retrieved September 10, 2016. from <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs369/en/>.

Wright, Kevin B., Jenny Rosenberg, Nicole Egbert, Nicole A. Ploeger, Daniel R. Bernard, and Shawn King. (2013). Communication Competence, Social Support, and Depression Among College Students: A Model of Facebook and Face-to-Face Support Network Influence. *Journal of Health Communication*, 18(1), 41-57. DOI:10.1080/10810730.2012.688250.