Memorializing the dead through death rituals has inevitably permeated in online spaces. In particular, Facebook users have maximized the platform to commemorate the dead, thereby forming communal digital mourning. Hence, this paper investigates how Filipinos foster an online community through their online practices of the Filipino concept of pakikiramay and pakikidalamhati. Guided by Virgilio Enriquez’s Sikolohiyang Filipino (Filipino psychology) and Rotman and Preece’s (2010) characteristics of online communities, this paper investigated 593 posts from 24 memorialized Facebook accounts using textual analysis. Findings reveal that pakikiramay [sympathizing with another] and pakikidalamhati [sharing the burden of mourning] expressed through practicing death rituals using the technological affordances of Facebook demonstrate that the bereaved has maintained company with the departed in life and in death (“I have been with you, and I will always be with you”). Communal digital grief affirms that the bereaved are never alone while in mourning (“We are together in mourning”).

Introduction

Facebook has become one of the online spaces for mourning. Since this platform rolled out its Legacy Contacts in 2015 and Tributes Section for Memorialized Accounts in 2019, this social networking site has provided a way for its users to manage and interact with other people’s digital remains (Sandberg, 2019). These Facebook features allow users to use the platform as a tool for mourning and grieving, similar to face-to-face rituals and behaviors observed at wakes, burials, and cemetery visits (Forman, et al., 2012). Mediated acts of affection and condolences to the bereaved in the Web environment are usually expressed through various signs and symbols associated with the posting of images and videos (Haverinen, 2014). This ability to build digital gravescapes is facilitated and amplified by the affordances of online platforms. In this case, “the dead never really die, but rather are perpetually sustained in a digital state of dialogic limbo” (1).

Through these different platform affordances offered by Facebook to its users, the users can engage in social interactions with each other, which eventually form online communities. Communities that were formed at the event of death are built on cultural rituals, memories, and feelings for the departed that provide space and mutual support for those who are mourning (Mims, 1999 as cited in Forman, et al., 2012; Roberts and Vidal, 2000; Walter, 2014). Inside these “virtual cemeteries” are “communities of the bereaved” wherein the mourning individual gains social support and helps process the unfortunate situation (Roberts, 2004).

However, concrete definitions of the concept of a community formed in social media remain slippery. Traditionally, a community can be described in terms of the relationships among individuals who maintain certain interests or commonalities. The prevalent definition is the place-centric community in which social interactions — from the mundane to the extraordinary — must happen in a specific geographical landscape (McMillan and Chavis, 1986). McMillan and Chavis’ (1986) sense of community theory aims to capture the belongingness of individuals to a particular community and that their specific needs can be met via committing to this group. This theory suggests that these four elements, namely, membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connections, are necessary for an individual to experience belongingness to a physical community. These elements, however, are also observable in virtual communities (Gibbons, 2020).

What is crucial is that an online community must possess “shared rituals, social regulation, and collective action through patterned interaction and the creation of relational linkages among members that promote emotional bonds, a sense of belonging, and a sense of identification with the community” (1). With the pervasiveness of the Internet, communities emerge and flourish no longer solely via co-location of individuals in a single, physical place, but also through mediated spaces such as social media (Tayebi, 2013; Goodspeed, 2017).

Numerous studies have shown the use of social media in observing funerary practices and expressing mourn and respect toward the dead. It offers quick transmittal of information among networks about a person’s death (Agbing, 2020), relief through expressing grief (Willis and Ferrucci, 2017), post-mortem commemoration (Moore, et al., 2019), and maintaining communication with the departed through their legacy account (Irwin, 2015). As such, Facebook has become an extension of the self, specifically, of the deceased, in continuing the relationship between the bereaved and the deceased through digital remains (Kasket, 2012). This social media use can also be explained by the continuing bonds theory of Klass, et al. (1996), in which the survivor maintains an ongoing, lifelong relationship with the departed, and such relationship manifests even in social media. The bereaved can gain emotional support and help in moving forward by sharing their circumstances in an online group (Walter, et al., 2012; Perluxo and Francisco, 2018). Online practices of memorialization inevitably make way for a new process of grieving (Andrews, 2010). These objects and activities of mediated memories about the dead serve not only for archiving but also for communication which carry “ritualistic and symbolic practices” (1).

In the Philippines for example, funeral homes host e-burol or electronic wakes; (burol is the Filipino word for a wake) (Derogongan, et al., 2019). Another example is the Filipino use of Twitter to offer emotional support and send information about the massacre of 44 elite policemen during a covert operation (Bautista and Lin, 2015). Overseas, Filipino migrant workers in the Funeraria (Derogongan, et al., 2019), the Filipino term for a funeral home, or at the house of the deceased to pay their respects and offer flowers and/or monetary contributions during wakes. They find their way to the location of the wake to “fulfill a cultural expectation” (1). This rings true especially for immediate family members who are “expected to attend the burial no matter how far away they might be at the time” (1). Some visitors stay overnight not only to pay respect to the departed but also to take the opportunity to reunite and catch up with relatives and common friends. During the wake, Filipinos try to maintain a “light-hearted behavior” (1) and preoccupy themselves with games such as card games, bingo, mahjong, and sungku (a traditional Filipino table-top game using cowrie shells). Sala-Boza (2007, cited in Sabanpan-Yu, 2009) elaborated that such practices during wakes are coping mechanisms for Filipinos who are naturally joyful people and avoid talking about death. In some places, the elderly prohibits playing instruments, singing, and chanting to keep the wake solemn (Laguilles-Villafuerte and de Guzman, 2019; Agbing, 2020).
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Evident in the wake is the concept of a Filipino core value called kapwa or “shared identity” [19]. Pakikipagkapwa or sharing one’s identity involves treating one another as a kapwa or fellow in two modes of social interaction: the “ibang-tao” [outsider] [20] and the “hindi-ibang-tao” [one-of-us] [19]. In the context of mourning, pakikipagkapwa is evident through pakikiramay — compassion and sympathizing that is expressed from one kapwa [that which is “one-of-us”] to another — and pakikidalamhati — sharing of carrying the burden of the grieving or the deep sorrow in experiencing the loss of a one-of-us variation of kapwa (Santiago, 1993; Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). What is interesting is that funerary practices — which were traditionally done in private such as in funeral homes, hospital rooms, cemeteries, and columbaria — are now broadly displayed on social media (Moore, et al., 2019; Brubaker, et al., 2019). Objects of mediated memories, such as photos, videos, stories, and personal effects, are contingent on the platform vernaculars of social media and audiences imagined by the users (Thimm and Nehls, 2017). Altogether, these digital remains expand both the communal and private presence of the departed (Walter, 2015).

In interpersonal transactions, people are now quick to offer condolences to the bereaved upon knowing the death of a person. The unique features of social media help Filipinos fulfill cultural expectations of mourning and death rituals (Bautista and Lin, 2015). Consequently, participants in the funerary practices are no longer limited to the personal networks or communities of the departed and the bereaved, thereby extending who engains in the communal observation of mourning. Called online mourning or communal grief, an entire community — even those who do not personally know the dead — offers condolences and participates in the mourning, thereby strengthening the belongingness of the bereaved, invoking emotions that they are not alone in their grieving (Babis, 2021). A similar concept related to this is parasocial grieving in which media, through its technological affordances, facilitates mourning for the dead with strangers with [11]. Memorialized Facebook accounts have turned into an “alternative space to mourn that is public, collective, and with archival capabilities” [12]. Ad hoc mini-publics or intensive but short-lived social media activity between the mourning users and their networks are also created, whether intentionally or not [13]. These online spaces contain inconspicuous meanings that “create new notions of the Filipino way of grieving and mourning” [14]. All of these raise questions about what mourning rituals are expressed on Facebook and how this platform has become a space for communal acts of mourning through pakikipagkapwa.

Hence, this study explores the question: How do memorialized Filipino Facebook accounts foster a sense of an online community in expressing pakikiramay and pakikidalamhati through online practices of mourning and death rituals? Specifically, this work aims to answer these objectives:

1. To describe how the content of memorialized Facebook accounts surface pakikiramay and pakikidalamhati through online practices of mourning and death rituals; and,
2. To examine how pakikiramay and pakikidalamhati on memorialized Facebook accounts foster an online community.

Significance of the study
Answering these research objectives offers at least two contributions. One, this study continues literature on online mourning and respecting the departed which is practically dominated by those from the Anglosphere (see Carroll and Landry, 2010; Kasket, 2012; Christensen and Gotved, 2015; Bassett, 2015; Thimm and Nehls, 2017; van Ryn, et al., 2016; Nansen, et al., 2017; Akhther and Tetteh, 2021), while literature on death studies in the Philippines is continuously growing (e.g., Abraham, 2009; Derooganan, et al., 2019; Lapulilles-Villafuerte and de Guzman, 2019; Agbura, 2019). This study broadly accounts for the discursive space for people to enact their death rituals and practices which are both individual and communal in nature. The communal nature of death rituals simultaneously allows the continuing bonds (Klass, et al., 1996) of the bereaved with the departed to persist and online communities to form. Mancenido (2019) commented that the mediatory role of funeral parlors and directors is now challenged by social media, in which media, through its technological affordances, facilitates mourning for the dead with strangers. Objects of mediated memories, such as photos, videos, stories, and personal effects, are contingent on the platform vernaculars of social media and audiences imagined by the users (Thimm and Nehls, 2017). Altogether, these digital remains expand both the communal and private presence of the departed (Walter, 2015).

The resonance of these four characteristics to the Filipino concepts of pakikiramay, pakikidalamhati, pakikiramam, and pakikidalamha is evident through online practices of mourning and death rituals? Specifically, this study explores the questions about what mourning rituals are expressed on Facebook and how this platform has become a space for communal acts of mourning through pakikipagkapwa.

Theoretical concepts

Online communities

While a concrete definition of the term online community remains wanting Rotman and Preece (2010) have identified four characteristics of online communities based on their literature review:

1. Commitment to a shared domain — Members can identify a common space similar to a physical structure such as a Web site (Porter, 2006).
2. Shared repertoire and resources - Members have a “shared practice” including common experiences, tools, stories, and ways of solving problems [17].
3. Companionhip and bonding — Members have “affiliative” relationships with a network of individuals and not on a particular group or one-on-one connections [18].
4. Social activity and interaction or collective efficacy — Members actively participate in communal activities (Preece and Maloney-Krichmar, 2003). Commemorating the dead through pakikipagkapwa can offer insights as to how online mourning is practiced. Practically, the deference of some individuals, more so the elderly, to online death rituals may be dampened because of possible similarity in depth, value, and practice of mediated face-to-face interactions. Two, examples of death rituals documented in this study may be a preview of the threats and opportunities for those who seek on the funerary industry whose practices have been so far limited to face-to-face settings. Nansen, et al. (2017) commented that the mediatory role of funeral parlors and directors is now challenged by “digital disruption” [14] at least in cultural and economic aspects (also see Kasket, 2012).

All of these raise questions about what mourning rituals are expressed on Facebook and how this platform has become a space for communal acts of mourning through pakikipagkapwa. Others are cautious in turning the wake into a “media spectacle” [14], thereby diluting the fellowship of mourning.

Pakikipagkapwa in pakikiramay and pakikidalamhati

Pakikipagkapwa connotes a common understanding and coming together of individuals, thereby showing care for one another. It is derived from a core Filipino value and identity, kapwa or “shared identity” [20]. Reyes (2015) commented that pakikipagkapwa is ultimately the full realization of “being one with another” [21] exhibited intimately first within a family, outwards to the kapwa, and eventually to the bayan (nation-state). Also, kapwa is anchored in Enríquez’s Sisiklohayong Filipino or Filipino psychology which privileges the Filipino perspective on their experiences, ideas, and cultural orientation (Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). Kapwa is tied with the Filipino virtue of the loob (will), or the notion of personal and its relational understanding with another (Reyes, 2015). Enriquez (1992, as cited in Reyes, 2015) adds, the closest English equivalent for kapwa is ‘others’, however, contrary to the English notion of the ‘other’ that is in opposition to the self, the Filipino notion of kapwa is identified in the unity of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’.

Pakikipagkapwa in mourning and grieving is hinged on the concepts of pakikiramay and pakikidalamhati. On one hand, pakikiramay is roughly translated as compassion and sympathy expressed by an individual towards a kapwa. On another hand, pakikidalamhati comes from the word dalambahti which means “burden carried deep within” [22]. Dalambahti comes from the Filipino words dala meaning “the load carried” [23] and hati denoting a division, splitting, or sharing of one’s heart or emotions (Santiago, 1993). In the context of mourning the dead, pakikidalamhati signifies the sharing of burden of the grieving or the deep sorrow in experiencing the loss of a kapwa. Commemorating the dead through pakikipagkapwa and pakikidalamhati shows care and resembles a community evidenced by their pakikiramam and pakikipagkapwa while expressing their grief. Here, pakikiramam roughly translates to a shared internal perception of “feeling for another,” while pakikipagkapwa means treating one another as kapwa (Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). As such, practices like these follow the Filipino virtue based on the loob essentially “seeks to preserve and strengthen human relationships” [24].

Synthesis

A specific place, common ties, social interactions, and exchange of meanings and symbols are prerequisites of a community, at least in a physical sense. These attributes are inevitably present in online communities given the evolving meanings and symbolic interpretation in mediated settings such as memorialized Facebook accounts. Facebook accounts offer an expansive discursive space for people to enact their death rituals and practices which are both individual and communal in nature. The communal nature of death rituals simultaneously allows the continuing bonds (Klass, et al., 1996) of the bereaved with the departed to persist and online communities to form. Mancenido (2019) commented, “Filipinos have a deep sense of community, that even before they act for themselves, they consider the people around them ... They believe that things are done better when done with somebody who shares the same causes.” This idea affirms the linkage between online communities and Filipino psychology (Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). Hence, in this work, Rotman and Preece’s (2010) characterization of an online community is made more evident by the concepts of pakikipagkapwa, pakikiramay, and pakikidalamhati, core values entrenched deeply with the Filipino psyche.
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Theoretical constructs

The theoretical concepts of Sikolohiyang Pilipino and the characteristics of online community are organized in Table 1 below with their definition and guide questions. The latter was used to help identify aspects of the theoretical concepts from the sampled Facebook accounts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Guide questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online community (Rotman and Preece, 2010)</td>
<td>Commitment to a shared domain</td>
<td>Does the text try to engage with other people using social plugins such as the share button and comments section and personal stories with the departed? Does the text mention “inside stories” between the departed with other members of the community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shared repertoire and resources</td>
<td>Was the text shared or reposted by other Facebook users who are related to the departed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Companionship and bonding</td>
<td>Does the text mention relational identity or communal relationship of the departed with other members of the community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social activity and interaction</td>
<td>Does the text about the departed receive comments from other Facebook users who are familiar with or personally know the departed? Do other Facebook users extend their pakikiramay and pakikidalamhati not only to the user who posted the text but also to the family of the user?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakikidalamhati</td>
<td>“Set of reactions triggered by the loss of a significant person or a symbol of the latter” [26]</td>
<td>Does the text show personal stories and/or experiences between the departed and the living Facebook account user (memories, quotes from the dead, conversations with the deceased, etc.)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalamhati: Denoting a division, splitting, or sharing of one’s heart or emotions [27] Pakikidalamhati signifies the sharing or carrying the burden of the mourning or the deep sorrow in experiencing the loss of a hindi-ibang-tao variation of kapwa.</td>
<td>Does the text show expression of mourning triggered by life events shared with the deceased such as birthdays and holidays?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the text trigger emotions of sorrow in longing for the presence of the bereaved (e.g., dreams, visitation)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design, particularly a textual analysis, for this would allow polysemic interpretation of all available texts in Facebook accounts. In addition, textual analysis privileges the context that “ties down the entire intensive data analysis session. During the entire process, procedures such as maintaining rich, thick descriptions, revisiting analytic memos, and peer debriefing were undertaken to ensure the validity of findings (Given, 2008; Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

Sampling method and curation

Twenty-four (24) Facebook accounts — with an aggregate of 593 posts — were identified via criterion sampling method. Each account has met the following criteria: (1) The Facebook account must present the person’s memory as a living individual; (2) the account must demonstrate that the account owner has passed away; and, (3) acts of commemoration for the departed are evident. Only Facebook accounts owned by Filipinos residing in the Philippines were included to prevent language and cultural barriers. In addition, the researchers did not include Facebook accounts of public figures as celebrification and media coverage can confound online memorial practices. The date of expiration of the departed varied from as early as the years 2011 up to 2021. Initially, the samples were limited to accounts and posts with public settings, but turnover was relatively small. Hence, samples with private or modified settings (e.g., Friend of Friends) and accessible to the researchers through their personal Facebook accounts were also included. However, only posts with public settings (denoted by a globe symbol) were included as exemplars in this research. Other ethical considerations involved in this decision are discussed further in the succeeding subsection.

To avoid returning to the Facebook accounts, the researchers took screenshots of the posts from the accounts. The posts contain written text, videos, photos, and social plugins such as the number of reactions (Like, Love, Ha-ha, Wow, Angry, and Sad), shares, views, and content of the comment box. Videos that were uploaded or shared were downloaded if the link was accessible. To respect the dignity of the departed and the grieving party and prevent the researchers from visiting the accounts more than once, the researchers immediately anonymized all found data upon recording and replaced file names with code numbers that can be traced back solely to the Facebook account of origin, thereby avoiding data contamination and mix-up. All samples were kept confidential and accessible solely to the researchers and the researchers’ course adviser.

Data analysis

To allow meaning-making from the samples, the researchers scheduled a data analysis session in which the entire samples were jointly observed and repeatedly studied using the developed theoretical constructs. analytic memos while closely reading the samples were maintained and all possible consistencies and peculiarities from the samples were studied. After this, the researchers collectively analyzed the unique samples via initial and process coding (Saldana, 2015). Any conflicting codes that were identified were also settled. Once consensus was reached, thematic analysis was then undertaken which led to two overarching themes with five subthemes. Lastly, the researchers revisited and finalized the final themes after the entire intensive data analysis session. During the entire process, procedures such as maintaining rich, thick descriptions, revisiting analytic memos, and peer debriefing were undertaken to ensure the validity of findings (Given, 2008; Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

Ethical considerations

The theoretical concepts of Sikolohiyang Pilipino and the characteristics of online community are organized in Table 1 below with their definition and guide questions. The latter was used to help identify aspects of the theoretical concepts from the sampled Facebook accounts.
At the time of this research, the authors’ institution did not have an ethics review committee for social research involving human subjects. No ethics review from institutions external to the authors’ affiliation was sought.

The researchers were deliberate in not requesting consent from relatives or friends of departed account owners. One reason is that engaging a given mourning party may unnecessarily trigger emotions of loss and grief. Another reason is that Facebook users are aware that the content they consciously or unconsciously produce on the platform may become visible to other users, regardless of their privacy settings (Irwin, 2015). Content made by Facebook users can be studied unobtrusively, in situ (Irwin, 2015; van Ryn, et al., 2016; Myles, et al., 2019) and so the researchers employed a passive, observational approach to Facebook memorial accounts (Allen, 2017). This is similar to a material-oriented approach to ethnography in which attention is given to the “intermediary role and affordances of the technological platforms for commemoration” such as Facebook (Allen, 2017).

Results and discussion

This section presents the two major themes with five subthemes. The first theme contains three subthemes while the remaining two are placed under the second major theme.

Theme 1: “Sinamahan Kita at Patuloy Kitang Sinasamahan [I have been with you, and I will always be with you]”

Filipinos view death as a transit or journey rather than a terminal/end stage. Hence, this theme shows the relationship and the journey of the deceased and the bereaved as the latter traverses the passage of life and death. The Filipino root word ‘samahan’ (to keep company or to accompany someone) of ‘sinamahan’ (to have kept company) and ‘sinasamahan’ (has been keeping company) not only denotes ‘being together’ with another kapwa, but also traveling with the kapwa from one place to another (Mercurio, 2021). As such, the practice of pakikipagkapwa or togetherness in life, in death, and in the afterlife have now permeated at least on Facebook. Additionally, this theme embodies the individual’s processing of grief of the bereaved through different death practices and rituals performed on the memorialized Facebook accounts. Also, the users expressed their mourning via Facebook and extended their sympathies to the departed and the bereaved. More so, the users’ Facebook activities show their presence during the mourning stage of the bereaved, and oftentimes, they tried to maintain it, either off-line or online, until the body was finally laid to rest. It is as if they were saying, “I was here in the wake to show my love and pay respect to my departed friend/family and the departed.”

Immortalizing past moments: Given the technological affordances of Facebook, users post and share their stories about or with the deceased online. Examples are recollections of memories and experiences with the departed through sharing images (Figure 1), stories, and video tributes, resembling a digital version of a eulogy, as well as seemingly mundane details of their lives as they continuously live. Taken together, this materialization of recalled memories encapsulates how people remember the dead as they keep and preserve what was left of the connection between the living and the dead. Despite the death of individuals, their traces of digital data persist in cyberspace which may remain accessible to relatives of the departed and succeeding generations, whether related to the departed or not. This finding is in congruence with previous studies demonstrating the use of “mediated memory objects” (31) such as photos and videos that can reconnect the past and future events, rejuvenate intimacy with the departed and the survived, and preserve endearing memories. At the same time, the appearance of these digital objects may have come from a careful curation by the users for an enhanced presentation of the self, the departed, and a previous moment together. At least for the samples in public settings, death is brought up in the public sphere, setting the topic of death no longer merely a private matter but also a social affair (Walter, et al., 2012).
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Practicing death rituals. Practices of the wake, procession of the dead, babungfukas (a Filipino death ritual during the first death anniversary of the deceased suggesting the end of the mourning period of the bereaved family), 40 days, and abuloy (a Filipino death practice of giving monetary help to the family of the deceased), among others, have been constantly observed in posts that have shown pakikiramay and pakikidalamhati. Several accounts were also found to have live-streamed the mentioned death rituals using the affordances of current communication technologies, substantially extending these traditions and practices to the mediated space. Santiago (1993) mentioned that observing death rituals “assists and heals the individual in mourning in an almost magical way” [32].

Furthermore, the results gathered have also affirmed the Filipino belief in the afterlife, a peaceful place with no suffering or a heavenly paradise. The veneration of the dead in the Philippines can be traced down to the animistic practices of Filipinos even before the Spanish colonization (Dakudao, 1992; Santiago, 1993; Tope and Nonan-Mercado, 2002) and the placement of cemeteries near the Roman Catholic churchyards as means to nurture the spiritual community among the “living and the los que fueron (those who were)” [33]. In the Philippines, a wake also acts as a “reunion of seldom-seen relatives and friends” where they participate in the vigils with the bereaved family [34]. As such, an amplification of this can be observed in Figure 2 (right screenshot) in which the user live-streamed the wake. Consequently, symbols related to death also surfaced (Figure 2, left screenshot). Rich in symbolic repertoire shared and understood by other Facebook users, these death rituals and practices have found an “alternative space” [35] on Facebook in which online “ad hoc mini-publics” [36] can converge. Moreover, Filipinos “look forward to a good death” [37]. In doing so, they give importance to the final resting place as it gives integrity and respect to the departed (Laguilles-Villanueva and de Guzman, 2019).

Figure 1: A post from Account 9 sharing a festive celebration joined by the departed, and a post from Account 12 in which the user shared photos together with the departed.
Figure 2: A post from Account 3 using a lit candle and white roses which are symbolic of death, and Facebook live stream of a wake from Account 12 showing a Roman Catholic necrological service.

Derogongan, et al. (2019) commented that while death indeed brings “togetherness”, death rituals and practices hosted by funeraria with modern touches bring convenience and practicality but lessen family closeness and established funeraria.
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Tradition. Preference of non-representative aging Filipino siblings for traditional ways of funeral services was previously reported (Laguilles-Villafuerte and de Guzman, 2019), although a recent survey among Filipinos ranging from 31 to 70 years old reported mixed predilection to traditional and contemporary practices (Agbing, 2020). Whether this erosion of family closeness and funeraria tradition indeed happens on Facebook-mediated death rituals remains to be seen.

Interestingly, none of the samples indicate that the death rituals and practices were mediated in funeraria, despite their cultural significance in the Philippines, for the setting in almost all samples were taken at homes. This runs consistent with Laguilles-Villafuerte and de Guzman (2019), suggesting that aging Filipinos prefer hosting death rituals at home for comfort, convenience, and practicality. Meanwhile, the provision of embalming, coffin or urn, and other funeral items (e.g., candelabra, hearse, religious effects) are understandably delegated to professional services, but some practices, as mentioned earlier, are evolving. This can be attributed to an uptick in multicultural exposure facilitated by mass and social media (Agbing, 2020).

Establishing online presence post-mortem. While the wail and anguish of the bereaved are difficult to show on Facebook, they are nonetheless evident in the generous use of emojis (e.g., 🙁, 😞). For instance, the constant use of emojis of crying () and pensive () faces; the sincere messages addressed to the deceased as if the dead could still read their messages, or the evidence of a “paranormal co-presence” [39] and continuing bonds (Klass, et al., 1996; Kasket, 2012; Klass, et al., 2017); including the simple comments during the Facebook Lives of the bereaved, manifest the loss they felt. Messages such as “I love you”, “Missing you so much ...”, “Thank you for everything ...”, and “Balik ka na [please come back] ...” directly address the deceased as if they were still alive, treating the departed as “conscious recipients of communication” [40]. These technological affordances (Akhther and Tetteh, 2021) are visual cues that allow users to express their emotions and also to extend their pakikiramay and pakikidalamhati.

While several accounts demonstrated how they established their online presence, one account showed a user who shared a photo of himself, half-naked (Figure 3). The caption clarified that the departed took the photo but it seems like the user is the central focus. This does not indicate insensitivity on the part of the user but possibly the intensity of media usage. It also resonates well with Thimm and Nehls’ (2017) observation wherein death or grief became a “side topic” [41]. At the same time, this post can be a different form of pakikiramay that is not necessarily expressed in a somber tone but in a “light-hearted behavior” [42].

![Figure 3: A post from Account 5 showing an image of the user himself while acknowledging the departed who took the photograph.](image)

Meanwhile, briefly composed comments such as “Rest in Peace,” “RIP,” or “Condolences” in Figure 4 from other users demonstrate the innate sense of Filipinos to pay respects to the departed. Despite their brevity, such compositions should not be taken lightly. Some users could be at a loss for words and others may prefer sending their messages in private. Others may be simply mimicking what other users are doing, and perhaps such a practice follows the Filipino coping mechanism of not engaging in contemplation on death as a phenomenon as a “happy people” [43]. It is also possible that these brief comments can be described as standardized acts of courtesy which the users might have impulsively written to show civility, respect, and acknowledgment of someone’s death. In case these comments were seen on Facebook by the relatives of the departed, the relatives would be pleased. These findings are consistent with Sabanpan-Yu’s (2009) observation that pakikiramay is a “cultural expectation” [44] in which the bereaved anticipate some individuals to attend the wake or at least have their presence felt during online commemoration. But there is a possibility that participation in online death rituals may be an excuse for those who do not want to attend physically (Walter, et al., 2012). Such practices also show how in establishing one’s presence, despite being online, a community is created through the connections and socialization of a user to another one or
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several other users regardless of the magnitude of the interaction (also see Christensen and Gotved, 2015). The participatory actions of the users are the “most important factor in the existence of a community” [45].

Figure 4: Comments sections showing a series of condolences from numerous users showing standardized acts of courtesy. Screenshots were taken from publicly available posts in Accounts 4 and
Theme 2: “Sama-sama Tayo sa Pakikiramay at Pakikidalamhati [We are together in mourning]”

Sabanpan-Yu (2009) has observed that in the Philippines, Filipinos do not die alone for “death creates community” [46]. The innate sense of Filipinos to sympathize collectively through pakikiramay and pakikidalamhati with the mourning is a semblance of a community gathering together to help and okay (to lead or to guide) the bereaved while mourning. It emerges not only in physical places such as funeral parlors or homes of the bereaved but also in online spaces such as Facebook. Only this time, remembering the dead is not an individual experience anymore, but rather a short-term, intensive online gathering of different online users in memorializing the deceased.

Revealing relational identity as motive for commemorating. A person’s identity is a lifelong project of image-building with “open-ended futures” (van Ryn, et al., 2017). Individuals purposively reveal an aspect of their identity to gain an ideal image, which happens both in online and off-line encounters. However, with the person’s death, active self-presentation ceases but not the labeling of others on the dead. See Account 2, for example. In the posts from Account 2 (Figure 5), different people reveal their distinct connections with the deceased with nicknames or any terms of endearment that they use to call the departed. Examples are “Daddy”, “classmate”, “partner”, “Pastor”, and “My friend”. Altogether, they represent an aspect of the multifaceted identity of the departed that is not fully known to the bereaved. Hence, even in death, the familiarity of the bereaved with the departed continues to grow (also see Christensen and Gotved, 2015). These relational identities, especially the terms of endearments or any other unique words, affirm the motive of the users in participating in the online memorial, and the importance of the departed in the lives of those who remain. Companionship and bonding, an attribute of an online community for Rotman and Preece (2010), is evident here.
Fostering online communities through pakikiramay and pakikidalamhati on memorialized Facebook accounts

Figure 5: A post and series of comments from Account 2 showing numerous terms of endearment and nicknames about the departed.

The post from Account 13 (Figure 6) is a viable example of maximizing hashtags, another social plugin of Facebook. Here, hashtags served as descriptors of the departed, thereby revealing the relationship the departed had with the survived. For example, the hashtags “#Mentor”, “#Leader”, and “#Teacher” suggested that the user was a colleague who deeply respects the departed. The “#Joker” might mean that the departed was fond of telling hilarious stories. These descriptors evidently differ from one another and have arisen from different contexts, but nonetheless have emerged within communities from which the departed once belong.
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Figure 6: Post from Account 13 with descriptive hashtags about the departed and a class picture.

For Rotman and Preece (2010), diversity of users is essential in creating a community. Within the individual posts and comments of various users, they identified their connection with the deceased. Consequently, it was observed that they became acquainted with the departed in distinct situations influenced by their specific contextualities. Through diversity and the establishment of affiliations amongst the users, a "sense of belonging" within companionship and shared interests forms the foundation of a community (Rotman and Preece, 2010; Parks, 2010). This follows the importance of communal relationships of the users with other users or members of the community and, inevitably, with the departed.

Demonstrating communal pakikiramay at pakikipagkapwa

Pakikiramay and pakikipagkapwa surfaced through the use of the different social media plugins used for different user's pakikiramay and pakikidalamhati. For instance, one comment from Account 10 said that they were glad to have a Facebook live stream of the death ceremony of the first death anniversary, which is called babangluksa, of the deceased because they were overseas during this time (Figure 7). This indicates pakikipagkapwa of the Filipinos, that is "treating the other person as kapwa or fellow human being" [47] even postmortem. The host of the Facebook live stream could have thought of hosting the online event to allow those afar to participate in the important death ritual.

Figure 6: Post from Account 13 with descriptive hashtags about the departed and a class picture.
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Figure 7: Post and comments from Account 10 announcing the first death anniversary of the departed and those who have shared their prayers, wishes, and messages to the departed.

A post from Account 5 (Figure 8) broadcasted a user-generated concert via Facebook Live to raise funds for the dead. The post contained the bank account where ‘concertgoers’ or online viewers can send abuloy (a Filipino practice of giving financial assistance to the family of the deceased) digitally, as a contemporary way of the traditional practice of physically giving an envelope with cash to a family member of the departed. A shared purpose, such as the practice of sending abuloy or fundraising, provides a sense of a unified goal that reifies the relations within the community (Rotman and Preece, 2010).
Pakikipagkapwa also emerges through the pakikipagkwentuhan or maintaining conversations with the grieving party (Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). In the comments section of Account 6 (Figure 9), an exchange of information was observed between two senior citizens who are strangers to one another. While conversing, they found a connection between them through the exchange of their fondest memories with a common friend. The affordances of Facebook provided an opportunity for establishing personal interactions among users, which is one of the characteristics of an online community (Rotman and Preece, 2010). Traditionally, wakes serve as reunions for relatives and friends of the departed (Sabanpan-Yu, 2009) but Facebook facilitates ad hoc mini-publics whose social connections of its online members are defined by blood or friendship, among others.

*Figure 8:* First two screenshots from Account 5 show the title of the concert along with the bank details where abaluy can be sent. The last screenshot on the right captures a performer singing for the online concert while people engage with the live stream through comments and reactions.
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Figure 9: Comments section from Account 6 showing a conversation between two strangers recalling their relationship with the departed. The long thread was spliced into two separate panels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment 1</th>
<th>Nakakagulat nga, ... Ano b ikinamatay? Student ko ito noon ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comment 2</td>
<td>nagtatanung-tanong pa ako kung anong nangyari.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comment 3</td>
<td>stage 4 breast cancer po</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comment 4</td>
<td>breast cancer cells have spread to her lungs. Neri was a long time friend too, she and her family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comment 5</td>
<td>masyado akong nalungot sa paglisan nya.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comment 6</td>
<td>i understand. Ako din. Akala ko on remission na siya. Btw, Sis anong Dept ka sa UPLB?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comment 7</td>
<td>Bakit daw ang bata pa nya rip and condolence to her family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Death in the Philippines is perceived as a “very social experience” [49]. How one reacts to social cues and expectations within social events, such as death rituals, reflects how one understands what is anticipated of the kapwa in the form of pakikiramdam and pakikipagkapwa. As such, this has been observed on posts asking for monetary donations, announcements of scheduled death rituals and ceremonies, live streaming of ongoing on-ground death rituals, as well as simple heartfelt posts from people who have known the departed, among others. The researchers inferred that people who have commented, viewed, and reacted to the samples from the different accounts under this theme, have the deep-rooted Filipino values of pakikiramdam and pakikipagkapwa that they have subconsciously expressed through these social plugins. This corresponds accurately to at least two characteristics of an online community for Rotman and Preece (2010). One, the technological affordances of Facebook such as the live stream, comments section, and social plug-ins (e.g., emojis) transformed into “shared domains” in which different users participated in death rituals to commemorate the departed, comfort the grieving, and practically defray the cost of funeral services. Two, predictably, social activity and interaction at least in the form of sharing common experiences were observed among the users, even strangers who have met each other exclusively online.
Despite the emotional vulnerability of those mourning online, none of the samples were ridiculed by trolls nor berated by other users. This runs contrary to previous studies (e.g., Bautista and Lin, 2015; Thimm and Nehls, 2017; van Ryn, et al., 2017) which detected cyberbullying, vandalism, and trolling, serious downsides of online mourning. The absence of which can be attributed to pakikiramdam, although this cannot be confirmed empirically at this point.

Conclusion

Pakikiramay and pakikidalamanhi in new emergent forms of mediated Filipino death rituals on Facebook memorialized accounts can foster an online community when an individual passes away. The unique features and affordances offered by Facebook have been facilitative in overcoming space and time constraints while practicing death rituals. Some common Filipino death rituals and practices traditionally done off-line that have extended and permeated the digital space were: abaytoy, babangulaksa, observance of the 40th day of death, lamay, and funeral procession, as well as sharing information and personal stories about the dead, among others. Standardized forms of courtesy such as the templated “Rest in Peace,” “RIP,” and “Condolences” were also observed, suggesting respect and acknowledgment by some users of an unfortunate event. Social plug-ins such as emojis represented the emotional baggage of those who used them while hashtags were used as descriptors for the departed. But more importantly, the visibility of these death rituals and practices on Facebook should not be interpreted as mere migration of off-line practices to Facebook. Facebook itself permitted the exercise of these rituals while the users exploited the features and plug-ins of Facebook to observe these death rituals and practices. Consequently, these death practices and rituals inevitably fostered an online community that allowed the expression of the Filipino core value of pakikipagkapwa. The researchers then emphatically answer in the affirmative to Walter, et al.’s (2012) question of whether the Internet change how people die and mourn.

It was evident that the users, while memorializing the deceased, have shared the memories that they shared with the departed while the latter was still alive. This includes both the mundane and the extraordinary moments together. As such, the dead is able to continue to live digitally (Bassett, 2015; also see Carroll and Landry, 2010). Hints of Roman Catholic influence are also seen in some users who mentioned the belief in the afterlife, although the belief systems of account owners are difficult to confirm. Technological affordances of Facebook were maximized to observe death rituals in unconventional ways such as hosting online concerts to raise money for the deceased’s funeral arrangements, as well as live streaming of wakes, necrological masses, and funeral processions. These were maximized by those who are unable to be physically present and enjoyed by those who have access to Facebook.

The two overarching themes from this study resonate well with the recent trajectories of the continuing bonds theory envisioned by its original proponents (Klass, 1998, p. 111). Previous iterations of this theory focused on the individual level, but the bonds of the departed and the bereaved occur within the larger social and cultural milieu. Ultimately, this resonates with the Filipino virtue of the kapwa that finds its being in being together with another kapwa, which, in this case, has transcended the temporality of life and death.

This study succinctly documented the communal online mourning through pakikipagkapwa, albeit limited to the networks of the departed and the aggrieved and platform vernaculars of Facebook. The findings of this study should be interpreted with caution given that Philippine-based samples are predominantly limited to those with an evident Christian ideology. Hence, funerary practices and death rituals from other religious, indigenous, or cultural groups should be sampled in future works. How these conventions are expressed in mediated settings and in languages aside from English and Filipino, and how Facebook’s media logics afforded such expressions are exciting new areas of research.

Moreover, a panoramic view involving longitudinal data on digital remains can uncover the “long-term process” of mediatization of Filipino mourning which involves media and communication, on one hand, and culture and society, on another [ see Forman, et al., 2012, paragraph 1]. The impact of digital remains on the bereaved is an unresolved and delicate terrain of research. This shall serve as an impetus to inquiries on the acceptance of online mourning to Filipinos, or not. Lastly, the reception of participants of online death rituals can be explored by those in the funerary industry to know whether mediated practices are acceptable or not.

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