



Research in Brief

Portrayals of depression on Pinterest and why public relations practitioners should care



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 22 June 2015

Received in revised form 2 August 2015

Accepted 5 September 2015

Available online 19 September 2015

Keywords:

Pinterest

Depression

Public relations

Health communication

ABSTRACT

Using a quantitative content analysis, this study focused on how depression has been portrayed and communicated on Pinterest. Key findings include: Depression-focused pins elicited high response levels for repins, likes, and comments, and more than half of the pins expressed perception of depression as a severe disorder. Various coping mechanisms were present in the pins, with the dysfunctional coping strategy most prevalent. Implications for practitioners on how to utilize visual media platforms to effectively engage at-risk publics on health issues were discussed.

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1. Introduction

Depressive disorders result in substantial functional impairment, as well as increased emotional, economic, and productivity costs (Donohue & Pincus, 2007). Given the role the Internet and specifically social media play in providing health-related communication, and the fact that limited research has been done to address this area in public relations and public health literature, this study focused on the social media platform Pinterest, a relatively new visual social media platform that has not received much scholarly attention (Guidry, Carlyle, Messner, & Jin, *In press*), and analyzed depression-related pins as they relate to Pinterest engagement, coping variables, and risk issue perceptions.

2. Research questions

RQ1: How is depression portrayed on Pinterest?

RQ2: How do Pinterest users respond to the depression pins they encounter on Pinterest?

RQ3: To what extent do depression-related Pinterest pins mention issues related to suicide and cutting/self-harm?

RQ4: What types of depression related coping strategies are communicated on Pinterest?

RQ5: What is the identity of the posters of depression-related pins?

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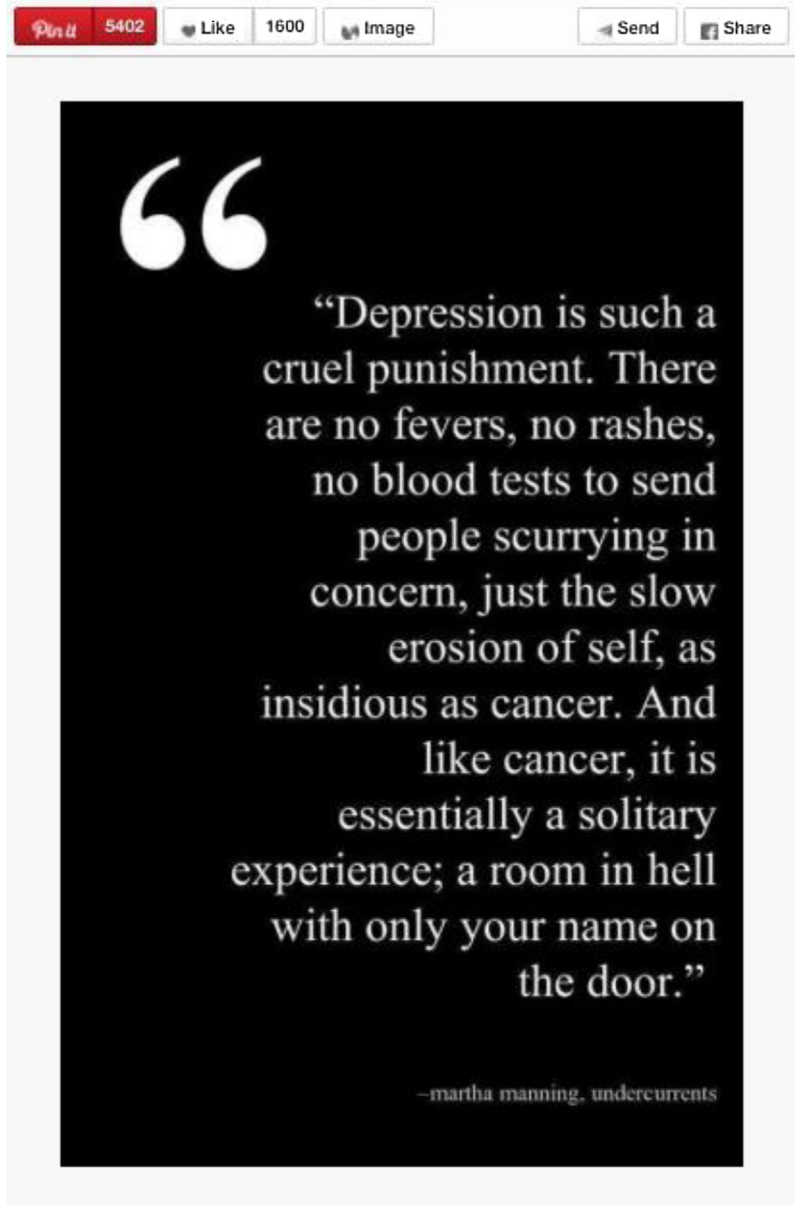


Fig. 1. Example of negative stance pin.

3. Method

In a quantitative content analysis, 800 Pinterest posts (hereafter identified as “pins”) were identified by choosing every fifth applicable pin for analysis. This study used four depression-related keywords to select the pins for the sample: “depression,” “clinical depression,” “depressive disorder,” and “bipolar disorder”. On May 20, May 22, and May 25 of 2014, each fifth pin for each keyword search was selected by scrolling down the page with search results and a screenshot captured as well as any links to connected websites noted; reaching a total of 200 pins per keyword for a total of 800 pins in the sample. Between collecting the sample and coding the sample; 17 pins were deleted from Pinterest; therefore; the final sample consisted of 783 pins.

Coding protocols for pins relating to the topic of depression by Pinterest users were developed, tested and implemented for the coding process. The pins were coded for a series of typical Pinterest characteristics, including when the post was published, the account name of the pinner who posted, whether the pin originally was a repin, the number of repins, number of likes, number of comments, whether the pin linked to another website and if so, which one, how many types of engagement

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