

## Mental Illness on Youtube: Exploring Identity Performance in the Virtual Space

**Authors :** P. Saeed, Baiju Gopal

**Abstract :** YouTube has seen a surge in the recent years in the number of creators opening up about their mental illness on the video-sharing platform. In documenting their mental health, YouTubers perform an identity of their mental illness in the online world. Identity performance is a theory under identity research that has been readily applied to illness narratives and internet studies. Furthermore, in India, suffering from mental illnesses is regarded with stigma, making the act of taking mental health from a personal to a public space on YouTube a phenomenon worth exploring. Thus, the aim of this paper is to analyse the mental illness narratives of Indian YouTubers for understanding its performance in the virtual world. For this purpose, thematic narrative analysis on the interviews of four Indian YouTubers was conducted. This data was synthesized with analysis of the videos the YouTubers had uploaded on their channel sharing about their mental illness. The narratives of the participants shed light on two significant presentations that they engage in: (a) the identity of a survivor/fighter and (b) the identity of a silent sufferer. Further, the participants used metaphors to describe their illness, thereby co-constructing a corresponding identity based on their particular metaphors. Lastly, the process of bringing mental illness from back stage to front stage on YouTube involves a shift in the audience, from being rejecting and invalidating in real life to being supportive and encouraging in the virtual space. Limitations and implications for future research were outlined.

**Keywords :** cyber-psychology, internet, media, mental health, mental illness, technology

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