

“Staring down the devil” – Metaphorical negotiations of emotional experiences in a digital Community of Practice of persons living with dementia

Digital platforms have become an important resource in health communication, fostering not just an exchange of information beyond institutionalised doctor-patient talk (cf. Kleinke 2015), but also the emergence of digital Communities of Practice (CofP) where participants bond over shared emotional experiences mainly, but not exclusively, connected to their medical conditions. This can, for example, be observed in digital online support groups providing a platform for people identifying as living with dementia. This study, which is based on a corpus of 28 threads from one of these online forums, explores how users express and negotiate their emotions, relating to both their immediate online interactions and offline experiences.

While a previous study on the corpus (authors, under review) has revealed a high density of explicit emotion labels with a dominance of positive over negative labels (e.g. *love, hope* vs *fear*), this analysis focuses particularly on the metaphorical construal of emotions. On the one hand, the data yield evidence of culturally conventionalised scripts, e.g. the conceptualisation of the disease as *one of those journeys* (cf. Kövecses 1995), and well-established negative conceptualisations, e.g. of dementia as a powerful antagonist. On the other hand, some metaphors stray from these recognised patterns and convey a broader range of emotional facets, which go beyond widespread, often stereotypical expectations of living with dementia. Our analysis thus demonstrates that users who identify as living with dementia negotiate and reperspectivise their experiences, making their voices heard in the digital sphere.

References

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