

Chapter 3

A Case Study of MY Psychology: Malaysia's First Online Psychoeducational Platform

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ABSTRACT

MY Psychology is an online educational platform currently based in Malaysia, formed with the intention to spread awareness towards the general public of not only on issues related with mental health and those who suffer under mental illnesses, but also to create a place where psychology as a basic knowledge can be taught and learned. This is in order to correct misunderstandings from the public toward psychology. Operating on the internet requires the company to shift towards a marketing-oriented direction, in the meantime, coping with internal and external challenges in order to strive for greater reach and engagement from the audience.

BACKGROUND HISTORY OF MY PSYCHOLOGY'S FORMATION

A statement made by the Malaysian Psychiatric Association (2013), detailed the shocking rise of mental health problems in children below the age of 15, as the group rose from 13% of the population in the year 1996 to 20% of the population in 2012. Add to that, the recent report made by The Star Online (2017) from a statement by resident consultant psychiatrist in the International Medical University, Dr. Philip George, claiming that the actual numbers of people who had mental health problems might be

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-6073-9.ch003

A Case Study of MY Psychology

underreported, maybe due to the stigma often attached to such conditions and the topic in general. As such, a non-conservative estimation of the mentally-ill population would be around 40% of Malaysians (The Star Online, 2017).

To further elaborate upon the role that stigma poses against the advancement of the mental health field in Malaysia, stigma towards mental illness and psychology in general are mostly a result of misunderstandings towards the foundations of the field and of the nature of mental illness in itself. Coupled with a lack of knowledge in the subject matter, this causes such a fear to become widespread not only in real life but also in the virtual realm (online and offline). The deficiency in Malaysia when it comes to the availability of mental health practitioners, according to a recent report made in the NST, stands at 1 psychiatrist for every 200,000 of the total population – much lower than the expected ratio set and recommended by WHO: 1;10,000 (Landau, 2017). The report by the World Health Organization (2011) stated that the mental health expenditures from the local government is only a meagre 0.39% in the total budget allocated to health, and that further expenditures towards mental health hospitals are not even available.

This deficiency, coupled with the fact that mental health problems will be on the rise for the foreseeable future as stress levels in a developing country will potentially be one of the most important risk factors for the population, will inevitably demand a higher level of awareness and knowledge regarding mental health in the general public. So what we have now is a vast range of barriers, from perceived stigma towards the mentally afflicted (Clement et al., 2015), a general uncertainty towards clinical effectiveness among the practitioners themselves (Morris, 2008), economic issues, and finally a deficiency in trained personnel (Berry & Haddock, 2008), all these varying factors result in a reluctance from those who are currently afflicted with one mental health issue or another that can vastly benefit from psychological interventions are now either unwilling to reach out for help, or are unable to do so from the sheer fact of a lack in sources of help.

One of our main goals in establishing MY Psychology as an online platform is to provide a form of countermeasure towards this issue. Our goal is to provide an outlet of information for general knowledge on common psychological topics, and currently progressing towards the dismantling of stigmatization of mental illness through making interventions and information regarding these interventions available and accessible to the audience. It has been shown by Trefflich, Kalckreuth, Mergl, and Rummel-Kluge (2015) that the levels of internet use in those who are afflicted with mental health issues, including those with severe mental health problems (SMIs), are the same as the general population.

Of course, when MY Psychology was originally formed, we didn't have such lofty aspirations, as our original aim was to provide psychological information towards the general public in digestible and accessible formats. These included, educational videos explaining a psychological concept while incorporating comedy skits, or articles ranging from book and movie reviews, to pieces that highlight a single psychological phenomenon. Our approach gradually shifted since our five-year inception from being a pure content creator to incorporating elements of an online educational platform to better suit the goal that developed further down the line. We aimed to not only provide educational insight into the workings of the psychology field and the mental health faction, but also to dispel psychological misconceptions, as well as to raise awareness towards the predicament of the mentally ill. We are not alone in trying to establish ourselves as online providers of psychological and mental health information in Malaysia as well as abroad, as we have also linked up with multiple similar platforms based in the Canada, Taiwan, as well as the Philippines. But this is still a relatively new path for a field that is previously so grounded in the practice of helping through direct contact, and there are still challenges still ahead of us.

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