

The meaning of digital legacies for mourning and remembrance

Research project of Lorenz Widmaier

Project description

The digital society is often described as a data society and the Internet as a gigantic archive. But inevitably, death is still a turning point that decides what we forget and what we remember. This research project examines the meaning of digital legacies for those left behind and explores digital mourning and memory practices.

Those who die today leave behind vast and personal digital legacies with countless photographs on smartphones, voice messages, videos, chat protocols, or social media accounts. These data illustrate all spheres of life, the most ordinary and the most intimate. The study examines the meaning of these digital legacies for the bereaved, how they access and organise the digital remains, and how they use them for private and public mourning and memory practices.

The digital society invents new mourning and remembrance opportunities like telling stories about the deceased publicly on social media, mourning together in private messenger groups, or uploading memorial videos. The study further explores how bereaved use and experience these private and public digital mourning and memory practices.

The empirical study is based on in-depth interviews with the bereaved. The research data are further enriched with photographs and screenshots taken during the interviews.

Beyond the academic interest, the research aims to assist mourners who are confronted with a digital legacy and to support those who seek assistance with digital mourning and remembrance.

The dissertation is being conducted at the Cyprus University of Technology in the Visual Sociology and Museum Studies Lab. It is part of the EU research network POEM, which deals with participatory memory practices.

Sharing vs. collecting: biographical memories and digital death

Research project of Lorenz Widmaier (2018-2021)

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Project of the network H2020 POEM (poem-horizon.eu)
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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 764859