

Virtual Mourning and Memory Construction on Facebook: Here are the Terms of Use

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the online information practices of persons grieving and mourning the death of another via Facebook through an examination of how, or if, these practices and Facebook's terms of use policies have implications for those in mourning and/or the memory of the deceased. To explore these questions the researchers contrasted traditional publicly recorded asynchronous modes of grieving (i.e. obituaries) with Facebook's asynchronous features (i.e. pages, photos, messages, profiles, comments etc.) Additionally, by applying observational techniques to Facebook memorial pages and Facebook profile pages, conducting a survey, and following-up on survey responses with interviews, the researchers examined the benefits and issues of online information sharing via Facebook when coping with loss. It was found that immediacy of publishing comments, messages, wall posts, photos, etc. provided Facebook mourners with a quick outlet for emotion and a means of timely group support via responding comments; however, these actions directly affect the deceased's online curation of self, memory, as well as created an environment of competition amongst the mourning. The aforementioned benefits and complications of using Facebook during bereavement are shaped by the policy outlined by Facebook, as Facebook's present policy leaves the deceased's surviving family and/or friends to change the status of the profile to be memorialized, close the profile account, or remove a memorial page; thus, leaving one's reputation beyond the grave in the hands of others.

Keywords

Online information practices, mourning, grief, moral rights, self-curation, memory, Facebook, and social media.

INTRODUCTION

For a growing number of the world's literate population the

rise of social media brought new channels for personal and collective expression, as well as new spaces for narrating identities. However, a decade later these sites remain locales of contestation where the rules of engagement and policies governing these spaces are still in formation and reformation. Today, worldwide, Facebook is the most utilized online platform for social connection and the construction of a digital identity (Alexa, 2013). As Facebook's number of users continues to swell, this site has become a global venue for personal, social, and cultural memories. Thus, as more users pass away, Facebook becomes a virtual locale for commemoration, bereavement, and public expression of emotion (Carroll & Landry, 2010; Hogan & Quan-Haase, 2010; Getty et al., 2011). Prior to the advent of social media, newspaper obituaries, radio announcements, television programs, phone calls, email, and texts were the main modes of public notification of someone's death (Carroll & Landry 2010). Now, before we have time to turn on the radio, flip on the television, or open the newspaper, we are notified by Facebook of a death (Levack, 2008; Stone, 2010; Carroll & Landry, 2010).

The rise in mobile media worldwide has also contributed to the millions of people who actively participate on social media sites. Access to the mobile internet is reshaping how we think about information sharing, and the uptake of data services on mobile media - including the rise of wireless fidelity (Wifi) hotspots in public spaces - is transforming when and how people engage with social media. No longer is the desktop the only place that information is exchanged - it is increasingly happening wherever we have our mobile phones (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010; Rainie & Wellman, 2012). Public spaces are grounds for contestations of what constitutes appropriate and ethical social behavior both online and offline, and the rules of engagement are still being defined (Ling & McEwen, 2011; McEwen & Scheaffer, 2012). This leads to a pervasive sense that Facebook and other social networking sites are omnipresent.

This paper is an analysis of the nature of the everyday work undertaken to produce, manage, and in some cases, unintentionally erode digital identities and memory archives. More specifically, the research presented here, rooted within the context of bereavement and the limitations

of Facebook's terms of use policies, explored the tensions at play between the collective construction of individual digital identities/memory and the individual's curation of self on Facebook.

Grief and/or mourning defined

After being informed of a death, Westerners, depending on distance and culture, traditionally gather in public venues for mourning, such as wakes, memorials, or funerals. For those that are unable to attend the event physically, Facebook reinterprets and repackages memorials online; thus, Facebook becomes a social space for continual grieving support, or does it)?

Within this paper grief and mourning are placed within the context of bereavement. Grover and Fowler's definition of mourning and grief is utilized throughout the paper, "Mourning is the external part of loss. It is the action we take, the rituals and customs. Grief is the internal part of loss, how we feel" (2011, p. 9). Facebook users mourn online to remember loved ones that have passed away, to connect with the deceased's community of friends, to honor the life lived by the deceased, and to receive and give support to other Facebook users (Stone, 2010; Hogan & Quan-Haase, 2010; Getty et al., 2011; and Carroll & Landry, 2010). The authors contextualize Facebook member's online actions using Goffman's (1959) notion of front and backstage. Front stage performance, the actions each of us perform in a public sphere for public consumption, are extended to online mourning via Facebook (eg. the construction of memorial pages, memorializing profiles, tagging photos, adding photo and video captions, posting comments and status updates). Whereas the backstage performance, the private awareness and personal performance, in this case internal grief of a user is acted out in private via Facebook (e.g. sending a direct message to the deceased Facebook member via his/her profile).

The collective process of digital identity construction, the individuation of profile ownership, and memory

"When the submitter of this content is still living, we can maintain the illusion that the submitter and submitted content are one" (Hogan & Quan-Haase, 2010, p. 311).

Online self-curation describes practices of intentional content creation and the editing of that content on a digital platform to represent one's self. Identity via Facebook is constructed by users when they add content to their profiles. Such content includes requesting and accepting friend request, "friending"; liking pages; adding photos; tagging one's self and others in photos; writing captions for photos; adding information in the "About" section; posting statuses; making wall posts; generating comments; and uploading videos. User's activity on pages and profiles where they are not the administrator also contributes to the construction of the user's online identity, for as Van House and Churchill

argue, "what is remembered individually and collectively depends in part on technologies of memory and the associated socio-technical practices" (2008, p. 296). Thus, unlike a personal webpage, it is not only the content created or edited on the portion of the Facebook platform where you are the administrator, but the contribution of others' on your profile, as they add content through comments, photos, videos, likes, that also build your online reputation and persona and Facebook becomes a social space for the development of a collective online memory and digital archive for the individual; thus, perpetuating a culture of interdependent connectivity (Getty et al, 2011, Kern et. al., 2013; van Dijck, 2010).

"Since the self is a 'collaborative manufacture' between performer and audience, authorization must be a collective act. Individuals cannot be the sole arbiters of their online identity" (Davis, Sieder, & Gardner, 2008, p.1086). In this highly articulated process it becomes necessary for interacting individuals to seek consensus regarding the parameters of authorization. As part of these consensus building processes Facebook users continually verify the self-presentations of others through feedback that take the forms of "liking" a comment, photo, or status, and vice versa or by contributing evidence in form of text, photos, videos, or links. Yet, in spite of the social nature of online identity management processes, individual Facebook users take personal ownership of the sum of these interactions as represented by their edited or unedited profile. Fowler (2005) states that "...collective representation can exist through the medium of individual interaction, but they are socially situated and are thus 'social facts'" (p. 54). Thus, although created and maintained by a collective in a process of social construction, this digital output in the form of a profile is associated with - and in many senses belongs to - a single person. The Facebook profile that is the working-end product is still the curatorial digital asset of the profile owner.

Mission expansion through "memorialization": an open connection between the bereaved and the deceased.

According to their website, "Facebook's mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected". How that mission is extended to bereaved Facebook users was conceptualized through a policy in response to the unexpected death of a Facebook colleague and avid Facebook user in 2005. In response to this loss Facebook instituted a "memorializing" procedure. In its infancy, to "memorialize" a deceased member's account meant that a Facebook friend or an immediate relative had to report the passing of that user to Facebook. Once Facebook received the notification and verified the information, the deceased member's account would be "memorialized": preserved in its current state so that no new content or friends could be added or deleted from an account, as it would be a digital archive of the deceased user's creation of content and interaction with others on the platform. Then after 30 days the account would be

permanently deactivated (Kelly, 2009). That definition of “memorializing” remained in place until 2007. It was in that year Facebook received an overwhelming number of requests from the loved ones of the Virginia Tech victims’ to keep the deceased’s profiles indefinitely active (Wortham, 2010). The outcome from the massive amount of emotional correspondence and passionate advocacy was a redefining of “memorializing” by Facebook to denote a state where the deceased user’s account remains in an active state to enable the loved ones that established connection with deceased via Facebook prior to his or her passing, to continue an online relationship. The policy, 2013, now reads:

Memorializing the account: It is our policy to memorialize the account of a deceased person. In order to protect the privacy of the deceased person, we cannot provide login information for the account to anyone. However, once an account has been memorialized, we take measure to secure the account. If you need to report a timeline to be memorialized please contact us.

Removing the account: Verified immediate family member may request the removal of a loved one’s account from the site (Facebook, 2013).

When a person passes away, we memorialize their account to protect their privacy. Here are some of the key features of memorialized accounts:

- *No one can log into a memorialized account and no new friends can be accepted*
- *Depending on the privacy settings of the deceased person’s account, friends can share memories on the memorialized timeline*
- *Anyone can send private messages to the deceased person*
- *Content the deceased person shared (e.g. photos, posts) remains on Facebook and is visible to the audience it was shared with*
- *Memorialized timelines don’t appear in People You May Know and other suggestions*

Creating a timeline in remembrance of an already deceased person is not allowed. We encourage you to create a Page to do this.

Thus, the profile of a deceased Facebook user - the portion of the users’ digital estate that resides on Facebook in his/her name - is left in the hands of friends and family members. And as it stands Facebook’s policy allows loved ones to engage in the front stage bereavement performances of mourning and honor the deceased via 8 distinct practices:

- a) A contribution of content in form of videos, photos, links, comments, or likes on the deceased’s profile
- b) Taking over the authorship/administration of the deceased’s profile
- c) Adding content to his/her own page and tag the deceased
- d) Requesting for the deceased profile to be memorialized
- e) Deactivating the deceased’s profile
- f) Creating and/or acting as an administrator of a memorial page for the deceased
- g) Liking the memorial page created for the deceased
- h) Adding content to a memorial page.

In short, memorialized accounts leave the content of the deceased user, related to the addition or deletion of friends, unchanged; however, the content contributed to the profile by the deceased’s friends is un-editable; thus, no longer does the profile of the deceased reflect the work of the user, but now reflects, the remembered life of the user’s Facebook friends, and the individual’s memory archive becomes a social archive. Thus, the online self-curation of the deceased is overridden.

Research questions

The most recent literature (Zhao, Grasmuck, Martin, 2008; Back et. al., 2009; Hogan, Quan-Haase, 2010; Hongladrom, 2011) surrounding public online self-representation via social networking sites concludes that online self-representation is congruent with and reflective of public offline self-representation. However, the curation of objects of the online-self differs from the objects available offline and defining and refining objects digitally via Facebook is limited to the features (for example photos, comments, videos, status updates etc.) offered by the social media platform.

These constraints afforded by features and policies are engineered into the very fabric of services like

Facebook, and lead to the following research questions:

- (a) What happens to the Facebook profile page of someone who dies, and what are the consequences for the deceased’s self-curation online?;
- (b) How do Facebook’s features support or constrain online information practice of mourning and grieving the death of a loved one?;
- (c) How do Facebook’s terms of use policies affect the memory of the deceased?

METHODS

To explore these questions the researchers used document analysis techniques to contrast traditional and publicly recorded asynchronous modes of grieving (i.e. obituaries) with Facebook’s asynchronous features (i.e. pages, photos, messages, profiles, comments etc.) Additionally, utilizing document analysis techniques on specific Facebook

memorial pages and Facebook profile pages in combination with the analysis of a mini-survey and interviews with volunteer participants, the benefits and issues concerning online information sharing, use, and seeking when coping with loss were examined.

Document analysis

This study included document analysis of three types of data: a) terms of use policies (Facebook), b) public obituaries - following replicating practices used by Fowler (2005), and c) selected participant Facebook pages, and publicly accessible Facebook memorial pages. The documents in a) and b) are publicly available documents, while the selected Facebook pages (c) were provided via screen shots and on an opt-in and voluntary basis from consenting participants' Facebook pages. The document analysis data provided a 'sense of setting' and positional information that cannot be captured in interview data (Simons, 2009, p. 55). Both researchers analyzed the selected documents, and shared the coding of data.

Mini-survey

An "opt- in" approach was utilized for the survey and interview to remain respectful of those mourning the death of a loved one. In April 2012 the researchers posted a message once a week for two weeks on their respective Facebook profiles to recruit volunteers to participate in a survey. The goal was to attract "random" adult volunteers from a convenience sample that began with the Facebook networks of the researchers with a potential of expanding this recruitment pool via referrals. For this study, participants were active Facebook members. Participants were selected for participation on a first come (contact) first recruited basis, based on the following criteria: participants were a) 18 years old and over and this was easily verified, as all participants were within the networks of the researchers or their friends-of-friend on Facebook; b) self-disclose as active members of Facebook - i.e. they have a Facebook account; c) know someone who has died within the period March 1, 2006-present; d) used Facebook to mourn or grieve a death; and e) speak and write English.

Interviews

In the mini-survey, we asked participants if they would be interested in participating in an interview (approx. 30 minutes). All of the respondents had indicated that they were willing to contribute to this research project by engaging in a follow-up email. 5 interviews were conducted in the study. Interviews were used to more fully unpack the survey responses. The researchers ensured that interview participants had sufficient time to review the consent form before signing it and asked participants if they have any questions before commencing with the interview questions. The researchers reviewed the key points of the consent form with the participant. Participation was entirely voluntary and consent-driven.

Although interviews can have limitations based on how articulate participants are and on the skill of the interviewer (Creswell, 2009, p. 179), they are still an excellent way to gain insight into the interviewee's perspective on a topic and to obtain information on unobservable data (Simons, 2009, p. 43).

When we asked the mini-survey question, 'what happened to [the deceased's] Facebook account after he/she passed away', half of the participants indicated that the deceased's profile still exists as an active account. This means that years after the owner's passing their Facebook page is discoverable by the public via Facebook's search engine; the owner's last postings, including their privacy settings and very last status update, are intact; and that the profile picture that existed at the time of death still appears on the profile. In this scenario there are two additional points of interest: i) any automated notifications set-up by the profile owner (for example, birthday greetings, game updates, and holiday salutations) continue to function and in many cases this includes sending messages to the deceased's friends, after his/her death; and, ii) the Facebook friends of the deceased are able to, and do, continue to post messages, photos, and videos on the deceased's wall.

These short, semi- structured interviews consisted of mainly open-ended questions used to gain in-depth perceptions. The participant was able to choose to terminate the interview at any time without recrimination or penalty. Interviews were audio recorded for transcribing as per the consent form.

Screenshots of memorial pages, the deceased's profile, memorialized profiles, and postings of the deceased with all names and photographs redacted by the participants were submitted to researchers.

FINDINGS

Research question 1- Consequences for digital identity

To answer the first research question that asks 'what happens to the Facebook profile page of someone who dies, and what are the consequences for the deceased's self-curation online?' findings from the mini-survey and document analysis offered key insights.

Active accounts

This could be a deceased user's account that was memorialized or an deceased user's account that is still active and Facebook was not notified by friends or family of the user's passing.

The effects of both of these occurrences on participants range from unsettling to comforting. In many cases participants remarked in interview that unexpectedly receiving an alert or greeting from the deceased's profile is startling and one participant said that it was like "seeing a ghost". On the other hand, the ability to visit

the profile of a loved one and read the messages and postings of others was a source of comfort for others who appreciated having an ongoing community of people with whom they could share memories and grief.

Yet a consequence of leaving the Facebook profile active after death is that the profile page persists after death, and the social construction of identity process continues in the absence of the profile owner. One participant remarked that while she felt that she and her husband were close during their ten years of marriage it was in continuing to read posts added to his Facebook page during the year following his death that she learned new things about him, and that seeing him through the eyes of his friends enhanced her understanding of who he was in life. Perhaps it is for reasons similar to this one that 28% of survey respondents wish that his or her profile page remain as-is (active) after he or she passes away. (“as is” meaning not memorialized or active and memorialized).

When the deceased’s profile is left in an active state, it begins to resemble a multimedia guest book that friends and family return to and update often during the first years after the passing of a loved one. Our data show that Facebook activity is especially intense for the first few months after the death if the member was young and/or very active online and offline. This timeframe coincides with the early phases of both grief and mourning and Facebook serves a community archival function. For example, in the study we noted the following post by a friend on the wall of someone who died (whose pseudonym is “Lewis”) – the posting appeared four-months after his passing, “I know it makes no sense and is completely contrary to what I believe in but I find a level of comfort on this page still being up and bustling wid limers [sic friends]. I kinda would like this when I go. Not that I would know. So wha gwaan Lewis?” Nine other members ‘liked’ the comment and made additional sub-comments echoing the sentiments expressed.

However, there are other more dour consequences to leaving the profile page active after death. On document analyses of Facebook profiles pre- and post-death it is clear that the editor and arbitrator roles that the owner of the profile page played when alive are key in shaping the identity that he/she presents to others online. In the absence of the owner playing these control functions, when left in the hands of the community, the online identity is substantially altered. In one case in point the deceased’s mother – who was not a major contributor to his profile wall during his life – became a principal figure. Her wall posts described the deceased as an animal lover and she details her animal rights activities taken in memory of her dead son. The 8 photos of dogs and cats that she posted on his page in the months following his death, and her active encouragement for his Facebook community to donate money to an animal

rights fund opened in his name, were striking because previous to his death he made no mention of being an animal lover. Other community members reacted to these posts in a reserved manner with only two short comments indicating incongruence of the animal rights persona with his previously understood identity. One comment simply stated “I didn’t think Mark loved animals”, and 10 people “liked” this comment.

This post-mortem alteration of the Facebook profile effectively alters the deceased’s online identity in a similar manner to an obituary. When compared to the obituary written for the deceased in this study the latest entries of an active Facebook profile shares many functional similarities to an obituary. Both are artifacts constructed through the eyes of others; both offer a glimpse into the social network of the deceased; and both represent narratives that attempt to capture elements of who this person was. However, the obituary is strikingly different from the Facebook profile in terms of whose voices are represented its construction. The immediate family is privileged in the construction of the ‘final image’ of the deceased and the obituary is imbued with the notion that it is the official word on the death. In contrast the deceased’s Facebook profile posts are open to friends already accepted in his/her network online.

Their collective voices compose the unofficial obituary, and their postings are littered with images, slang, inside jokes, poetry, and more personal and unfettered emotion. One participant remarked that the obituary is not a good representation of the deceased, and that the Facebook profile is closer to the ‘real’ person and is a much richer accounting of a person’s life than the obituary. The Facebook profile appears to be a complement to the obituary in most cases and in a few cases, particularly among younger users, it replaces the function of the obituary.

Deleted accounts

In response to the survey question regarding what happened to the deceased’s Facebook profile pages, about 17% reported that the profile was deleted. There are two ways that a Facebook profile can be deleted. First, if a surviving friend or family member has the account username and password they can go in and do so acting as if they are the owner; whether or not this was the expressed wish of the deceased. Second, if there is official confirmation of a death and proof of death Facebook administrators will remove access to the account. Proof of death takes the form of a copy of a death certificate, along with a copy of the deceased’s birth certificate. Facebook conducts an investigation and if satisfied with the validity of the request the account is removed.

When a profile that was once active is removed without prior knowledge, the deceased’s social network on

Facebook respond in anger. One participant expressed it in this way, “What the hell...it’s like she disappeared and never existed. WTF, how come the people who loved her had no say. How could they do this? She was our friend too”. This statement reflects the tension that exists between the Facebook profile as a shared construct (i.e. it’s ours) versus a property right perspective that the profile belongs to the owner, and as with other ‘property’ the Facebook profile is part of the digital estate now in the hands of those managing the deceased’s assets.

While we could not confirm whether or not the deceased person requested that the account was deleted following their death, the sentiment in the online community is that this action was not sanctioned by the deceased, and there is a feeling that someone else is attempting to control access to the memory of that person. As a consequence of deleting the Facebook profile there is a residual bitterness among members of the online community that taints the postings on their walls and room for misinterpretation of the choice to remove the profile. We conjecture that the online community lose a space for mourning their loss and in two cases participants indicated that they know of online community members who went on to create memorial pages for the deceased after the profile page was removed.

Interestingly and seemingly contrary to these sentiments 28% of those surveyed indicated that they would like their profile deleted after death. This is the same percentage of persons who would like to have their page remain active. When we queried this apparent contradiction people expressed a desire to close things off for those whom they leave behind and see deleting the page as a way for others to “move on”. In their responses to this question there was evidence of a need to retain control of the profile, and the feeling that this control is lost if the page remains active after death.

Wizard of Oz profiles

A smaller but significant number of participants, 17%, reported that after their loved one died someone else gained access to the profile and currently acts as the administrator for the Facebook profile of the deceased. We were unable to establish whether this was at the bequest of the original owner or whether the new administrator assumed responsibility because they knew the login information or have access to an account that remains signed-in post-mortem. Regardless, one of the curious aspects of this arrangement is that there is someone who continues to add friends, reply to wall posts, and in other ways act on behalf of the deceased.

From the cases in our study where this has occurred we understand from an analysis of the wall postings that friends of the deceased are aware that he/she is dead and that someone else is in charge of the account. We also note that for most people this is acceptable. In fact when questioned about what they would want to have happen

when they pass away 39% of the survey participants want someone to take over the management of their Facebook profile. A consequence of having someone take over the administration of a deceased person’s Facebook page, in addition to now being a co-author of the profile, is that that person has access to direct messages. Direct messages within the Facebook system are similar to email messages; only the profile owner (or someone with access to his/her account) can read the messages. In contrast to a wall post that is viewed by anyone in the profile owner’s network, a direct message is more private in nature. In this study one participant had access to a close friend’s Facebook profile after he died. In his response to questions on direct messaging he explained that although it was slowing down his friend received over 100 direct messages, and continues to on a weekly basis. The content of the message described the users grief and express how much the deceased is continually missed. The interviewee took over the management of the page to keep the presence of his departed friend alive.

Two points that are worthy of further research arise: first, what motivates someone to appropriate the Facebook profile of another, and second, is the profile still considered to be an artifact of digital self-creation representing the deceased?

Memorial pages

Finally, 11% of participants reported that their loved one’s profile was memorialized or a memorial page was created. To achieve this a Facebook page is created by a family member or loved one to honor the deceased, and it can be either a new page where grief and thanksgiving may be expressed by the online community (i.e. a memorial page) or an adaptation of the deceased person’s profile page (i.e. memorializing the profile). The information practices (Savolainen, 2008) observed on memorial pages share many commonalities with those on active profiles discussed earlier in this paper, with a few difference. One of these differences is that a memorial page can be created by a friend or family member for the deceased although the departed may not have been a Facebook user. This is an important distinction since the online persona described and constructed via others comments and postings can never be adjusted by the person for whom it was created. Thus, memorial pages serve a function more similar to a guestbook or obituary than to a Facebook profile that remains active after a death.

In the study we were able to interview two people separately regarding the death of a man who was connect to both of them. In this case the deceased was a 60-year old sports coach who was not a Facebook user during his life. When he died his daughter, an active Facebook user, created a memorial page for him and made her aunt, one of our respondents, an administrator. Our respondent explained that she happy her niece added her as an admin, as she

wanted to use Facebook as an information sharing platform to let her friends, their shared friends and family know that he passed away and to provide a place that they could share memories of him with each other. She also knew that in his life he worked with hundreds of young people who were likely on Facebook themselves and would be more likely to search for information about her brother there versus read a death announcement in a newspaper. Finally, she indicated that she wanted to have people remember him “the way he was for most of his life – not the way he was at the end”. Her brother, who was a decorated member of the United States military, intelligent and passionate sports fan, developed Alzheimer’s toward the end of his life. She purposefully reversed the clock for her brother by focusing his memorial page on his pre-Alzheimer identities. This did not go unnoticed. When we interviewed a mutual friend of the siblings we found that at least one person found this choice to reconstruct his and others memories to be a well-intentioned manipulation of the deceased’s identity. The mutual friend asked the question, “would he have wanted this?”

Mini-survey

Research question 2- Facebook features

How do Facebook’s features support or constrain online information practices of mourning the death of a loved one?

At the end of the two week recruitment period, 18 Facebook users had contacted the researchers to participate in the survey. The survey consisted of open and closed ended questions. Thirty-three percent (33.3%) of the respondents were male and 66.7 were female. The age breakdown of the respondents were:

- 11.1% 18-28 years of age
- 61.1% 29-39 years of age
- 27.8% 40+ years of age

Eighty-nine percent of respondents have had a Facebook account for 18 months or more and over half, 55.6%, of our respondents access Facebook 10-25 times a day.

Just over sixteen percent of respondents were notified of their loved one’s death via Facebook, while the majority, over 50%, was notified via a phone call. All of the deceased in question had passed away after 2008.

Facebook’s features allow the living users to connect with other bereaved Facebook individuals socially connected to the deceased. Over half of the participants, 55.6% stated that Facebook was important, very important, or essential in the process of coping with the death of their loved one.

This type of social support provides users with a locale to mourn and share their stories. The testimony of one’s grief and memories of the deceased are corroborated by deceased’s other connections through comments on wall posts or like. However, on the other side of the coin the public nature of wall posts and photo captions can create an environment of competition and coercion; thus, inducing a feeling that one has to contribute content to the deceased’s profile or memorial page. Thus, rather than Facebook acting solely as a venue for expression of sincere sentiment, an environment where there is war over who loved the deceased more was created. Carroll and Landry (2010) also observed Facebook’s online memorials as a milieu for competition.

Direct messages provided bereaved individuals an opportunity to write a message to the deceased. The direct message is a backstage performance used as space for people to explore internal feelings. This is an area in need deeper exploration through a longitudinal study. Direct messages are the online equivalent of writing a letter to the deceased, copying it for your records, and mailing it.

The new timeline layout allows everyone to review the evolution of events, sentiments, and postings over time—from the moments after death to present; this is a form of memory process. Interestingly, as mentioned previously, a little over half of the participants identified Facebook as an important or essential contributor to their coping with the loss of their loved one. However, 72.2% of the respondents forwarded the news that their loved one passed away via Facebook; therefore, it may not be as important a factor in the coping side of bereavement as it is in the communication side.

The majority of respondents, 83.3%, were unaware of Facebook’s policies regarding what happens to a Facebook account when a user dies. Therefore, illustrating an information need by the Facebook members.

Interviews

Research question 3 – Terms of use policy on the death of a member

In the third research question we asked, how do Facebook’s terms of use policies affect the memory of the deceased? During the interviews we got some insights but before discussing this, the following offers a brief summary of Facebook’s terms of use policies associated with the death of a member.

The thinking behind Facebook’s current policy on member’s death emerged after members began to question how they should proceed in the event of a death, and was not a part of the original design of the

service. According to Facebook's policy if a member dies and Facebook is not officially notified, the profile remains active for as long as Facebook exists. If someone dies, Facebook administrators must be officially notified and a copy of the original death certificate and another proof of death, such as an obituary, must be sent to Facebook. Facebook will then verify that the documents are valid. If this is the case Facebook offers three options: a) the profile remains as-is; b) the profile is memorialized (as described earlier); or c) access to the profile is disabled, effectively removing the profile. Unless there is a request in a will, the decision about which option to choose is in the hands of the friend or family member.

This raises the question, who has the right to decide on behalf of the deceased what should be done with the profile? If, as is argued in this paper, a Facebook profile is a representation of a person's digital identity and is also a self-curated artifact belonging to that individual, then upon the death of that person this profile can be considered to be a digital asset. The personal assets or effects of the deceased are handled very specifically under the law. In fact, the rules governing the treatment of personal assets require specialized legal knowledge. In the absence of a formal will, there are rules about who can make decisions about assets. Yet for digital assets in the realm of social media this is a grey area. In our interviews only one participant had a general idea of what the policy regarding Facebook accounts might contain. All of the interviewees remarked that a decision about how they would want their Facebook profile treated was something that they had not considered but that it is something that they would want to take care of.

The contents of a user's Facebook profile should be afforded the same protection in copyright law as would a personal journal. Under Canadian law these rights cover the lifetime of the user plus 50 years after death (in the United States it is life plus 70 years). When a Facebook user dies and a family member or friend notifies Facebook with the appropriate documentation requesting that the profile should be memorialized, according to the Facebook terms of use policy process the following privacy setting changes are made to the profile: no new friends can be added to the account (or removed) and personal information (as defined by Facebook) is removed. Part of the policy also indicates that people who were within the deceased's network before death can continue to access the profile after death and that this access to the work continues in perpetuity.

In addition, for cases where no proof is given and another family member takes over the account (i.e. Wizard of Oz profiles) we conjecture that the deceased's rights are being infringed. According to the Canadian Copyright Act, creators of copyright works have a second set of rights known as moral rights. Under section 14.1(1) of the

Copyright Act, an author of a work has a right to the integrity of their work and to be associated with their work by name, unless they choose otherwise; these are known as moral rights. Moral rights continue even after a

work is no longer in the creator's possession. Thus far, these legal principles have not been associated with the type of digital assets represented by a Facebook profile. Moral rights, in principle, may cause difficulties with the memorialization of a profile page since if an author of a work has a right to the integrity of their work and to be associated with their work by name even after death, then when a Facebook profile becomes a memorial through the decision of others – one could argue that the author has lost the right to the integrity of their work and the control of their digital identity.

"... the idea of moral freedom is here to stay. It is not a simple matter to repeal a freedom once it has been embraced by the majority of society. The challenge, Wolfe argues, is to strike a balance between the authority of tradition and the authority of the individual." (Davis, Sieder, and Gardner, 2008, p.1104).

DISCUSSION

The features of Facebook and the memorializing policy that Facebook has instituted facilitate a continuing bond between the deceased and the living. The living Facebook friends of the deceased are maintaining a relationship with the departed by creating memorial pages or via the deceased's active profile, continuing to post on the his or her wall; directly messaging the dead; posting, tagging, and adding captions to photos of the deceased; and tagging him or her in status updates or comments. This type of continuing bond is fostered by Facebook's features and policies. The continuation of a relationship is only disrupted if an immediate member of the deceased's family requests for the removal of his or her profile from Facebook.

Continuing Bond Theory emerged in the 1990s (Rothhaupt and Becker, 2007). It is a therapeutic approach where the bereaved maintain a relationship with deceased. Only recently has continuing bond as a mode of mourning and grieving received empirical attention. Although heavily theorized, longitudinal studies concerning the effect of maintaining a relationship with the deceased (thereby continuing a bond) are lacking, especially within the context of social networking sites. Stroebe et. al (2012) conducted a longitudinal study of how widows and widowers offline continual bonds affected the resolution they felt concerning the loss of their spouse. The results of their study were consistent with other short-term studies; thus, showing that continuing a bond with the deceased has a potential to be a harmful practice. Investigation into the effect of continuing a bond via Facebook would provide insight as to whether the current policy of memorializing a deceased member's policy is aiding or hindering the mental state of the user.

Regardless of the benefits of one grieving theory versus another (Rothaupt & Becker, 2007), Facebook has become the location where mourning and grief are taking place and being experienced through continual bonds. The immediacy of publishing Facebook grieving and memorializing comments, messages, wall posts, photos, etc. provided users with a quick outlet for emotion and a means of timely support via replies; however, these actions have direct consequences for the curation of self, the intentional online content creation and content editing to represent an intentional persona, by the deceased. The aforementioned benefits and complications of using Facebook during bereavement are a result of the terms of use outlined by Facebook, as they present opt-out policy for the loved ones of the deceased to change the status of the profile to be memorialized, close the profile account, or remove a memorial page; thus, leaving one's reputation beyond the grave in the hands of others.

CONCLUSION

In an always-on age where increasingly our information practice is that we log on to social networking sites on our mobile and stationary devices but never log out, issues around access to our online identity move 'identity theft' to beyond the grave.

Facebook offers its members, via their features and policies, a locale for the bereaved user to access an online community for support, to act out front stage performances of mourning regardless of physical geography, and negotiate the private backstage performance of grief through a continual online bond with the deceased. The mental state this type of bond attributes to deserves further exploration. The terms of use shape and constrain the grieving and mourning process carried out by users.

Additionally, the policy of memorializing an account directly impacts the self-curation work of the deceased. Whose Facebook life, work, and reputation is it anyway? We make the following recommendations: a) digital estate options for Facebook users should be presented and decided upon by the new user at the time of signup. This decision, similar to friending and unfriending, should be able to be amended at any time; b) turning a FB account into a Memorial page is not covered by the fair use/dealing exception. It would be better to shut off any modification functionality for the FB account and leave the work up as it - and FB should delete everything after 50 years, and finally c) the Facebook profile of deceased member should be frozen but accessible by Facebook friends with the same privacy filters enabled. Meaning that after the date of death, the members' account will no longer be a locale for posting content, in form of text, photos, videos or likes, by friends. The profile will not be locatable via search and the direct message feature will be disabled. Thus, the profile content has fidelity to the deceased, as it is reflective of the users' self-curation. Online memorial pages can be created.

Finally, it should be noted that while Facebook's policy is to permit surviving friends or family others to take over the authorship/administration of the deceased's profile, this is in direct violation of the terms of use that users sign when initiating their accounts on the social networking site. Facebook should either change the terms of use permissions, or disallow this practice in accordance with their policy.

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