

Death in Social Media: The Psychology of Online Memorialisation

Online memorials first appeared in the late 1990s through websites created and hosted by families and friends starting their own pages. Having grown quickly in popularity, they are now increasingly associated with contemporary bereaving, commemorating and memorialising practices, and integrated into everyday social interactions via social media. Today's interactive media technologies do more than mediate: they are the mechanism both for recording or conveying news about death, and for remembering and memorialising. The incorporation of the deeply personal and private into the public realm is central to the therapeutic aspect of online memorialisation. Drawing upon several kinds of digital memorialisation, this lecture considers the influence of these new forms – that create a perpetual 'here and now' for the dead – on the way people experience and communicate grief, and the implications, more broadly, for life writing and trauma theory. I will draw on recent examples to discuss questions of representation through forms and modes of narration; questions of ethics through debates about appropriate conduct and interaction; and questions of governance through debates about roles and rights in the administration of digital after-lives.