

Sharing the death: Ritual communication of online mourning

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Abstract

The digital era has ushered in new sociocultural landscapes, extending its influence even to the domain of death. Social media is reshaping the practices and norms related to death, loss and mourning, extending the limits of memorializing and grieving. While professional assistance from psychologists or social workers can be effective in addressing grief, these strategies are not universally adopted. Indeed, the majority of those who have experienced loss prefer seeking support from online communities. Therefore, the main aim of this study was to explore how people manage and express bereavement in online communities.

In this study, we analyze the online collective mourning of public figures on social media, including mourning rituals, textual expressions, and emotional currents in social network mourning practices. Our findings suggest that death and mourning experiences have traditionally remained shrouded in secrecy due to the constraints of physical space and time within conventional cultural systems. However, the advent of social media has reconstructed the forms and norms of mourning and emotional expression, reshapes not only the relationship between the living and the dead, but also the interactions among those who are grieving. Additionally, it has also facilitated the integration of personal memories with shared, collective memories, inspiring the bereaved to gain support and guidance from their online communities.

Furthermore, our research reveals that the bereaved engage in conversations with the deceased, incorporating this ritual activity as an integral part of daily lives. Among these activities, mourners collectively maintain a unique realm centered around the public figures' profile, thus evolving into a distinctive sphere for interactive emotional expression.

Keywords

online mourning, bereavement, collective memory, social media

Bio

My name is Ruohan Liu. I am a postgraduate student at Shantou University in China, majoring in Journalism and Communication. My studies focus on political communication and the evolution of public opinion during emergencies. I recently presented my publication 'Dual Reconstruction of Event Characteristics and Propagation Attributes: a fsQCA Analysis Based on 28 emergencies from 2017 to 2021' at a domestic conference.

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