

## MOURNING IN THE FEED: FACEBOOK AS A DIGITAL GRAVEYARD AND THE EMOTIONAL POLITICS OF ONLINE MEMORIALIZATION

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18253651>

### Keywords

Online memorialization, Digital Graveyard, Facebook, Digital Mourning, Pakistan Emotional Experience, Commodification of grief

### Article History

Received: 30 October 2025

Accepted: 18 December 2025

Published: 31 December 2025

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### Abstract

Social media has altered the way people go about mourning in that they can now “grieve, recall, and pay tribute in environments that are persistently online.” This paper examines the “digital graveyard” of Facebook in Lahore, Pakistan, and what the experience of mourning in the “feed” is like, where “memories pop up at random moments and where personal grief is partially public.” Using in-depth interviews of 25 participants, the paper discovers that there are three interrelated patterns in the “experience of mourning in the ‘feed’ realm of the ‘digital graveyard’ of Facebook in Lahore, Pakistan,” and that these patterns reveal “the combinations of emotional experiences that mourning in the ‘feed’ brings.” Participants in the study found the creation of memorial “posts and pages” that were “both consoling and painful.” While they provided “connection and support for the bereaved and the feeling that the departed is ‘socially present,’ they were also “sources of intensified grief that ‘keeps grief ‘alive’ by continuously bringing the departed ‘alive’ in the ‘feed.’” These interviews also point towards the ethical issues related to the aspects of privacy and consent, authenticity, and the uneasy realization that grief can be used as content that can be liked, shared, and even monetized. However, the results of the study point towards the aspect that Facebook memorialization isn’t only a therapeutic practice or negative but can instead be emotionally complex and culturally nuanced. This paper proposes the need for a more culturally attuned, complex approach to digital grief that takes into consideration the coexistence of offline traditions with the new ones related to Pakistan’s transformed griefscape.

### INTRODUCTION

Social media has become one of our everyday comforts due to the digital age in which we all find ourselves. Studies show that communication and how people used to pass the time have mainly changed when social media platforms came into play (Shahjahan & Chisty., 2014). One primary influence on everyday life is how we share and consume information. Therefore, social media profiles must reflect who you are and what you do,

as prospective followers will view them for insights about their interests. As a result, people’s habits have altered; on an average day, young adults spend a large portion of their time reading through and interacting with social media information (Anderson, 2018). Contemporary youth engage in a prescribed array of time-intensive activities for several hours daily; studies indicate this is likely due to the significant

influence of social media on their listening habits, behaviors, and values. In more direct words, it constitutes a component of their daily routine to some degree (Gao & Chen, 2021).

According to (Ugander et al., 2011) Facebook, the fancy ball of our time is a digital age game-changer for communication. While researcher still trying to determine whether Facebook will hold up its end of the bargain, it is necessary for several people. A staggering number: 2.80 billion monthly active users (Al-Haddad et al., 2022). Facebook's impact can only be described as substantial because it gave people access to expression and communication through sharing experiences and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) (Khalaf et al., 2023). Elections to markets, disruption of markets to spreading news because Facebook has Equity Facebook to almost completely upset whole realms of existence. Facebook's Equity Facebook has almost completely upset whole realms of existence because Facebook contributes to entrepreneurs / entrepreneurships because small businesses can access a wider market to communicate with their potential customers (Olanrewaju et al., 2019).

Features of Facebook mysteriously enthralls and enable users to interact with varied identities (engagement with civil society but in substance and not in intensity; enable exile, varied identities to propagate ideas). (Lee et al, 2021). (Rauch-Sassen & Sharif, 2021) suggested that the excessive interaction may result in the aberrant use of the services on the platform to distribute misinformation, trespass into the private realm, and jealousy created through the above increase in social comparison. Social networking is the base and foundation of this era. However, the significance is not just limited to the realm of relationships. Several people grieving the loss of loved ones use Facebook to help them understand their emotions (Bouc et al., 2023).

This might be a helpful way for friends and family to cope after someone dies. The site immediately alerts friends and family about permanent messages left by a loved one that express what they can no longer say through chat, email, or even the phone, including comments on posts or walls. Communications. (Beaunoyer et al. 2020) have highlighted the experience of the comfort of

belonging and grieving together, which can be salient during the initial stages of mourning when the loss is fresh.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence that the memorialization feature on Facebook has on families who are grieving. Another issue that the study aims to highlight is the persistent activity of a deceased person's Facebook profile, which can potentially cause distress to their loved ones. In addition, the research will concentrate on determining the advantages and disadvantages of grieving through the social networking site Facebook. The last item on the agenda is to discuss the impact that the social media account of a deceased person has on the suffering of others, specifically whether or not it helps them through the process or makes it more difficult.

### Objectives

- To analyze the effects of having the profile of a deceased on display on Facebook all over again can be emotionally devastating for the family.
- To examine the pros and cons of Facebook as a mourning and bereavement space.
- To understand how Facebook's memorialization tool affects grief and bereavement experiences.

### Research Question

- How it effects having the profile of a deceased on display on Facebook all over again can be emotionally devastating for the family?
- What are the pros and cons of using Facebook as a place for expressing grief and mourning?
- How Facebook's memorialization tool affects grief and bereavement experiences.

### Literature Review

Social media and internet, are now becoming part of the new digital world. (Riaz & Mudassar, 2019) gave many examples based on Facebook research to study because it has such a large following and how we can improve various domains in our everyday life concerning studies, such as Facebook, the need for socializing, and dealing with Bagging about skills. According to (Abhisek, 2024),

Facebook is an online platform where individuals maintain touch with loved ones, meet others, and exchange stories about their feelings and experiences as favorite leisure activities. The way Facebook still manages configurations is unique and provides very fine-grained control and personalization. However, Facebook suits those struggling to create their identities online stylishly (Susilawati et al., 2020).

After social networking sites (SNS) gained popularity, they evolved from being places to connect people's lives to becoming places to connect with death (Tech Neck, 2021). According to Maddrell (2012), "It is not surprising to find that the internet has been adopted as a site of memorialization and bereavement support given the widespread incorporation of the internet into our lives." Regarding memorialization, the Internet makes it simple to create "spontaneous shrines," which are unofficial memorials that appear in public areas like the scene of a fatal vehicle accident (Gibson, 2011). Online versions of similar monuments, such as the widely used Facebook group page tool, enable a more accessible and lasting memorial with the added benefit of managing membership and visibility and quickly disseminating important information about funerary services (Irwin, 2015).

Facebook memorial groups have remained the central focus of online death research for the majority of the past decade. Starting with Kasket's (2012) qualitative document analysis of posts on five public memorial group pages, and followed by Marwick and Ellison's (2012) examination of thirty-seven pages in a similar fashion, Facebook memorial pages have been analyzed from various perspectives, including technological (Marwick and Ellison, 2012; Sherlock, 2013), bereavement (Kasket, 2012), and continuing bonds (Bell et al., 2015; Kasket, 2012; Irwin 2015). This dissertation primarily examines personal memorialized profiles rather than memorial group sites; nonetheless, the interactions identified in the studies, as mentioned earlier, enrich and shape users' interactions and decisions concerning their memorialization preferences. However, due to the quantitative nature of Facebook's "reaction" mechanism, these Facebook memorial pages are

nonetheless susceptible to "digital vandalism" from trolls and internal member conflict (Lingel 2013; Marwick & Ellison 2012). These pages may also experience "grief tourism" from unrelated readers, ranging from the mildly inquisitive to the morbidly voyeuristic, if appropriate privacy and visibility settings are not enabled (Marwick and Ellison 2012).

For most of us in Pakistan, young people spend their lives on the internet and social media. In a case study of multilingual Pakistani teenagers, the more often they accessed Facebook per day. The platform's linguistic, gendered construction, and reading practices were bare. (Mehmood et al., 2023)

### **Theoretical Framework**

Grief after losing a loved one is complex and nuanced, unlikely to fit any model as simple as stages or phases. Stroebe and Schut's (1999) dual process model of grief provides a more complex understanding of grieving that considers the interplay between loss-oriented and restoration-oriented coping mechanisms Shear and Shair (2005). According to the dual process model, a person going through grief will go back and forth between facing their loss head-on and doing things that help them adapt and evolve.

That model guides this study, which postulates that mourning entails swinging between loss-oriented and restoration-oriented processes. In loss-oriented scenario, the person is lost in emotions and just focusing on the pain. He or she crying all day just thinking about that deceased person. In the restoration scenario he or she rather than the started focusing on rebuilding him or herself, he may find other activities and responsibilities just to cope up the loss. So, this model will be applied to understand how people can combine online memorialization with traditional forms of grieving.

Media ecology is a field popularized by theorist Marshall McLuhan in 1964 (media ecology was officially coined in 1968 by Neil Postman), who has come back into fashion since the rise of social media. McLuhan's original work challenged the view, at the time, that media content was what impacted society and culture. According to him,

the medium through which knowledge is transmitted drives social and cultural change (Skey, 2022). Media ecology theory will be used to analyze the social media environments affecting what is communicated and how we act and interact with others, more concretely, in terms of how the culture of mourning is “localized” in the digital world.

This framework aims to determine if Facebook memorialization features help or hinder the mourning process and how users negotiate this mix between online and offline funerary experiences.

## Methodology

This study makes use of qualitative method. To collect the data for this study, the researcher conducted In-depth interviews with twenty-five individuals who had experienced the use of Facebook during bereavement periods in their families and their loved ones. These interviews aimed to understand how these individuals utilized Facebook while they were grieving. Additionally, the authors used the idea of "verstehen" throughout the interviews to guarantee that he could empathize with the acts and perspectives of the participants. To pique the interest of the target population, this research utilized the snowball sampling method in conjunction with the Facebook profile. The researchers asked their respondents, who were only familiar with three persons, to recommend more people who might be willing to volunteer. As a result, the researcher provided instructions to investigate the remaining seven subjects. The participant's age, educational level, cultural and technical literacy, and place of origin were all subject to several criteria imposed by the researcher. The participants were required to be from Lahore. To gather information for this study, the researchers inquired about the respondents' Facebook usage, the frequency with which they use Facebook, and the degree to which they comprehend the procedures for alerting other members of the family about death. For this cross-sectional study, the researcher focused solely on individuals who were at least 20 but less than 65. They considered both males and females. The

researchers selected the older generation to explore the customary perspectives surrounding funerals. The selection of the younger generation was based on their consistent use of the social media network Facebook. The researcher will conduct every interview in English, with an average duration of thirty to forty-five minutes.

## Findings and Discussions

From the transcription and analysis of 25 in-depth interviews conducted in Lahore, these three overlapping themes emerged as being significant for the participants' perceptions of Facebook memorialization practices: (1) the emotional and social traction of online commemoration, (2) the broader cultural and religious dynamics of grieving, and finally (3) the constraints and dilemmas of platform-supported grief. Interpreting these overlapping discourses together, it becomes apparent that Facebook is better understood as a social ecosystem in which grief can become less painful one minute and sharper the next, through the same tools and infrastructure.

### 1) The afterlife of the profile: comfort that can reopen grief

This ambivalence was superbly portrayed by Participant 1: “It’s nice to reflect upon old posts and photos but at the same time, it brings a kind of pain that kind of feels like it’s brand new.” This pain being rekindled as an issue of unfinished grief was implicit in the way the participants responded to prompts created by the platforms. Participant 5 reflected that the memory function created by Facebook had the effect of bringing old posts about a deceased cousin back to their front page, “sometimes welcome, sometimes overwhelming.” Participant 9 extended this insight by locating the prompts of the platforms within the grief experience of time: What is analytically interesting with these accounts is not only that Facebook hosts remembrance, but it structures when and how remembrance is encountered-many times without intention from the mourner. This helps explain why participants experienced the same digital space as soothing yet destabilizing: grief is

not only “expressed” online; it is also summoned there.

### 2) Condolences in the feed: extended support, reduced intimacy

While many participants appreciated the way in which Facebook extended their circle of support, providing them with easy access to extended family, acquaintances, and distant friends, the sociality of the platform was often characterized as being emotionally shallow, supportive in intention, but lacking in intensity compared to communal support.

Participant 12 highlighted the comfort that came with receiving words and prayers online: “Kind words from friends and family helped me to feel less alone in a time of grief that was difficult for me.” However, Participant 3 brought into focus the dimension of “weight” lacking in the online platform that would have been experienced by being physically present. The condolences were genuine, yet lacked the warmth and comfort that came with silence and physical contact inherent in consoling in Pakistan.

These accounts, however, suggest not that Facebook replaces offline support but that it produces something quite different in kind—lighter, faster, more visible, and sometimes more performative, whose value depends on what the bereaved need at any given moment. For some people, it offers a bridge across distance. Others find it points up what cannot be digitized: co-presence, ritual time, shared bodily witness.

### 3) Culture and religion as boundary-setting: “Use it, but don’t let it become the ritual”

Digital grieving was placed by the respondents within societal norms about where grief should be. In the case of Pakistan, a society in which grief is known as a community-based, face-to-face, and social gatherings-based experience, online grief appears culturally confusing—that is, easy, convenient, but not quite complete in terms of culture. This is evident in the context of re-routing the experience of bereavement on a social platform, which is related to concepts of cultural suitability (Naik, 2013).

“Face-to-face meetings like Qul, soym offer a chance for the family to share their grief by attending these events, which even FACEBOOK cannot replace.” In a similar vein, for participant 18, Facebook is a platform for quick communication, but their faith also teaches them manners in their expressions of grief: “Social media is good for spreading the info quickly, but we know that in sadness our faith teaches us how to be personal and respectable.” Lastly, participant 21 adds rituals offer a sense of closure in a way that online platforms can hinder, as it offers a sense of ‘finality.’

On the other hand, however, there was no mention of culture being fixed or unitary. As Participant 15 indicated:

“The younger generation mourners are quite at ease with online commemorations, but their parents are worried about their children moving away from conventional methods.” In this case, rather than culture being reduced to “culture versus technology” in a “culture loses out to technology” scenario, there is a formulation of boundaries: what is to be done online (announcements, prayers, posts of remembrance) and what is to be done in church (commemoration in community).

### 4) Memory-work as care: posting as tribute, storytelling as release

Alongside the risks of exposure and re-triggering, participants also described online remembrance as meaningful “memory-work”, a way of caring for the deceased through stories, images, and continued relational presence. For some, posting functioned like a tribute archive; for others, it offered a sense of catharsis.

“The comfort of remembering the memories through the mournful offer of Facebook comforts again thus acting as virtual altars of our deceased.” Speaking to the provision of collective grief through the sharing of photographs and videos on memorial pages, Participant 22 proclaimed: “It helps others to remember and react to the videos and photos.” Participant 10 conveyed the healing vicarious nature of the act of narrative in general, and through the sharing of personal narratives on Facebook in particular, through the following

statement: “To share the achievements of my father on Facebook helps me to relieve myself... It is like caring for the memories of my father through his stories and his photographs.” Participant 24 spoke of the process of healing through the reliving of old photographs and videos: “It helps in the healing process and moving towards accepting the event of death in every aspect.” Facebook is not merely a space of triggers but is also a space of deliberate remembering where mourners engage actively with remembering. However, this is done in a space where visibility translates to value, which has several implications for this space of remembering.

##### **5) Platform limits and ethical strain: misinformation, insensitivity, and privacy**

Participants also highlighted how mourning, when performed within a space of rapidity, sharing, and likes, can be both constrained and perform harm. Extending concerns regarding inaccuracy and insensitivity in the social media environment (Muhammed and Mathew, 2022), participants described instances when the logics of the platform ran headlong into the vulnerability of bereavement. Interviewee 6 recalled a situation where misinformation spread like wildfire: “A friend posted a message on a social site that my uncle is no more which was not true had created so much hype.” Participant 11 referred to the viral nature of emotional violence: “Pictures of crash or graphic descriptions of how people die go viral without regard for how such information hurts families.” Such moments suggest that mourning is performed within a semi-public context in which attention travels faster than care.

Privacy and post-mortem identity were particularly pertinent. Participant 19 spoke about what has happened to their cousin’s account post-mortem: “Everybody just took advantage of his account, linking it to whatever post they wanted to link to their account. And this is very bad.” Participant 25 was adamant that there ought to be action to ensure greater privacy protection: “The social networking sites should enable better privacy features. We want to see these memorializing accounts treated with respect.” On these accounts, there was not merely a question of “privacy” as a

facility but of dignity: who might control the deceased’s presence online?

##### **6) Interpreting the pattern: oscillation, ecology, and the platform as actor**

The pattern is well represented through the theoretical lens already at work in this research. The Dual Process Model of Bereavement by Stroebe & Schut accounts well for the reasons participants tended to fluctuate between moments of grieving and moments of managing the process: “On the one hand, there are ways in which the internet may contribute to the restoration process (connection, memorial, shared prayer) while, on the other hand, there are ways in which it may hinder it (reminders, picture reminders, and persistent profiles).” McLuhan’s Media Ecology Theory advances this interpretation methodology specifically in the role of the medium in redefining grieving: “Condolence becomes a comment, memorial becomes a status update, remembrance becomes an encounter in the news stream, happens faster, more visible, more ‘presence-present’ and ‘powerfully different’ from the routines of everyday face-to-face life.” Lastly, ANT provides insight into the reasons the internet, specifically in the form of Facebook, should not be conceptualized simplistically as an inactive container. This is because the internet acts in ways that should not be overlooked as ‘forces,’ including in the form of memorialized pages, notifications, comments, and resurfacing algorithms.

In other words: respondents were not merely “using” Facebook to grieve; they were grieving in a space that is constantly interacting, prompting, sharing, and sometimes distorting.

##### **Conclusion**

This research investigated the phenomenon of Facebook memorialization in Lahore through 25 interviews and argues that online grief is neither purely therapeutic nor purely detrimental. The research argues that it is in the realm of ambiguous caring, in which it could be a source of connectivity and commemoration and keeping the stories alive (Participant 4, Participant 10, Participant 22, Participant 24), and could also

amplify grief through sudden shocks and constant online visibility (Participant 1, Participant 5, Participant 9), as has been suggested in online grief research in emotional overflow (Shear, 2012). The evidence also points to online grief being a culturally mediated phenomenon wherein in a given scenario in which community and offline ritual practices take precedence, online grief practices can often be tolerated for being ancillary rather than alternative (Naik, 2013). Religious and cultural norms and notions of dignity and respect and closure worked as boundary-maintaining factors in these online practices (Participant 7, Participant 18, Participant 21).

However, the imperfections on the new platform are not only incidental but structural. Circulation pace, context, and the public nature of the information are some factors that can facilitate inaccuracy, insensitive sharing, and victimization, apart from the issues noted in previous literature related to inaccuracy and victimization in the context of social media environments (Muhammed & Mathew, 2022). Privacy issues related to post-death identity management turned out to be pressing, with the demand for respect and controls over memorialized accounts being emphasized by the respondents (Participant 19, Participant 25).

In conclusion, what the study reveals is that there exists the need for the developing of preventive, multidimensional, and culturally competent strategies in the emerging domain of digital commemoration, strategies that can position the existence of traditional grief and the cyber domain of commemoration side by side, while acting to respond to the challenges of vulnerability related to the issues of consent, dignity, authenticity, and the commodification of grief and commemorative processes and products in the emerging post-loss scenario of the city of Lahore in particular. The question is not if people in the city of Lahore will grieve on the cyber domain, but the mechanisms of the cyber domain to render grief in that domain more respectful, real, and safe, without weakening the social and spiritual practices that give grief meaning in the domain of the social

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