

DIGITAL AFTERLIVES: ETHICAL CHALLENGES OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN DEATH, MEMORY, AND MOURNING

Dr. Atul Gautam^{1*}, Naren Sahay², Dr. Rohit Nainwal³

^{1*}Assistant Professor, University of Delhi mailatulgautam@gmail.com

²Research scholar, Mass communication and Journalism, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Lucknow sahay.naren@gmail.com

³Research Scholar, DCEE, University of Delhi rohitnainwal1@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence technologies has begun to reshape how societies experience death, remembrance, and mourning. Digital platforms increasingly enable the reconstruction of personal identities through data traces, images, and algorithmic simulations, creating new forms of what scholars describe as the “digital afterlife.” This article explores the ethical implications of artificial intelligence in mediating memories of the deceased and managing digital remains. Drawing on insights from thanatology, digital anthropology, and AI ethics, the paper examines how technological interventions influence the emotional practices of mourning and the practical issues surrounding digital data left behind after death.

Using two ethnographic vignettes, one illustrating the creation of an AI-generated image of a deceased family member participating symbolically in a wedding ritual, and another highlighting institutional challenges related to inaccessible digital data after the sudden death of a colleague, the article demonstrates how AI technologies operate simultaneously as tools of emotional resilience and sources of new ethical dilemmas. These cases reveal the emergence of AI-mediated memory practices and the growing complexity of digital legacies.

The paper argues that while artificial intelligence may help reconstruct symbolic presence and support grieving individuals, it also raises important concerns regarding consent, ownership of digital identity, emotional dependency, and the dignity of the deceased. By examining these developments, the article proposes an ethical framework to guide the use of AI in contexts of death, memory, and mourning in increasingly digitised societies.

KEYWORDS: Digital Afterlife, Artificial Intelligence, Digital remains, Death, Memory and AI Ethics

INTRODUCTION: DEATH IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Death has always been deeply embedded within cultural rituals, social practices, and systems of meaning. Classical sociological studies have emphasised that death is not only a biological event but also a collective and symbolic process shaped by cultural beliefs and ritual practices (Hertz, 1960). Scholars within Thanatology have long emphasised that mourning rituals function not only as expressions of grief but also as social processes that reaffirm collective memory and cultural continuity (Walter, 2015).

However, the rapid expansion of digital technologies has begun to transform how death is experienced, remembered, and mediated in contemporary life. In recent decades, the growth of digital communication platforms has resulted in individuals leaving behind extensive digital traces in the form of emails, social media accounts, photographs, and cloud-based data. These digital traces often persist beyond biological death, creating what researchers describe as new forms of posthumous digital presence within online environments (Walter et al., 2012; Bassett, 2015).

The persistence of digital traces has contributed to the emergence of the concept of digital remains, referring to the body of data individuals leave behind in digital systems after death (Carroll & Romano, 2011). Social media profiles, online archives, and digital photographs can continue to circulate among networks of family and friends, allowing the deceased to remain symbolically present in everyday digital interactions. As a result, digital infrastructures increasingly function as spaces where mourning, remembrance, and memorialization unfold.

Recent developments in Artificial Intelligence further intensify these transformations. Artificial intelligence technologies are capable of generating images, reconstructing voices, and simulating conversational patterns using existing digital data. These technological capabilities allow digital traces to be transformed into dynamic representations that appear to recreate aspects of a deceased person’s identity or personality. Such developments have begun to reshape traditional practices of remembrance by enabling new forms of symbolic interaction with representations of the dead.

These developments raise important ethical and social questions. Artificial intelligence has the potential to reshape mourning practices by allowing families and communities to recreate symbolic interactions with deceased individuals. At the same time, such technologies challenge conventional understandings of memory, identity, and the boundary between life and death. Questions emerge regarding who controls digital representations of the deceased, whether posthumous simulations require prior consent, and how such technological interventions may influence the emotional processes of grief. These concerns increasingly intersect with debates in Bioethics regarding autonomy, dignity, and the responsible use of personal data (Floridi et al., 2018).

This article examines the ethical implications of artificial intelligence in shaping emerging forms of the digital afterlife. By combining conceptual discussion with ethnographic vignettes drawn from everyday experiences, the paper explores how AI technologies simultaneously facilitate new practices of remembrance while generating complex ethical dilemmas surrounding digital remains, memory, and mourning.

Conceptual Framework: Artificial Intelligence, Memory, and the Digital Afterlife

The increasing integration of artificial intelligence into everyday digital environments has begun to reshape how death, memory, and mourning are experienced and mediated. To analyse these transformations, this article proposes a conceptual framework that connects artificial intelligence technologies, digital memory practices, and the ethical management of digital remains. The framework draws from insights in Thanatology, Digital Anthropology, and Bioethics to examine how technological mediation alters the social and moral landscape surrounding death.

At the centre of this framework is the recognition that contemporary individuals increasingly leave behind extensive digital traces throughout their lives. Emails, photographs, social media posts, and cloud-based data collectively form what scholars have described as digital remains, the persistent digital presence of individuals after biological death (Carroll & Romano, 2011). These digital materials can remain accessible across multiple technological platforms and often continue to circulate within social networks long after a person has died.

Artificial intelligence technologies can organise, analyse, and sometimes reconstruct aspects of these digital traces. Through machine learning techniques, AI systems can generate images, analyse communication patterns, and simulate interactions that resemble individuals' communicative behaviour. Such technological capabilities enable new forms of posthumous representation that extend beyond static archives of digital memory.

Within this framework, artificial intelligence functions as a mediating layer between digital remains and social practices of remembrance. AI systems can reconstruct visual images, simulate conversational patterns, or curate digital archives, enabling families and communities to engage with technologically mediated representations of the deceased. These processes give rise to what may be described as AI-mediated memory, where technology becomes an active participant in the construction and preservation of remembrance (Bassett, 2015).

At the same time, the emergence of AI-mediated memory raises complex ethical questions. The ability to recreate images, voices, or identities of deceased individuals challenges traditional assumptions about consent, privacy, and the dignity of the dead. While such technologies may provide emotional comfort and resilience for grieving individuals, they also risk generating forms of digital presence that the deceased may not have anticipated or authorized. Scholars of digital ethics therefore emphasize the need to consider questions of autonomy, accountability, and responsible data governance in technologically mediated environments (Floridi et al., 2018).

The conceptual framework proposed in this article therefore identifies three interconnected analytical dimensions. The first dimension concerns technological mediation, referring to the capacity of artificial intelligence systems to process and reconstruct digital traces of individuals. The second dimension focuses on social practices of memory and mourning, examining how families and communities incorporate these technological representations into rituals of remembrance (Walter, 2015). The third dimension addresses ethical governance, highlighting the emerging need for normative guidelines regarding consent, ownership of digital identity, and the responsible management of digital remains.

By situating artificial intelligence within this triadic relationship between technology, memory, and ethics, the framework provides a structured lens for analyzing the ethnographic cases discussed later in the article. It enables the paper to move beyond purely technological descriptions and instead examine how AI participates in the evolving cultural and moral practices surrounding death and remembrance in digitally mediated societies.

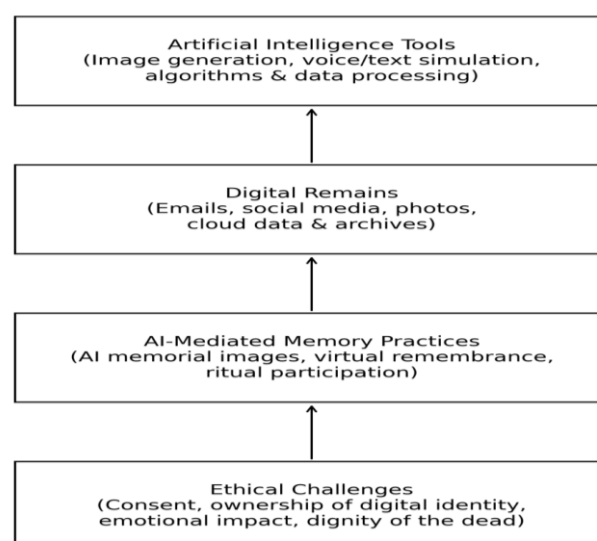


Figure 1: AI, Digital Remains, and the Ethics of the Digital Afterlife

Figure 1 is a conceptual framework that illustrates the relationship between artificial intelligence technologies, digital remains, AI-mediated memory practices, and emerging ethical challenges.

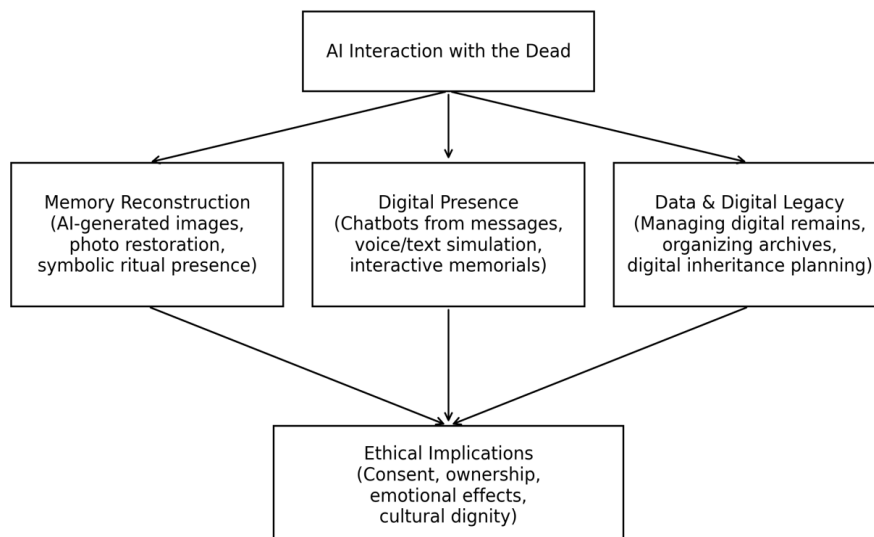


Figure 2 : Types of AI Interaction with the Dead

Figure 2 illustrates the typology of AI interactions with the deceased, including memory reconstruction, simulated digital presence, and management of digital legacies.

Understanding Digital Afterlives

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has significantly transformed how individuals leave traces of their lives after death. In contemporary societies, personal identities are increasingly embedded in digital environments through emails, social media profiles, digital photographs, and cloud-based archives. These digital traces often persist long after biological death (Kasket, 2020), contributing to what scholars describe as the digital afterlife, the continued presence of individuals through their digital data and representations in networked environments (Walter et al., 2012; Bassett, 2015).

Within the field of Thanatology, the study of death has traditionally focused on rituals, mourning practices, and cultural meanings associated with mortality. However, the emergence of digital communication platforms has expanded the spaces in which remembrance occurs. Social media platforms, online memorials, and digital archives increasingly serve as environments in which the deceased remain socially present through stored images, written messages, and recorded interactions (Walter, 2015). These developments illustrate how technological infrastructures now play an important role in shaping contemporary mourning practices.

One important concept that has emerged from these developments is that of digital remains. Digital remains refer to the accumulation of digital data that individuals leave behind after death, including emails, online accounts, photographs, videos, and other forms of personal information stored in digital systems (Carroll & Romano, 2011). Unlike traditional material remains, digital remains are distributed across multiple technological platforms and often remain active or accessible long after a person's death. This persistence introduces complex questions about ownership, inheritance, and the management of personal data in the absence of the individual who created it.

Recent developments in Artificial Intelligence have further intensified these transformations. Artificial intelligence systems can analyse large datasets, reconstruct visual imagery, generate textual responses, and simulate aspects of human communication. These capabilities make it possible to recreate elements of a deceased person's digital identity from existing data traces. In some contexts, AI-driven systems can generate conversational agents or visual representations that appear to reproduce aspects of the deceased individual's voice, personality, or appearance. Such technologies contribute to what some scholars describe as posthumous digital presence, where the dead continue to appear socially active through algorithmic mediation (Bassett, 2015).

From the perspective of Digital Anthropology, these developments highlight the ways in which digital infrastructures reshape cultural practices surrounding death and remembrance (Gautam 2025). Mourning, which has historically been embedded in physical rituals and communal gatherings, increasingly extends into digital spaces where memories, photographs, and written tributes circulate continuously (Walter et al., 2012). These online environments allow the deceased to remain part of ongoing social interaction, enabling new forms of collective remembrance and emotional engagement.

However, the expansion of the digital afterlife also introduces complex ethical concerns. The persistence and potential reconstruction of personal data raise questions about consent, privacy, and the dignity of the deceased. In many cases, individuals do not explicitly determine how their digital information should be managed after death. As a result, family members, institutions, and technology companies are often left to negotiate the control and interpretation of digital remains. These issues connect closely with debates in Bioethics concerning autonomy, responsibility, and the ethical treatment of personal data in technologically mediated environments (Floridi et al., 2018).

Understanding the digital afterlife therefore requires an interdisciplinary approach that integrates insights from death studies, digital culture research, and technology ethics. Artificial intelligence not only expands the technical possibilities for preserving and reconstructing digital traces but also transforms how societies negotiate memory, mourning, and the continuing presence of the dead. The following section presents two ethnographic vignettes that illustrate how AI-mediated technologies are beginning to shape both emotional practices of remembrance and practical challenges associated with digital remains.

AI-Mediated Memory and Digital Remains: Ethnographic Vignettes

To illustrate how artificial intelligence technologies are beginning to shape contemporary experiences of death and remembrance, this section presents two ethnographic vignettes drawn from everyday contexts. Rather than representing large-scale technological systems, these examples demonstrate how AI-mediated practices emerge within ordinary social situations. As scholars of digital culture have noted, technological transformations surrounding death often appear first through small, localised practices that gradually reshape broader cultural understandings of memory and mourning (Walter et al., 2012; Bassett, 2015).

The two cases presented here highlight different dimensions of the digital afterlife. The first vignette illustrates how artificial intelligence may facilitate symbolic forms of remembrance and emotional resilience within ritual contexts. The second vignette reveals the practical challenges associated with digital remains and raises questions about data governance and access after death. Together, these examples demonstrate the complex interplay between technological mediation, social practices of mourning, and ethical considerations surrounding digital legacies.

Vignette 1: AI-Mediated Blessings and Ritual Continuity

The first case emerged in the context of a family wedding that took place shortly after the death of a close elder relative. The bride had recently lost her grandfather only a few days before the ceremony, and as a result he was unable to participate in the wedding rituals. In many cultural contexts, especially within South Asian family traditions, the presence and blessings of elders during marriage ceremonies carry significant emotional and symbolic meaning. The absence of the grandfather therefore created a visible emotional gap within the event. In response to this situation, a family member used an artificial intelligence image-generation tool to create a digital image depicting the deceased grandfather smiling and symbolically blessing the bride. The generated image was shared among family members during the wedding celebrations and circulated through digital messaging platforms. Although everyone present understood that the image was technologically produced, it functioned as a symbolic gesture that acknowledged the continuing emotional presence of the deceased within the ritual moment.

This example illustrates what may be described as AI-mediated memory, where technological systems participate in reconstructing symbolic connections between the living and the dead. Rather than replacing traditional mourning practices, the AI-generated image served as a form of emotional mediation, enabling family members to reconcile the disruption caused by death during an important life event. In this sense, artificial intelligence became embedded within a broader cultural process of ritual adaptation.

Scholars studying digital remembrance have noted that online technologies often extend the presence of the deceased by allowing memories, images, and messages to continue circulating within social networks (Walter, 2015). The use of AI in this context intensifies this process by enabling the creation of new visual representations rather than simply preserving existing ones. The case therefore illustrates how artificial intelligence may contribute to emerging practices of technological resilience, where digital tools help individuals symbolically reconstruct moments that were disrupted by death.

At the same time, such practices raise important ethical considerations. The creation of visual representations of deceased individuals through algorithmic systems introduces questions regarding authenticity, consent, and the potential emotional consequences of technologically mediated remembrance. While the image in this case was widely accepted by family members as a meaningful gesture, the broader implications of AI-generated representations of the deceased remain an important area for ethical reflection.

Vignette 2: Locked Data and the Problem of Digital Remains

A second vignette highlights a different dimension of the digital afterlife, namely the practical challenges associated with digital remains after the sudden death of an individual. In this case, a colleague who had been responsible for coordinating a research or institutional project passed away unexpectedly in an accident. Much of the project's documentation and communication had been stored within her personal digital infrastructure, including email accounts, cloud storage platforms, and files located on a password-protected laptop and mobile phone.

Following her death, colleagues discovered that accessing this information had become extremely difficult. The devices were protected by multiple layers of security, including passwords and biometric authentication systems, and no one within the institution had access to the necessary credentials. As a result, important project data remained technically inaccessible, creating significant challenges for the continuation of the work.

This example illustrates a growing issue associated with digital remains in contemporary societies. As individuals increasingly rely on personal digital devices and cloud-based systems to manage professional and personal information, death may leave behind large bodies of data that are difficult to access or manage. Scholars have observed that digital assets—including emails, documents, and online accounts—often form part

of an individual's broader digital estate, yet mechanisms for managing these assets after death remain underdeveloped (Carroll & Romano, 2011).

From the perspective of technological ethics, this case highlights the tension between data security and posthumous accessibility. Security measures such as biometric authentication are designed to protect personal privacy during an individual's lifetime. However, when death occurs unexpectedly, these same mechanisms may prevent legitimate access to important information by family members, institutions, or collaborators.

The situation also raises questions about whether emerging artificial intelligence systems could assist in managing digital legacies more effectively. AI-driven tools may eventually help individuals organize digital assets, designate trusted access protocols, or develop automated systems that facilitate responsible data transfer after death. Nevertheless, such solutions would require careful ethical governance to ensure that the privacy and autonomy of individuals are respected.

Analytical Reflection

Taken together, these two vignettes illustrate how artificial intelligence and digital technologies intersect with both the emotional and practical dimensions of the digital afterlife. The first case demonstrates how AI can participate in symbolic practices of remembrance, enabling families to reconstruct ritual moments that were disrupted by death. The second case highlights the institutional and ethical challenges that arise when digital data remains locked within personal technological systems after an individual's death.

These examples reveal that AI-mediated technologies operate simultaneously across multiple domains: they shape emotional practices of mourning, influence cultural rituals of remembrance, and generate practical questions concerning the management of digital remains. As digital infrastructures continue to expand, the relationship between technological mediation and the social experience of death will likely become an increasingly important area of scholarly inquiry.

The next section builds upon these cases to examine the broader ethical challenges of AI-mediated digital afterlives, focusing particularly on issues of consent, ownership of digital identity, emotional implications for mourners, and the preservation of dignity for the deceased.

Ethical Challenges of AI-Mediated Digital Afterlives

The emergence of artificial intelligence within practices of remembrance and digital legacy management introduces a range of ethical questions that extend beyond technological functionality. While AI systems may enable new forms of symbolic interaction with the deceased and assist in organizing digital remains, these developments simultaneously challenge established ethical norms regarding consent, identity, privacy, and the dignity of the dead. Scholars in Bioethics and digital culture increasingly argue that the governance of posthumous digital presence represents one of the most complex ethical issues arising from contemporary technological systems (Floridi et al., 2018; Walter, 2015).

The ethnographic examples discussed in the previous section demonstrate how artificial intelligence can operate simultaneously within emotional, social, and institutional contexts of death. While AI-generated representations may offer comfort or continuity within mourning rituals, the ability to recreate or manage digital identities after death raises important normative questions. This section examines four key ethical dimensions of AI-mediated digital afterlives: consent and posthumous autonomy, ownership of digital identity, emotional consequences for mourners, and the ethical management of digital remains.

Consent and Posthumous Autonomy

One of the most significant ethical questions surrounding AI-mediated digital afterlives concerns whether deceased individuals have consented to the posthumous use of their digital traces. Contemporary individuals generate vast amounts of personal data throughout their lives, including photographs, messages, social media interactions, and voice recordings. Artificial intelligence systems can analyse and recombine these materials to create new representations of a person's identity or personality.

However, these technological possibilities raise questions about posthumous autonomy. Individuals may not have anticipated that their digital materials could be used to generate AI-based simulations or reconstructed images after their death. As scholars of digital ethics have argued, the absence of explicit consent mechanisms creates a moral ambiguity surrounding the legitimacy of such practices (Floridi et al., 2018).

The case of the AI-generated image used during a wedding ceremony illustrates this dilemma. While the image functioned as a meaningful symbolic gesture within the family context, it remains unclear whether the deceased individual would have approved of such a technological representation. This tension highlights the need for clearer ethical frameworks governing how digital traces may be used after death.

Researchers studying digital legacy have suggested that individuals should be encouraged to make explicit decisions regarding the management of their digital data, similar to traditional forms of inheritance planning (Carroll & Romano, 2011). Such mechanisms could allow individuals to specify whether their digital images, voice recordings, or communication patterns may be used in AI-generated representations.

Ownership and Control of Digital Identity

A second ethical challenge concerns the ownership and governance of digital identities after death. Digital platforms often store vast quantities of personal data, yet the legal and moral ownership of this data remains ambiguous once an individual dies. Family members, institutions, and technology companies may all claim different forms of authority over digital materials.

In the case of the deceased colleague whose research materials remained locked within password-protected systems, the issue was not the creation of AI representations but rather the inaccessibility of digital information. The security mechanisms designed to protect personal privacy during life became obstacles after death, preventing colleagues from accessing project-related data that was essential for continuing institutional work.

This situation illustrates a broader problem within the management of digital estates. As individuals increasingly rely on personal digital infrastructures for professional and personal activities, death may leave behind significant quantities of data that are difficult to retrieve or manage. Scholars of digital legacy note that digital assets—including emails, cloud documents, and online accounts—often fall into legal and ethical grey areas when access credentials are unknown (Carroll & Romano, 2011).

Artificial intelligence may eventually play a role in organizing digital legacies by helping individuals structure data management systems that allow trusted persons to access certain materials after death. However, such solutions would require careful regulatory frameworks to balance the competing values of privacy, data protection, and legitimate posthumous access.

Emotional Implications for Grief and Mourning

AI-mediated representations of the deceased may also have significant psychological and emotional implications for mourning processes. Traditional mourning rituals often involve gradual processes of acceptance and symbolic closure. However, technologies that simulate ongoing interaction with the deceased may alter these dynamics by extending forms of digital presence.

Researchers in digital death studies have observed that online memorial spaces can allow relationships with the deceased to continue symbolically through posts, messages, and shared memories (Walter et al., 2012). AI-based systems that simulate conversation or generate new visual representations may intensify this phenomenon by creating the appearance of continued interaction.

In some contexts, such technological mediation may provide emotional comfort and contribute to resilience among grieving individuals. The wedding vignette described earlier demonstrates how AI-generated imagery allowed family members to symbolically include a deceased elder in an important life ritual. In this case, the technology functioned as a tool for emotional continuity rather than denial of death.

At the same time, critics caution that highly realistic simulations of the deceased could potentially complicate grieving processes by blurring the boundary between memory and technological reconstruction. The ethical challenge therefore lies in determining how AI-mediated representations can support remembrance without undermining the psychological processes involved in mourning.

Governance of Digital Remains

The final ethical dimension concerns the broader governance of digital remains within technologically mediated societies. Digital remains include the data traces individuals leave behind across online platforms, devices, and cloud infrastructures. Unlike physical remains, which are typically managed through established cultural and legal systems, digital remains often exist within fragmented technological ecosystems controlled by private corporations.

Scholars within Digital Anthropology and digital sociology have emphasized that the management of digital remains requires new ethical frameworks capable of addressing issues of data ownership, long-term preservation, and posthumous identity (Bassett, 2015; Walter, 2015). Artificial intelligence further complicates these questions by enabling new forms of digital reconstruction and algorithmic representation.

The cases discussed in this article illustrate how digital remains may take multiple forms: symbolic representations created through AI-generated imagery, as well as large archives of data locked within personal digital infrastructures. Both situations demonstrate that the digital afterlife is not merely a technological phenomenon but also a social and ethical one. Developing responsible approaches to AI-mediated digital afterlives therefore requires collaboration across multiple domains, including technological design, legal regulation, and cultural practices of remembrance. Ethical frameworks must balance respect for the dignity and autonomy of the deceased with the needs of families, communities, and institutions that interact with digital legacies.

DISCUSSION

The analysis presented in this article demonstrates that artificial intelligence is not merely an additional technological layer within existing practices of death and mourning, but rather a transformative force that reconfigures how the dead are remembered, represented, and engaged with in contemporary society. By bringing together conceptual analysis, existing scholarship, and ethnographic vignettes, this study highlights the emergence of what may be understood as AI-mediated digital afterlives, a phenomenon situated at the intersection of technological mediation, cultural practice, and ethical reflection.

The conceptual framework proposed in this article emphasises a triadic relationship between artificial intelligence technologies, digital remains, and ethical governance. This framework is supported by the empirical cases discussed earlier, which illustrate how AI operates across both emotional and institutional domains. The first vignette demonstrated how AI-generated imagery can facilitate symbolic continuity within disrupted ritual contexts, allowing families to reconstruct moments of absence through technological means. The second vignette, in contrast, revealed how digital infrastructures can produce new forms of disruption, particularly when access to digital data becomes restricted after death. Together, these cases underscore that AI-mediated digital afterlives are not uniform phenomena but rather consist of diverse practices that vary across social contexts.

From the perspective of Thanatology, these developments suggest an expansion of traditional understandings of mourning and remembrance. Earlier studies have emphasized the importance of ritual, memory, and symbolic continuity in the social

processing of death (Walter, 2015). The findings of this article indicate that artificial intelligence is increasingly incorporated into these processes, not as a replacement for existing rituals but as a supplementary mechanism through which individuals negotiate absence and presence. The concept of AI-mediated memory, as illustrated in the first vignette, reflects an emerging mode of engagement in which technological systems actively participate in sustaining emotional bonds with the deceased.

At the same time, the second vignette highlights the growing significance of digital remains as institutional and infrastructural concerns. While much of the literature on digital death has focused on online memorialization and social media practices (Walter et al., 2012; Bassett, 2015), the case of inaccessible project data demonstrates that digital afterlives also have material consequences for organizations and professional environments. This expands the scope of digital death studies by foregrounding the practical challenges associated with data governance, access, and technological dependency. The ethical analysis further reveals that AI-mediated digital afterlives operate within a field of unresolved normative tensions. Issues of consent, ownership, emotional impact, and dignity are not easily reconciled, particularly in contexts where technological capabilities outpace social and legal frameworks. As scholars in Bioethics have argued, the governance of emerging technologies requires careful consideration of human values, autonomy, and social responsibility (Floridi et al., 2018). The cases presented in this article demonstrate that such considerations are equally relevant in the context of death and posthumous identity.

Importantly, this study contributes to Digital Anthropology by showing how artificial intelligence becomes embedded within everyday cultural practices rather than remaining confined to specialized technological domains. The use of AI-generated imagery in a family ritual and the challenges of accessing digital data after death both illustrate how technological systems are integrated into lived experiences of loss. These examples highlight the need for ethnographic approaches that attend to the localized and context-specific ways in which AI is adopted and interpreted.

The article also proposes an emerging conceptual contribution through the idea of AI-assisted resilience in mourning practices. This concept captures the capacity of artificial intelligence to support individuals and communities in adapting to disruptions caused by death, particularly when traditional forms of ritual participation are no longer possible. At the same time, the analysis cautions against uncritical acceptance of such technologies, emphasizing that resilience must be understood alongside ethical considerations regarding consent and representation.

Finally, the discussion points toward several directions for future research. There is a need for further empirical studies examining how different cultural contexts interpret and regulate AI-mediated representations of the deceased. Additionally, interdisciplinary research combining technological design, legal frameworks, and cultural analysis will be essential for developing responsible approaches to digital legacy management. As artificial intelligence continues to evolve, its role in shaping the boundaries between life, memory, and death will likely become an increasingly significant area of scholarly inquiry.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the emerging relationship between artificial intelligence, death, and memory through the lens of the digital afterlife. Drawing on insights from Thanatology, Digital Anthropology, and Bioethics, the study has argued that artificial intelligence is not merely transforming technological infrastructures but is actively reshaping how societies experience mourning, remembrance, and posthumous presence.

The analysis demonstrated that contemporary individuals leave behind extensive digital traces that persist beyond biological death, forming what can be understood as digital remains. Artificial intelligence technologies, with their capacity to reconstruct images, simulate communication, and organize large bodies of data, enable these digital remains to be transformed into dynamic representations of the deceased. As a result, the boundary between memory and technological reconstruction becomes increasingly fluid, giving rise to new forms of AI-mediated presence.

Through the ethnographic vignettes presented in this article, two key dimensions of AI-mediated digital afterlives were identified. The first relates to the use of artificial intelligence in facilitating symbolic and emotional continuity, as illustrated by the AI-generated image that allowed a deceased family member to be included in a significant ritual moment. The second concerns the practical and institutional challenges associated with digital remains, as demonstrated by the difficulties in accessing essential data following the sudden death of a colleague. Together, these cases reveal that artificial intelligence operates simultaneously as a tool of emotional resilience and as a source of new ethical and organizational complexities.

The article further identified a set of critical ethical challenges associated with AI-mediated digital afterlives, including questions of consent, ownership of digital identity, emotional implications for mourning, and the governance of digital remains. These challenges highlight the need for developing robust ethical frameworks that can guide the responsible use of artificial intelligence in contexts involving death and posthumous representation. In particular, the absence of clear norms regarding digital legacy management underscores the urgency of interdisciplinary collaboration between technological design, legal regulation, and cultural analysis.

Conceptually, this study contributes to existing scholarship by proposing the notion of AI-mediated memory and AI-assisted resilience in mourning practices. This framework emphasizes that artificial intelligence should not be understood solely as a tool of simulation, but also as a participant in the evolving cultural processes through which individuals and communities negotiate loss. At the same time, the analysis cautions that such technological mediation must be critically examined to ensure that it does not undermine the dignity, autonomy, or ethical treatment of the deceased.

In conclusion, the integration of artificial intelligence into practices of remembrance and digital legacy management signals a broader transformation in the relationship between life, memory, and death. As digital technologies continue to evolve, the study of death must increasingly engage with questions of technological mediation and ethical responsibility. Future research should continue to explore how different cultural contexts interpret and regulate AI-mediated

representations of the deceased, as well as how emerging technologies can be designed in ways that respect both the living and the dead.

REFERENCES

1. Bassett, D. J. (2015). Who wants to live forever? Living, dying and grieving in our digital society. *Social Sciences*, 4(4), 1127–1139. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci4041127>
2. Carroll, E., & Romano, J. (2011). Your digital afterlife: When Facebook, Flickr and Twitter are your estate, what's your legacy? *New Riders*.
3. Floridi, L., Cowls, J., Beltrametti, M., Chatila, R., Chazerand, P., Dignum, V., Luetge, C., Madelin, R., Pagallo, U., Rossi, F., Schafer, B., Valcke, P., & Vayena, E. (2018). AI4People—An ethical framework for a good AI society: Opportunities, risks, principles, and recommendations. *Minds and Machines*, 28(4), 689–707. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11023-018-9482-5>
4. Gautam, A. (2025). Socio-religious construct of funeral workers in Hindu society. *International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Studies*, 7(2), 166–171. <https://doi.org/10.33545/26648652.2025.v7.i2c.296>
5. Hertz, R. (1960). *Death and the right hand* (R. Needham & C. Needham, Trans.; E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Intro.). Free Press.
6. Kasket, E. (2020). *All the ghosts in the machine: The digital afterlife of your personal data*. Robinson.
7. Walter, T. (2015). Communication media and the dead: From the Stone Age to Facebook. *Mortality*, 20(3), 215–232. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2014.993598>
8. Walter, T., Hourizi, R., Moncur, W., & Pitsillides, S. (2012). Does the Internet change how we die and mourn? Overview and analysis. *OMEGA—Journal of Death and Dying*, 64(4), 275–302. <https://doi.org/10.2190/OM.64.4.a>