

Dear XXX,



Thank you for your interest in participating in this study, “An Analysis of the Use of Digital Death Tech and Human Beings Contemporary Relationship with Death.” This study will examine the use of Digital Deathtech, specifically, the use of digital technology in communications to/from the dead, digital funerals, and digital memorialization of the dead. This study is being conducted by Raine Shakti, a doctoral student at Tilburg University. Data gathered during the study will be used for academic research and journal articles summarizing the findings will be written and submitted for publication.

This project will begin in the Fall of 2025 and continue for approximately four years.

Participation

Participation in this study is purely voluntarily. If you decide to participate you will be asked to participate in a digital interview via MS Teams lasting between 60-90 minutes. These interviews will be recorded to ensure the accuracy of the collected information, and all interviews will be transcribed into a written record. Once the interview has been transcribed and the transcription checked, the recording will be deleted. The interviewer will also take notes during the interview.

Please do not hesitate to ask questions about the study before participating or while the research is taking place. I will be happy to share the results with you at the completion of the study.

There are no known physical risks to participating in this study. However, we will be discussing sensitive emotional issues including death, grieving, and bereavement. If at any time during the interview, you feel uncomfortable, please let the interviewer know and we will stop the interview and you can choose to discontinue participation or we can reschedule for a later date. You have the right to withdraw from participation in this study at any time without explanation. You also have the right in principle, to request access to and rectification, removal, restriction of or object to the processing of the personal data.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how individuals use digital tools to:

- **Communicate with the dead.** This includes virtual memorial walls, including Facebook; one way communication tools, such as text and email; and simulated two-way communications with the dead using griefbots.
- **Conduct funerals enabled by technology.** These include hybrid funerals where participants are present in-person and online; online memorial services; and viewing recorded funerals.
- **Memorialize the dead.** This includes the use of online cemeteries; hybrid cemeteries; online obituaries and the use of social media, including Facebook and posted videos, to memorialize the dead.

Importance of Research

There are no direct benefits to you in participating in this study. However, this research is important for several reasons. First, it will add knowledge to the fields of thanatology, ritual studies, and IT, and will help to answer the question as to whether digital death tech is changing our relationship with death and the dead. The goal is for it to inform future studies into digital death tech and to provide evidence as to how bereaved individuals interact with digital death tech including technology used in funerals, memorialization, and communication from and to the dead. This will help inform vendors of death tech and funeral directors about the uses of such technology and will allow them to advise clients on the use of technology. This study will also directly inform users of digital death tech by helping them to understand how others have used the technology and the impact it has had on their mourning processes. Lastly, this information could prove useful for therapists and others providing support to counseling bereaved individuals.

Confidentially

Ensuring the confidentiality of data is the norm in research and all necessary actions will be taken to protect the confidentiality of your data and the data of the deceased. Your name will not be used in the published study without your consent. Digital versions of the transcripts will be stored in a password protected SharePoint owned by Tilburg University and shared only with the researcher and research supervisors. The transcription from the interview will be maintained for no longer than 10 years or one year after the publication of the final research project.

Research Approval and Contacts

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics and Data Management Committee (REDC). If you have any questions about this study, please contact Raine Shakti, the student investigator at (216) 534-9587 (cell) or via email at r.c.shakti@tilburguniversity.edu. You may also contact the research supervisors Dr. Martin Hoondert at

M.J.M.Hoondert@tilburguniversity.edu or Dr. Max Spotti at M.Spotti@tilburguniversity.edu. If you have any remarks or complaints regarding this research, you may also contact the “Research Ethics and Data Management Committee” of Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences via tshd.redc@tilburguniversity.edu

Next Steps

Within the next few hours you will receive an email requesting your electronic signature on an informed consent form. This form will reiterate the information included in this letter and ask for your signature. Signing the form indicates that you consent to participating in the study, although as noted above, this consent may be revoked at any time.

After you’ve signed the informed consent form, you will receive a countersigned form and the interviewer will reach out to schedule a time for an online interview.

Thank you again for your help with this important research.