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Afterlives of information: Death, memory, and AI in digital society

Lilach Alon *, Inbar Levkovich

Faculty of Education and Teaching, Tel-Hai University of Kiryat Shmona in the Galilee, Kiryat Shmona, Israel

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ABSTRACT

Digital platforms, personal archives, social media profiles, and emerging AI tools are reshaping the afterlives of information: how personal data, digital remains, and memory continue to matter after death. People increasingly face decisions about what should be accessed, preserved, deleted, kept private, remembered, or mediated through AI, yet these practices have not been examined as a coherent human-technology domain. Drawing on survey data from a large sample of 1,735 adults, this study introduces death-related information behavior as a multidimensional construct that captures how people engage with information before and after loss: from managing another person's materials and planning for one's own posthumous information, to avoiding emotionally difficult content, using digital spaces for remembrance, and considering AI-supported assistance. Descriptively, participants reported greater engagement with information following another person's death than planning for their own posthumous information. Exploratory analysis yielded a provisional six-component solution that has not yet been validated in an independent sample. Everyday AI use was associated with greater openness to AI-supported bereavement, digital remembrance, and posthumous information management. By connecting death, memory, personal data, and AI, the study advances research on digital death, bereavement technologies, and emotionally sensitive information systems, while offering a framework for examining how technologies mediate responsibility, avoidance, access, and continuity after loss.

1. Introduction

Death and loss increasingly leave people with information to manage. After a death, those left behind may need to locate, interpret, organize, preserve, share, restrict, or delete documents, files, messages, photographs, social media profiles, and other personal traces. At the same time, they must deal with the emotional weight of these materials (Dinneen et al., 2024). People may also anticipate such issues in relation to their own information, including what should happen to their physical and digital materials after death (Sas et al., 2019). From an information behavior perspective, death and loss therefore reshape practices of information seeking, management, avoidance, preservation, and meaning making (Krtalić & Dinneen, 2026).

Scholarship on death and information has expanded in recent years, especially around digital afterlife and memorialization (Morris & Brubaker, 2025; Thangaraj et al., 2026), legacy management (Maddrell et al., 2022; Thangaraj et al., 2025), and privacy and access to personal information after death (Holt et al., 2026). This literature shows that death-related information issues extend across personal archives, digital platforms, institutional infrastructures, and practices of remembrance and management (Dinneen et al., 2024; Krtalić & Dinneen, 2026). However, these strands of research have largely developed separately, leaving unclear whether and how bereavement-related information handling, anticipatory posthumous planning, concern and avoidance, digital remembrance, and AI-supported assistance coexist within individuals. We therefore lack an integrative account of whether these practices constitute distinguishable dimensions of a broader domain of death-related information behavior and how those dimensions vary across people, experiences, and technological contexts. The present study focuses on these information behaviors and orientations and does not examine psychological outcomes such as grief adaptation, death anxiety, death acceptance, or well-being.

This need becomes especially important in light of work on information transitions. Ruthven (2022) argued that major life disruptions can be understood as *information* transitions, in which information becomes central to how people make sense of change, respond to uncertainty, and reorganize everyday life. Recent work has extended this perspective by showing how information practices may function as scaffolds during acute disruptions, helping individuals orient themselves, interpret unfolding events, manage uncertainty, and maintain

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: alonlil@telhai.ac.il (L. Alon).

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continuity under conditions of disruption and loss (Alon et al., 2026a, 2026b). Bereavement can be understood as one such transition, whether it unfolds as a sudden rupture or as a more gradual and anticipated process (Alon, 2026). The present study seeks to extend this framework rather than merely apply it: by measuring death-related information behavior multidimensionally, it examines whether the informational reorganization that characterizes life transitions also encompasses anticipatory planning, avoidance, and technologically mediated remembrance, aspects that current accounts of information transitions have not yet integrated.

This perspective also intersects with bereavement psychology. The Dual Process Model of coping with bereavement conceptualizes coping as an ongoing oscillation between loss-oriented processes, centered on the loss itself, and restoration-oriented processes concerned with the practical demands and reorganization of life following loss (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). From this perspective, engaging with, postponing, or avoiding death-related information may form part of how individuals move between the emotional and practical demands surrounding loss. Integrating these perspectives situates information practices within the changing practical and emotional demands of bereavement, which often coexist as individuals navigate loss and its consequences (Levkovich & Duvshan, 2021). This integration allows engagement, postponement, and avoidance to be examined as information behaviors without treating them as direct indicators of psychological adjustment.

Death-related information behavior also includes hesitation, postponement, and selective engagement. Work on information and loss has shown that loss reshapes people's relationships to documents, objects, traces, and meaning (Owen, 2021). Research on information avoidance further suggests that people may delay, resist, or avoid information when it is emotionally burdensome or identity-threatening (Hicks et al., 2025). These perspectives suggest that death-related information behavior involves both engagement and avoidance, as people decide what to confront, preserve, postpone, or leave untouched.

Digital technologies and artificial intelligence add another layer to these practices. Social media profiles, stored messages, digital photographs, and other online traces increasingly shape how people remember the dead and encounter loss over time (Kaplinsky & Yeshua-Katz, 2026). Emerging AI tools may also help people locate information, draft memorial texts, or obtain initial guidance in situations of death and bereavement (Li & Lan, 2026). Information behavior after death may therefore include digital and AI-based forms of support, remembrance, and decision making (Yin et al., 2026). In this study, AI-supported bereavement is treated as a distinct dimension rather than as part of broader digital remembrance practices, for two reasons. First, whereas digital remembrance centers on preserving and revisiting existing traces of the deceased, AI-supported assistance involves generative and interactive mediation, in which new content and guidance are produced rather than retrieved. Second, attitudes toward AI in emotionally sensitive contexts are shaped by considerations of trust, appropriateness, and privacy that do not necessarily govern remembrance practices (Alon & Levkovich, 2026; Morris & Brubaker, 2025), suggesting a partly independent attitudinal structure. The exploratory analysis reported below provides an initial examination of whether this theoretical distinction is reflected in participants' responses.

Taken together, prior scholarship has identified important practices surrounding digital legacy, digital remains, posthumous data management, remembrance, and information avoidance, but these have largely been examined as separate topics, often through qualitative or small-sample studies. What remains unknown is whether these different forms of engagement constitute distinguishable but related dimensions of a broader pattern of death-related information behavior. No integrative construct or systematically developed instrument currently captures how the same individuals engage with information following another person's death, plan for their own posthumous information, experience concern or avoidance, use digital spaces for remembrance, and evaluate emerging AI-supported assistance. Death-related information behavior, as conceptualized here, therefore spans practices enacted before and after loss, directed toward both one's own information and that of others, and encompassing both engagement and non-engagement. Examining these practices within a single multidimensional framework makes it possible to identify how they are organized, how strongly they are endorsed, and how they vary across individuals and relevant experiences.

This study develops and provides an initial exploratory psychometric evaluation of a multidimensional measure of death-related information behavior in a large sample of 1,735 adults, representing an initial scale-development step rather than a complete psychometric validation. The measure captures how adults manage personal and digital traces, respond to emotionally difficult information, use digital spaces for remembrance, and evaluate AI-supported assistance in contexts of bereavement and legacy planning. Establishing an initial multidimensional structure provides a basis for future research examining how specific death-related information behaviors may relate to such psychological outcomes. The study was conducted in Israel during a period in which death and loss were highly salient in public life, providing a context in which questions of bereavement, remembrance, and posthumous information management were especially salient. At the same time, attitudes toward death, remembrance, privacy, and technology are culturally situated; the Israeli sample is therefore treated as a context-specific setting for this initial exploratory investigation rather than as representative of digital societies more broadly. By offering an initial empirically grounded framework and preliminary measurement tool, the study advances research on digital death, bereavement technologies, and emotionally sensitive information systems.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Information behavior in the context of death and loss

Information behavior refers to the ways people engage with information in everyday life, including seeking, using, sharing, organizing, preserving, and avoiding information (Savolainen, 2026). These activities are often examined through the lens of information practices, namely repeated and purposeful actions through which people manage information across physical and digital environments (Bergman & Whittaker, 2016; Dinneen & Julien, 2020). Such practices are closely tied to a person's personal information space, which may include documents, files, messages, photographs, records, platform accounts, and other materials distributed across devices, paper archives, cloud storage, and social platforms (Alon, 2025; Jones & Teevan, 2007). In contexts of death and loss, this information space may become newly salient, both for the person anticipating future decisions about their own information and for those who remain after a death.

Recent scholarship has begun to consolidate death and loss as a meaningful area of inquiry within information science. In their literature review, Dinneen et al. (2024) show that death-related information issues span digital legacy, memorialization, online accounts, posthumous privacy, data access, legal arrangements, and personal practices of preservation and stewardship. Krtalić and Dinneen (2026) further argue that death has emerged as a domain that raises core information questions about access, control, memory, preservation, responsibility, and meaning. Their review also shows that this literature is distributed across several strands, including bereavement, digital remains, personal archiving, platform governance, and post-mortem data management. These studies indicate that death-related information behavior includes a broad set of activities and orientations that extend well beyond one isolated issue.

One central aspect identified in this literature concerns personal information management (PIM). PIM is commonly defined as the activities through which people acquire, organize, store, maintain, and retrieve personal information for future use (Jones & Teevan, 2007; Whittaker, 2011). This concept is especially relevant in death-related contexts.

After a person dies, the information they managed during life may need to be located, accessed, interpreted, sorted, preserved, or deleted by others. Holt et al. (2026), in their study of post-mortem information management, show that judgments about appropriate access to a deceased person's data depend on contextual factors such as the kind of data involved, the relationship between the deceased and the person seeking access, and the purpose for which access is requested. Related studies further show that people increasingly think in advance about who should access their information after death, what should be preserved, and what should remain private, linking legacy management to practical questions of organization, stewardship, and control (Lei et al., 2025; Maddrell et al., 2022).

A second aspect concerns the information practices that support people after loss. Research on informational transitions has shown that information practices can help people regain orientation, reduce uncertainty, and maintain continuity during periods of disruption (Ruthven, 2022). Within this line of thought, information behavior may function as scaffolding: a set of temporary supports that help people cope with complex situations, make decisions, and move forward while conditions remain unstable (Alon et al., 2026a). In bereavement, such scaffolding may include searching for information, checking facts, coordinating with others, managing records, preserving meaningful traces, and creating temporary systems for handling emotionally charged materials (Alon et al., 2026). Owen (2021) shows that after loss, people's relationships with documents, objects, and traces are reshaped by grief, memory, and meaning, and that these materials may be approached gradually and selectively over time. Additional work also points to concrete bereavement-related practices such as verifying the circumstances of death, sharing updates and memories through social and digital channels, documenting mourning, and curating memorial artefacts in material and digital forms (Frankenburg & Oreg, 2024; Kot et al., 2024).

Bereavement psychology provides a complementary explanation for why engagement with death-related information may vary across situations and over time. In the Dual Process Model, adaptation to bereavement involves movement between loss-oriented and restoration-oriented processes (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). Information practices may intersect with both orientations. Revisiting messages, photographs, records, or other traces of the deceased may focus attention on the loss, whereas locating documents, managing accounts, organizing information, and making practical decisions may accompany restoration-oriented demands. The model also recognizes periods of disengagement from loss-related demands, providing a psychological basis for considering postponement and avoidance as meaningful aspects of death-related information behavior. In the present framework, these ideas are used to contextualize information practices rather than to infer bereavement adjustment or other psychological outcomes.

A third aspect concerns the variation in how people orient themselves toward death-related information. Engagement with such information may involve readiness as well as hesitation or avoidance. Hicks et al. (2025) argues that information avoidance should be treated as a substantive and meaningful form of information behavior, especially when information is emotionally difficult, overwhelming, or disruptive. This perspective is highly relevant in contexts of death and loss. Dinneen et al. (2024) note that handling information after death may involve delay, partial engagement, and periods of inaction. Owen (2021) similarly shows that people sometimes create emotional and temporal distance from meaningful objects and records, returning to them later under different emotional conditions. This body of work suggests that concern, postponement, and purposeful non-engagement are part of the broader pattern of death-related information behavior. In the conceptual framework developed below, these orientations are accordingly treated as a constitutive dimension of death-related information behavior, alongside engagement-oriented practices, rather than as a peripheral phenomenon.

Taken together, previous studies point to several recurring aspects of information behavior in contexts of death and loss: engagement with bereavement-related information, death-related PIM, and differing orientations toward death-related information, including concern and avoidance. These practices now often involve digital information as well, which introduces additional questions about access, persistence, remembrance, and the emerging role of AI in death- and loss-related contexts.

2.2. Digital remembrance and AI-supported bereavement

Digital technologies increasingly shape how people encounter death, remember the deceased, and manage what remains behind (Holt et al., 2026). They influence how loss is communicated, how traces are preserved, and how personal information continues to circulate after death (Thangaraj et al., 2026). Within this broader technological landscape, AI may become relevant after death in several concrete ways. It can help people sort through information, draft texts, retrieve needed details, and respond when they are overwhelmed and unsure how to begin (Paumen & Gabriels, 2026; Sri Takshara & Bhuvaneswari, 2025).

Hadar Shoval et al. (2026) suggest that conversational AI may also serve as a space for testimony and expression in emotionally difficult situations, especially when people need to articulate experience, organize fragments or receive a form of responsive engagement. In bereavement, these possibilities matter both practically and emotionally: AI may assist with immediate tasks, but it may also become part of how people process loss, remember, and formulate meaning. At the same time, this line of work raises questions about trust, sensitivity, privacy, and the appropriate place of AI in intimate situations of grief and loss (Alon & Levkovich, 2026; Morris & Brubaker, 2025).

Digital traces are already central to how many people experience bereavement. Studies have shown that profiles, messages, photographs, and other online traces often remain present after death and continue to shape remembrance and connection. Brubaker and Hayes (2011) and Brubaker et al. (2013) showed that social media spaces may become sites of ongoing mourning, where people post memories, mark anniversaries, and sustain continuing bonds with the deceased. Kaye et al. (2006) similarly pointed to the growing significance of digital possessions and raised early questions about what happens to them after death, who should manage them, and how they should be preserved.

More recent work shows that death-related information becomes the subject of specific decisions about access, preservation, and visibility. In their review, Dinneen et al. (2024) identify recurring concerns around digital remains, including who has the right to access a deceased person's accounts, how platforms govern memorialization and deletion, and how bereaved people handle messages, photographs, and other personal traces left behind. In a study of post-mortem data access, Holt et al. (2026) found that judgments about appropriate access depended on contextual factors such as the requester's relationship to the deceased, the type of data involved, and the purpose for which access was sought. Work by Lei et al. (2025) similarly shows that decisions about a deceased person's digital information are shaped by competing expectations of privacy, care, family responsibility, and social legitimacy. These studies show that digital remembrance involves active information practices, including revisiting, preserving, curating, restricting, and negotiating the digital traces left after death.

Overall, this literature points to two additional aspects of death-related information behavior: digital remembrance and AI-supported bereavement. Digital remembrance concerns how digital traces are revisited, preserved, and given meaning after death. AI-supported bereavement concerns the emerging use of AI to help people manage and respond to death- and loss-related information.

2.3. Study's conceptual framework

Drawing on the literature reviewed, the present study conceptualizes death-related information behavior as a multidimensional phenomenon.

The framework brings together five dimensions that recur across prior scholarship: bereavement information practices, death-related PIM, orientations toward death-related information, digital remembrance, and AI-supported bereavement. Table 1 presents the conceptual framework that further guided us in the development of the scale. Unlike digital legacy or posthumous data management, which typically focus on specific assets or decisions, the proposed construct spans pre- and post-loss practices, self- and other-oriented information, and both engagement and avoidance.

The framework served two complementary purposes. Conceptually, it offers an integrative model of death-related information behavior that brings together strands of research that have typically been studied separately. Practically, it functioned as the blueprint for scale development: each dimension was operationalized through multiple items, as described in Section 3.2. Fig. 1 presents the conceptual model and its five dimensions.

2.4. Research questions

Building on the conceptualization of death-related information behavior and the study's dimensional framework, the present study aimed to develop and conduct an initial exploratory psychometric evaluation of a new measure of this construct and to examine how the resulting dimensions vary across participant characteristics, death-related experiences, and AI-related background variables. The study therefore addresses the structure, distribution, and correlates of death-related information behavior, rather than its relationship with psychological outcomes of bereavement. Specifically, the study addressed the following research questions.

RQ1. What component structure characterizes death-related information behavior, and to what extent do the resulting components demonstrate acceptable reliability?
RQ2. How are the dimensions of death-related information behavior distributed in the sample, and to what extent are they associated with demographic characteristics, death-related experiences, and AI-related background variables?

3. Methods

3.1. Participants

The study included 1,735 participants ranging in age from 18 to 89 years ($M = 43.81$, $SD = 16.15$). The sample was nearly evenly divided by gender: 869 participants identified as male (50.1%), 866 as female (49.9%). Regarding marital status, 23.7% were single, 59.1% were married, 8.5% were in a relationship, 7.4% were divorced or separated, and 1.3% were widowed. Most participants reported having children (66.3%). Nearly half of the sample (46.9%) reported relatively low religiosity (ratings below 5), 20.2% reported moderate religiosity (5-6), and 32.9% reported higher religiosity (above 6).

Three death-related background variables were also assessed. First, death/loss salience was measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (to a very great extent). Participants reported relatively low to moderate levels of death/loss salience ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.22$), with 55% selecting ratings of 1-2, 24.8% selecting 3, and 20.2% selecting 4-5. Second, participants were asked whether they had experienced the death of a close person; most participants (72.6%) reported that they had. Among those participants, 12.3% indicated that the loss had occurred during the previous year, 20.9% within the past 1-3 years, and 40.1% more than 3 years earlier. Third, participants were asked whether they had prior experience handling information left behind after a person's death. In response, only 29.8% reported such experience.

Because the scale also addressed the role of AI in remembrance and in death-related information behavior, we examined participants' familiarity with and use of AI tools. Participants reported moderate familiarity with AI tools ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.01$) and moderate AI use ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.14$). These measures referred to overall use of generative AI tools in everyday life rather than to specific functionalities. Participants could indicate more than one tool. ChatGPT was the most widely used tool (n = 1,498, 86.3%), followed by Gemini (n = 1,166, 67.2%), Claude (n = 296, 17.1%), and Copilot (n = 226, 13.0%). Eighty participants (4.6%) reported that they had not used any AI tool.

3.2. Scale development

A self-report questionnaire was developed for the current study to assess information behavior in contexts of death and loss. The initial item pool was developed based on the literature and the study's conceptual framework and was designed to capture five proposed dimensions of death-related information behavior: bereavement information practices, death-related PIM, orientations toward death-related information, digital remembrance, and AI-supported bereavement.

Items were generated deductively: for each dimension, candidate items were drafted to reflect the core practices and orientations identified for that dimension in the literature review, using plain, non-technical wording suitable for a general adult sample. The initial version of the instrument included 26 scale items and four additional background items concerning participants' experiences with death and loss. To establish content validity, the items were reviewed by eight researchers from relevant fields, including information science (n = 3), educational technologies (n = 3), and therapeutic professions (n = 2). The experts were asked to evaluate the items in terms of conceptual relevance, clarity, sensitivity, and overall appropriateness for the topic.

Table 1
Conceptual framework of death-related information behavior.

Dimension	Core idea	What it includes	Main citations
Bereavement information practices	Death and loss generate practical and emotional engagement with information.	Locating, interpreting, organizing, and using information after death; dealing with documents, instructions, accounts, and personal materials; managing emotionally charged information.	Dinneen et al. (2024); Krtalić and Dinneen (2026); Owen (2021)
Death-related ***PIM***	Death raises questions about how personal information should be prepared, accessed, managed, preserved, or deleted.	Planning for one's own information after death; deciding who may access information; handling another person's information; uncertainty about where information is stored.	Holt et al. (2026); Lei et al. (2025); Maddrell et al. (2022)
Orientations toward death-related information	People vary in their willingness to engage with death-related information.	Information concern, emotional difficulty, postponement, selective engagement, and avoidance.	Hicks et al. (2025); Owen (2021); Dinneen et al. (2024)
Digital remembrance	Digital traces become part of how loss is remembered, revisited, and managed over time.	Memorial profiles, messages, photographs, ongoing visibility of the deceased, revisiting and curating digital traces, negotiating deletion versus preservation.	Brubaker and Hayes (2011); Brubaker et al. (2013); Dinneen et al. (2024); Holt et al. (2026)
AI-supported bereavement	AI may become a practical and expressive tool in death- and loss-related situations.	Guidance, drafting memorial texts, helping organize or retrieve information, assisting people when they do not know how to begin.	Paumen and Gabriels (2026); Sri Takshara and Bhuvaneswari (2025); Hadar Shoval et al. (2026)

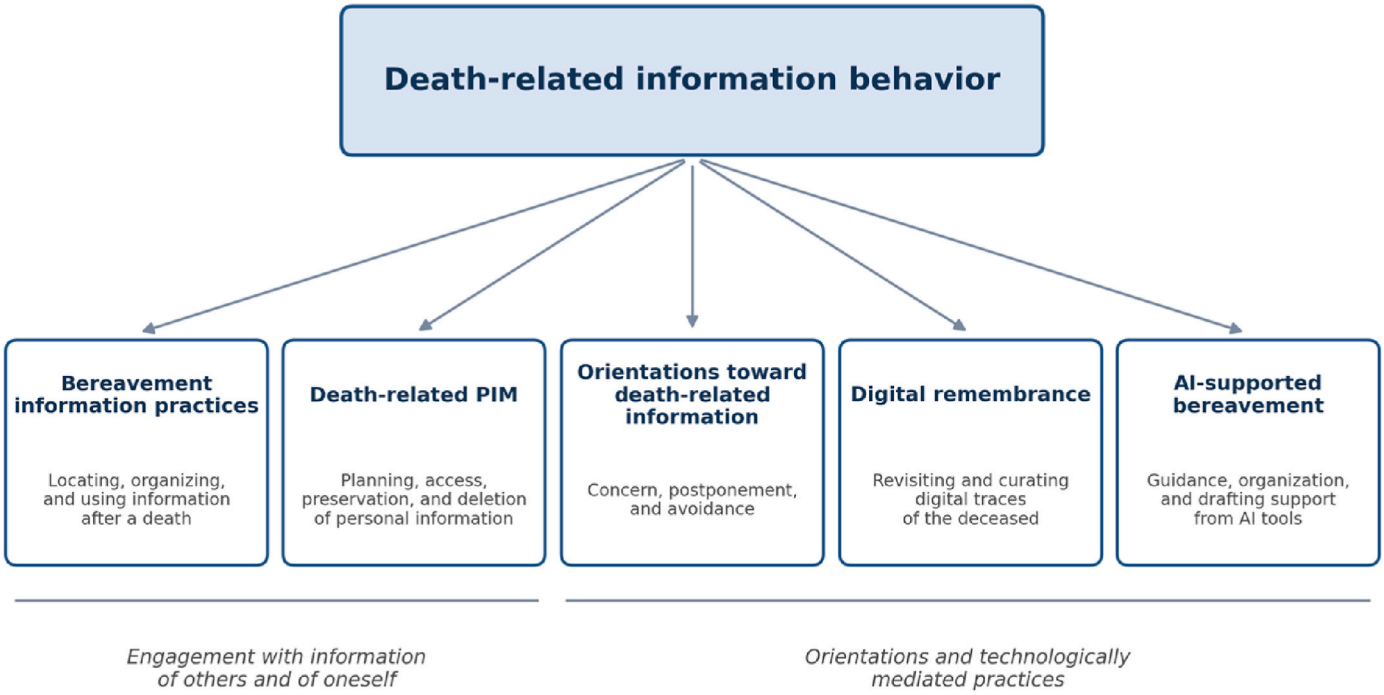

Fig. 1. Conceptual model of death-related information behavior.

Each expert reviewed the items independently and provided both ratings and open-ended comments. The research team reviewed all feedback jointly; comments that recurred across experts were prioritized, and revisions focused on clarifying wording, softening emotionally charged formulations, and ensuring that each dimension was adequately covered by its items. Based on their feedback, several items were revised for greater clarity, and two new items were added: one concerning advance arrangements for one's own personal and digital information in the event of death, and one concerning the difficulty of identifying where a deceased person's personal information had been stored. The final scale included 28 items, in addition to the four background items. The complete questionnaire, including the introductory instructions, response scale, final item wording, and subscale organization, is provided in Appendix A. Within the scale, the AI-supported bereavement items referred to concrete functionalities, such as obtaining initial guidance, organizing and retrieving information, and drafting memorial or administrative texts, rather than to AI use in general.

The questionnaire addressed a potentially sensitive topic; hence, the participants first received a short introductory explanation. This introduction clarified that the questionnaire concerned thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors related to personal and digital information in contexts of death, loss, and end-of-life. It also explained that some questions referred to the participant's own information, whereas others referred to the information and materials of a close person after death. In addition, the introduction defined *personal information* broadly as physical and digital information, such as documents, files, photographs, messages, social media accounts, and other digital or physical content related to a person and reflecting their life, identity, relationships, or preferences. Participants were told that if a question was not directly relevant to their personal experience, they could respond according to their views or general perceptions.

All scale items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*to a very great extent*), with higher scores indicating stronger endorsement of the attitude or orientation reflected in the item.

The questionnaire also included demographic and AI-usage variables, including year of birth, gender, marital status, parental status, occupation, and religiosity. Religiosity was assessed on a 10-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 10 (*to a very great extent*). In addition, participants reported their familiarity with AI tools and their use of AI tools in everyday life, each on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*to a very great extent*). Participants were also asked to indicate which AI tools they used and could select more than one option.

3.3. Procedure and ethics

Data were collected during March 2026 through an anonymous online questionnaire administered by iPanel, an Israeli online panel provider. Eligibility was restricted to adults aged 18 years or older residing in Israel. iPanel maintains a large panel of Israeli adults recruited through multiple channels. For the present study, the provider distributed invitations to eligible panel members and applied age and gender quotas intended to approximate the composition of the adult population in Israel. Because recruitment and quota management were conducted by iPanel, the number of invitations distributed was not available to the research team, and a conventional response rate could not be calculated.

As with opt-in online panels more generally, self-selection cannot be ruled out, and panel members may be more digitally literate than the general population. These limitations are addressed in the Limitations section. Data were collected during a period in which death and loss were highly salient in Israeli public life, and this context should be considered when interpreting the findings. Before beginning the questionnaire, participants were informed that the study concerned death, loss, personal and digital remains, and attitudes toward artificial intelligence in these contexts. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Participants were informed that they could skip any question or discontinue the questionnaire at any time without penalty.

The study was approved by the institutional ethics committee prior to data collection. Given the sensitivity of the topic, the questionnaire was worded carefully and respectfully. Although the study was considered minimal risk, some participants may have experienced mild emotional discomfort when reflecting on death and loss. Participants were therefore invited to contact the authors if completing the questionnaire raised any difficulty or distress. No directly identifying information was collected, and the data were stored securely on password-protected drives accessible only to the research team. Given the sensitivity of the data, de-identified data are not publicly available and may

be shared only upon reasonable request and subject to the ethical approval required for the proposed data sharing and protection of participant confidentiality. Although the measure was designed to be transferable, the present exploratory evaluation should be viewed as context bound. Replication and further psychometric testing in other cultural settings are therefore needed before broad generalization.

3.4. Data analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS (version 31). The analysis proceeded in several stages. First, descriptive statistics were calculated to characterize the sample and the main study variables. Second, to examine the underlying structure of the scale, a principal components analysis (PCA) was conducted on all 28 items using Varimax rotation. Prior to extraction, the suitability of the data for PCA was assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The number of components was determined by examining the eigenvalue distribution and scree plot alongside the conceptual coherence and interpretability of the resulting item groupings. These statistical indicators were used as guides rather than as mechanical retention criteria. PCA was selected at this initial exploratory stage to reduce the item pool to a parsimonious set of components and to examine whether the theoretically proposed dimensions could be differentiated in the response patterns. Varimax rotation was selected to facilitate interpretation and item assignment.

Following the PCA, a composite score was calculated for each subscale by averaging the items assigned to that component. These composite scores retained the original 1–5 response scale and were used in the descriptive, correlational, and regression analyses. Internal consistency was assessed separately for each composite subscale using Cronbach's alpha. Pearson correlations were calculated to describe the relationships among the six composite subscale scores.

Finally, six separate multiple linear regression analyses were conducted, with one composite subscale score serving as the dependent variable in each model. Each model included age, gender, parental status, religiosity, everyday AI use, death/loss salience, experience of losing a close person, and prior experience handling information after a death, entered simultaneously. AI familiarity was reported descriptively but was not included in the regression models, which focused on everyday AI use as the more direct indicator of participants' engagement with AI tools. Given the cross-sectional design, the variables were treated as background correlates rather than causal predictors.

Table 2
Principal component analysis (PCA) of the scale items with Varimax rotation.

Component	Items	1	2	3	4	5	6
Bereavement information practices	1. When someone dies, there should be clear instructions about the information they left behind.	0.793					
	2. When someone dies, it is important to know where their information and materials are.	0.767					
	3. Dealing with a close person's information after death is emotionally and practically complex.	0.706					
	4. After the death of someone close, it is difficult to decide what to keep and what to let go of.	0.627					
	5. After a person dies, it is difficult to know where their personal information is stored.	0.532					
	6. Family members or a designated person should decide what happens to a person's profile after death.	0.481	0.455				
	7. Social media platforms should handle the profiles of deceased users sensitively.	0.405	0.442				
AI-supported bereavement	8. AI can help organize or locate information related to death or loss.		0.775				
	9. I would consider using AI to understand what needs to be done after a death or loss.		0.764				
	10. AI can provide initial guidance after a death when a person does not know where to begin.		0.737				
	11. I would feel comfortable using AI to draft a notice, memorial text, or eulogy.		0.733				
Death-related PIM	12. I have thought about what would happen to my personal information if something happened to me.			0.698			
	13. I have arranged how my personal information should be handled if I die.			0.647			
	14. It is important to me that my information be organized and accessible in an emergency or after death.	0.549		0.545			
	15. There is information I want to be kept after my death.	0.459		0.536			
	16. It is important to me to decide in advance who could access my information if something happened to me.	0.526		0.535			
	17. When I encounter information about death, I want to understand more.			0.506			
	18. There is information I would want deleted or made inaccessible after my death.			0.421			
	19. I think about how death may affect the handling of personal or family information.			0.509	0.407		
Death-related information concern	20. I would be concerned about giving AI personal or sensitive information in situations of death and loss.				0.643		
	21. Using AI in matters related to death is inappropriate.				0.642		
	22. When social media resurfaces content from a deceased person, it can be disturbing.				0.440		
	23. I might postpone dealing with information a deceased person has left behind.				0.416		
Information avoidance	24. I tend to avoid information about death.					0.846	
	25. There are topics related to death or loss that I prefer not to deal with.					0.819	
	26. At this stage, I tend not to organize my personal information for emergency, illness, or death.					0.405	
Digital remembrance	27. When a deceased person's profile remains active on social media, it may comfort those close to them.						0.815
	28. A deceased person's social media profile is an important space for remembrance after death.						0.723
	Eigenvalues	8.27	2.45	1.99	1.39	1.18	1.12
	% Variance	29.54	8.76	7.1	4.96	4.21	4.02
	Cronbach's alpha	.866	.855	.787	.607	.623	.802

Note. Only component loadings of .40 or higher are displayed. Extraction was performed using principal component analysis with Varimax rotation. Cross-loadings are shown where applicable. Items with cross-loadings $\geq$ .40 were assigned primarily on the basis of conceptual-theoretical fit and interpretability rather than solely on the highest numerical loading.

4. Results

4.1. Exploratory component structure and internal consistency

To examine the structure of the death-related information behavior scale, a principal component analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation was conducted on the 28 scale items (Table 2). The data were suitable for PCA, with a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy of .913 and a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity, $\chi^2(378) = 19{,}644.87$, $p < .001$. Based on examination of the eigenvalue distribution, scree plot, and the conceptual coherence and interpretability of the item groupings, a six-component solution was retained.

Although the conceptual framework proposed five broad dimensions, the exploratory analysis identified six components. Specifically, the broader theoretical dimension of orientations toward death-related information separated into two components: death-related information concern and information avoidance. The components were named on the basis of their item content and their alignment with the conceptual framework. They were interpreted as: (1) bereavement information practices; (2) AI-supported bereavement; (3) death-related PIM; (4) death-related information concern; (5) information avoidance; and (6) digital remembrance.

Most items showed their strongest loading on the component to which they were assigned. However, several items displayed secondary loadings above .40, particularly at the intersection of bereavement information practices and death-related PIM. Where the loadings were similar across components, item assignment was based on the item's conceptual alignment with the proposed dimension and the interpretability of the resulting subscale, rather than exclusively on the numerically highest loading. All loadings of .40 or higher are reported in Table 2. These assignments should be regarded as provisional and require re-examination through common-factor analysis and confirmatory testing in independent data.

The first component, bereavement information practices (7 items), explained the largest proportion of variance (29.54%) and showed strong internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .866$). The second component, AI-supported bereavement (4 items), explained 8.76% of the variance and also demonstrated high reliability ($\alpha = .855$). The third component, death-related PIM (8 items), explained 7.10% of the variance and showed acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .787$). The fourth component, death-related information concern (4 items), explained 4.96% of the variance and showed relatively low internal consistency ($\alpha = .607$). The fifth component, information avoidance (3 items), explained 4.21% of the variance and similarly showed modest internal consistency ($\alpha = .623$). The sixth component, digital remembrance (2 items), explained 4.02% of the variance and demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .802$).

The lower alpha coefficients for components 4 and 5 suggest that these dimensions should be interpreted with greater caution. At this stage, they may reflect relatively broad or still-developing constructs whose internal coherence could be strengthened in future refinement of the scale. Their provisional retention in the present study was supported by their conceptual relevance and the interpretability of the exploratory component solution, but additional item development and independent psychometric testing are required. More generally, alpha estimates for the shorter subscales should be interpreted cautiously, and future validation should supplement alpha with additional reliability indices.

Pearson correlations were calculated among the six composite subscale scores (Table 3). All six subscales were positively and significantly correlated, with coefficients ranging from .113 to .560, $p < .001$. The correlations indicate that the subscales were related but not completely redundant. However, their discriminant validity cannot be established from these correlations alone and requires examination through confirmatory models and external validity measures.

4.2. Descriptive findings and correlates of death-related information behavior

After identifying the scale's six-component structure, we examined how these dimensions were reflected in the adult sample and which background variables were associated with them. Descriptive analyses showed that bereavement information practices had the highest mean score ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.89$), followed by digital remembrance ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 1.14$) and AI-supported bereavement ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 1.03$). Slightly lower mean scores were observed for information avoidance ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 0.98$) and death-related information concern ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 0.83$). The lowest mean score was found for death-related PIM ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 0.78$).

To examine the background correlates of the six death-related information behavior subscales, six separate multiple linear regression analyses were conducted. The same eight variables were entered simultaneously in each model: age, gender, parental status, religiosity, everyday AI use, death/loss salience, experience of losing a close person, and prior post-death information-handling experience.

All six models were statistically significant, although the explained variance was modest, ranging from 3.9% for death-related information concern to 16.2% for death-related PIM. Table 4 presents the model-level statistics, while the complete regression results for all variables entered in each model are provided in Appendix B.

The regression findings showed differentiated associations across the three death-related background variables. Greater death/loss salience was associated with higher bereavement information practices, AI-supported bereavement, death-related PIM, death-related information concern, and digital remembrance. Having experienced the loss of a close person was associated with higher bereavement information

Table 4
Model summaries for the six multiple regression analyses.

Subscale	$F(8, 1726)$	R^2	Adjusted R^2
Bereavement information practices	11.289***	.050	.045
AI-supported bereavement	33.824***	.136	.132
Death-related PIM	41.669***	.162	.158
Death-related information concern	8.698***	.039	.034
Information avoidance	12.507***	.055	.050
Digital remembrance	14.751***	.064	.060

Note. Complete regression results for all variables entered in each model, including unstandardized coefficients, standard errors, standardized coefficients, and p values, are provided in Appendix B. All models used $N = 1{,}735$.
***$p < .001$.

Table 3
Descriptive statistics, internal consistency, and intercorrelations among the six death-related information behavior subscales ($N = 1{,}735$).

Components	Items	*M*	*SD*	α	1	2	3	4	5	6
Bereavement information practices	7	3.50	0.89	.866	-					
AI-supported bereavement	4	3.14	1.03	.855	.550[a]	-				
Death-related PIM	8	2.62	0.78	.787	.560[a]	.421[a]	-			
Death-related information concern	4	2.84	0.83	.607	.505[a]	.113[a]	.299[a]	-		
Information avoidance	3	2.89	0.98	.623	.321[a]	.166[a]	.145[a]	.368[a]	-	
Digital remembrance	2	3.16	1.14	.802	.541[a]	.456[a]	.438[a]	.250[a]	.210[a]	-

[a] $p < .001$.

practices, AI-supported bereavement, death-related PIM, and death-related information concern. Prior experience handling information after a death was associated with stronger death-related PIM and lower information avoidance. Everyday AI use was associated with higher bereavement information practices, AI-supported bereavement, death-related PIM, and digital remembrance, as well as lower death-related information concern.

The demographic variables showed a more selective pattern. Older participants reported higher AI-supported bereavement and lower death-related information concern and information avoidance. Women reported higher bereavement information practices, AI-supported bereavement, information avoidance, and digital remembrance than men. Participants with children reported higher AI-supported bereavement and lower death-related information concern. Greater religiosity was associated with lower AI-supported bereavement, death-related PIM, and digital remembrance.

Overall, the findings indicate that the six subscales were associated in different ways with death/loss salience, previous loss and information-handling experience, everyday AI use, and selected demographic characteristics. The generally modest explained variance and small standardized coefficients indicate that these variables represent only part of the variation in death-related information orientations.

5. Discussion

This study makes a conceptual and empirical contribution by developing and providing an initial exploratory psychometric evaluation of a new measure of death-related information behavior. The exploratory analysis produced a six-component solution representing related but substantively different ways in which people engage with information in contexts of death and loss. By offering a preliminary empirically grounded framework for examining this emerging domain, the study brings together death-related information issues that have often been examined separately, including post-mortem information management, digital remembrance, access, avoidance, and emerging forms of technological support (Dinneen et al., 2024; Krtalić & Dinneen, 2026; Lei et al., 2025; Morris & Brubaker, 2025).

Several strengths of the study merit emphasis. The sample was large and demographically diverse (N = 1,735), in contrast to the predominantly qualitative and small-sample designs that characterize much digital death research. This enabled an initial large-sample examination of the proposed components and their associations with relevant background variables. The study offers, to the best of our knowledge, the first multidimensional measure specifically developed to examine death-related information behavior, integrating domains that have previously been examined largely in isolation. The inclusion of AI-related items and background variables is also timely and situates the measure within emerging research on bereavement technologies. These strengths should nevertheless be understood alongside the need for independent psychometric confirmation.

The labels assigned to the subscales should also be interpreted in relation to their item content. In particular, bereavement information practices includes perceived importance, responsibility, complexity, and sensitivity surrounding the handling of information after death, rather than the frequency of enacted practices alone. More generally, the measure combines reported behaviors, intentions, attitudes, and normative orientations. It should therefore be understood as assessing orientations toward death-related information behavior, not solely directly observed or frequently performed behavior.

An important insight from the exploratory analysis is the distinction between death-related information concern and information avoidance. Their emergence as separate components suggests that people's orientation toward death-related information may vary in meaningful ways, from greater interest and engagement to postponement and avoidance. This pattern aligns with work showing that information avoidance is often a meaningful response to emotionally difficult information, especially when engagement is experienced as burdensome or destabilizing (Hicks et al., 2025). It also resonates with Owen's (2021) study of loss as something that reshapes people's relationships to objects, documents, and traces over time. These findings suggest that death-related information behavior includes both active engagement and selective withdrawal, and that both should be understood as part of how people navigate loss.

The content of the death-related information concern subscale merits particular conceptual attention because its items span several forms of unease: privacy concerns about providing sensitive information to AI, normative concerns about the appropriateness of AI use, discomfort when platforms resurface content from a deceased person, and postponement of engagement with information left behind. One possible common element is anticipatory unease about encountering or losing control over emotionally sensitive death-related information. However, the heterogeneity of the items and the subscale's modest internal consistency indicate that this interpretation remains provisional. Future item development should examine whether privacy concern, technological appropriateness, involuntary resurfacing, and postponement form one broader construct or should be represented as more specific dimensions.

The findings provide preliminary evidence regarding how participants perceive selected digital and AI-supported practices in the context of death-related information behavior. Digital remembrance emerged as a distinct dimension, pointing to the importance of profiles, messages, photographs, and other digital traces in how loss is remembered and managed over time. This result is consistent with research showing that social media profiles and other online traces can become enduring sites of memory, presence and continued bonds after death (Brubaker et al., 2013; Kaye et al., 2006; Morris & Brubaker, 2025).

The emergence of AI-supported bereavement as a separate exploratory component suggests that openness to these selected practical uses of AI may represent a distinguishable orientation within death-related information behavior. Participants who reported greater AI use also tended to report stronger endorsement of AI-supported bereavement, alongside greater engagement with bereavement information practices, death-related PIM, and digital remembrance. This association indicates that people who use AI more frequently in everyday life are also more open to its practical use for early guidance, organization, and communication in situations involving death and loss. Emerging work has pointed to the growing relevance of AI in emotionally sensitive and death-related settings, including support for narrative processing, testimony, and mediated forms of care and meaning-making (Fu et al., 2025; Hadar Shoval et al., 2026). The present findings suggest that AI should also be considered within information behavior research on death and loss. Two caveats are warranted. First, given the cross-sectional, self-report nature of the data, the associations between AI use and the scale dimensions indicate co-occurrence rather than temporal development, and the direction of these relations cannot be determined here. Second, a clear distinction should be drawn between what the scale measured and the broader landscape of emerging AI-afterlife technologies: the AI-supported bereavement items addressed practical, assistive uses, such as obtaining guidance, organizing information, and drafting texts, rather than griefbots, avatars of the deceased, or other forms of AI-mediated posthumous presence, and conclusions about the latter cannot be drawn from the present data.

An interesting finding from the regression analysis is that greater proximity to loss was associated with greater engagement in death-related information behavior. When death becomes part of lived experience, information-related issues may become more concrete, immediate, and actionable. This pattern is consistent with broader work showing that major disruptions reorganize information practices and make information central to orientation, adaptation, and everyday coping (Alon et al., 2026a; Ruthven, 2022). In the present context, the findings are consistent with the possibility that lived encounters with loss, responsibility, and post-death tasks make death-related

information issues more concrete. However, the cross-sectional design cannot determine whether loss experience changes these orientations or whether other characteristics explain the associations.

Several demographic patterns also merit attention. These patterns point to the need to approach death-related information behavior as a diverse and socially situated domain. People do not encounter death-related information from the same position, and their engagement with planning, remembrance, avoidance, and technological support is likely shaped by social roles, life stage, and cultural orientation (Maddrell et al., 2022). Bereavement research similarly shows that while loss is universal, it is experienced, expressed, and supported differently across cultural and social contexts, including variation in bereavement practices, emotion display rules, help-seeking norms, and interpretations of loss (Hilberdink et al., 2023; Killikelly et al., 2021; Silverman et al., 2021; Skrozic & Kijamet, 2022). This perspective helps situate the present findings and suggests that engagement with death-related information may vary across groups in systematic ways.

In the present study, diversity was especially visible across gender, age, and religiosity. Women reported greater engagement with bereavement information practices, AI-supported bereavement, digital remembrance, and information avoidance. This pattern suggests a more emotionally engaged orientation toward death-related information, and it is consistent with broader literature showing that women often report more emotionally expressive, support-oriented, and communicative forms of coping in response to loss and distress (Leaune et al., 2025; Stroebe et al., 2001). It also aligns with earlier work on PIM showing that women report more intense affective experiences around information and larger gaps between actual and ideal information practices, indicating that information-related tasks may carry greater emotional weight for them (Alon, 2026). These patterns should not be read as evidence of inherent gender differences in emotional engagement. They may equally reflect gendered socialization and social roles, including the disproportionate responsibility women often carry for kin-keeping and memorial labor, or measurement bias, if items referencing emotional engagement are interpreted or endorsed differently across genders.

Age showed a more differentiated pattern: older participants reported lower information concern and lower avoidance, alongside higher endorsement of AI-supported bereavement. The lower concern and avoidance are consistent with research suggesting that fear of death does not necessarily intensify with age and may, in some cases, decline, even when concerns about the process of dying remain salient (Fortner & Neimeyer, 1999; Sinoff, 2017). This interpretation is also broadly compatible with prior work showing that affective intensity around PIM tends to decrease with age (Alon, 2026). At the same time, the positive association with AI-supported bereavement may reflect a distinct dimension of response to loss, suggesting that lower emotional concern about death-related information can coexist with openness to mediated forms of support or remembrance in later life. Given the limited evidence on age differences in AI-supported bereavement, this finding should be interpreted cautiously. Alternative explanations also cannot be ruled out: cohort differences in technology exposure, differential selection of older adults into the online panel, and age-related differences in how the AI items were interpreted could each contribute to this pattern.

Religiosity was associated with lower endorsement of AI-supported bereavement, weaker orientation toward death-related PIM, and lower digital remembrance. This pattern may reflect the stronger role of ritual, family, community, and established mourning practices in religious contexts. These aspects may shape how grief is held, expressed, and remembered, and may reduce the need for digital or AI-mediated forms of support without diminishing the significance of loss itself (Dein, 2024a, 2024b). This interpretation should nonetheless be treated with caution, because religiosity was assessed with a single self-rating item, which cannot capture denominational affiliation, specific beliefs about death and afterlife, or communal mourning practices; future work should employ multidimensional measures of religiosity. These findings suggest that death-related information behavior is socially and culturally patterned, and that engagement with death-related information is shaped by different emotional, relational, and value-based contexts.

5.1. Implications for theory and practice

This study contributes to research on human engagement with emotionally sensitive digital technologies by developing and testing a multidimensional scale of death-related information behavior. Theoretically, the study positions death-related information behavior as an emerging domain of human-technology interaction that includes engagement with digital traces, personal archives, emotionally sensitive information systems, and selected forms of AI-supported assistance (Dinneen et al., 2024; Krtalić & Dinneen, 2026). The findings also extend previous work linking information behavior to life disruptions and transitions. Prior research has shown that life transitions reshape information needs, practices, and sense-making processes (Ruthven, 2022). Other studies have suggested that information practices may function as scaffolding during acute change and uncertainty (Alon et al., 2026). The present findings are consistent with this line of work and suggest that, in the context of death, information practices may be associated with how people approach practical demands, unfamiliar situations, and emotionally difficult information.

The study also points to several practical implications for the design of information systems and services. Support for death-related information should attend to the kinds of difficulties people face after loss. People may need help locating and organizing materials left behind by the deceased, making decisions about their own future digital legacy, preserving meaningful traces, and controlling when and how difficult reminders reappear. In practice, this calls for clearer ways to identify and manage a deceased person's accounts and files, simpler legacy-planning options, and settings that give users more control over visibility, timing, and resurfacing. These needs are relevant to digital platforms, archives, bereavement services, and other information services that may encounter people navigating loss.

The findings also indicate the potential relevance of AI tools for selected forms of practical support. Participants reported openness to using AI for initial guidance and communication-related assistance in situations involving death and loss. This suggests potential interest in tools designed to support initial guidance, message drafting, and orientation to bureaucratic or informational tasks, provided that such systems are developed with strong attention to privacy, trust, appropriateness, and emotional sensitivity. More broadly, the scale offers a structure for identifying where support is needed and for distinguishing between different forms of death-related information engagement.

Following further psychometric validation, the measure may have applications in several settings. In research, it could support comparisons of death-related information orientations across cultures, age groups, and bereavement circumstances, and could be examined as an outcome or moderating variable in studies of digital legacy interventions. In user research and design, aggregated subscale patterns may help generate hypotheses about desirable features. For example, stronger avoidance may indicate the importance of user-controlled timing of memory resurfacing, whereas lower death-related PIM scores may point to the potential value of accessible legacy-planning prompts, such as legacy-contact or inactive-account mechanisms. In bereavement-support, archival, and estate-planning research, the measure may help structure conversations about informational burden and preferences concerning preservation, deletion, and delegation. At its current stage, however, the measure should not be used as a clinical screening, diagnostic, or individual decision-making instrument. Design work in this space can further draw on HCI research on sensitive data and end-of-life technologies, favoring reversible actions, graduated disclosure, and human oversight of AI-generated content.

The findings also point to the need for platform designs that give users and bereaved relatives greater control over memorialization

settings, visibility of deceased users' profiles, resurfacing of memories, posthumous access, and the use of AI-generated support in emotionally sensitive contexts (Alon, 2026). At the same time, such tools should be designed with strong safeguards around privacy, transparency, user control, and emotional sensitivity. The scale can support future research and design by identifying which forms of death-related information behavior require support and where users may be more hesitant, avoidant, or open to technological assistance. Because these implications derive from an Israeli sample, platform and service design recommendations should be generalized cautiously across cultural contexts.

6. Limitations and future research

The study has several limitations. First, it provides an initial exploratory evaluation rather than a complete validation of the measure. The structure was examined using principal component analysis in the same sample in which the newly developed items were first tested, and no independent confirmatory analysis was conducted. Consequently, the stability of the six-component solution and its comparative fit against plausible alternative models remain unknown. We regard this as the most significant methodological limitation of the study. PCA is a data-reduction method and does not model latent variables or measurement error in the same manner as common-factor or confirmatory approaches. Future research should therefore re-examine the item pool using exploratory factor analysis with oblique rotation and subsequently test the resulting measurement model through confirmatory factor analysis in an independent sample. The current components and item assignments, particularly those involving cross-loadings, should be regarded as provisional until these analyses are completed.

A related limitation concerns the absence of external evidence for convergent, discriminant, criterion, and predictive validity. The correlations among the newly developed subscales describe their relationships but do not establish that they represent empirically distinct constructs. Future studies should examine their associations with established measures of information avoidance, death anxiety, digital legacy planning, grief-related experiences, technology acceptance, and relevant behavioral outcomes.

The subscales also varied in psychometric strength. Death-related information concern and information avoidance demonstrated modest internal consistency, and the conceptual breadth of the concern subscale remains uncertain. Digital remembrance was represented by only two items, limiting its breadth and likely making its performance more sample-dependent. Cronbach's alpha should also be interpreted cautiously for the shorter subscales because internal consistency estimates are influenced by the number of items. Future validation should supplement alpha with additional reliability indices appropriate to the finalized measurement model.

In addition, the digital remembrance and AI-supported bereavement subscales capture only selected aspects of rapidly evolving domains. Digital remembrance focused primarily on social media profiles, while AI-supported bereavement focused on practical assistance such as guidance, information organization, and text drafting. Additional item development is therefore needed before these subscales can be treated as comprehensive representations of their respective concepts. For Digital Remembrance, future item pools could extend beyond social media profiles to include personal digital archives, photo libraries, stored messages, and other locally maintained digital materials. For AI-supported bereavement, future items could examine emotion-oriented forms of AI companionship and conversational support alongside the practical assistance assessed here. Because the subscales differ in content, number of items, and reliability, their mean scores should not be treated as directly equivalent indicators of the relative prevalence or strength of the underlying constructs. The observed ordering of means is therefore descriptive and requires replication with more fully developed and psychometrically comparable subscales.

The data were collected in Israel in March 2026, within a social context in which death, loss, and crisis were highly salient. This context included widespread exposure to displacement, captivity, bereavement, and crisis-related mental health needs, which may have increased the personal and public salience of loss-related issues during the study period (Levkovich et al., 2025; Levkovich & Labes, 2024).

This broader context may have shaped participants' orientations toward death-related information, remembrance, preparedness, and the use of technology in emotionally sensitive settings. Mourning rituals, religious norms, platform use, and attitudes toward AI vary considerably across societies. Some elements of the framework may therefore be culturally specific, and cross-cultural validation is needed before broad generalization. The study also relied on an opt-in online panel. Self-selection cannot be ruled out, and panel members may have been more digitally literate and more familiar with AI than the general population. The sample also included a relatively large proportion of younger participants, which may have influenced patterns related to AI use, digital remembrance, and legacy planning. Replication in older and less digitally engaged populations is needed.

The study relied on self-report data, and the items combined attitudes, intentions, normative beliefs, perceived difficulty, and some reported behaviors. The results therefore reflect participants' endorsed orientations toward death-related information more directly than they reflect observed information-management behavior. Responses may also have been affected by recall and social desirability biases, particularly given the emotional sensitivity of the topic.

The cross-sectional design precludes causal or temporal inferences. The single-administration design also means that the temporal stability of the subscale scores could not be assessed; test-retest reliability should therefore be examined in future validation studies. The associations observed between AI use, loss-related experience, demographic characteristics, and the subscales may reflect bidirectional relationships or unmeasured third variables, such as education, general technology adoption, or prior exposure to digital legacy tools. The study also did not distinguish between different forms of loss, such as sudden versus anticipated death, or between relationships to the deceased. These differences may substantially shape death-related information behavior. Finally, the sensitive topic may have influenced both participation and response patterns. Some individuals may have chosen not to participate or may have answered cautiously because reflecting on death, loss, and personal or digital remains was emotionally uncomfortable.

Future psychometric research should begin by refining and expanding the item pool, particularly for the concern, avoidance, digital remembrance, and AI-supported bereavement dimensions. The revised item pool should then be examined using exploratory factor analysis with oblique rotation and tested through confirmatory factor analysis in a genuinely independent sample. Subsequent studies should evaluate convergent, discriminant, criterion, and predictive validity and examine measurement invariance across age, gender, cultural setting, and bereavement experience. Longitudinal and mixed-methods studies could further clarify how death-related information behavior changes over time and how reported orientations relate to actual practices before and after loss.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Lilach Alon: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Inbar Levkovich:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Methodology, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Ethics declaration

Written informed consent to take part in the study and to publish the article has been obtained from all participants or their legal representatives. The privacy rights of participants have been observed.

This study was performed in compliance with relevant laws,

regulatory frameworks and guidelines where the research took place. This study was approved by the Tel-Hai University of Kiryat Shmona in the Galilee. (Approval No. 04-03-26)

Generative AI use

During the preparation of this work, the authors used generative AI tools solely to improve the language and readability of the text. No AI tools were used to generate research content, ideas, data, analyses, or references. All output was carefully reviewed and edited, and the authors take full responsibility for the final content of this submission.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendices.

Appendix A. Death-related information behavior questionnaire

Instructions

The following statements concern thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors related to personal and digital information in contexts of death, loss, and end-of-life. Some statements refer to your own information, while others refer to the information or materials of a close person after death. Personal information includes physical and digital materials such as documents, files, photographs, messages, social media accounts, and other content related to a person's life, identity, relationships, or preferences. Please indicate the extent to which each statement applies to you or reflects your view.

Response scale

1 = Not at all; 2 = To a small extent; 3 = To a moderate extent; 4 = To a great extent; 5 = To a very great extent.

Bereavement information practices

1. When someone dies, there should be clear instructions about the information they left behind.
2. When someone dies, it is important to know where their information and materials are.
3. Dealing with a close person's information after death is emotionally and practically complex.
4. After the death of someone close, it is difficult to decide what to keep and what to let go of.
5. After a person dies, it is difficult to know where their personal information is stored.
6. Family members or a designated person should decide what happens to a person's profile after death.
7. Social media platforms should handle the profiles of deceased users sensitively.

AI-supported bereavement

8. AI can help organize or locate information related to death or loss.
9. I would consider using AI to understand what needs to be done after a death or loss.
10. AI can provide initial guidance after a death when a person does not know where to begin.
11. I would feel comfortable using AI to draft a notice, memorial text, or eulogy.

Death-related personal information management

12. I have thought about what would happen to my personal information if something happened to me.
13. I have arranged how my personal information should be handled if I die.
14. It is important to me that my information be organized and accessible in an emergency or after death.
15. There is information I want to be kept after my death.
16. It is important to me to decide in advance who could access my information if something happened to me.
17. When I encounter information about death, I want to understand more.
18. There is information I would want deleted or made inaccessible after my death.
19. I think about how death may affect the handling of personal or family information.

Death-related information concern

20. I would be concerned about giving AI personal or sensitive information in situations of death and loss.
21. Using AI in matters related to death is inappropriate.
22. When social media resurfaces content from a deceased person, it can be disturbing.
23. I might postpone dealing with information a deceased person has left behind.

Information avoidance

24. I tend to avoid information about death.
25. There are topics related to death or loss that I prefer not to deal with.
26. At this stage, I tend not to organize my personal information for emergency, illness, or death.

Digital remembrance

27. When a deceased person's profile remains active on social media, it may comfort those close to them.
28. A deceased person's social media profile is an important space for remembrance after death

Appendix B. Complete multiple regression results

Six separate multiple linear regression analyses were conducted. In each model, one composite subscale score served as the dependent variable. The same eight background variables were entered simultaneously using the Enter method.

Table B1
Multiple regression predicting bereavement information practices. Model statistics: $F(8, 1726) = 11.289$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .050$, adjusted $R^2 = .045$

Correlate	B	SE	β	p
Age	.003	.002	.046	.152
Gender	.200	.043	.112	< .001
Parental status	.011	.055	.006	.848
Religiosity	−.002	.007	−.008	.750
Everyday AI use	.045	.020	.058	.021
Death/loss salience	.094	.018	.128	< .001
Loss of a close person	.134	.051	.067	.009
Prior post-death information-handling experience	.001	.040	.001	.976

Table B2
Multiple regression predicting AI-supported bereavement. Model statistics: $F(8, 1726) = 33.824$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .136$, adjusted $R^2 = .132$

Correlate	B	SE	β	p
Age	.009	.002	.137	< .001
Gender	.133	.047	.065	.005
Parental status	.214	.061	.098	< .001
Religiosity	−.043	.008	−.127	< .001
Everyday AI use	.244	.022	.271	< .001
Death/loss salience	.080	.020	.095	< .001
Loss of a close person	.196	.056	.085	< .001
Prior post-death information-handling experience	−.078	.044	−.043	.074

Table B3
Multiple regression predicting death-related personal information management. Model statistics: $F(8, 1726) = 41.669$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .162$, adjusted $R^2 = .158$

Correlate	B	SE	β	p
Age	.001	.001	.022	.470
Gender	.006	.035	.004	.862
Parental status	.023	.045	.014	.615
Religiosity	−.013	.006	−.050	.027
Everyday AI use	.083	.016	.122	< .001
Death/loss salience	.205	.015	.324	< .001
Loss of a close person	.113	.042	.065	.007
Prior post-death information-handling experience	.090	.032	.067	.005

Table B4
Multiple regression predicting death-related information concern. Model statistics: $F(8, 1726) = 8.698$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .039$, adjusted $R^2 = .034$

Correlate	B	SE	β	p
Age	−.006	.002	−.117	< .001
Gender	.056	.040	.034	.165
Parental status	−.118	.052	−.067	.023
Religiosity	.011	.007	.038	.117
Everyday AI use	−.074	.018	−.102	< .001
Death/loss salience	.059	.017	.087	< .001
Loss of a close person	.133	.048	.071	.006
Prior post-death information-handling experience	−.009	.037	−.006	.806

Table B5
Multiple regression predicting information avoidance. Model statistics: $F(8, 1726) = 12.507$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .055$, adjusted $R^2 = .050$

Correlate	B	SE	β	p
Age	−.010	.002	−.168	< .001
Gender	.164	.047	.084	< .001
Parental status	−.053	.061	−.026	.380
Religiosity	.009	.008	.026	.271
Everyday AI use	.002	.022	.002	.924
Death/loss salience	.007	.020	.009	.724
Loss of a close person	.049	.056	.022	.383
Prior post-death information-handling experience	−.088	.044	−.051	.043

Table B6
Multiple regression predicting digital remembrance. Model statistics: $F(8, 1726) = 14.751$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .064$, adjusted $R^2 = .060$

Correlate	B	SE	β	*p*
Age	.004	.002	.054	.091
Gender	.250	.055	.110	< .001
Parental status	−.058	.070	−.024	.410
Religiosity	−.032	.009	−.084	< .001
Everyday AI use	.133	.025	.133	< .001
Death/loss salience	.112	.023	.120	< .001
Loss of a close person	.087	.065	.034	.180
Prior post-death information-handling experience	−.098	.050	−.049	.052

Note. N = 1,735 for all analyses. B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardized regression coefficient. All variables were entered simultaneously using the Enter method. Dichotomous variables were coded as follows: Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female; Parental status: 0 = no children, 1 = has children; Loss of a close person: 0 = no, 1 = yes; Prior post-death information-handling experience: 0 = no, 1 = yes.

Data availability

The authors do not have permission to share data.

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