



The Impact of Globalization and Population Mobility on Shifts in Consumer Behavior in the Funeral Industry

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Abstract

The article analyzes how globalization, high population mobility, and digital technologies are reshaping consumer behavior in the funeral industry. The topic gains relevance due to the expansion of remote participation in farewell ceremonies, wider adoption of cremation and memorialization practices not strictly tied to a specific location, the diffusion of environmentally oriented burial formats, and the accelerated “digitization of memory” through digital-legacy management services. Research originality lies in integrating findings on transnational death, online rituals, the digital-afterlife market, and demand for sustainable death care into a unified interpretive framework that explains a shift in consumer choice from body-centered procedures toward the governance of remembrance, biographical traces, and access to the deceased person’s digital data. Special attention is given to online funeral services, digital cemeteries, platform-based memorialization, VR, and media technologies for preserving personal representations, as well as to inequality-related factors shaping families’ preparedness for post-mortem digital traces. The study aims to identify how demand and service-selection logic change under mobile lifestyles. The methodology combines a review of scholarly publications with a comparative interpretation of empirical results. The conclusion outlines implications for funeral providers’ product policy and for ethical and legal agendas in data governance. The article addresses researchers of consumer behavior, service management specialists, and funeral industry practitioners.

Keywords: Globalization; Population Mobility; Funeral Industry; Consumer Behavior; Digital Memorialization; Online Funerals; Digital Legacy; Eco-Friendly Funerals; Transnational Death; VR-Based Remembrance.

INTRODUCTION

The funeral industry is undergoing a persistent reconfiguration of demand driven by two interrelated processes: the growth of cross-border family mobility and the diffusion of digital services that support farewell rituals, procedural coordination, and long-term remembrance. Labor migration, geographically dispersed relatives across countries and cities, and reduced physical accessibility of cemeteries and family plots generate demand for “remote participation” formats and for memorial solutions that are not tied to a single territory [2; 8; 9]. At the same time, the digital environment shifts part of the value of funeral services from bodily care toward the management of biographical materials, the public image of the deceased, access rights to online accounts, and the preservation of digital traces [6; 7].

The study aims to explain the mechanisms through which consumer choice in the funeral sector changes under globalization, population mobility, and digital technologies,

with attention to eco-friendly death care and digital memorialization practices. The objectives are:

- 1) to describe how the spatial dispersion of families reshapes demand for farewell formats and the logistics of post-mortem procedures;
- 2) to analyze how digital services (online streaming, platform-based memorialization, and digital legacy management) transform the value structure of funeral services;
- 3) to identify how eco-friendly practices and placeless forms of remembrance influence consumer preferences and organizational product decisions.

Research novelty is grounded in a comparative synthesis of empirical findings on transnational death, virtual funerals, digital legacy, and sustainable funeral practices, followed by an inference about a shift in the basis of consumer choice: from territorially anchored burial toward the governance of memory and access to the deceased’s digital data.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

The material base comprised academic and analytical publications from 2021 to 2025, reflecting multiple layers of sectoral transformation. Alakbarova examined digital cemeteries as infrastructures for storing and presenting remembrance, outlining managerial and technological constraints [1]. Cleuziou and Ismailbekova described transnational practices of handling the body and organizing repatriation among migrants, including the digitalization of fundraising and coordination via applications [2]. MacNeil et al. synthesized evidence on virtual funerals, their implications for grieving, and trajectories through which hybrid formats persisted after the pandemic [3]. The National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) reported findings from a 2025 consumer survey on the spread of digital planning and preferences in service selection [4]. Nosi et al. investigated sustainable funeral practices and consumer intentions, linking technological innovation with cultural shifts toward eco-friendly death care [5]. Nowaczyk-Basińska analyzed the professionalization of “digital afterlife” intermediaries and the emergence of markets for digital legacy support services [6]. Park, Oh, and Sang empirically connected digital access, digital literacy, and preparedness for managing post-mortem digital traces with subjective well-being and resource inequality [7]. Sánchez-Querubín proposed the concept of “technological haunting” to describe how transnational families sustain bonds with the deceased through media environments [8]. Uriu et al. examined funeral webcasting practices and the problem of “remote presence” using evidence from Japan [9]. Wilson et al. studied participants’ experiences of virtual funeral attendance, identifying motives for remote participation and perceived differences relative to in-person formats [10].

The study applied publication analysis, the comparative method, problem–thematic grouping of findings, and interpretation of empirical results informed by interdisciplinary approaches, including digital inequality research and service management.

RESULTS

The analysis indicates that rising population mobility reshapes the consumer logic of selecting funeral services through two pathways: changes in the feasibility of in-person participation by relatives and friends, and stronger demand for solutions that reduce the dependence of remembrance on a specific place. In studies of transnational death, body repatriation, paperwork, and the cross-country allocation of responsibilities are described as practices requiring accelerated coordination and rapid financial mobilization, with digital applications and networked channels supporting fundraising, information transfer, and procedural organization [2]. Under pronounced territorial dispersion of families, service value shifts toward speed, procedural transparency, logistical predictability, and the

possibility of “remote participation,” which alters provider selection criteria: preference moves to operators capable of delivering an integrated chain of “administrative support — remote communication — media broadcasting of the farewell ceremony” [2; 9].

Empirical work on virtual funerals documents the consolidation of online and hybrid ceremonies as responses to limited physical co-presence and as instruments for sustaining the deceased person’s social network under geographic separation [3; 10]. Literature syntheses on virtual funerals show that online participation lowers barriers for distant relatives while generating new forms of frustration linked to the perceived “incompleteness” of ritual experience and the absence of bodily co-presence [3]. Research on funeral webcasting in Japan refines the technological side of demand: consumers expect not merely a video stream but managed “remote presence,” supported by ritually appropriate camera work, sound, access interfaces, and privacy norms [9]. Interview-based studies of virtual funeral attendance describe motives for choosing remote participation (geography, health, workload), and identify quality criteria such as connection stability, visibility of central ritual actions, a sense of belonging to a community of mourners, and access to recordings [10]. Consequently, the digital component of funeral service ceases to function as an “add-on” and acquires the features of a standalone product with measurable consumer expectations [9; 10].

In parallel, a “placeless memory” trajectory takes shape, shifting value toward preserving biographical traces, emotionally significant artifacts, and controlled access to the deceased person’s data. Conceptual analysis of transnational death through the lens of media environments describes how migrating communication into digital channels sustains ongoing bonds with the deceased in dispersed families; media technologies intensify the effect of continuous digital “presence,” influencing grieving trajectories and memorialization practices [8]. The service infrastructure of digital cemeteries is interpreted as an institutionalization of such memory: digital profiles, linked to a grave or existing independently, combine archiving, public representation, and navigation/search functions, producing a new form of consumption of memorial products [1]. Under high mobility, demand for these solutions relates not to replacing burial as a legal act, but to securing the accessibility of remembrance for a distributed audience and maintaining a “family-history aggregation point” beyond geographic constraints [1; 8].

At the market level, professionalization of intermediaries who support “digital post-mortality” becomes visible. Analyses of the “digital afterlife leaders” phenomenon describe the emergence of specializations connected with account inventorying, inheritance settings, preparation of guidance for relatives, mediation between families and platforms, and, in many cases, the commercialization of digital-trace

preservation [6]. This professionalization changes the structure of consumer choice: alongside conventional criteria (price, ceremony format, place), a criterion of “governability of digital data and access rights” appears, and its salience increases in families where the deceased person has a dense digital biography [6; 7].

An empirical model linking digital access, digital literacy, and preparedness for managing post-mortem digital traces formalizes the demand mechanism for “digital memory” services. A Social Media + Society study reports a sequential relationship: digital access, via literacy development, supports preparedness for managing digital remains, and preparedness is associated with subjective well-being; the study also highlights risks of post-mortem data exploitation and unequal preparedness resources across social groups [7]. The model’s logic can be reproduced as a scheme for describing consumer behavior in the funeral sector, where purchasing a service is interpreted as a reduction in uncertainty about the governance of digital traces.

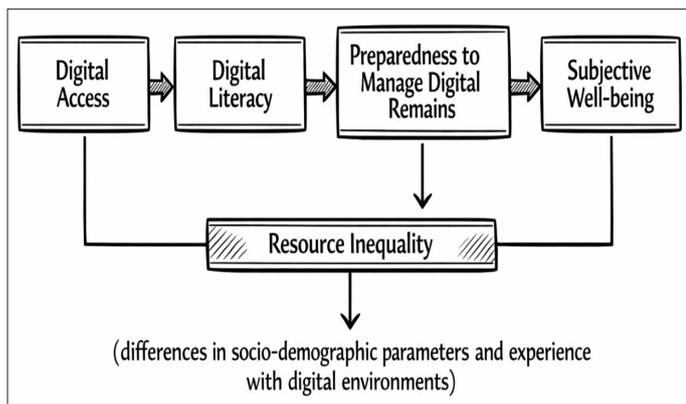


Figure 1. Sequence of forming preparedness for managing post-mortem digital traces and its association with well-being (author’s visualization based on the study’s logic)

Within applied funeral service settings, this relationship is interpreted as an explanation for demand for digital legacy consultations, memorial platforms with access-right management, and archiving and transfer services for digital artifacts to relatives [6; 7].

A shift toward eco-friendly solutions complements the transformation of consumer behavior. In research on

sustainable funeral practices, eco-friendly death care is described through a combination of technological innovation and cultural change that influences consumer intentions to select “green” formats [5]. As a result, consumer value increasingly centers on reducing the material footprint of funerals and on symbolic forms of remembrance. Instead of large memorial structures, demand rises for nature-oriented solutions and rituals compatible with mobile lifestyles, including practices that reduce memorialization’s dependence on a specific plot [5].

A distinct layer of findings concerns the digitalization of planning and service selection. The NFDA 2025 survey documents the prevalence of digital planning and expectations associated with online channels of interaction; the press description of the study reports sample parameters (1,126 respondents aged 40+; spring 2025), enabling the materials to be treated as an empirical source reflecting the direction of consumer attitudes and the “normalization” of digital entry points into funeral services [4]. In combination with academic research on virtual funerals, these data support the inference that a stable consumer segment has formed, for whom the digital component of funeral service functions as a service-quality standard rather than a situational measure.

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of the findings supports an understanding of funeral service as a hybrid offering in which material operations (the body, documentation, logistics) are tightly coupled with operations over memory and data. Family mobility increases sensitivity to time costs and to the risk of “not arriving in time” for the ceremony; demand therefore reallocates toward solutions that enable real-time participation from multiple locations and preserve recordings for asynchronous viewing [3; 9; 10]. In transnational organizations of procedures, digital channels function as trust infrastructure: they facilitate fundraising, verify intermediaries’ actions, align routes and timelines, and reduce uncertainty for relatives in different countries [2].

Table 1 systematizes empirical indicators of how mobility and family dispersion alter the criteria for selecting farewell services and organizing procedures.

Table 1. Empirical markers of mobility effects on the choice of funeral formats and service parameters [2–4; 9; 10]

Observed shift in consumer choice	Empirical basis in the sources	Implications for funeral providers’ product design
Reorientation toward remote participation	Consolidation of virtual/hybrid ceremonies and reported effects of online participation on grieving [3]; motives for remote attendance and quality criteria for online presence [10]	Online package with privacy protocols, recording support, and access moderation
Higher salience of managed “remote presence.”	Webcasting practices and requirements for ritually appropriate media delivery [9]	Filming/sound standards, camera scripts, and real-time technical support during the ceremony

Stronger need for fast coordination procedures under transnational death	Repatriation described alongside digitalized fundraising/coordination via apps and networks [2]	“Single-window” documentation workflow, transparent stage tracking, online communication with the family
Normalization of digital entry points into service planning	NFDA consumer survey: study parameters and documented interest in digital planning (1,126 respondents aged 40+, spring 2025) [4]	Online service catalog, digital approvals, support via messengers/portal channels

After remote rituals become established, the “memory as product” trajectory intensifies. Under media influence, transnational families sustain bonds with the deceased through regular digital practices; such practices maintain the deceased person’s “presence” in everyday communication and shape symbolic demand for memorial platforms [8]. Within this logic, the digital cemetery functions as an infrastructure for long-term accessibility of remembrance: biographical records and media libraries form an alternative to “visiting the place” for dispersed relatives [1]. An additional factor concerns governance of digital rights and risks of post-mortem data exploitation: the Park–Oh–Sang model

links preparedness for managing digital remains to digital literacy and emphasizes unequal preparedness, which gives family demand for mediation and digital legacy guidance a socio-stratification dimension [7]. The professionalization of digital afterlife intermediaries described by Nowaczyk-Basińska consolidates the market for such services and reclassifies “digital legacy management” as a purchasable competence [6].

Table 2 summarizes types of deathtech digital products and their expected consumer effects, based on formulations and empirical observations in the cited sources.

Table 2. Digital products in the funeral industry and expected consumer effects [1; 3; 4; 6–10]

Product/service	Consumer effect
Online farewell and hybrid ceremony	Lower barrier to participation for distant relatives; formation of a community of mourners under geographic separation
Ceremony recording and link-based access	Asynchronous participation and repeated return to the ritual as part of grief work
Digital cemetery/online memorial	Long-term accessibility of remembrance without territorial anchoring; formation of a “family-history aggregation point”
Digital legacy support (account inventorying, instructions, mediation)	Reduced uncertainty over access rights; risk minimization regarding post-mortem data exploitation
Digital planning and online channels for service selection	Transfer of first contact and part of decision-making into online space; expectation of transparency and convenience

The eco-friendly trajectory of demand transformation complements the digital one: sustainable funeral practices acquire meaning not only in terms of “material frugality,” but in terms of intensified symbolic remembrance accompanied by reduced emphasis on monumentality. Research on green funerals links technological innovation and societal shifts toward sustainable death care, supporting a projection of growing demand for services that combine eco-friendly solutions with digital memorialization for dispersed families [5]. Taken together, the discussion registers a transition from a model of “funerals as a local ceremony at the burial site” to a model of “funerals as a network of services,” where memory, data, access rights, and remote presence form an autonomous domain of consumer value.

CONCLUSION

Spatial mobility and transnational family organization intensify demand for remote and hybrid farewell formats, for funeral webcasting services with managed quality of “remote presence,” and for digital channels that coordinate procedures and fundraising; the provider selection criteria

expand to include parameters of media service and transparency of documentation workflows.

Digital technologies restructure the value of funeral service: consumer decisions increasingly relate to governing memory, biographical artifacts, and post-mortem digital traces, including access rights to data; professionalization of the digital afterlife intermediary market and the reported linkage between digital literacy and preparedness for managing “digital remains” support demand for consultation and platform products integrated into funeral services.

Eco-friendly death care practices reinforce orientation toward non-material forms of remembrance and toward solutions that reduce the dependence of memorialization on a specific plot; sustainable funeral practices and digital memorialization form a compatible product trajectory for the sector under consumers’ mobile lifestyles.

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