

# From Privacy to Legacy: Trust in Post-Mortem Social Media Data Management in Sweden

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## Abstract

In an increasingly socially connected society, the question of how social media data should be managed after death has become both a practical and ethical concern. This study investigated the preferences and trust of Swedish citizens regarding the post-mortem data management of their social media accounts, which was carried out through a quantitative survey of 174 respondents. The study identified trust levels towards users, social media providers, and analysed how demographic factors influenced trust. The study's findings revealed that most participants wished to convert their accounts into memorialised profiles or delete them entirely, with a large majority placing their trust in family members rather than friends or social media platforms to carry out the deceased's wishes. Demographic factors such as age and whether they have children were found to affect trust levels. The study highlights a lack of awareness regarding the possibility of digital wills, pointing out the need for better user education and clearer legacy tools from social media providers. The study concludes by presenting recommendations for users, social media providers, and policymakers to address the legal, ethical, and emotional issues of post-mortem social media management.

## Keywords

Digital inheritance, Digital legacy, Post-mortem privacy, Sweden, Social media, Trust

## 1. Introduction

In the growing online presence of people all over the world, people leave digital footprints on the Internet through a wide variety of websites. The trail of digital footprints individuals leave behind eventually becomes a digital legacy, something social media users may not realise [1, 2]. When users lack awareness of the digital legacy they will leave behind, they cannot make informed decisions about the post-mortem management of their data. This includes whether it should remain publicly available, be accessible to close relatives, or be deleted entirely [2]. Nakagawa and Orita [2] emphasise that without clear guidelines or documented preferences, it becomes challenging to honour a deceased individual's wishes regarding their digital legacy.

Social networks differ in how they handle the accounts of deceased users. Some platforms allow either deletion or conversion into a memorial account. For instance, both Facebook and Instagram offer options to either delete the account or memorialise it. When an account is memorialised, friends and family can share memories, and the deceased's posts and photos remain visible. These platforms also lock the account to prevent logins and exclude it from search results [3, 4]. In contrast, Mali and Prakash [5] note that X (formerly Twitter), along with Google and Facebook, supports only the complete removal of a deceased person's account [6, 5].

YouTube and other social media providers owned by Google work with post-mortem accounts by submitting a request through Google to help manage any deceased users' accounts. In some cases, family or representatives can get access to content after careful review. Google, however, prioritises privacy and doesn't share passwords. Individuals can plan with the Inactive Account Manager to designate access or deletion preferences for their account [7].

In Sweden, Medieakademin (Media academy) [8] mentions that public trust in social media platforms remains generally low. Among platforms like X, Facebook, and Instagram, trust levels are low, with

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only 4%, 5%, and 6% of the respondents expressing high or very high trust in these platforms. As Reeves et al. [9] suggested, having features for post-mortem management could help social media platforms increase the trust of the general public towards them.

For European citizens, the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) exist to protect personal data [10] and do not cover the data of deceased people [11]. This shows that there is a void in what manner companies should handle user accounts post-mortem and has the potential to create a confusing situation for family members on how to best handle the account [9].

These factors show that it is increasingly important to ensure that privacy concerns are met even after death. Therefore, this study aims to investigate Swedish citizens' perception of digital legacy and to give recommendations for companies, policy makers and users on how to honour the wishes of their deceased users. This will be achieved by answering the following research questions (RQ):

*RQ1: How do Swedish citizens want their social media accounts to be managed after their passing?*

This question explores citizens' perceptions, as literature has shown that most citizens have not actively planned for their digital legacy and may be unaware of features such as account memorialisation. We explore this to understand whether current platform options align with users' unarticulated but important preferences.

*RQ2: Who do Swedish citizens trust to manage their social media data after death?*

This question assumes that trust is not evenly distributed among family, friends, or social media providers, and that emotional bonds may matter more than technical competence. By examining trust dynamics, we seek to clarify which actors are perceived as legitimate custodians of post-mortem data.

*RQ3: How do demographic factors influence Swedish citizens' trust in different entities to manage their social media data?*

This question assumes that preferences and trust are socially situated, and that age, family situation, and social media literacy shape not only what users want, but also whom they trust.

## 2. Background

The concept of post-mortem privacy is central to understanding how personal data should be managed after death. Harbinja [12] defines post-mortem privacy as the protection of personal data after an individual's death, emphasising the need to respect the deceased's wishes as expressed through wills or digital tools. This notion extends beyond traditional inheritance laws, which often fail to account for the complexities, namely the large amount of data present and the variety of information a user posts online, which Öhman and Floridi discuss [13]. The idea of "informational immortality" is also pertinent, where the deceased's data can be utilised to create a digital persona that may be interacted with by the living, raising questions about dignity and the commercialisation of memory [13].

### 2.1. Digital Legacy

Digital footprints are small bits of our online identity that we leave behind on the Internet, separated into active and passive as described by Kaku [14]. Active footprints are data that users create themselves, including social media posts and other uploaded user-created content, while passive footprints include IP addresses and cookies [14]. The active digital footprints individuals leave behind ultimately form a digital legacy that remains after their passing. This raises critical questions about how this content should be preserved, managed, or removed, emphasising the growing importance of establishing a personal legacy plan to address these concerns [15].

The issue with persistent digital data and lack of knowledge is that it can lead to companies using the digital legacy of the deceased individual to create personas that create monetary gain for the company, which is discussed by Nakagawa[2]. The ethical issues surrounding the commercialisation of digital data from deceased individuals are increasing in significant ways. One key concern is the management of personal data post-mortem, which raises questions about maintaining the dignity of deceased individuals and adhering to their wishes. Öhman & Floridi [13] identify commercial enterprises as among the first to recognise the challenges associated with post-mortem data, particularly in light of

the increasing number of deceased Internet users. Initially, businesses faced difficulties in handling the data of deceased users, but new services were quickly developed to address this issue. However, these solutions also introduced new ethical problems, such as the commercialisation of digital personas. The use of images and personal data from deceased individuals is used for entertainment or profit, which presents ethical dilemmas with respect to consent and the potential exploitation of their identities [2].

## **2.2. Digital will**

The absence of a will that addresses digital assets raises significant ethical concerns, particularly regarding who has the right to access and manage a deceased person's social media accounts. Morse and Birnhack [16] discuss how this ambiguity affects decisions about which family members can view the deceased's posts and photos, as well as how platforms may use such data for their own purposes. Öhman and Floridi [13] point out that most user-generated content is co-owned by the platform that hosts it, meaning that internet companies can potentially claim full rights to a person's digital remains. Unlike physical possessions, digital assets and accounts are rarely included in wills, and there are few legal guidelines for doing so [16]. This creates ethical challenges related to preserving the dignity and privacy of the deceased. As digital data continues to exist online, questions persist about who has the authority to manage it and how such data might influence the memory or posthumous reputation of the individual [17].

Previous research indicates that most users have not considered creating a digital will to manage their digital data after death. A survey by Reeves et al. [9] conducted in Australia found that the vast majority of respondents did not have a digital will or any formal instructions for handling their digital data post-mortem. The survey also explored users' preferences for posthumous data management, with the most common choices being "Remove all content" and "Share some content with family and friends" [9]. At the same time, a report from eMarketer [18] shows a steady decline in users' trust in social media platforms to safeguard their personal data and privacy. Although few users actively plan for their digital legacy, concerns about how platforms handle personal data remain prominent. Facebook, for instance, was the most trusted platform, yet only 31% of respondents reported trusting it.

## **2.3. Current landscape in Sweden**

As previously noted, internet usage in Sweden is widespread across individuals and businesses, with minimal disparities related to age, education, income, or business size. This places Sweden among the most digitally inclusive countries in the OECD [19]. However, despite its leading role in digital adoption, Swedish inheritance law does not distinguish between tangible and intangible property. According to Lavendla [20], there is currently no specific legislation in Sweden governing the inheritance of digital assets, such as social media accounts. In the absence of such regulation, the standard inheritance order may conflict with the terms of service agreed to when the account was created. As a result, disputes could arise between heirs and platform providers over who has the legal right to access or control the digital property. Lavendla [20] also notes that this legal ambiguity has not yet been tested in Swedish courts.

## **2.4. Stakeholder perspective**

When discussing "citizens" in this study, it is important to recognise that they do not represent a uniform perspective. Different stakeholders engage with the problem of post-mortem data management in different ways. For individuals, the concern may be about dignity, privacy, or continuity of memory. For family members, the issue is often emotional closure and maintaining access to memories. For social media providers, the focus lies on liability, compliance, and user trust. For policymakers, the emphasis is on regulation and protecting rights. By highlighting these different viewpoints, we acknowledge that what counts as a "problem" or an "appropriate solution" varies across groups. These varied perspectives highlight digital legacy as a socio-technical challenge rather than simply a personal choice.

### 3. Method

This study employed a quantitative approach, using a survey to collect data. Quantitative methods rely on statistical analysis to produce generalisable and reliable findings, in contrast to qualitative methods that explore more complex and nuanced understandings of human behaviour [21, 22, 23]. Klapp [21] emphasises that statistics help demonstrate results that are not due to chance, while Säfsten and Gustavsson [24] note their value in identifying patterns within collected data. This approach enables a systematic mapping of general opinions and is particularly suited to examining user preferences on how social media data should be handled after death. By grounding the analysis in empirical evidence, the study contributes to a broader understanding of the research problem [25].

To ensure credibility, key concepts were clearly defined to help respondents understand the questions, reducing the risk of irrelevant responses. The survey was conducted in Swedish to target Swedish citizens and to ensure clarity and accessibility. Measures were also taken to enhance validity by designing the survey to minimise external influences and ensure a clear relationship between variables [26]. Keeping the survey brief further reduced the risk of fatigue or disengagement among participants.

The responses and statistics collected from the participants were analysed, as discussed in Section 3.2, to explore the perspectives of individuals in Sweden, aged 18 and older, regarding post-mortem data management, with a specific focus on social media platforms. A similar approach was successfully employed in the study by Reeves et al. [9].

#### 3.1. Data Collection

The survey included structured single- and multiple-choice questions, along with a few open-ended questions to explore respondent reasoning. The survey platform used was Microsoft Forms, and the questions asked were designed to address the three research questions, plus a set of questions to collect demographic data. The complete survey is included in Appendix A. Participants were Swedish residents aged 18 and older with active social media accounts. To ensure representativeness, the survey captured a range of demographic variables: gender, age, education level, marital status, employment, social media usage, and presence of children or dependents. These were selected based on Reeves et al. [9] to enable comparisons between demographic factors and trust in digital platforms across Swedish and Australian contexts. Collecting demographic data helps ensure the sample reflects the population of interest and provides a reliable foundation for future trend analysis [27].

Surveys were chosen for their suitability as self-completion tools, allowing respondents to answer independently. According to Bryman [28], such surveys are generally easier to follow, less prone to fatigue, and more concise than interviews. They also enable broader reach and larger sample sizes, increasing data collection [29]. A Likert scale was used to measure trust levels and attitudes, as recommended by Wohlin [26] and Magalhães et al. [30], for its effectiveness in capturing respondent perspectives across varied contexts.

A pilot test was conducted to refine the survey and ensure clarity. After revisions, the survey was distributed via social media platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn to reach active users and encourage wider sharing. When responses declined after a week, 50 additional responses were purchased via Prolific, targeting underrepresented respondents aged 35–75+. All the data collection was performed during the spring of 2025.

#### 3.2. Data Analysis

The data was analysed following the process outlined by Albers [25], beginning with exploratory analysis, followed by statistical testing and reflection on unexpected or noteworthy findings in an iterative process. Exploratory analysis was the first step in the analytical process. The exploratory phase involved assessing data quality, running basic statistical tests, and visualising distributions using descriptive statistics and graphs to identify patterns or anomalies [25]. Each result was then interpreted in light of the research questions.

The open-ended responses were analysed thematically to identify patterns in participant reasoning. According to Braun and Clarke [22], thematic analysis is effective for identifying and reporting recurring themes in qualitative data. In this study, responses were systematically coded and grouped to uncover underlying motivations and attitudes.

To examine how demographic variables influence trust in family, friends, and social media providers, a linear regression analysis was conducted [31]. In this model, demographic factors served as independent variables, while trust-related measures were the dependent variables. This analysis provided insight into the influence of demographic differences on trust, helping address RQ3.

## 4. Results

The study gathered 174 Swedish respondents and explored their preferences on how their social media data should be handled post-mortem. The quantitative data collected through the survey were analysed, and the results are presented below, starting with the demographics of the respondents, followed by the results of each RQ.

### 4.1. Demographics

Table 1 presents a summary of the Swedish demographics of the study. The demographic sample is considered relatively diverse, with the exception that 65,5% of the respondents were male and the age group 75+ lacked respondents.

### 4.2. Results from research questions

The survey was designed to ensure alignment with the research questions. To investigate RQ1, respondents were asked about their preferences for post-mortem management of their social media accounts and if they had created any form of digital will for their social media accounts. RQ2 was addressed through questions that identified who participants would trust to be responsible for the management of their social media data. The trust levels were then examined, and the distribution of trust levels between different social groups was examined. RQ3 looked at demographic factors, analysing variables such as age, gender, marital status, education level, children, employment, and social media usage to determine whether they affected trust levels in different entities.

#### 4.2.1. How do Swedish citizens want their social media accounts to be managed after their passing?

To investigate RQ1, the respondents were asked what they would prefer to happen to their social media accounts after their passing. In Figure 1, the responses are displayed, and *Convert it into a memorial account* was the most popular choice, followed by complete deletion of their account. Respondents were asked what type of data they considered particularly important to protect and preserve as an open-ended question. Among all responses, 86 participants specifically mentioned their pictures as especially important. 12 other respondents mentioned that preserving the confidentiality of their private messages was important, where one respondent reasoned that *"these things you don't really want others to read, both hackers, but also other people who would have access to my account after death"*. Some respondents emphasised the importance of protecting their personal data, with 14 participants expressing this as a concern. One respondent stated, *"possibly personal data referring to my relatives, or otherwise traceable to people I know who are still alive"*. The remaining 64 respondents indicated that there was nothing in particular they wished to protect or manage after their death.

As indicated in Figure 2, the majority would prefer that another person have access to their social media accounts after their passing, but notably, there are many who are unsure. The respondents were also asked to explain their reasoning in an open-ended question. 59 respondents raised privacy concerns and trust issues as their primary reasons, expressing fears that someone might post on their



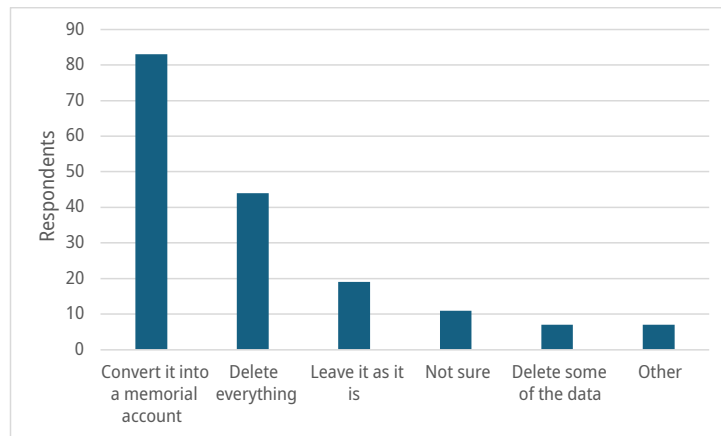
**Table 1**  
Demographic characteristics of participants

Category	Subcategory	Count	Percentage
Age	18-24	36	20.7%
	25-34	41	23.6%
	35-44	30	17.2%
	45-54	29	16.7%
	55-64	21	12.1%
	65-74	10	5.7%
	75+	7	4.0%
Gender	Male	113	64.9%
	Female	61	35.1%
	Non-binary/Other	0	0.0%
Marital Status	Partner	61	35.1%
	Single	54	31.0%
	Married	51	29.3%
	Divorced	5	2.9%
	Widow/widower	3	1.7%
Education	University	113	64.9%
	High school	54	31.0%
	Elementary or lower	7	4.0%
Children	No	92	52.9%
	Yes	82	47.1%
Employment	Full-time employed	96	55.2%
	Student	37	21.3%
	Retired	18	10.3%
	Part-time employed	10	5.7%
	Self-employed	9	5.2%
	Unemployed	4	2.3%
Social Media Usage	Every day	153	87.9%
	Every other day	13	7.5%
	Once a week	5	2.9%
	Once a month	3	1.7%
	Do not use	0	0.0%

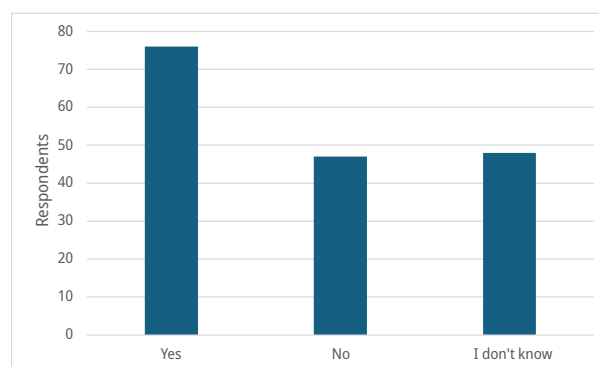
behalf or misuse their accounts. One respondent said that it *“feels uncomfortable if someone else would post in my name”* and another one mentioned *“so that it is not used for the wrong purpose”*. The majority of the 59 respondents also expressed the desire for their accounts to be permanently deleted after their death in order to protect their privacy. Others reasoned that they want someone else to have access to turn it into a memorial account, as mentioned by 49 of the respondents. In this group, one said *“so that someone can keep my memories”* and another one saw it as a *“digital archive for children and grandchildren”*. The remaining 68 respondents indicated that they had no clear opinions or had not previously considered how they wanted their social media accounts to be handled post-mortem.

Figure 3 presents the results of a question asking respondents whether they had made any decisions about how their social media accounts should be managed after death, either through a digital will or by adjusting account settings. The vast majority of respondents were either unaware that such options existed or had not taken any action. Only a small number had actively made decisions to ensure their accounts were handled according to their wishes.

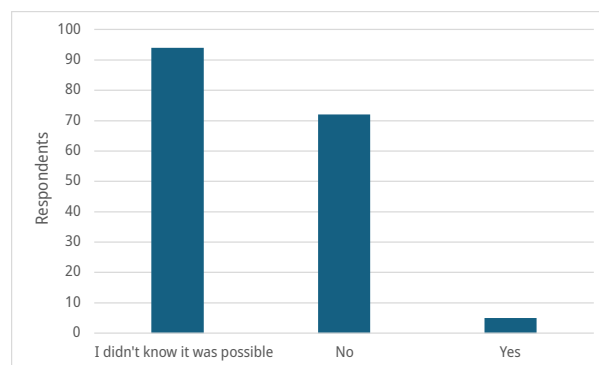
When asked why they had not created a digital will or adjusted settings for the management of their social media accounts after death, 72 respondents provided open-ended explanations. The most common reason, mentioned in 52 out of 72 responses, was simply that they had not thought about it.



**Figure 1:** Response frequency to the question *What would you prefer happens with your social media account after your death?*



**Figure 2:** Responses to the question *Would you like another person to have access to your account after your passing?*



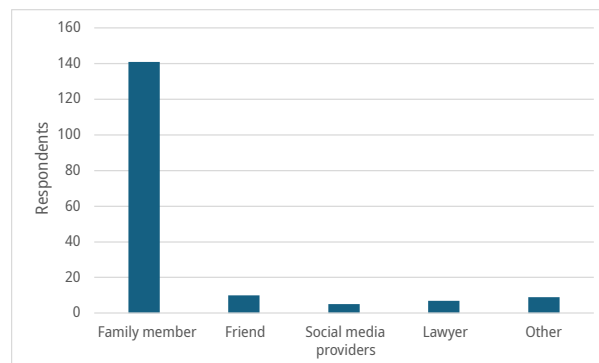
**Figure 3:** An overview of the response to the question *Have you created a digital will or changed any settings for how your account should be managed after death?*

Typical comments included *"I haven't thought about it"* and *"that thought has never crossed my mind"*. The second most cited reason, noted by 12 respondents, related to young age or the perception of death as a distant event. One participant stated, *"I haven't thought about what will happen after my death, probably because of my young age"*. Lastly, some respondents attributed their inaction to a fear of death, which led them to avoid planning altogether. One explained, *"death scares me so I try to keep the subject at a distance, thinking of wills included"*.

#### 4.2.2. Who do Swedish citizens trust to manage their social media data after death?

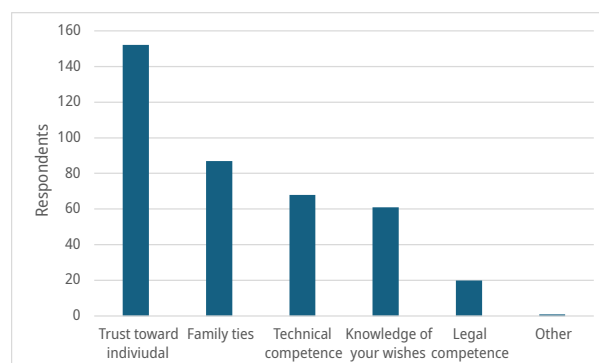
To answer RQ2, Swedish citizens were asked who they trust to manage their social media accounts after their death. In Figure 4, respondents were asked: *Who would you trust to follow your instructions for your data after your death?* As shown in the figure, 141 out of 174 respondents indicated that they would trust a family member to carry out their wishes. The other options were selected only five to ten times each.

One respondent explained their choice by stating, *"It is the family that is most affected by death. Not having access to the account can be very difficult when you are grieving."* Another respondent added, *"A family member should take over my account after death to ensure that my online presence is handled with care and respect, and reflects my true self."*



**Figure 4:** An overview of the response to the question *Who would you trust to follow your instructions for your data after your death?*

To understand what qualities respondents value in a person entrusted with managing their social media accounts after death, they were asked to identify the most important factors in making this choice. Both the personal relationship and the individual's expertise were considered. As shown in Figure 5, the most important factor was trust in the individual, followed by family connection and technical competence. Respondents were allowed to select up to three factors they considered most important.



**Figure 5:** Distribution of answers to the question: *Which of the following factors are important to you when choosing who should handle your social media data after death?*

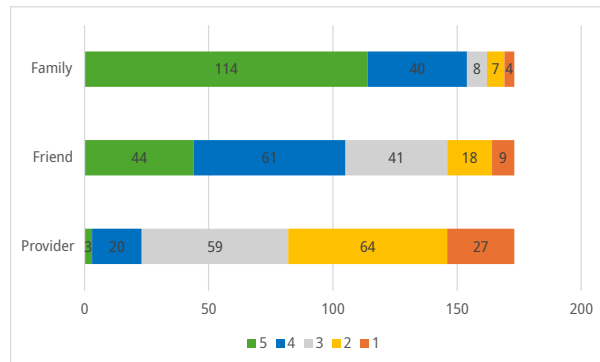
Respondents were asked to indicate their level of trust in different parties to manage their social media accounts after death, using a Likert scale from 1 (lowest trust) to 5 (highest trust). As shown in Figure 6, trust in family members was the highest, with 5 being the most frequently selected option, followed by 4.

When asked about their trust in a friend, the most common response was 4, closely followed by 5, with 3 indicating a slightly more neutral position.

Finally, participants rated their trust in social media providers to manage their data through built-in



tools or settings. In contrast to trust in personal contacts, the responses here reflected lower levels of trust. Ratings of 2 and 3 were nearly equal and most common, indicating average to below-average confidence in platforms themselves.



**Figure 6:** Distribution of trust levels across different social groups

#### 4.2.3. How do demographic factors influence Swedish citizens' trust in different entities to manage their social media data?

The third research question was about how different demographic factors play a role in the trust of Swedish citizens in different entities in relation to their social media accounts. Table 2 presents the results of a regression coefficient table that predicts different forms of autonomy. Age plays a part in the trust level for the different options, with it having a negative effect on "Trust in friends", and borders on affecting trust in family in a positive manner. However, it can be seen that when it comes to the children factor, trust in both friends and family is statistically significant. Trust in friends is positively associated with greater autonomy in both child-related decisions and social media usage, while trust in family is linked to reduced autonomy in matters concerning children.

**Table 2**  
Predictors of trust in different entities

Independent variable	Trust in providers	Trust in friends	Trust in family
Age	1.20	-2.31*	1.65
Gender	-0.99	0.34	-0.62
Marital Status	0.03	1.99*	-2.18*
Education	-0.41	0.49	-1.75
Employment	-0.83	0.05	0.67
Children	-0.16	2.20*	-3.45***
Social Media Usage	1.14	2.05*	0.76

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

## 5. Discussion

This study surveyed 174 Swedish respondents to explore their preferences for managing their social media accounts after death—specifically, what should happen to their accounts and who should manage them.

Most respondents preferred to have their accounts memorialised, followed by complete deletion. This aligns with Morse and Birnhack [16], who found that many people appreciate the idea of keeping public accounts accessible for grieving. Graham et al. [1] also noted the role of memorialised profiles in the mourning process. However, unlike Morse and Birnhack, our study highlights a tension between

preserving a digital legacy and controlling the post-mortem narrative, especially when the wishes of the deceased conflict with those of family members or platforms.

Reeves et al. [9] investigated the same question in their study, but from the point of view of the Australian population. Although their questions and response alternatives differ from ours, it shows that Australians are far more inclined to let another person get control of their account after their passing, to a varying extent. Graham et al. [1] investigated the topic of other people having access to a deceased person's account, where the people interviewed feared that information that was private would become public if someone managed another person's account and could change others view of the deceased, which matched some of our respondents' reasoning [1].

Although respondents expressed opinions about what should happen to their accounts, most had not taken concrete steps or were unaware of the available options. This mirrors findings by Reeves et al. [9], Mali and Prakash [5], and Nakagawa [2], who found that most people lack digital wills or plans, leaving companies to act without clear guidance.

Respondents overwhelmingly trusted family members to manage their accounts post-mortem, citing emotional closeness and shared understanding over technical competence. One respondent said, "*It is the family that is most affected by a death,*" highlighting the emotional rationale. Nakagawa and Orita [2] also found that people most often entrusted spouses, children, and siblings. Still, as Harbinja [12] notes, trust and emotional bonds don't always align with family structures and can lead to conflicts.

Trust was a central factor in choosing who should manage social media accounts. When asked to rate their trust on a 1–5 scale, family received the highest scores (mostly 5), followed by friends (most often 4), and social media platforms scored the lowest (mostly 2). This reflects Reeves et al. [9], where trusted individuals were also preferred, and aligns with reports of declining trust in platforms like LinkedIn (17%), Instagram (8%), Facebook (5%), and X (4%) [18, 8]. Bright, Lim, and Logan [32] attribute this distrust to privacy concerns and digital fatigue.

Demographics played a key role in shaping trust. As shown in Table 2, trust in companies was not significantly affected by any demographic factor, consistent with Goyeneche et al. [33] and Reeves et al. [9].

In contrast, trust in friends was influenced by age, marital status, having children, and social media usage. Younger participants were more likely to trust friends, perhaps due to stronger peer networks, while older participants cited concerns about digital literacy. Married individuals and those with children tended to trust friends more, possibly because of smaller but closer social circles [34]. Frequent social media users also showed more trust in friends, potentially due to increased interaction and familiarity.

The findings show that trust in friends to manage social media accounts post-mortem is influenced by several variables, including age, parental status, marital status, and social media usage. Age emerged as a significant factor: younger individuals may rely more on friends, while older individuals may avoid involving friends due to concerns about their digital literacy or limited trust in their peers [35]. Marital status and having children are also positively associated with trust in friends, possibly because married individuals and parents tend to have smaller, more intimate social networks, which may foster deeper trust in close friendships [34].

Social media usage was positively correlated with trust in friends. This suggests that people who engage more frequently with social platforms may develop stronger online social ties, increasing comfort with the idea of entrusting friends with their digital legacy.

Trust in family members was also shaped by demographic factors, particularly marital status and having children. Having children showed the most significant effect, which may be due to shifts in how individuals define their closest family members. For example, parents might consider their spouse and children as their primary family, while individuals without children might prioritise parents or siblings. Parenthood may also introduce stress that affects interpersonal dynamics and reduces overall trust in others [36, 37].

A similar pattern applies to marital status, though its effect on trust is less pronounced. Still, a change in marital status can alter how individuals conceptualise their family and whom they trust to manage their digital accounts after death.

To sum up, we found trust as a central theme, and it was clear that ‘trust’ is not a singular concept. Respondents spoke of trusting family members not only because of emotional closeness but also because they believed family would respect their wishes with integrity. In contrast, distrust toward social media platforms was linked to concerns about privacy, data security, and fears of commercial exploitation. These responses illustrate that trust spans several dimensions, such as security (protection from hacking or misuse), integrity (that the deceased’s online identity will not be distorted), and privacy (that sensitive content will not be exposed). A narrow view of trust risks overlooking these nuances. For example, a family member may be trusted emotionally but not technically competent, while a platform may be technically competent but distrusted in terms of motives. Recognising trust as multi-dimensional highlights the complexity of designing solutions that address both emotional and technical needs.

## 6. Conclusions

To conclude, we found that for RQ1, most Swedish citizens preferred converting their social media accounts into memorial profiles, followed by complete deletion. A large majority also wished to preserve photos. While most respondents were open to someone accessing their accounts after death, many were uncertain or had not considered it. Overall, there is a preference for accounts to remain viewable as spaces for mourning, though views on access vary. For the second RQ, respondents overwhelmingly trusted family members to manage their accounts after death. When asked what factors influenced this choice, “trust in an individual” ranked highest, followed by “family ties” and “technical competence.” In rating trust on a 1–5 scale, family scored highest, followed by friends, with social media providers rated lowest. These results show a strong preference for entrusting digital legacies to close family due to emotional bonds and familiarity. For RQ3, demographic factors influenced trust differently depending on the entity. Trust in companies was unaffected by demographics, reflecting general scepticism. Trust in friends varied with age, marital status, parenthood, and social media use, suggesting that personal relationships shape trust. Trust in family was influenced by marital status and whether the individual had children. These patterns suggest that as family structures evolve, so do perceptions of who is trusted to manage sensitive post-mortem data.

Based on the findings, a set of recommendations on how to better address post-mortem data management and improve user control over digital legacies for users, social media providers, and policymakers can be formulated:

### *Recommendations for users*

- **Create a digital will:** Users should prepare a digital will, or include specific instructions in existing wills, outlining how their social media accounts should be managed after death.
- **Stay informed:** Users should keep up to date with the available options on each platform and regularly review their account settings as their preferences evolve.
- **Discuss digital legacy with others:** Having open conversations with family and friends can prevent misunderstandings and ensure that digital wishes are respected. It is also helpful to speak with elderly relatives who may be less familiar with digital platforms to help them articulate and document their own wishes.

### *Recommendations for social media providers*

- **Introduce clear and accessible legacy tools:** Develop intuitive features that allow users to specify their post-mortem preferences, such as account memorialisation, deletion, or transfer. These options should be integrated during account creation or prompted periodically to keep user choices up to date. While enforcing such settings may pose challenges, the successful implementation of Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) across platforms shows that security and customisation features can be achieved.
- **Enhance transparency:** Clearly communicate what happens to an account after a user’s death. Publicly available policies can reassure users that their digital wishes will be respected, helping to build trust in platforms, which remains low.

- **Ensure strong privacy safeguards:** Introduce robust privacy controls to prevent unauthorised access to deceased users' data and reduce the risk of post-mortem data misuse.

#### *Recommendations for policymakers*

- **Promote public awareness:** Government agencies should run campaigns to raise awareness of digital legacy planning, helping individuals understand its importance and how to take action.
- **Include post-mortem privacy in legislation:** At present, regulations such as the GDPR and Swedish national law do not explicitly cover post-mortem privacy. Legal frameworks should be updated to protect user data after death and ensure that individuals' digital wishes are legally recognised and enforced.

Finally, there are many aspects related to the topic to continue working on. One potential area is the relational dynamics of digital legacy management, particularly when the deceased had stronger online connections with non-family members. These cases highlight the complexity of digital identity and the central role of emotional trust, beyond traditional family structures. Future research could explore how online friendships and communities influence decisions around post-mortem account management. Another topic is the role of digital literacy in users' preparedness to plan for their digital legacy. Understanding whether the barriers stem from a lack of awareness, technical complexity, or emotional discomfort could help platforms design more accessible tools and guide policymakers in crafting more supportive regulations.

## Declaration on Generative AI

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used ChatGPT-4 and Grammarly in order to: Grammar, spelling check, and improve clarity. They were not used to generate original content or provide factual claims. After using these tools, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the publication's content.

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## Appendix A - The Survey

### 6.1. Demographic and introductory questions

- What is your gender? Check the option that best represents you
  - Man, Woman, Non-binary/Other
- What is your current marital status?
  - Partner, Single, Married, Divorced, Widowed
- What is your age?
  - 18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55–64, 65–74, 75+
- What is your highest level of education?
  - University, High school, Elementary school or lower
- Do you have any children?
  - Yes, No
- What is your current employment status?
  - Full-time employed, Student, Part-time employed, Self-employed, Unemployed, Retired
- How often do you use social media?
  - Every day, Every other day, Once a week, Once a month, I do not use social media
- Have you already appointed someone to manage your social media accounts after your death?
  - Yes, No, I've thought about it, but haven't decided
- Are there specific types of information or content on your accounts that you believe are especially important to protect or manage in a specific way?
  - Free text (open-ended)
- How aware are you of the digital footprints you leave behind when using social media? Digital footprints are traces of data you leave online, such as browsing history, posts, purchases, and logins. (1 = Not at all aware, 3 = Neutral, 5 = Very aware)
  - 1–5



## 6.2. Research Question 1

- Have you previously thought about what should happen to your social media accounts after your death?
  - Yes, I have clear preferences, Yes, but I haven't decided anything specific, No
- Do you think users should have the option to decide how their account and data should be handled by social media platforms after death?
  - Yes, No, I don't know
- Do you want someone else to have access to your social media accounts after your death?
  - Yes, No, I don't know
- Motivate why you do or do not want someone else to access your social media accounts
  - Free text (open-ended)
- Is it important to you that someone else has control over your social media data after you've passed away? (1 = Not at all important, 3 = Neutral, 5 = Very important)
  - 1-5
- Is it important to you to protect your social media data after your death? (1 = Not at all important, 3 = Neutral, 5 = Very important)
  - 1-5
- Is it important to you that your private posts remain private after your death? Private posts mean that only selected people can see them. (1 = Not at all important, 3 = Neutral, 5 = Very important)
  - 1-5
- Have you created a digital will or made any settings for how your account should be handled after your death?
  - Yes, No, I didn't know it was possible
- If no, why not?
  - Free text (open-ended)
- What would you prefer to happen to your social media accounts after your death?
  - They are permanently deleted, They are converted to a memorial account, They are left as they are, Some data is removed, I don't know, Other (specify)
- Motivate why you want this to happen to your social media data
  - Free text (open-ended)

## 6.3. Research Question 2

- Would you like your loved ones to continue interacting with your account after your death (e.g., by commenting or sharing memories)?
  - Yes, No, I don't know
- Please explain why you do or do not want your loved ones to continue interacting with your account after your death
  - Free text (open-ended)
- Who would you trust to follow your instructions for your data after your death?
  - Family member, Friend, Lawyer/legal professional, Social media platform (e.g., Facebook), Legal guardian/trustee

- If you do not make any settings yourself, who do you think should have the right to decide over your accounts?
  - Family member, Friend, Lawyer/legal professional, Social media platform (e.g., Facebook), Legal guardian/trustee
- Motivate why you chose this person
  - Free text (open-ended)
- Which of the following factors are most important to you when choosing who should manage your social media after your death?
  - Trust in the person, Legal competence, Technical competence, Family relationship, Ability to follow your specific instructions
- Do you think social media companies should have clearer guidelines for managing accounts of deceased users? (1 = Strongly disagree, 3 = Neutral, 5 = Strongly agree)
  - 1–5
- How important is it to you that your social media accounts are managed according to your wishes after your death? (1 = Not at all important, 3 = Neutral, 5 = Very important)
  - 1–5
- How much trust do you have in the social media platforms' built-in features to manage your account? (1 = No trust, 3 = Neutral, 5 = Full trust)
  - 1–5
- How much trust do you have in a friend managing your account? (1 = No trust, 3 = Neutral, 5 = Full trust)
  - 1–5
- How much trust do you have in a family member managing your account? (1 = No trust, 3 = Neutral, 5 = Full trust)
  - 1–5
- From your point of view, did we miss any perspective? This can be anything from a missing question to a missing response option. Is there something we should have asked that you didn't get the chance to answer? (Optional)
  - Free text (open-ended)