**Participant Information Sheet**

**Study Title**: The Story of Us

**Researcher**: Ashton Kingdon

**ERGO number: 40702**

***Please read this information carefully before deciding to take part in this research. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.***

**What is the research about?**

Digital culture has progressively influenced the ways in which individuals’ journey through the grieving process, and, as a result, the Web should no longer be considered a supplementary space for rituals that traditionally manifest offline. In a similar vein, the advent of social media, and rise in platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have provided alternative outlets for people to display their grief. It is this emerging memorial culture that is beginning to challenge the conventional societal and cultural constraints that once encompassed the nature of mourning. Moreover, social media has transformed the connection people can have with those who are facing death, as communication with the dying was once restricted by geography, time, and familial connections. However, as society cements itself within the digital realm, the traditional hierarchies that once encompassed the grieving process are beginning to disintegrate, which has enabled a new level of intimacy and methods of saying goodbye.

Existing literature demonstrates that social media is becoming just as imperative a method for displaying grief as the funeral and erection of the memorial and should thus be given equal value. Therefore, we propose to build a social media application that will be both mobile and Web based, designed to unite people in grief, enabling them to continue the story of their loved ones in a specifically tailored and networked community. This application will be designed not only to coincide with advances in technology, but to correlate with the progression of societies relationship with grief, helping people to cope with loss day by day and find comfort by expressing themselves in a virtual community.

**Why have I been asked to participate?**

As a leading industry professional you will be at the forefront of change and innovation within the funeral industry. It is your experience and knowledge that is beneficial to this study as a way of determining whether or not a social networking application for the bereaved is a necessary and valuable invention that is feasible to implement.

**What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you decide to take part in this research, you will be asked to participate in one interview conducted by myself in which you will be asked a series of questions based on several themes. These themes will focus on the impact existing social media platforms have had on the grieving process; the advantages and disadvantages of having a social network for the bereaved; the concerns surrounding the marketing of such an application; the legal and ethical issues surrounding the use of such an application. The interviews will take approximately one hour, however, as they are open ended questions in a semi-structured format, the time limit is flexible. This interview will not be video, or audio recorded. However, with your permission, I will make brief notes throughout the interview.

**Are there any benefits in my taking part?**

Whilst there are no monetary benefits to this study, this is a chance for you to tell your story about being a part of one of the most under researched industries within society and help tailor future research into effectively implementing technology to coincide with the changing nature of grief.

**Are there any risks involved?**

This is an informal interview and there are unlikely to be any questions that have the possibility of causing psychological discomfort or distress and you will not be asked for any personal information. If at any point throughout the interview you begin to feel uncomfortable, you have every right to not respond or stop the interview completely and your responses will be struck from the analysis.

**Will my participation be confidential?**

In order to comply with the Data Protection Act, I will follow the guidelines set out by the University of Southampton in their Statement of Ethical Practices and ensure that no personal data including names and locations are documented throughout the interviews. Your responses to interview questions will be kept confidential and at no time will your identity be revealed. Throughout the write up of your interview, you will be assigned a pseudonym, and as I will be the one analysing the data, only I will know you relate to this name. Any data that is collected throughout this study will remain with me and be stored in a safe and secure, password protected location, and will be deleted once written into the project.

**What should I do if I want to take part?**

If you agree to take part in this research project your signature on the consent form will indicate that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant, that your questions have been answered, and that you have read and understood all the information provided. You are also acknowledging that you can stop or withdraw from the interview at any time, although, it is important to note that once your data has been written into the project it will be too late to withdraw.

**What happens if I change my mind?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you chose to withdraw please inform me at any point and the interview will be terminated with no questions asked. You may also choose to skip any question or questions during the interview but continue to participate for the rest of the study. If you choose to withdraw from the study any data that is collected in relation to your participation will be destroyed, unless, as stated above it has already been written into the project.

**What will happen to the results of the research?**

The results of this research will be implemented into a wider project for the module titled the Science of Online Social Networks in which we design a new and innovative social networking application. The project will then be pitched and displayed to a panel of leading industry experts later in the year. If you wish to receive a copy of the results please contact me on the email below and you can be provided with copy of our portfolio when the work is complete.

**Where can I get more information?**

If you have any further queries, please feel free to contact me:

Ashton Kingdon: A.R.Kingdon@soton.ac.uk

Alternatively, you can contact my supervisor:

Dr David Millard: DEM@soton.ac.uk

**What happens if something goes wrong?**

In the unlikely event that you have concerns or complaints you can contact the Research Integrity and Governance Manager:

02380595058

Rginfo@soton.ac.uk

It is important to note that this is a University of Southampton sponsored study the University has insurance in place to cover its legal liabilities in respect of this study

**Thank you.**

I would like to personally thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and considering taking part in this research.