

# Mediatisation of death and RIP pages on Facebook as virtual shrines

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In the wake of high a profile death, it is increasingly common to see mass public outpourings of grief on RIP Facebook pages. This article in *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia* explores media coverage of death and its relation to public expression of grief via social media.

Contemporary society is far removed from [death](#); few die at home; hospitals and funeral homes deal with the aftermath. Death rituals are private and many mourners are socially unsupported outside the confines of home.

Public expression of grief is not the norm. However death in the media is far from taboo; prevalent in TV drama and news [media coverage](#) of celebrity or shocking and dramatic death.

Online memorials are seen by many as a destination for "grief tourists" with suspect motivations. Is mediatisation of death simply a channel for morbid curiosity?

Klastrup argues that RIP pages provide a space to share grief and bond in the face of death. She reasons that RIP sites are legitimate virtual shrines for respectful strangers to sympathise and identify with the bereaved, just as they lay flowers at the scene of a tragic death.

The author observed RIP pages paying tribute to 6 young Danes, whose deaths received high profile press coverage. In context of their post mortem celebrity status, she studied the relationship between 'RIP-ing'

and media coverage alongside communicative practices on RIP pages.

Each 5000+ strong RIP page was monitored for types of expression, address and familiarity then cross referenced with press coverage within 2 weeks of death. The immediacy of the most messages after press coverage showed media hype as a probable driver. Posts were mainly from strangers, a notable difference from pages with smaller followings and less press where visitors typically include friends and family.

Fascinatingly many addressed the deceased directly, this connection presumably an attempt to keep the person and their memory alive. A lack of collective spirit amongst mourners showed most messages to be a fleeting expression of sympathy from unconnected individuals "like a candle or a flower left by a stranger, never to return to the site again."

RIP pages have changed the speed, scope and form of mourning. News media heightens awareness to individual cases, spurring waves of online public grief and empathy. The author concludes that RIP pages "provide material for news media coverage of spectacular deaths...which in turn are likely to drive more traffic and more strangers there.... we need more studies on the relation between news media and digital social platforms, and the role both types of media play as enablers and mediators of new public mourning".

**More information:** "I didn't know her, but...': parasocial mourning of mediated deaths on Facebook RIP pages." *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia*. [DOI: 10.1080/13614568.2014.983564](https://doi.org/10.1080/13614568.2014.983564)

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