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New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia ›
Volume 21, 2015 - Issue 1-2: Online Memorial Cultures

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“I didn't know her, but...”: parasocial mourning of mediated deaths on Facebook RIP pages

Lisbeth Klastrup

Pages 146-164 | Received 29 Sep 2014, Accepted 07 Oct 2014, Published online: 01 Dec 2014

Cite this article https://doi.org/10.1080/13614568.2014.983564 Check for updates

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Abstract

This article examines the use of six Danish “Rest in Peace” or (RIP) memorial pages. The article focuses on the relation between news media and RIP page use, in relation to general communicative practices on these pages. Based on an analysis of press coverage of the deaths of six young people and a close analysis of 1,015 comments extracted from the RIP pages created to memorialize them, it is shown that their deaths attracted considerable media attention, as did the RIP pages themselves. Comment activity seem to reflect the news stories in the way the commenters refer to the context of death and the emotional distress they experience, but mainly comments on the RIP pages are conventional expressions of sympathy and “RIP” wishes. The article concludes that public RIP pages might be understood as virtual spontaneous shrines, affording an emerging practice of “RIP-ing.”

Keywords:

R.I.P. memorial pages | Social network sites | Facebook | Death | Media | Media ecology

Notes

[1] This quote and all other quotes in the article have, unless explicitly stated, been translated by the author from Danish to English. Since this study focuses on vernacular communicative practices, and in order to preserve the original feel of the sentence, in translation it has been a priority to keep a wording as close to the original as possible even if it may result in a somewhat clumsy English phrasing.

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