

## Death video, photos radiate as media, Internet go viral

Jennifer Harper | June 26, 2009

It is shades of paparazzi past.

A photo of Michael Jackson, engulfed by an oxygen mask and lying in an ambulance, was made public Thursday afternoon, even before his death was officially announced. Footage of Mr. Jackson's body being moved from hospital to morgue was trailed overhead by a TV station helicopter, as if the crew were following a police chase or tracking a celebrity wedding.

"It's truly the coarsening of our culture. It's the Princess Diana syndrome. Can you remember a time in the past when morbid photos of celebrities were spread all over the place for all to see?" said Warner Todd Huston, a media analyst with Newsbusters.com and publiusforum.com.

"It is driving us down the road of bad taste and poor judgment. Some of it has to do with our culture of communication. You have to know things right this minute. Now. On Twitter, or on the screen. People are not willing to be reflective at a time like this, which deserved solemnity," Mr. Huston said.

**Robert Lichter, director of the Center for Media and Public Affairs at George Mason University, said he "wouldn't be surprised if we see the autopsy photos. There are no limits now. There are nude photos of pregnant actresses, and the dearly departed too. It's like we get fetal-to-death celebrity now."**

The availability of the images of Mr. Jackson in death proved an opportunity for ambitious news organizations.

The still photo and video footage immediately went viral, both online and in broadcast. CNN prominently featured the helicopter footage, taped by Los Angeles ABC affiliate KABC - paired with nonstop commentary and celebrity interviews with Larry King.

Entertainment Tonight splashed the photo across its Web site at 5 p.m. Eastern time, billing it "Breaking News - Michael Jackson: Exclusive Last Photo," emblazoned in red, with the "ET" logo prominently displayed on the photo itself. The Web site is a property of CBS Studios.

Recently, the death of actor David Carradine drew similar treatment, as several news accounts in tabloid and the mainstream press featured photos of a closet draped with ropes, said to be the spot where Mr. Carradine died.

Photos of a severely ailing, emaciated Farrah Fawcett, who died Thursday of cancer, have also surfaced, along with images of terminally ill Patrick Swayze.

In the case of Neda Agha-Soltan - the young woman gunned down during recent civil unrest in Iran - her photo and the grisly video footage of her bloody death on the street also received considerable media attention, though it led to her lionization, not commercialization.

Neda quickly became a symbol among Iranians of courage and democracy.

View the story [here](#).