

Media

Iraq war loses out to US massacre

By Belinda Moore

Two senior New Zealand media editors have responded to criticism over the disparity of media coverage between the Virginia Tech "massacre" and violence in Iraq, saying it's not a simple case of American lives being considered more valuable than Iraqis.

They say there are a number of reasons why the death of 32 Americans at the hands of a crazed student at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg received more coverage than the nearly 200 Iraqi deaths that occurred the following day in Baghdad.

Statistics released by an online media watchdog, Project for Excellence in Journalism, show that in the week of the killings, the Virginia "massacre" accounted for over 50 per cent of American news coverage.

In comparison, the horrific attacks in Iraq only occupied five per cent of coverage.

Liberal media critics are upset with this discrepancy in coverage, which they say reflects the

hierarchical worth media place on people's lives.

But the New Zealand editors say the issue is more complex than simply valuing one person's life over another's.

"I think there is a price on life but...I think it's wrongly assumed that that's a wrong thing," says *New Zealand Herald* assistant editor Jeremy Rees.

"It's much easier to understand a lone nutter than the complexities of Iraq."

"Because of geographical proximity, or cultural interests, we value life in some areas more than others," says Rees. "I don't think there's any doubt about that."

What needs to be understood, Rees says, is that "if the definition of news is what happened today that didn't happen yesterday," then it is difficult for Iraq to stand up against the shock value of the Virginia "massacre".

"Possibly wrongly, it's much

easier to understand a lone nutter than the incredible complexities of Iraq at the moment," says Rees.

One News producer Tony Davenport agrees. "Daily there are 50 people dead in Iraq and the pictures are always the same. It gets very, very repetitive."

Both Davenport and Rees say that issues of access for journalists in Iraq, particularly the inherent danger for Westerners there, hinder the coverage available to editors.

In contrast, they considered the Virginia "massacre" story more newsworthy because it allowed for personal stories and a human interest angle.

Rees says the internet also played a distinct role in the increased Virginia coverage because students could post their own personal accounts before media even arrived.

"There is a human instinct towards different life having different levels of interest. I don't think it's exclusively nasty to New Zealanders or white journalists."

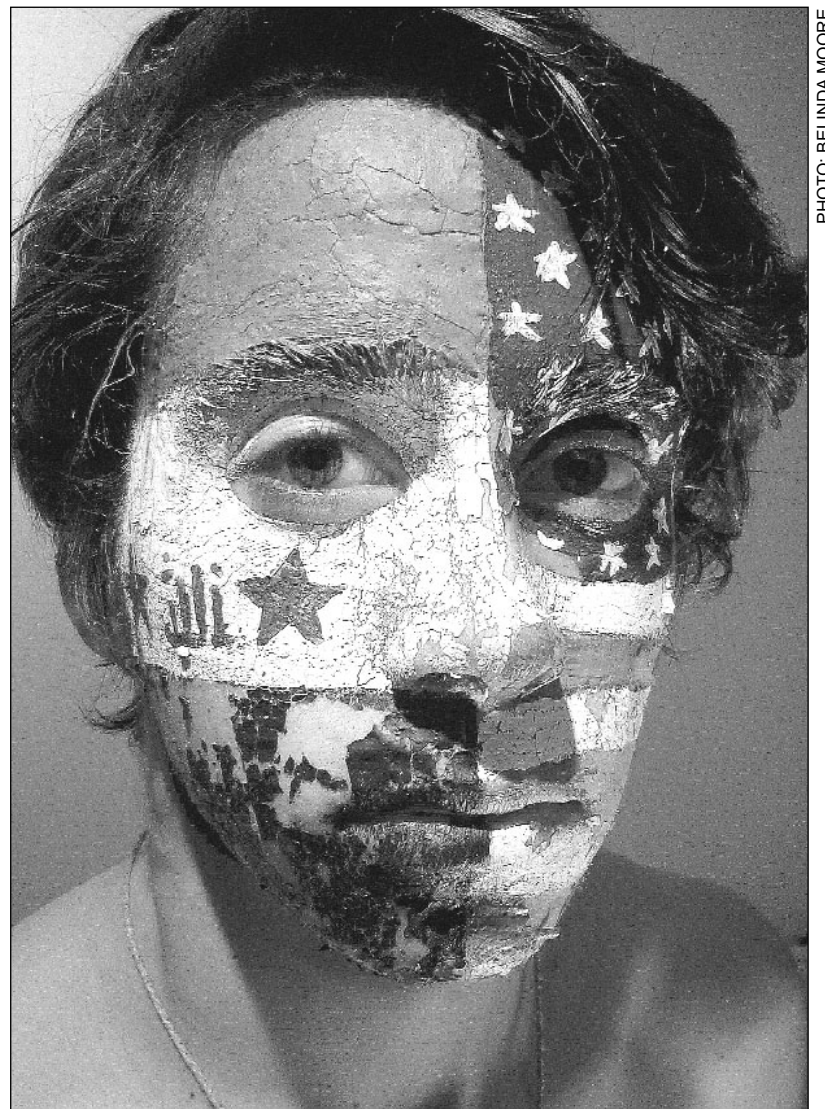


PHOTO: BELINDA MOORE

MEDIA COVERAGE: Fifty per cent of US news coverage that week was on the Virginia "massacre", compared with five per cent on Iraq.

New media helping charities raise funds

By Jomine Neethling

Online communities are changing the way charities raise money and mobilise volunteers.

Non-profit organisations like Auckland City Mission and World Vision New Zealand are using sites like TradeMe and MySpace to engage the public with their cause.

This is also an international trend, says a report released last October by England's National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO).

"People are shifting their attention from conventional forms of new media, such as websites, to newer forms, such as web casting and blogs," it says.

But non-profit organisations are too slow in following and need to use these online communities more effectively, says NCVO head of research Karl Wilding.

"Charities must exploit these mediums to create powerful campaigns and more transparent consultations," says Wilding.

Interactive Advertising Bureau chief executive Mark Evans says it does not surprise him charities are using MySpace and YouTube.

"Interactive advertising and marketing is a low-cost, highly effective mechanism for getting business," says Evans.

As part of Auckland City Mission's winter appeal it is running a TradeMe auction.

The auction ran last year for the first time and was a great success, says fundraising team manager Alexis Sawyers.

"The idea sprang from wanting to reach a new and younger audience, and we thought the

internet would be great," says Sawyers.

For its three-week-long auction, ACM is asking for sale items from high-profile Aucklanders, businesses and schools which other people can then buy, says Sawyers.

They hope to make \$300,000 from the whole winter appeal, which will be used for the running of different services, says Sawyers.

TradeMe head of advertising Olivia Willard says charities benefit from using TradeMe because it "gets the community to engage with their cause".



PHOTO: MICHELE COELHO

ONLINE COMMUNITIES: A better option to raise money for charity.

The site's "dedicated charities programme" – with its question and answer section – helps non-profit organisations get active support from the public, says Willard.

TradeMe usually has about six large auctions by charities each year, as well as 10 to 20 continual one-item auctions, says Willard. But this number is increasing.

Youth in danger of sharing too much

By Vaimoana Tapaleao

Young people are becoming increasingly vulnerable to disclosing too much personal information, as the popularity of social networking websites grows dramatically, says internet safety group NetSafe.

While websites such as Bebo, MySpace and Hi5 have become a platform for creativity allowing users to create their own pages, upload pictures and post comments on other profiles, they also bring dangers.

The craze has led to problems that include online harassment, cyber-bullying and even identity theft, says NetSafe spokesperson Rachel Harrison.

"Identity theft is becoming more frequent. We've had people calling us for help, after someone has put up a fake profile of them, pretending to be them."

"It's as bad as someone stealing your passport," she says.

Harrison says people using these social networking websites sometimes forget about the dan-

gers of the online world.

"The internet is not a private environment. Anyone can copy your pictures and put them up somewhere else," she says.

Pictures of a funny or intimate nature can also be harmful to a person's reputation, as potential employers and even scholarship boards have access to the internet.

"People need to remember that things they put online can appear again in the future, so it's important to always look at your pictures and think, 'How do I want to be seen?'" she says.

Many schools and public libraries have blocked these sites, due to the misuse and harassment, and the long periods of time a person is logged on.

Auckland university student and Bebo member Tufou Fa'anana, 21, acknowledges that the site can be a distraction.

"I've lost track of time once or twice. I only meant to be on for 10 minutes, but then ended up being on a couple of hours."

"I know people who can go on for ages, like five hours. It's quite

addictive," she says.

Another student, Irene Tuiolemotu, says for many members the popularity factor plays a key role in attracting people, particularly teenagers.

"I reckon it's all about popularity — how many friends you have, your number of profile views, the pictures you've got and who comments on your page," she says.

Harrison warns of the nature of online members, pointing out that some people tend to come across differently online than in real life.

"Young people need to remember that you don't have to accept people just because they've requested you as a friend. Think about safety," she says.

NetSafe's website provides guidelines for using the internet, with the emphasis being on how to be safe and sensible online, says Harrison.

"People need to employ techniques to protect themselves and to be safe on these networking sites. It's all about balance," she says.

Kiwis find their place on MySpace

By Pippa O'Rourke

MySpace has hit the New Zealand mainstream, and it is taking hold.

It is a website for people to create a personalised profile or "space" for and about themselves. They can post messages to fellow members, add pictures and videos, and write blogs.

"Nobody uses email to keep in touch anymore, it's all about MySpace," says Devon Taylor, 19, a student from Otago.

Felicity Brown, an AUT University communication studies tutor, says: "It can be quite liberating to have an identity that is fluid and doesn't necessarily relate to your physical self in the real world."

While members might be engrossed in the social connections and relations through their profiles, they should also be aware of being under large-scale surveillance.

"It has become increasingly normal in our society to watch other people and see what they

are up to.

"We're watched on the street and we watch each other," says Brown.

When you become a member of sites like MySpace, it is like a trade-off between you and the website.

"You agree to the terms and conditions, which often means you agree to allow access of cookies."

"Consumer surveillance is a massive industry. Targeted advertising is totally invaluable," she says.