

Media and mass shootings: odd bed fellows

By
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Abstract

Journalist students should learn how to cover mass shootings, even if the mass shootings are in a different country 8000 kilometres away. New Zealand media may be adding to the problem. Psychologists have long begged the media to tread carefully when covering mass shootings. Their *contagion effect* theory posits that many mass shooters aim for high-publicity suicide, and they are copy-cattng previous high-media shootings; thereby posthumous media publicity encourages others to plan similar mass shooting rampages. Psychologists want the media to highlight the photo of the victims, not the shooter, and to avoid using the shooter's name in the headlines. With more than 350 mass shootings a year in the United States, it is worth trying to limit the deaths, but are the media heeding this call? A recent mass shooting at a video game pub in Florida got global coverage, and this research showed some media earned high marks while others got failing marks in how they covered it responsibly.

We analysed 579 media headlines and photo selections. This included 469 hard-copy USA newspapers; 18 hard copy Oceania newspapers; and 92 online news sites.

Mass Shooting 2018 worse year in USA

USA: 7 a week average

Mass shootings: 4 shot at one time by one person

Mass Shooting Rampages: Public place without knowing victims

NZ: 7 in past 80 years



Suicide by mass shooting

Half of mass shooters
die in the attack

- 38% kill themselves
- 12% suicide by cop *

Higher percentage suicide in
MASS SHOOTING RAMPAGES

- Not spontaneous
- Not related
- Not politically motivated
- In public place

Flamboyant death feeds their ego....narcissistic ending

....expect to die

....get on the front page

... go out in a blaze of notoriety

....revenge against an uncaring world

....fatal fascination with fame

Gun related deaths per capita (100,000)

	Gun deaths per 100,000	Unintentional	Suicides	Guns per 100
USA	12	0.15	7.10	89
NZ	1.07	0.05	0.84	30
Australia	1.04	0.02	0.8	8.8
Ireland	0.08	0.25	0.28	4
Israel	2.09	0.05	0.67	7

University of Sydney School of Public Health, 2016

* other countries have high suicide rates, but not by guns

* NZ has high gun ownership, but the stats are unclear

Copy Cat
Shooters

Media highlight
shooter

Shooters collect
clippings

Contagion
Effect

More
rampages



Several years:
psychologists/psychiatrists
beg media to ban
shooters' name & photo
from front page.

Instead: highlight victims.



Journalists: too many mass shootings to cover, select most newsworthy

Rampage Shooters ramp it up to get publicity



My research conclusion:
Newspaper heeding psychologists...
leaving shooters name/photo off the
front page
.....but online news ignore the advise
(feeding social media postings)



Case Study:

Jacksonville Video Game Mass Shooting



Streaming football video games
At pub in Florida
Losing player opens fire
Watched on life stream
Shot many, killed three

Plenty of photos immediately of victims
as well as shooter

Sunday night (EST),
Full story by Monday breakfast media

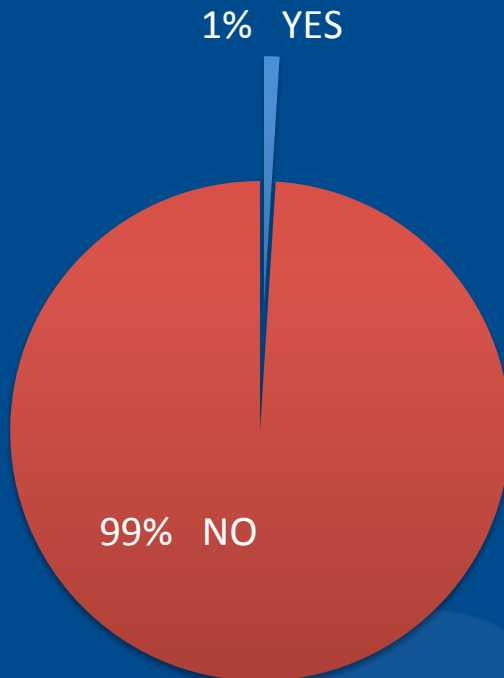
Al 579I Media covered it in some way

487 Newspapers

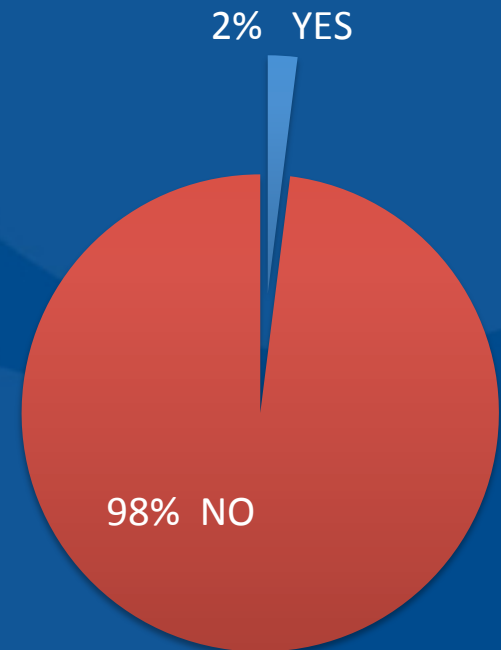
USA/UK/EU/AUS/NZ

97% newspapers ran the story, half on the front page. But most omitted name/photo from frontpage

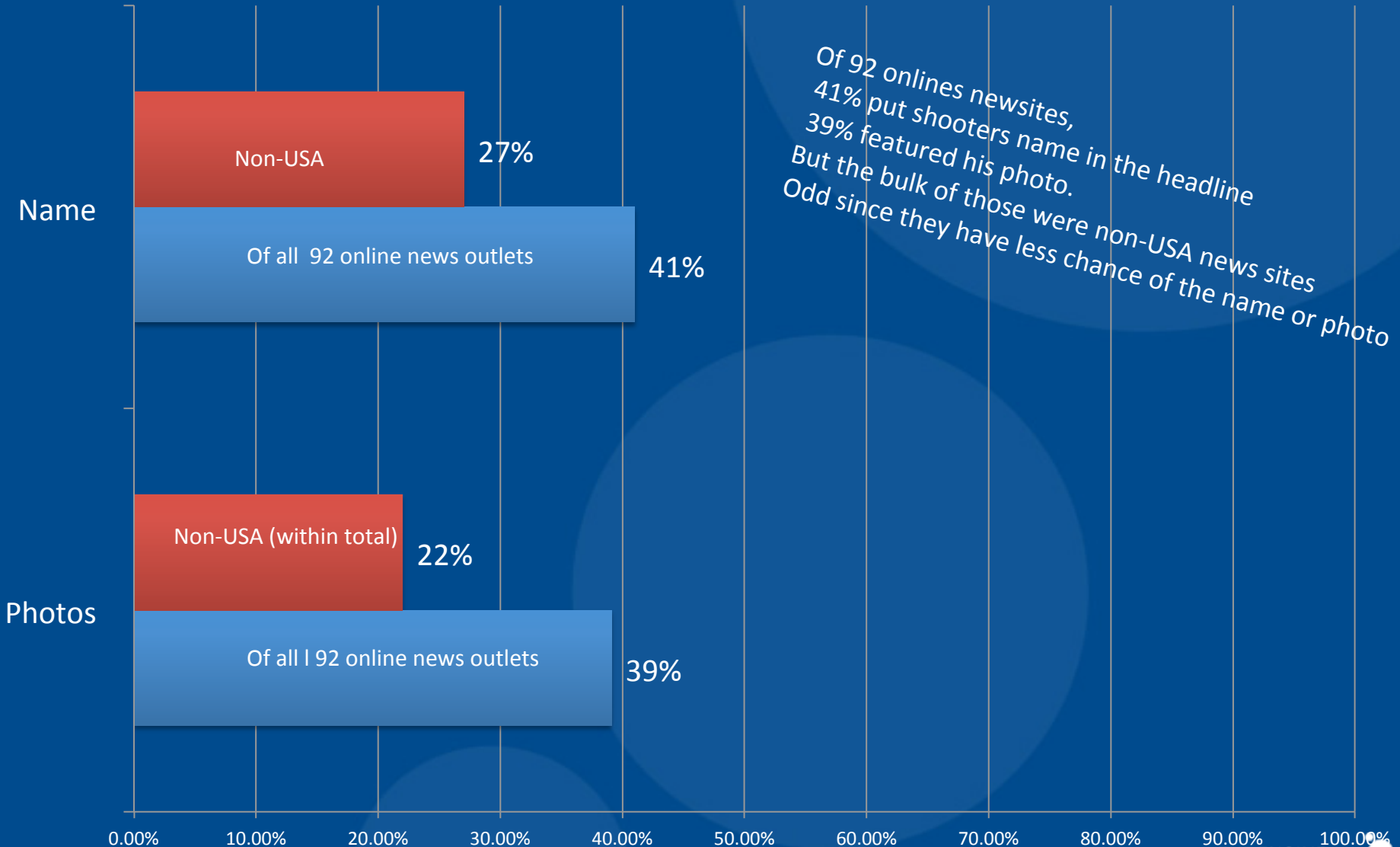
Photo on front page



Name in front page headline



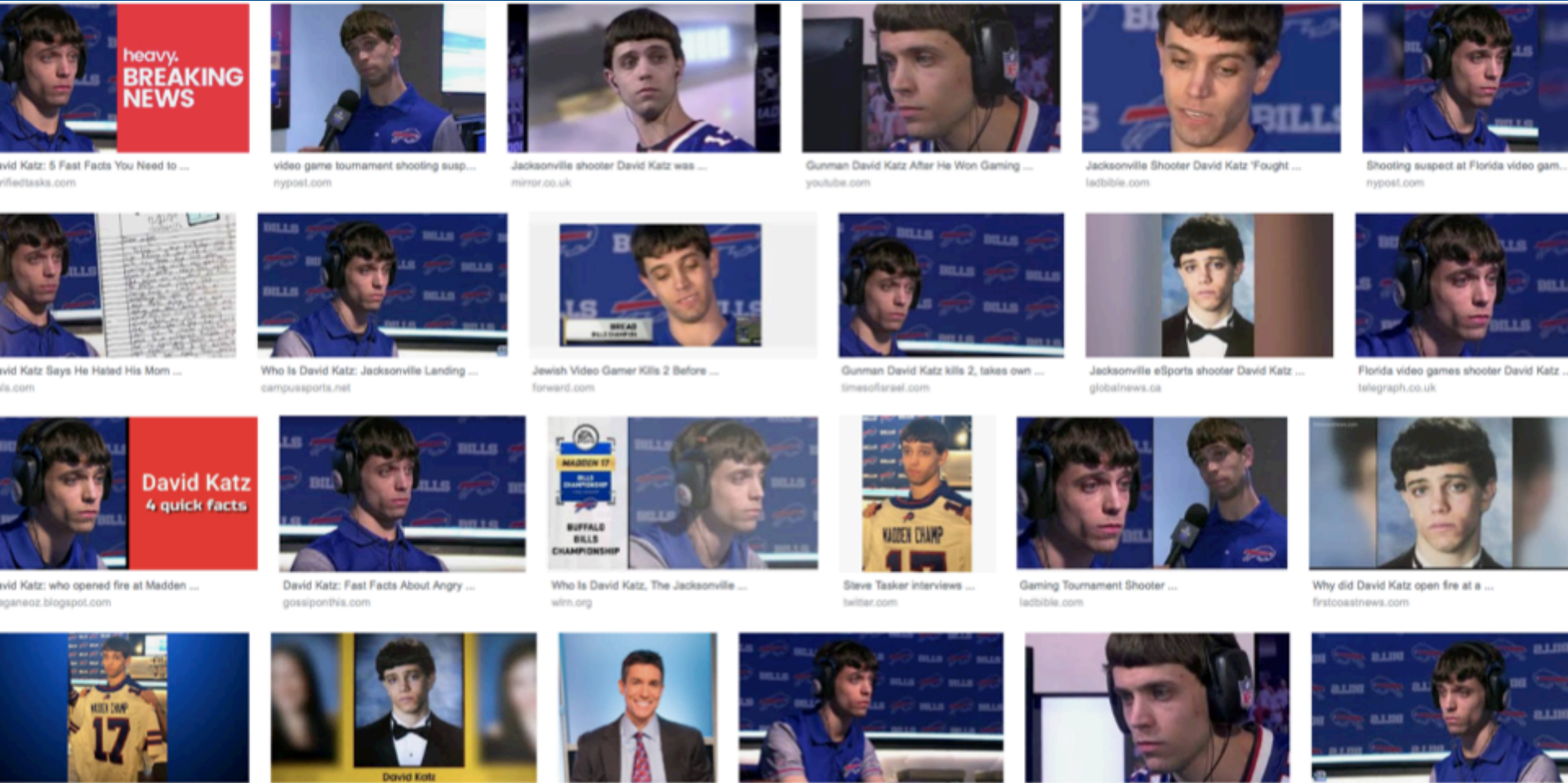
Online story treatment (homescreen)



*Of 92 onlines newsites,
 41% put shooters name in the headline
 39% featured his photo.
 But the bulk of those were non-USA news sites
 Odd since they have less chance of the name or photo*

“David Katz” is now famous

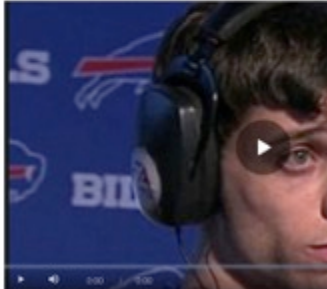
Google: 3.2 million finds



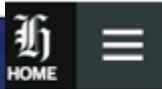
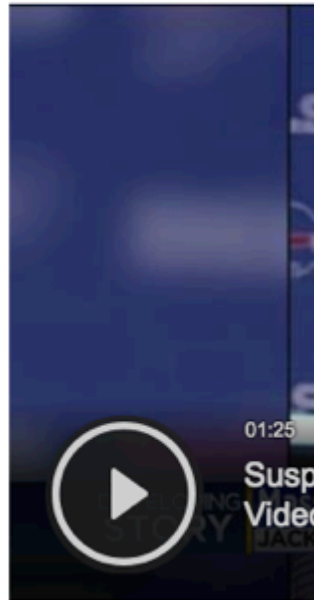
Police reveal identity of gunman David Katz

17:12, Aug 27 2018

27/08/2018

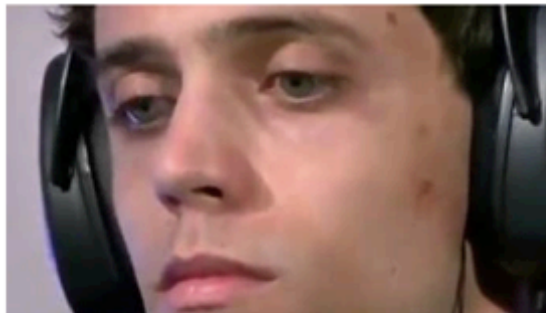


WARNING: Disturbing video. David Katz, 24, killed two and injured



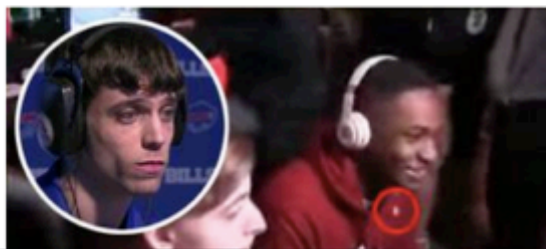
Gamer gunman David Katz was hospitalised for psychological issues

Man had "significant" medical needs which resulted him undergoing psychiatric treatment.



Jacksonville gunman David Katz was an eSports champion who 'kept to himself'

The suspect was described as someone who kept to himself.



Seconds from death: Footage shows laser on gamer before he was shot by David Katz

Witness said David Katz got mad after losing, returned and started 'blasting everybody'.

This includes NZ news sites – remember newspaper version omitted featuring him

Interesting note from this content analysis of 500+ news stories

- none of the media called him a terrorist or madman..... it was gunman or shooter.
- Profile of mass shooters, especially a rampage shooter is Male, white, in 20s, not politically active, socially aloof, often described later as “*just good old boys gone bad*”.

Conclusion

Unknown: how strong is the contagion effect theory.

Deaths rising from mass shooting rampages, so media should help.

Legacy media acting responsibly (especially newspapers).

Online news outlets are not; even those associated with the legacy media companies.

Further Research: Why the NZ media's self-imposed ban on reporting suicide details doesn't apply to overseas mass shootings

Recommendation to Journalism Educators

Alert students to the media's involvement in mass shootings

Often the digital copy tasting for influential online news is being done by younger journalists with less experience in media-ethical discussions.

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Thanks to researchers
Flora Galy-Badenas
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