

News of Jackson's death first spread online

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FILE - In this Nov. 13, 1988 file photo, pop singer Michael Jackson performs before a sold out crowd for his Bad tour at the Los Angeles Sports Arena. Jackson, 50, died in Los Angeles on Thursday, June 25, 2009. (AP Photo/Alan Greth, file)

(AP) -- It was a where-were-you moment in a digital age. Michael Jackson's death was not learned from a fatherly TV news anchor. Instead, the news first spread online.

Some of the initial reports from various outlets were confusing: Was Jackson still alive? Was he in a coma? They spread like wildfire across [news](#) sites, social media networks and Twitter.

The celebrity Web site TMZ.com. site broke the news of Jackson's death at 5:20 p.m. Thursday.

It was a huge scoop for the AOL-owned TMZ, though many did not believe TMZ's report until it was matched by more established news organizations.

"Everything starts with a tip," said Harvey Levin, managing editor of TMZ. "We wouldn't have put it up if we weren't positive."

Jackson's death was confirmed by the Los Angeles Times and then The Associated Press just minutes before the nightly network news began. The anchors relayed the news at the top of their broadcasts, though CBS and ABC quickly moved on to their prepared obituaries for Farrah Fawcett, who died earlier Thursday.

MTV, the channel that had so much to do with Jackson's incredible rise to fame, played Jackson's iconic music videos "Beat It" and "Thriller," and continued with a Jackson marathon.

Jackson dominated the discussion on Twitter, generating the most [tweets](#) per second since Barack Obama was elected president in November.

"We saw over twice the normal tweets per second the moment the story broke as people shared their grief and memories," Twitter co-founder Biz Stone said in an e-mail.

The tweeting tripped up Twitter briefly, but engineers quickly responded to keep the service running. At times Thursday night, Jackson-related search topics were the most popular on the site.

Celebrity users on [Twitter](#) - including Lindsay Lohan, Ashton Kutcher, John Mayer, Ryan Seacrest and ?uestlove of the Roots - posted their remembrances.

"I will be mourning my friend, brother, mentor and inspiration," tweeted

MC Hammer. "He gave me and my family hope. I would never have been me without him."

Comedian Rob Corddry, the former "Daily Show" correspondent, joked: "I wish it had been Michael Jackson that broke the story of TMZ dying."

Others sought to corrupt the memorializing of Jackson. A false rumor was spread that actor Jeff Goldblum had died. His publicist had to release a statement saying that Goldblum was fine.

Blogger Perez Hilton also caused a stir when he initially doubted that Jackson had gone into cardiac arrest. In a post since removed from PerezHilton.com, the blogger speculated that Jackson was pulling a stunt. (Hilton didn't immediately return an e-mail requesting comment late Thursday.)

Akamai's Net Usage Index, which monitors global news consumption online, found that Web traffic to news sites increased by about 50 percent, peaking around 6:30 p.m.

So many people wanted to verify the early reports of Jackson's death that the computers running Google's news section interpreted the fusillade of "Michael Jackson" requests as an automated attack from about 5:40 p.m. through 6:15 p.m.

As a defense mechanism, Google's news section responded to requests for information about Michael Jackson with squiggly letters known as a "captcha." Just as [online](#) ticket buyers regularly do to complete their purchases, the Michael Jackson searchers had to enter the letters correctly to see Google's new results.

Searches made through Google's main search engine were unaffected, according to company spokesman Gabriel Stricker.

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Others were using Facebook to organize vigils and celebrations of Jackson. One in San Francisco with nearly 50 confirmed guests hoped to recreated the "Thriller" dance.

Within a few hours of the news of Jackson's death, his 1982 album "Thriller" was the No. 1 album on iTunes. Several of his discs were also in the top 10 of the digital store.

AP Technology Writer Michael Liedtke in San Francisco contributed to this report.

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