

e-News: Closer but better?

In spite of it being heralded by a highly problematic disrespectful advert (see MMP comment of 06/02/01) last week Monday (05/02/01) e-tv launched its daily hour-long news programme during prime time. The decision to have an hour-long bulletin is a positive one and has the potential to present issues in an in-depth and critical manner. MMP's monitoring of the first weeks of bulletins has revealed an increased number of items in the report and while visual changes were evident coverage was not substantially different.

Aside from a few spelling errors and technical glitches a positive aspect of the bulletin is the emphasis and high number of national items. A clear structure in the ordering of news items was observed. It was noted that items of national and local concern were given prominence over items of International concern. Of the five news bulletins monitored last week, all the headline stories dealt with issues of national concern. Interestingly SABC 3 as a public broadcaster service seemed to do the opposite. International news items were given prominent coverage over and above national and local news items – a trend that was observed in the run up to the local elections. e-news can be commended for its efforts to report on issues in an in-depth manner. For example the coverage given to issues such as TB, the abuse of drugs and South Africa as a highway for drug trafficking, the issue of HIV/AIDS and its impact on amateur boxing in South Africa and the issue of unemployment. e-tv reported the issue of drug abuse in SA and not simply on the United Nations conference as was apparent on SABC 3. The in-depth coverage given to the above-mentioned issues however could be extended to other news items as well which otherwise tend to be factual event-based reports with little analysis or discussion.

Another positive aspect of the hour-long bulletin on e-tv is the inclusion of an arts segment. The segment will apparently discuss and promote local talent and locally produced shows. However it was noted that Hollywood gossip as well as soon to be released movies were also featured in the Arts segment - a potentially worrying aspect.

In spite of the new visuals Africa coverage has disappointingly and essentially remained the same with a segment given to "news from the African continent." Previous monitoring has shown that e-tv's Africa news is generally limited to four items that are usually brief even if they are about complex issues taking place on the continent. Further they tend to be limited to brief factual descriptions of events rather than issues. There is also tendency for the items to always be negative.

The introduction of more in-depth news items is to be commended as are some of the stylistic changes and new segments, it is hoped that e-news will build on these aspects and also give added focus to their African news.

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