

The Way Advertising News Should Not Be

Last night e-tv launched their new one hour news programme. There were many positive elements and changes to the programme for which e-tv are to be commended. Unfortunately the launch was heralded with a highly problematic print media advert depicting dead bodies. The advert makes use of what would conventionally be viewed as a news photograph. The image used depicts a disaster scene. In the background bystanders can be seen observing a building that has been damaged, with smoke coming from the side. A flower patterned couch to the edge of a rubble-covered road makes up the remainder of the background. In the foreground there are three dead people. One is slumped over a bicycle, another lying close by with one of the bicycle wheels close to the persons head. Just a few feet away a third person is lying perpendicular to the other two bodies. Blood from the bodies can be see pouring onto the ground. e-tv's logo sits in the top left hand corner with the line, "e-news, no one gets you closer." Bar some fine print outside the frame of the image which contain a small blurb and scheduling details, there are no other advertising elements. No context or explanation of the image is given.

The MMP has on a number of occasions cautioned against the unnecessary and unjustified use of violent and gruesome images. In the present instance readers may find the image distressing and children, in particular may be badly affected by it. In addition to this the image leaves little dignity for the victims or their families. The failure to contextualise the image not only robs it of any value other than shock value but also robs the value and meaning of the deaths of the three people depicted. While the media have in some instances argued persuasively for the necessity of using images such as these to drive home the destruction and pain which is the result of tragedies and violence, the same cannot be said regarding the e-news advert. The advert is not there to depict the horror, destruction and loss of life of a disaster but to sell e-news.

The distinction between using the image for advertorial as opposed to news purposes is a critical one. In news strong justification is necessary for the use of violent and gruesome images depicting dead bodies. Their depiction can however be justified in order to report the news accurately and fairly. No such justification exists for advertising purposes.

But there is another dimension that goes beyond the distinction between using it for news or advertorial purposes. We live in a society that has become used to violence. The value of human life in our country has never been high. Part of building our democracy is the need to transform our society into a more peaceful one, which, governed by human rights, protects and respects human life. Images such as the one used in the advert for e-news, contributes to the dehumanising and desensitising of readers. When pictures of brutalised human beings become the norm they lose their shock value and fail to engender a common respect for human life. That images of dead

people are used to sell a product, (in spite of the link to a news product) is disrespectful in the extreme. The MMP calls on e-tv to withdraw the advert.

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