

Public Abstract

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The Emotional and Cognitive Processing of Negative News Photographs

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The purpose of this study was to determine if color, size and emotional content of negative news images affects how viewers respond to the images. This question is important because picture editors are often advised to run disturbing images in small sizes and in black-and-white. But does changing these structural features make a difference, or does the content matter more? Two within-subjects experiments were conducted. The first experiment manipulated the variables of color and emotional intensity, and the second experiment manipulated size and intensity. Physiological and self-report measures were obtained. Results indicate that the structural feature of color failed to produce significant responses. The size of the negative news images and the intensity of the content had a greater influence on people's emotional assessments and news judgment. In addition, the intensity variable was replicated across two message samples, and the findings show that the results were the same for both samples of stimuli. These findings can help news editors understand how readers will respond to negative news photographs and will help guide them as they decide how to handle these disturbing news images.