

2017-61 Douglas Johnson vs Vancouver Sun

*September 7, 2017*

The National NewsMedia Council dismissed a complaint that the Vancouver Sun's "Five Things To Know" article breached journalistic standards by presenting news in a juvenile and tasteless manner. In dismissing the complaint, the NNC found that the article shared characteristics with a column, which allows for personal perspectives and humour.

The Vancouver Sun's "Five things To Know" website series is a regular news digest that links news items to full stories elsewhere in the publication. The piece in question featured gifs linked to news of a car crash and of an animal bite incident. The complainant found the gifs inappropriate given the subject matter.

The gifs in question represent long-established cartoon characters and music. On a reasonable viewing, they do not exploit trauma to victims. The NNC recognizes that humour is a matter of taste, and what is acceptable to one may be objectionable to another. In this case, the humour was deemed not to exceed generally accepted standards.

Although it is based on news, the digest takes a conversational tone. In that light, the feature is more akin to a column, where there is latitude to incorporate opinion, humour and personal viewpoint.

The "Five things to know" feature can reasonably be viewed as a quick reference that offers a conversational, first person perspective on 'must read' news items. Readers who do not appreciate the tone can chose to skip the column without being denied information that appears elsewhere in the paper.

The NNC finds no breach of journalistic standards and no grounds for a complaint.