

TO CLICKBAIT OR NOT TO CLICKBAIT? AN EXAMINATION OF CLICKBAIT
HEADLINE EFFECTS ON SOURCE CREDIBILITY

Nathan Hurst

Dr. Sungkyoung Lee, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

One content marketing strategy currently proliferating on Facebook is the use of “clickbait,” or sensational, headlines to attract readers to view the content being marketed. The aim of this study is to examine how the use of clickbait headlines on Facebook influences the perceived credibility of the story source by employing a 2 (news type) x 2 (source type) x 2 (level of source credibility) online experiment. Participants were presented with either clickbait or traditional science news headlines, which differed in the type of source (education vs. news) and the level of source credibility (low vs. high.) After exposure to each headline, they were then asked to rate their perceived credibility toward the source of the article. The findings showed that the use of clickbait headlines results in negative effects on perceived source credibility. Also, sources with pre-existing low credibility suffered the most when using clickbait strategies than sources with high pre-existing credibility.