# CLICKBAIT – Trust and Credibility of Online News Media

ABSTRACT

Clickbait headlines are compelling and designed to lure readers to click on the linked article. To understand their impact on the credibility of news items, we designed and conducted an experiment on news articles from the Webis-Clickbait-17 dataset. The role of readers' age and epistemic curiosity on clickbait propensity was also studied. We observed that clickbait headlines significantly reduced the credibility of news items. A correlation between age and propensity for clickbait was observed. We hope that our findings may lead to a better end-user experience in terms of access to credible information for news readers, bereft of clickbait.
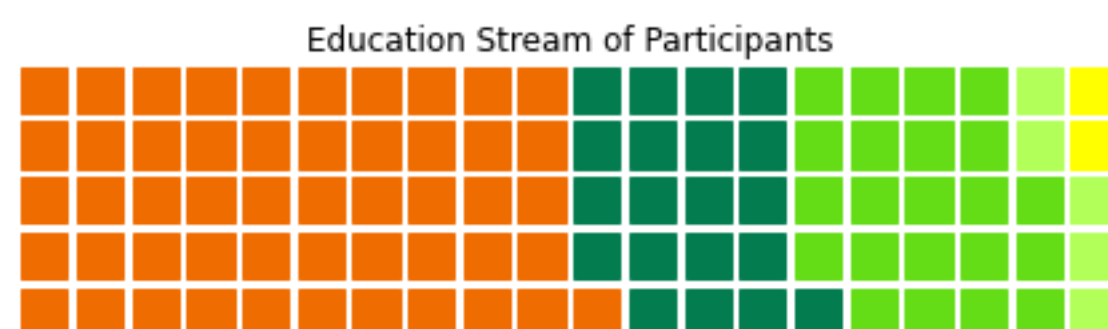
Education Stream of Participants
- Science, Technology, Engineering and Medicine (51%)
- Finance, Commerce and Business Administration (20%)
- Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (22%)
- Media and Mass Communication (5.0%)
- Others (2.0%)

METHOD

Two datasets of 6 articles each of news relevant to North America and India were selected and each article was assigned a clickbait and a non-clickbait headline based on a pre-test for clickbait perception. 200 participants (100 each of English-speaking American and English-speaking Indian) were instructed to click and read through any two articles of their choice and fill a credibility questionnaire. Epistemic curiosity and demographic data were collected at the end of the experiment.
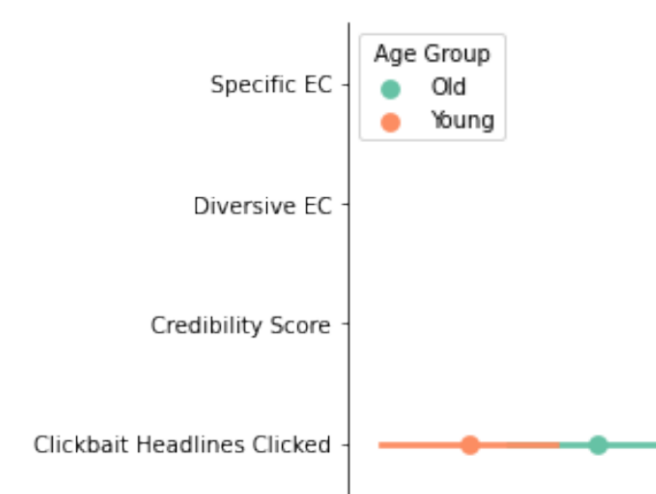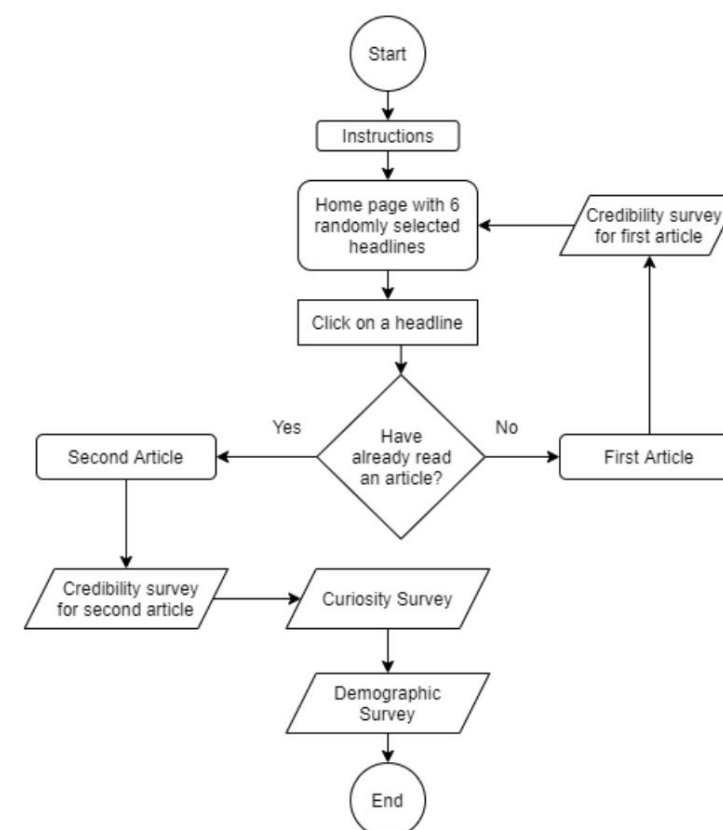
CONCLUSION

We showed that clickbait headlines significantly reduce the credibility of news items, when controlled for the articles' content. We also reported a correlation between age and interaction with clickbait headlines. The study proposes a critical contribution to print and social media news reporting by journalists and media houses. Our analysis especially brings to light an urgent need for news media publishers, platforms and aggregators to review their policy regarding clickbait content on their forum, given the lower credibility for news items with a clickbait headline.

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