



Sentence Patterns, Factual Content, and News Values in News Headlines: Their Impact on Readers' Decisions to Engage with the Full Story

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Abstract: *This study examines the relationship between sentence patterns, factual content, and news values in headlines with readers' choices to read the full news content. Specifically, it tests the extent to which sentence patterns, factual content, and news values in headlines relate to readers' decisions to engage with the articles. If there is a relationship between any of these three variables – whether individually or collectively – then headlines can be confirmed as predictors of readers' choices to read the full news content. The results of this research will serve as a foundation for publishing study programs to develop more reliable and accurate guidelines for news writing. Media editorial teams will also be able to find more measurable and practical solutions, particularly regarding headline writing. This research employed a quasi-experimental method involving students from the Department of Graphic Engineering and Publishing. Treatments were designed using two types of news headlines as experimental treatments. The impact of these headline treatments on readers was analyzed using the Chi-Square statistical method. The results showed that, significantly, headlines written in active or passive sentence patterns containing opinions were more likely to be read by respondents than headlines containing factual statements. This trend was evident both in crime news and other general news categories, especially economic and health news. Therefore, it can be concluded that news value does not play a role in motivating people to read or ignore a news story.*

Keywords: *Factual Content, News Value, Sentence Patterns,*

Introduction

News is a report. It is a report of an event, and an event never becomes news unless it is reported. News is periodically presented through mass media and is continuously updated 24 hours a day with the latest developments (Mulyadi and Musman 2017) The structure of a news article typically consists of: (1) headline, (2) dateline (media name, location, and date), (3) lead (first paragraph), (4) body, and (5) closing paragraph.

As the first element, the headline serves to introduce the news content and trigger the reader's decision to continue reading. Three criteria define a good headline: it must be concise (7–12 words), use active voice, and present factual information (if opinion-based, the source must be cited). Although headlines may appear trivial, they are far from simple. A headline is the core summary of the news content that must be conveyed as briefly and clearly as possible, without neglecting journalistic principles or language conventions. In addition to brevity and clarity, sentence structure, factual accuracy, and news value must be reflected in the headline.

Headline must be engaging. The readability of a news story heavily depends on its headline. A good headline provokes curiosity and is tailored to fit the media layout, typically written in a larger font size. Writing headlines is a linguistic skill and an editorial art Yunus (2010).

Recent empirical research strengthens this argument. A study on online reading behavior among Generation Z found that headline style—specifically clickbait—significantly increases reading interest Rahmatika and Hidayanto (2020). Similarly, an experimental study on high school students demonstrated that clickbait headlines exert a statistically significant effect on reading motivation, even though the explained variance remains modest (Hastuti, Handayani, and Setiawan 2022). In the context of public-health reporting, research during the COVID-19 pandemic showed that the type of headline (misleading vs. non-misleading) directly influences readers' decisions to continue reading the article (Taqqyah et al. 2022). These findings collectively indicate that headline construction is a measurable predictor of reader engagement.

Headlines should generate curiosity rather than suppress reader interest. Writers must be meticulous in producing attractive and effective headlines. Therefore, sentence patterns (active or passive), content types (fact or opinion), and news values—as previously outlined—are key variables that may influence readers' decisions to engage with the full article.

If these variables—sentence structure, factual content, and news value in the headline—are found to affect reader choices, then they can be considered strong predictors. The critical question is: which of the three is the most influential—sentence pattern, factual versus opinion-based content, or the inherent news value.

This issue, based on a review of news-related research publications—particularly those focusing on news headlines—over the past six years (2017–2024), has not yet been thoroughly investigated. In fact, examining the relationship between headlines and readers can offer valuable insights into why certain online news articles are read while others are ignored. The findings of this study are expected to serve as a foundation for journalism and publishing study programs to develop more reliable and accurate theories and concepts regarding headline writing. In doing so, media editors, journalists, content creators, and press professionals may discover more measurable, practical, and precise solutions—especially in crafting effective and engaging news headlines.

Studies on news headlines published between 2013 and 2024 reveal that both newspapers and online media still tend to overlook several basic headline conventions. Faraba (2017), for example, analyzed ten popular headlines from Line Today published on December 4, 2016. Using a descriptive analysis method, they found that six of the ten headlines contained ellipses: four with omitted subjects and two with omitted predicates or subject-predicate combinations. This omission often led to ambiguous meanings.

Zaman (2020) observed the use of metaphors in the headlines of Kompas published on Thursday, July 16, 2020. The findings showed that 46% of the 39 main headlines contained metaphors, primarily ontological, followed by structural and orientational types. While metaphors may enhance understanding and reinforce abstract concepts, connotative metaphors should be avoided in headlines to prevent misinterpretation.

Hermawan (2018), using content analysis, examined basketball sports headlines from Kompas during March 2018. He concluded that the headlines often included both contextual and conceptual meanings and frequently used specialized terms that were difficult for readers to grasp. Connotative metaphors and conceptual expressions often led to misunderstanding among readers.

Similar issues arise in online media that rely heavily on clickbait strategies. García, Gallur, and López (2017) found that general newspapers in 28 EU countries commonly used clickbait to lure users into clicking non-journalistic hyperlinks. As a result, headlines no longer function solely as informational cues but act as persuasive tools to keep users on the page. Their study confirmed that nearly half of the analyzed headlines were provocative and sensational, sacrificing journalistic integrity for traffic generation. These findings are consistent with more recent research showing that online media increasingly employ emotionally charged and sensationalized headlines to maximize engagement Molyneux and Holton (2015).

Kurniasari, Andrianti, and Isnaini (2018) examined a headline from Tribun Jabar, published in April 2018: “Isu TKA Digoreng Menjelang Pilpres.” Their qualitative descriptive analysis revealed six spelling errors in Indonesian, including errors in acronyms, capitalization, word splitting, conjunction usage, and name spelling.

Jubei (2018) found phrase- and word-level errors in Warta Kota headlines published between April and May. Her content analysis identified lexical pathology in 23% of the 500 words analyzed—though still within a tolerable range, it suggests room for improvement. More broadly, linguistic distortions and lexical problems in headlines are shown to affect readers’ ability to accurately process information, particularly when coupled with sensational framing Scacco and Muddiman (2020).

Ellipses in subject and predicate, metaphorical language, contextual and conceptual ambiguities, spelling mistakes, lexical pathology, and clickbait collectively lead to ambiguous, biased, and misleading headlines. These distortions negatively affect readers’ understanding. Recent studies show that these distortions also contribute to misinformation vulnerability when audiences rely on headlines alone (Choi and Shin 2022; Kilgo and Mourão 2021). However, quantitative studies involving two or more reader-related variables remain scarce.

Piotrkowicz et al. (2017) studied the influence of headline features on news popularity on social media platforms. They analyzed headlines from The Guardian and The New York Times published during four months in 2014 (April, July, October, and December), with a total of over 35,000 headlines. Their findings indicated that prominence, stylistic conciseness, headline simplicity, proximity, and sentiment significantly affected readers’ decisions to click on a headline. These results are in line with more recent research that shows how audiences are influenced by emotionality and narrative elements embedded in headlines (Linden, Leiserowitz, and Maibach 2021).

Despite its significance, quantitative-correlation research on news headlines involving multiple variables is still limited. Ekawati and Wijayati (2017) using a qualitative descriptive method, examined lexical ambiguity in headlines from Tribun, Kedaulatan Rakyat, Suara Merdeka, and Radar Kedu between April and July 2017. Interviews with 50 respondents

(students, lecturers, primary school graduates, and dropouts) revealed that both lexical ambiguity (homonymy, polysemy, antonymy) and grammatical ambiguity (misuse of punctuation) led to comprehension problems—20% among educated readers and 90% among less-educated respondents. This aligns with broader findings showing that ambiguity in headlines reduces comprehension and increases misinterpretation (O'Donnell 2021).

To date, correlational or experimental research in Indonesia exploring the relationship between sentence structure and factual content in headlines and reader behavior remains underdeveloped. Most assumptions are still based on qualitative-descriptive approaches and lack quantitative or survey-based validation.

Studies on news values within headlines are also rare. Sari (2015) analyzed infotainment content from Insert Trans TV and Intens RCTI aired between March 1–15, 2012, identifying eight news values: extraordinariness, consequence, timeliness, proximity, informativeness, conflict, prominence, and human interest. Interestingly, neither program featured sex as a news value.

In 2015, Abdul Sukur and Abdul Wahid examined 14 international news reports translated from English to Malay during September 3–9, 2012, obtained from sources such as Associated Press, AFP, Yahoo, and Google. Their study found that most news values were preserved, typically maintaining at least one of Stovall's seven key values, such as conflict, prominence, or impact. (Abdul Sukur and Abdul Wahid 2015).

Suciati and Fauziah (2020) analyzed 279 main headlines from *Republika.com*, *Merdeka.com*, and *Tribunnews.com* published between September 12–18, 2019, between 7:00 PM and 9:00 PM. Using Maxqda 2018, they classified 24 categories of news values and identified six dominant themes: The Power Elite, Eliteness, Relevance, Conflict, Novelty, and Negativity. These findings align with global patterns where conflict, negativity, and elite actors dominate news selection (Anderson and De Vito 2021).

However, it is important to note that these three studies focused on news value within full news content—not specifically on headlines, despite the fact that headlines are the first element reader's encounter. Headlines serve to advertise the story, introduce the content, and influence the decision to read or skip an article. Therefore, a study that examines news values in headlines represents a novel contribution to the field.

Methodology

This study employed a **quasi-experimental design**. The research subjects were sixth-semester students enrolled in the *Packaging Printing Technology* and *3D Graphic Printing Technology* study programs, under the Department of Graphic Engineering and Publishing at the State Polytechnic of Jakarta (PNJ) for the 2024/2025 academic year.

Each group was given headline treatments based on the following design:

1. Groups 1 and 2 received headline treatments consisting of:
 - a. active sentences with factual statements and active sentences with opinion-based statements, and
 - b. passive sentences with factual statements and passive sentences with opinion-based statements.

2. Groups 1 and 2 received treatments differentiated by news content domain.
 - a. Group 1 was assigned *crime-related news*, such as murder and fraud, which typically carry sensational appeal.
 - b. Group 2 was given *economic and health news*, which are generally more neutral in tone.

Table 1. Treatment 1 dan Treatment 2

Treatment	News Topic Area	Sentence Structure	Number of News Items
1	Crime-related News (Yellow journalism)	Active Factual	2
		Active Opinion based	2
		Passive Factual	2
		Passive Opinion-based	2
2	Economic and Tourism News (White Journalism)	Active Factual	2
		Active Opinion-based	2
		Passive Factual	2
		Passive Opinion-based	2

The only notable difference in treatment between the two groups lay in the subject matter of the news content. Although not entirely ideal, this design closely approximates an intact group comparison.

Result and Discussion

The study was conducted among students of the Department of Graphic Engineering and Publishing, specifically from the *Packaging Printing Technology (TICK)* and *3D Graphic Printing Technology (TCG)* study programs. From each program, sixth-semester students were selected. There were three classes from the TICK program and one class from the TCG program. Due to the quasi-experimental nature of the study, these classes were chosen based on their “natural availability.” The four classes were then divided into two groups as intact groups, with the following details:

Table 2. Group Division

No.	Group	Class	Total
1.	1	TICK 6A	21
		TICK 6C	22
2.	2	TICK 6B	24
		TCG 6B	21
3.	Total		88

The table shows the following:

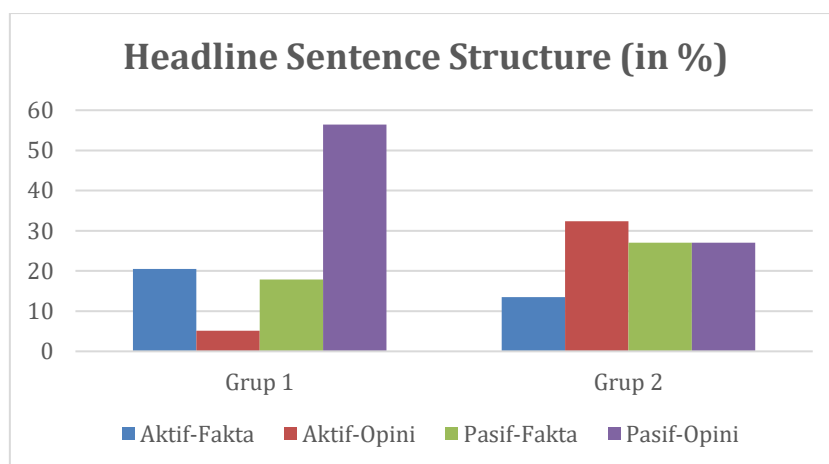
1. The number of participants in Group 1 and Group 2 was relatively balanced. Group 1 consisted of 43 students, while Group 2 had 45 students.
2. Group 1 received Treatment 1, and Group 2 received Treatment 2. Both treatments applied the same sentence structures in the headlines, with the only difference being the *topic of the news content*. Treatment 1 involved crime-related news, such as murder and fraud, while Treatment 2 involved “softer” news topics, including health, MSMEs, and the economy. This was done to control the “news value” bias often present in crime stories, so that it would not influence the respondents’ choices to read the full article. Thus, the responses from Groups 1 and 2 could be interpreted primarily as effects of the sentence patterns used in the headlines.

As a result, the number of students from both groups who responded to the questionnaire was the same—42 from each group. Therefore, a total of 84 students (95.45% response rate) completed the questionnaire. Of these, 8 respondents reported reading only the headlines without continuing to the news content. These participants were excluded from the subsequent analysis, which was conducted on the remaining 76 respondents. The 76 responses were then analyzed using the Chi-Square test, with the following results:

Table 3. News Readers Grouped by Headline Sentence Structure

No.	Sentence Pattern	Group				Total	
		1		2		f	%
		f	%	f	%		
1	Aktif-Fakta	8	20,5	5	13,5	13	17,1
2	Aktif-Opini	2	5,1	12	32,4	14	18,4
3	Pasif-Fakta	7	17,9	10	27,0	17	22,4
4	Pasif-Opini	22	56,4	10	27,0	32	42,1
	Jumlah'	39	100,0	37	100,0	76	100,1

The results indicate a difference in responses between the intact group that received headline treatments related to crime and criminal issues, and the group that received headlines with similar sentence patterns but covering economic and health-related topics.



Gambar 1. Groups of News Readers Based on Headline Sentence Structure

The bar chart illustrates that Group 1, which was exposed to crime-related news (with headlines written in passive voice containing journalist opinions), tended to read the full news content. Similarly, Group 2, which was given economic and health-related news (with headlines written in active voice and containing opinions), also showed a tendency to read the full articles. The difference in the effect of sentence patterns on these two types of headlines was statistically significant, with a Chi-Square value of 12.821 at $p = 0.005$.

Tabel 4. Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.821 ^a	3	.005
Likelihood Ratio	13.715	3	.003
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.671	1	.102
N of Valid Cases	76		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.33.

Overall, news headlines written in either active or passive voice that contain opinions were more likely to lead respondents to read the full article compared to headlines that presented purely factual statements. This pattern was observed not only in crime-related news, which naturally carries higher appeal, but also in general news categories, particularly in economic and health-related reports. Therefore, it can be concluded that news value alone does not significantly influence whether readers choose to engage with a news story.

This finding is further supported by additional data gathered from a new group of 34 students. When both types of treatments (Treatment 1 and Treatment 2) were presented simultaneously to this new respondent group, the results indicated a similar pattern of reader preference (Orosa 2017; Linden, Leiserowitz, and Maibach 2021; Tandoc 2018).

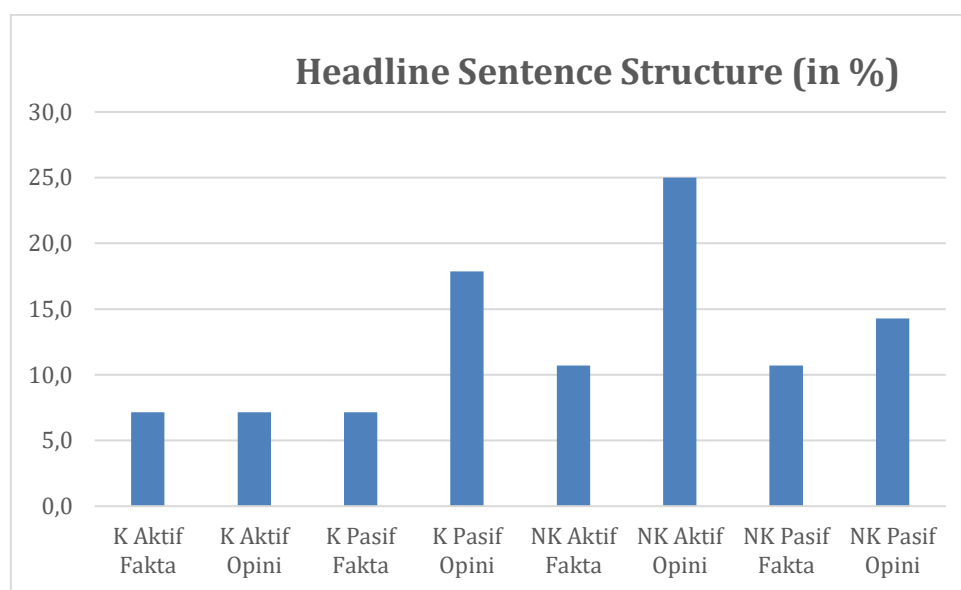


Figure 2. News Article Readers Based on Headline Sentence Structure

It was observed that news content with passive-voice opinion-based headlines in the crime category (K) was read more frequently by respondents. Similarly, non-crime (NK) news using active-voice opinion-based headlines attracted around 25% of readers. Therefore, it can be concluded that the sentence structure (active/passive) and the nature of the content (factual or opinion-based) in news headlines tend to influence a reader's decision to read the full article more than the sensational or inherent news value of the story itself Piotrkowicz et al. (2017).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study shows that the writing style of news headlines—particularly the use of active or passive voice—has a significant influence on students' choices in deciding what news to read. Meanwhile, factual events remain more attractive than opinion-based content, although their interaction with writing style did not always show a significant effect. These findings emphasize the importance of crafting clear, concise, and engaging headlines as the first gateway that shapes readers' decisions in consuming news.

This research, however, has several limitations: the sample was limited to students from the Publishing Program, the variations of headlines tested were relatively narrow, and the controlled experimental setting may not fully reflect real digital reading behavior. Therefore, future studies are encouraged to involve more diverse participant groups, expand the types of headline structures examined, and utilize real platform environments or behavioral measurement tools—such as eye-tracking or click-through analytics—to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of how headline style and event framing shape reader engagement.

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