Rage, giggles and fishing for clicks:
A qualitative study on how clickbaiting affects perceived online news content quality

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Abstract

Purpose
The purpose of this study is to explore how the use of clickbait marketing strategies by online news outlets affects consumer perceptions of online news content quality.

Design/methodology/approach
A qualitative, deductive, exploratory and cross-sectional method, wherein data was collected through semi-structured interviews to understand consumer perceptions of how the use of clickbait strategies affects perceived online news content quality. The gathered data was then analyzed with the help of a directed content analysis supported by qualitative content analysis software Atlas.Ti.

Findings
This study found that the use of clickbait content strategies affected the perceived quality of online news content. Furthermore, it was found that there are two primary consumer groups, one of which seeks to avoid clickbait and one of which seems to engage with clickbait. Finally, several new variables were found for perceived news content quality that applied in the online space.

Research limitations/implications
The main implications of this research are that clickbait strategies should be utilized cautiously as they are often found misleading or displeasing, and may cause damage to the publisher. Furthermore, despite clickbait sometimes being entertaining, most clickbait was found to be highly context sensitive. Finally, a number of new variables were found that expanded previous understandings of perceived news quality.

This study was limited by several factors - firstly, a lack of english as a first language which may have resulted in misunderstandings. Secondly, the articles utilized were found to have several shortcomings during the research procedure. Finally, due to the qualitative nature of this study, its findings are non-generalizable.

Keywords: clickbait, marketing, news, online news, clickbaiting, strategy, perceived online news content quality, fake news.
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Darius Lazauskas, Julia Jacka and Ingrīda Kažemēkaitė-Vīkauskienė
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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

While most news producers, such as television and radio stations, adapted to the digital era, the advent of digital technology has irrevocably altered the newspaper industry by causing a near-total collapse of previous revenue models, which had relied almost entirely on traditional advertising, subscriptions and unit sales (Palau-Sampio, 2016). The newspaper industry began to sharply decline in the 1990s and continues to fall today (Palau-Sampio, 2016; Pew Research Center, 2017). For example, in the United States, the drop in circulation in the past 30 years has exceeded 65 million yearly copies, while in Germany the amount of news copies sold each year has reduced from 27 to just below 15 million in the last 16 years (Pew Research Center, 2017; Statista, 2018). Newspaper advertising has likewise suffered a massive decline, particularly in the aftermath of the 2007-2008 financial crisis, with some nations, such as the United States, experiencing a decrease of over 60% since 2007 (Palau-Sampio, 2016; Pew Research Center, 2017).

As a result of this decline, newspapers have been forced to find different ways to create, and advertise articles and other news content to remain profitable (Palau-Sampio, 2016; Orosa, Santorun and García, 2017). Due to a growing number of consumers who seek to access news content online, newspapers have attempted to follow suit by making most of their content available online or by becoming dedicated online news outlets and applying new digital marketing techniques to reach consumers (Chen, Conroy and Rubin., 2015; Palau-Sampio, 2016; Orosa et al., 2017; Reuters Institute, 2017).

The Good News Is That Santa Is Real, The Bad News Is That His Remains Have Been Discovered

RIP, Santa.

Posted on October 8, 2017, at 2:15 a.m.

Figure 1. Example of clickbaiting news content (Buzzfeed, 2017)
One unique marketing strategy that has emerged from this growing trend is known as “clickbaiting” (See Fig. 1.) (Palau-Sampio, 2016; Orosa et al., 2017). Clickbaiting is primarily described as an online news content marketing strategy that encompasses a variety of techniques used to create news content that takes advantage of consumer curiosity and encourages “clicking” links to specific web pages or articles to generate revenue (Blom and Hansen, 2015; Chen et al., 2015; Anand, Chakraborty and Park, 2017; Palau-Sampio, 2016; Bolton and Yaxley, 2017).

Unlike traditional newspaper publishing, revenues online are primarily obtained through the traffic that individual articles generate, with clicks on hyperlinks being particularly valuable (Chakraborty et al., 2016; Palau-Sampio, 2016). As competition for online news readers is exceptionally high, clickbaiting is believed to be an attractive marketing strategy for many online news outlets as it allegedly allows for articles and advertisements to generate huge amounts of views and clicks (Chakraborty et al., 2016; Palau-Sampio, 2016).

Due to this, clickbaiting has rapidly become a widespread marketing strategy, today appearing in a wide range of online news outlets, from tabloid news producers to prestigious publications (Palau-Sampio, 2016). For example, the majority of online news outlets in the United States exhibit some degree of clickbait usage (Rony, Hassan and Yousuf, 2017). Even in Europe, a vast quantity of online news outlets displayed tendencies to utilize clickbait, regardless of geography, online news outlet size or reputation (Orosa et al., 2017).

However, there is a growing worry that by utilizing clickbaiting strategies, online news outlets have begun to produce misleading content that exploits the reader into clicking the headline and distributes deceptive, untrustworthy or questionable information. (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001; Orosa et al., 2017). Likewise, Wahl-Jorgensen et al. (2016) note that the lines between editorial news, falsehoods, and advertising have been significantly blurred as controversial, false or misleading content and advertising disguised as news becomes increasingly prevalent in online journalism. As news is one of the principal methods by which information is shared within a society, a high standard of quality and a good reputation must be maintained to keep the public well-informed, educated and capable of making informed decisions (Hall, 2001; Barnhurst, 2013; Karlsson, 2016; Krebs, 2017).
1.2. Problem Discussion

Clickbaiting marketing strategies have been linked with tabloid journalism and declining news content quality (Blom and Hansen, 2015; Chen et al., 2015; Chakraborty et al., 2016; Karlsson, 2016; Palau-Sampio, 2016; Orosa et al., 2017). However, according to Blom and Hansen (2015), Chen et al. (2015) and Kuiken et al. (2017), research into this link has largely been neglected in favour of suppositions and assertions. Chakraborty et al. (2017) and Rochlin (2017) further add that this field has largely been subjected to a great degree of researcher bias, as almost anything that is opposing the researchers point of view or ideas can be easily attributed to false news or clickbait content.

Despite the many claims that clickbaiting affects news content quality, almost all previous research on clickbait was found to be centered almost entirely on two separate directions - defining the nature and spread of the clickbait phenomena (Karlsson, 2016; Palau-Sampio, 2016; Bolton and Yaxley, 2017; Orosa et al., 2017), and offering methods by which clickbait can be identified from other news (Chen et al., 2015; Anand et al., 2017; Chakraborty et al., 2016; Potthast et al., 2016, Rony et al., 2017). However, in investigating how to identify clickbait, four distinct types of clickbait content have been identified by previous researchers - traditional, forward-referencing and question-based formats (Blom and Hansen, 2015; Chen et al., 2015; Chakraborty et al., 2017) and fake news (Berger and Milkman, 2012; Chen et al., 2015).

Orosa et al. (2017) suggests for using perceived news content quality as the primary measure when judging the quality of online news. Perceived news content quality focuses on readers’ perceptions of the level of quality in a given article or similar journalistic product (Orosa et al., 2017). According to Picard (2004) and Orosa et al. (2017), this concept has largely focused on several key areas that are believed to be key indicators of quality - completeness, diversity, impartiality, honesty, accuracy and relevance. However, in reviewing this concept, it was found to be based on evaluating physical media and was not adapted to the online context.

Only several works - such as Palau-Sampio (2016) and Orosa et al. (2017) - attempted to explore the link between clickbaiting strategies and news content quality, but exclusively relied upon expert
assessment and data-mining to gather and interpret results. Blom and Hansen (2015) and Kuiken et al. (2017) state, however, that this area severely lacks consumer data and that the outcomes of clickbaiting strategies are still poorly understood, especially in regards to how they affect the quality of content produced from a reader standpoint. As low content quality in the eyes of the reader often results in substantial issues for news enterprises - such as low reader retention rates, reduced reputation and loyalty, and lost trust (Hamilton, 2006; Macnamara, 2014; Karlsson, 2016) -, exploring and understanding how clickbaiting strategies affect content quality from a consumer standpoint is of key importance to guide the development of online news outlets (Blom and Hansen, 2015; Kuiken et al., 2017).

By addressing this deficiency in existing research, this study seeks to extend the knowledge of online news marketing strategies and how clickbaiting strategies affects consumer perceptions of online news content quality. Furthermore, by studying a consumer perspective of clickbaiting strategy use, this study seeks to address a lack of consumer data and contribute insights to online news outlet managers and editors into how the use of clickbaiting strategies may affect consumer perceptions of news content quality and help understand the potential benefits and risks of utilizing a clickbaiting marketing strategy. Finally, this study seeks to contribute a framework for studying the relation between clickbaiting strategy use and perceived news content quality.

1.3. Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore how the use of clickbait marketing strategies by online news outlets affects consumer perceptions of online news content quality.

1.4. Research questions

- How do different categories of clickbait content affect consumer perceptions of online news content quality?

1.5. Delimitations

Due to the nebulous nature of clickbait content, this study will focus exclusively on online news articles and exclude lists, hashtags, videos, pictures and similar content due to the different quality criteria and the lack of theoretical understandings in regards to non-article clickbait content.
1.6. Study outline

In this study, a literature review was conducted to understand better the greater context of online news marketing strategies, the concept of clickbaiting and the different categories of clickbait that are known to exist. The theory of perceived news content quality was defined and utilized to guide this study in designing the data gathering method and understanding the gathered results. Finally, this study employed a qualitative, deductive, exploratory and cross-sectional method, wherein data was collected through semi-structured interviews to understand consumer perceptions of perceived online news content quality and how it is affected by the use of a clickbaiting strategy. The gathered data was then analyzed with the help of a directed content analysis supported by qualitative content analysis software Atlas.ti.
2. Literature review

2.1. Clickbait as news content

Chakraborty et al. (2017) state that clickbait content most often utilizes a variety of marketing techniques focused on designing headlines that stand out and make readers curious. Researchers distinguish three main clickbaiting stylistic techniques that are widely used by online news outlets: modified traditional headlines, forward referencing and question-based headlines (Blom and Hansen, 2015; Chakraborty et al., 2017). These techniques can also encompass the use and design of photos, lists, hashtags and similar content (Chen et al., 2015; Rochlin, 2017).

Chen et al. (2015) identifies that clickbait content hinges on the concept of “sensemaking”, wherein it is believed that humans are driven to satisfy knowledge needs when presented with a gap in knowledge that arouses curiosity. Kuiken et al. (2017) adds that clickbait often manipulates readers through emotional elements such as suspense, curiosity and reading enjoyment - the primary processes that drive the desire for knowledge. Dor (2003) adds that headlines have communicative functions that are utilized by skilled readers to gain the main facts about a story, and tabloid or otherwise low quality headlines generally seek to trigger curiosity in the mind of a reader and to evoke images and scenarios that would gain a reader’s interest. Both Chakraborty et al. (2017) and Chen et al. (2015) identify clickbait headlines as a contributor to misleading, unsubstantiated and rarely corrected online news. On the other hand, according to Chakraborty et al. (2017) and Rochlin (2017), researchers and evaluators of clickbait are subject to a great degree of bias in determining what is clickbait and fake news.

Chen et al. (2015) and Chakraborty et al. (2017) discerned that previous research has largely highlighted the negative aspects of clickbait as news content as negativity, provocation, simplification and so forth. Authors such as Chakraborty et al. (2016) and Anand et al. (2017) tried to develop automatic clickbait detection systems and methods to limit the spread and noticeability of clickbait news articles. Blom and Hansen (2015), Chen et al. (2015) and Kuiken et al., (2017) noted that previous clickbait analyses have universally relied on examining content on various news sites in terms of words use and individual consumer behaviour and actions, without consideration
for readers’ perceptions of clickbait and news content, highlighting a gap in previous attempts to study clickbait.

2.1.1. Traditional headlines in a clickbait context

The main use of headlines has traditionally been to summarize the content of a news article for a particular group of readers, often highlighting different aspects of a story to meet the interests of a specific audience (Dor, 2003). Thereby, traditional news headlines are described as having two functions - to summarize the content of an article and highlight key points in the story (Kuiken et al., 2017).

When creating clickbait, however, journalists tend to use psychological methods to leave empty slots in the reader's mind after reading the headline, such as by using pronouns to refer to anticipated parts in the full article (Chakraborty et al., 2017). Thus, instead of focusing on summarizing the content of an article, clickbait articles often have headlines that withhold certain information or hide key facts from the audience to exploit readers’ curiosity (Orosa et al., 2017).

2.1.2. Question-based headlines

In general, humans are inherently curious and driven to learn and understand the world around them (Blom and Hansen, 2015). When faced with a lack of knowledge, people often begin to question themselves, which urges them to try and satisfy the need for information (Blom and Hansen, 2015; Woxenius, 2015; Chakraborty et al., 2016). To lure readers, journalists and marketers create clickbait based on cliffhangers, communicating statements that challenge the reader, for example, “did you think this product was good for you? Think again!” (Blom and Hansen, 2015).

These question-based headlines are used to generate attention, interest or curiosity by creating a lack of knowledge, often through self-referencing cues and personal pronouns aimed at the reader that trigger the readers to question their knowledge, beliefs or expectations (Dor, 2003; Blom and Hansen, 2015). According to Lai and Farbrot (2013), the value of question-based headlines is in generating interested readership through a persuasive message, but may be of questionable use today due to it being a more obvious example of reader manipulation.
2.1.3. Forward-referencing headlines

One of the stylistic techniques online news outlets use to create sensational headlines and pique curiosity in potential readers is forward-referencing (Blom and Hansen, 2015). Forward-referencing headlines are designed to tease the reader by using unclear pronouns or indicating how exciting the article hypothetically is and what the reader could potentially learn (Campbell, 1981; Blom and Hansen, 2015; Orosa et al., 2017).

Blom and Hansen (2015) and Chakraborty et al. (2017) outline that a typical forward-referencing article uses two forms of lingual construction - discourse deixis, the use of words that vary in meaning based on context, and cataphora, the use of a word or phrase to stand in for a later word. Thereby, Kuiken et al. (2017) highlights that authors of forward-referencing clickbait often use signal words in headlines such as "what", "this" and 'why", or pronouns "he or she" to hide information and create ambiguity that the reader will wish to resolve.

2.1.4. Fake news

Ordinarily, news content is expected to present accurate, objective and meaningful information to society (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001; Tandoc et al., 2017). However, in recent years, online news content has increasingly presented subjective, misleading or fictional content produced by advertisers, journalists or governmental institutions as objective fact (Chen et al., 2015; Tandoc et al., 2017; Rochlin, 2017). Collectively, this phenomena has been described as “fake news” (Chen et al., 2015; Tandoc, Wei Lim and Ling, 2017).

Fake news is a term that has been used in academic work since the 1930s, but has only recently gained mainstream popularity during the 2016 United States presidential election (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2016). The term has been used to describe many different concepts over the years, making it challenging to define (Bolton and Yaxley, 2017; Tandoc et al., 2017). Previously, fake news principally referred to parodies of news or satire directed towards popular issues, politicians and news organisations (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2016). During more recent years, however, the term has come to mean propaganda, manipulation, advertisement or unequivocal fabrications disguised as news (Tandoc et al., 2017). Rochlin (2017) adds that fake news encompasses any content that fabricates information, disseminate deceptive content or distorts actual news content.
Fake news is identified as being one of the main forms of clickbait, as the authors are free to write fiction and present it as fact, making it easy to create sensationalist and dramatic content (Bolton and Yaxley, 2017). Tandoc et al. (2017) add that fake news, are utilized primarily for financial and ideological reasons, as it is a convenient means to get readers to click and spread misinformation. When used in this manner, fake news is considered especially problematic as most online news readers only scan social media streams and headlines, not original news sources, removing the information from any deeper context (Orosa et al., 2017). Allcott and Gentzkow (2016) further add that due to the lack of easily identifiable features, fake news is notoriously tricky for readers and outside entities to identify.

2.2. Perceived news content quality

Perceived news content quality is identified as a readers’ perception of the level of quality within a news article, video, website or similar journalistic product (Orosa et al., 2017) Six aspects are believed to form the basis of perceived news content quality: completeness, diversity, impartiality, honesty, accuracy and relevance (Picard, 2004; Orosa et al., 2017). If these characteristics and qualities are not meet, it is considered that readers will perceive the news outlet as being of low quality, which may result in the loss of reputation, reader interest and loyalty towards the outlet, as consumers are prompted to search for new sources of information (Herbert, 2000; O’Malley and Soley, 2000; Hamilton, 2006). Indeed, as news is often identified as a personal and essential part of many peoples’ lives, news content that is deficient in any of these areas may severely reduce reader trust in the news outlet - and potentially news media in general (Macnamara, 2014; Hamilton, 2006; Karlsson, 2016).

Conversely, the higher the quality of journalistic content, the more loyal the reader is believed to become, encouraging them to follow the news outlet regularly and often inspiring good word of mouth about the outlet (Herbert, 2000; O’Malley and Soley, 2000; Macnamara, 2014; Karlsson, 2016). Indeed, loyal newsreader often stay with one news source their entire lives and such a trust generally affects how other family members and especially children see the news outlet (Hamilton, 2006).
2.2.1. Completeness

The completeness quality criteria relates to whether the author has thoroughly described all aspects of a story (Orosa et al., 2017). Completeness is mainly connected to the perceived depth of the article and how much information is given to the reader, if enough of the background is represented within the article and whether essential perspectives are considered (Moher et al., 1996; O’Malley and Soley, 2000; Hall, 2001). Completeness also encompasses the phrasing of the headline, as a headline should describe the content of the article and a reader should be able to understand the issue presented based on the title of the article alone (Hall, 2001; Orosa et al., 2017). If a story is described in insufficient depth, essential information may be lost and inaccurate or misleading depictions of the depicted events may be shared, which reduce the quality of the article (Moher et al., 1996; O’Malley and Soley, 2000).

2.2.2. Diversity

Diversity considers whether an article is founded on information from many different perspectives and people, and whether it is open minded or tells about unique stories that may not get attention otherwise (Herbert, 2000; Hall, 2001; Hamilton, 2006; Humprecht and Büchel, 2013; Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2016; Orosa et al., 2017). Diversity is strongly connected to honesty and it has been proven that the more diverse an articles sources are the more likely it is to be objective and unbiased, making it seem more honest (Hamilton, 2006; Humprecht and Büchel, 2013). This is also believed to allow online news outlets to publish stories that target different segments of readers, thereby garnering a larger reader base (Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2016).

While many thought that the continuous growth of online journalism would allow for a diversification of the medium, letting more freelance journalists and amateurs access platforms to share their ideas and articles (Hamilton, 2006; Dutton, 2009; Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2016). This actually occurred when news went online, but it did not have it’s solely positive affect, the ability to get more diverse sources and writers made it more difficult to regulate the news for editors before publishing (Herbert, 2000; Hall, 2001; Humprecht and Büchel, 2013; Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2016). Instead of diversifying to a more transparent market, online news has become more challenging to differentiate from non-partisan stories, advertising, PR and propaganda this lowering the quality of the news source (Hamilton, 2006; Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2016).
2.2.3. Impartiality

Impartiality indicates to what degree a news article is presented without a political, ideological, advertising or other angle, bias or prejudice (Barnhurst, 2013; Krebs, 2017). With any story, there is usually more than one perspective and news outlets should make the effort to present news without their articles being tarnished by individual thoughts, opinions and assumptions (Hall, 2001; Karlsson, 2016). Impartiality, or at least the illusion of impartiality, heightens the readers trust and perceived quality since the articles seem to be based on facts and that the information was not written to mislead (Barnhurst, 2013; Krebs, 2017)

Most newspapers display political affiliation, based on the publisher’s own political views and beliefs. While most readers are aware of the political prejudice the publisher might have, readers with divergent ideological beliefs are often offended (Picard, 2004). Furthermore, companies and advertisers may also exert influence over content published in news media through sponsorships, resulting in articles that seem primarily to act as advertisements (Karlsson, 2016; Krebs, 2017).

2.2.4. Honesty

Honesty reflects the level of truthfulness in a given article, such as whether the facts and details presented without manipulation or if the author is not overtly deceiving the audience (Herbert, 2000; Hall, 2001; Hamilton, 2006;). It is essential that journalists don’t invent, hide or exaggerate information as such actions can have a huge impact on society (Herbert, 2000; Hall, 2001; Hamilton, 2006). In extreme cases, such actions can even create life threatening situations, such as the Pizzagate shooting, when a man attacked a pizzeria after reading about an alleged human trafficking ring on premises (Shu et al., 2017). Furthermore, many consumers see news outlets as a trustworthy institution and assume news stories to be true without due consideration. Therefore it is vital that journalists deliver on these expectations of honesty to ensure the public is informed enough to make societal decisions (Hamilton, 2006; Armstrong et al., 2012; Palmatier and Sridhar, 2017).

2.2.5. Accuracy

Accuracy centers around presenting real events as they occurred and noting any information related to the main story, such as names or ages, correctly (Hall, 2001; Hamilton, 2006; Orosa et al., 2017).
Accuracy is described as an essential component of quality, as delivering accurate and up-to-date information enhances and maintains the credibility and trustworthiness of the article, and, by extension, the source (Herbert, 2000; Hamilton, 2006; Orosa et al., 2017; Palmatier and Sridhar, 2017). Inaccurate news tends to result in the public regarding the publisher as misleading or incompetent, and thereby there is a risk of losing readers’ trust (Hall, 2001; Orosa et al., 2017).

2.2.6. Relevance

A number of authors identified that the basis of news is the relevance and newsworthiness of the information, that is, whether the story in the article is of interest or importance anyone in society (Herbert, 2000; Hall, 2001: Hamilton, 2006). A journalist can publish an article that fits all other quality criteria, but if the article does not contain relevant or noteworthy information for the readers, it will likely not be seen as high-quality news (Hall, 2001; Orosa et al., 2017). Relevancy often varies based on the reader - some prefer politics, while others only read news within a niched segment, for example - but some articles can be identified as generally less newsworthy (Herbert, 2000; Karlsson, 2016). Headlines are seen as one of the main indicators of relevance and, if a headline does not reflect the newsworthiness of the article, the quality of the associated article is likely to decrease (Herbert, 2000; Hamilton, 2006).

3. Conceptual Framework

During the course of this research, it was identified that clickbaiting was outlined as a specific content marketing strategy. Clickbait news content itself was seen differently by various authors and most definitions were found to be rather nebulous, but all shared commonalities in that they identified clickbait news content as being news content that seeks to exploit curiosity to gain clicks and pageviews. Four different types of clickbait content were identified - the traditional format, the question-based format and the forward-reference format. Finally, a final category of clickbait was found to be fake news, which focused mainly on misleading or misinformative content rather than a specific design technique.

The concept of perceived online news quality was previously defined and utilized by several authors. However, the constituent variables that were used to determine perceived online news quality varied widely between authors and were largely based on measures applied to traditional
journalism without adaptation to the online context. As such, they were used as guidance, rather than exact variables, as it is uncertain whether they are exactly representative of the variables by which the quality of online news content was judged. The six most common variables that were identified were *completeness, diversity, impartiality, honesty, accuracy* and *relevance*.

Based on the content of the literature review, several assumptions were made to facilitate the construction of the following model for how clickbait use affects perceived news content quality (see figure 2.). Firstly, it was assumed that previous authors were correct in determining that there was a relation between clickbaiting strategy use by online news outlets and perceived news content quality. Secondly, it was assumed that the different categories of clickbait would have a different effect on the various aspects of perceived news content quality. Finally, it was assumed that the same criteria used to determine offline perceived news content quality were usable when attempting to determine perceived online news content quality.

In developing this model, each individual clickbait category was connected with each facet of perceived news content quality. To summarize each individual connection, each variable was drawn into one of two groups - either clickbait categories or perceived news content quality. Finally, to highlight the online context of this study, it was specified that these connections were made in an online context. Subsequently, this model was then used as the basis of the methodology chapter.
Figure 2. Research model for how clickbait strategies affect perceived news content quality through clickbait categories.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research approach

As it was found during this research that the relation between various categories of clickbait and perceived news content quality was largely speculative and reliant on theories and variables that were applied to non-online media, the veracity and depth of previous research in this area was highly questionable. Furthermore, this study relied on gathering in-depth knowledge on consumer perceptions of clickbait content and how different categories of clickbait affect perceived news content quality in an online context. Therefore, a qualitative approach was applied to further
develop existing understandings of clickbaiting, clickbait content and how the use of different categories of clickbait affected perceived news content quality. This is supported by Malhotra (2010) and Bryman and Bell (2015) who state that qualitative research is best utilized when seeking to gain in-depth knowledge of a problem or context, understand perceptions and attitudes, and when previous studies are insufficient to define a problem or framework completely.

During the course of this study, it was found that the theories of clickbaiting clickbait content and different clickbait categories by online news media and perceived news content quality had been previously defined by several scholars, but the constituent variables and relations between them had scarcely been touched upon in the context of online news. Therefore, the authors applied a deductive approach to this study by utilizing theory as a starting point to guide further research and derive assumptions from to assist in developing a greater understanding of clickbaiting, clickbaiting categories and the effect that clickbaiting may have on perceived news content quality. This choice is corroborated by Bryman and Bell (2015), who outline that a deductive approach, while largely utilized by quantitative studies, may also be appropriate in qualitative works when using previously developed theory to guide the study by helping build expectations and assumptions. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) further support this, outlining that a deductive design is frequently used in qualitative studies when seeking to understand specific, known variables or the relation between known variables, determining coding schemes and the relationships between codes and building predictions for further research.

4.2. Research design

This study largely focused on investigating a poorly explored relation between the use of clickbaiting marketing strategies by online news outlets and perceived online news quality through several clickbait content categories. Previous variables used by perceived online news quality were found to be derivative from studies conducted with traditional news media, with no adaptation or research to indicate that the variables were suitable for use in online contexts. Thus, an exploratory design was identified as a suitable approach. As described by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016), Malhotra (2010) and Bryman and Bell (2015), exploratory research is primarily used when the intent of a study is to reveal new ideas and research directions, expand or elaborate variables, give insight into specific problems and outlining suggestions, models and relationships for future
studies. According to Bryman and Bell (2015), exploratory research is particularly useful in examining broad variables and problems, and rendering them into smaller, specific variables and problems.

The purpose of this research was to explore the assumed relationship between clickbaiting strategies and perceived news content quality through consumer perceptions. In particular, there were many assumptions made as to the relationships and variables involved between different measures of perceived news content quality and different clickbait categories. As such cross-sectional design was considered to be the most appropriate method by which these assumptions could be investigate and utilized to build further theory. As Hair et al. (2011) and Bryman and Bell (2015) state, the cross-sectional method focuses on obtaining data during a specific moment in time as an expedient way to gain a deeper understanding into relationships, patterns, verbal expressions and perceptions. Bryman and Bell (2015) outline that this design is further useful when seeking to test assumptions and develop theories for future use.

4.3. Primary data

During the course of this research, it was found that previous studies contained insufficient data on the relation between clickbaiting strategy use by online news outlets and the perceived quality of online news content, having assumed this relationship existed and was correct. Furthermore, there was insufficient consumer-side data and different categories of clickbait to allow for a more thorough examination of the phenomenon. Therefore, it was sought to correct these deficiencies by gathering primary data directly from respondents. consumers through interviews and tailoring to the gathered data for the purposes of this study Bryman and Bell (2015) describe primary data as data gathered and analyzed by the researchers for a specific purpose - typically a study or to address a lack of data in some area of scientific research.

4.4. Sampling

For the purposes of this research, respondents were selected through the use of specific criteria - they were required to be readers of online news in order to provide relevant information and be above the age of 18, to comply with the needs of the study and the guidelines of academic ethics
(Bryman and Bell, 2015). Thusly, this study applied a non-probability sampling method to categorize desired respondents by a number of pre-set variables - age and online news readership status (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Saunders et al., 2016).

Furthermore, this study used a convenience sampling method to gather a number of subjects that were accessible to the researchers and who could deliver relevant and diverse information about how the use clickbaiting strategies affects perceived online news content quality (Malhotra, 2010; Bryman and Bell, 2015). To determine the amount of respondents needed for this study, Francis et al.’s (2010) and Bryman and Bell’s (2015) method of data saturation was applied, wherein a sufficient number of respondents is reached when data begins to repeat. According to Francis et al.’s (2010) a typical threshold to use in qualitative research is 3 repetitions - that is, when no new data is produced in 3 separate and sequential interviews, it is considered an acceptable level of data saturation.

To ensure all respondents fit the criteria of this study the authors devised qualifying questions that were asked at the beginning of the interview process (see Table 1). Furthermore, a number of additional questions were asked to help understand how each respondent utilized online news to ensure they could provide relevant content on online news outlets and set a baseline understanding of what each respondent expected from online news.

Table 1. Qualification questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Reasoning</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-probability sampling</td>
<td>Qualifying questions</td>
<td>In this research, the respondents must fit certain criteria to be considered eligible.</td>
<td>What is your age?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Do you read news online?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How often do you read news online?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What are your expectations when reading online news?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What online news outlets do you</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5. Semi-structured Interviews

Since this study relied upon acquiring highly detailed data on the relation between clickbaiting strategies and perceived online news quality, interviews were chosen as the most suitable method (Malhotra, 2010). By using interviews, a rich set of specific data could be collected, which then aided the development of an understanding for how the use of clickbait and, more specifically, different categories of clickbait affected the perceived content quality of online news articles (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

As gathering detailed and comprehensive data on a poorly-researched topic was essential to this paper, a semi-structured interview method was deemed the most suitable. Semi-structured interviews most often result in the highest quality of gathered qualitative data, as the interviewers can ask open-ended questions and alter or adjust questions during interviews (Malhotra, 2010). Furthermore, a semi-structured interview approach allows researchers to explore stated answers from interviewees by asking supporting questions or requesting to refine what respondents have previously stated (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

4.5.1. Pre-test

To ensure the highest quality possible in the data gathering process, several experts in the field were consulted in order to ensure the credibility and validity of the content of the operationalization and interview guide. Due to the lack of previous studies in this area, the questions in the operationalization were developed with basis in theory surrounding key concepts found in the literature (for a full list of questions, see Table 2).
Following each consultation, questions were revised to clarify meanings and remove ambiguity. Furthermore, a pilot study of four subjects was conducted before the interview collection period with the revised interview guide. During the interviews, several questions arose about specific definitions and corresponding questions.

The initial interview guide was found to be too complex and the questions were revised and simplified, focusing on the specific quality criteria outlined in previous research and the different clickbait categories. The articles used for the experimental part were also found to be too complex for some of the participants both due to specific topics and language barriers, hence the articles were revised so as to simplify and speed up the interview process. Furthermore, the authors endeavored to clarify the meaning of each facet prior to each interview, to ensure the respondents understood the question adequately.

4.5.2. Operationalization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Reasoning</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clickbait use</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>By studying how different categories of clickbait affect consumer perceptions of online news content quality towards the same content, an understanding of the effects of clickbaiting strategies can be developed.</td>
<td>Each respondent was given a control, fake news and several clickbait articles, some with altered headline to gauge how the use of clickbaiting strategies affect consumer perceptions of news content quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question-based</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forward-reference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fake news</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived news quality</td>
<td>Completeness</td>
<td>Completeness, diversity, impartiality, honesty, accuracy and expected relevance are all considered to be the most important aspects that affect consumers’ perceptions of content quality in an online news article.</td>
<td>How well would you say the headline represents the content of the article?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How thorough is the article, in your opinion?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How in-depth do you think online news articles are?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>news articles should be?</td>
<td>Do you feel that this article offers you multiple perspectives on the same topic?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impartiality</td>
<td>How impartial would you say this article is?</td>
<td>How important is it for online news articles to represent multiple viewpoints, in your opinion?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>How honest would you say this article is?</td>
<td>How important do you think it is for news articles to be unbiased?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>How accurate does this article feel to you?</td>
<td>How important is being truthful in online news articles, in your opinion?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>How newsworthy would you say this article is?</td>
<td>How newsworthy should online news articles be in your opinion?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(For more thorough operationalization, see Appendix A)

### 4.5.3. Conducting interviews

A total of 12 interviews were held prior to reaching the data saturation threshold with seven male and five female subjects who were found to be between the ages of 18 and 30. All interviews were
conducted individually, with one interviewer and respondent at a time live or over the internet via Skype and other chat programs, such as Discord or Facetime to help communicate over a large distance and at diverse times to ensure the respondents were comfortable with the setting and timeframe. Some respondents rejected voice interviews and instead offered to perform the interview through online correspondence. All interviews were conducted between April 26th and May 12th, 2018. The duration of the each of the interviews varied between 35 to 109 minutes.

To assist in the conduction of interviews and gathering of data, a number of practical examples were used. Five articles were selected intuitively based on perceived news content quality criteria as there were no clear guidelines to for rating article quality. This was done to ensure that participants were exposed to a wide variety of online news content from different publications, thereby ensuring that more comprehensive data could be gathered.

Article 1 was used as a control article to introduce consumers to the concepts utilized and to establish base expectations. While the option to use clickbait found on the internet was considered, it was chosen instead to alter the names of several articles to have greater control over the exposure respondents would receive to clickbait content and to make sure each example was depicted clearly and accurately. Articles 2-4 had titles altered to correspond to different clickbait categories, while Article 4 was presented as is. Article 3 was also misleading, as the headline described different contents to what was contained in the article (For the full list of articles, see Appendix B).

Where applicable, all interviews (see Table 3 for a full list of interviews) were recorded and, in some cases, notes were also made to highlight the reactions of respondents during the interview. All interviews were transcribed for analysis which consists of approximately 222 pages and are available upon request.

**Table 3: Participants of semi-structured interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Interview time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>42 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>42 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>56 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>44 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>109 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>37 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>49 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Correspondence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>97 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total time: 605 minutes

### 4.6. Content analysis

As the primary focus of this study was to explore respondents’ perceptions of how clickbaiting strategy use affected perceived news content quality based on pre-existing theory, a qualitative directed content analysis approach was chosen as the most appropriate.

By using qualitative content analysis, the data gathered from respondents could be analyzed in terms of its lingual components, such as keywords or word choice (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Thereby, the underlying themes and information could be uncovered to assist in comprehending opinions, attitudes and behavioral patterns, as well as allow for a deeper understanding of the studied phenomena (Neuendorf, 2017).

To integrate aspects of pre-existing theory, the directed form of content analysis was utilized to investigate the validity of predicted constructs and relationships (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Neuendorf, 2017). By doing so, previous theories can be extended or validated, and useful information - such as possible relationships or unexpected variables - can be obtained (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).
The analysis was split into four main steps, as recommended by Neuendorf (2017) - each interview was recorded and transcribed, with gathered data then categorized and coded to extract specific patterns according to the operationalization scheme and fundamental insights obtained from the respondents. Within the analysis, key quotes were identified, distinguished and grouped into themes and categories. Repetitions or similar statements were also combined and presented in the same column. As a final analysis procedure, the reduced data was studied for themes in accordance with previous theory, and similarities and differences among cases were explored to form answers to the research questions of this study and draw conclusions.

To aid in content analysis process, computer-aided qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti was utilized to gather, analyze and categorize complex phenomena in unstructured text. Through utilizing this software it was possible to uncover themes and categories in the text that were otherwise not identifiable or may have been overlooked.

4.7. Explanation of the coding process

According to Bryman and Bell (2015), coding helps to organize, structure and retrieve data which can be later on themed to specific patterns and drafted down as observational notes for the research analysis. As the primary focus of this study was to identify significant patterns and perceptions of perceived news quality in relation to online news based on answers gathered from respondents replies, a software-enabled coding method was utilized with the help of Atlas.ti software. By choosing this software, researchers were able to select various coding options, based on the researchers theoretical or analytic interests, rearrange gathered coding themes, observational notes and “read between the lines” in what was said during interviews.

The process began by submitting all collected data in separate file ordered based on participants assigned number and age. Respondent answers were split into general texts and article-specific texts to be able conceptualize gathered data for analysis. A fundamental aspect carried out in accordance with Neuendorf (2017) at this stage was to extract specific patterns according to the operationalization scheme and other observational notes. Based on perceived news quality components and clickbait categories the process of initial coding resulted in a list of approximately 288 codes, however afterwards codes were themed (see Appendix C), some of them merged or split
based on authors mutual decision and organized based on frequency in the Code Manager. Codes with high frequency were themed to additional groups - authority, transparency, educational value, entertainment and presentation (see Appendix D) Developed themes helped to capture significant elements in consumer perceptions of perceived news content quality and clickbait and develop classifications and meaningful insight to analyze data through the presented themes. The end result of coding and associated files may be obtained from the researchers upon request.

4.8. Quality criteria

This study followed Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Bryman and Bell’s (2015) four-factor approach to evaluating the validity and quality of qualitative research. These factors were identified as credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability.

Firstly, in accordance with recommendations set out by Bryman and Bell (2015), detailed records of the research and data gathering procedures were kept, multiple differing perspectives were obtained during data gathering and pre-testing, and a number of experts were consulted to attain credibility. Secondly, Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Bryman and Bell’s (2015) proposal to keep detailed and transparent records of the methods used to collect and analyze data and retain the data for outside inspection was followed to ensure dependability and transferability. Finally, this study supported Guba and Lincoln’s (1994) suggestion to keep as detailed a record as possible of the data gathering instrument development, analysis and data gathering process to reduce the influence of researcher bias and make sure of this study’s confirmability.

4.9. Ethical considerations

This study was performed in accordance with the four primary ethical rules and guidelines set out by Bryman and Bell (2015) - causing no harm to the participants, obtaining informed consent, not invading privacy and not deceiving the respondents. To overcome these key issues, advice from contacted experts was followed and suggestions outlined by Bryman and Bell (2015) utilized.

This study was designed with these concerns in mind and, as such, eschews any activities that could be dangerous or taxing, or endanger the mental, physical and emotional health of the participants.
Moreover, all data gathered from respondents was anonymized and only relevant information gathered to ensure none of the participants could be easily identified.

To not deceive or invade the privacy of the respondents, this study rejected the use of covert research and all participants were informed of the general goals, content and conduction details of this research. Respondents were further given the right to refuse participation in this study and to not answer any questions they did not wish to for any reason.

To obtain informed consent, each respondent was familiarized with the data gathering procedures, for what purpose the data was gathered and then assured of their anonymity and that the data would not be used outside of research purposes. Finally, all respondents were allowed to ask additional questions about the study and express verbal consent was sought to ensure that respondents were comfortable and agreed to the terms of this research.

5. Empirical chapter

5.1. Respondent background and general questions

All respondents were familiar with online news and most obtains news from online sources, though in varying frequencies. Participant 1 exemplified the most active readers: “...[I read online news content] every day. Multiple times every day”. Participant 7, on the other hand, typified the majority response when asked about reading the online news: “In general, yes, [I read online news] but rarely...”.

When asked about the sources from which they obtained news content, even though most respondents only occasionally sought out online news content, it was outlined that online sources were their primary avenue for accessing news content at all. Participant 2 stated: “the only news I get is from Facebook. [...] I don’t watch any telly, but my friends, if they tell me anything, I look it up. Usually google it, or Instagram, or if anything is trending...”, whilst a similar sentiment was held by Participant 9: “...usually it comes through my Facebook[...] The Independent. Then Buzzfeed UK” [...] I don't really look specifically for the news, they [the news] find me”.

30
Most respondents expressed that they exclusively used online sources though infrequently, often through downloaded apps or specific online news outlets, ranging from local papers like Smålansposten and Verslo Žinios to international brands such as The Knife Media and the BBC. As Participant 11 stated: “Recently, I’ve read the Knife media mostly [...] it kinda gathers news from other sites, but then tries to get to the core of what actually happened.” Some outlined that they reached news content through less specific platforms like Facebook and YouTube. Participant 3, for example, stated: “I watch the news show on Youtube, that's where I get most of my news.[...] But yes, also some articles”. Participant 5 added: “...svenska dagbladet. [...] I get push notifications on the phone and if it is interesting I go in and check...”. The local and national news was the most frequently read topics, mainly due to the respondents relying on local news apps to present notifications about important news topics.

Though the online news was the primary source through which news content was obtained, respondents expressed a wide range of opinions when questioned about their expectations regarding online news content and online news content quality. For example, Participant 6 stated: “[When I am reading online news] I am expecting to read at least one article that will in some way infuriate me. [...] And at least one article that will be so stupid that I'll just lose out laughing.” In contrast, Participant 10 asserted: “[My expectations are] to see what new events happened for the topics I’m interested in and how different news sites cover the same topic.” Some respondents even expected for online news to be a form of entertainment, such as Participant 9, who stated this when asked about his expectations for online news: “...[I expect] entertainment. Maybe expectations about truth.”

Many respondents indicated that online news should not be expected to have the same quality as printed news or news which was shown on the television, as anyone could publish online news. Participant 5 affirmed this by stating: “...No, I do not think it is the same quality, anyone can write an article online...”. A few respondents believed that online news was rarely accurate or checked by an editor, such as Participant 3: “It's probably not that accurate and has probably not been checked by an editor...”. Several respondents believed that online news largely consisted of irrelevant or unimportant news, or was presented in an intellectually insulting way. Participant 2, for example, stated - “I mean there's more important stuff in the world to read up on and it's kind of
sad to see that this is what makes it [onto online news outlets].”. Participant 1 was of a similar opinion, stating that: “It might work on dumb people like 99% of the world, but the smart 1% don't really care in that sense. I just hate it.”

Most respondents regarded online news outlets with suspicion, identifying it as a source for mainly less newsworthy and lower quality news. Participant 7, for example, expressed: “I don't really trust that they are as well-produced” Participant 1, on the other hand, stated: Multiple respondents described online news as proliferating clickbait or ”clickbaity” content, largely describing clickbait as any content that seeks to grab attention - however, respondents were split on whether such content was a detriment or benefit and when clickbait was appropriate. Participant 2 stated: “I think the headline is misleading. [...] Because it’s a clickbait”, while Participant 7 expressed that: “…[the] words “you won't believe” specifically are annoying because they are clickbaity”. Participant 1 said: “…those clickbait articles is more short-term entertainment for me, like, "I didn't know that. I can tell it for my friends". Participant 5 considered: “…because with the internet you have to grasp people's attention because you lose it quicker.” Participant 3 described online news content as: “…[online news content] could work like fishing for those who are interested for real while also still getting out news to people.”. Finally, Participant 11 expressed that clickbait often misled or confused readers: “And especially when it comes to news that is, it can be very difficult, especially if read fast to separate what seems like an opinion or a take on subject, and what is actually the objective reporting of what happened.”.

Respondents who found clickbait to be more interesting noted that such content gave them shorter, more entertaining stories. Longer, more serious or technical articles were found to be over-complicated or tiresome, such as in the case of Participant 7: “I guess the one that’s written in the document [clickbait] is more interesting… ”. Conversely, respondents that expressed a strong dislike for clickbait largely desired more in-depth, diverse, relevant and impartial articles, such as in the case of Participant 10: “The topic should match with the content of an article; article should give some background info about what happened and why; if applicable, all involved sides should be highlighted so that the readers could hear all opinions and draw a conclusion themselves.”
Figure 3. Participants view of clickbait.

Most respondents, especially those that enjoyed clickbait content, were more accepting of entertaining and entertainment-focused articles, stating that online news allowed for any individual to find articles they were interested in and that not being confined to paper or other mediums allowed for articles to be as diverse and in-depth as possible, such as Participant 11: “...I'm not sure if this is the correct way to answer, but this is online, it's already online, it's already easier to get more information about the topic, and especially... They can also list... You can often have a list of links for example directly on the same page of the same news article.”. Participant 9 stated: “Any news could be interesting for someone, it's a case of choosing the right portal for the news.”. Finally, Participant 1 stated: “I would say 50% [of my news] comes from these clickbait articles like, "Drake lost his shoes in the ocean". Something like that. The other 50% would be downloaded apps like smålands posten enough to know what is going on. I get news sent to me, whenever they post it. [...] and Facebook [...] I'm that guy just go straight reading not to care about the headlines. I do not really know why, but I really do care more about the information. [...] No, I don't believe it. Is it true? [...] but how it's written it had my attention 100%.” However, some had misgivings over the fact that such a wide spread of articles had allowed for tabloid journalism to become more prominent in comparison to other news, such as in the case of Participant 5: “...yeah, it depends
where you go looking for the news, and sadly it is more often the Hollywood [tabloid] news, those are the ones that pop up […], not real articles with real journalist but those that are a little more clickbaity.”

When discussing headlines, most respondents identified that headlines should generally fit the content of the article, but should also be interesting. Participant 1, for example, stated: “...it's [the headline] the first thing you often see, [...], but it's quite important. For me, I don't really care, but I know that people would care about the headline because that's what catches your interest.” Participant 10 also expressed a similar opinion: “A title sets expectations for the rest of the article. A bad or wrong title can draw wrong readers to an article”.

5.2. Traditional headline

In response to the modified traditional headline article (See Figure 4), respondents generally identified this article as being an entertainment-focused article with several stating it constitutes clickbait (See Fig. 5.). Participant 7, for example, outlined it like so: “I would definitely read the whole article because it seems interesting and definitely a crazy idea.”. Some of the readers identified the headline as funny and curious, as in the case of Participant 9: “I think it’s- it’s -it represents the heading and it’s a good size for this news, sounds funny, which you would read. [...] It's not necessarily true, but funny to read.”
Figure 5. Participants perception of quality for traditional headline article

Other respondents found the headline to be misleading since the headline did not represent the article’s content to the degree the respondents had expected from the headline, as in the case of Participant 5: “That they say the edge of space and back, did they not and THERE IS NO END TO SPACE. To the edge of space, so no... or maybe they mean where space begins, but I don't get that. [Do you find the headline misleading?] Yeah, I would agree with that.”. Some readers found this to be very aggravating since the information they had been hoping for never appeared, such as Participant 10: “I had no idea what the article would be about and it felt a bit misinformative too. The title gave an impression that the taster was in space, rather than on Earth”. Some respondents like participant 2 also found the headline vague, the description unbelievable and challenging to decipher the exact topic, “I just didn't understand the context of it, what it meant [...] But I think that could be just a trick to get me to read the entire article”.

Despite most participants rating the article highly on most scales, such as impartiality or honesty, the majority of respondents held a negative opinion of the overall article due to a perceived focus on entertainment and lack of newsworthiness. Participant 1 stated: “Entertainment, yes of course. Nothing more to it. There's no scientific experiment. It's just entertainment. Pure entertainment, yes.” Participant 6 had the following opinion: “Because I mean it is, is can be interesting, yes, but
at the same time I feel like this is a viral thing. This is something that mainstream media really shouldn’t have as a focus.”

5.3. Forward-referencing headlines

Forward-referencing headlines (See Fig. 6) were strongly connected to clickbait by most respondents, as Participant 12 explains: “First of all, if I see capital letters in a headline I normally just ignore this...”. Most respondents reacted negatively towards the forward-referencing headline (see Fig. 7), stating that it was inappropriate, misleading or condescending. When presented with the article, Participant 2 stated, “I think the headline is misleading because it’s a clickbait and it’s what you see very often on, for example, YouTube... “You will not believe the reason...”, it starts off as, which is kind of manipulative, because, it’s... why would I not believe it? [...] It just wants me to read up on an entire article [...] Which just goes through the entire article, and in the end they say okay, it’s because of this, and this, and this. [...] I just wish they were more upfront in the beginning so I wouldn’t be wasting my time reading it.” Participant 10 also elaborated on the subject by stating: “It is clickbait and gives a wrong impression. [...] One, the phrasing of the title just screams clickbait and low-quality news. Two, such articles are usually a waste of time due to the low quality of writing and reliability. Three, given the title, I’d expect the reason why the movie was banned in Cannes, but the article covers why it was banned in Kenya. wrong place, totally unreliable and subverting expectations.”

![Figure 6. Adapted forward-referencing headline](image)

The use of capital letters was strongly criticized by several participants, as many of them thought that this was a misleading or desperate attempt to grab attention. As Participant 12 explains: “First of all, if I see capital letters in a headline I normally just ignore this...”
Most participants expressed distaste or outrage that a forward-reference headline had been applied to an article identified as being highly newsworthy and relevant. Some respondents even went so far as to say that it damages the brand of the publisher, as Participant 3 explains:

“It's the same kind of headline that's on a lot of clickbait sort of articles so I thought, 'okay, this is busted, this is going to be some random crap', then it's about really serious issue and you're like... it doesn't feel right in a way, it doesn't match what I think. [...] I'm not going to like their [the publisher’s] stuff, and they might actually bring up some really good stuff in the future, but I'm not going to take them seriously, I'm not going to want to read them.” Others, however, expressed no opinion or did not care about the headline, such as participant 1: “I'm that guy just go straight reading not to care about the headlines. I don't really know why, but I really do care more about the information.”

Most respondents rated the article content as medium-to-high quality, especially in terms of relevance, however, the headline and presentation of the article were found to be highly questionable to many consumers as it gave an impression of a low quality, clickbaiting article. Participant 5, for example, said: “I think it's a shame, because the headline makes you think that this
is just another trashy article, but actually it is real news. It is important news, it is about, I can read that it is homophobic and I can see that they are oppressing gays.” Participant 11, on the other hand, was more critical of the writing style, stating: “I feel like it's had a lot of elements all over the place, and it mentioned some really important things but taken out of context. It's feels hard to kind of place this news in my head.” Many respondents also believed that the article was slanted heavily against Kenya and perceived homophobic attitudes, and while some were forgiving due to the importance of the issue, others stated that bias detracted from the quality of the article. Participant 10, for example, said: “The quality suffers due to opinion pushing (and bad title), imo [in my opinion]. The writer gives the article an overall feeling of "How dare you protect your morals and family values?! You should be praising this movie about gays, because gays and uncensored television is good!". Too much bias, rather than just covering the facts.”

Most readers noticed the misleading element in the headline, such as Participant 6 who said: “No, this... headline goes against everything that I see as quality headlines. This is pure clickbait, this is just... This headline is written just to give me an impression that isn’t even in the article.” Respondents that preferred entertainment, however, generally missed the misleading element, like Participant 8: “I guess it kind of represents okay, because the reasons, and they actually explain the reason why it was banned, so- and they- they didn’t mention it, because I guess it’s like a mystery. If you would go there and then read about it, that’s why they didn’t mention it, and so I guess it’s okay”.

5.4. Question-based headlines

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 8.** Adapted question-based headline.
Respondents were split on the quality of this article and the quality of the headline. Whilst some news readers found the question-based headline (see Fig. 8.) to heighten their interest and made them more curious about the topic (See Fig. 9.). Participant 5 typified this response: “When it’s a questions, it’s... intriguing. Like, are they going to flip? I don’t know. Ehh, so yeah I would say it's good headline.” Some respondents, such as Participant 8, stated that the question-based headline created a more interesting story to read: “I guess the one that’s written in the document [see Fig. 6] is more interesting, because if I would read- okay, ‘it’s not gonna flip then’, - okay! It’s not gonna flip, so why should I read? ‘Everything’s going to be fine. So, okay. I just skip it”.

Figure 9. Participants perceived quality of question-based article.

Others, however, were more critical, as they felt that the question-based headline took away from the information and the expectation became less about new information and more about answering the question. Participant 2 illustrated this by saying: “I think they should have explained what the consequences [in the adapted clickbait headline], ...or what it actually means for the magnetic poles to flip. I have no information about that, what that would mean. They say mass extinction, they say impending doom, whereas it’s meant to dramatize the situation, but I don’t really know what it means...”. Some respondents who felt that the headline misrepresented the article believed the question to be a lure to bait readers which displeased some of the participants. This felt like the publisher only cared about the views, which made them lose all interest in the article, as described
by Participant 2: “I don't understand why anyone put downtime on this. They might make money or something [...] It's ridiculous. [...] He [author] clearly put time into this to mislead someone. I think if this is a real article he'd be successful at this”.

In terms of quality evaluation, the respondents were split evenly between evaluating the question-based article as a high, mediocre and low-quality article. Respondents that did not consider it clickbait, but rather an interesting way to market content, enjoyed the presentation - but noted the lack of authority and clear sourcing, such as Participant 10 who said: “like the question-arguments-conclusion approach, but the used sources are vague and probably unqualified to speak about this topic.” Respondents that treated the article as clickbait generally had more annoyed reactions that focused on the presentation, the lack of authority and lacking educational value, such as Participant 6 who said: “Seeing that it's a question you would think that the article would give you a definite answer and it doesn't really give you a definite answer, it says maybe it will but if signs point maybe not. You're like, what?” However many respondents reacted positively to the presentation of news sources, such as Participant 7 who stated: “with sources and stuff, it's believable. They talk a bit about the people who believe that the world will go for world death. The apocalypse will ever-- They also have an extra twist, but they also then argue against it”.

5.5. Fake news

The fake news article (see Fig. 10.) was found to be the article considered to be the lowest quality, even though some of the respondents did not identify it as a fake (see Fig. 11.). All respondents found it as improbable, but even when asked about trustworthiness some found this to be trustworthy, such as Participant 10 who stated: “Well, it seems the goal was to inform the readers about a sudden development. It seems that information was lacking at the moment of writing, so I
cannot really say much else about the quality." Despite the general lack of trust, the presentation and writing style was found entertaining to many respondents, such as Participant 1 who said: “I liked the last one with the Pope.-it's short, and it covers a lot. It's impartial. The headline represents the text. The other articles when you go down to the depth and it's bullshit, it just lost my attention. I don't really care about-- I find that very entertaining. Even though their Pope article wasn't true, it's the best written.” However, the majority opinion was negative in nearly every dimension, especially presentation, with Participant 3 exemplifying the most common concerns: “Oh my God, where is the punctuation? [...] It connects pretty well [to the headline] in being it sounds like a joke, [...] ...and we expect it to be bullshit I guess.”

**Figure 11.** Participants perceived quality of Fake news article

A primary source of criticism was the implausibility and ridiculous, manipulative nature of the article, as described by Participant 2: “I just think it’s one person writing this, just to create up a fake story. [...] it feels very, very partial [...] Secondly... “We are losing followers and we have to go a step further in the search for modernization of the church.” There are no apostrophes, Around that sentence, so it's not... It’s not Pope Francis saying that, instead it’s the writer’s article that is
saying that, so it’s his beliefs. [...] It’s using words such as “totally outdated”. [...] Lowest quality-wise was definitely the last one.”. Sourcing and transparency was the second problem, as highlighted by Participant 9: “Well, because it’s- it’s kind of, I don’t know, it’s not even a statement, it’s…someone writes this, and I’m not sure even if it’s truth or not. It’s kind of big thing, and there are no like confirmation. Which day, when happened? When, what, why, who? And doesn’t feel really real”. Indeed, the participants that enjoyed the article the most, on the other hand, highlighted it’s entertaining elements, such as Participant 6: “As said my hunch is that it’s satire. Satire isn't honest, it's there for comedy”.

5.6. Quality criteria

5.6.1. Completeness

In general, the respondents found completeness an important element of online news content quality and criticized some of the articles for being unfulfilling in terms of the depth of information presented about a subject. For example, Participant 3 stated: “They probably should have gotten more in-depth around the consequences of what might happen. So, yes [the lack of completeness lowers the quality].”

Participants who were more partial to clickbait content generally preferred shorter, overview articles to in-depth pieces, such as Participant 5 who stated: “I wish there was more background and less numbers [in regard to control article]”. Consumers most against clickbait generally preferred deep, rich and highly detailed stories, such as Participant 10 who stated: “The topic should match with the content of an article; article should give some background info about what happened and why; if applicable, all involved sides should be highlighted so that the readers could hear all opinions and draw a conclusion themselves.”

However, most participants identified that the expectation of completeness varied from article to article, with entertainment articles needing the least completeness and science articles needing the most. Participant 11 stated: “Yeah, if it were an outlet focused on for example finance, I would expect a lot more in-depth when it came to... stocks, and the history of the company and its owners, and any famous workers in them.” Indeed, the lack of additional data on specific subjects could be found misleading, such as with Participant 2: “For the uninterested, yeah. I think. But for the person
who is a bit more tech-savvy, or just reads up on stuff like this, or has heard anything. I think this is a bit misleading”.

5.6.2. Diversity

Similarly to completeness, respondents regarded diversity as an integral part of quality. For example, with the traditional headline participant 10 stated: “It is important [to be diverse in the reporting], where possible and appropriate. In this case, I would like to hear what other people besides the Youtuber had to say about this whole event.”.

However, the respondents outlined that diversity was important, but the importance of diversity may vary from article to article Participant 6 offered a thorough opinion: “Because it depends on the topic, per se. Like, for example an article about... Let's take a business article for example, like the one we're discussing. There it could be interesting to hear a different perspective, it could be interesting to hear you know, from other people, their viewpoints. How did Musk handle the... the meeting, and what do they think will happen as a result of this meeting? But in an article about, eh, like... Let's take the volcano in Hawaii. That... I don't think it would benefit to have different perspectives because in the end you kind of want... There aren't too many perspectives, to be able to use to use. To use! To make it into a good article, if you understand how I mean.” Similarly, Participant 11 stated: “Yeah. If it’s... If it’s meant to be like an overview, like this news seems to be, I would say yeah [diversity improves the quality of an article]. But there are a lot of news that are written very personally...”

5.6.3. Impartiality

The majority of the participants indicated that complete impartiality was impossible to achieve a story would always have perspective in it and be partial, but trying to stay as impartial as possible was key. Participant 12 stated: “I think that if a newspaper is not unbiased, I wouldn't read it.” Participant 2

Although impartiality was seen as an important factor for the news to be trustworthy and reliable, some participants indicated that the degree of impartiality varied from article to article, and outlet to outlet. Participant 1 gave this example: “I think when you have a big audience, you should really,
really think of what you write [...] When you have that big influence on the market and political agenda and everything like that, you should be impartial because just by telling the truth”.

Other participants indicated that sometimes partiality was preferable in certain situations and that one could learn more from a slightly partial article since this could inform the reader from new perspectives. Participant 6 stated: “In most cases, yes [partiality would lower the quality of an article], but not in this case, because I feel like it... [sigh] I feel like I'm gonna contradict myself by saying this, but the impartialness of this article actually highlights an outdated law.” Participant 11 highlighted: “So, even though for example I mentioned before I like political news to be impartial, but at times, the very exact opposite, like, very biased news about politicians or political movements can be incredibly enlightening.”

5.6.4. Honesty

Honesty was seen as one of the most important quality criteria by all respondents, as exemplified by Participant 1 who stated: “Honesty and real facts, that's the most important thing [...] Imagine publishing lies and representing it as news, image doing that. That wouldn't work because the people would be mind ****** [laughs], and it would destroy the company, everything like that.”. Participant 3 also added to the need for honesty in news reporting: “Why it's important to be honest? You could start some pretty terrible **** if you weren't honest. It would divide people and that's not really okay pushing someone to your own agenda because you like or don't like something.”

This was mirrored in especially the fake news article were many were astounded that the article has been published was clearly so untrue to them, but leeway was given due to it being very entertaining for numerous participants. As Participant 6 stated: “Satire isn't honest, it's there for comedy.”

5.6.5. Accuracy

Accuracy was also identified as one of the most important criteria, close to honesty and completeness. As Participant 3 states: “[Accuracy is important] For the similar reasons as truthfulness, they're very similar in themselves but they're differently described. It's because if you're not accurate then the news isn't really news, you're not telling the truth, you're not telling
However, respondents highlighted that accuracy was not always key, such as in the case when news was reported quickly about a significant development. Participant 10 explains: “I can live with typos in the text or some information missing at the time of writing an article, as long as it gets updated once more information is available. Hiding info or providing wrong data is bad in my book.”

5.6.6. Relevance

Relevance was identified by consumers as being of prime importance online, as the lack of restrictions on paper and the ease of reaching highly specific audiences allowed for almost any article to be newsworthy to someone. As participant 2 stated: “...there is always someone who wants to read about it. To be honest anything is newsworthy.” Participant 1 identified a similar opinion by stating: “For the new world that we live in, every piece of information is important for someone.” Some, however, believed that mainstream online news should maintain some sort of standards, such as Participant 10 who stated: “Promotion of a specific person's channel and bakery, no concrete reasoning behind this publicity stunt and lack of other information about this event [low quality since it is irrelevant].”

However, online the relevance of articles was perceived in two ways - individual and public relevance. Individual relevance centered around the relevance that each article held for a specific person, as online content allowed for individual articles to be aimed towards specific groups of people. Participant 6 exemplified this phenomenon by stating: “[newsworthiness tesla article] For me personally, I mean, [the newsworthiness is] average. [...] I'm not that interested in cars... [...] So it is difficult for me to judge the quality”. On the other hand, there was also a strong understanding of public relevance - that is, how important or newsworthy a given article is to the rest of society or a large swathe of society. Participant 3 describes this as: “It's very important for a lot of people I think when it comes to industry and financial stuff and stuff. Very important, I think.”

5.6.7. Transparency

One of the primary quality criteria that affected quality was transparency, the level of which the author showed where information and data came from, how it was gathered and the degree to which it was directly referred to in the text. Participant 11 gave an example of this phenomena: “Yeah,
yeah. It [quotations underlining transparency] feels like a quick test of how honest they are, like if they aren’t give like at least somewhat honest representation, what was actually said and the context in it, already can speak volumes”.

This aspect was heavily related to honesty, completeness and accuracy as most participants stated it in conjunction with one of the previous elements. Participant 6, for example, stated: “But at the same time I would say that it is thorough enough because it links... It cites sources. [...] It LINKS to everything I need know essentially to get an understanding for the article. Which you know I feel like, okay they might not have had the time to write out everything. Or maybe they were told that they needed to summarize it to a certain extent, or something like that. So they did what they could...”. Participant 10 expressed his misgivings with a lack of transparency, by stating: “...it is hard to say if the presented information is accurate or if the sources are reliable. [...] The presented viewpoints seem truthful enough, although it is weird why some sources were selected.”

5.6.8. Educational value

Educational value was found to be a variable of some importance that connected to individual and public relevance if the article taught the reader something even something frivolous, the quality was generally seen as being higher for most consumers. Participant 2 stated: “...I think science news is always interesting. Because it's very relatable. Everyone can relate to it because it's happening right now. Eh, and when it's about Earth it's about everyone that lives on it, so I think more people should read up on it.” Participant 11 stated: “When I get the newspaper I want it mostly serve a so-called higher purpose, like education and enlightenment.”

5.6.9. Entertainment

Entertainment was found to be related to quality when it came to certain online articles. Less serious articles that scored highly in most areas were found to be of lesser quality if they were not entertaining. Participant 1, for example, stated: “Clickbait, oh ****. This is exactly what it is. [...] Entertainment, yes of course. Nothing more to it. There's no scientific experiment. It's just entertainment.” On the other hand, articles that scored low on many quality criteria could be evaluated more positively due to being entertaining. Participant 11 stated: “It's kind of a tie [for the best article] between Pope Francis and, well, I kind of want to choose that word document “Are the
Earth’s magnetic poles about to flip?” but the real actual article isn’t that great, so I have to say, Pope Francis”.

5.6.10. Presentation
The visual and text presentation of the article, such as text flow, grammar, word choices, typos, writing style, tone and so forth were found to affect quality. The quality of the presentation noticeably affected how each participant perceived the quality of an article. For example, when presented with the fake article, Participant 2 said: “…Secondly, it says “abril”. What the hell? Abril 2, 2018. Sr Lobo, I don’t know who that is, and hashtags are “bible”, comma, “Francis”. Pope with a small P. Okay. […] And just, the grammar of this entire thing is really bad. So it's not really trustworthy, I don’t think it’s real […] It’s using words such as “totally outdated”. It’s not formal at all, using words such as “totally”.

Regardless of content, the presentation seemed to immediately affect the initial perception of quality each reader had towards an article. Participant 10, for example, stated: “The phrasing of the title just screams clickbait and low-quality news.”. Participant 9 also had a similar opinion about one of the articles: “It's not one piece, it's like it’s just cut off from a bigger article. It's too many short sentences, too many lines it's hard to read because it's a bit many pieces. [this lowers quality]”

5.6.11. Authority
Multiple respondents, especially those that disliked clickbait and online news, also outlined that an issue with online news is the lack of authoritative or otherwise knowledgeable writers and that this was a detriment to the quality of news content. Participant 1 said: “…if I want to go in the depth, I would find someone who really knows his thing and not a reporter who interview 10 different people, and every person said a different thing…”. Participant 11 expressed similar opinions by saying: “my first idea is "Why should I listen to some Joe Shmuck" for the matters like this, like, what proof, what credence does he have for these claims? Just mentioning an institution and a title, well at least he has this thing behind him to give him some credence, and a reason to listen to this…”.
Participant 2 further indicated that the authoritativeness of an outlet had a great effect on quality by stating: “The credibility of the source is connected to how, like, established they are”. At the same time, the interviews showed that when an article was perceived as being of low quality the participants expected a less professional source to have published it, and if the sources were perceived as a high-quality authority, readers lost trust in the source and the reputation of the source was affected. Participant 3 stated, for example: “What is this, buzzfeed? [Identified that it was another news source] I feel they're dragging themselves down, that is sad I guess because you don't want that”.

6. Analysis

6.1. Participants and general observations

In coherence with Chen, Conroy and Rubin. (2015), Palau-Sampio (2016) and Orosa et al., (2017) stating that news consumers are now primarily relying on online news, it was found that most respondents were online news users and even those that used online news the least generally obtained news from online sources primarily. Some even noted that they exclusively obtained news from online sources and checked multiple times a day to ensure they were constantly up to date.

A large portion of consumers identified that they despised clickbait, while a relative minority were considered as being positive towards clickbait content. This is in sharp contrast to previous theory, developed by authors such as Chakraborty et al. (2016), Palau-Sampio (2016), Orosa et al. (2017), as clickbait had been assumed to be a largely negative phenomenon. However, despite such a group being identified, the only characteristic that was definitively shared by those who enjoyed clickbait were their focus on obtaining news exclusively online news media, whilst more skeptical respondents tended to have a mix of sources. Age, reading frequency, expectations, outlet choice and other news source types were found to have no effect on clickbait preferences.

In accordance with research carried out by Blom and Hansen (2015) and Kuiken et al. (2017), respondents had a largely diverse opinion towards clickbait and were significantly more permissive than previously established expert expectations. While numerous consumers were identified as having a generally negative opinion towards both clickbait and online news in general, with most
respondents identifying that they did not trust online news, a significant amount only utilized online news and sought primarily entertainment-focused content rather than serious news. Indeed, many respondents even identified that they preferred online news media due to the freedom it brings content creators and the ability to reach desired topics and news articles whenever needed.

Clickbaiting, however, was found to be largely despised, in accordance with Palau-Sampio (2016) and Orosa et al. (2017), as most respondents identified clickbait as being low quality, “cheap” and otherwise inferior content. Some respondents even considered clickbait to be so undesirable that it would stop them from reading the newspaper or news outlet that published the clickbait.

**6.2. Clickbait strategies**

**6.2.1. Traditional headlines**

Even though the traditional headline amused many of the participants, many immediately identified the traditional headline as misleading and “clickbaity”, in difference to established theory by authors such as Chen et al. (2015) who outlined that recognition of traditionally-phrased clickbait may be difficult. The omission of key details in the article headline confused some consumers as to the topic of the article and while consumers were interested - many ended up being disappointed by the lack of a conclusive resolution.

The description “sent to the edge of space” in combination with the unimportant topic of garlic bread made the readers doubt the trustworthiness of the article, which resulted in low quality evaluations from most respondents. However, participants who perceived this article as entertaining were more likely to rate it higher due to it being considered less a news article and more an entertainment piece..

Participants with stronger views on clickbait and news content quality, on the other hand, found the exaggerated language, such as “sent to the edge of space”, as very misleading which lowered the quality of the article in their eyes. Another thing that disturbed these participants was the phrase “taste test” in the headline - these participants did not feel like the article contained enough information about this activity. This followed theories set out by Dor (2003), Kuiken et al. (2017) and Chakraborty et al. (2017), who indicated that the success of a traditional headline is dependant
on the chosen phrasing of the headline focus in the article and relevance in the story. By omitting details, clickbait authors were perceived as being manipulative and thus lowering the quality of their online news content.

### 6.2.2. Forward-referencing headlines

While the theory on forward referencing was rather sparse, Kuiken et al. (2017) highlighted that this was a common way to create ambiguity the reader would wish to resolve. However, most respondents saw this headline as misleading and unclear, which made the reader expect something completely different to what actually occurred in the article. Even prior to knowing about the intentional misleading, most respondents had identified that the headline made the article seem “cheap” and “low quality”, likening it to clickbait.

Despite Blom and Hansen (2015) and Orosa et al. (2017) outlining that a forward-reference headline was meant to create excitement and interest, the headline was quickly understood to be manipulative - which only made consumers uneasy about reading it. The expectation of a low quality article along with the phrase “you won’t believe the reason why” and the use of excessive capital letters made many of the participants unwilling to even read the article expecting to be disappointed even before reading the article. When they then later started to read the article and identified relevant and interesting content the participants got even more upset since the low quality of the headline had misrepresented an important topic they would have dismissed because of the clickbaited headline.

### 6.2.3. Question - based headlines

Question - based clickbait headlines were seen as more acceptable than either of the other types, as questions appeared to news readers as being more genuinely inquiring and encouraging curiosity, rather than directly manipulating. Indeed, some respondents indicated that they felt like a more describing headline might actually give the entire articles plot away, and then they would not feel like it was necessary to read the article at all. This was found to be largely in accordance with Blom and Hansen, (2015), Woxenius, (2015) and Chakraborty et al.’s (2016) theories on consumer curiosity towards question-based clickbait, some consumers were triggered to question their knowledge and seek answers.
This group of respondents was found to be mainly more well-disposed towards clickbait and online news in general. These respondents were found to be mostly obtaining their news through social media or larger search engines, reading what ever caught their eye briefly before clicking.

Participants who cared a great deal for the news, as described by Dor (2003), and who had a low opinion of clickbait were much more strategic in their search for news, however, searching for informative headlines that would describe the article and any specific information they wanted. These participants identified that a question based headline did not give the reader relevant data and largely had a negative perception of online news content that employed this strategy if the answer was not explicitly provided in the article.

6.2.4. Fake news

In comparison to Allcott and Gentzkow (2016) and Orosa et al.’s (2017) suggestion that fake news is problematic and hard to identify, many consumers identified the use of a fake news strategy quickly, largely due to the use of more satirical and outrageous claims within the fake news article. However, despite a majority of respondents identifying it as fake news, a significant minority could not tell apart even a very outrageous fake news article, which lends credence to Allcott and Gentzkow’s (2016) assertions.

Even if the headline was identified as being generally representative of the content, most respondents still regarded it as clickbait and fake news and had a negative reaction towards it. Indeed, the relevance of the headline was secondary to honesty and accuracy, which were deemed to be more important. However, a number of participants who were predisposed positively towards clickbait found this article to be very entertaining regardless of whether it is fake or not, and identified this as their favorite article.

In general, participants were able to predict the false nature of the fake news article based on several key lacking areas - presentation, completeness, transparency, impartiality - and due to a lack of notoriety. The quality, writing style and layout of the text was the first indicator for most respondents, who identified typos, odd phrases, informal language and similar low quality language markers as being a significant hint towards it being false content. Furthermore, a lack of depth was observed by some respondents, as there was very little information, and the information presented
felt heavily redacted and taken out of any context it might have had. The story also posted no sources nor hints as to where the information came from, which hinted to most consumers that it was likely not true. Finally, the heavy and easily noticeable slant evident in the text was noticed by some respondents, who identified it as a sign of lacking professional and amateurish content that is likely to be false.

6.3. Model development

Based on the observations made about the different variables of perceived online news content quality in this study, it was found that the previous model outlined by Picard (2004) and Orosa et al. (2017) was applicable to online news media, but did not constitute the entirety of key variables. As such, an adjusted table (See Fig. 12) was devised to account for the discrepancies between the information presented in the literature and the findings of this study. While all previous variables were found to be applicable to the online space and were identified by respondents as being affected by clickbait use, completeness, diversity, impartiality and accuracy were highly context sensitive and varied from article to article, and outlet to outlet. Honesty was the only variable which was expected to be consistently high throughout.

Completeness was found to be principally based upon not only the intended audience - with respondents who regarded clickbait positively opting for less completeness and more contextual information, while respondents who disliked clickbait preferred a more thorough approach - and the topic in the article. Serious news was regarded as requiring greater depth, while topics that were uninteresting to the respondents or largely entertainment-focused needed only the bare minimum.

Similarly, the importance of diversity varied largely based on article topic, as certain topics - especially those that dealt with factual information alone - were identified as needing less diversity than others. Similarly, highly personalized news, news that required specialist knowledge to comment upon and entertaining news had lesser diversity expectations.

Most respondents had somewhat low expectations of impartiality, as it was accepted that perfect impartiality was impossible and journalists were heavily subject to bias. However, impartiality was also found to vary from outlet to outlet and article to article. Outlets with a wide reach were
expected to have a very high standard of impartiality, while small enterprises had reduced expectations. Similarly, while impartiality was generally considered important for most news, in certain situations it was seen as preferable to inform the reader or offer new perspective. Accuracy, while also important, was identified as being extremely important and almost on the level of honesty. However, due to the nature of the internet being able to facilitate near instant reporting, there was leniency given to the accuracy of certain articles - so long as they are kept updated and continuously revised.

In terms of new variables, relevance was split into two - with respondents identifying individual and public relevance as being significant to their online news experience. This was found to be due to the role of the internet medium in being a facilitator of news content dispersion, where individual articles could be brought together with individual readers, thereby raising the importance of each article being personally relevant to the reader to be considered high quality.

Finally, a number of other quality criteria were ascertained - transparency, educational value, entertainment, presentation and authority. Transparency was found to be the key variable in the online context, as universally all consumers expressed a preference for being given access to information and data to allow each reader to form a personal opinion and verify the claims made by the journalist. Entertainment was found to be a secondary variable which could enhance or decrease the quality perception of an article based on how it is used contextually and what type of news it is applied to with serious news being affected negatively by humor, while more light-hearted subjects were positively impacted by the addition of entertainment. Presentation was a third variable that is identified as instrumental in setting initial expectations and contributing to the perception of overall quality and professionalism. Educational was a less important variable, but consisted of how informative an individual consumer found the content of the article, with articles that contributed to a reader’s learning becoming more endearing and positive in the eyes of the reader. Finally, authority was a final new variable that consisted of the knowledge and reputation of the author of an article and the outlet that published it. Some consumers outlined that they desired to see the credentials of someone writing on complex subjects to ensure that the arguments were well-understood and substantiated, and others identified that the credibility of the outlet as an authority on a given subject would help ensure that an article was received as trustworthy.
Figure 12. Adjusted research model for the effect of clickbaiting strategies on perceived news content quality.
7. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore how the use of clickbait marketing strategies by online news outlets affected consumer perceptions of online news content quality. This was done by undertaking a literature-guided exploration of how different categories of clickbait content affected consumer perceptions of online news content quality through analyzing their effect on perceived news content quality.

It was found that the use of clickbaiting strategies strongly influenced the quality of news content as it is perceived by most consumers. The more obvious and manipulative clickbaiting, the more likely it was to disappoint and off-put potential readers, with many consumers even becoming confused and uncertain of what to expect when presented with clickbait content. While there were acceptable uses of clickbait (such as in the case of question-based headlines or satirical fake news), the majority of consumers showed significant distaste for clickbaiting techniques, which they regarded as leading to disappointment and unfulfilled expectations.

However, this research also revealed that clickbaiting as a phenomena is significantly more complex than previously assumed. There was a clear divide between two groups of consumers - those who disliked clickbait and those who were positive towards it, as those who were positive towards clickbait seemed to engage with clickbait as a form of entertainment rather than news content, while those who disliked clickbait sought to avoid it entirely as content that was likely to disappoint or displease them. However, there were no predictors found for what caused individuals to like clickbait content beyond exclusive online news usage.

Finally, a model was devised for what facets of perceived online news content quality were affected by categories of clickbait. It was found that all previous measures of perceived news content quality were affected by the use of various clickbait strategies, to a greater or lesser extent based on the context. Furthermore, a number of new variables were uncovered that assisted in identifying the criteria of quality by which consumers judged online news content.
8. Implications

8.1 Practical implications

The results of this study imply that online news outlets should be cautious when utilizing clickbait news content strategies, as they were found to be highly suspect and resulted in many disappointed or frustrated consumers. While clickbait is seen as entertaining content to a certain level by a number of consumers, the usage of clickbait is highly context sensitive and requires that expectations set out in headlines and other clickbait content are fulfilled to avoid consumer disappointment.

Further, this study implies that there is a significant difference between the different clickbait strategies. Question-based headlines were seen in the most positive light as a strategy that encourages curiosity, though utilizing this strategy also requires for the question to be answered to avoid disappointing consumers. Forward-reference headlines and fake news were found to be the most difficult strategies to use effectively as they were more easily detectable as manipulation and could upset consumers if they do not have sufficient substance behind them.

Finally, it was identified that there were numerous content quality criteria that online news content had to fulfill to be seen positively by consumers. While all the traditional measures of journalism applied, a number of new variables - such as presentation and transparency, - were found to be key to developing quality content in online spaces.

8.2 Theoretical implications

The theoretical findings of this study largely contradict previous theories, such as those set out by Chen et al. (2015), Chakraborty et al. (2016), Palau-Sampio (2016) and Orosa et al. (2017), who have expressed clickbait as a negative phenomenon universally. According to data gathered during this research, however, there are two broad groups of consumers in regards to clickbait - those who treat it as an entertainment piece and find it generally positive, and those who treat it as news and are generally disappointed.
Furthermore, this study applied the perceived news content quality model in the online context as described by Picard (2004) and Orosa et al. (2017). By doing so, it was recognized that there were several other variables that were instrumental in determining the quality of online news content - such as transparency, entertainment, authority and so forth. Finally, it was determined that the different facets of perceived news content quality were largely dependent upon context and audience.

9. Future research

This study offers numerous avenues for future research. Firstly, the model created in this study should be further studied and tested to identify both the validity of the findings of this study and the applicability of these results in a wider societal context. A quantitative study should also be carried out to test the potential relationships between the different categories of clickbait and perceived news content quality.

Secondly, further studies should be undertaken into each strategy individual to identify how it affects perceived online news quality specifically to better understand the ramifications of utilizing these strategies. This should also be followed by an examination of the consume groups that enjoy and don’t enjoy clickbait to further understand the audience that enjoys clickbait as entertainment and those who do not, as well as the reasons behind it.

Future studies should also seek to investigate the context-sensitive nature of perceived online news content quality, especially in the context of clickbait to better understand how variations of journalistic quality measures vary based on different contexts.

Finally, this study did not account for a wide variety of clickbait - such as videos, lists, pictures and so forth. Future studies should seek to encompass more types of clickbait and more ways to engage with clickbait content - such as social media, online platforms such as YouTube and so forth.
10. Limitations

The primary limitation in this research was found to be a language barrier that existed between the interviewers and respondents - while the respondents spoke English, it was not a primary language to many of them and, as such, could have resulted in miscommunication or misunderstanding. As such, future studies should attempt to use subjects that are fluent in English or conduct the study in a local language.

A secondary limitation was the articles utilized. Though they were selected to offer a wide variety of quality for consumers to consider, no definite guidelines could be found that concretely described how the quality of articles should be identified. Therefore, all articles were selected intuitively and may be subject to unforeseen variations in quality. Finally, the names of some articles were changed during this research to offer consumers a clear depiction of each clickbait technique - however, these may not have been accurate depictions of each type and may have caused confusion. Consequently, future studies should more carefully select example material and seek to identify ways to determine article quality. Furthermore, headlines that are misleading may constitute a separate study as adding a misleading element may have affected results.

Finally, due to the qualitative nature of this study, any results found should not be considered generalizable for the whole population and may constitute minority opinions. Moreover, researcher bias may have been a factor in the interviews and the design of the study and the results may have been influenced by the opinions held by the researchers to some extent. Thus, future studies should consider quantitative means to depict how the use of clickbaiting strategies affects consumer perceptions of online news content quality and further studies undertaken to investigate the findings of this study.
Reference list


Macnamara, J. (2014), Journalism–PR relations revisited: The good news, the bad news, and insights into tomorrow’s news. Public Relations Review, 40, pp. 739 - 750


## Appendices

### Appendix A - Table of definitions

### Table I. Operational definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Operational definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clickbaiting</td>
<td>News as clickbait</td>
<td>A content marketing strategy that encompasses several design techniques to create online news content that seeks to take advantage of consumer curiosity to gather clicks and pageviews for increased revenue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Headlines that describe the content in the article, but omit essential details to create curiosity in the reader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question-based</td>
<td>Headlines that are phrased as a question to create curiosity in the reader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forward-reference</td>
<td>Headlines that offer unclear allusions or hypotheticals towards the content in the article.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fake news</td>
<td>A form of clickbait news content that relies on false, manipulative or fictional news stories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived online</td>
<td>Completeness</td>
<td>The degree of thoroughness and depth present in a news article.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>news content quality</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>The amount of different viewpoints that are covered by a news article.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impartiality</td>
<td>The degree to which a news article appears to be free of partisan opinions and bias.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>The degree to which a news article appears truthful and trustworthy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>The degree to which a news article correctly represent reality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>The degree of newsworthiness associated with a news article.</td>
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</table>
Appendix B - Clickbait articles

In this section, we present the articles that was used. Each article was presented with an adjusted or “clickbaiting” headline and without identifying marks of the journal it came from.

**Article 1 - Tesla (Control article)**

*Tesla remains optimistic despite another record loss*

Tesla said it will be profitable in the second half of 2018 - but only if it can make 5,000 Model 3 cars every week. Reaching that goal is in doubt given the electric car maker produced just 2,270 in the last week of April.

Tesla is striving to produce more cars as questions mount about its financial situation. The company posted a record quarterly loss of almost $710m (£523m) for the three months to March - more than double the same period last year.

Revenues jumped 26% to $3.4bn, but it continued to burn through cash. Tesla said it would cut capital spending this year to less than $3bn as it focuses on "near-term needs".

Elon Musk's firm also told investors that it will deliver more of its expensive luxury models in the second half of the year.

Tesla's manufacturing challenges persist, however. It suspended Model 3 production in mid-April in a planned shutdown and expects a total of 10 days of downtime this quarter.

The company is trying to improve its manufacturing process of the Model 3, its newest car aimed at the mass market.
"We made a mistake by adding too much automation too quickly," Tesla told investors on Wednesday. Efraim Levy, an analyst at CFRA, said the results were "mixed", noting the decline in the firm's available cash.

On a call with financial analysts, the strain over the firm's finances was apparent.
Mr Musk refused to answer a question about the number of Model 3 reservations, and cut short an exchange about Tesla's spending plans.

"These questions are so dry. They're killing me," he said, moving to take questions from a private shareholder and owner of a finance-focused YouTube channel rather than an institutional analyst.
Mr Musk also criticised media coverage of accidents involving driverless cars, saying reports gave a misleading impression about the safety of such vehicles.

Tesla shares, which had declined slightly at the start of the call, fell about 5% in after-hours trading in New York.

Mr Musk said investors should be focused on the long-term and dismissed concerns about rapid stock movements.

"If people are concerned about volatility, they should definitely not buy our stock," he said.
Despite its heavy losses the company is worth about $51bn - roughly as much as General Motors, America's biggest car maker.

Jamie Albertine, an analyst at Consumer Edge, said in a note: "Steady, a word not often used in describing Tesla, is becoming more of a reality as management continues to chip away at its 5,000 units per week Model 3 production goal." He estimated the company would hit that target in the second half of 2018.
Garlic bread is one of the most delicious snacks around, but what happens to the taste when it’s been sent to the edge of space?

YouTuber Tom Scott sent half a loaf of garlic bread to the edge of space, then taste-tested it against bread that had stayed on Earth.

The video sees the bread float 35km up to the stratosphere – the second major layer of Earth’s atmosphere – on a weather balloon. The bread is then sent back down and tasted by a group.

The amazing video has over 973,000 views and shows Scott with a group, including maker of the bread Barry Lewis, and Steve Randall from Random Aerospace, launching the snack into the stratosphere.

The group tracked the balloon with a GPS to find the garlic bread’s predicted landing spot. Scott said it’s rare that space-sent food actually gets eaten, and when the group tested the bread, they found it had an icy middle due to the stratosphere’s freezing temperatures.

Scott said: “This started as a conversation in a pub a few weeks ago, and turned into one of the more ridiculous videos I’ve ever done.

“We send home-made garlic bread skyward on a balloon; exposed it to the stratosphere, 35km up; successfully returned it to Earth in a protective box; and then ate it.

“It tasted… cold.”
Scott has over one million subscribers to his YouTube channel. As well as tasting garlic bread from the stratosphere, he is also famous for launching an entire fireworks display at once.

**Article 3 - Kenya**

NAIROBI — Ten days ago, when Wanuri Kahiu’s film “Rafiki” was announced as Kenya’s first entry at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival, Ezekiel Mutua, head of Kenya’s Film Classification Board, could barely contain his pride.

“She is our icon when it comes to film,” he said of Kahiu, while on air at HOT 96 FM’s Nairobi studio. In his estimation, Kahiu stood beside Hollywood mega-star Lupita Nyong’o as Kenyans in film who should be celebrated.

“We are just handling the classification issue,” said Mutua, who controls what Kenyans can and can’t see on television and in theaters, “so we don’t end up, you know, have a situation where it is nominated, and we are not celebrating it here.”

But anyone who knew the content of the film and knew Mutua’s politics would have felt deeply confused. “Rafiki,” which means friend in Swahili, is about two young women who are best friends and fall in love. Mutua is well-known for inflammatory remarks about LGBT people. In Facebook posts, he has described homosexuality as “filth” and said it was a Western concept intent on “destroying our children.” His board regularly bans content that recognizes LGBT people’s existence.

On Friday, his KFCB announced that the film would be banned in Kenya.
“Anyone found in its possession will be in breach of law,” the board said in a tweet. It is unclear exactly which law the film itself or possession of it would contravene, though gay sex is illegal in Kenya and punishable by up to 14 years in jail. A petition to overturn that law is underway in a Nairobi high court.

KFCB spokeswoman Nelly Muluka tweeted a justification for the decision. “Our culture and laws recognize family as the basic unit of society,” she wrote. “The (board) cannot, therefore, allow lesbian content to be accessed by children in Kenya.”

The board then unveiled its own hashtag, promoting its decision: #KFCBbans LesbianFilm. Kenyans of all persuasions on issues of sexuality flooded Twitter with their opinions. KFCB retweeted dozens of those who expressed derision toward LGBT people.

But in a world where more and more people have access to content over the Internet, the KFCB has power over a diminishing amount of content.

To Kahi, it seems like she’s being singled out because she’s Kenyan and the KFCB wants to make a statement about Kenyan culture.

“I’m really disappointed because Kenyans already have access to watch films that have LGBT content, on Netflix, and in international films shown in Kenya and permitted by the classification board itself,” she told Reuters. “So to then just ban a Kenyan film because it deals with something already happening in society just seems like a contradiction.”

In its announcement banning the film in Kenya, the KFCB said it gave Kahi two days last week to “remove the offensive classifiable elements,” a request that Kahi rejected.

The film is based on the award-winning 2007 novel “Jambula Tree” by Ugandan author Monica Arac de Nyeko, and will debut at Cannes next month.
“Jambula Tree is about the relationship between two young girls in a very complex social setting in a community which does not look kindly at that relationship,” Arac de Nyeko told the BBC’s Network Africa soon after it came out. “It's a combination of struggle and the power to dream and love.”

Homosexuality is taboo for many Africans, especially those who profess Christianity and Islam, which includes the vast majority of Kenyans. As with dozens of former British colonies, Kenya inherited its laws against gay sex from Victorian-era penal codes written by colonial administrators. In the light of the KFCB’s decision, some of Mutua’s praise for the film on the radio earlier this month seems strangely pertinent.

“Film, and art, should be a mirror of society,” he said. “We may react with shock and consternation, but we forget it is actually a reality.”

**Article 4 - Magnetic poles**

**PHYSICS**

Are the Earth’s magnetic poles about to flip?

Ryan F. Mandelbaum

Yesterday 3:00pm • Filed to: DOOMSDAY

Despite recent panic surrounding the potential reversal of our planet’s magnetic poles, new evidence suggests it’s probably not the impending doom it sounds like.

Implausible as it sounds, public worry about the poles flipping seems to be ever-present, typically backed by real evidence of the Earth’s magnetic field weakening. These outbreaks of concern almost always come with doomsday threats. But really, you don’t have to worry.

It turns out that the current behavior of the field “is not characteristic for the beginning of a reversal or excursion,” i.e., a quick position change to the field’s poles, study author Monika Korte from the German Research Centre for Geosciences told Gizmodo.
The Earth has a magnetic field, generated (we think) by motion in its core. A recent book and the subsequent press coverage mention that the field’s poles have flipped hundreds of times in Earth’s 4-billion-year history—but haven’t done so in almost 800,000 years. The field has been weakening around 5 percent per century since 1840 and is especially weak in the South Atlantic. Some think this could signal an impending flip, which could herald mass extinctions and power outages.

The authors behind the new paper found two times in the Earth’s geologic history where its magnetic field looked similar to the way it does today, based on past data. It had big spots of weaker field, like the one over the South Atlantic. Both times, the poles didn’t switch, nor did they experience an excursion where they quickly snap to a different position, according to the paper published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

That being said, if the South Atlantic magnetic field anomaly persists, and if the field continues to weaken, it could still be bad for electrical grids or satellites passing overhead. We humans still rely on the magnetic field as protection from high-energy radiation from space.

Others agreed with the paper’s importance and conclusions. “The analysis shows that the magnetic field showed similar structures in the past that did not lead to an extreme event, so the South Atlantic Anomaly cannot be taken as an indication that we are in the early stages of such an event,” Sanja Panovska, another researcher at the German Research Centre for Geosciences who was not involved in the study, told Gizmodo.

As with any research based on modeling, there are limitations, such as missing data. “Although it is the first model using a reasonable data coverage, there are still large gaps in global data coverage with palaeomagnetic sediment records that intrinsically limit our knowledge about the global field behavior,” said Panovska. And given that this is a model, the Earth may not behave the way scientists expect.

But you still shouldn’t worry about the magnetic field flipping. As Nadia Drake writes for National Geographic, it’s a process that occurs on incredibly slow timescales, thousands of years or so. We don’t even have proof that such a reversal would lead to mass extinctions, either.
So, as usual, the end is not imminent. That goes for civilization in general, of course, since you’re probably not living past 120.

**Article 5 - Pope Francis**

Pope Francis has surprised the world today by announcing that The Bible is totally outdated and needs a radical change, so The Bible is officially canceled and it’s announced a meeting between the highest personalities of the church where it will be decided the book that will replace it, its name and its content. Some names are already being considered and the one that has more strength is “Biblia 2000”.

“We can not keep trying to talk our public in a totally new world with a book that has thousands years. We are losing followers and we have to go a step further in the search for the modernization of the church. to rewrite the word of God, even if it is only the Old Testament, in which there are certain passages that it is better not to repeat.”

The news has fallen like a bomb among the most conservative, who consider this idea the definitive clue of madness of Pope Francis.
### Appendix C: Coding theme keywords and description

**Table II.** Coding theme keywords from in-depth semi-structured interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding theme</th>
<th>Keywords</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td><em>friends and family, old, well known, well established, expertise</em></td>
<td>The author or publisher of an article are seen as an established authority on a given subject, or specialists in their area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td><em>Sources, authors, researchers, quotes, statistics, facts</em></td>
<td>The article is perceived as clearly depicting the information, facts and sources the article is based on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational value</td>
<td><em>Learning, information, relevant, informative, important.</em></td>
<td>The article is perceived as being informative and as capable of teaching the reader new information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td><em>Funny, entertaining, soft news, interesting, crazy.</em></td>
<td>The article is perceived as interesting or amusing, written with levity or with the goal of entertaining the reader in mind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td><em>Layout, pictures, structure, grammar, design, spelling, writing style</em></td>
<td>The way the article is presented, encompassing the visual elements of the web page, the layout and pictures, grammar, text flow, writing style and so forth..</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D - Adopted Atlas.ti theme development through visualizing