The Influence of Writing Style and Events in Headlines on the Choices of Students in the Publishing Program, Department of Graphic Engineering and Publishing, in Reading News Content

Fani Nur Jannah, Mohammad Fauzy

Printing Technology and Publishing Department Politeknik Negeri Jakarta

Depok, Indonesia

fani.nur.jannah@grafika.pnj.ac.id

Abstract—*This study examines the influence of writing style and the presented issue in news headlines on the choice to read the content of the news. The study investigates the extent to which the writing style and events in news headlines affect the reader's decision to continue reading the news content. If there is an influence from either or both of these variables, then the news headline is confirmed as a predictor for the reader's choice to read the news content. Publications on the research of the effect of news headlines in journals over the past 10 years (2013−2023) have not been conducted. However, understanding the influence of news headlines on the reader's choice can explain why certain news articles in online media are widely read or abandoned by readers. The study was conducted on students in the Publishing Program, Department of Graphic Engineering and Publishing, Jakarta State Polytechnic, in the academic year 2023/2024. The research findings indicate that whether the headline uses an active or passive voice significantly influences the reader's decision to read the news content, with a Pearson Chi-Square value of Asymp. Sig. (2-Side) = 0.00, which is < 0.05. The influence occurs in news articles containing factual events as well as articles containing opinion events in the headlines. This research utilized a quasi-experimental design. Treatments were prepared using two types of news headlines. The results of the treatments for each type of news headline on the readers were analyzed using the Chi-Square statistical method.*

Keywords—*news headlines, news choices, active-passive sentences*

I. INTRODUCTION

News is a report. According to Musman and Mulyadi, news is a report of an event. An event never becomes news if it is not reported.[1] News is presented periodically through mass media. Every morning, every afternoon, every evening, or even continuously for 24 hours, news is updated with the

latest events. News is presented in a standard format consisting of: News headline, Dateline, Lead, Body, and Closing. Therefore, the headline is the first element. The news headline serves to introduce the content of the news to trigger the reader's decision to read the news or skip it. Hence, there are three criteria that must be met by a news headline:

1. The news headline is written briefly, with a maximum of 7 or 12 words.
2. The news headline is written in an active voice.
3. The news headline must contain facts. If it includes an opinion, the source must be mentioned. Observations of 30 news headlines from two online media sources, Kumparan and CNBC News, on March 28 and 29, 2023, showed the following:

1. The majority of news headlines have a length of 7 to 12 words. The percentage in CNBC News (60%) is higher than in Kumparan (40%).
2. The majority of news headlines use active sentence structures. The percentage in CNBC News (52%) is higher than in Kumparan (48%). Meanwhile, for the use of passive sentences, the percentage in Kumparan (60%) is higher than in CNBC News (40%).
3. The majority of news headlines contain opinionated content. The percentage in CNBC News (56.5%) is higher than in Kumparan (43.5%). In terms of factual content, Kumparan (71.4%) has more than CNBC News (28.6%).

4. The majority of news headlines present economic events. The percentage in Kumparan (55.6%) is higher than in CNBC News (44.4%). For religious and political events, CNBC News (66.7% and 80%) have more than Kumparan (33.3% and 20%).

These results, while not sufficient to represent all news headlines from Kumparan and CNBC News, due to the limited number of sampes, have raised questions:

How are the word count, active-passive sentences, and factual content in news headlines from Kumparan, CNBC News, and other online media channels?

If in CNBC News the news headlines are longer than those in Kumparan, and they contain more active sentences and opinionated content, do the headlines in CNBC News encourage readers to read the content more than the headlines in Kumparan?

Do the events within the news, such as economic, religious, and political events, also play a role? If so, how significant are these events in influencing the reader's choice of a news article?

These questions can be formulated into a single problem: to what extent do the writing style (word count, sentence structure, and factual content) and events in news headlines determine the reader's choice to read the content? Therefore, this research focuses on the influence of writing style and events in news headlines on the reader's choice to read the content.

If there is an influence from these variables — writing style (word count, sentence structure, and factual content) and events in news headlines on the reader's choice to read the content — then the writing style and events in news headlines gain reinforcement as predictors of the reader's choice to read the content. The issue then arises, which of these two variables has the most significant impact?

This issue, as per research publications, especially regarding news headlines in journals over the last five years (2017–2023), has not been investigated. Yet, research on the relationship between news headlines and readers can explain why news articles in online media are either read or abandoned by their readers.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. News and News Headlines

News is a report of events that hold news value. It can also be referred to as the latest information. Types of news writing include straight news and feature news. [2] News presented through mass media is always structured in a standardized format. Taufiqur Rahman[3] mentions that the structure of news consists of a headline, dateline, lead, and body. In more detail, according to Nadhya Abrar[4] and Kris Budiman[5], the structure includes a headline, dateline, lead, and body.

Headline: Often accompanied by a subheadline to (1) help readers immediately understand the reported event, and (2) highlight the news with the support of graphic techniques.

Dateline: Some consist of the name of the media, the location of the event, and the date of the event. Some consist of the name of the media and the location of the event. Its purpose is to indicate the location of the event and the media's initials.

Lead: The first paragraph of a news article, which is the most crucial element of the news. It encapsulates the entire news story in a brief manner.

Body: It narrates the reported event in concise, compact, and clear language. The body is an elaboration of the news.

The headline is located at the very beginning of the news structure. The function of the headline is to introduce the content to the reader, allowing them to quickly determine if the news is useful or not. Therefore, there are several requirements for a headline. Mulyadi and Musman quote LKBN Antara, explaining that:[6]

1. The news headline is written in a concise sentence, no more than 7 words.
2. The headline reflects the main content of the news summarized in the lead.
3. The news headline uses uppercase letters.
4. The news headline is preferably in an active sentence form.
5. The headline contains facts.
6. Quoted headlines can begin with the title of the source if the source is a well-known figure.
7. Avoid news headlines with ambiguous meanings.

B. State of the Art on News Headlines

Studies on news headlines published between 2013 and 2023 show that news articles in newspapers or online media still overlook several rules for news headlines. Faraba and Setyaningrum examined the headlines of 10 popular Line News articles on Line Today media on December 4, 2016. Using a descriptive analytical method, the results showed that out of 10 headlines, 6 clauses experienced ellipsis or omission: 4 clauses omitted the Subject (S) and 2 clauses omitted the Predicate (P) along with S+P.[7] These omissions create bias in the meaning of the news headline. This includes the use of metaphors found by Saeful Zaman in Kompas headlines on July 16, 2020. The result was that 46% of the 39 main headlines contained metaphors, ranging from the most common, ontological metaphors, to structural and orientational metaphors.[8]

Metaphors are used to facilitate understanding, reinforce meaning, and conceptualize something more tangible and relatable to the reader. However, news headlines should avoid metaphors with connotative meanings. In the same newspaper, Agus Hermawan used content analysis to study headlines related to Basketball in Kompas during March 2018. The result was that the written language in Kompas headlines contained contextual and conceptual meanings. "The headlines often use unique terms, which are difficult for other people to comprehend."[9]

The use of metaphors with connotative, contextual, and conceptual meanings clearly leads to biased comprehension. This also occurs in the headlines of online media articles that aim for clickbait. The study by García, Gallur, and López demonstrated that general newspaper headlines from 28 EU member countries used "clickbait" as a new strategy to attract online media users to click on hyperlinks that employed non-journalistic values. Consequently, headlines are not only key elements for providing information, but also essential elements for persuading readers to stay on the page as long as possible. They confirmed the presence of clickbait in most newspapers. This undermines traditional journalistic values in headline writing and editing. The study concluded that general newspapers in 28 EU member countries generate clicks not through quality content, but rather — in almost half of the cases — through provocative, sensational main page headlines designed to exploit user curiosity.[10]

Several spelling errors were reported by Kurniasari, Andrianti, and Isnaini,[11] who examined a headline from the Tribun Jabar newspaper's April 2018 edition, "Isu TKA Digoreng Menjelang Pilpres" (Issues Regarding Foreign Workers Heated Up Before the Election). The qualitative descriptive analysis method showed six spelling mistakes in the Indonesian language in that headline: (1) 1 acronym error, (2) 2 capitalization errors, (3) 1 word truncation error, (4) 1 conjunction error, (5) 1 name writing error. Phrase and word errors were found by Siti Jubei in Warta Kota headlines during April-May. The content analysis method used showed that word pathology in Warta Kota headlines reached 23% out of 500 words. This pathology is still relatively low and can be tolerated.[12]

Omissions of subjects and predicates in headline writing, the use of metaphors, the use of contextual and conceptual meanings, spelling errors, phrase and word errors referred to by Jubei as pathology, and clickbait certainly make headlines contain double meanings, biases, and blur the meaning of the headline. This has a negative impact on readers. However, quantitative studies with two or more variables related to reader response to these news headlines are rarely found. Piotrkowicz, Otterbacher, and Markert conducted a study to determine if the characteristics of news headlines influence the popularity of news shared on social media. They analyzed news headlines from The Guardian and New York Times in April (11,980 headlines), July (13,806 headlines), October (5,074 headlines), and December (5,011 headlines) of 2014. The results showed that news prominence value, style conciseness, and headline simplicity were highly correlated. Prominence value, proximity, and sentiment of the headlines were also rated very positively by respondents when clicking on the main headlines. This means that news containing prominent events influenced readers to click on the headlines.[13]

Research on news headlines quantitatively using correlation tests is quite limited. Ekawati and Wijayanti conducted a qualitative descriptive study examining word ambiguity in the headlines of the daily newspapers Tribun, Kedaulatan Rakyat, Suara Merdeka, and Radar Kedu from April to July 2017. Its implications on the comprehension of 50 readers were assessed through interviews with groups of students and teachers as well as groups of elementary school graduates and dropouts. The study found lexical incongruities including homonyms, polysemy, and semantic opposition, as well as grammatical incongruities due to incorrect punctuation usage. As a result, 20% of educated respondents and 90% of uneducated respondents struggled to understand the news headlines effectively.[14]

Quantitative-correlative research with two or more variables like the two recent studies are rarely found in publications over the last 10 years. In general, the hypothesis that the writing style and events presented in news headlines.
influence readers is currently an assumption based on qualitative-descriptive assessments and has not been quantitatively-surveyed on readers, let alone experimentally. However, errors in news headline writing need to be identified for their causes and solutions. According to Mulyadi and Musman, news headlines serve as advertisements for news. They introduce the content and prompt readers to decide whether the news is useful or not, to read it or skip it. [15] The model for the relationship between the researched variables is as follows:

Based on the above description, it can be proposed as a hypothesis: There is an influence of news headline writing style and events in news headlines on the reader's choice to read the content.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

A. Research Method

The research method employed in this study is quasi-experimental. The subjects of the research consist of third and fifth-semester students in the Publishing (Journalism) program, Department of Graphic Engineering and Publishing, Jakarta State Polytechnic (PNJ) for the academic year 2023/2024. They comprise 125 third-semester students and 130 fifth-semester students. Each group received news treatments with the following title designs:

- Group 1 received treatment 1, which includes news headlines using active voice containing factual events and news headlines using active voice containing events (mixed) opinions. Additionally, they received treatment 2, which includes news headlines using passive voice containing factual events and news headlines using passive voice containing events (mixed) opinions.
- Group 2, as the control group, received treatment 2, which includes news headlines using active voice containing factual events and news headlines using active voice containing events (mixed) opinions, which were then transformed into news headlines using passive voice. Similarly, they received treatment 2, which includes news headlines using passive voice containing factual events and news headlines using passive voice containing events (mixed) opinions, which were transformed into news headlines using active voice.
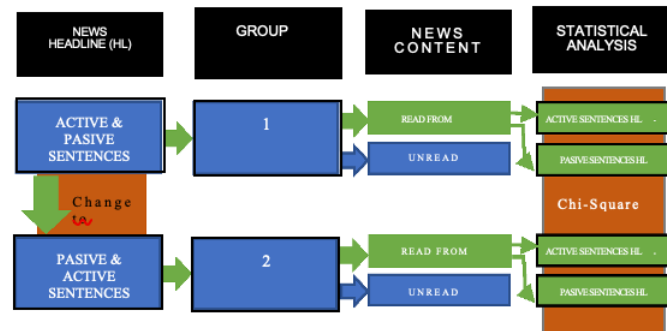

Fig 1. Research Flow Chart

B. Population and Sample

This study aims to address the Influence of Writing Style and Events in Headlines on the Choices of Students in the Publishing Program, Department of Graphic Engineering and Publishing, Jakarta State Polytechnic for the academic year 2023/2024. The population of the study consists of students in the Publishing Program, Department of Graphic Engineering and Publishing (TGP), totaling 255 students (125 in the third semester and 130 in the fifth semester). All students were included in the study through a census. However, in practice, only 75 third-semester students and 91 fifth-semester students responded to the questionnaire.

C. Data Analysis Technique

The objective of this research is to measure the Influence of Writing Style and Events in Headlines on the Choices of Students in the Publishing Program, Department of Graphic Engineering and Publishing, Jakarta State Polytechnic, in Reading News Content. Since the variables "Writing Style in Headlines" and "Events in Headlines" are discrete/categorical, and the variable "Choice in Reading News Content" is also discrete/categorical, statistical analysis using the Chi-Square test was employed.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The influence of headline writing style, categorized into the use of active and passive voice, on the two groups of respondents in reading news content yielded the following results:

In Group 1 (Table 1), news content with headlines written in the passive voice was relatively more read by respondents compared to headlines written in the active voice. In Group 2, when the writing style of the news headlines was switched from active to passive and vice versa, news content with headlines in the active voice turned out to be more read by respondents compared to news content with headlines in the passive voice. Therefore, whether the headline is written in active or passive voice influences respondents in reading the news content. The Chi-Square calculation shows a Pearson Chi-Square value of Asymp. Sig. (2-Side) = 0.000, which is < 0.05. The influence of headline writing on the choices of students in the Publishing Program, Department of Graphic Engineering and Publishing, in reading news content is highly significant.

TABLE 1. THE INFLUENCE OF NEWS HEADLINE BASED ON
SENTENCE PATTERNS

No.	NEWS HEADLINE	GROUP				Total	
		1 n = 75		2 n = 91			
		f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Active Voice	20_a	26,7	70_a	76,9	90	54,2

2	Pasive Voice	55b	73,3	21b	23,1	76	45,8
	Total	75	100,0	91	100,0	166	100,0

Each subscript letter denotes a subset of contain categories whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 level.

In Group 1 (Table 2), news content with headlines containing factual events was relatively more read (56.0%) by respondents compared to news content with headlines containing opinions, which was read by only 44.0% of respondents. However, after changing the writing style of the news headlines from active to passive and vice versa in Group 2, there was a change in the number of respondents reading the news content. News content with headlines containing factual events was read by fewer respondents, only 46.2%, compared to news content with headlines containing opinions (53.8%).

Therefore, changing the writing style of headlines containing factual events, from active to passive and vice versa, influenced the reading activity of Group 1 respondents, leading to a decrease, and the reading activity of Group 2 respondents who read headlines containing opinions increased. However, this change was not significant. The Chi-Square calculation shows a Pearson Chi-Square value of Asymp. Sig. (2-Side) = 0.207, which is > 0.05. Thus, there is no significant influence of factual or opinion content in the events mentioned in the news headlines on the choices of students in the Publishing Program, Department of Graphic Engineering and Publishing, in reading news content.

Table 3 aims to provide a more detailed explanation of the influence of writing in active and passive voice on respondents, controlled through the content of factual or opinion events in the news headlines. The data indicates that in the headlines containing factual events, in Group 1, news content with headlines written in passive voice was relatively more read by respondents (64.30%) compared to news content with headlines written in active voice. Meanwhile, in Group 2, news content with headlines written in active voice was relatively more read by respondents, 85.70%. The same trend occurred in headlines containing opinion events.

TABLE 2. THE INFLUENCE OF NEWS HEADLINE BASED ON CONTENT EVENT

No.	NEWS HEADLINE	Group 1 (n = 75)		Group 2 (n = 91)		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
1	headlines containing factual	42a	56,0	42a	46,2	84	50,6
2	headlines containing opinions	33a	44,0	49a	53,8	82	49,4
	Total	75	100,0	91	100,0	166	100,0

Each subscript letter denotes a subset of Event categories whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 level.

TABLE 3. THE INFLUENCE OF NEWS HEADLINE BASED ON SENTENCE PATTERNS CONTROLLED BY THE CONTENT EVENTS

No	NEWS HEADLINE	Facts Group 1 (n=) f	%	Facts Group 2 (n=42) f	%	Total f	%	Opinions Group 1 (n=33) f	%	Opinions Group 2 (n=) f	%	Total f	%
1	Active Voice	15a	35.70	36a	85.70	51	60.70	5a	15.20	34a	69,38	39	47,56
2	Pasive Voice	27b	64.30	6b	14.30	33	39.30	28b	84.80	15b	30,61	43	52,43

Total	42	100.00	42	100.00	84	100	33	100	49	100	82	100

In Group 1, news content with headlines written in passive voice was still relatively more read by respondents (84.80%) compared to headlines written in active voice. Meanwhile, in Group 2, news content with headlines written in active voice was relatively more read by respondents, 69.38%.

The Chi-Square calculation shows a Pearson Chi-Square value of Asymp. Sig. (2-Side) = 0.00, which is < 0.05, occurring in both categories of cases. This means that whether in headlines containing factual events or headlines containing opinion events, the influence of headline writing on the choices of students in the Publishing Program, Department of Graphic Engineering and Publishing, in reading news content remains highly significant.

These findings indicate that whether using active or passive voice, using the prefix "me" or "di," has an effect on writing news headlines regardless of whether they contain factual or opinion events. Active voice is equally effective as passive voice in encouraging readers to read the news content. Whether the headline presents a subject or not, the headline remains effective. This is not related to whether the headline contains factual or opinion events.

Therefore, creating a news headline using an opinion, which can sometimes be sensationalized to create clickbait, without a basis and especially if it doesn't align with the content, is unfounded. Furthermore, broader research with a larger sample size would be beneficial in the future.

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