



Debriefing Statement

Title	Sensational headlines affect evidence accumulation during veracity decisions and exacerbate polarization
Chief Investigator/Senior Supervisor	Dr Lauren Saling & Dr Damiano Spina
Principal Research Student(s)	Fletcher Scott

Firstly, the research team would like to thank you for participating in this project.

In this study, you were asked to decide whether a series of news headlines were true or false. The purpose of the research is to examine how clickbait wording might influence the way people judge the truth of information. Emotional cues in clickbait can make us more likely to accept and share content that aligns with our existing views, even when it is inaccurate. By investigating the shortcuts people use when encountering sensational headlines, this project aims to understand why such content can contribute to biased information consumption and political polarisation.

You were in the clickbait group. Each headline you saw was phrased in a sensational, curiosity-inducing style (for example, dramatic wording) while the underlying factual claim remained unchanged. This allows us to test whether emotionally provocative language affects the speed or confidence with which people judge a headline's truth.

It is important that you do not leave the study believing any false statements. To address this, we are providing a fact-checking sheet that lists the correct factual status of every headline you saw. Please review it to clarify any misconceptions that may have arisen during the task.

If the questions or topics raising in this study have negatively affected your mood, self-esteem or psychological state in any way, please contact your GP or use the following resource for country specific mental health support:

Australia:

Beyond Blue:
Ph: 1300 224 636

Website: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au>

Headspace:

Ph: 1800 650 890

Website: <https://headspace.org.au>

Global:

Let's talk about mental health

Website: <https://letstalkaboutmentalhealth.com.au>

This research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC *ethics number here*). If you have any concerns about this project please contact Pascal Bernard, Manager, Research Governance and Ethics, Email: humanethics@rmit.edu.au Ph: +613 9925 1985

Re-direct to Prolific: (link)



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In this study, you were asked to decide whether a series of news headlines were true or false. The purpose of the research is to examine how headline wording might influence the way people judge the truth of information. Emotional cues in sensational headlines can make us more likely to accept and share content that aligns with our existing views, even when it is inaccurate. By investigating the shortcuts people use when encountering different headline styles, this project aims to understand why such content can contribute to biased information consumption and political polarisation.

You were in the control group, meaning you only saw headlines expressed in a neutral tone. Each headline you saw was phrased in a straightforward, factual style without sensational or curiosity-inducing language. These neutral headlines allow us to establish a baseline for comparing how clickbait phrasing in another condition might affect the speed or confidence with which people judge truth.

It is important that you do not leave the study believing any false statements. To address this, we are providing a fact-checking sheet that lists the correct factual status of every headline you saw. Please review it to clarify any misconceptions that may have arisen during the task.

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