Can Fake Headlines Rescue Journalism?
The Irrelevancy between Headline and Content in Online Journalism

Alaaddin F. Paksoy, Anadolu University, Turkey

Abstract
This paper claims that headlines and body of news reports have become remarkably irrelevant in new journalism's writing styles. The readers' experience while consuming online news media today is a type of trickery. The reader is firstly directed by an overwhelming headline and then they encounter a totally unrelated content. Therefore, this paper aims to answer the research question "what types of tricks the Turkish online news media employ in news headlines to receive more clicks?" 10 news websites' main pages were monitored for 5 days on in October 2014. In total 980 news items' headlines were analysed and evaluated if they were useful to answer the research question of this study. The empirical work was carried out on the news websites by employing a qualitative content analysis.

Keywords: Online journalism, headlines, media ethics, clickbait

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Introduction

While hard copy newspapers require better circulation figures, news websites seek to reach more and more clicks. In the new circumstances of news media, the latter started to employ more striking and sensational headlines in order to improve its click rate statistics. Making the headline interesting is a duty of any journalist since journalism came into existence, however what is happening in recent years is a new way to sacrifice the authenticity of journalism.

This paper claims that headlines and the body of news reports have never been that much irrelevant in journalism history. The readers' experience while consuming online news media today is a type of trickery. The reader is firstly directed by an overwhelming headline and then they end up with content where the headline was constructed as a 'click-catcher' but not as an informative sign. For instance, on 14th April 2011, a Turkish daily *Sabah* used a horrible headline about a Turkish actor: "Peker Açıkalın died but…" (Sabah, 2011). When the readers clicked the headline and read the whole report, it was found out that the actor had a cardiac arrest and his heartbeat became normal after an electroshock treatment. Therefore, he actually did not die but was killed by the headline. This striking and tricky headline probably received so many clicks but it was a clear example of how media ethics can be overlooked for the sake of the number of clicks in the new media order.

The issue is new for the readers and the academics in media studies. Some opinion articles and some news reports have been published to criticise what is happening regarding these tricks in headlines (Thompson, 2013; Ersoy, 2014; Evrensel, 2014; Lagorio-Chafkin, 2014). The tricks that misuse the readers' attention are usually called 'clickbait'. According to Oxford Dictionaries (2014), this term refers to Internet "content whose main purpose is to attract attention and encourage visitors to click on a link to a particular web page".

All in all, this preliminary research aims to categorise the types of tricks conducted by Turkish online news media and presents some examples that can clearly put forward the transformation headlines in the new conditions of news writing.

Research Sample and Method

This study is based on a satisfactory sample that can be accepted as representative of the Turkish online news media. 10 Turkish news websites (milliyet.com.tr, hurriyet.com.tr, haber7.com, mynet.com, ensonhaber.com, haberturk.com, internethaber.com, sozcu.com.tr, radikal.com.tr, sabah.com.tr) were chosen for the sample as they received the most traffic between 27 September 2014 and 26 October 2014 (Alexa, 2014).

The empirical work was carried out on the news websites by employing a qualitative content analysis. Categories according to the type of employed tricks were prepared and a coding schedule was designed to perform the analysis. A pilot study was firstly applied to 2 news websites on 26 October 2014. This was useful to test the method and create the categories. Following that, 10 news websites' main pages were monitored for 5 days on 27-28-29-30-31 October 2014. In total 980 news items' headlines were analysed and evaluated if they were useful to answer the research

question of this study. The table below shows the rank of traffic of the news websites and indicates the number of news items included in the study.

Rank in highest traffic	Name of news website	Number of news items in headlines gallery	Number of news items included in the analysis
1	milliyet.com.tr	15	75
2	hurriyet.com.tr	15	75
3	haber7.com	25	125
4	mynet.com	15	75
5	ensonhaber.com	20	100
6	haberturk.com	14	70
7	internethaber.com	20	100
8	sozcu.com.tr	22	110
9	radikal.com.tr	25	125
10	sabah.com.tr	25	125
		Average: 19,6	Total: 980

Table 1: The rank of traffic of the news websites and the number of news items included in the study.

Research Question

News websites of today are usually built on headline galleries of the main pages which include the headlines of the relevant moment. This is usually in motion throughout the day but some important news items remain there all daylong. This study investigates only the news gallery of main pages instead of analysing the whole site.

News reports' headlines in these galleries and the content of these reports were analysed to see the tricky techniques to receive more clicks. By this way, it was possible to find out what kind of clickbaits Turkish news websites use. All in all, this paper aims to answer this research question: What types of tricks the Turkish online news media employ in news headlines to receive more clicks?

Findings

In this section, the tricks types found in the headlines will be exposed. The presentation of tricks will be made in separated sub-sections. Therefore, the findings will not be listed according to the name of websites but according to the type of trick.

Trick Type 1: Hidden/Implicit Subject

This is one of the most common tricks in Turkish online news media. The subject, the protagonist of the news story is somehow hidden in the headline. This is a way to make the readers be wondering who is this person, acting or being affected in this event. However, in some cases this trick becomes the default way in headline writing and most of the time it is in a remarkably disturbing fashion. Here are some examples:

milliyet.com.tr (26.10.2014)

"O Saldırıda Flaş Gelişme" ("Shocking Development In <u>THAT</u> Attack")
The story is about an armed attack against Turkish soldiers by a terrorist group in southeast of Turkey. Three soldiers were killed in the incident and this follow-up news story is about some people who are taken into custody.

The assault was one of the most important issues of the week in the news agenda. Therefore, probably most people firstly thought of the assault when they read the headline "... <u>that/the</u> attack". The event was actually very well known by the editors but it was deliberately hidden in the headline. However, making the headline in this way created a meaning that the attack is not clear and it might mean that a new attach happened. That is why the readers start wondering what it is and click the news story.

milliyet.com.tr (27.10.2014)

"Açıkladı! Galatasaray'ın Yeni Hocası…" (<u>S/He</u> Revealed! Galatasaray's New Coach Is...)
This headline is a clear example of implicit subject. The reader must click the headline to see who revealed it and who has become Galatasaray Football Team's new coach. The content of news story is a real disappointment. The name of new coach is not an official declaration from the club but just a guess by a football commentator.

Trick type 2: Exploiting Three Dots

This kind of trick is used almost everyday in low and middle quality news websites. Using it can actually be a literary initiative if it is not used with exploitation. However, in this study, it was found that 'three dots' at the end of headlines is the easiest way for news websites editors to make the readers confused and strongly motivate them to click the headline.

milliyet.com.tr (27.10.2014)

"Floryada kritik saatler! Istifa…" ("Critical hours in Florya! Resignation...")

This story is about Turkish football team Galatasaray's Italian coach Cesare Prandelli and the possibility of his resignation. The headline forces the readers to think that the resignation is coming up as it is used with three dots. However, when the content of the story is checked, it is possible to see that there is no resignation and there is even a point that says that the possibility of resignation case is now closed.

hurriyet.com.tr (31.10.2014)

"G.Saray-Kasımpaşa Maçına Doğru... EYVAH" (Towards G.Saray-Kasımpaşa Match… ALAS!")
In this example, three dots is used for exaggeration or simply for lying. After this headline, the content says that tonight's match can be played in heavy rain but the pitch looks fine. At first glance, the headline signifies that there is a serious problem about the game and the match can even be cancelled. The body text of the news item has no connection with these issues.

Trick type 3: Intensification / Mitigation

It is possible to better explain this trick by drawing into the discursive strategies of Wodak (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009). According to her view, some discourses are created by modifying (intensifying or mitigating) the epistemic status of a proposition. In this trick type, it would be too much to refer to a discursive strategy but the tactic is a similar one to expose things bigger than their real existence. The headline in the example below was employed to show something much bigger than its reality.

haber7.com (27.10.2014)

"Yüzbinlerce Üniversite Mezununa Müjde: Borçlar Siliniyor" ("Good News for Thousands of Graduates: Debts Are Going to Be Written Off")
When we look at the headline, it explicitly says us that graduates' loan debts are going to be abolished. This is extremely good news for many graduates. However, when the news content is checked, it can be seen that the written off bit of the debt is only the interest. The reader can only understand this if they continue reading the 2nd paragraph. Besides, there is an example of mitigation here because the editor or the correspondent used the word "deferral debt" instead of simply writing "interest".

Trick type 4: Using the Archive

In this trick, news websites aims to get attention from their readers by using pictures or events from the past. They represent the events as if they are happening nowadays or just happened recently. This is sometimes a historical event or sometimes an archive picture. By this means, news websites can depict the events more than their potential importance by using some archive or made up photographs.

sabah.com.tr (30 October 2014)

"Bomba Iddia! İsrail ABD Gemisini Kasten Vurdu" (Big Claim! Israel Bombed US Ship On Purpose)

This striking example is a clear example of deliberate lying. The headline tells the reader that a US military ship had a missile strike by Israel. No date was mentioned. When the content is checked the readers realise that the event took place in 1967.

mynet.com (27 October 2014)

"Çinli Kadın Askerler Nefes Kesti" ("Chinese Female Soldiers Will Make You Breathless")
The news piece is strange itself as it shows woman soldiers' pictures from China. In addition to its insignificance, the headline box of the news photo gallery presents a semi-soldier looking sexy models that are definitely not from the Chinese Army as the pictures composition clearly reveals that they were from a photo shoot cast.

Trick type 5: Omissions in the Headline

Omissions in headlines are not something new came with online journalism. It is also still popular in traditional newspapers. However, in the case of online media, it is employed to increase the number of clicks the news websites gather, and therefore it is used in an extreme fashion.

mynet.com (27 October 2014)

"15 yaşındaki öğrenciden şoke eden cinayet" ("Shocking murder by a 15 years old student)
The event is really shocking. As a reader, you would probably wonder how it happened and in which city it happened in your home country. However, when the news content is read, it is seen that the murder happened in Estonia not in Turkey. It is known that a murder in a far away country cannot easily make a headline in the paper's home country.

haberturk.com.tr (27 October 2014)

"Samsung çekiliyor" (Samsung withdraws market)
This omissioned headline tells the reader that Samsung leaving Turkey. This would be a remarkably unexpected event if it would have been real. When you click the headline, the content tells that Samsung is going to giving up LED light market. This is extremely insignificant event when the size of Samsung in electronic market is considered. The readers are simply deceived and forced to click to the headline.

Trick type 6: Forcing to multi-clicks

This trick forces the readers go through a photo gallery. It is not possible to define each photo as a news story but there is very short information about each photo. Readers must click continuously to reach the news text and photograph they are looking for. Each click means more advertisement revenue for the news website.

hurriyet.com.tr (29 October 2014)

"Geri dönüyor" ("He is coming back")

In the main page, Kenan Işık's, a famous TV presenter in Turkey, picture is used and written in the headline that "he is coming back". Most readers know that he has been in coma for a long time and being taken care at a hospital abroad. Coming back here might refer to coming to TV programme or his home country. So it is not clear. The readers who are interested in his recent condition and if he is going back to his TV programme click the headline. However, instead of the expected news text, they face a photo gallery where totally unrelated photographs with unrelated topics are listed one by one. The reader needs to click each photo to pass the next one. It takes 27 photos to reach the content about his health condition.

Conclusion

This preliminary research about the clickbait issue aimed to put forth different types of tricks that are employed in today's online journalism language. It is of course cannot be limited by the tricks listed here. There are different types of tricks to misuse the readers' attention. This paper was limited with the most common ones within the Turkish online news media sample.

The overall findings show that there are six main trick types for news websites to use in clickbait headlines. Even though these tricks look new for our online news media readership experience, one can connect these tricks to the times of 'yellow journalism'. It is surprising that 21st century's online journalism enjoy so many technological benefits but also go back to 1900s New York style eye-catching and sensational techniques to get attention from the readers. In the following research projects, this working paper's framework could be improved by more empirical data on content and news production process.

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Contact email: afpaksoy@gmail.com