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Apr 23rd, 10:30 AM

Believability of Emotionally Worded Headlines

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Pogue, Kelsey; Sparks, Mary; Norkus, Michael; Trejo, Adani; and Rueckert, Linda, "Believability of Emotionally Worded Headlines" (2021). *NEIU Student Research and Creative Activities Symposium*. 2. <https://neiudc.neiu.edu/srcas/2021/s10/2>

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BELIEVABILITY OF EMOTIONALLY WORDED HEADLINES

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Studies in the past have found that when people stop and think about news articles - and consider their plausibility - that they are more likely to identify fake or misleading articles. While it is understood that taking a moment to consider the headline helps to critically think about the information, it is also understood that emotion can inhibit the ability to critically think. The purpose of this study is to examine whether emotional words have an effect on the believability of news article headlines. Examining whether emotional wording in news article headlines made them more likely to be (a) believable, and (b) shared on social media platforms, we used a variety of articles taken from recent headlines found to be true as well as articles found to be entirely false by reputable fact-checking sites. Those headlines were then manipulated to include either more or less emotional wording and separated into four categories; true emotional, true non-emotional, false emotional, and false non-emotional. The participants will be able to take the survey on Qualtrics where the data will be collected. Participants will be randomly assigned to groups that include four of each category of headline within the survey on Qualtrics. They will be asked if they have seen each headline before, how believable they find it, and how likely they would be to share it. We will then look to see if there is any correlation between these variables and age, gender, political leaning, and current educational attainment, which will be gathered in the demographics section of the survey at the end. The expected result from this study is that emotional headlines will be more likely to be shared and believed. Regardless of the truthfulness of the article, we anticipate that articles with emotional wording will be believed and shared at a significantly higher rate.