

IMPACT OF CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT AND BREAKING NEWS EFFECT ON THE ATTENTION OF CONSUMERS

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(Received: March 2021; Accepted: June 2021; Published: July 2021)

Abstract: In the last decade, the new means of communication have determined substantial changes in human behavior and in the way individuals interact with each other. Besides the numerous benefits and opportunities that have arisen throughout the digitalization process, both for individuals as well as for private companies and state institutions, the widespread use of the Internet has generated vulnerabilities and threats. One of the most consistent concerns related to the new means of communication, especially social media platforms, refers to fake news. In recent years, major events including the 2016 presidential election in the US, Brexit, and the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic have proven the negative effects of fake news on society.

In this paper, we use an eye-tracking experiment to determine the unconscious reactions of consumers regarding the attraction potential of a fake news manner written article about a celebrity couple. The results of the experiment for this magazine's article, with a fake title about the celebrity couple, show that the participants focus their attention on celebrities and fake titles mostly. The picture of the celebrities and the fake title of the article beats the other areas from the article and less on the information in the text. The research proves empirically that consumers are more attentive to celebrity pictures and fake breaking news titles and less to real information in the article. To sum up, testimonials and fake news play an important role in attracting publicity and influencing consumer behavior.

Keywords: celebrity endorsement, fake news, breaking news effect, clickbait, neuromarketing.

JEL Classification: M10.

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic represents the most difficult challenge of the century and has generated instability, insecurity and over three million human deaths worldwide (Worldometer, April 2021). The internet and the state of an art technology play a significant role in the way humanity faces this threat. On the one hand, it enables us to remotely connect with each other and carry out professional activities, thus supporting the macroeconomic environment, as well as important pillars of society, such as the educational and medical systems. On the other hand, by surfing online, individuals can access the latest news regarding the pandemic and other related issues, which they can comment on and share with others. In this context, the importance of digitalization has reached throughout 2020 a new maximum, as states all around the globe have accelerated this process within all public sectors. However, besides the numerous benefits associated with the internet, which prevented the jam of the economic, social, and medical environment, there is also a downside related to these new means of communication developed online. One of the main concerns refers to the high spreading degree of disinformation and misinformation in the online environment, especially on social media platforms. In recent years, four major events have highlighted the negative effects of this phenomenon: the 2016 presidential election in the USA, the Brexit, the 2019 pandemic, and the 2020 presidential election in the USA. The outcome and evolution of the above-mentioned events have been partly influenced and determined by the spreading of fake news in the online environment. Numerous articles highlight the fact that most of the tensions related to the way authorities have handled the pandemic have been stimulated by the dissemination of false information in the online environment and led to protests and reluctance regarding the recommendations and treatment schemes provided by healthcare organizations and state institutions.

Compared to the 70ties or 80ties period in which individuals could communicate with each other through the post, wire phones, or fax machines, and could access news by radio and TV, nowadays, the new means of communication have simplified the way people can connect and share information. However, in this new and emerging context, the information overload is overwhelming making it impossible for online users to filter out information and surpass uncertainty. Moreover, studies show that alongside false information that is disseminated online, there are other negative digital tools like bots, clickbait titles, fake reviews, deep fakes, or phishing which are being used to manipulate online users and, in most cases, illicitly generate financial gains (Tantau et al., 2018). Furthermore, these instruments are being used to damage the reputation of competitors, manipulate markets or discredit public figures or institutions. These risks have attracted the attention of scholars, public institutions, companies, and multinational

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providers of online services which strive to find optimal means to fight against this negative phenomenon (Pop, 2020).

In our research, we have focused on determining the impact of clickbait and fake news when the topic uses celebrities as a hook for generating traffic and spreading false information. A recent and unfortunate event regarding the spontaneous protest in Washington, as a reaction to the US presidential election result, has been linked to the communication activity implemented on social media by the former US president. Moreover, Donald Trump has been accused of spreading fake news and instigating violence on social media platforms, thus being banned from the most important online platforms (The Guardian, April 2021). This is an example that highlights the impact of celebrities or public figures on the spreading degree of fake news in the online environment.

The paper starts with a literature review on the concept of fake news and especially on the eye-catching breaking news announcement for online articles. It also includes a literature review on the impact and influence of celebrities on the consumers' attention. The empirical part of the paper presents the results of an eye-tracking experiment regarding the attention of consumers towards an article written in a breaking-news manner about celebrities. The results show that the most attractive element of the image is the picture of the celebrities' couple followed by the fake article title. The text containing the explanation of the article title is less attractive to consumers. Although both fake news and celebrity endorsement are much-debated topics, our research proves empirically that consumers pay more attention to catchy attractive pictures or fake breaking news titles and less to real information in the text.

2. Literature review

2.1. Literature review on fake news

The last couple of decades have been marked by major changes generated by the emergence of the internet and through the exponential development of the IT infrastructure worldwide. These changes have determined new economic, social, and political challenges, most of which have been intensified by social media platforms. Although, these platforms have initially been developed to connect people and bring them together, regardless of geographical boundaries, soon these instruments have become important tools for creating and sharing news and information online (Tandoc et al., 2018). Shearer and Matsa (2018) claim that the vast majority of adults in the USA, Spain, Italy, and the UK read and engage with news on social platforms. Unfortunately, the online environment, especially social media platforms, exposes an uncontrolled, anonymous, and unverified communication space where misinformation and disinformation can optimal be disseminated (Flynn et al., 2017). However, Burkhardt (2017) raises attention that

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fake news has always been part of society and has developed alongside other communication capabilities. In recent years, the term "fake news" has gained relevance after the 2016 US presidential election, as speculations and accusations regarding the vitiation of the results through fake news have strongly been promoted in the public space (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017). Fake news represents not only a threat to a state institution and public figures, but it also has the potential of affecting the reputation of private companies, as social media platforms are more often included in the corporate communication strategies and are being used for marketing purpose, client service specific activities or the development of new products and service (Di Domenico et. al, 2021; Busu, 2019; Neagu et al., 2019). The authors point out that fake news can harm the perception of consumers, as well as the reputation of multinational companies, and emphasize the case of Pepsi and New Balance which recently faced product boycotts caused by the online spreading of misinformation. Jost et al. (2020) propose a new perspective regarding the way fake news can be analyzed. By considering fake news a good that is traded on a market, they have determined three important factors which influence the impact of fake news: the production process, the supply side, and the demand side. The production factor has become more efficient due to the accelerated digitalization process and as a result of the emergence of digital tools and algorithms that enable the replication of graphic and video content. Moreover, bots and fake social media users can reproduce human behavior patterns and disseminate fake news to targeted users who share believes and opinions presented in the fake news pieces. All the above-mentioned instruments have enabled the mass spread of fake news in the online environment (Shane, 2017). Secondly, the supply factor is influenced by financial gains. Eye-catching, sensational, and breaking news headlines, called clickbait, generate website traffic and high income related to the advertising industry (Pickard, 2017). The third factor, the demand side, is influenced by the behavior pattern of users belonging to the Y-generation, who highly value information and news encountered online, especially on social media platforms, and are accustomed to paying for digital services and goods (Gottfried and Shearer, 2016; Pelau et al., 2021). In this context, we can state that the production, supply, and demand for fake news has developed an industry that is highly attractive for speculators that are tempted by financial gains, making it more difficult for institutions and companies to combat this negative phenomenon. Moreover, Pennycook and Rand (2021) point out that another important factor related to the successful spreading of fake news is represented by the poor truth discernment and the lack of relevant knowledge of online users. Furthermore, the authors affirm that there is a substantial gap between the content that users believe in and the one which they share on social media platforms. This phenomenon, being influenced not by the conscious sharing of fake content, but by the inattention related to this

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activity. However, the situation changes when referring to politically relevant content. Khan (2017) believes that individuals are conscious and motivated consumers of fake news when it comes to political themes and topics, as they engage in "identity-protective cognition". For this reason, individuals tend to assimilate political information that is in concordance with their political beliefs and partisanship and is skeptical when encountering information that contradicts their partisan identity (Khan, 2013). Furthermore, Bavel and Pereira (2018) affirm that individuals have the tendency to value their political loyalty more than the truth and thus becoming easier victims of fake news promoted to gain ideological and political advantages.

2.2. Literature review on the eye-catching breaking news announcement for online articles

In journalism, headlines have always played a significant role in arousing the reader's interest. Saxena (2016) believes that the title of a news piece should represent a summary of the whole content. Thus, headlines should accomplish two important functions: summarizing and capturing the attention of the reader to go through the full text. However, in a 2017 study, Andrew Blake has questioned the summarizing function of a headline, as he affirms that, in general, titles do not correctly describe the full content they introduce. Ifantidou (2008) believes that headlines do not contribute to a better understanding of the article and lack essential information, thus not improving the reader's comprehension. Moreover, her research shows that headlines have the potential of misleading the reader by directing his attention to a limited aspect of a story, subjectively emphasizing facts, and by oversimplifying important topics of a news article, and masking essential information. Thus, in most cases, headlines under or over present a news piece. This issue has always been a part of journalism, but in recent years, it has become more visible, as traditional journalism has begun an accelerated transformation process to correspond to the exponential digital demand. Nowadays, most users consume news online by accessing social media platforms or web browsers on their mobile devices. This habit makes individuals more vulnerable to fake news promoted through eye-catching breaking news announcements, referred to as clickbait. By using sensational and misleading headlines, especially on social media platforms, clickbait has the objective of attracting and determining online users to click on a given link to generate website traffic (Zhang and Clough, 2020). The authors point out, that there is increasing evidence that clickbait, as well as fake news, is related to financial gains. This phenomenon is problematic as it affects the credibility of media and directly contributes to a higher spreading degree of fake news in the online environment (Saquete et al., 2020).

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Unfortunately, clickbait is a common instrument implemented in the virtual space and is strongly associated with the "post-truth" era we live in, whereby fake news threatens to replace facts and pieces of evidence (Saquete et al., 2020). Zannettou et al. (2018) consider clickbait to be one of the eight categories defined in their study which contribute to the dissemination of disinformation and misinformation online. Another issue related to eye-catching headlines refers to the fact that through this method, anonymous and low-quality websites, which lack a journalistic approach and a content validation process, are being promoted to generate financial gains (Zhang and Clough, 2020). From this point of view, clickbait could be compared to phishing, another deceptive method used to mislead online users and obtain personal data and information that can easily be monetized. Moreover, authors believe that eye-catching headlines are similar to spam, an instrument that redirects mail users to malicious websites. Independent of the definition we refer to when describing clickbait, an aspect is certain, this negative phenomenon is being used to arouse interest and suspense to mislead and determine internet users to take any action, as a response to the created „curiosity gap” (Zhang and Clough, 2020). In this regard, our research has focused, on the one hand on determining the influence of eye-catching headlines on the spreading degree of fake news and on the other hand, on analyzing the impact of celebrities or public figures when linked to news articles that promote false information.

2.3. Literature review on celebrity endorsement

The term Celebrity alludes to a person who is known to the general society for their accomplishments in zones other than that of the item class supported. It can be for example an actor, an entertainer, a performer, a singer, a sports figure, and others (Friedman and Friedman, 1979). This is helpful, because when big names are portrayed in advertisings or news articles, they bring their own socially related implications with them, regardless of the necessarily limited-time job (McCracken, 1986). The actual appearance allure of a famous person is interconnected to the person's underlying judgment, which is invigorated by the characteristics and qualities of the endorser (Bardia, 2011). Attractive endorsers will probably prompt customer purchasing expectations (Van der Waldt et al., 2009). Concerning the appeal factor, the buyer is more incited by alluring endorsers rather than the less attractive ones (Joseph, 1982; Kahle and Homer, 1985). A viable, successful, and clear message can be passed on through the main component which is attractiveness (Schlecht, 2003). Subsequently, the actual appeal of endorsers or famous people could be applied to improve the promotion. The specialists found out that the image of a brand can be easily improved through testimonials or superstars because they are engaging the quality. If the endorser`s actual property to engage the quality of a product or service can be compared with the supported

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item, then the customers will develop a positive philosophy towards it. Praet (2001) sustains that convincing and initiating people in regard to a brand represents the testimonial's best aptitude. Therefore, it is less effective for publicists or sponsors to use standard messages and advertorials, than utilizing popular individuals in advertising. Superstars with significant zones and expertise would be more successful and fruitful (Charbonneau and Garland, 2005). Usually, the endorsers, testimonials which are well known and notable by the public are more successful than the less known testimonials, which don't have big notoriety or an own image. For this reason, notable superstars increase the feeling of reliability, influencing emphatically the consumers buying objective (Lazar, 2020). According to Chao et al. (2015), the trustworthiness of the celebrity has a positive impact on the consumers' buying decision, making it important to marketers and advertisers. Another important aspect is the choice of the right celebrity brand ambassador. An endorser should be a peaceful person who was not involved in scandals or has no problems with the law, as these aspects decrease the consumers' trust in testimonials (Lomboan, 2013). If people see that a famous person is involved in a scandal, his/ her image affects the endorsed product. The match-up between celebrity and the promoted product should be also taken into consideration. This principle is as important as all the other aspects (Hassan & Jamil, 2014). A successful advertising campaign may be given by the appropriateness between a testimonial and the promoted brand (Lim et al., 2017). For this reason, a company must choose the endorser of its goods correctly and wisely.

3. Methodology and empirical data

The objective of our research is to determine the impact of celebrities and article titles written in a breaking news style on the consumers' attention. For this objective, we have conducted an eye-tracking experiment presenting a picture about a celebrity couple and a fake title about their divorce. The analyzed eye-tracking frame included a picture of the internationally famous couple, the description of the picture, the fake title about their opinion on a possible divorce, the logo of an online newspaper where the article was published and a text written with smaller font about the statement of the couple that they are not getting divorced. The title of the article was written in a breaking news manner, making a click-bait on the association between the picture of the famous couple and the word "divorce". 16 people, with ages between 18 and 25 years took part in our eye-tracking experiment. The participants were required to watch the frame on the screen for 8 seconds while the eye-tracking data was recorded by the eye-tracking tool.

We used the eye-tracking experiment to measure the attention of the consumer towards the elements of the above-mentioned picture. Eye-tracking is a

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neuroscientific methodology that allows researchers to observe, analyze and comprehend an individual's visual attention. This method can be used to decide where a consumer looks at an advertisement, news article, or internet page, how long he holds his eye on a specific point, and follow his eye direction. Eye-tracking has the advantage that it measures the unconscious reactions of the consumer, facts that the consumer is unable to explain (Pop et al., 2013; Rosca, 2017).

For the analysis of the results, we specified the following five Areas of Interest (AOIs), as shown in table 1. The area of interest (AOI) is a subarea from the eye-tracking screen that can be selected to monitor particular indicators for each of them.

Table 1 Description of variables

Variable	Description of variable
AOI 001	Picture
AOI 002	Description of the picture
AOI 003	Source of the article
AOI 004	Fake title of the article
AOI 005	The article itself

Source: Own determination of variables

The defined subareas are the following: the picture of the international known famous couple from the White House (AOI 001), the description of the picture (AOI 002), the source of the article (AOI 003), the fake title of the article (AOI 004) and the article itself (AOI 005). For each one of the five specified areas, the key performance indicators have been measured and analyzed.

4. Empirical results

For each of the defined area of interest, we measured with the help of a Gazepoint eye-tracking device, several key performance indicators (KPIs) including a number of viewers, entry time, total viewed time, revisits, to quantify the effect of the article news with a fake title and endorsed celebrities on the audience, as shown in table 2. These KPIs provide us with useful statistical details about the fake news article after it has been viewed, such as the elements of the article viewed by the participant, the number of participants in the experiment who have looked at a specific element, the moment at which specific elements of the article were viewed or the number of the revisits.

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Table 2 Key Performance Indicators for the Eye-Tracking Analysis

Variable	Viewers	First view (s)	Viewed time (s)	Viewed time (%)	Revisits
AOI 001	16/16	1.25	0.90	11.26	10/16
AOI 002	13/16	2.49	0.94	11.79	9/16
AOI 003	11/16	1.18	0.97	12.15	8/16
AOI 004	15/16	1.42	2.19	27.38	14/16
AOI 005	11/16	3.32	1.30	16.19	9/16

Source: Own research results

The viewers are given by the number of participants who watched a certain AOI. As can be observed in table 2, in the case of our fake news article, all participants saw the picture of the celebrity couple (AOI 001). This means the most attractive element in this article, which no one ignored, was the picture of the celebrity couple, so 16/16 people watched it. The next most attractive element in this article is the fake title (AOI 004). 15/16 participants watched the fake title and only one person missed it. This means that the fake title was successful and well-chosen by the magazine. The third interesting element is the description of the picture (AOI 002). 13/16 persons watched this area and only 2 people missed it. The fourth and fifth positions are occupied by AOI 003 and AOI 005. As we can observe from table 2, these two areas were less attractive by having only 11/16 visitors. These areas were representing the source of the article and the article itself. So, we can conclude that the picture of the celebrities and the big fake title of the article beats the article itself and its source.

The first view means the first moment during the 8 seconds in which a participant watched a certain AOI. We extracted the following first views: AOI 001 – 1.25 s, AOI 002 – 2.49 s, AOI 003 – 1.18 s, AOI 004 – 1.42 s, and AOI 005 – 3.32 s. The fastest first view has been generated by the source of the article (AOI 003). This means that the participants on average looked first to the source of the article, so the name of the magazine. This happened most probably because this is written with big red major capitals and this fact catch everyone`s eyes first, as it cannot be ignored. In the second place, we have the picture of the famous couple (AOI 001). Participants watched quickly their pictures when starting the eye-tracking experiment. The next quickest noticed element is the fake article title (AOI 4). This was also found interesting and attractive by the participants of the experiment. In the fourth place, we have the description of the photo which included the name of the celebrities (AOI 002). In the last place, we can observe the article itself (AOI 005). This element was watched latest by the people. It was the last element that captured their view. This means the article itself did not represent such an interest for the participants in comparison with the picture of the celebrities or the fake

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title. In conclusion, the consumers' attention was caught by the celebrities and the fake titles.

Viewed time shows the total time of watching a certain AOI, measured in seconds. For our article with the international celebrity couple, we obtained the following results: AOI 001 – 0.90 s, AOI 002 – 0.94 s, AOI 003 – 0.97 s, AOI 004 – 2.19 s, and for AOI 005 – 1.30 s. As we can observe in this magazine article, the participants spent most of their time, watching the fake news title (AOI 004). This area was the most attractive for them and they were thinking if it is true or not. This was followed by the article itself (AOI 005), which means that some of the participants have read the article. The source of the article (AOI 003) was next. This has been catchy for the participants with a time of 0.97 seconds most probably thanks to the writing and color. This is followed by AOI 002, the description of the photo. The shortest time had been spent by the respondents on a specific area of the picture of the famous couple (AOI 001). This indicates that this element has been immediately recognized by the participants of the experiment, so they did not need to spend much time watching the picture itself or the description of the picture, which was useless for them.

Revisits number is given by the number of participants who watched a specific area of interest for the second time. As can be observed in table 2, in the case of our fake news article, all participants saw AOI 004 at least two times. This means the most interesting and catchy element in this article, which no one ignored, more than this, they came back over it was the fake title of the article – 14/16 people watched it at least twice. In our magazine's article, another catchy element was the picture with the celebrity couple (AOI 001). 10 of our 16 participants watched this element twice. In the third place, we have AOI 002 and AOI 005 together. This means the description of the picture and the article itself were also watched more than one time by 9 of our 16 participants. For the source of the article (AOI 003), we have the smallest number of revisits. This is because the source was written with big red capital letters. The fastest first view has been generated by AOI 003, the source of the article. This means that the participants on average looked first to the source of the article, so the name of the magazine. So they viewed this at first and it was enough for them.

5. Conclusions

The results of our experiment show that the most attractive element in this article, which no one ignored, was the picture of the international celebrity couple as all respondents watched it. The next most attractive element was the fake title - only one person missed it, this means the fake title was successful and well-chosen by the magazine. The fastest first view has been generated by the source of the article. This means that the participants on average looked first at the name of the

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magazine. This happened most probably because this is written with big red capitals and this fact catches everyone's eyes first, as it cannot be ignored. The participants also watched quickly the picture of the famous couple when starting the eye-tracking experiment. The next quickest noticed element was the fake article title, which means that this was also found interesting and attractive by the participants of the experiment. The article itself was watched most lately by the people; it was the last element that captured their view. This means the article itself did not represent such an interest for the participants in comparison with the picture of the testimonials or the fake title. The people spent most of their time, watching the fake news title, maybe they were thinking if it is true or not. This was followed by the article itself, which means that some of the participants have read the article. The shortest time spent by the respondents was on the picture of the famous couple. This means that this element has been immediately recognized by them. The most interesting and catchy elements in this article, which no one ignored, more than this, they came back to it and watched it again were the fake title of the article and the picture with the celebrity couple. In conclusion, the consumers' attention is caught by celebrities and fake titles written in a clickbait, breaking news manner. So, we can conclude that the picture of the celebrities and the fake title of the article beat the other areas from the article and that celebrities and fake news play an important role in attracting publicity and influencing the behavior of consumers.

This research proves empirically with the help of an eye-tracking experiment, that both celebrity pictures and fake breaking news titles are more attractive to consumers than the real content of an article. Consumers have the tendency to select the media they read based on attractive pictures and spectacular titles, which might mislead public opinion. A consumer might believe and memorize the information in the fake title, although frequently the content of the article contradicts the initial information in the title. This research has important policy implications as it draws attention to a frequent form of the fake news article, where a false or unclear statement is made in the title, while the information in the content contradicts the initial information. Especially for hurried and inattentive consumers, this type of media information can mislead public opinion. Therefore, legal regulations should be made to reduce the number of fake news articles related to celebrities. These articles are posted with a high commercial purpose of attracting the consumer to a certain internet site and less for the information it provides. Therefore, measures should be taken to reduce this phenomenon of misleading public opinion for commercial purposes.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the anonymous reviewers and editor for their valuable contribution.

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Funding

This research received no external funding.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, M.P. and L.L.; methodology, L.L.; software, L.L.; formal analysis, M.P. and L.L.; investigation, M.P. and L.L.; resources, M.P. and L.L.; writing—original draft preparation, M.P. and L.L.; writing—review and editing, M.P. and L.L.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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