



## **Critical analysis of news headlines in print Media**

(With reference to newspapers)

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### **Abstract**

*Headings of Indian newspapers are turning into trolls, teasers & derogatory comments. Many a times these headlines present subjective views & one sided narratives though the story that follows reads something else. As many people have no time to read full news report, they receive just what headline states. Print dailies that are supposed to be doing serious journalism, have constantly been turning into view based, sensationalized tabloids & using headings to present subjective views through colour symbolism & misleading words that have similar denotative meaning but different connotations. This paper tries to find out if the headings that are supposed to present the gist of the story, are being used to lure, confuse & tease readers.*

### **Introduction**

*“Headlines, in a way, are what mislead you because bad news is a headline & gradual improvement is not.” -Bill Gates*

News Headlines are the essential & the most visible part of a news piece that not only tell the gist of the story that follows but also state the most important facets of a story. They attract reader first place. They are so important that a reader decide to read or skip a story based on what headlines say. No wonder news writers try to package information in headlines in such a way that the news story seems to be more interesting, extraordinary & relevant.

An effort to stand out among the competing publications, also make editors to cover an event with a different angle. A publications' target audience, owners' ideology, reporters' beliefs, are the other factors that play an important role in the coverage & presentation of news. But the point is that the news as the chronicle of an event, cannot have different points of view. But of course, the events or issues that have been reported can be interpreted differently by different writers.

That is the reason objectivity, balance, truthfulness & accuracy have been the most important news elements that if incorporated in news sincerely, make it a non-bias read. But, now a days it has become a popular trend to report news in a subjective manner. The biasness & subjective views are also frequently occurring in headings that either mislead readers about the news that follows or give it altogether a different colour that makes reader form a perception about the issue. Media openly support or attack a particular political party, candidate or ideology.

In one such incident of provocative news Headline published in Surat edition of Hindi Daily Dainik Bhasker after terrorist attack on Amarnath pilgrims in 2017, the Network of Women in Media, India (NWMI) sent a strong complaint to the Press Council of India. The complaint stated that paper carried a distorted headline that sought to readers on communal lines.



Akashay Bajad in Youth ki Awaz writes “Headlines are expected to be accurate in relation to stories but can often be misleading or biased, although remaining ‘technically’ accurate. A misleading headline fixes a false narrative in the public mind. Some newspapers, news magazines, news websites, and television news channels have mastered the art of manipulating one or two words in a sentence in order to make even a truthful and honest headline slightly twisted in a specific way. It breaches the basic ethics of journalism.

The paper tries to find out if the popular notion about the mainstream newspapers frequently carrying biased headlines to influence the readers has the elements of truth in it or it is just a perception of readers.

### Review of literature

In a study presented in ninth International AAAI conference on web & social Media in 2014, researchers conducted an experiment in which factual or opinion news were presented to participants, but with different headlines. They analyzed the content of 69,907 headlines produced by four major global media corporations during a minimum of eight consecutive months. They discovered that the sentiment of the headline is strongly related to the popularity of the news. The findings of the experiment say that the misleading headlines affect readers’ memory, inferential reasoning, and behavioral intentions. These effects arise not only because headlines constrain further information processing, Headlines not only bias readers towards a specific interpretation, but readers also struggle to update their memory in order to correct initial misconceptions. These efforts highlight the importance of news headlines. It goes beyond attracting users to read news and it even changes individuals’ perceptions or attitudes towards the content.

A comprehensive study with the title ‘The Effects of Subtle Misinformation in News Headlines’, was published in journal of experimental psychology, in August 2014. This was a joint study by Western Australia University’s School of psychology & University of Bristol’s school of Experimental psychology. Two experiments were conducted to examine the effects of misleading headlines.



The experiment examined the effects of headlines that emphasize secondary content rather than the article's primary gist. It investigated how headlines affect readers' processing of factual news articles and opinion pieces, using both direct memory measures and more indirect reasoning measures. The conclusion was that the misleading headlines result in misconceptions in readers' mind who do not read beyond the headlines. The result also stated that the headline can be used to cast someone in a dubious light even when every word in both the headline and the accompanying article is accurate.

In an interesting study by D'Alessio and Allen who the coverage of presidential election of USA from 2019 to 1980s by the media tells that media do give biased coverage to the events. Though the study was not limited to headlines only, it did tell about the subjective views presented as news in media. The researchers list three forms of media bias as the most widely studied.

**1-Coverage bias:** That is also known as visibility bias. When actors or issues are more or less visible in the news.

**2- Gatekeeping Bias-** Also known as selectivity or selection bias. It is sometimes also referred to as agenda bias, when the focus is on political actors and whether they are covered based on their preferred policy issues.

**3- Statement bias-** Also known as tonality bias or presentation bias. When coverage is slanted towards a particular person or issue.

In an study by Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska of Opole University, Poland in 2013, the researcher studied 120 headlines collected from Daily mail website in 2012. Of the many conclusions, the research also found out that the negatively charged words were used to sensationalize the headlines.

### **Methodology**

Manifest Content Analysis method has been used for qualitative analysis of news headlines of print dailies. Random sample of newspapers has been taken that consists all- Hindi, English, national & regional newspapers. Only main leads (front page headlines) of the newspapers have been chosen for analysis.

Two major events that have been chosen for analysis include-

- I. Abrogation of article 370 from Kashmir
- II. Ayodhya Verdict
- III. Besides, some random headlines have also been taken for analysis that has been much talked about on social media for being controversial.

The content of headlines has been analysed on three major themes

- I. Connotative & denotative meanings of the words used in headlines
- II. Do headlines, instead of giving the clear picture of primary news, convey secondary content or subjective views?
- III. How accompanying subheads & images add sentiments by complimenting Headlines.
- IV. Do headlines present bias of the writer?

### **Objective**

- To find out if headlines are being used to deliberately misrepresent the facts?
- To research if headings instead of being objective are presenting subjective, sensational & customized narratives.
- Do headlines stick to the ethical guidelines given by the Press council for news coverage?

## Discussion

### Coverage of the Abrogation of Article 370 from Kashmir in Indian Print dailies:

On 6 August 2019, home minister Amit Shah in parliament announced a proposal to revoke Article 370 & proposed bifurcation of Jammu & Kashmir state into two union territories; Jammu Kashmir and Laddakh. All national & regional news papers of India carried the the historic decision as main leads on front pages.



Almost all National Hindi newspapers covered the news objectively as well as with a positive tone. India's number one newspaper (circulation wise) Dainik Jagran published two words' centre headline in its national edition, that read – 'अनुच्छेद 370' with a big red cross over 370. At both the sides of the headline there were caricatures of Home Minister Amit Shah & PM Narendra Modi. Dainik Bhasker published a banner headline that read- 'देश में अब एक विधान, एक निशान'. Jansatta's headline was " एकछत्र भारत ". Rajasthan Patrika wrote – " भारत का विलय सम्पूर्ण' Almost all Hindi dailies' headlines were objective with a positive tone.

India's English dailies, on the other hand were with mixed feelings in their coverage. The Indian Express wrote in a banner headline- 'History, in one stroke'. India's number one English daily The Times of India's Banner headline read- 'Kashmir is now Union's territory'. The accompanying image at the centre below the headline showed a gloomy picture of an isolated road of Kashmir valley from outside a barbed wired fencing. There was another subhead at the left side that read- 'J&K to lose special status, Centre to directly rule Ladkha'. Almost same was the Headline of Hindustan Times that read- Territory of the Union. In the center there were two images: A black & white big picture of Late Pt Jawahar Lal Nehru shaking hands with J&K

maharaja Hari Singh & another small colorful picture of PM Modi tapping Amit Shah's back in Parliament. The Hindu wrote- "J&K loses its special status, divided into two UTs". The accompanying picture was same as of Times of India's was.

The Telegraph, gave this news a completely different shade. The banner headline read 'Partition' in bold black letters. Below the banner the sentence continues as "of mind & a state. This time by the largest democracy of the planet, without asking J&K" Another heading on same page read- J&K loses status, statehood & Land. The whole coverage gave the news a negative shade.

Mumbai Mirror's headline was- "Cloak & Dagger that pierced Kashmir's heart". There was no objectivity in news heading. A statement was published in place of actual news.

Jammu & Kashmir state newspapers Greater Kashmir covered it with the heading- "J&K divided, disempowered & downgraded" – a subjective statement.

### Coverage of Ayodhya Verdict:

Almost all Hindi newspapers covered the news objectively & with a positive tone. Dainik Bhasker wrote- "रामलला ही विराजमान". Navbharat Times' headline was- 'मन्दिर वहीं, मस्जिद नई', and Dainik Jagran just wrote 'श्रीराम'. At the right side there was a picture of Lord Rama & in the centre of the page there was a picture of a temple. Hindustan's headline was- 'राम मन्दिर का रास्ता साफ'.



English Dailies' reactions were of mix kinds. Indian Express wrote- "Temple gets site, Mosque a plot". Sunday Times' heading read, 'Ram Mandir Within site'. Mail Today said it "Supreme Balance", while Hindustan Times' headline read 'Temple set in stone". Mumbai Mirror added sentiments it its headline by writing "Lord gets his land; Muslims, a fragile peace". The Hindu wrote- "Temple at disputed site, Mosque within Ayodhya, rules SC". 'Mid Day Heading was no news but a statement- Judgement delivered. But Justice?'

The most vicious this time also was The Telegraph. The heading read "In the name of Ram the site is now HINDU STHAN". Accompanying three column picture was of a hand with 'kalawa'

in wrist & “rudraksha Mala’ in hand with fingers making a victory sign. In the backdrop there was a blurred picture of Supreme Court.

### Other Random Headlines:

There were some other headlines that have been deemed controversial due to their subjective nature & different connotations.



### Findings & Conclusion:

On the basis of the content analysis of the headlines of the sample taken, it was found that some English newspapers did carry biased headings through publishing subjective statements in place of objective news of event happened. Hindi news papers were more objective & careful in covering important issues related to peace & harmony of the country. While English newspapers were more open & subjective in the writing of headlines despite covering issues related to country's integrity & communal harmony.

Negative words like “divided”, “Blames”, “Partition” gave the news a different color. They don't stick to the guidelines of Press Council of India as well. The accompanying images used in The Telegraph, Times of India, The Hindu presented complimentary negative views of headline writer.

The result is strictly limited to the sample size only that is too small to generalize the findings. It is said that the subjective bias seen here is limited to aforesaid issues only as only these issues have been analyzed.



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