RECOGNISING CLICKBAIT

INFORMATION AND DATA LITERACY > 1.2 EVALUATING DATA, INFORMATION AND DIGITAL CONTENT

TARGET GROUP	AGE GROUP	PROFICIENCY LEVEL	FORMAT	COPYRIGHT	LANGUAGE
All	All	Level 1	Activity sheet	Creative Commons (BY-SA)	English, French

Participants create their own eye-catching titles, they will understand how those titles are created and why. The aim of this exercise is to raise awareness on the economic models behind those titles.

General Objective	Awareness building
Preparation time for facilitator	less than 1 hour
Competence area	1 - Information and data literacy
Time needed to complete activity (for learner)	0 - 1 hour
Name of author	Nothing 2hide
Support material needed for training	Post-its-Screen-Computers OR tablets OR printed articles
Resource originally created in	French

WORKSHOP DIRECTIONS

1 Introduction

Some media platforms try to attract readers with bombastic, misleading or straight up false headlines in order to bring in the maximum number of clicks or users to their sites. This workshop aims to grow awareness of the economic reasoning between 'clickbait' as well as of our individual responsibility in relation to the circulation of quality information online. It is about learning to recognise misleading headlines and reflect on the idea of truth in online information – useful for every person as individuals or citizens.

Facilitation tips: To learn more on the subject of clickbait, and fake news more broadly, we recommend you refer to the workshop plan 'Fake News and other Information Manipulation'.

2 Making clickbait

'5 reasons that…'., 'You won't believe…', 'What happened next was incredible…' – these are the kinds of headlines we often see online. However, when we click on such links, we're often disappointed. Some media platforms try to attract readers with bombastic, misleading or straight up false headlines in order to bring in the maximum number of clicks or visits to their sites. For sites whose economic model is based on advertising, this is vital. The more visits a site has, the more an agency pays to have their ads featured there. We call this 'clickbait'.

Clickbait is most often encountered on social media platforms. Their objective is to lead users to click on the link in order to find out more. This phenomenon becoming more prevalent, even Facebook decided to harden their stance and put in place measures to filter such kinds of articles. Not being more stupid than Facebook – we should therefore know how to spot clickbait. In order to be able to recognise it reliably, we should know how to make it. Participants will now make their own clickbait! Write the below phrases on post-its. There should be one colour per post-it per phrase group,

'Beginning' Post-its

- Incredible…

- Magic!
- Strange:
- Everything seemed normal at first…
- You won’t get over this !
- You won’t believe your eyes:

‘People’ Post-its

- A mother
- This photograph
- A cute kitten
- This panda
- This man
- George Lucas
- An old man
- The Queen of England
- This child
- His girlfriend
- A former reality TV star

‘Action’ Post-its

- danced
- assassinated
- slips

- copies
- kissed
- discovered
- locks themselves inside
- tattooed themselves

‘Second action’ Post-its

- inspired by Game of Thrones.
- to get over their shyness
- while staring at themselves at the mirror
- while rummaging in his basement
- at a supermarket
- in tighty-whities
- in the subway

‘Finishing’ Post-its

- Pure genius!
- We explain why!
- These photos will warm your heart!
- It’s troubling, and a little worrying too…
- And these 14 things will prove it!

To make a clickbait headline, all you need to do is to compile a sequence of the following:

- A beginning post-it
- A people post-it

- An action post-it
- A second action post-it
- A finishing post-it

You can take use two people post-its if you wish to create examples like the following: 'You won't get over this! A mother discovers George Lucas at a supermarket! These photos will warm your heart…'

3 Behind the headlines

After having driven home the mechanics of clickbait headlines, show some real examples. Ranker.com is a website that allows users to vote in polls on a huge variety of subjects, including their favourite examples of clickbait headlines.

- Here are 4 from the front page:
  - All she did was drag her bowl across the water. What happens next blew my mind.
  - Baby ducks see water for the first time — Can you BELIEVE what they do?
  - 19 shocking food facts – you'll never want to eat again
  - 87 year old trainer shares her secret to losing weight and gaining energy

Ask participants what they imagine is really waiting beyond these headlines. ***Facilitation tip***: You can make your own selection. There are many more on https://www.ranker.com/list/clickbait/jacob-shelton.

4 Writing headlines

Now do the opposite. Take articles on various subjects – not necessarily big or shocking news – and ask participants to use their imaginations to come up with the best clickbait headlines for each example.

- Pop-up bike lanes help with coronavirus physical distancing in Germany
- Monkey, or Maybe Chimp, or Maybe Nothing, Runs Amok in Texas
- The NFL loosens rules over players' use of marijuana

5 Discussion

Conclude by saying that the group should now know:

- how to recognise and create misleading headlines
- why they are made
- that the articles behind the headlines are terrible the vast majority of the time.

Explain that recognising clickbait and not promoting their circulation (for example by not forwarding them on social media) is a civic act. A study led by the New York Times in 2016 revealed that over 44% of American got their news exclusively from Facebook. This is a worrying situation due to the false rumours that easily spread via clickbait which can influence users' political preferences and therefore how they vote. Ask if there are any questions remaining and address them if so.