

Chapter – VIII

HEADLINES VS EVIDENCE – THE GAP BETWEEN FACTS AND PERCEPTION

BY

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Abstract

Headlines are becoming more important to the general public in the modern information ecosystem, as opposed to the evidence they purport to depict. The accelerated pace of the news consumption through digital media, social media and algorithmic curation has created a critical divide between facts and perceived reality. Headlines, which are usually prepared to capture attention, engagement and be viral, were generally simplistic in nature, focusing on emotional appeals rather than facts. The tendency leads to the proliferation of misinformation, the confirmation bias, and skewed public discourse. With the audience taking information in fragmented forms, their cognitive shortcuts cause them to develop a strong opinion based on minimal or misleading information as opposed to actual evidence. This paper will examine structural, psychological as well as technological conditions that generate and perpetuate the gap between headlines and evidence. It explores the role of economic pressures in media organisations in motivating sensationalism, the cognitive biases of selective exposure and motivated reasoning in distorting interpretation and the role of digital architecture in enhancing polarised or sensational content. The implications of this gap to policy-making, public trust, and democratic decision-making are also examined in the paper and cases of how headline-driven narratives have dominated research-based knowledge are presented. To overcome these challenges, the paper highlights the importance of using evidence-based communication, greater editorial responsibility and the media literacy of consumers. It states that the solution to this gap involves a concerted effort by journalists, technology platforms, educators, and regulators. However, in the end, the realization of how headlines manipulate perception and how evidence can take back its rightful place in informing the society is vital in developing a better-informed and more cohesive society.

Keywords: Headlines, Evidence, Misinformation, Digital Media, Sensationalism, Democratic Discourse.

Introduction

Over the last few decades, there has been a fundamental change in the way the masses of the population consume information. In contrast to the previous time when much of the popular knowledge was formed as a result of the continuous exposure to newspapers, reports and professional commentary, the current information consumption is becoming more of a headline than evidence-based. The emphasised speed, brevity and emotional immediacy of digital media settings encourage readers to read summaries, alerts, and headlines instead of the underlying content that supports those in digital media settings. Consequently, headlines tend to serve as the main meaning generating resources as opposed to points of entry into more intensive factual interpretation.¹

This transformation has been closely connected to the emergence of online platforms and ecosystems of social media. Algorithms used in curation encourage the content that attracts the most attention the most, which strengthens short attention spans and favours sensational or emotionally charged framing. This trend has been further exacerbated by the advent of so-called speed journalism, whereby the news organisations are competing to be first, not to be accurate or all-inclusive in their publication.² Verification, contextualisation and the depth of evidence are often postponed or watered down in such an environment, with headlines getting disproportionately greater sway over the way the public interprets things.

In order to comprehend this phenomenon, one has to conceptually differentiate between facts, evidence, narrative and perception. Facts are discrete and verifiable constituents of reality; evidence is the systematic organisation and interpretation of facts in terms of data, expertise and methodology. As opposed to this, narratives are built structures that assign meaning to facts through the process of selecting, highlighting or excluding facts. The interplay between these stories and personal mental filters results in what is perceived by the population, which in most cases is quite different in relation to the evidence behind the stories.³ Headlines work on a narrative level, creating the impression before a person is exposed to evidence, whether evidence is presented or not.

The main research question to be discussed in this paper is the loss of knowledgeable popular opinion due to the increasing disconnect between news stories and facts. This is a gap that has serious consequences on the trust of the people, the deliberation process in democracy, and the policy making

¹ Jack M Balkin, 'Free Speech in the Algorithmic Society' (2018) 51 *UC Davis Law Review* 1149.

² Tarleton Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet* (Yale University Press 2018).

³ Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality* (St Martin's Press 2018).

process. Whenever perceptions are made based on incomplete or skewed representations, then evidence-based decision-making is even more challenging and corrective information has a hard time taking root.⁴

The importance of this study lies in the fact that it places the headline-evidence disconnect in the context of more general structural, psychological and technological factors. The paper is a contribution to the current discourses on media accountability, the administration of platforms, and social literacy by examining the forces that give preference to perception over proof. The paper is organized structurally by first providing a conceptual framework that would govern headlines and evidence, then discusses the causes of distortion, and finally evaluates the outcomes and possible solutions.

Conceptual Framework: Headlines, Evidence, and Perception

To comprehend the disparity between reality and perceptions, it is necessary to have a clear conceptual framework that will help to identify the role of headlines, evidence, and cognitive interpretation in the modern media ecosystems. Headlines are not just disinterested summaries of news material, but are narrative framing devices, which influence the initial perception of information. By the use of selective emphasis, tone and language, headlines direct the reader to specific meanings without any interaction with the underlying content taking place.⁵ Within a digital space where most users do not move beyond the headline, such a framing effect is particularly consequential.

In its turn, evidence can be defined as the systematic presentation and explanation of facts, which is based on empirical data, official reports, expert analysis, and methodological reasoning. Evidence is cumulative and contextual in nature and must take time and mental effort to evaluate, unlike headlines. It is not valuable in immediate but in reliability, verifiability and coherence.⁶ The asymmetry of the availability of headlines and the complexity of evidence, however, implies that evidentiary substance tends to be subject to simplified narrative indicators.

The effect of cognitive filtering in which heuristics and mental shortcuts are crucial results in the creation of public perception. They are overwhelmed with information and will rely on emotional

⁴ Daphne Keller, 'Who Do You Sue? State and Platform Hybrid Power over Online Speech' (2021) 49 *Hofstra Law Review* 1.

⁵ Tarleton Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet* (Yale University Press 2018) 3–15.

⁶ Jeff King, *Judging Social Rights* (Cambridge University Press 2012) 27–34.

resonance, familiarity and ideological alignment to process information in a compressed manner when faced with information overload.⁷ Headlines make use of these shortcuts especially well, since they are intended to be read quickly, and frequently are intended to provoke fear, outrage, or confirmation. Once a perception is created, then later evidence is often selectively construed to support the beliefs that were in place, a fact that is well-reported in cognitive psychology.

This dynamic is centered on the relationship between framing and meaning-making. Media framing theory describes how the way information is presented, what is emphasised, what is not emphasised, how issues are placed in context, affects the way the audience understands them. Agenda-setting theory also implies that although media might not tell people what to think, it has a strong influence on what people think about in the sense that it gives priority to certain issues by being repeatedly aired.⁸ Headlines are at the confluence of these theories and they define the salience as well as the interpretive lens of the way events are perceived.

Therefore, headlines need to be construed not as neutral points of entry to information but as interpretive frames that mediate reality among the audiences. They tend to limit the spectrum of interpretations that readers can have through pre-structuring the meaning before they get to an evidence. This conceptualisation is essential in examining how perception may deviate sharply with reality of fact or evidentiary facts, which is the basis of the wider analysis that has been made in this paper.

Structural Drivers of the Headlines–Evidence Gap

The increase in the distance between headlines and evidence is not the outcome of personal reading patterns or journalistic decisions; it is based on the structural changes in the modern media ecosystem. The pressures of economies, the structures of platforms, and institutional pressures all influence the manner in which information is generated, prioritised and disseminated, usually favouring the immediacy and impact over the depth of evidence.

The change of the media to an attention-based economy is one of the main structural drivers. News organisations are becoming more and more reliant on advertising incomes that relate to the number of clicks, views, and other interaction metrics instead of subscription-based readership that is based

⁷ Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality* (St Martin's Press 2018) 45–55.

⁸ Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, 'The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media' (1972) 36 *Public Opinion Quarterly* 176.

on long-form consumption. This economic paradigm encourages headlines that will gain the maximum interest, outrage, or emotion since these attributes can be directly mapped into traffic and monetisation.⁹ Consequently, the headline itself becomes a commercial product itself, one that is geared toward attentiveness regardless of whether it oversimplifies or inflates the evidence behind it. Investigative thoroughness, contextual reporting, and methodological prudence, qualities needed to produce evidence-based journalism, are not prioritised since they are not as immediately lucrative.

Still closely related to these economic reasons is the effect of digital platforms and algorithmic curation. The social media and search engines dictate the appearance of news content under the influence of opaque algorithms that optimise engagement. Information that elicits a high emotional response has much more chances to be amplified, shared and recommended, irrespective of the quality of evidence behind it.¹⁰ Such an algorithmic reasoning supports polarisation and generates echo chambers where users are continuously fed on headline-driven stories that confirm their pre-existing beliefs. The fact that challenges these stories can hardly get the same level of visibility, thus, solidifying perception rather than evidence.

The other structural condition is the emergence of speed journalism and the undermining of the norms of verification. The pressure to post quickly in competitive digital space has decreased the time needed to fact-check, corroborate the sources and analyze the contexts.¹¹ Headlines are written and passed around before any comprehensive information is known, and other corrections are given much less attention than the first framing. This is an imbalance in terms of time, so the initial accounts are often fixed within the minds of the people; even when subsequently found to be confusing and inaccurate.

This issue is also enhanced by institutional constraints. Reduction of newsroom resources, staff cuts and dependency on syndicated news restrict the ability of media organisations to generate original and evidence-based reporting.¹² The situation in which journalists are working is increasingly dominated by the principles of volume over depth and this is a cycle that perpetuates itself, with

⁹ Jack M Balkin, 'Free Speech in the Algorithmic Society' (2018) 51 *UC Davis Law Review* 1149, 1152–1160.

¹⁰ Daphne Keller, 'Who Do You Sue? State and Platform Hybrid Power over Online Speech' (2021) 49 *Hofstra Law Review* 1, 6–15.

¹¹ Tarleton Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet* (Yale University Press 2018) 75–92.

¹² Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality* (St Martin's Press 2018) 89–102.

headlines becoming a replacement of substantive interaction as opposed to a gateway to substantive interaction.

The combination of these structural drivers forms the environment where the headlines take the upper hand over informational hierarchies, and evidence is simply pushed to the periphery of design and not coincidence. These systemic forces are critical in understanding why there is still a gap between facts and perception and why the responsibility of an individual is not enough to bridge this gap.

Psychological Dimensions: Why Headlines Work

The human cognitive psychology is entrenched in the effectiveness of headlines in forming the perception of the masses. People do not process information as disinterested judges of evidence; they use mental shortcuts to get through complex and information-saturated environments. These cognitive dispositions are exacerbated in digital media ecosystems where updates are constant and the content is overwhelming and thus headlines are the most compelling tools of perception formation.

Cognitive heuristics, or mental shortcuts, which enable people to judge things fast without having to analyse them in detail, is one of the most important psychological processes involved. With little time and focus, the readers tend to draw conclusions about the entire story basing on its headline only.¹³ This dependency is also supported by the availability heuristic in which information that is more readily available or that is more emotionally vivid is seen as more significant or more true than it really is. Headlines, which are made to be quickly consumed, take advantage of this trend and foreground dramatic or striking aspects at the expense of detail.

Similar to the first one is the confirmation bias, which is the tendency of people to find, interpret, and retain information that confirms what they already hold as a belief or identity. Headlines that appear to echo on ideological standpoints or emotive anticipations are easier to accept and countering information discounted or disregarded. When a headline has already proven to a person his or her worldview, there is usually no need to further read the entire article, or even the opposing evidence, on the part of the reader. This is the reason why subsequent corrections, clarifications or retractions seldom carry the same psychological weight as the original headline. There is also central involvement of emotional processing. It has always been found out that emotionally coloured content,

¹³ Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (Penguin Books 2011) 20–58.

especially one that triggers fear, anger, or moral outrage, is remembered better and processed faster than neutral information.¹⁴ These emotional responses are intentionally designed through the use of headlines in order to elicit greater engagement and shareability. Although such emotional indications are functional in attaining attention, they also inhibit the use of logic, diminishing the chances that the readers might evaluate the evidence behind it. Information overload and cognitive fatigue is another causative factor. Constant news alert, notification and scrolling feeds reduce the ability to focus on one task at a time.¹⁵ In this situation, readers tend to rely more and more on surface-level information, e.g., headline wording, visual information, or familiarity with the source, when making decisions about what to trust. This atmosphere favours perception as opposed to verification and speed as opposed to reflection. Lastly, the identity and social belonging are important factors that determine the interpretation of headlines. People tend to interpret information in terms of group affiliation, political, cultural, or social. The headlines that point to conformity to group discourses are more convincing and those that question group identities can elicit opposition irrespective of their strength of evidence.¹⁶ Therefore, psychological entrapment in identity just increases the divide between headlines and evidence.

Overall, headlines are effective not because they are believed to make people less informed, but because they just fit perfectly with the natural cognitive tendencies. Any concept of bridging the gap between the facts and the perception must hence consider these psychological dimensions understanding that evidence alone cannot be enough unless it interacts with the way the human beings process information.

Consequences of the Headlines–Evidence Gap

The increasing prevalence of headline-driven stories over the basis of evidence has far-reaching implications on the trust of the people, policy making and democratic discourse. The ability of societies to make informed decisions is greatly impaired when perception is influenced mostly by simplified or sensational framing.

One of the main effects is the loss of trust of the population in institutions that have historically been linked to knowledge and authority, such as the media and scientific professionals and governmental

¹⁴ George Loewenstein and others, 'The Psychology of Curiosity: A Review and Reinterpretation' (1994) 116 *Psychological Bulletin* 75.

¹⁵ Herbert A Simon, 'Designing Organizations for an Information-Rich World' in Martin Greenberger (ed), *Computers, Communications, and the Public Interest* (Johns Hopkins Press 1971).

¹⁶ Cass R Sunstein, *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media* (Princeton University Press 2017) 59–88.

institutions. The recurring misleading headlines, half truths and the subsequent corrections breed scepticism and confusion with the audience members and viewers.¹⁷ Such an environment over time fosters a kind of generalised distrust of journalism and even of evidence itself, since facts are seen as subject to manipulation or political dependency, not being grounded in facts. Trust is gone, and even properly and well-substantiated information will not find a way to be legitimate.

The headlines-evidence gap also has far reaching consequences on policy formulation and governance. The policymakers are working in the public opinion ecosystems that are being progressively influenced by the headline narratives and not by deep analysis. Political responses in these situations can be more concerned with visibility and symbolic reassurance than with evidence-based solutions in the long term.¹⁸ Complicated policy problems like government health, climate change or economic regulation are simplified into simple communicable frames that mask trade-offs, uncertainties and empirical constraints. The trend is a danger of coming up with reactive governance as a result of perception management instead of informed deliberation.

In addition, accountability is usually distorted through headline-driven policymaking. With sensational framing where the mass media draws attention to the issue, it is the structural or systemic causes of social problems that are less scrutinised than the individualised or dramatic events.¹⁹ Consequently, policy discussions can be based on short-term blame or action, whereas evidence-based institutional changes are postponed or even disregarded. This dynamic undermines the place of expertise in democratic governance and places narrative resonance above analytical rigor.

The implications are also very dire on democratic discourse. Democracy relies on an educated citizenry who are able to assess rival arguments and debate in a rational manner. But when headlines serve as a replacement of evidence, there is a higher degree of polarisation and fragmentation of the discourse of the population.²⁰ Streamlined stories promote binary thinking, lessen tolerance to complexity, and reinforce ideological eco-chambers. In these settings, disagreement is conceptualized as a conflict based on morality or identity as opposed to a battle of evidence and interpretation.

¹⁷ Tarleton Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet* (Yale University Press 2018) 143–160.

¹⁸ Jeff King, *Judging Social Rights* (Cambridge University Press 2012) 101–120.

¹⁹ Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality* (St Martin's Press 2018) 157–176.

²⁰ Cass R Sunstein, *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media* (Princeton University Press 2017) 119–145.

There is proliferation of misinformation and disinformation in such circumstances. The fragments of headlines are easily removed out of their context and shared alone over the digital platforms, which increases the misperceptions.²¹ Corrections or subtle explanations seldom reach as deep and far and false beliefs are often left after they are debunked by empirical means. This imbalance delegitimizes the rectifying role of the popular discourse and congeals perception as a leading power.

Lastly, the aggregate impact of these effects is a diminished support of deliberative bases of democracy. Once evidence is stripped of its authority in comparison to narrative appeal, then democratic decision-making in such cases will be performative, not substantive. The headlines-evidence gap is therefore not just a media issue but a structural issue on the sustainability of democracy that needs to be addressed not only through individual media consumption patterns.

Case Illustrations: When Headlines Override Evidence

In order to provide concrete evidence of the fact that headlines determine perception regardless of the content of the evidence, this section conducts an analysis of illustrative areas in which the mismatch between headline stories and empirical facts has been most noticeable. These examples show that framing, speed, and emotional salience regularly overwhelm the process of critical thinking, creating enduring biases in the general perception.

Public health communication is one of the fields that stand out, particularly in times of crisis like pandemic or vaccination. The headlines on health emergencies tend to focus on urgency, fear, or controversy, including individual negative incidents or early results, and minimise the statistical background and scientific uncertainty. Health emergency headlines are usually focused on urgency, fear or controversy, e.g., isolated adverse events or preliminary results, and downplay the statistical background and scientific uncertainty. Consequently, the remote possibilities can seem widespread and the changing scientific direction can be viewed as inconsistency or incompetence instead of methodological reluctance. Empirical research and consensus documents, which are generally challenging to read and need situational interpretation, are hard pressed to compete with dramatic headline framing. This asymmetry has been observed to add to vaccine hesitancy and mistrust in the population, despite where the base of evidence suggests that safety and efficacy is well supported.²²

²¹ Daphne Keller, 'Who Do You Sue? State and Platform Hybrid Power over Online Speech' (2021) 49 *Hofstra Law Review* 1, 18–26.

²² World Health Organization, *Managing the COVID-19 Infodemic: Promoting Healthy Behaviours and Mitigating the Harm from Misinformation and Disinformation* (WHO 2020).

The second example arena is the area of environmental and climate reporting. Climate science is based on longitudinal information, probabilistic modelling and peer-reviewed consensus. Nevertheless, in most cases, the headlines tend to put the climate related developments in the context of an episodic event, such as heatwaves, floods, or cold spots, in ways that do not give sufficient attention to their connection with the larger climatic patterns.²³ There are instances where short-term deviations are pointed out in a manner that undermines long-term scientific discoveries, further convincing people. The sheer amount of evidence about the climate is therefore reduced to simplified narratives either dramatising catastrophe or indicating scientific disagreement that in reality does not exist, which mislead the population on both urgency and causation. Another obvious example is the crime and security reporting. Violent or sensational events are usually spotlighted in the headlines, and most unusual events are disproportionately highlighted.²⁴ Such framing may develop an impression of insecurity increase despite stable or decreasing crime rates. There are much lower levels of attention paid to the empirical data on crime trends, socio-economic correlates, and policy effectiveness than to the individual incidents being framed in the emotional appealing manner. As a result, the urge to punish or make a statement in front of the masses can lead to increased demand, even though there is little evidence about their effectiveness. In these spheres, it is possible to observe a certain pattern: headlines lose the facts of their evidencing context and spread as autonomous accounts. These stories are difficult to refute once internalised, even when they are proven wrong by extensive data or professional interpretation of the data.²⁵ The examples provided in the case reflect the fact that the gap between the headlines and evidence is not an abstract concept but does exist in concrete policy-relevant domains, which influence behaviour, trust and the outcomes of governance. Such examples support the thesis that headline dominance is a systematic bias in favour of immediacy and emotional appeal as opposed to accuracy and proportionality. They also show why corrective measures should not only be developed to counteract misinformation but also precursory structural and cognitive mechanisms that enable headlines to dominate evidence in the first place.

²³ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Sixth Assessment Report: Summary for Policymakers* (IPCC 2021).

²⁴ David Garland, *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* (Oxford University Press 2001) 131–155.

²⁵ Cass R Sunstein, *On Rumors: How Falsehoods Spread, Why We Believe Them, What Can Be Done* (Princeton University Press 2009) 67–92.

Bridging the Gap: Normative and Practical Responses

The solution to the issue of disconnect between headlines and evidence is a multi-level intervention that would involve journalism, online platforms, and the community at the same time. Since the issue is both structural and psychological, and not just informational, remedial measures should not rely on fact-checking, but instead aim to transform incentives, practices, and abilities of the information ecosystem. One primary normative reaction is the journalistic responsibility and professional ethics. Headlines must be regarded as part of journalistic factuality and not as the marketing instruments that are independent of evidencing information. Proportionality, contextual fidelity and transparency to uncertainty are the ethical headline writing conditions. This does not mean that one should stop engaging, but instead, framing of narratives is synchronized with the power and limitations of available evidence. The editorial procedures of verifying headlines by pushing them to the back burner, giving them prominence through correction, and providing explanatory sub-headlines can all serve to reestablish the headline as an entry point to evidence and not a replacement of evidence. Second, any significant reform is based on platform accountability. Digital platforms wield a lot of control in the visibility of information via the algorithmic ranking and recommendation systems. Although the issue of free expression is valid, proportional responsibility is not censorship. Headline-driven distortions can be reduced by creating more openness in the design of the algorithms, amplifying less content that has been proved to be misleading, and prioritising authoritative sources when high-stakes events are taking place. Notably, platform governance is best seen as infrastructural control instead of content control, as a way of redressing systemic bias against sensationalism. Third, media literacy and education of the people cannot be ignored. The only way to be resilient against being misled by perception in the long run is to provide individuals with the ability to critically read headlines, differentiate between claims and evidence, and be aware of framing techniques. Media literacy efforts ought to leave the category of fake news and emphasize interpretive competence, i.e. teaching readers how stories are formed, why emotional framing is convincing, and how evidence ought to be considered. This literacy is particularly important in democratic societies in which citizens are habitually expected to evaluate rival claims. The modelling of evidence-based communication is also involved in institutional actors such as regulators and public authorities. Sensational narratives can be overcome by official messaging in which clarity, transparency, and consistency are prioritised to build on public trust, and conversely, sensational messages can be undermined by official messages and vice versa (Martin, 2015). In the event the institutions themselves turn to simplifications that headline writers find acceptable, they themselves legitimize discourse based on perception. Lastly, to bridge the gap, it is necessary to realise that evidence is not

enough unless it is conveyed in a manner that is cognizant of cognitive realities. Evidence based stories carefully framed but methodologically truthful are a viable way out of the technocratic abstraction that offers no solution and the sensational distortion that fails to offer any solution. It is not aimed at doing away with narrative, but to match the power of narrative and the power of evidentiary integrity. To conclude, bridging the headlines-evidence gap requires concerted efforts in reforming journalistic norms, platform design, education, and institutional practice. In the absence of such systemic reactions, perception will always be ahead of the proof, which will weaken informed public conversation and democratic debate.

Conclusion

The current paper has discussed the increasing gap between headlines and evidence, which is a characteristic of modern information ecosystems. It has been shown that the prevalence of headline-driven stories is not an accident of contemporary media but rather a result of the overlapping structural, technological and psychological forces. Attention-based economic incentives, amplification by algorithms of digital platforms, and cognitive shortcuts used by audiences as a group all contribute to the rise of perception over fact-finding, and in turn redefine the process of forming popular knowledge. By providing a conceptual explanation of the meaning of headlines, evidence, and perception, the research has demonstrated that headlines are increasingly being used as interpretative prismatic, and not as neutral summaries. The media framing and agenda-setting theories describe the pre-structured nature of the meaning prior to the audiences being exposed to the evidentiary content, and cognitive heuristics explain why these initial frames have such enduring power. The examples of the case based on the public health, environmental reporting, and crime accounts also show that this gap has very concrete implications, which influence the behaviour, trust, and the results of governance on the multi-vital policy areas. Democratic societies are especially prone to the effects of this divide. Under the influence of simplified or sensational framing of the public discourse, the trust in the institutions diminishes, policymaking turns reactive and deliberative processes become weaker. Reasoned arguments are incapable of competing with emotionally appealing stories, and misinformation and polarisation thrive. Under these circumstances, democratic decision making can easily be performative as opposed to substantive which compromises its ability to solve complex social problems. Simultaneously, the paper has contended that to resolve the headlines-evidence gap, there is no need to forego narrative or engagement. Rather, it demands a re-adjustment of journalism standards, platform regulation, and popular literacy to match narrative authority with evidentiary honesty. Ethical headline practices, algorithmic responsibility, and interpretive competence education are not independent solutions but complementary approaches. The

research does not lack limitations. It makes use of theoretical analysis and illustrative cases more than a large-scale empirical measurement of audience behaviour. Future studies may expand on this base by including cross-jurisdictional comparative research, quantitative research on headline impacts, or ethnographic research on news consumption behaviour. The final solution is to make evidence more important than perception in order to maintain an informed public discussion. Closing the gap between headlines and evidence is a media reform agenda and a democratic requirement, which is fundamental to the integrity and safety of modern civic life.

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