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Selective Exposure to Health Information: The Role of Headline Features in the Choice of Health Newsletter Articles

Abstract:

This study investigated how content and context features of headlines drive selective exposure in the context of the choice between headlines of a monthly email health newsletter in a naturalistic setting. Study participants received a monthly email newsletter and could freely open it and click any headline to read the accompanying article. A total of 324 headlines, each of which competed with 8 other headlines for selection, appeared in 36 versions of email newsletters over a period of 9 months. Visual and textual information of the headlines was content-analyzed, and click-through data on the headlines were collected automatically. The results showed that selective exposure to headlines increased when the headlines presented efficacy-information in an imperative voice; when they used a moderate number of negative emotion words; when they displayed negative thumbnail images while mentioning cancer or other diseases, and when they were placed higher in position.