



Construction of News Headlines in Influencing Public Opinion: A Study of Hypodermic Theory

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ABSTRACT

The choice of diction in news headlines is a construction to produce meaning that can influence audiences. A news headline can influence our cognition to produce behavioral changes. Audiences gain influence as a result of the concept of hypodermic or needle theory as an effect of mass communication. This theory assumes that audiences are unable to resist the messages and influences carried out by the media in a news story. The purpose of this research is to find out the extent to which the construction of a headline on the news can influence readers' opinions. So that readers are directly affected by the news message. The method used in this research is a descriptive qualitative approach from various literature reviews using the constructivism paradigm. The theory used to identify problems is the hypodermic theory. The result of this research is that audiences are actively or passively influenced by the message of the title given by a news story in the media. The headline is the first step of a message in influencing the reader's opinion.

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1. Introduction

In this era of information disclosure, audiences have actively played their role in the search for information or news to become a source of information. Technology makes it easy for us to be an active part of media journalism. News is still one of the information that can be trusted by audiences. News has the power to convey messages, because news has been organized systematically from various points of view and sources of information based on the 5W 1H rule. To attract readers' attention, the choice of diction in a headline must be considered (Bagus, 2020). The title is the first gate for the news to be read by the reader. The title is also the first step for the media to lead readers to what they want to convey, in accordance with the framing formed.

News has the power to influence audiences. The news as a whole provides complete information, so that the audience believes in the information. The news as a whole is organized

with systematic and constructive sentences, so that there is a main message in the news (Sausina, 2022). In order for readers to be interested in the news that has been made, the media must make an interesting title. The choice of diction can have the power to attract readers to do further activities, namely clicking on the news from the title that makes readers curious. A strong title can invite clickers to continue and open the news.

This study has been studied by many other researchers, with different points of view. As stated by Alamsyah, with the article title "Representation, Ideology and Media Reconstruction", emphasizing that media with the hypodermic needle theory has a strong influence because of the process of giving meaning and an active and creative role in interpreting it. The difference in this study is that it uses an encoding-decoding model which is an activity of exchanging meaning based on the background of the creator (media). The same thing as stated by Fairclough and Sausina in the title of the article "News Construction of the Kanjuruhan Riots in Online Media: Critical Discourse Analysis", states that discourse practices in the construction of news writing language in the two online media analyzed have differences in terms of describing the chronology of events. This means that the media or writers have different points of view in choosing news language. Meanwhile, Achfandhy in his article "Discourse Construction and Reality of Online News Portals" states that the discourse built in the Republika online news portal about "Aksi Reuni 212" was built in the news text to provide a positive image of the group. However, this shows that there is an assumption of a shift in the media as a source of information due to inconsistencies in the news that has been presented. Of the three previous studies, the study that will now be researched is the construction of news headlines as the main force in driving public opinion.

Today we recognize the term *clickbait*, which is able to make readers access media and click on links on the site. The construction of titles made by the media leads to the practice of *clickbait* (Taufik et al., 2023). With more and more online media popping up, competition is inevitable, so the practice of *clickbait*, especially in news headlines, is unavoidable (Kertanegara, 2018). In this research, the *mesostructural* element of construction can describe how the process of herding readers' opinions is carried out. A news writer has various news writing techniques as an effort to express his ideas, in the form of diction selection in headlines, image angles, and meanings that lead to certain things (Tandiono et al., 2022). The use of diction shows news value. In addition, the choice of diction in the title is inseparable from the nature of social media, where a hashtag can speed up news appearing on a page (Triadi & Aziz, 2019).

A headline contains information that uses language and writing by the writer to construct a message to the audience (Wirawanda & Arrasyid, 2021). As revealed by Larry L. Barker, that language has three functions, namely labeling or naming, interaction and transmission. A person uses language to be able to identify material and non-material objects, by naming them. On the other hand, language becomes a medium of social interaction, which illustrates that each individual understands an idea, sympathy and emotion from another individual. The construction of a headline in a news story is done to build meaning in the form of words and sentences (Tauran & Hamzah, 2019). The construction of the title aims to make the audience consume the news and cause social change (Achfandhy, 2021). Therefore, mass media is an effective and practical tool to convey messages and directly reach the public, especially online media.

The structure of a news story contains ideological values and the interests of the media (Gabore, 2020). This is what makes a media can no longer be said to be neutral or independent in constructing social reality through titles to news content (Indrayani, 2018). Media has its own way of doing perspective and presenting the social reality that occurs through the construction of titles to attract readers. Sometimes, the constructed title is not purely according to what the title directs; sometimes the title is just *clickbait* to invite readers to the page. However, in a news report, the media has the values of certain institutions or agencies and ideologies that cannot be objective in writing news (Badara & Jamiludin, 2020). A news writer in conveying a message to the audience has the freedom to transfer various forms of opinions, opinions, ideas and thoughts through a discourse construction (Achfandhy, 2021).

The term public opinion can be used to signify any collection of opinions expressed by individuals. The term is often used to refer to the collective opinions of a large number of people (Qadri, 2020). To change public opinion also requires an understanding in looking at the interesting side of the issues that develop in the community (audience) (Faulina et al., 2021). Public opinion is what the average person thinks. Opinion can be identified as a statement or attitude in words. An attitude can be expressed as a person's disposition or tendency to act or respond to an action (Annas et al., 2019).

Public opinion has several characteristics. Among them are: 1) Public opinion has content, direction and intensity. Content is the topic, issue or object that is being discussed in the community. Direction can be represented as an attitude of belief or disbelief, support or opposition, and so on. The intensity can be represented as strong, moderate or weak public opinion. 2) Public opinion is controversial, meaning something that not all people agree on. There are those who agree and those who disagree or oppose it. 3) Public opinion has volume. This means that the controversy in public opinion can touch and affect everyone, both those who feel the direct and indirect consequences of the controversy. Volume in public opinion indicates how many or few people are involved with an issue of controversy. 4) Public opinion is relatively fixed. This means that public opinion occurs over an indeterminate period of time. Public opinion that generates controversy can last a long time because there are elements of culture, norms and values that underlie conflicting opinions. 5) Public opinion has a pluralist appearance, meaning that public opinion is not identical to other opinions because public opinion influences one another. This influence is the embodiment or collective expression of personal beliefs, values and expectations that are displayed.

The hypodermic needle model does not see any elements between the beginning of the stimulus and the final response given by the audience. Elihu Katz in his book, "The Diffusion of New Ideas and Practices" points out interesting aspects of this hypodermic needle model, namely the mass media has tremendous power, able to inject ideas deeply into the minds of helpless audiences and audiences are considered like atoms that are separate from each other, not interconnected and only related to the mass media. A mass communication message does not have the same effect on each person. Its impact on a person depends on several things, including the characteristics of a person's personality and various aspects of the situation and context Lazarsfeld said that if audiences are hit by communication bullets, they do not fall down (Jones, 2019). Sometimes the bullet does not penetrate. Sometimes the effect is different from the aim of the shooter, the mass media. Often the targeted audience is happy to be shot. Meanwhile, Raymond Bauer states that the target audience is not passive. They actively seek what they want from the mass media. If they find it, then they immediately interpret it according to their tendencies and needs (Alamsyah, 2020).

For this reason, the researcher conducted a study with a limitation on the construction of news headlines, which in fact is a sentence that can build a perception on the integrity of the news. The choice of news topics in this study is still related to the 2024 election contestation which recently occurred. The mainstream media reports a lot about this, so this is a reason for researchers to study how several online media portals can lead readers' opinions through a news title so that they continue to read the news in full and have a perception of what the media expects. Researchers chose several mainstream media that are widely targeted as trusted information media, such as antaranews.com, detik.com and others. This research is titled 'Construction of News Headlines in Influencing Public Opinion: A Study of Hypodermic Theory'.

2. Method

The analysis conducted by researchers is semantic analysis. According to Chaer, semantics is one of the levels of language analysis focusing on studying meaning or meaning in language. Djajasudarma also describes semantics as a part of linguistics that studies meaning. It can be concluded that semantics is a branch of linguistics or language that studies the meaning or meaning of words, as well as sentences. Thus, it can be interpreted that semantic analysis is an

analysis that focuses on meaning. Researchers will conduct a semantic analysis of the use of words or diction. So that the research conducted will focus on the acquisition of meaning in the words used in the headlines (Dede Hamzah & Reza Firdaus Tsani, 2022).

In this study, researchers used a descriptive qualitative approach using the constructivism paradigm. This approach states that social reality is relative because it is the result of social construction. The constructivism paradigm is used as an analysis knife in this article as the answer to the ontological question of the constructivism paradigm is relativism, the answer to the epistemological question is subjective, and the answer to the methodological question is interpretative (Kelana et al., 2022). The title of a news story is the result of the author's construction to emphasize a value and emotion so that readers or audiences are interested and can influence opinions to change behavior.

This study is reviewed through some literature taken from several news titles on the internet, from several online news portals. This study is analyzed with semantic meaning whose diction will be deciphered so that it has an influence and persuasive nature that can influence readers.

3. Analysis and Results

Headlines taken from several online news portals which in terms of diction and construction of meaning can influence readers' opinions. These titles are the result of the media writers' construction of updated news about the 2024 election results. Readers can feel certain emotions just from reading the headline in one go, to having a perception of what will happen in the integrity of the story.

The constructivism paradigm views in this study that how the title can have a certain effect on the audience. So that readers or audiences are willing to open links, then receive cognitive effects and the influence of titles that have been read has succeeded in having a strong influence in accordance with the interests of the author or the media itself.

3.1. The Influence of News Headlines on Readers' Opinions

The use and selection of diction in news titles is often carried out by mass media in Indonesia. This is done to provide different values and emotions when the audience or readers read the title of a news story. News headlines in the scope of news in general can be likened to a mask put on by the author, it can be a beautiful and attractive mask, or a bad and creepy mask (Triadi & Aziz, 2019).

Etymologically, the notion of semantics comes from the Greek *sema* which is a noun meaning 'sign' or 'symbol' and *samaino* (verb) which has the meaning of 'marking' or 'symbolizing'. Semantics is an important field of study in learning linguistics. The importance of studying semantics is due to the impact of its application which greatly affects a person's understanding in learning language, as well as in life activities such as communication, social interaction, and so on. According to Chaer, semantics is one of the levels of language analysis focusing on studying meaning or meaning in language (Chaer, 2013). That is, semantics examines the use of diction and its meaning which affects the meaning of sentences, as well as the use of language conveyed. A similar opinion is also presented by Djajasudarma who says semantics is a part of linguistics that studies the meaning of language (Djajasudarma, 2021). This opinion also explains that semantics studies meaning. Thus, it can be concluded that semantics is a field of linguistics that studies the meaning of language use. This makes semantics important and influential on understanding in reading news texts, as well as for news writers in writing the content of news texts properly (Dede Hamzah & Reza Firdaus Tsani, 2022).

The headline is the main part that readers will see when reading the news. The content of the headline is the core of the news and the summary of the news. The choice of words to be used in the headline should be more precise and clear in meaning. However, the use of diction that has a certain meaning will affect the sentence used. Journalists and the media use a lot of strong and compelling diction. This strong meaning is written and chosen by the writer to give more sensation to the reader. This is done to attract the reader's attention and curiosity, they use

words that have sensation and emotion in order to attract the reader's attention (Tauran & Hamzah, 2019).

When the reader has digested the headline, a temporary opinion will be formed. Then with comprehensive information from the news, it will form its own opinion, which is the result of the reader's perception of what has been read. Public opinion determines which way people will express their opinions on social media. Public opinion is often the driving force in the formation of public policy, so research conducted by James W. Stoutenborough wants to ensure that what the public thinks can be changed from various perspectives (Edgerly & Thorson, 2020)(Stoutenborough, 2020).

3.2. The Hypodermic Theory Effect in News Headlines

Hypodermic needle theory or also known as bullet theory is one of the mass communication theories, especially the theory of mass media effects initiated by Harold Lasswell in the 1920s when writing a book "propaganda technique" during the world war. Hypodermic needle theory is a linear communication model that emphasizes the power of media influence on audiences. The magic bullet theory is the belief that the originator's media message can convince the audience by inserting ideas directly into the audience. That is, the creators of this theory make the assumption that they will be able to influence their audience by injecting the message directly into the audience's brain. Injectable needle theory uses the same idea as the Magic bullet theory's "shooting" analogy (Effendi et al., 2023).

Communication research in its early days used this model as its foundation. This model is mostly found in research on the influence and effects of media on audiences. The media is considered to have an unlimited effect or a powerful effect, which is why it is often found in experimental research that seeks to explain the effect of one variable on another. This theory has a strong influence and also assumes that media managers are considered smarter than the audience can be deceived in such a way from what is broadcast, that the media has a guess, the audience can be subdued in such a way or even can be formed in any way the media wants (Jones, 2019). In essence, the media in the hypodermic needle theory has a direct effect of being "injected" into the audience's unconscious.

This model assumes that the components of communication (communicator, message, and media) are very powerful in influencing communication. It is called a hypodermic needle because in this model it is impressed as if communication is injected into the communicant's soul, as medicine is stored and spread in the body so that changes occur in the physical system as well as persuasive messages change the psychological system. The needle theory argues that audiences have absolutely no power to reject information after it has been fired through the communication media. Audiences are doped up like a drug through a syringe so that they cannot have alternatives to make other choices, except what is broadcast by the media.

The construction of a news headline, which still has a strong influence on the reader's opinion, is one of the studies of the hypodermic theory. This is because the reader cannot reject the initial information of a news story, which is the main door in drawing a perception of the information read as a whole. The hypodermic theory that considers the power of the media so strong in firing ideas from a headline, can give a strong impression on information that has been constructed by writers or journalists in a news story. Over time, as Lazarfield argues, it turns out that the audience is not all passive, but the audience is also not immediately affected by the info. So, when the reader reads the headline, the reader is not necessarily led directly to the flow of information, because there are also readers who are critical and think long in acting on the information they have received.

3.3 Interpretation of News Headlines



Source: viva.co.id

In this picture, we can see that the word 'menang' emphasizes that the statement is an absolute single winner in the 2024 election contestation. They claim about the result as they expect.

The word 'satu putaran' gives the reader the idea that it is better for elections to be conducted in one round rather than two. This statement leads public opinion to agree with this, because it is associated with political costs that require a lot of money and energy.

The word 'moncer' builds an opinion that if this candidate runs and wins one round, then becomes president and vice president in this period, the benefits will be more, especially in terms of foreign investment. The word 'investasi' associates with something that brings benefits to the country. So, it is one of the achievements that became an asset in winning the electability vote. This will be a consideration for voters to make their choice and ensure that the election is only conducted in one round.



Source: antaranews.com

The second news at this picture taken from *antaranews.com*. The word 'prediksi' means that the Constitutional Court in this case sees that problems will arise, such as lawsuits from various camps. Our opinion as readers will lead to things that are against the law, especially in terms of the 2024 elections.

The word 'meningkat' indicates that this election year there are more complaints and challenges about the 2024 election results than in the previous period. The statement from this title can lead the audience that there are indeed many problems that occur and the Constitutional Court also confirmed this.



Source: detik.com

The 3rd news at picture above, taken from *detik.com*. The word 'resmi' in the title emphasizes to the audience that the 3rd candidate (Ganjar-Mahfud) really filed a lawsuit over the alleged election fraud that had occurred. This candidate means that they believe and acknowledge the problem. When we read the title, we realize that they find various election frauds, and they feel unacceptable because it is an injustice in democracy. Unconsciously, we become aware of it.



Source: antaranews.com

The 4th news of picture above, taken from *antaranews.com*. This headline is one that confirms that there will be various frauds in the 2024 election results. This headline adds to the list of news about issues related to disputes and fraud allegedly committed by one of the candidate. Even though this headline is additional information from various reports that have appeared, from various mass media.

This news not only adds to the list of fraud that occurred in the 2024 election. This builds a negative opinion in the minds of readers. This cheating does not only occur in presidential election sessions, but also in legislative elections.



Source: tempo.co

The 5th news of picture above, taken from *tempo.co*. The word 'prediksi' builds an opinion that a certain thing will happen, which in the current issues is the existence of fraudulent election results from one of the presidential candidate. This word (prediksi) explains that there have been indications of election fraud so that it is used as a lawsuit.

The word 'lebih besar' emphasizes that this year's lawsuit and problems are more than the previous year and will take a lot of time until it is legalized and sworn in as the winner in the 2024 election contest.



Source: tvonenews.com

The 6th news of picture above, taken from *tvonenews.com*. The word 'pisahkan' the issue of PPHU cases and election fraud indicates that it is true that many lawsuits have entered the Constitutional Court and the sentence in this title contributes ideas or gives influence to the audience's opinion to continue to monitor the movement of election results. Audiences are led to distinguish between the PPHU case and all the election fraud that has surfaced. These two things are different. So as the audience then has the opinion that if the 2 cases are different, then the problem seems to be more.



Source: tvonenews.com

The last news of picture above, taken from *tvonenews.com*. The word 'siap bongkar' emphasizes to the audience that there really is fraud that occurs and the lawsuit will go to the Constitutional Court. This gives cognitive and behavioral influence to the audience that the community must be aware and move to monitor and even take action against the fraud. The word 'bongkar' leads us to think that there is something to be uncovered from this. There is something behind all this that people don't know about.

The term 'kecurangan pilpres' indicates that the election of this year has a lot of democracy violations. The word 'kecurangan' has negative meaning, so the election contains that is not good. As a reader, our opinion refers to what we have read before. Before reading the whole news, the readers have been led a perception in that direction.

4. Conclusion

In this research, the limitation studied is media construction in news headlines, with the selection of mainstream media that is widely accessed by the public. The choice of diction in a news title gives a strong impression and influence on public opinion. The public will be encouraged to do something, think something, and change social behavior in responding to the issues that have been raised. The title of a news story can move the audience to open the link, read the news in full, and make the information a credible reference. The implication of a headline that is captivating and has strong values will give emotions to the reader, so that the reader feels believed, moved, and aware of the issue. News writers perform various constructions on headlines to attract readers' interest. In addition to constructed diction, images, angles, points of view are also constructed in such a way as to suit the message to be conveyed, or according to the interests of the media and the public.

Researchers hope that future studies on media construction can be more specific from various unexplored points of view, so that this study can add insight and knowledge about the study of public opinion and media power.

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