

THE CREDIBILITY OF CLICKBAIT JOURNALISM ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM: USERS' OPINION

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Abstract

As internet popularity grows, clickbait journalism on digital media platforms is rapidly increasing. It's challenging the credibility of news in Pakistan's evolving digital media landscape. This study examines the results of sensationalized headlines on public viewpoint of authenticity and their behaviour online news and information. The research follows the supportive argument of Uses and Gratification theory and Selective Exposure and Attention Theory, which focus on audience choice regarding media selection. Study aimed. To understand viewers' perspective on whether they consider clickbait as credible in terms of trust and accuracy. To explore the presence of clickbait news as it appears on social media in the settings of Pakistan. To compare the perceived credibility of thumbnails with the user's personal interests. To analyse the behavioral reaction of the selected users to YouTube clickbait thumbnails to know if they click on it despite awareness. To understand the reasons that make people engage with content they don't fully trust. To identify gaps in existing studies and give suggestions for further research studies from Pakistani perspective, and to suggest practical ways to improve digital media literacy. The survey questionnaire was used to assess users' perceptions and reactions. The sample of 548 participants was used to carry out the research through a convenience sampling technique. The questionnaire consisted of four sections of 20 questions. Each section was designed to assess the YouTube clickbait thumbnail credibility and users' behavioral reaction. The findings of study revealed that people don't trust the accuracy of the clickbait.

1 Introduction

The technological revolution has influenced everything; the journalistic process is not immune to it (Lasora et al., 2012). The audience has migrated to social media to read news instead of traditional newspapers. (Mitchel, 2018). The Internet has paved its way into our daily life routine.

Now the world has become an actual global village; this fact cannot be ignored. The availability of 3G and 4G has changed the dynamics of mobile journalism extensively, yet has brought no betterment to journalism (Ghaznavi, 2021). In two decades, the news

industry has been openly welcoming online presence by shifting there (Ladd, 2011). Journalistic practice has been refined globally (Obijiofor et al, 2013). Social media grants the availability of tools to reach people at ease. It is not only for the public but for people holding prominent positions to influence decision-making (Ekwunife, 2020). It has given liberty to media personnel, such as reporters, especially from small villages, to provide information about recent happenings. Pakistani journalists have become a means of instant news updates. And in regards to social media, it has become a universal truth not only for interaction but also

for staying informed. According to Smart Insights, over 63.9% of the inhabitants, which made around 5.24 billion individuals, use social media daily. This scenario has strategized the production, distribution, and utilization of news. Technology and alternative tools have been beneficial for producers and consumers, leaving traditional media behind (Khattak and Nasir, 2011). It has allowed every citizen to stay informed, share, and participate to become a source of information itself. The information distribution on the internet is also changing; website visitors who used to read news through search engines and websites are declining and moving to social community platforms like Facebook, X (former Twitter), YouTube, and WhatsApp. Recommended and endorsed by aggregators and social circles (Bazaco et al, 2019). The proportion of readers were 32% around the world who use websites and apps to follow news stories in 2018 has been reduced to 10% in total in 2024 (Digital News Report – Reuters, 2024)

A decade ago, there were two major digital news sources. Facebook was leading as of now; it has expanded to YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter), according to the Reuters 2024 digital news report. Global trend indicates that the Pakistani landscape is not indifferent. Till first quarter of year 2024, Pakistan has 111 million cybercitizens in which 71.7 million users of social media consumers are active. (Datareportal, 2024). YouTube is surpassing all social media platforms as the most used platform, followed by TikTok and Facebook as a news source. A portion of 64% population of Pakistan is under 30, according to the UNDP report published in 2018. A large share of social media users is driven by youth, which makes our research study more significant. Social media is mostly used by the 18-24 age bracket and is mostly dominated by male figures that shape political opinion and public debates (Freedom on the Net, 2024).

1.1 Emergence of Clickbait: The decline of Public Trust

The news dissemination is faster than news verification nowadays. Everything comes with pros and cons. With global reach, it has limited

the scrutiny in countries like Pakistan; it has become a real battleground for stakeholders, elite powers, policymakers, media organizations, and citizens. Moreover, it is becoming more challenging, where there are tons of anonymous accounts and user-generated content disguised as news. Media is struggling to attract more public to their digital platforms with subpar informational content (Rehman and Mamun, 2024). It has paved the way for a new subject term, pseudo journalism, where journalists who turned into daily vloggers do not operate under the newsroom code of conduct, solely working to generate revenue through their monetized accounts. As of current digital media runs on speed and views, stepping over verification. Because the economy revolves around monetization based on views to earn revenues. Clicks and page views result in dollars. Digital revenue recorded as \$50.7 billion in the United States of America (Mitchell and Page, 2015). Non-professional content creator delivers news on YouTube just to earn, encourage other non-professionals to share on social media, may lack expertise, value, be full of errors, and lack ethical consideration. They mostly promote, sometimes hate speech, and exaggeration of information, just to gain monetary benefits.

The 24/7 cycle of news and demand for constant reporting declines the public trust. According to a survey, 58% Pakistanis showed distrust in the media and pointed out fake news as a major challenge to the country (Samia & Asad 2024). The need for speed and demand for going viral to get more view counts compromised the basic principles of ethical journalism accuracy. They often generate their own news stories to retain their audience. When the target audience approves of the news, organizations try to produce it in large numbers. This makes journalism more challenging and unreliable. This chaotic environment gave birth to clickbait. Clickbait is defined as a proactive, catchy, and sensational headline and thumbnail to get viewers to click on a linked news article (Rahman and Mamun, 2024).

1.2 Analysis of Clickbait Mechanism on YouTube

Platforms like YouTube operate on User-Generated Content (UGC). From expert to

layman, content is uploaded and shared daily. As it is a key source of information sharing, two billion people visit YouTube in a day. In 2019, over 500 hours of footage were streamed each minute (Tankovska, 2021). COVID-19 became a big reason for YouTube video viewing habits and watch time increase (Schomer, 2020). With COVID-19, millions of people have turned to social media platforms and become content creators to earn a living. Due to the effectiveness and easy accessibility of the internet, people can turn to it for health information without delay (Paige et al, 2017). But with time to sustain and be relevant, creators try to manipulate and feed algorithms with the wrong information. Studies have shown shocking revelations that YouTube leads from the front in providing misinformation, specifically in global public health emergency such as the H1N1 influenza pandemic, Zika, and Ebola virus outbreak. Out of all 26% YouTube videos were misleading and were generated by independent users proclaiming health care workers (Pandy A, 2010, Bora K, 2018). One mostly used technique to grab attention is a video preview image, which is a thumbnail. Users prefer videos that are more striking and compel viewers to click (Park, 2022). Mostly, the thumbnail influences the viewer to watch the video. (Yoon and Kim, 2019).

Sensational news headlines shown with test on thumbnail cover, for example "You wouldn't believe this young woman is 70-year-old" or "33 things to do before you turn 40". It has given rise to clickbait that generates and attracts more viewership (Molyneux and Coddington, 2020). The more negative thumbnail increases the chances of video selection (Yoon and Kim). It's not a random approach but deep-rooted in human psychology that triggers curiosity. Around the globe, clickbait mostly revolves around celebrities or human interest, but in Pakistan, it's mostly political regional rivalry to evoke. We have seen examples on YouTube, for instance, when reporting about a blast, certain headlines roam around "Raat Gy Dhaka Shadain Hi Shahadain" (blast at night, number of casualties) without mentioning the place and number of casualties. One example of reporting death news as "Bari Shakhshiyat Ka Inteqal, Ghar Main Saf E Maatam" (A great

personality passed away, lines of mourners at home), these kinds of news mostly create panic and cause backlash, but they are still using it for high views. These examples are not from small pages but from big news channels including ARY News, Capital TV, and Express News. Small channels mostly rely on spicy news to arouse emotion with cheap titles and blurred thumbnails to fulfill their need for clicks. Certain elements are added to spark curiosity while sharing on social media; some focus on important personalities, for higher impact, murder news, conflict, unusual happenings, or are important to some extent (Mencher and Shilton, 1997). Individuals obtain and trust the information that is given substance to already existing beliefs and ignore what doesn't resonate with it (Sunstein, 2016). Content creators mould news headlines into questions or frame them to drive the desired result, increasing the Click Through Rate (CTR), which measures YouTube revenue (Mubeen & Ahsan, 2024).

There are many studies available regarding news sensationalism and the public trust element. There is no study found defining Pakistani users' YouTube clickbait consumption and trust in the associated news's credibility. As the public is our main focus, the opinion has a wait for the study to drive authentic on-spot results. We are attentive towards the trustworthiness of clickbait on social media digital platforms because it has a significant impact on behaviour, especially among the general public, on news media outlets, and on how they identify fake and garbage content. If they scroll down or are intrigued to click.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The global media crisis is expansion is not new in Pakistan. This situation is perhaps far worse. The nation's current deep divisions in political, religious, and ethnic lines, have become a resource for online engagement and exploitation. The problem is no longer just that news is of low quality. It is that information itself is being weaponized in the race for viral content. To get the most from this polarized environment, media outlets and online influencers often present audiences with exactly what they already believe and agree with, instead of fulfilling the journalistic duty of putting the

unvarnished truth before the public. This practice creates a powerful digital narrative, where citizens are trapped in their own biases, making them more extreme in their views (Sunstein, 2017).

The monetization factor is present to give more hype to clickbait. The economic structure has produced an influencer industry that prioritizes revenue, leading content creators to generate exaggerated content to get attention. It's more beneficial if garnished with persuasion and emotional appeal. It confirms the use of classic clickbait strategies to generate traffic, including question-based headlines, omitting key information, and the use of sensational language to pique curiosity (Asad and Samia, 2024). Its extension can be seen on YouTube by exploiting emotions and personal tragedies to chase views. These are societal impacts that cause the collapse of the social fabric by undermining its roots.

The central problem that this study addresses is the resulting crisis of credibility and its impact on the youth of Pakistan. As traditional media compromises its principles and social media platforms promote sensationalism over substance, the public is losing its trust in the very institutions that are meant to be the voice of the people. They are navigating a polluted information ecosystem where it is increasingly difficult to notice verified journalism and manipulative clickbait (Tandoc et al, 2018). The problem has many sides; it is the financial crisis of the media, online algorithms, and the collapse of public trust, all of which leave an entire generation of common citizens scattered and uncertain. This study investigates this crisis by examining how young Pakistanis perceive and react to clickbait.

First, this study is significant because it will make a crucial contribution to academic knowledge by adding more to previously done work in this domain. The academic work has examined the rise of clickbait on a global level but this research will provide the first data-driven analysis of public perception in Pakistan. Moreover, the study expands with claim of the Uses and Gratifications Theory. It seeks to know the human element, the "why", behind every click. Understanding the motivations behind urge for more credible substitute to the current

informational environment. This work will add a vital and non-Western perspective.

The relevance of the research also lies in potential benefits that re crucial for Pakistani society. Its findings will directly contribute to the urgent need for better implications and media literacy, a fundamental survival skill in the 21st century (Livingstone, 2004). This research is significant for its role in against "information disorder" (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). By evaluating clickbait headline, this study will produce a crucial understanding of the psychological triggers that make people exposed to garbage content. For the newsrooms and media institutions of Pakistan, this study will hold up accountability by revealing the long-term consequences of a "clicks at all costs" strategy on their credibility (Chen & Wells, 2018). The findings can spark an important conversation about ethics and more effective approach for policy making that favours the citizens through education.

1.4 Rationale of the Study

1.4.1 Navigating Pakistan's Polluted Information Environment

This research study is required by current circumstances; it is an immediate reaction to the lousy information environment we are facing today. With social media, popularity information makes its way through shares (Mitchell and Page, 2015). Without attention to details, factual context gets filthy with fiction (Robin et al, 2015). We are bombarded with information, yet clarity, accuracy, and facts are lacking in their true form. In Pakistan, a climate of selective censorship often hangs over the traditional media. The news that reaches the public through established channels can be filtered, shaped, and sanitized by powerful interests. Press freedom is rare in Pakistan because of unannounced regulatory bodies (Reporters without Borders, 2019). The direct approach to true information has become a rare commodity, often inaccessible to the average citizen. In this situation, the public has not given up its search for truth; it has simply migrated to the world of social media. The rationale for this specific study is therefore grounded in the urgent need to understand what is happening

there, as it is now the stage where public opinion is shaped.

1.4.2 Youth Centric Approach to Information Overload

The core rationale for this study's approach has its fixed focus on the public of Pakistan. Young people, specifically those between the ages of 18 and 34, are not merely a segment of the audience; they are at the absolute centre of this issue. Youth use these social media platforms with reference of connectivity and get to know about everything (Muller P et al, 2016). They are the technophiles who have been born and grown up with a smartphone in their hands, for whom Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok are not just applications but a primary door to the world. Therefore, to understand the problem of data smog and information noise, we must begin with the generation that is most deeply involved in it. Their raw, unfiltered experiences and their instant responses to the content they encounter are the most valuable and authentic data available. Their habits today will become the nation's information culture tomorrow, making the study of their perceptions not just relevant, but predictive.

1.4.3 Crisis of Credibility in The Digital Age

This analysis is further justified by its intention to be more than an academic work; it is designed to be a trigger for change. The findings are meant to provide leaders, policymakers, and civil society organizations with a sensible understanding of the digital landscape so they can begin to address the mechanisms of self-serving goals and fake news. Fake news proliferation is not new; it was prominently highlighted in the year of 2016, Presidential elections when Donald Trump was blamed of producing false news on a mass scale (Bensky and Yamamoto, 2017). The rapid and constant wave of clickbait is not a harmless offense; it is an impurity in the atmosphere of information. By understanding "why" these types of clever strategies work on the public, we can build a more effective antidote to this social plague. This research justifies the need to defend what is left of the professional news industry in the context of Pakistan. Every time a user is persuaded by a fascinating headline, and if it has

a more negative inclination, the names of all public institutions are questioned, let alone the media. It will give short-term gain for viral content and website traffic, but over time, the audience gets bored (Molyneux and Coddington, 2010). This is a lifelong crisis of credibility (Chen & Wells, 2018). The need for this work is immediate and undeniable, as the very nature of truth and trust in our society hangs in the balance; otherwise, societies collapse due to non-existent scrutiny.

1.4.4 Narrative Building and Fuelling the Democratic Process

Clickbait is a powerful tool to fasten the process of narrative political building. States use this tool by different means of influential people to fuel campaigns. They introduce emotional and misleading content to shape public opinion towards their agenda. They expose repetitive and similar content to condition voters for their own political means. In Pakistan, commonly used terms are Traitor, West lobby and framing specific ethnic minority groups are common examples. This practice does not rely on terms but on a chain of lies that form a resilient ideology that becomes firmer over time with constant persuasion. By pointing out these tactics, we can inform the common people to make wise decisions for the secure future of upcoming generations.

1.5 Rationale for the Selection of the Population

We have selected users of Pakistan who lie between 18 - 34 intentionally because they represent well and will prove to be a meaningful choice. This segment of the population is critical as they are starting their adult life. They are aware and mature enough cognitively to make the right decisions. They actively engage within online communities. With the leverage of social media, political parties do not rely just on door-to-door campaigns; they have built strategies to exist online for locals, especially the youth, to mobilize them. They remain active on Facebook, X, and YouTube to engage with potential voters. In the general elections in 2018, all political parties of Pakistan emerged more massively on the political scene and favoured by the youth directly. This proves the selection more useful.

Youth not only observe social issues keenly but are also a driving force in making and participating in political debates. They are a focused population and set out to collect opinions for our research.

1.6 Research Objectives

We conducted this research to achieve six focused aims. The base of research is get to know about clickbait credibility and its associated influence on consumer. The intended audience of this paper is the general public aged between 18 to 34 years. The present study shares an overview of how clickbait has an impact on journalism and news trustworthiness. It also expects to get other related aspects of clickbait, especially in the context of YouTube, because a larger audience can easily access it through the video-sharing platform YouTube.

1. To understand viewers' perspective on whether they consider clickbait as credible in terms of trust and accuracy when compared with standard news.
2. To explore the presence of clickbait news as it appears on social media in the context of Pakistan
3. To compare the perceived credibility of thumbnails with the user's personal interests
4. To analyse the behavioural reaction of the selected users to YouTube clickbait thumbnails to know if they click on it despite awareness.
5. To understand the reasons (like curiosity or the desire for entertainment) that make people engage with content they don't fully trust.
6. To identify research gaps in prior studies and give suggestions for further research studies from the perspective of Pakistan, and to suggest practical ways to improve digital media literacy.

1.7 Research Questions

By following the study, we have derived core objectives that give direction to this research. The questions are not just mere statements but formulated based on research and objectives associated with this. They are precisely designed to get an understanding of clickbait news, credibility, trust, and public opinion. Each question targets the problem, logically identifying and categorising the evaluation to explain user behaviour.

RQ1. Do people take clickbait as credible in terms of trust and accuracy to their preexisting interests?

RQ2. How well does the general public identify clickbait? Is there a link between clickbait awareness and the selection to click it anyway?

RQ3. What are the behavioural reactions of the selected group to YouTube clickbait thumbnails they click, share, or ignore?

RQ4. What are the main reasons to click on YouTube thumbnails if they find them untrustworthy?

1.8 Hypothesis

H₁: Users generally identify clickbait as non-credible.

H₀: Users generally identify clickbait as non-credible.

2 Literature Review

This research article deals with the Credibility of Clickbait Journalism on Social Media platforms from the angle of users' opinions. A literature review is an analysis and discussion of works published in the same field of study by different scholars (WashU, 2025). It's a part of scholarly research (Weng M, 2022). It also provides a path to carry out research studies and to understand the current gaps and challenges. In this context, the literature reviewed was about news originality, clickbait, and trustworthiness of content on YouTube, mainly that which is distributed through social media platforms.

2.1 Multiregional Analysis of Clickbait Proliferation

Abdur R, Abdullah A 2024 investigated Bangladeshi newspapers by using a descriptive research approach to explore the underlying reasons for the rise of clickbait in the Bangladeshi news environment and media personnel's perception of credibility. In this research paper, 4 top-tier media outlets were examined, and 12 news personnel were interviewed. Results showed significant availability of clickbait in the analysed content. Clickbait proliferation was linked to news demand, competition, and the need to increase revenue. Concerns showed that it negatively impacts trust in news and audience credibility.

Judith Flora et al (2021) tried to explore audience perception and clickbait headlines in sub-Saharan Africa. With technological advancement, traditional mainstream media have to adapt new methods to stay relevant and compete with social media. For that, they use the strategy of clickbait titles to get instant audience attention. Some of the viewers marked this as threatening, and others had the opinion that it's not linked to credibility. This research experiment aims to get audience responses about clickbait headlines that talk about the credibility of media, mainly to differentiate traditional news distribution and clickbait news by people of Tanzania and Zambia, and whether the public says lower authenticity for news content or not. The results were really useful, with statistical insights based on the structure of these clickbait news materials, which were perceived negatively in Tanzania and Zambia, respectively.

Aba A (2021) studied the newspapers of Nigeria to investigate the journalistic landscape change and how media outlets use clickbait headlines that attract more people and readership. The paper used Algorithmic Text Analysis and manual content analysis to analyse clickbait headings. Findings were more than shocking. Analysis included 10242 headings, 49% which consisted of 5039 that were clickbait. The interesting thing is that the country's leading newspaper, "The Tribune," which had a large readership, was contributing one-third of the sensational and misleading titles that appear on the front page. It was recommended to control the fake news environment among Nigerian newspapers and emphasize the use of clickbait detectors.

Turrochmah et al. (2025) identified how clickbait headlines in the news world on the internet significantly affect users, particularly in Indonesia, where digital interaction and engagement are low. Researchers selected and analysed five headlines that were in English and were taken from media giants The York Post and CNN. These leading news outlets capture large numbers of audiences nationally and internationally. They interviewed readers and used linguistic analysis for the interpretation of results. The findings revealed that readers were manipulated through ambiguous, exaggerated

language and emotional appeal. The language used was negative and questioning in nature. They used sensationalism and curiosity-driven content. Users' perception was totally based on their own media literacy. Some were more critical and aware, while the rest believed information to be true. They concluded the study by emphasizing the need to improve and provide a more critical approach to filter information and the application of ethical journalism in the rapidly changing computer age.

Chaitanya Shinkhede (2019) researched how rapid change in the online environment and increasing user base caused the rise of fraudulent activities, especially clickbait deception. The method uses false or fake story thumbnails (video preview images) and takes them to the audience through direct links. At first, it was used for commercial purposes and has now become a tool for mainstream media and online news portals, as well as for frequent baiting, raising serious ethical concerns about journalism. The central point of the study was to grasp the core of clickbait's origin and its presence in Indian news media and public vulnerability to online fraudulent activities.

2.2 Balancing Viral Demand with Journalistic Integrity

This study investigated (Dr E Van and C Van, 2021) the impact of going viral trend in journalism and reliability of content on journalists. The main objective of researchers was to get a full understanding of journalists' perception towards viral journalism and to know how news media outlets and media personnel cope with the issue of credibility in the current media environment. The researchers carried out 10 semi-structured interviews with media personnel from free and subscription-based digital news houses. The inquiry signifies that with a shift of audience to online news media; newsmen are under strain with the time to report the news. Due to this, sometimes facts and sources can't be checked thoroughly, and as a result, minor errors are published. In addition to this, many online news organizations now use a paywall. It is subscription-based article reading. Due to this, readers expect high quality. If the reader encounters low-quality content, they will

express their regret of reading this online. To avoid losing revenue, these organizations make sure the content that is going to be published is credible. The study suggested that the concept of viral journalism is not a threat or reinforcement for the practice of journalism. The technique applied by journalists is mostly to create creative and attractive statement of headlines. Moreover, it has been emphasized by the journalists that title and headlines should be matching to the content so it shouldn't be deceiving. It is crucial these days that reader should not be disappointed as they have plenty of options. This research study aims provide a pool of insights about the live experiences of journalist like how they cope with viral journalism and maintaining the credibility side by side. With the improvements in media and online news, the environment of the Institute of Journalism is changing quickly. Therefore, a further study is required to dig more valuable data about how the experiences of journalists evolve in the upcoming years. These studies confirm that the clickbait problems are widespread because of economic pressures, but are still effective in attracting a large group of audience. The answer to the statement is the psychological and design principles of clickbait that hit the target instantly. The next section explores this trick in detail.

2.3 How Clickbait Works

A research experiment by Schoenmakers (2022) was conducted with the purpose of assessing the making of headline and outline on two dependent variables: curiosity and credibility. "Formulation" refers to whether the headline was structured as a declarative statement or as an interrogative question. "Figuration" refers to the presence or absence of linguistic exaggeration. To test this, clickbait was designed with four different situations. They were put together as a statement and question. Statements were presented with or without exaggeration. The research included 140 participants randomly to conduct experiment. They were shown headlines with different topics. The experiment was parted into two divisions, A and B. Level of curiosity by showing headlines was measured in part A. The second part was designed to check the credibility of title and linked article. The

results broaden the understanding. This study shares similar findings with prior work concerning headlines that are formulated without exaggeration. The results confirm that headlines without exaggeration are more credible to viewers than exaggerated headlines. Anna Katharina et al (2021) researched the connection between clickbait news and news user engagement on content such as comments, clicks, and likes on the social media platform Facebook. Researchers include 10 different news sources and get the data of 4400 posts to test the user's engagement with clickbait post captions and titles. Findings suggested common phrases and intentional punctuation were used excessively to grow users' engagement; on the other hand, a few components harmed it. The study also researched user interface and user experience (UI &UX), referred to as digital nudging, which also influences users' behaviour because it works as a framing to drive the public to specific things, mostly monetary gain. This type of framing technique always works when the creator misses something and viewers, in their innocence, point it out in comments. From the viewer's side, it's a correction, but from the video creator, it's a tactic for engagement and to get the video viral.

Audrey et al 2024 studied the mechanism of clickbait headlines. They use superlatives like least, best, or worst, biggest, or smallest. Also use intensifiers like shocking, unbelievable, fantastic, and amazing. This strategy of using language is used to create information gaps. This gap creates an extreme need in the reader's mind to get knowledge out of curiosity. The purpose of creating these gaps is to increase the significance of links in the reader's mind. These links lead users to websites that are time-wasting and sometimes can be fraudulent in nature. Then the text introduces a more sophisticated approach that can boost it with the help of targeted clickbait. This method involves taking information from a user's social media profile to align the clickbait. It is specifically designed for targeted users' preferences and pre-existing beliefs that make it potentially difficult to resist. In this research work, researchers organized a series of pilot studies to recognize the influence of targeted clickbait on the behaviour of viewers. Depending on initial findings from these

studies, they involved a group of 24 participants in the research design. They called this "story-based warnings" against targeted clickbait. It means the researchers and users created warnings together.

The analysis of created warnings resulted in the development of four design variations. These variations were evaluated through an online survey on a crowdsourcing platform, Amazon Mechanical Turk. The findings demonstrate the consequences of persuasive narratives with the addition of information to create effective warnings against targeted clickbait. This shows that presenting simple facts is not as effective as presenting those facts within a compelling story. Overall, the research provides a valuable understanding of users' perceptions and behaviours when they are confronted with targeted clickbait. Furthermore, the work indicates the efficacy of using story-based interventions as a potential remedy.

These tactics are not just a random framework but are exclusive to the platform ecosystem. YouTube is the largest video-sharing platform that works on specifically designed algorithms. It provides a assessment of the function of linguistic and psychological strategies. The next part studies the YouTube techniques.

2.4 YouTube Platform as Case Study

Junho Park (2022) designed an online experiment to understand why users select certain YouTube videos over other YouTube content. Users see video previews before deciding to choose a video, which include thumbnail images, rule-of-thumb mental shortcuts like the view count, likes, and the date of the video. These feature helps users decide a video to watch. The experimental study included 95 people to participate, and specifically designed tools were used to measure two main factors: the valence of the thumbnail (whether the image included emotional factors that were positive or negative) and the video view count (whether it was low or high). The aim was to see how these two factors influence, independently, and when together would affect a video choice of user, their motivation to share the video further, and their ability to remember the content of the thumbnail image later. It was revealed that there wasn't a any relationship

between video selection and thumbnail wording. However, the study found a significant interaction when it accounted for a surprising variable: the frequency of participants' neck pain. The findings showed that participants who reported having neck pain more often had a greater tendency to select videos with positively-valenced thumbnails over negatively-valenced ones. Furthermore, researchers predicted, YouTube thumbnails showing high view counts on the search feed were selected and preferred more than those thumbnails that showed low view counts. This result supports previous research studies about cues (like view counts) to judge the content of video. Simultaneously, the results didn't support the "negativity bias" hypothesis, which says people are typically more inclined to negative content. The practical implications gained from this study suggest a clear strategy for content creators. If their objective is to increase the number of users to their videos, they should design thumbnails in a manner that shows positively-valenced visuals and include clear cues, such as a high view count.

A paper by Poudel et al. (2025) studied about thumbnails, users' online behavior and YouTube's recommendation algorithms. The researchers studied the specific elements of clickbait thumbnails, such as colourfulness, brightness, and overall visual aspects of thumbnails. It then analysed the relationship between these visual attributes and user engagement metrics. In addition to these visual elements, the researchers also analyzed thumbnail text, also known as captions. They achieved this with the help of advanced image captioning models. Exploring the accuracy of text descriptions on the thumbnails reflects the actual content of the video and how they direct viewer behaviour. With these investigations, the researchers found that features like brightness, colourfulness, or thumbnail quality do not cause any change in engagement metrics for content being shown to the user. However, their findings point out that thumbnails featuring popular content, or content related to globally relevant and engaging subjects such as horror, mystery, and science, crime dramas attract more audience and receive high views. This research offers an in-depth analysis of thumbnail

effectiveness on user interaction and also provides a detailed overview of the biases that are maintained by YouTube's own strategy. Through the clear picture, the authors aimed to build a broader understanding of content techniques on online platforms. They also proposed highly effective design implementations that can potentially weaken influence and improve user interactions on the internet so they can get benefits without spending much of their energy on useless time-wasting content.

The misleading techniques are not new in the media industry. Zannettou et al (2018) carried out a research project focused on this deep-rooted issue of these techniques used on user-generated video content platforms like YouTube. The use of such methods is due to their everywhere presence. To researchers' notice untrustworthy uploaders, or those acting as experts without ethical consideration, deliberately mislabel video descriptors that define content such as titles, tags, and thumbnail covers, with the single aim of escalating view numbers that are directly related to revenue. The problem of clickbait can severely affect the user experience by misleading viewers and wasting their time. In this particular work, the researcher's goal was to study the clickbait mess on YouTube by scraping and analysing the metadata for a large dataset of 206,000 videos. To address this issue, they have devised a deep learning model with the help of advanced AI (Artificial Intelligence), based on a specific infrastructure known as variational autoencoders. This model is designed to support the different approaches to data about videos. It means the algorithm can process different types of information, like text and images, at a time. The formulated AI model works by using a limited amount of labelled data. This labelled data is identified by people as clickbait. Based on the existing labelled data model, identify more data that is unlabelled. With this trained model, researchers analyze the collected data. It revealed a key finding that YouTube recommendations don't scrutinize the clickbait. Apparently, it means the platform itself encourages misleading content.

Cui et al 2024 indicated that videos spread around online marketing and social media

content. Creating a highly clickable clickbait video thumbnail is challenging for content creators. The researchers noted that high competition for advertising revenue and sponsorship has increased the use of clickbait-style thumbnails and titles. These exaggerated sentiments are designed to boost click-through rates CTR. Taking cognitive schema theory as their framework, the researchers analysed the emotional appeal present in video titles, thumbnails, and the captions of thumbnails to determine the effects on the video views count. Their analysis was on a large dataset of 16,215 YouTube video covers. The findings of their analysis reveal many important effects. First, strong sentiments displayed in the thumbnails themselves, with positive or negative emotion that led to more views. This suggests that emotional images are effective at capturing attention. On the other hand, sentimental text on thumbnails has the opposite effect, fewer views. For video titles, the results showed that positive wording generates more views. In addition, the study found that the use of punctuation such as exclamation points, capital letters, and emojis contributes to more clicks. The authors conclude that these findings highlight a complex reality: the use of emotions in video thumbnail covers can have both a positive and a negative effect, depending on its application. It is suggested that a successful strategy requires a balance of emotional cues with presentation.

2.5 Gateway to Misinformation

Gosh Thinakkakath (2025) tested fake news information and clickbait, their insights to misinform the general public in the digital age. The research shed light on the internet's benefits by connecting everyone around the globe to communicate. He discussed that algorithms and sensational content help fake news spread. Also discussed how clickbait with misleading headlines causes mistrust of users in news sources. This chapter of research argued the media's responsibility towards the purpose they serve initially, rather than focusing on other profits. It also suggested the immediate actions for media literacy in this digital age to overcome the clickbait phenomenon, or at least take some steps to move the clickbait pointer below.

2.6 Global Trends and Local Need

D. Fayvinshenko & I. Shudrak (2025) used a mixed methodology for deep analysis of clickbait concepts in the modern media world, audience trust, and its impact on the media itself. Researchers did content analysis, discourse analysis, generalization, theoretical modelling, and expert evaluation to examine phenomena thoroughly. The broad scenario of results was on media validity, technological, social, economic, and mental elements that were present to amplify it in its roots. It was figured that clickbait is a bigger issue than on a surface-level connection with profession and ethics. During wartime, it creates panic and an information gap. Research suggests that clickbait can negatively influence a professional approach. Despite being studied and experimented on by many researchers and reviewing all the literature, it is said that dealing with clickbait needs a deep structural reform because it's not that simple to deal with. Where it starts with competition, it goes further with psychological factors for public news consumption. There is still a gap in the Pakistani scenario. It is a dynamic shift in public opinion and trust in the media.

3 Theoretical Framework

The framework is founded on already present theories and concept of research work. It gives the basis to formulate hypotheses and concepts to investigate the research problem (William, 2006). In social media, ground users have full control of the content they use, but regarding internal motivation, it is quite complex. It becomes critical to explain their behaviour. The two theories that study the psychology of media users provide our research the right direction: Uses and Gratification Theory and Selective Exposure and Attention Theory.

3.1 Uses and Gratification Theory

Theory of Uses and gratification is suited for this research because it explains that defining credibility comes later; the primary goal of the user for using and clicking on specific news may differ from their actual needs. They have many factors of their gratification because clickbait success depends upon the current mood and motivation.

Uses and gratification theory was developed first to elaborate how active users purposely choose specific media to satisfy their needs and desires. It is also called Blumler and Katz's Theory, named after its founders, who proposed it in 1974. First, it was proposed in 1959 by Elihu Katz, and the focus was on what media do to the people and then it shifted to what people do to the media. This shift is more relevant today than ever, as online platforms have given countless options to public to choose from (Ruggiero, 2000). This theory is not only limited to old media but new more relevant to internet and its products (Ahorony, 2015)

The users can be converted into two categories: one is the information seekers, and the second is the entertainment seekers. When the goal of the audience is to form an opinion, stay informed, and learning about current events (Ancu & Cozma, 2009). They measure news goodness based on how accurate and factual it is. Sensational headlines and lack of substance make it "Information pollution", as termed by Dr. Paek-Jae-Cho (Ramesh Pandita, 2014). On the other hand, clickbait is the opposite of this goal. Its priority is high engagement. For this category, the clickbait does not justify its need and is low in credibility, so it gets a negative reaction from the users. For entertainment seekers, it's an escape from daily monotonous life, and they tend to share clickbait more (Peng et al., 2023). This part of users is more inclined to be attracted to entertaining, shocking, and interesting stuff rather than giving attention to facts.

The act of sharing news in social circles as a conversation starter and in political groups links to user identity and inclination towards a certain group, fulfilling the need for gratification and satisfaction by getting admiration from their peer group. It leaves the facts far behind in terms of popularity and self-appraisal.

This framework provides a comprehensive approach to analyse our study and draw meaningful conclusions about user opinion of clickbait credibility in Pakistan. Because the application of theory makes it easy to categorize users based on their habits and usability.

3.2 Selective Exposure and Attention Theory

This theory offers a psychological and more accurate behavioural approach to the audience. The theory argues that individuals are not passive consumers. They chose the media that aligns with their already existing beliefs, attitude, and presents information. They tend to ignore the information that contradicts their opinion. It includes three processes: selective exposure, selective perception, and selective retention, which define how people select the media that matches their viewpoint to safeguard against contradictory information. It is driven by factors as finding comfort for familiar beliefs and avoiding conflicting views (EBSCO, 2025). This theory was proposed by Joseph T. Klapper and was published under the name *The Effects of Mass Communication* in 1960. It served as a roadmap for media influence on the masses and to understand their behaviour. He argued that the media is not a catalyst for change but supports the prevalent attitudes. It is opposite to the magic bullet theory, also known as the hypodermic needle theory. That says the media has an immediate, direct, powerful, and uniform effect on a passive audience (Study.com). In that case, all users are vulnerable to react equally because of an external trigger, but the selective attention theory does not encourage this type of behaviour because of the individuality of people's choices.

In old times, people used to have limited choices to get themselves informed about their surroundings, mostly through word of mouth. Then came print, so any false news was a uniform effect on the masses, but with the passage of time, more information resources scattered the effects of uniformity on the public. McLuhan, one of the media pioneers, stated "medium is message" means the form of media used like poster, commercials, newspapers, tv or radio to disseminate the information have great impact on the receiver of the message but times define the media has been left far behind due to literacy and awareness people are more informed now the society shape with advancement on technology. Users have phones in their hands, and they scroll to their liking. According to a report detail by Microsoft (2015), attention span of public has dropped to 8 seconds from 12 seconds. And the average

duration to grab attention on video is the first 3 seconds, if it's interesting, the user will hook to it, or otherwise video message effort will go down the drain.

The selective exposure and attention theory suggests the media does not have a direct impact on opinion; rather, it encourages preexisting ideas. Every individual comes from a family, has friends, a social circle, and a geography that help to shape their personality and opinion. Selective exposure strengthens the ideology of every person. A clickbait like "X" politician is under arrest for corruption charges. People who are already not in favour of that politician will share this clickbait more for validation. This theory resonates with our study by focusing on public choice rather than the media's forceful implication. Like prominent figures use media to cater to a larger audience, it can be a religious personality, politician, or just a media person to trigger their masses for their personal motives.

4 Research Methodology

Research methodology is a systematic approach toward truth about the proposed statement, whether it supports or refutes our argument. It includes different research tools to test whether the statement's narrative is true or false. The following tools were used in this research study.

4.1 Research Design

Research design is a path that a researcher follows for the selected research method. This design framework helps the researcher to choose the right method for successful research on the topic he is conducting research on (Kabir, 2016). Research design expands the possibility for researchers to collect data strategies, suitable measurement tool applications, data analysis, and relationship establishment between the problems of the intended research.

Research design can be categorized into three categories. Quantitative research design approach, qualitative research design approach, and mixed research design approach consist of the other two research designs. Any method is applicable surrounded by the specific goals of research (Creswell, 2003). Quantitative method is a method in which numeric data is collected to identify the responses, correlation, and trends to test hypotheses for research (Scribbr, 2020).

In our research, we surveyed to collect responses from individuals. The survey questionnaire consists of 20 questions. The respondents were different in age, education, and views.

4.2 Research Method

The survey method is a collection of data systematically from a large population, and the product we get from the survey is statistical data. (Schwarz, 1998). We have used the survey method in this work to investigate the perceptions of clickbait credibility among the Pakistani public.

4.3 Sampling Strategy

A convenience sampling strategy was applied to the research to get 548 participate as sample. This technique is non probability approach to get easily available participants. In this strategy researchers usually approach random people to become part of research (MacNealy, 1999). The researcher utilizes the sources that are available at the time. It is the most inexpensive and quick method to collect data when time is limited. This strategy can be applied to any Research. In the current research, the participants were added to the study from all over Lahore. Lahore is recorded as the second-largest city of Pakistan with a population number of 14.8 million people according to a report published by World Population Review in 2025.

4.4 Sample

A sample is a sub division of the population to take part in a research study (Lavrakas, 2008). The sample is a concern group of the study. The sample comprised 548 young adults (male and female) aged between 18 and 34 years (Pew Research Center 2025). The research was on young adults' perception, so this specific age group was our sample. We included people of this age group because they are active social media users and are mature enough to give their best opinions.

4.5 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

We included people between 18-29 years of age. People who were willing to fill out questionnaires and gave active consent were included. Mostly educated participants were the priority because of their reasoning ability. All other people who were not in the range of 18 to

29 years were excluded, and those who were reluctant to give an opinion were also excluded. People who were not educated and are mentally disabled are generally not included.

4.6 Measures

We divided the questionnaire into four sections. The first section measured social media usage habits included 5 questions. The second scale consisted of 5 questions related to Awareness and Identification of Clickbait. The third section was the scale to measure Evaluating Different Headlines, which contained 5 questions. The fourth section was the scale to measure Reactions to Clickbait that contained 5 questions. Students were asked to respond to 20 questions on the five-point Likert scale. Where 1 indicates Strongly Disagree', 2 is Disagree, 3 is Neutral, 4 is Agree, 5 is Strongly Agree. The higher the score, the more supportive it is of our objectives.

4.7 Term Used in Survey

4.7.1 Social Media

Social media is digital form of communities. It is refers to the online platforms that people use to share opinions and experiences, including photos, videos, music, insights, and perceptions with each other (Lai & Turban, 2008). Social media is defined as "forms of digital communication through which users make online groups and communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content like videos (Smith, 2013). Social media habits were analysed in the first section of the questionnaire.

4.7.2 Clickbait

An exaggerated or sensationalized piece of content in the form of text, thumbnail image, or link that makes the viewer curious to click. The focus of this study was on YouTube thumbnails as clickbait.

4.7.3 Credibility

The credibility term is used to validate the message's believability. It can be based on two factors: the first factor is the trustworthiness of the source, which is whether it is unbiased and honest. The second factor is the expertise of the source in terms of perceived knowledge and

competence. (Hovland, 1953). This metric is the core of our research study that measures thumbnails very well based on text and images.

4.7.4 Awareness

The term is used to define the knowledge and consciousness of a person about a specific message or issue (Perse, 2001). The second section of questionnaire was consisting of such statement that were to evaluate the awareness of participants about YouTube thumbnails. We used multiple terms to check the knowledge base of the public about digital media literacy. If they are knowledgeable enough to identify media tactics to get more clicks.

4.7.5 Thumbnail

A thumbnail is a small image that is clickable and works as a cue or trigger for an online video (Riberio & Zagheni, 2021). The text in the image is usually not the actual text of the video but a framing technique to grab the audience's attention instantly. Mainstream media channels

get millions of subscribers using smart marketing tactics. YouTube thumbnails help a lot to hook the public. The final section of the questionnaire focuses on the YouTube thumbnail to get the responses of participants. We have included questions with instructions such as "I am likely to ignore a video with this type of thumbnail."

5 Results and Presentation

In this chapter, data is presented in a way that makes it easy to comprehend. The data presentation method used is bar charts with their interpretation. The study process went into great detail, from collecting data to analysing it for the problem of research.

Respondents were asked to provide their demographic information, which consisted of age, gender, education, and their social media preferences, to get themselves aware of their surroundings.

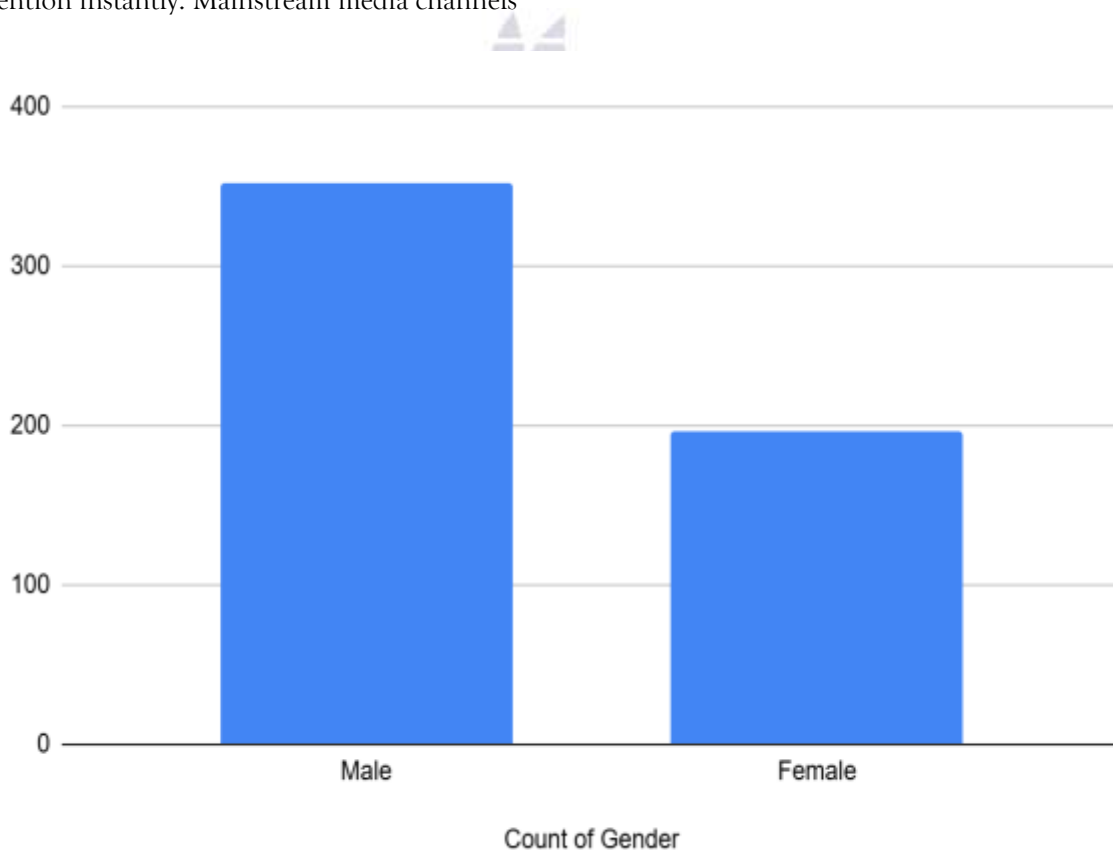


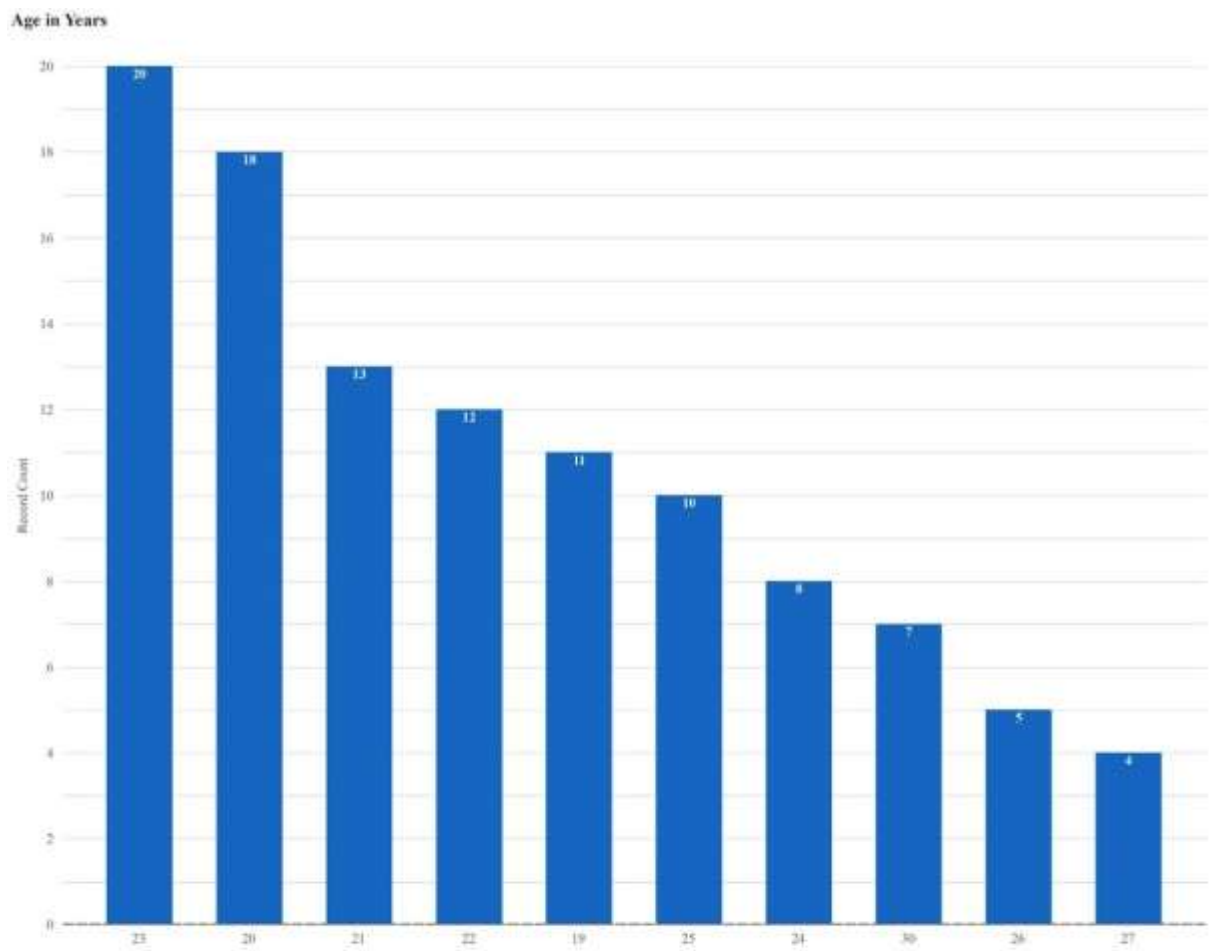
Table 5.1 Gender Distribution

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|------------|----------------|
| Male | 352 | 64.2 |
| Female | 196 | 35.8 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

Table 1 defines the gender ratio of participants in the study. According to the data in the table, there were 64.2% males and 35.8% females.





| Age in Years | Percentage | Record Count |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| 1. 2007 | 0.7% | 1 |
| 2. 2003 | 0.7% | 1 |
| 3. 2001 | 0.7% | 1 |
| 4. 1898 | 0.7% | 1 |
| 5. 55 | 0.7% | 1 |
| 6. 47 | 0.7% | 1 |
| 7. 45 | 0.7% | 1 |
| 8. 38 | 0.7% | 1 |
| 9. 37 | 0.7% | 1 |
| 10. 36 | 0.7% | 1 |
| 11. 32 | 0.7% | 1 |
| 12. 31 | 2.2% | 3 |
| 13. 30 | 5.1% | 7 |
| 14. 29 | 1.5% | 2 |
| 15. 28 | 2.2% | 3 |
| 16. 27 | 2.9% | 4 |
| 17. 26 | 3.6% | 5 |
| 18. 25 | 7.3% | 10 |
| 19. 24 | 9.8% | 8 |

Table 5.2 Age in Years

Interpretation

In Table 5.2, ages are shown. Most of the respondents were 20 years old, which is 14.6% of respondents, followed by 18 years (13.1%).

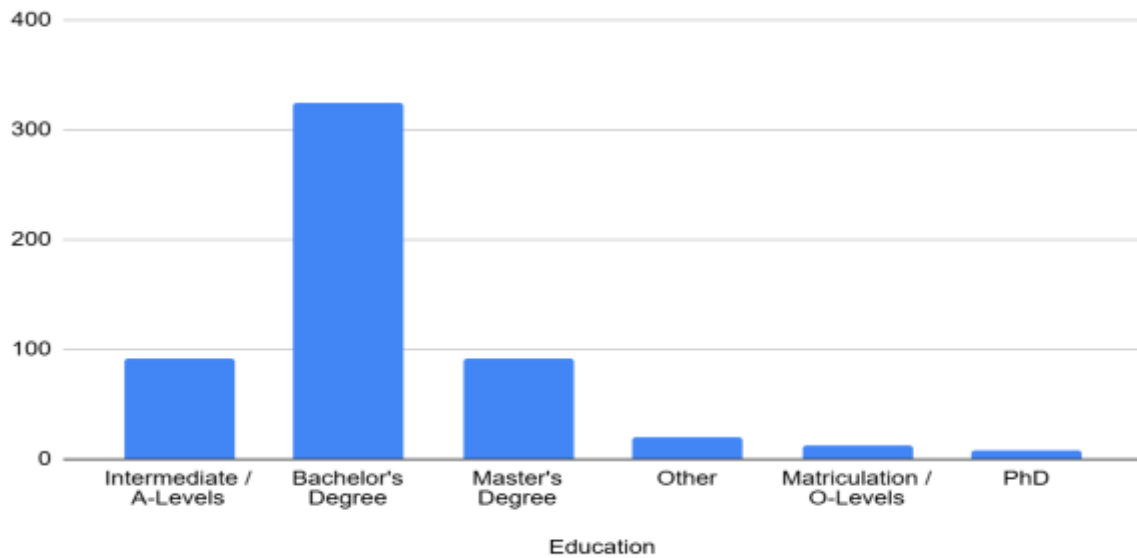


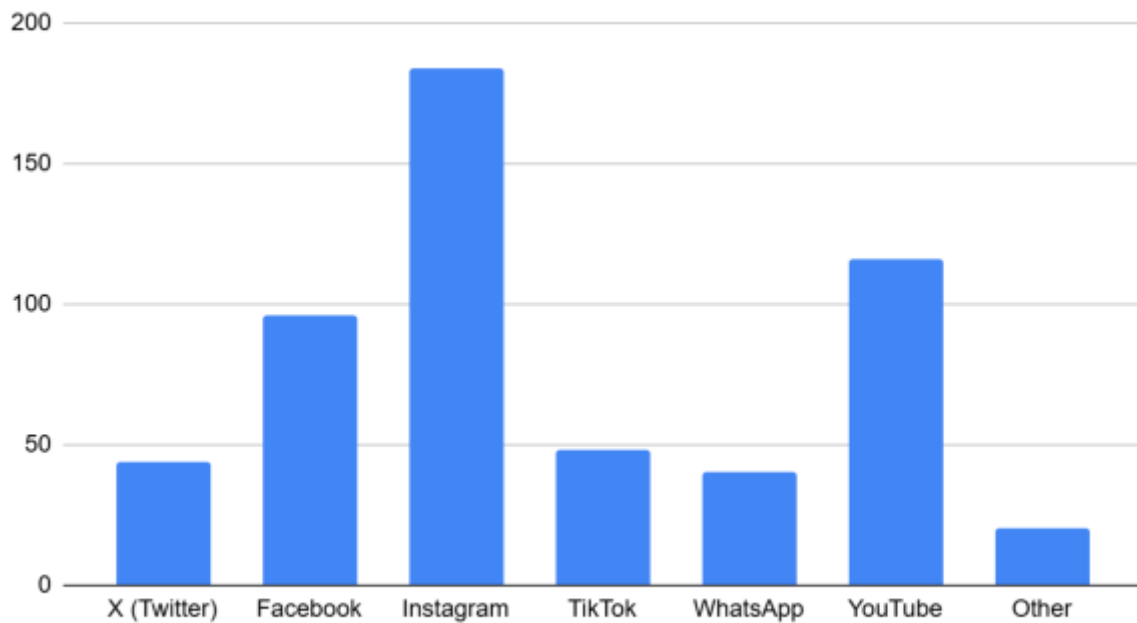
Table 5.3 Education Level Distribution

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------|------------|----------------|
| Matriculation / O-Levels | 12 | 2.2 |
| Intermediate / A-Levels | 92 | 16.8 |
| Bachelor's Degree | 324 | 59.1 |
| Master's Degree | 92 | 16.8 |
| PhD | 8 | 1.5 |
| Other | 20 | 3.6 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

Table 5.3 shows the education level of the participants of the study. When the question was asked about education, they chose the option, resulting in these results: 12 (2.2%)

Matriculation / O-Levels, 92 (16.8%) Intermediate / A-Levels, 324 (59.1%) Bachelor's Degree, 92 (16.8%) Master's Degree, 8 (1.5%), PhD, 20 (3.6%), Other.



Which social media platform is your primary source for news and current affairs?

Table 5.3 Primary Social Media Platform for News

| Social Media Platform | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------|------------|----------------|
| YouTube | 116 | 21.2 |
| Facebook | 96 | 17.5 |
| X (Twitter) | 44 | 8 |
| Instagram | 184 | 33.6 |
| TikTok | 48 | 8.8 |
| WhatsApp | 40 | 7.3 |
| Other | 20 | 3.6 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

To know the preference of social media, when we asked the participants Which social media platform is your primary source for news and current affairs? They preferred YouTube 116 (21.2%), Facebook 96 (17.5%), X (Twitter) 44 (8%), Instagram 184(33.6%), TikTok 48 (8.8%), WhatsApp 40 (7.3%), Other 20 (3.6%).

Social Media & News Habits

The section was designed to know the social media and users’ habits. It had five questions in total to know the responses. All questions were developed on a Likert scale.

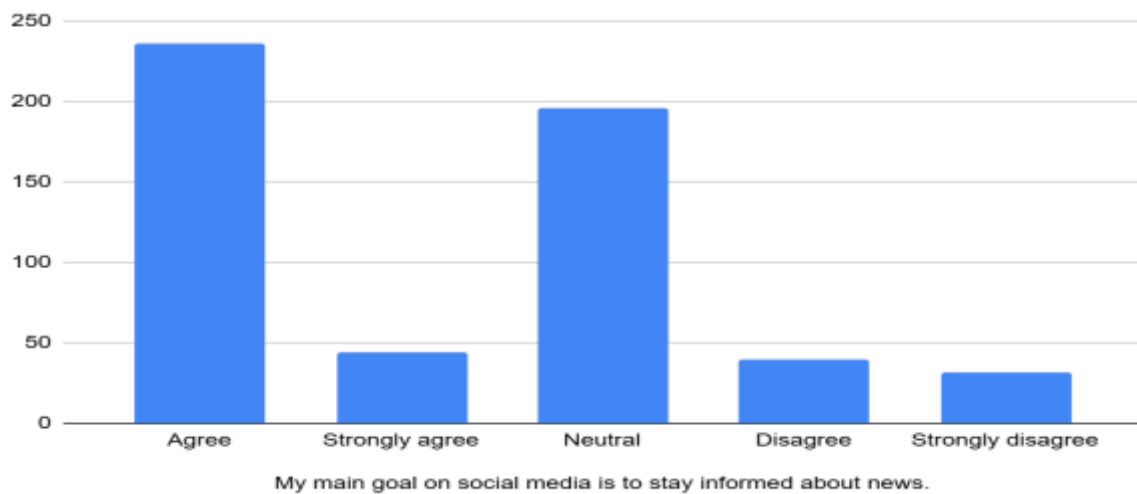


Table 5.5 My main goal on social media is to stay informed about news.

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 32 | 5.8 |
| Disagree | 40 | 7.3 |
| Neutral | 196 | 35.8 |
| Agree | 236 | 43.1 |
| Strongly agree | 44 | 8 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

Table 5.5 shows the data of statement when respondents were asked to rate the statement “My main goal on social media is to stay informed about news.” on likert scale to the

responses where 32 (5.8%) Strongly disagree, 40 (7.3%) Disagree, 196 (35.8%) Neutral, 236(43.1%) Agree with the statement, while 44 (8%) Strongly agree.

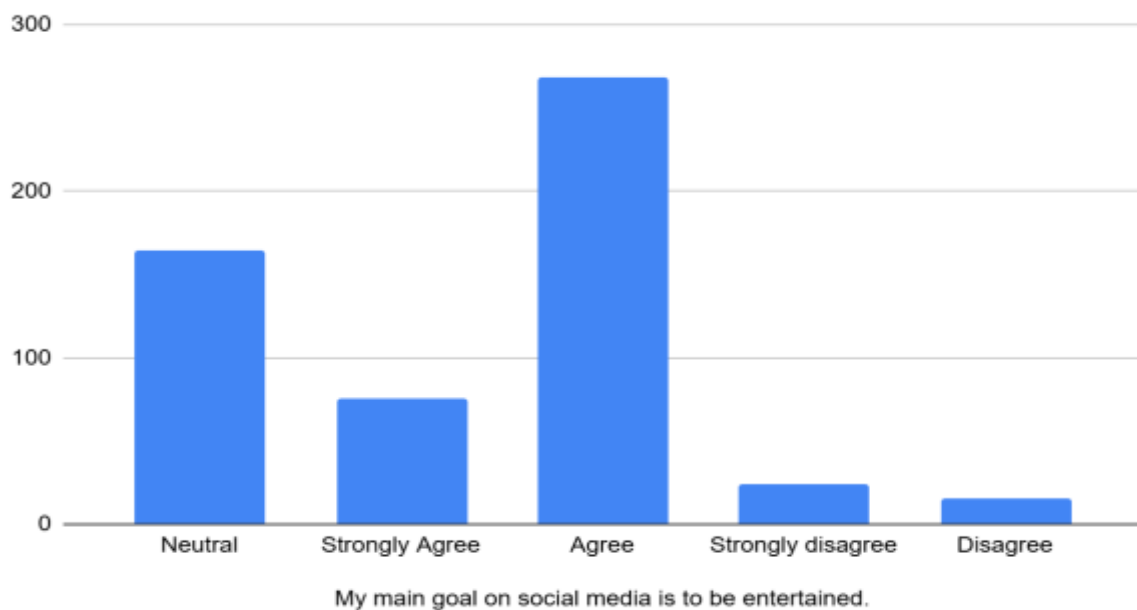


Table 5.6 My main goal on social media is to be entertained.

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 24 | 4.4 |
| Disagree | 16 | 2.9 |
| Neutral | 164 | 29.9 |
| Agree | 268 | 48.9 |
| Strongly agree | 76 | 13.9 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

When respondents were asked to give their opinion about “My main goal on social media is to be entertained.”. Where 24 (4.4%) Strongly

disagree, 16 (2.9%) Disagree, 164 (29.9%) remain Neutral, 268(48.9%) Agree with the statement, while 76 (13.9%) Strongly agree.

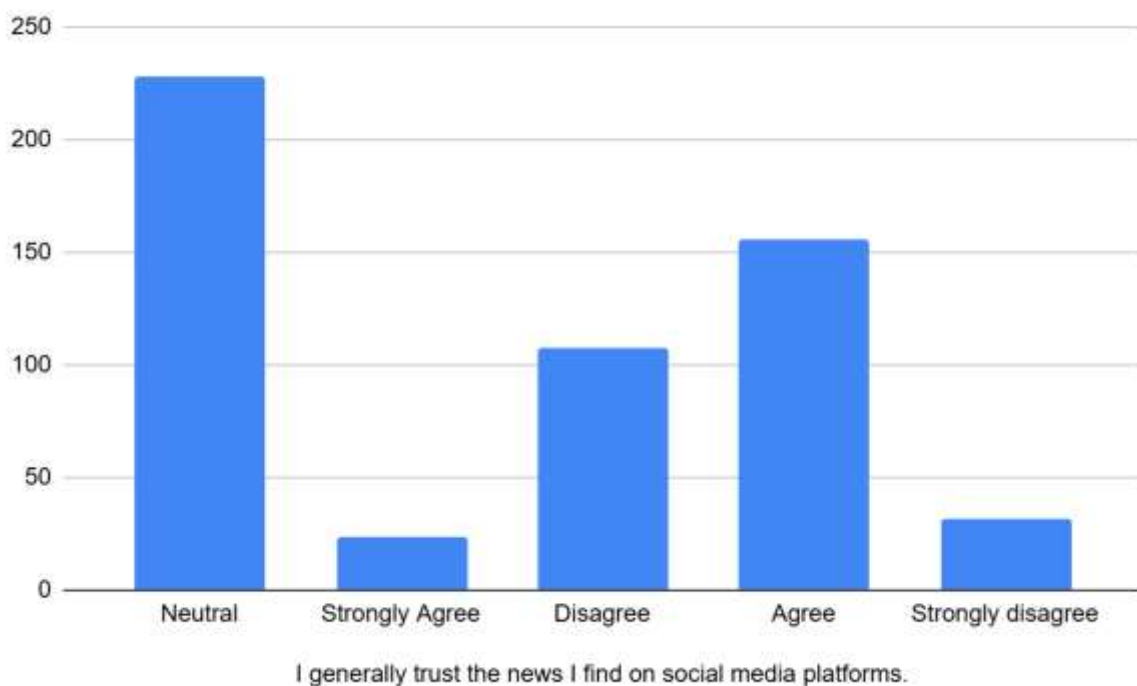


Table 5.7 I generally trust the news I find on social media platforms.

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 32 | 5.8 |
| Disagree | 108 | 19.7 |
| Neutral | 228 | 41.6 |
| Agree | 156 | 28.5 |
| Strongly agree | 24 | 4.4 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

The statement “I generally trust the news I find on social media platforms,” on a Likert scale. Where 32 (5.8%) Strongly disagree, 108 (19.7%) Disagree, 228 (41.6%) Neutral, 156 (28.5%) Agree with the statement, while 24 (4.4%) Strongly agree.

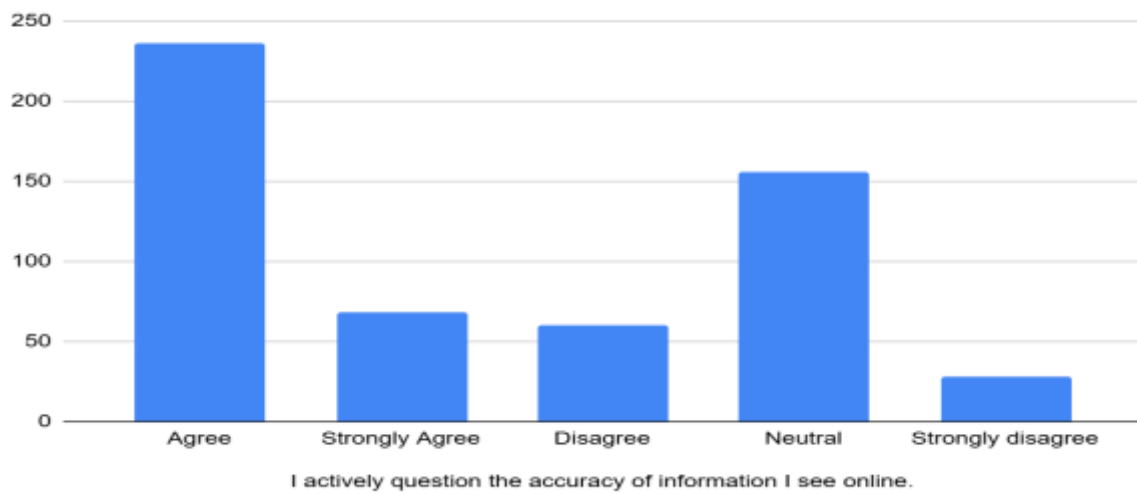


Table 5.8 I actively question the accuracy of information I see online.

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 28 | 5.1 |
| Disagree | 60 | 10.9 |
| Neutral | 156 | 28.5 |
| Agree | 236 | 43.1 |
| Strongly agree | 68 | 12.4 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

The statement “I actively question the accuracy of information I see online.” Was asked on a Likert scale. Where 28 (5.1%) Strongly disagree,

60 (10.9%) Disagree, 156 (28.5%) Neutral, 236 (43.1%) Agree with the statement, while 68 (12.4%) Strongly agree with the statement.

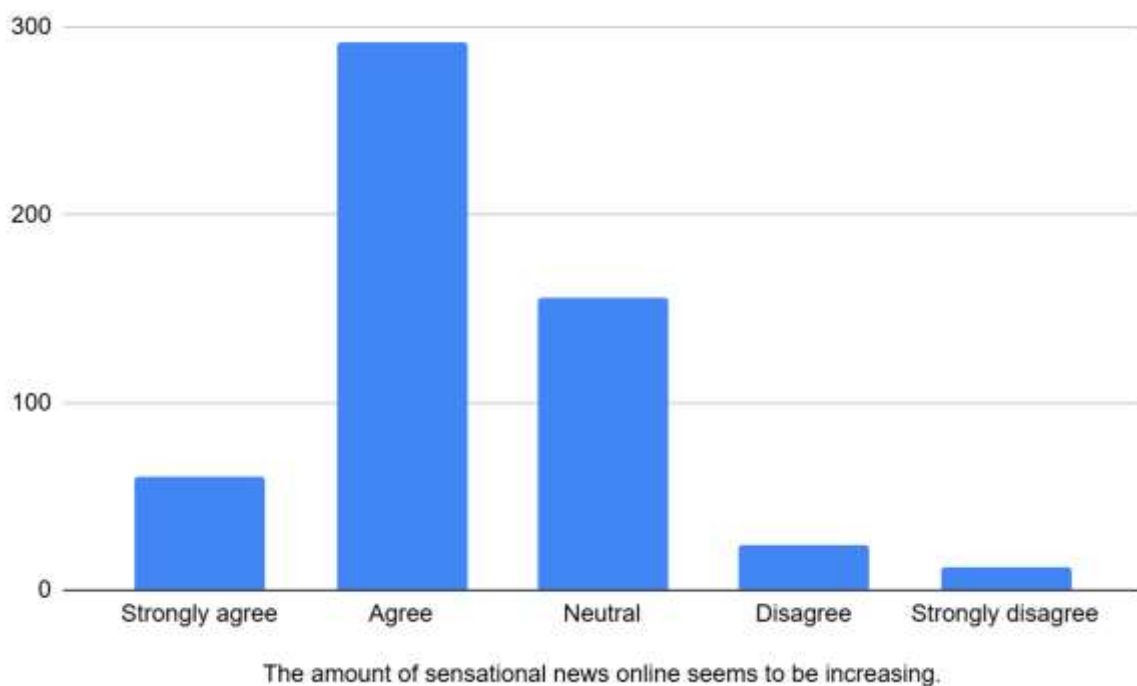


Table 5.9 The amount of sensational news online seems to be increasing.

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 12 | 2.2 |
| Disagree | 24 | 4.4 |
| Neutral | 156 | 28.7 |
| Agree | 292 | 53.7 |
| Strongly agree | 60 | 11 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

The statement “The amount of sensational news online seems to be increasing.” was included in the questionnaire. Where 12 (2.2%) Strongly disagree, 24 (4.4%) Disagree, 156 (28.7%) Neutral, 292 (53.7%) Agree with the statement, while 60 (11%) Strongly agree.

Awareness and Identification of Clickbait

The section on Awareness and Identification of Clickbait was designed to determine the level of users’ familiarity with clickbait, which is the objective of the study. It had five questions in total to know the responses. All questions were developed on a Likert scale.

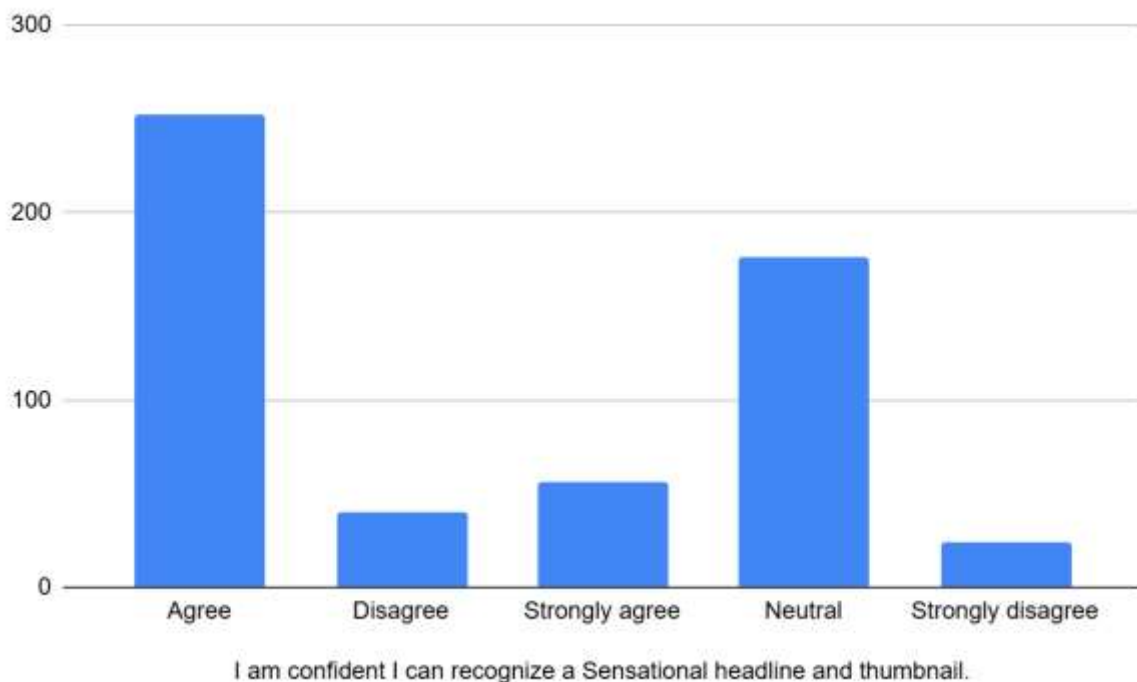


Table 5.10 I am confident I can recognize a Sensational headline and thumbnail.

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 24 | 4.4 |
| Disagree | 40 | 7.3 |
| Neutral | 176 | 32.1 |
| Agree | 252 | 46 |
| Strongly agree | 56 | 10.2 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

The statement was asked to respond to “I am confident I can recognize a Sensational headline

and thumbnail” on a Likert scale. Where 24 (4.4%) Strongly disagree, 40 (7.3%) Disagree, 176 (32.1%) Neutral, 252 (46%) Agree with the

statement, while 56 (10.2%) Strongly agree with the statement.

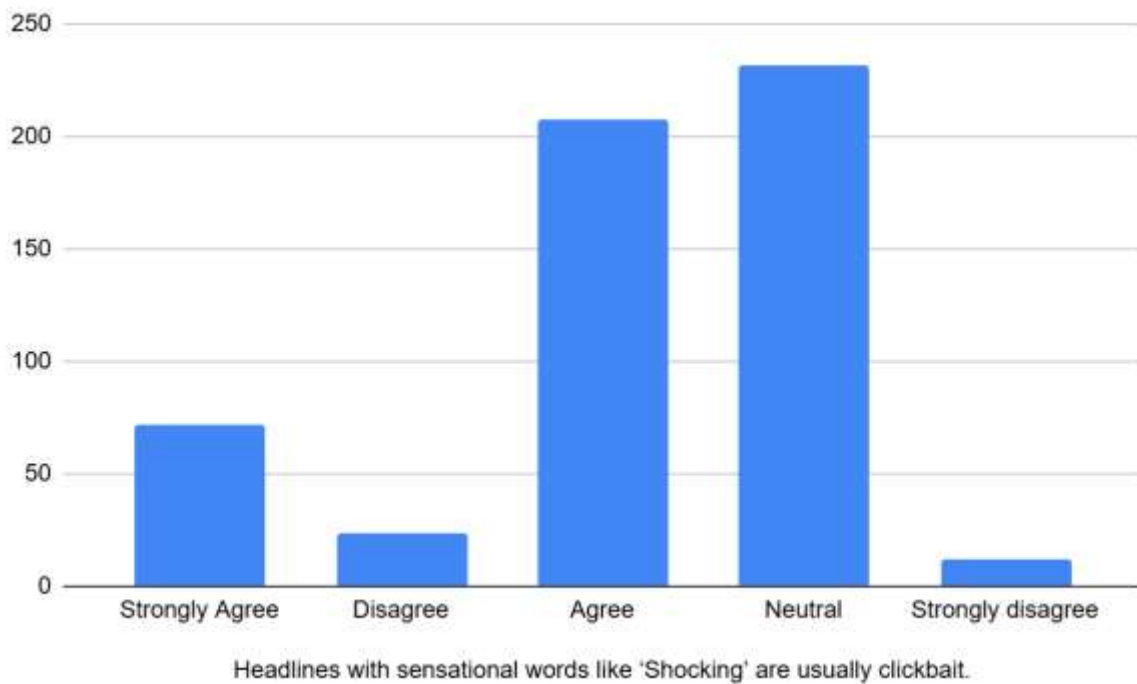


Table 5.11 Headlines with sensational words like 'Shocking' are usually clickbait.

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 12 | 2.2 |
| Disagree | 24 | 4.4 |
| Neutral | 232 | 42.3 |
| Agree | 208 | 38 |
| Strongly agree | 72 | 13.1 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

The statement in which respondents were asked, “Headlines with sensational words like ‘Shocking’ are usually clickbait,” was on a Likert

scale. Where 12 (2.2%) Strongly disagree, 24 (4.4%) Disagree, 232 (42.3%) Neutral, 208 (38%) Agree with the statement, while 72 (13.1%) Strongly agree with the statement.

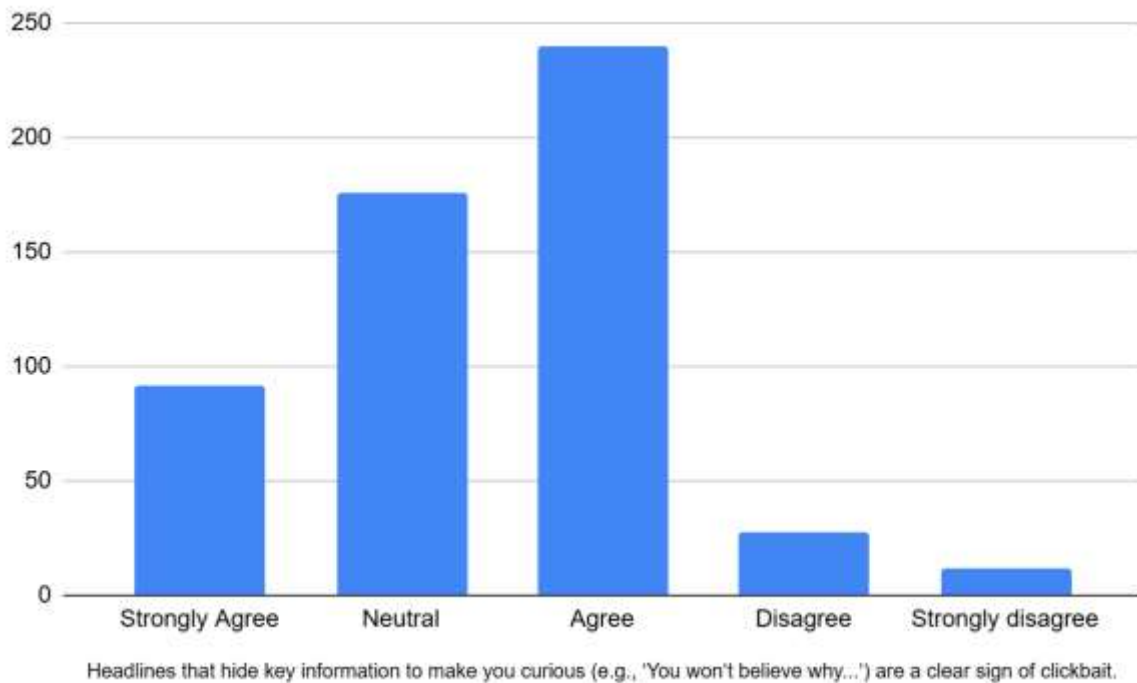


Table 5.12 *Headlines that hide key information to make you curious (e.g., ‘You won’t believe why...’) are a clear sign of clickbait.*

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 12 | 2.2 |
| Disagree | 28 | 5.1 |
| Neutral | 176 | 32.1 |
| Agree | 240 | 43.8 |
| Strongly agree | 92 | 16.8 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

The statement about “Headlines that hide key information to make you curious (e.g., ‘You won’t believe why...’) are a clear sign of

clickbait.” was asked. Where 12 (2.2%) Strongly disagree, 28 (5.1%) Disagree, 176 (32.1%) Neutral, 240 (43.8%) Agree with the statement, while 92 (16.8%) Strongly agree with it.

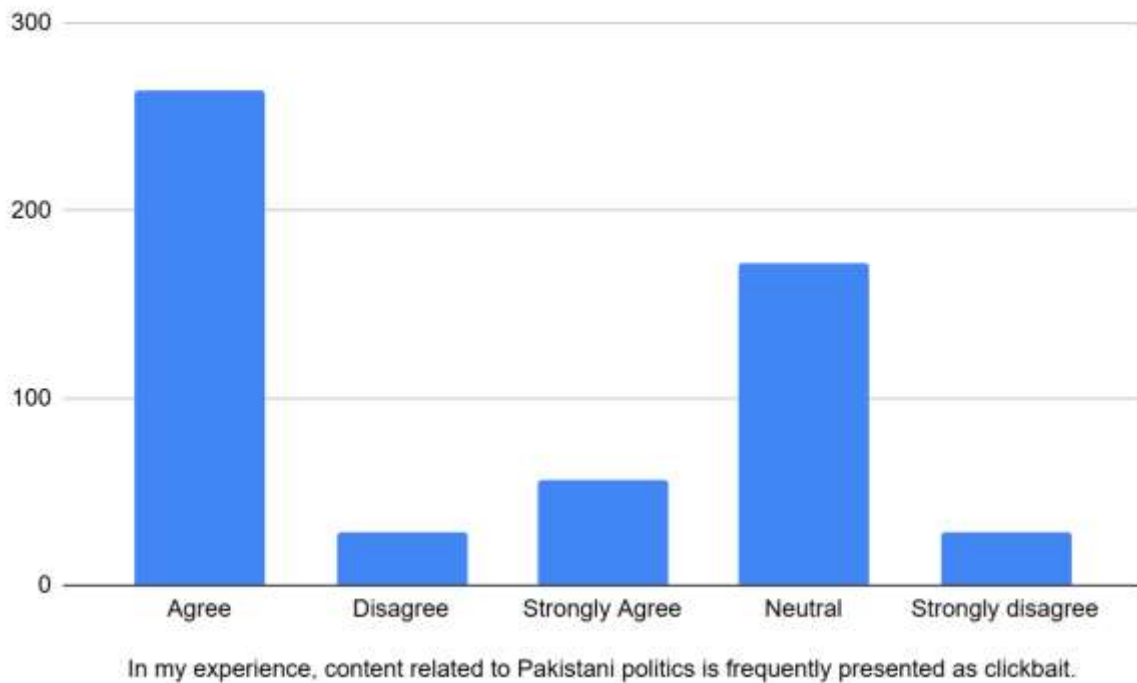


Table 5.13 In my experience, content related to Pakistani politics is frequently presented as clickbait.

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 28 | 5.1 |
| Disagree | 28 | 5.1 |
| Neutral | 172 | 31.4 |
| Agree | 264 | 48.2 |
| Strongly agree | 56 | 10.2 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

In the statement “In my experience, content related to Pakistani politics is frequently presented as clickbait.”. Where 28 (5.1%)

Strongly disagree, 28 (5.1%) Disagree, 172 (31.4%) Neutral, 264 (48.2%) Agree with the statement, while 56 (10.2%) Strongly agree.

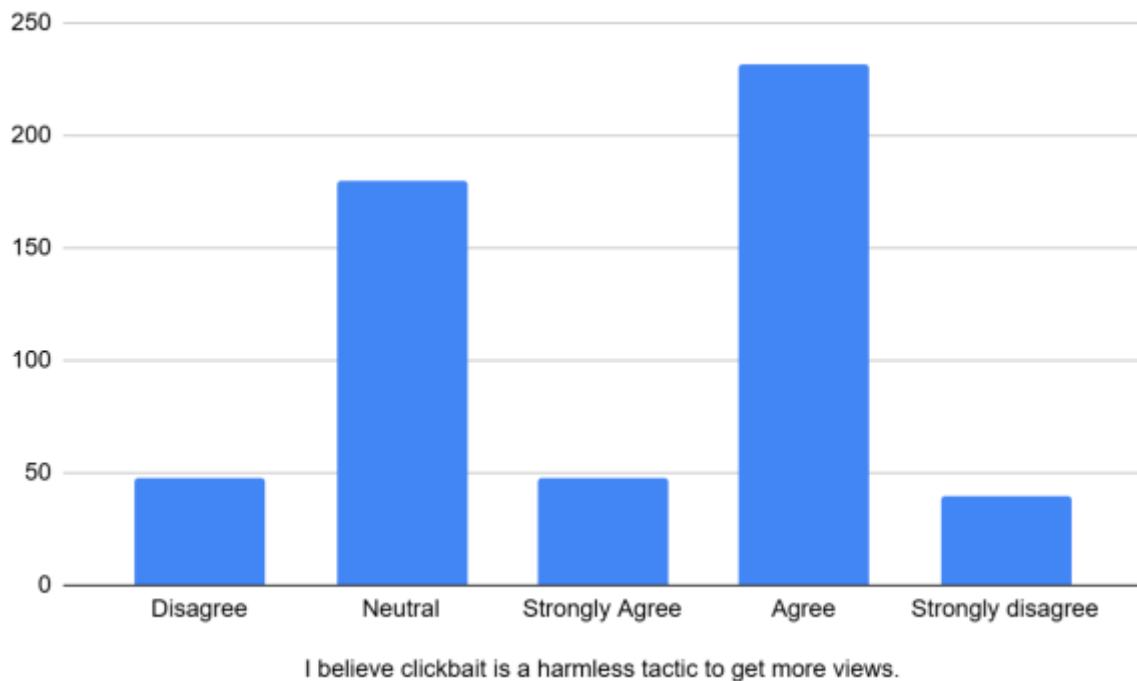


Table 5.14 I believe clickbait is a harmless tactic to get more views.

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 40 | 7.3 |
| Disagree | 48 | 8.8 |
| Neutral | 180 | 32.8 |
| Agree | 232 | 42.8 |
| Strongly agree | 48 | 8.8 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

The statement of question “I believe clickbait is a harmless tactic to get more views” was asked to respondents. Where 40 (7.3%) Strongly disagree, 48 (8.8%) Disagree, 180 (32.8%) Neutral, 232 (42.3%) Agree with the statement, while 48 (8.8%) Strongly agree with it.

Evaluating Different Headlines

The section on Evaluating Different Headlines was designed to evaluate users’ responses to a specific group of headlines. It had a set of three clickbait headlines that are below. It had five

questions in total about headlines to know the responses. All questions were developed on a Likert scale.

- Headline 1 (Public Interest News):** "NEPRA Approves New Electricity Tariffs for Major Cities."
- Headline 2 (Political Clickbait):** "Famous Politician's Secret Leaked... The Truth Will Leave You Speechless!"
- Headline 3 (Celebrity Clickbait):** "Famous Pakistani Cricketer's SHOCKING New Look!"

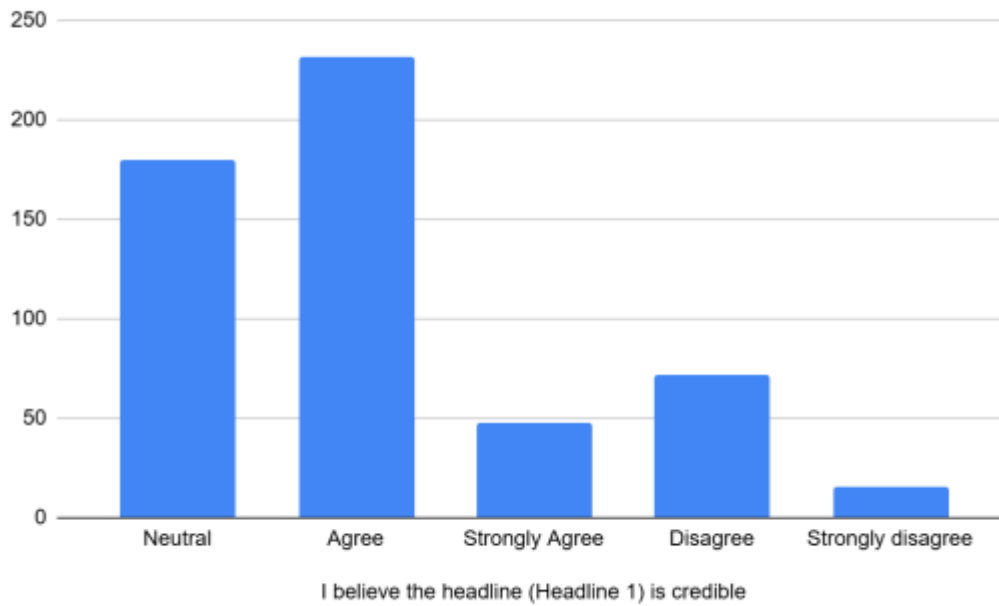


Table 5.15 I believe the headline (Headline 1) is credible

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 16 | 2.9 |
| Disagree | 72 | 13.1 |
| Neutral | 180 | 32.8 |
| Agree | 232 | 42.3 |
| Strongly agree | 48 | 8.8 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

The question “I believe the headline (Headline 1) is credible” was asked. Where 16 (2.9%) Strongly disagree, 72 (13.1%) Disagree, 180

(32.8%) Neutral, 232 (42.3%) Agree with the statement, while 48 (8.8%) Strongly agree with it.

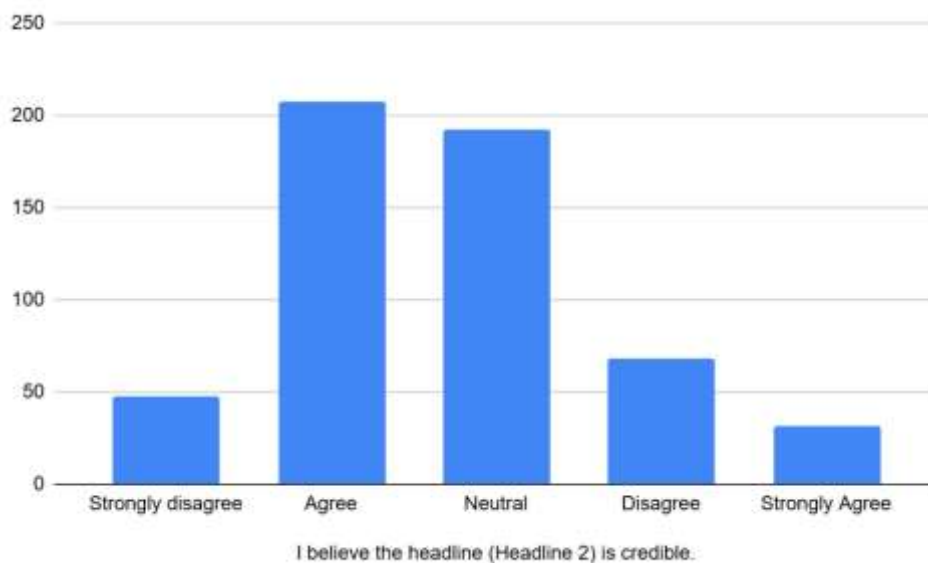


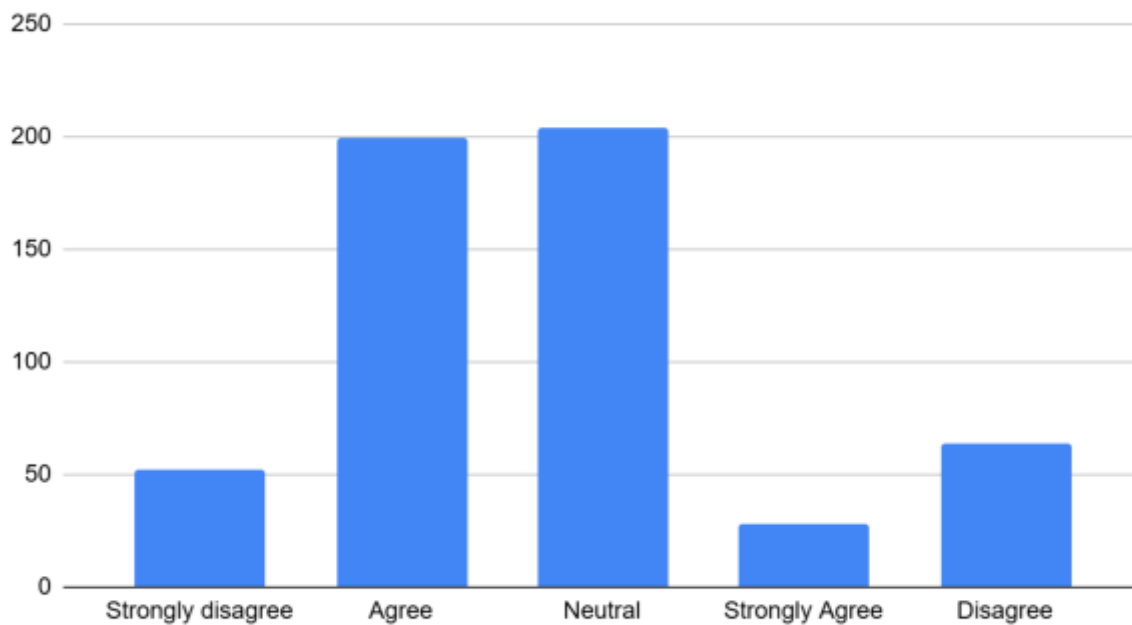
Table 5.16 I believe the headline (Headline 2) is credible.

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 48 | 8.8 |
| Disagree | 68 | 12.4 |
| Neutral | 192 | 35 |
| Agree | 208 | 38 |
| Strongly agree | 32 | 5.8 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

The statement “I believe the headline (Headline 2) is credible,” on a Likert scale was developed. Where 48 (8.8%) Strongly disagree, 68 (12.4%)

Disagree, 192 (35%) Neutral, 208 (38%) Agree with the statement, while 32 (5.8%) Strongly agree.



I believe the headline (Headline 3) is credible.

Table 5.17 I believe the headline (Headline 3) is credible.

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 52 | 9.5 |
| Disagree | 64 | 11.7 |
| Neutral | 204 | 37.2 |
| Agree | 200 | 36.5 |
| Strongly agree | 28 | 5.1 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

The question about “I believe the headline (Headline 3) is credible” got the responses as follows. Where 52 (9.5%) Strongly disagree, 64

(11.7%) Disagree, 204 (37.2%) Neutral, 200 (36.5%) Agree with the statement, while 28 (5.1%) Strongly agree.

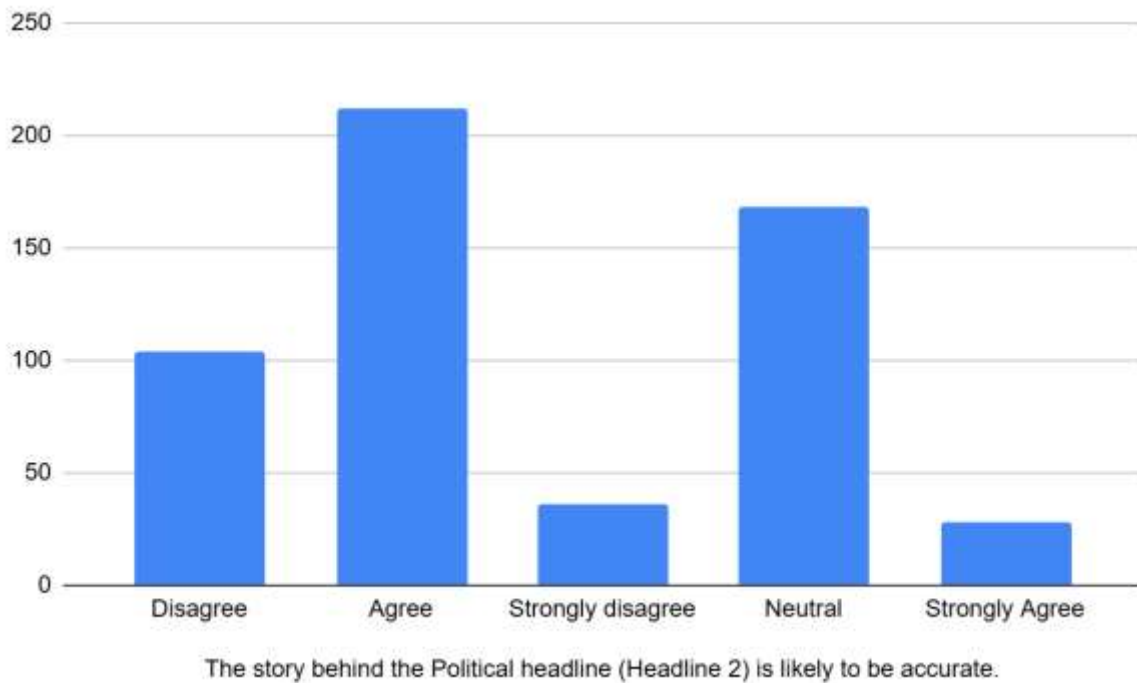


Table 5.18 The story behind the Political headline (Headline 2) is likely to be accurate.

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 36 | 6.6 |
| Disagree | 104 | 19 |
| Neutral | 168 | 30.7 |
| Agree | 212 | 38.7 |
| Strongly agree | 28 | 5.1 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

The statement about “The story behind the Political headline (Headline 2) is likely to be accurate” was in the questionnaire. Where 36

(6.6%) Strongly disagree, 104 (19%) Disagree, 168 (30.7%) Neutral, 212 (38.7%) Agree with the statement, while 28 (5.1%) Strongly agree.

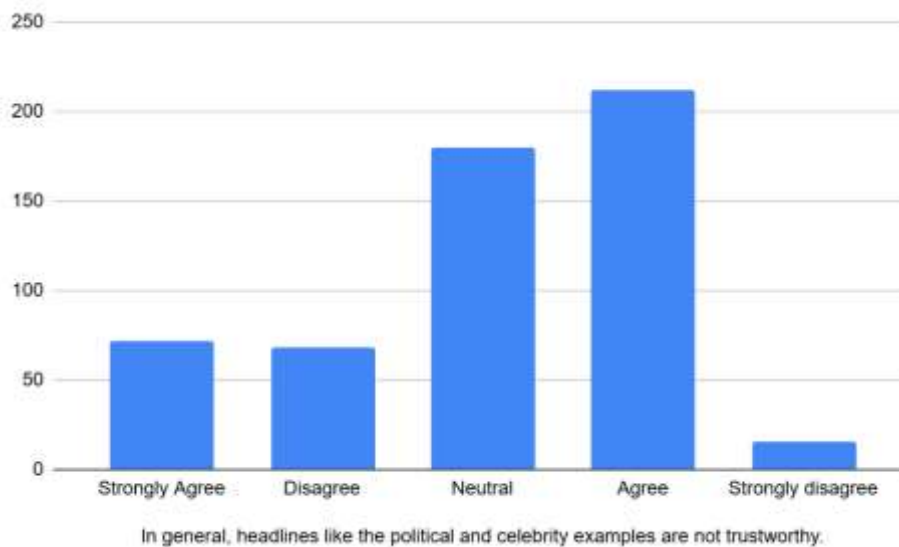


Table 5.19 In general, headlines like the political and celebrity examples are not trustworthy.

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 16 | 2.9 |
| Disagree | 68 | 12.4 |
| Neutral | 180 | 32.8 |
| Agree | 212 | 38.7 |
| Strongly agree | 72 | 13.1 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

The statement of question “In general, headlines like the political and celebrity examples are not trustworthy” is on a Likert scale. Where 16 (2.9%) Strongly disagree, 68 (12.4%) Disagree, 180 (32.8%) Neutral, 212 (38.7%) Agree with the statement, while 72 (13.1%) Strongly agree with the question.

Your Reactions to Clickbait

The section of Reactions to Clickbait was designed to know the immediate reactions of users about the action, where a statement of instruction was, a YouTube thumbnail with a shocked face, red arrows, and text like " YOU WON'T BELIEVE THIS!!" It fulfilled the objective of the study. It had five questions in total to know the responses. All questions were developed on a Likert scale.

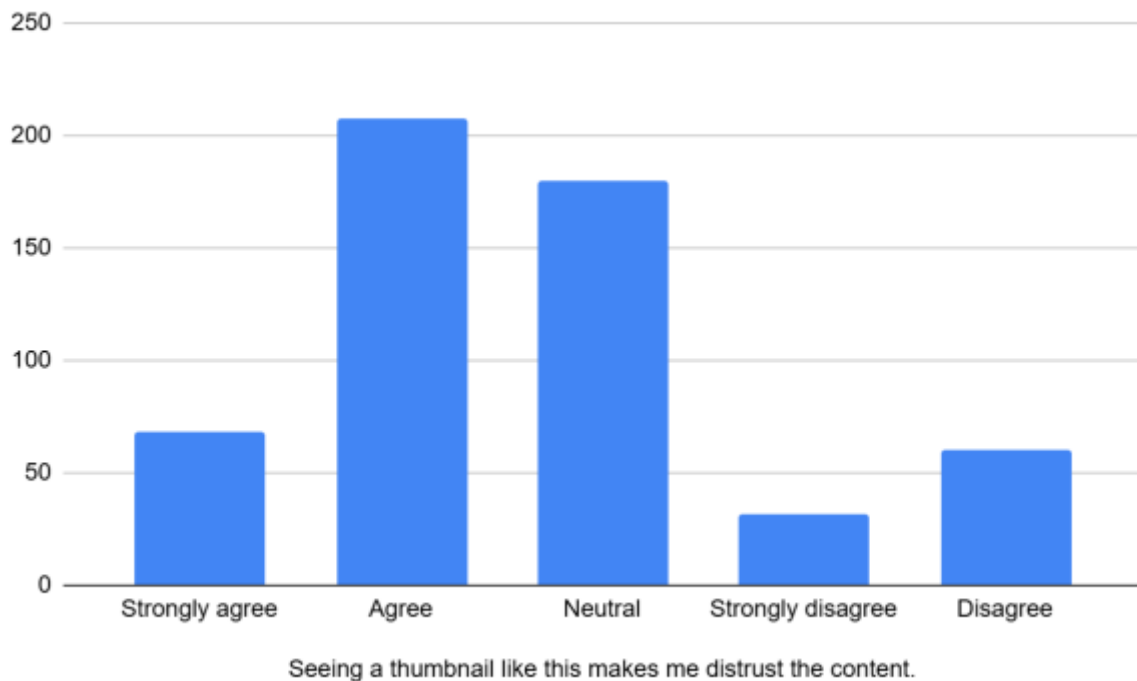


Table 5.20 Seeing a thumbnail like this makes me distrust the content.

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 32 | 5.8 |
| Disagree | 60 | 10.9 |
| Neutral | 180 | 32.8 |
| Agree | 208 | 38 |
| Strongly agree | 68 | 12.4 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

The statement “Seeing a thumbnail like this makes me distrust the content”. Where 32

(5.8%) Strongly disagree, 60 (10.9%) Disagree, 180 (32.8%) Neutral, 208 (38%) Agree with the statement, while 68 (12.4%) Strongly agree.

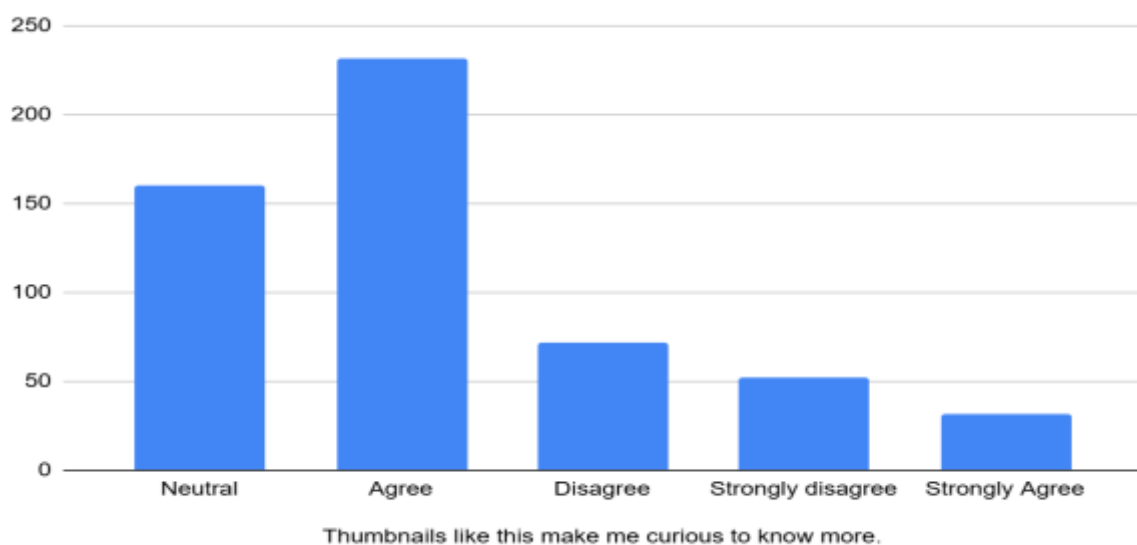


Table 5.21 Thumbnails like this make me curious to know more.

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 52 | 9.5 |
| Disagree | 72 | 13.1 |
| Neutral | 160 | 29.2 |
| Agree | 232 | 42.3 |
| Strongly agree | 32 | 5.8 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

The question was asked about “Thumbnails like this make me curious to know more” to participants. Where 52 (9.5%) Strongly

disagree, 72 (13.1%) Disagree, 160 (29.2%) Neutral, 232(42.3%) Agree with the statement, while 32 (5.8%) Strongly agree.

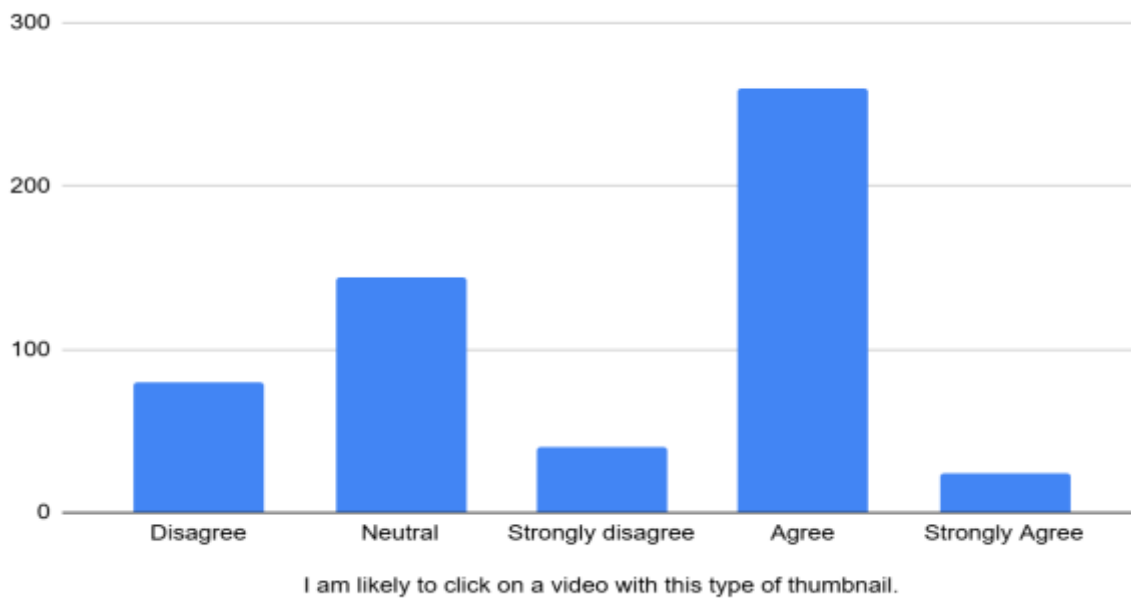


Table 5.22 I am likely to click on a video with this type of thumbnail.

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 40 | 7.3 |
| Disagree | 80 | 14.6 |
| Neutral | 144 | 26.3 |
| Agree | 260 | 47.4 |
| Strongly agree | 24 | 4.4 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

A question was asked: “I am likely to click on a video with this type of thumbnail.” In the questionnaire. Where 40 (7.3%) Strongly

disagree, 80 (14.6%) Disagree, 144 (26.3%) Neutral, 260 (47.4%) Agree with the statement, while 24 (4.4%) Strongly agree.

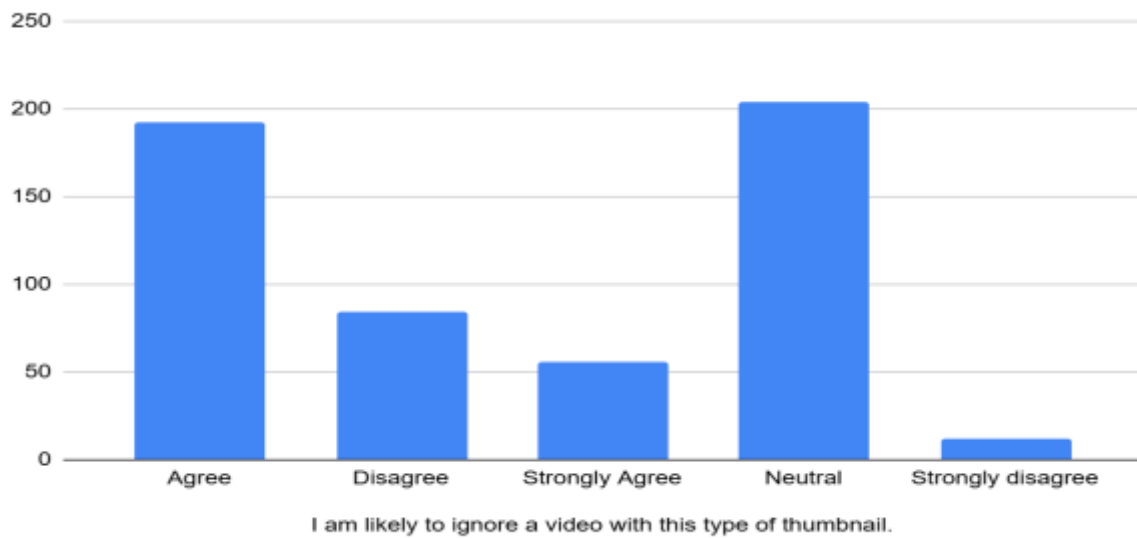


Table 5.23 I am likely to ignore a video with this type of thumbnail.

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 12 | 2.2 |
| Disagree | 84 | 15.3 |
| Neutral | 204 | 37.2 |
| Agree | 192 | 35 |
| Strongly agree | 56 | 10.2 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

When the statement “I am likely to ignore a video with this type of thumbnail” was asked. Where 12 (2.2%) Strongly disagree, 84 (15.3%)

Disagree, 204 (37.2%) Neutral, 192(35%) Agree with the statement, while 56 (10.2%) Strongly agree.

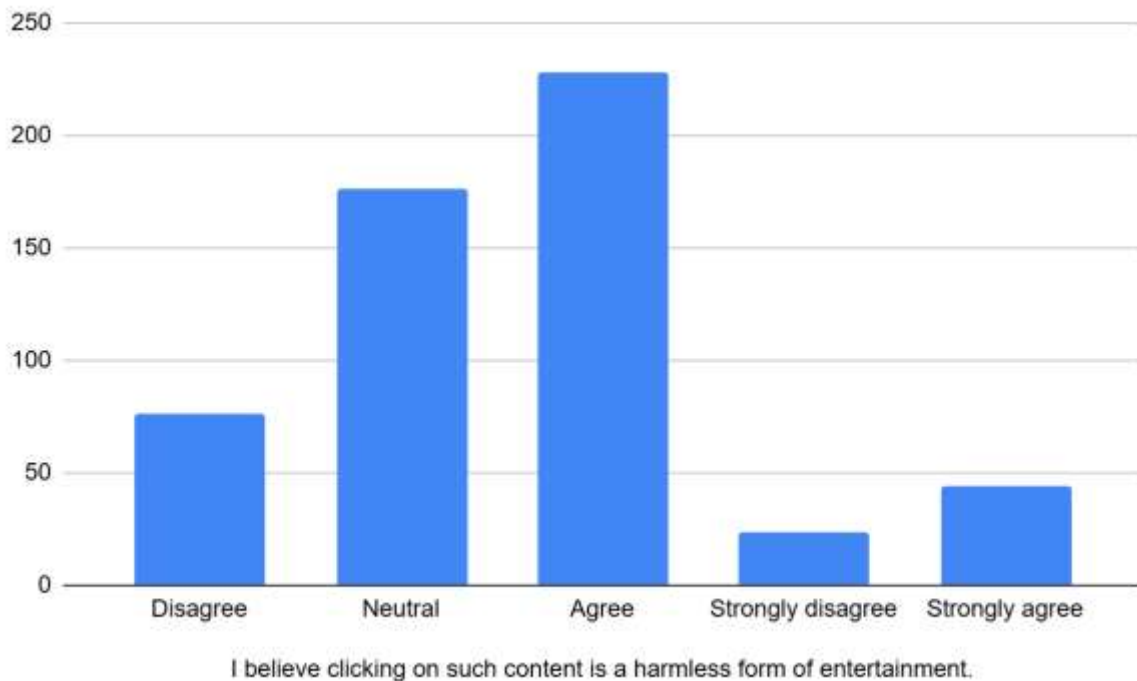


Table 5.24 I believe clicking on such content is a harmless form of entertainment.

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | 24 | 4.4 |
| Disagree | 76 | 13.9 |
| Neutral | 176 | 32.1 |
| Agree | 228 | 41.6 |
| Strongly agree | 44 | 8 |
| Total | 548 | 100 |

Interpretation

The statement “I believe clicking on such content is a harmless form of entertainment” was asked. Where 24 (4.4%) Strongly disagree, 76 (13.9%) Disagree, 176 (32.1%) Neutral, 228 (41.6%) Agree with the statement, while 44 (8%) Strongly agree.

6 Analysis

In this chapter we will discuss the results of survey to evaluate our research questions to find evidence-based answers. Also, will do an analysis of core hypothesis testing. The data, collected from a sample of 548 young, educated social media users in Lahore, will be examined to conclude the study on a solid base of evidence by analysing each question. These findings then will become base for interpretive discussion in the following chapter.

6.1 Analysis of Research Question 1

RQ1: Do people take clickbait as credible in terms of trust and accuracy when compared with standard news, and does the topic (like politics or celebrities) make a difference in how much they trust it?

To answer this, we first developed a structure by evaluating the credibility of an informational news headline with two clickbait headlines.

6.1.1 Informational News Headline (Headline 1):

1. The data in Table 5.15 shows that a clear majority of respondents viewed the standard headline (“NEPRA Approves New Electricity Tariffs...”) as credible. With a collective agreement of 51.1% either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement.

6.1.2 Clickbait News Headline (Headlines 2 & 3):

2. On the other hand, the clickbait headlines got a low number of credibility ratings as compared to Headline 1. The political clickbait headline (Table 5.16) was rated credible by 43.8% of respondents, and the celebrity clickbait headline (Table 5.17) was considered credible by 41.6%.

The first part of the answer is clear. The gathered data shows that users find standard news headlines more credible than clickbait headlines on average. But the second part of the question reveals a critical variation. Despite being identifiable as clickbait, the political and celebrity headlines were still considered credible by a large number of the sample (over 40%). This directly addresses the question of whether the topic makes a difference. It demonstrates that a sensational political headline preferred by people as credible means that the topic itself, such as politics, powerfully influences the evaluation behaviour of users. This thing alters the credibility in the user's mind. This finding directly points out the influence of pre-existing interests on credibility assessment.

6.2 Analysis of Research Question 2

RQ2: How well can the general public identify clickbait? Is there a link between clickbait awareness and the selection to click it anyway?

The first part of this question is answered by analysing the data on the user awareness section B of the questionnaire. The results indicate a high level of media literacy within the sample:

1. A majority of respondents (56.2%) were confident about identify clickbait thumbnails and headlines (Table 5.10).

2. This confidence was founded correct, as a majority of respondents correctly identified key clickbait tactics, such as the use of emotional words like "Shocking" (51.1%, Table 5.11) and headlines that hide key information (60.6%, Table 5.12).

The first part of question is justified with results that shows public cand accurately identify clickbait. The second part of the research question inquires about the link between awareness and behaviour. To answer this statement, we compared the data taken in the awareness section with the data on behavioural

intention that is section D (Reactions) of the questionnaire:

3. Despite high awareness, 51.8% of participants expressed there are chances that they will clickbait thumbnail video with exaggerated language (Table 5.22).

By comparing these two results, we can identify a there is no link between awareness and behaviour. There appears to be a very weak or non-existent link between a user's awareness of the clickbait format and their decision to engage with it. The data shows that knowing something is clickbait does not stop a user from clicking on it. This reveals a core inconsistency in user behaviour.

6.3 Analysis of Research Questions 3 & 4

RQ3: What are the behavioural reactions of the selected group to YouTube clickbait thumbnails they click, share, or ignore? **RQ4:** What are the main reasons to click on YouTube thumbnails if they find them untrustworthy?

The both questions can be evaluated together based on behavior and psychology . The primary reactions are divided: 51.8% respondents are hopeful to click clickbait thumbnail. While 45.2% are likely to ignore (Tables 5.22 & 5.23). This shows a division in the audience's reaction. Research Question 4 asks for the reasons behind the decision to click despite this distrust. The data reveal two key psychological factors:

6.3.1 • Curiosity

A big portion of the sample (48.1%) admitted that clickbait thumbnails make them curious to know more (Table 5.21). This suggests that the psychological need is a powerful motivation. To close this need of "information gap" created by the headline, they click it.

6.3.2 • Entertainment

49.6% of the respondents agreed with the statement that "I believe clicking on such content is a harmless form of entertainment" (Table 5.24).

The analysis gives important details that the main reasons for clicking on untrustworthy thumbnails are curiosity and thinking of it as a form of harmless entertainment. This justification allows users to ignore their own doubts. It compels the audience to engage with

the content to satisfy the need for entertainment rather than information.

6.4 Evaluating Hypothesis on Evidence

H1: Users generally identify clickbait as non-credible.

H0: Users generally identify clickbait as credible.

Formulated hypothesis "users generally identify clickbait as non-credible": The data in Table 5.19 provides strong support for this part. The response to "In general, headlines like the political and celebrity examples are not trustworthy" a majority of respondents (51.8%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Headlines like the political and celebrity examples are not trustworthy. This establishes that the sample views the clickbait format as non-credible. Only 15.3% disagree or strongly disagree with argument.

The data present a clear evaluation and strong support for H1. Users state that the format is untrustworthy in general. The evidence clearly shows that the surveyed users, when asked about the format in general terms, identify clickbait headlines as non-credible. The findings of study revealed that people don't trust the accuracy of the clickbait, and can identify the accuracy of clickbait. Therefore, based on results the alternative hypothesis (H1) has accepted.

7 Discussion & Interpretation

In this chapter, the investigation into the credibility of clickbait journalism from the perspective of the public, especially young educated users in Lahore, is analysed. Initially research study interpreted the research gap in the context of clickbait. A pile of literature was analysed more studies in the international perspective overlooked the Asian region and its socio-economic impact in the landscape of Pakistan. The findings gave a broader look at users, also known as consumers were completely aware and sceptical. The chapter deep dive to develop understanding and comprehensive discussion of findings, their relevance and significance with the study, scholarly connection with previously done research, and its practical implications in Pakistani society.

The big section of study revolves around the gratification of the user. The core behaviour of the user is dual in nature; information seeking

and entertainment are the triggers to navigate social media. The findings are complex in nature. The trust in online news has a gap as per findings, their ability to be aware of clickbait is great in general, and their engagement with clickbait as a common behaviour and political news content as a driving force of consumption are general results. The interaction with clickbait among Pakistanis is not a passive act but rather an aware personal need and existing biases for consumption.

7.1 Dual Gratification User: Information and Entertainment in the Digital Age

The most crucial insight that provides a foundation is in their motivation for youngsters to use social media. The collected data insights show they don't have a single purpose for engagement. A significant majority of respondent agreed to state that their main goal is to entertain themselves, as shown in Table 5.6 as follows: 24 (4.4%) Strongly disagree, 16 (2.9%) Disagree, 164 (29.9%) remain Neutral, 268 (48.9%) Agree with the statement, while 76 (13.9%) Strongly agree. This finding definitely goes with uses and gratification theory proposed by Katz, Blumer, and Gurevich in 1974. Uses and gratification define audience is not compliant to media but actively make selective decisions to satisfy their desires and needs (Ruggiero, 2000). The theory shifts the focus from what does media does to people to what people do to the media (Katz, 1959).

In the current study, the respondents actively use social media to fulfill their cognitive need for information and an effective need for diversion in the form of entertainment (Whiting & Willim, 2013). This type of dual motivation is an ideal environment where clickbait can survive easily. The clickbait headlines and YouTube thumbnail covers are designed masterfully to cater to the needs of entertainment and information, both cleverly. The headline *Famous Politician's Secret Leaked... The Truth Will Leave You Speechless!* is presented in the third section of the survey for evaluating headlines crafted skilfully. It presents as a piece of information and also fulfills the need for entertainment. These mixed-nature headlines are termed as infotainment. It can easily avoid the cognitive ability of consumers that is used to

filter content. This thing easily allows the spread of clickbait on the internet. These findings align with Muller et al. (2016) that Facebook posts act as an appetizer and a main dish by serving social and informational purposes. The high percentage of respondents remained "Neutral" on both the news and entertainment statements (in table 5.5, 35.8% and in table 5.5, 29.9%, respectively). Also indicates that a significant portion of the audience is unable to distinguish between these two modes of consumption. It further mixes up and makes the hybrid approach of clickbait more influential.

7.2 Awareness vs. Action: The Clickbait Dilemma

Users actively seek gratification, not simply out of innocence. The data revealed their sense of awareness and critical thinking in the media environment. 64.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the amount of sensational news online seems to be increasing day by day (Table 5.9). This perception aligns with the global "credibility crisis" identified in previous studies as information disorder (Muhammad & Khan, 2023; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Yet this awareness of sensationalism does not reject social media news completely. When asked if they generally trust the news found on social media, the responses were divided, with the largest single group (41.6%) remaining "Neutral" (shown in Table 5.7). Only 25.5% of respondents actively disagreed or strongly disagreed with trusting social media news. This neutrality suggests a state of indecision or bias. Users know the environment is defective, but it remains a primary source of information, particularly for Pakistan. When asked about their platform preferences (Table 5.4). There was doubt, and it was equal in percentage with a few digits change.

This finding complicates the narrative of a simple decline in trust. It suggests that for young users, "trust" may be unstable due to its nature. They may not trust the platforms completely, but they may trust specific posts based on personal preferences, shared by friends, and strong preexisting beliefs. This conditional and dependent trust gives more exposure to clickbait. As argued by Abdur and Abdullah (2024) in their deep research, the proliferation

of clickbait in the Bangladeshi news environment was directly linked to a decline in audience trust, yet the practice continued because it successfully generated revenue. This study's findings suggest a similar situation in Pakistan. Users express general distrust in clickbait, but their engagement patterns, driven by other needs, give a debate to the opposite opinion. The high percentage of users who agreed that they actively question the accuracy of information (55.5%, Table 5.8) further deepens this uncertain situation.

The most striking contradiction to emerge from this study is the significant gap between users' stated awareness of clickbait and their attraction towards it despite knowing the fact. An impressive 56.2% of respondents were confident they could recognize a clickbait headline and thumbnail (Table 5.10). They correctly identified key tactics. As the majority of them agreed that emotional words like "Shocking" (51.1%, Table 5.11) and headlines that hide key information (60.6%, Table 5.12) are clear signs of clickbait. This provides evidence of a high level of media literacy among youth with their "critical approach" (Turrochmah et al. 2025).

However, this awareness does not appear to function as an effective tool to guard users against the psychological curiosity to click on clickbait. When asked about typical clickbait YouTube thumbnails with a shocked face, red arrows, and text like "YOU WON'T BELIEVE THIS!!", a significant portion of the same respondents admitted that such thumbnails make them curious to know more (48.1%, Table 5.21). Respondents are expected to click on a video with that type of thumbnail (51.8%, Table 5.22). This, knowing what clickbait is and getting attracted to it makes it confusing. This is a challenge of modern media literacy.

This finding can be explained by the powerful psychological phenomena of clickbait. In past literature, it was observed that clickbait headlines are designed to create a "curiosity gap" that is cognitively uncomfortable. It compels users to click to find it (Blom & Hansen, 2015). The use of emotional language blocks the ability to think logically and makes you react instantly (McStay, 2016). The results of this study confirm this. Even when the mind identifies a

headline as a manipulative tactic, the subconscious mind seeks satisfaction out of curiosity.

This is further complex by the audience's perception. A combined 51.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they believe clickbait is a harmless tactic to get more views (Table 5.14), and 49.6% agreed that clicking on such content is a harmless form of entertainment (Table 5.24). This perception of harmlessness may lower their defence against thumbnail. If clickbait is an entertaining game between the creator and consumer, according to respondents, they may feel compelled to exercise their critical and reasoning skills. This aligns with Chaitanya Shinkhede's (2019) research, which framed clickbait as a form of "deception" and "fraudulent activity,".

7.3 Pre-existing Interests and the Power of Political Clickbait

While the clickbait strategies work globally but their content is often intensely local. This study reveals a critical insight into the Pakistani media landscape: a majority of respondents (58.4%) agreed that content related to Pakistani politics is frequently presented as clickbait (Table 5.13). This finding is vital and serves as a powerful illustration of the Selective Exposure Theory.

This theory says that individuals tend to favour information that supports their already present beliefs while avoiding contradictory information (Berinsky & Yamamoto, 2017). In a politically divided nation like Pakistan, as described in the problem statement, citizens often hold strong allegiances and biases. Political clickbait is effective in this environment because it does not need to convince a neutral audience; it only needs to activate the biases of a sympathetic one (Sunstein, 2017). A headline like "Famous Politician's Secret Leaked... The Truth Will Leave You Speechless!" is a compelling one. Because it is selectively tempting to those who already distrust that politician or their party. For this part of the audience, clicking the link is an act of seeking validation. This makes the audience an active collaborator in the clickbait sharing.

The data on headline credibility further supports this. When presented with the political clickbait headline, a combined 43.8% of respondents still rated it as credible (Table 5.16),

and almost the same percentage, 43.8% believed the story behind it was likely to be accurate (Table 5.18). This is a usually high number for a headline that is identifiable as clickbait. It suggests that for a significant portion of the audience, political affiliation blocks their critical thinking. The credibility of the source becomes secondary with it comes with their personal beliefs. This aligns with the findings of Khan & Muhammad (2024), who documented the role of social media in fuelling political polarization among Pakistani youth.

The section evaluating specific headlines provides a practical approach to the theories discussed above. The straightforward, informational headline about electricity tariffs (Headline 1) was, predictably, viewed as the most credible, with 51.1% agreeing or strongly agreeing (Table 5.15). This serves as a baseline, representing the audience's ability to recognize a traditional, non-sensational news item. The responses to the clickbait headlines are shocking. As discussed, the political headline (Headline 2) maintained a high credibility according to responses. The celebrity clickbait headline (Headline 3) performed similarly, with 41.6% finding it credible (Table 5.17). This indicates that the celebrity-focused content, much like political content, is under more influence of curiosity. The surprising result in this section comes from Table 5.19, where a combined 51.8% of respondents agreed that, *in general*, headlines like the political and celebrity examples are not trustworthy. This is a contradiction of their own evaluation. This result highlights a conflicting belief. Basically, users know these types of headlines are unreliable. But still unable to beat curiosity when shown an example. This supports the idea that the decision to click and the assessment of credibility are not just rational processes; they are influenced by the emotional or mood at the moment. This aligns with research in Tanzania and Zambia by Judith Flora et al. (2021) that while clickbait was perceived negatively overall but its immediate appeal could still be effective.

8 Conclusion

This study explores clickbait credibility in Pakistan. Findings have shown the different aspects of human thinking in which young

people navigate today's digital world. Its nature is complex and contradictory. The quantitative data collected from people gave strong evidence. The findings were not basic and simple in nature. The findings of study revealed that people don't trust the accuracy of the clickbait, and can identify the accuracy of clickbait. It reveals active and focused user base is driven by the two needs, information and entertainment. The mind of the user is in a constant state of war between their awareness and their psychological need. The audience understands the rise of sensationalism recently. They know about the clickbait views game, but often choose to play this game at the cost of their time. A large group of users tries to remain neutral or prefers conditional trust based on pre-existing views. They do not reject the clickbait completely. It might be possible due to current affiliations or the limited means of entertainment in the country. This is somehow deeper-rooted than a simplistic phenomenon.

With the frameworks of Uses and Gratifications Theory and Selective Exposure Theory, this discussion has argued about the human psyche. They use media for two purposes: one purpose is entertainment, and the second purpose is to inform themselves about their surroundings. The decision to click a thumbnail with a sensational heading does not show the signs of failure of media literacy. It could be to satisfy their inner need for gratification. When a user is introduced with a shocked face, arrows, circles, blurred objects, or text that is promising or shows some element of surprise, it hits right on target. It's a globally used common practice. The user who needs escape, diversion from a chaotic environment, or a break for entertainment clicks it easily. The click of the user is a rational choice because they know the content is low quality and the information presented than be wrong.

The selective exposure theory gives a more specific explanation of the more powerful persuasive mechanism of political clickbait. In a society like Pakistan, people are more politically charged. User doesn't consume media for the knowledge of surroundings or to remain neutral. They consume it to make their identity to enter into a tribe of a specific ideology. As Sunstein (2017) argued, we are to consume

content that reinforces our existing worldview and helps us make sense world in a way that is fitting with our beliefs. For that reason, a clickbait headline that assures a scandal about a political opponent is not just a piece of news; it is a piece of validation. When consumers click on clickbait, they know what they are doing; they just want to prove themselves in their mind and social circle that 'we were right'. For this type of audience, the ideological alignment of the message was more appealing and powerful than any journalistic integrity. The public questions the credibility of clickbait. They are well aware of the language used on youtube clickbait thumbnails. The stressors are used to exaggerate the content. This kind of content is non credible for audience.

8.1 Implications and Final Thoughts

In the end, this research serves as an identification of perceptions and a call to action for all the institutions involved. The relationship between young Pakistanis and clickbait is not a simple deception. It's a complex occurrence. It is a mixture of physiological needs and the social and political affiliation context of Pakistan. Users stress that the clickbait credibility is very low. The clickbait information is not credible to them. It is not a small dilemma but a powerful force that shapes perceptions, reinforces biases, and ruins the foundations of public trust in media organizations. It provides a foundation for understanding a critical issue in a non-Western context based on data. It adds a contribution by giving direction to the global academic conversation. It is really challenging to understand misinformation in developing nations because of unique cultural and political dynamics. For Pakistan, it emphasizes the urgent need to develop an approach that involves ethical implications in newsrooms, psychological training of students, and a responsible social media sector. The future of an informed citizen totally depends on the ability to navigate between awareness and the click on digital platforms.

8.2 Recommendations

The recommendations are given to highlight the importance of the topic, which could help literary scholars expand the research.

1. It is important to be aware of people's social media usage habits. New research studies on media are increasing awareness among people. It is important to say that when new technology comes, it brings good and bad consequences with it. Even excessive use of anything for the long term could be harmful. When people are aware of this, they will be able to make healthy and educated choices for themselves and for people who are near them.

2. Slow thinking practices should be encouraged in this fast-scrolling environment. Should adopt a habit of asking questions by yourself before clicking any piece of content like, the source of content, the motive behind it and its credibility.

3. Clickbait triggers emotions and we gave reaction based on current emotional state. So there should be self-awareness programs.

4. These recommendations are given to media practitioners, policy makers, and young adults. All of them should be aware of the bad outcomes that can cause threats to the right information, journalism, and social division within the nation.

5. Only through the right approach, encouragement of media literacy, and wise decisions can clickbait and fake news be monitored on social media, and can lessen the risk of mass sharing of wrong information.

6. Media houses should have discussions with the real audience through surveys and debates so that they can take positive measures to counter it and can regain audience trust in true information.

7. Media regulatory bodies should focus on these practices of text and images that create panic among the general public, with the use of vulgar, explicit, emotional, and clueless text to gain short-term benefits.

8. Beyond a just simple "like" or "dislike," platforms should add options for users to tick it as "Misleading Thumbnail/Title," "Helpful," or "Informative." This user-generated data can be a powerful tool for training algorithms to recognize quality content.

9. For further research, it is recommended that the sample size be scaled up so that more opinions can be added. Other factors should also be included in research. It was conducted in Lahore and should be expanded to other cities in Pakistan.

8.3 Limitations

- The shortcoming of this research is that we were unable to cover all factors that can contribute to this relationship.
- There are more hidden practices to use clickbait with creative writing, so it is really difficult to distinguish the natural plan facts and exaggerations that were made to make people somehow aware of its presence on YouTube.
- It was really difficult to find the participants because of the time limitation.
- One thing that was a huge hurdle was to get the people who are easy-going to fill the questionnaire because of the emergence of scams these days, they were more concerned about whether their information is really in secure hands and will not be used for fraudulent activities.
- People were hesitating to respond to the questionnaire, especially the female group of participants, because of ethnic and cultural norms.
- Most of the respondents were males, and the ratio of females was very small.
- The sample of research was limited and needs to increase the sample size of the population to find more favourable results.
- The factor of bias may be involved in some of the questionnaires.
- It was the first type of study conducted in Pakistan. It was difficult to find research literature in the context of Pakistan.

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