**Click-Baiting**

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Kate Middleton has gone missing. The palace is in crisis. Why is artificial intelligence being used to post announcements? Did the future queen of the UK really use magazine covers from the years gone by to create family posts for social media? Would anyone like to raise their hand and admit that we, as media, have gone too far in our race for ratings? For the last few years, we have been told about the rise of clickbait journalism and how it would become a pressing concern in the dissemination of news and information now that everyone likes information at their fingertips.

Clickbait journalism, characterized by sensationalized or misleading headlines designed to attract a high volume of clicks, poses significant risks in distorting information and manipulating emotions. While there seems nothing new about it as we’ve all been using it for as long as we can remember, perhaps the recent case involving the reporting on Kate Middleton’s cancer prognosis would go down in history as a stark example of how disastrous its effects could be.

As the readers are repeatedly exposed to misleading or exaggerated headlines, they would soon become disillusioned with the news industry on the whole.

Clickbait journalism is a tactic used by media outlets to generate traffic to their websites by exploiting curiosity and sensationalism. These headlines often exaggerate or misrepresent the actual content of the article, leading readers to click on the link in search of more information. Of course, many would argue that these are the same tactics used by newspaper publishers when they roared through the 60s with the emotional, sensationalist reporting style we remember as the yellow press. Others would point to loud reporting styles, studios turned into newsrooms, suggestive jingles as backgrounds for serious news stories and how the entire media industry seemed hell-bent on milking the fourth pillar of the state as an untapped avenue of entertainment. The primary motivation is the same as before: increase advertising revenue. This time, however, page views have taken the place of remote control or newspaper stands as now, the number of clicks directly impacts the profitability of online media platforms. Why would anyone not want to earn a few extra bucks off an audience that is full of clicks but short on time? Let’s feed them frenzied theories, draw attention via graphic visuals, loud headlines, flickering images and move on. The matter escalated to such a point that it landed on the floor of the White House. A reporter directly asked Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre if the White House ever digitally alters pictures of the US President, Joe Biden. Jean-Pierre categorically denied the allegations, but can one ever be entirely sure of such claims? We highly doubt it.

But just because history tends to repeat itself is no reason for us to never learn from our mistakes. One of the most concerning aspects of clickbait journalism is its ability to spread misinformation and distort facts. Take the case of Kate Middleton’s cancer episode. Headlines such as “Royal Shock: Kate’s Health Nightmare Revealed!” were posted in complete knowledge of the resulting sense of urgency and alarm among readers, which might have led many to believe that the Duchess of Cambridge was indeed on her deathbed and staring at the GrimReaper. However, upon closer inspection, it was revealed that the article lacked credible sources and was based on speculation rather than verifiable information.

Even now, as the explanatory videos have been released and Kensington Palace experts have, once again, won their share of airtime, more of the reporting seeks to poke holes in the official narrative in what could easily be read as a last-minute attempt to remain in-vogue for as long as possible. So much so that the debate managed to cross seas and land on the floor of the White House where a reporter asked Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre if the White House “ever digitally alters pictures” of US President Joe Biden.

The impact of clickbait journalism goes beyond the dissemination of false information because it also has the potential to manipulate the emotions of the audience. Sensationalized headlines are designed to evoke strong reactions from readers, whether it be shock, outrage, or sympathy. By playing on these emotions, media outlets can capture the attention of the public and keep them engaged with their content, regardless of the accuracy of the information presented.

What my dear friends fail to realise is how this prevalence of clickbait journalism is actually contributing to the erosion of trust in the media. We were never considered a friendly ally. But now, as the readers are repeatedly exposed to misleading or exaggerated headlines, they will soon become disillusioned with the news industry as a whole. This loss of trust not only undermines the credibility of legitimate media sources but also creates a fertile ground for the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories.

The psychological impact of consuming clickbait content should not be underestimated. Constant exposure to sensationalized news stories can result in heightened levels of anxiety, fear, and stress among individuals. By preying on people’s insecurities and vulnerabilities, clickbait journalism has the potential to cause significant harm to mental well-being.

To combat the detrimental effects of clickbait journalism, it is essential to educate the public on how to identify and critically evaluate misleading headlines. By teaching individuals to discern between credible news sources and clickbait content, we can empower them to make informed decisions about the information they consume. Instead of taking the easy way out and baiting them for more clicks to fill our pockets, why not turn the tide and steer them towards meaningful discourse? Away from empty words, one-sided commentaries and the menacing finger. To no more click-baiting

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