



RESEARCH ON NEWS LINKS FINDS THAT IMAGES, PLACEMENT ON PAGE CAN IMPROVE CLICK-THROUGH RATES

Austin, TX – September 27, 2018 – New research from the Center for Media Engagement (CME) on best practices for using links on news websites finds that audiences are more likely to click on links that use images in their layout, appear at the end of a page and reflect related content.

To learn what drives news audiences to click on news links, CME collaborated with seven local broadcast newsrooms from the Graham Media Group to do A/B testing over a weeklong period. This research was funded by The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

Data collected during the experiment show that news links accompanied by images generated 63 percent more clicks than those that consist of only text. Placing links at the end of a page garnered 55 percent more clicks than placing links in the middle of the page.

The testing also demonstrated that linking to other stories related to an article’s topic, as opposed to the site’s trending stories, led to a 14 percent increase in clicks. Popular content, however, generated slightly more clicks than related content when the referral page was Facebook.

“Overall, few site visitors click on links, which is consistent with what others in the news industry have experienced,” said Jessica Collier, CME research associate. “However, our findings show that there are best practices that newsrooms can follow to improve their click-through rates.”

Additional findings include:

- Generic wording (e.g. Related Stories) generated slightly more clicks than more complex wording (e.g. What Else People Can Read on This Topic).
- It didn’t matter whether people used a smartphone, phablet, tablet or desktop. For all of these devices, there were more clicks when links (1) appeared at the end of articles, (2) were accompanied by images, and (3) consisted of related content.
- The results were consistent across all seven broadcast news organizations.
- Links at the end of the article and links accompanied by images performed better regardless of the referral site.

“It’s important for news organizations to learn more about what works and what doesn’t when it comes to links, as the click-through rate not only affects business decisions, but also shows whether audience needs are met,” said CME Director Dr. Talia Stroud. “If other newsrooms are interested in doing this type of testing, we are happy to share our code and work with them to evaluate how links work on their sites.”

“These findings will help all news publishers with a better understanding of how audiences consume content. I’m pleased our development team has been able to work closely in tandem with the Center for

Media Engagement on this first-of-its-kind study,” said Catherine Badalamente, VP of Digital Media for Graham Media Group. “We look forward to a continued partnership.”

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The Center for Media Engagement, part of the Moody College of Communication at The University of Texas at Austin, provides research-based techniques for engaging digital audiences in commercially viable and democratically beneficial ways. Learn more at mediaengagement.org