

# Exploring Relationships Between News Expectations, News Behaviors and Political Views

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## Introduction

Do expectations about fact-based content predict the likelihood to read information?

- Attitude-confirming motivations compete with the desire for factually accurate information to drive both interest in and consumption of news (Kohurt et al., 2021; Garret 2009; Westerwick et al., 2013).
- ❖ Are those who think a news article has low factual content less likely to read it?
- ❖ What characteristics tend to make a (supposed) news article sound less like it is fact-based?
- ❖ What best predicts when people will be highly likely to read a news story?

Does political outlook relate to skepticism re: facts?

- ❖ Can perceptions of an article's factual content vary based on political leanings?

## Methods

Participants Stimuli, and Design:

- 183 USF psychology undergraduates

Stimuli, and Design:

- 80 headlines written to be neutral in tone
- Sub-analysis of 34 headlines with high variation in judgments of the likely fact content of article
- DVs: Four ratings on 7-point Likert-type scales

Participants were presented headlines twice in succession, answering the following questions:

"After seeing this headline, how would you feel about reading the entire article?"

- Interest - Likelihood to Read

"What is your impression of this article's headline?"

- Realistic (Headline) - Fact-Based (Article)

Example 1: Interest, & Reading Likelihood

Example 2: Realistic & Fact-Based

\*Participant Sample Question- First Viewing

\*Participant Sample Question- Second Viewing

plus Political Affiliation (7-point Likert-type scale)  
"In general, what is your political outlook?"  
(1=highly conservative, 7=highly liberal)

## Results

### News Expectations Based on Judgments of Fact Content

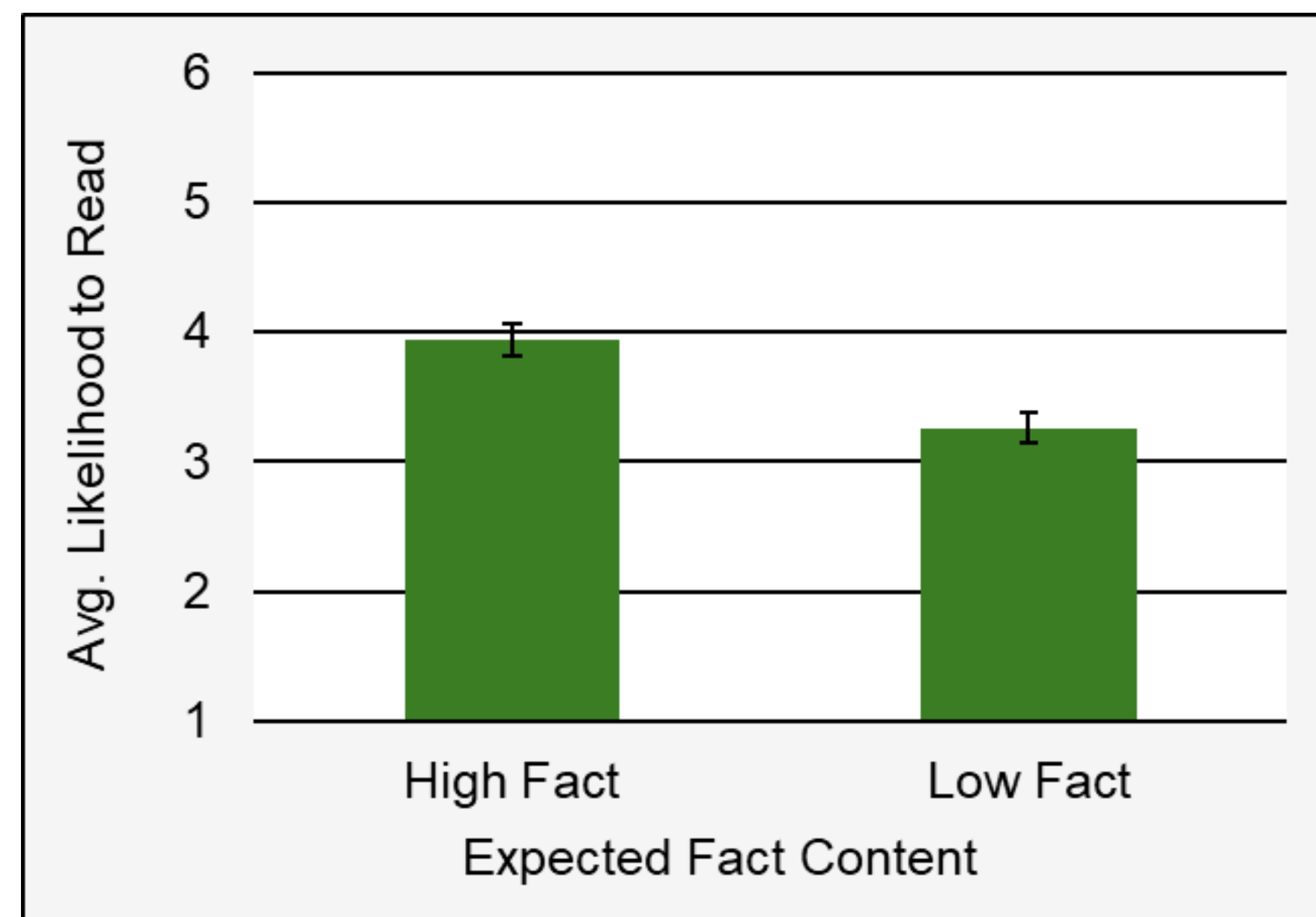


Figure 1: Reported Likelihood to Read the Article by Expected Fact Content

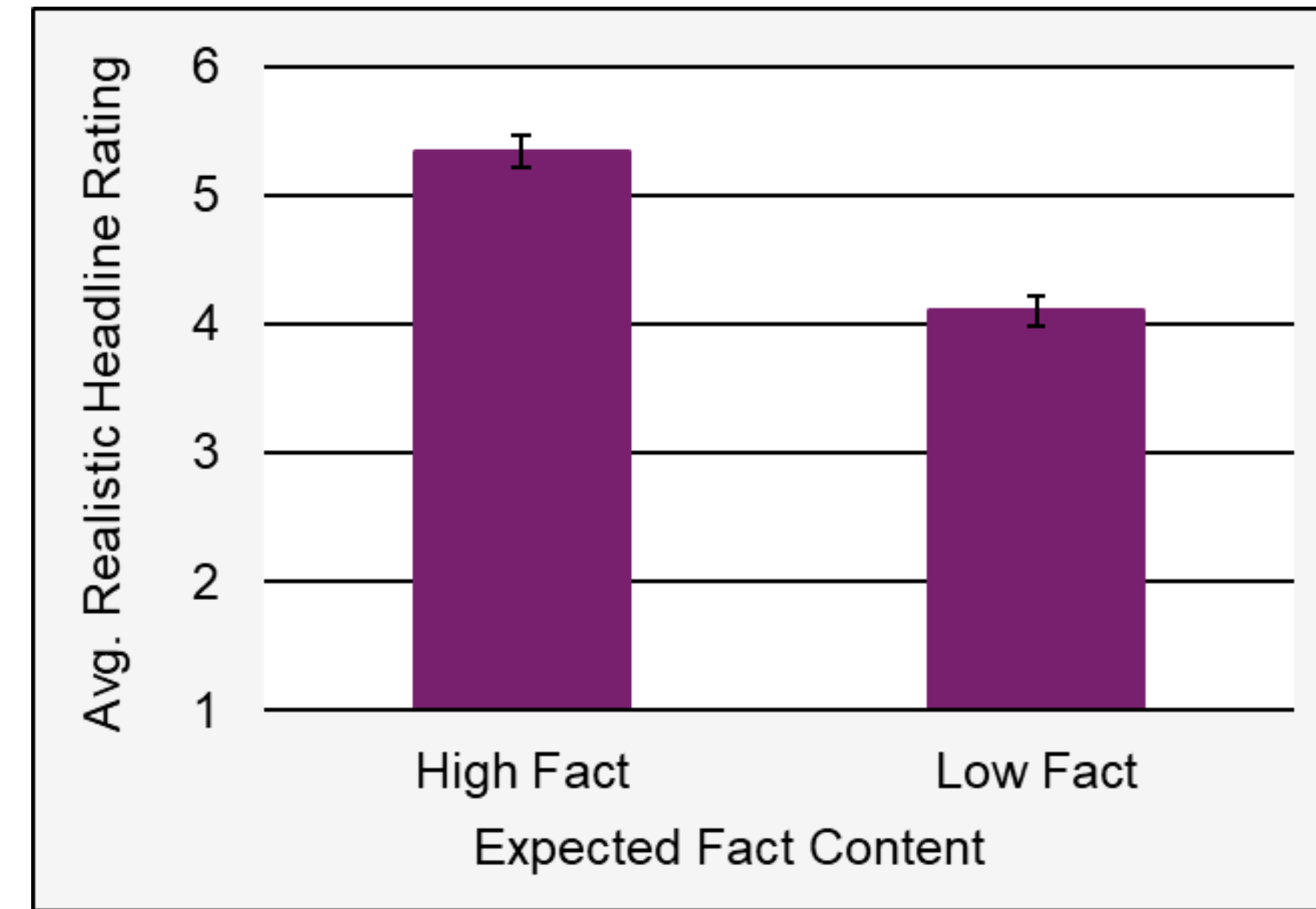


Figure 2: Reported Extent that Headline Seems Realistic by Expected Fact Content

- Participants who believed an article was **more fact-based** vs less fact based:
  - Reported **slightly higher** average ratings of **likelihood to read the article**
  - Reported **much higher** average **impressions that the headline sounded realistic**
- (Not pictured) An **almost perfect predictor** of average ratings of **likelihood to read** was
  - Rated **interest in the article topic**, which was correlated at **r = +.98**.

### Relation of Predictions about Fact-Based Content to Political Outlook

Conservative Skeptical/Confirmatory Headlines	r
The Push for Gender-Neutral Prom Royalty	0.45
Effects of Border Detainment Camps on Children	0.44
Concern about Covid at USF	0.36
What You Need to Know about Critical Race Theory	0.26
Scientists Weigh in on New CDC Guidelines	0.23
Congress Reviews Legislation to Revise Unemployment Benefits	0.22
Reviewing the UN's 2021 Climate Report	0.21
Liberal Skeptical/Confirmatory Headlines	
Upset over Mask-Wearing Policy at USF	-0.20
Keeping the Faith: Prayer in Schools Debate	-0.20

Figure 3: Correlations Between Political Outlook and Expected Fact-Content

- Of the 80 headlines examined, only 12 showed a significant correlation between political outlook and fact-based assessments.
- Of these 12 headlines, 10 exhibited a lower fact assessment from conservatives, while only 2 suggested greater skepticism about an article's fact content from liberals.

## What Makes A Headline Seem More or Less Fact-Based?

Typically, headlines that discussed social media tended to have low expected fact-based content.



- Push for Limit Controls on Posting to Social Media Platform
- Social Media influencer: A viable career choice?

Headlines which included a question mark tended to receive relatively low expected fact judgments.



- How Should the Government spend our Tax Dollars?
- Climate Change: Hot or Not?
- Is a Booster Shot Worth the Hassle?

Headlines referencing a respected 3<sup>rd</sup> party tended to be judged as likely to be high fact articles.



- Reviewing UN's 2021 Climate Report
- Scientists Weigh in on new CDC Guidelines
- Congress Reviews Legislation to Revise Unemployment Plans

## Conclusion

Likelihood to read an article was predicted mostly by interest in the content, only weakly by facts.

- Participants were only slightly more likely to read articles they deemed high (rather than low) fact, but were much more likely to consider them realistic.

- Articles rated particularly low in factual content were noticeably less attractive to readers.

Perceptions of factual content can sometimes vary with political outlook.

- When political outlook correlated with assessments of factual content, conservatives offered more frequent skepticism across a broader range of topics compared to liberals.

Future research will need to assess whether these patterns are seen across a wider array of topics and across different groups of potential news consumers.

## References

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