



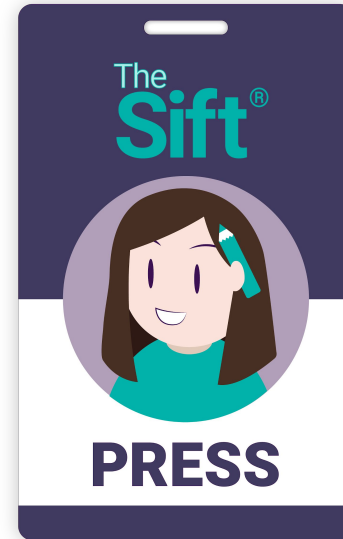
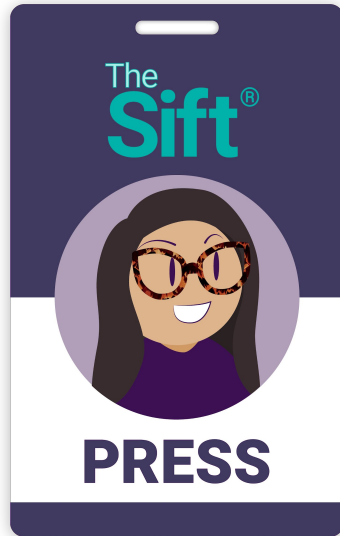
The Sift[®] News Goggles

Watchdog vs. clicks? Comparing two
Sacramento Bee news reports

Oct. 26, 2020

First things first

- Be sure to view these slides in presentation mode.
- Suzannah and Hannah, former reporters who work at NLP, are going to help you examine this topic through journalists' eyes.



This week, we're going to examine two reports recently [called out](#) by employees of the Sacramento Bee, who identify one as valuable watchdog journalism and the other as relying more on "clickbait" headline tactics.



What do you think?



What's clickbait?

Clickbait is a type of content, often a headline or story tease, that commonly uses misleading, sensationalized language to attract clicks. Clickbait generally seeks to drive page views for ad revenue and typically does not deliver on whatever it promises.

Note: The Bee proposal (as described) isn't a new idea. As print journalism transitioned online in recent decades, it emerged as a controversial tactic because of complaints that it led to lower-quality journalism.



News report 1: Taco Bell menu changes



THE SACRAMENTO BEE

NATIONAL

‘Save the Potatoes!’ Taco Bell purges some menu items and people can’t handle it

BY TANASIA KENNEY

JULY 17, 2020 12:56 PM



Do you notice anything about this headline or labeling? Would this story be specifically relevant and interesting to the local community? Why or why not?

Click to the next slide for our thoughts.

Note: Images of examples are hyperlinked.





THE SACRAMENTO BEE

NATIONAL

‘Save the Potatoes!’ Taco Bell purges some menu items and people can’t handle it

BY TANASIA KENNEY

JULY 17, 2020 12:56 PM



Note the “national” label.

Subscribers complain when they see headlines like this, Bee staffers said.





'Save the menu

BY TANASIA KENNEY

JULY 17, 2022 12:30 PM



Tanasia Kenney

@Tanasia_Kenney

National Real-Time Reporter for @McClatchy | KSU Alumna | Reality TV Junkie | Story ideas? Slide in my DMs ❤️📧

📍 ATL 🔗 anxiousblackgirl.blog 📅 Joined February 2015

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She is a national reporter for McClatchy, which owns the Bee and other newspapers. But her Twitter profile indicates she is based in Atlanta, Georgia – not Sacramento, California. Though some may be interested in this Taco Bell report, Bee journalists seem to feel such news doesn't serve their local audience as much as other kinds of reporting.



News report 2: UC Davis marching band investigation



THE SACRAMENTO BEE

LOCAL

Binge drinking, raucous parties and trauma from sexual encounters shadow UC Davis marching band

BY MOLLY SULLIVAN AND RYAN SABALOW

MAY 23, 2019 02:40 AM, UPDATED MAY 31, 2019 12:24 PM



What's the difference between the Taco Bell headline/label and this headline/label? Would this story be specifically relevant and interesting to the local community? Why or why not?

Click to the next slide for our thoughts.





THE SACRAMENTO BEE

LOCAL

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Note the “local” label. In contrast to the national McClatchy journalist who wrote the Taco Bell story, the bylined reporters on this report are local and are employed at the Bee. They worked on this award-winning story for months, the Bee staffers noted in a recent letter, identifying it as “good journalism.” It’s the kind of work that can lead to change because it highlights failure(s) of public concern that were previously unknown.



THE SACRAMENTO BEE

INVESTIGATIONS

UC Davis suspends marching band after Sacramento Bee investigation of raucous culture, hazing

BY MOLLY SULLIVAN AND RYAN SABALOW

MAY 29, 2019 01:34 PM, UPDATED MAY 31, 2019 01:39 PM



Yes! Actually it did lead to change, as we can see in this follow-up report above. The Bee's investigation prompted the university to suspend the marching band. This is watchdog reporting in action, which holds people or institutions accountable for corrupt or unlawful activity. The investigation is especially relevant to readers in Sacramento, which is near the UC Davis campus.



THE SACRAMENTO BEE



Note: The McClatchy Company newspaper chain, including the Bee, was [recently sold](#) to a hedge fund after filing for bankruptcy earlier this year.

Many journalists worry that the quality of news coverage will suffer if they are incentivized to write for clicks. This kind of arrangement would be controversial at a standards-based news organization, which is one reason it sparked widespread criticism.

Also note: The Bee's leadership has described the pay-for-clicks claims as "[inaccurate](#)" — a characterization that Bee employees have [disputed](#).



News Goggles: Next steps

Discuss: How do “clickbait headlines” drive web traffic? Why is web traffic important? Why would journalists raise concerns about a “pay-for-clicks” model of performance reviews? How does the Taco Bell news report compare to the marching band coverage? In what ways can watchdog journalism that holds the powerful accountable bring about change? How can such journalism, which can be more expensive to produce, be sustained?

Related:

- [“Opinion: If reporters focus on clicks, they won’t focus on news”](#) (Christian Trejbal, Seattle Times).
- [“The Sacramento Bee wants to tie metrics to pay. Its guild is not having it.”](#) (Kristen Hare, Poynter).

Resource: [“Democracy’s Watchdog”](#) (NLP’s Checkology® virtual classroom)



This exercise originated in the Oct. 26, 2020, issue of The Sift® newsletter from the News Literacy Project. You can read archives of the newsletter and subscribe [here](#).

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