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LINGUISTIC AND STYLISTIC STRATEGIES FOR ATTRACTING AUDIENCE ATTENTION IN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE ONLINE MEDIA HEADLINES: THE CASE OF SUSTAINABLE FASHION

Abstract: *the article examines linguistic and stylistic strategies used to attract readers' attention in English-language online media headlines covering sustainable fashion and the environmental impact of the clothing industry. A qualitative analysis is applied to a purposively selected set of headlines from The Guardian and British Vogue. The analysis focuses on metaphor, evaluative vocabulary, interrogative structures, quotation, practical reader address and curiosity-building devices. The article argues that sustainable-fashion coverage combines emotional and informational appeals: headlines frame environmental issues as urgent, make abstract processes more tangible and present sustainability as a matter of everyday choice.*

Keywords: *online journalism, headline, media discourse, sustainable fashion, environmental journalism, evaluative vocabulary, metaphor, clickbait.*

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ЯЗЫКОВЫЕ И СТИЛИСТИЧЕСКИЕ СТРАТЕГИИ ПРИВЛЕЧЕНИЯ ВНИМАНИЯ АУДИТОРИИ В ЗАГОЛОВКАХ АНГЛОЯЗЫЧНЫХ ИНТЕРНЕТ-СМИ: НА МАТЕРИАЛЕ ПУБЛИКАЦИЙ ОБ УСТОЙЧИВОЙ МОДЕ

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Аннотация: *в статье рассматриваются языковые и стилистические способы привлечения внимания читателя в заголовках англоязычных интернет-СМИ, освещающих устойчивую моду и экологические проблемы индустрии одежды. На материале тематически отобранных заголовков анализируются метафора, оценочная лексика, вопросительные конструкции, цитирование, практическая адресация и приёмы создания интриги. Показано, что экологическая повестка позволяет редакциям соединять эмоциональный и рациональный способы привлечения внимания: заголовок может обозначать проблему, обещать полезную информацию и задавать критическую рамку её осмысления.*

Ключевые слова: *интернет-журналистика, заголовок, медиадискурс, устойчивая мода, экологическая журналистика, оценочная лексика, метафора, кликбейт.*

Introduction.

The headline is one of the most visible elements of an online news story. In a digital environment, readers often encounter a publication through a search result, a social-media post, a news aggregator or a homepage feed. In these contexts, the headline performs several functions at once: it identifies the subject, gives an initial interpretation of the event and encourages the reader to continue. Its persuasive role, however, does not remove its informational responsibility. A headline that attracts attention but misrepresents the article may damage trust in the outlet.

The issue is particularly interesting in the coverage of sustainable fashion. The environmental impact of clothing production, consumption and disposal is a complex topic involving supply chains, labour, materials, overproduction and consumer behaviour. Journalists have to make these issues understandable without reducing them to a simplistic moral choice. Headlines therefore become a compact site where a publication selects a problem, establishes its relevance and signals the tone of the story.

The research question is: what linguistic and stylistic strategies do English-language online media use to attract audience attention when covering sustainable

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fashion? The aim is to identify and interpret the principal headline strategies in a selected sample of publications. The objectives are to outline the functions of online headlines; identify recurring lexical and syntactic techniques; examine how these techniques frame sustainable fashion; and consider the contribution of English-language features to the headline's meaning.

The object of the research is headlines in English-language online media. The subject is the set of linguistic and stylistic devices used in headlines about sustainable fashion and environmental issues in the clothing industry. The material consists of a purposively selected illustrative sample of headlines published by The Guardian and British Vogue. The sample is not intended to represent the entire output of either outlet; it is used for qualitative close reading.

The methods include descriptive analysis, contextual and stylistic analysis, and comparison of lexical and syntactic structures. The analysis does not measure click-through rates or audience responses. Consequently, the article discusses the likely communicative function of headline devices rather than claiming that a particular wording has been empirically proven to increase clicks.

1. The headline as a journalistic and digital-media device.

A headline is not simply a shortened version of an article. It is an independent textual unit that selects the most salient aspect of a story and provides readers with a framework for interpreting it. In online journalism, this function is intensified by the way content is distributed: a headline may be read without the accompanying photograph, introductory paragraph or full article. It must therefore be concise and sufficiently informative while remaining distinctive.

Research on online headlines has examined the relationship between headline structure and reader attention. Blom and Hansen describe forward-reference as a strategy that withholds part of the information and creates an incentive to open the story [1]. This mechanism can be effective, but it also creates an ethical tension: if too much information is withheld, the headline may become vague or misleading. Clickbait is not identical to every expressive headline; the key issue is whether the promise made by the headline is fulfilled by the article.

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A useful distinction can be made between informational and promotional elements. Informational elements identify the topic, actor, event or consequence. Promotional elements add evaluation, emotional emphasis, a question, a contrast or an invitation to the reader. In responsible journalism these elements should work together. An expressive headline can be engaging without exaggerating the facts, provided that the article supports its framing.

Sustainable fashion offers a wide range of possible headline angles. A publication may focus on environmental damage, new materials, business practices, consumer choices, regulation or the public image of designers. The headline's wording determines which of these angles becomes most prominent. A question may present the topic as unresolved; a metaphor may make a technical process vivid; a quotation may foreground a conflict or a participant's judgement.

2. Linguistic and stylistic strategies.

2.1. Metaphor and figurative language.

Metaphor makes an abstract or complex issue easier to imagine by describing it through a more familiar domain. In environmental coverage, expressions such as «dirty secret» or «from the brink» transform structural problems into images of concealment or crisis. Such wording is memorable because it adds an evaluative layer to the factual subject. At the same time, metaphor requires careful interpretation: the phrase is not necessarily a literal description, and the reader must connect its figurative meaning with the context of the article.

2.2. Evaluative vocabulary.

Words such as «ultimate», «hidden», «rife», «better» and «disaster» communicate an attitude towards the subject. Evaluative vocabulary can signal urgency, criticism or aspiration before the reader reaches the body of the article. In a headline about sustainability, positive evaluation may present a practice as desirable or prestigious, while negative evaluation may expose harmful business practices. The journalist's choice of adjective or noun therefore contributes to the framing of the issue.

2.3. Questions and direct reader engagement.

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Interrogative headlines invite the audience to consider a problem and suggest that the article will provide an answer or develop an argument. Questions are particularly suitable for topics in which the evidence is contested or the solution is not straightforward. They can also create a conversational tone. However, a question mark does not automatically make a headline neutral: the wording of the question may already contain an assumption or a particular point of view.

2.4. Quotation and attributed speech.

A quotation introduces a human voice into a short headline. It may convey criticism, experience or a strong assessment in a way that appears more immediate than an unattributed statement. Quotation marks also establish a distinction between the publication's own wording and the words attributed to a source. For accuracy, the article must identify the speaker and provide enough context for the quotation to be understood fairly.

2.5. Practical framing and reader benefit.

Headlines beginning with «how to» or addressing everyday choices promise practical value. This approach makes a broad environmental issue relevant to an individual reader by connecting it with clothing, shopping habits or personal budgets. The benefit is clear: the audience can anticipate useful guidance. The limitation is that consumer advice should not imply that individual choices alone can solve systemic problems such as overproduction or opaque supply chains.

3. Qualitative analysis of selected headlines.

The following examples illustrate different headline strategies found in English-language coverage of sustainable fashion. They are treated as qualitative cases rather than as a statistically representative corpus. The analysis concerns the communicative function suggested by the wording, not verified audience behaviour.

Table 1

Qualitative analysis of selected headlines

Headline and outlet	Dominant device	Interpretation
«Why regenerative garments are the ultimate status symbol» (The	Evaluative vocabulary; status framing	«Ultimate» intensifies the claim, while «status symbol» connects sustainability with social prestige. The headline reframes

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Guardian)		environmental responsibility as culturally desirable.
«The hidden plastics in our clothes – and how to avoid them» (The Guardian)	Concealment metaphor; practical promise	«Hidden» suggests that the problem is not immediately visible. The second part promises actionable information, combining curiosity with reader benefit.
"«Profit is being prioritised over climate action' – British fashion is falling behind on sustainability» (The Guardian)	Quotation; contrast; negative evaluation	The quotation foregrounds criticism and creates a conflict between profit and climate action. «Falling behind» frames the industry through a competitive metaphor.
«Has Sustainability Fallen Out Of Fashion?» (British Vogue)	Interrogative; idiomatic expression	«Out of fashion» works both literally and figuratively. The question links the fashion cycle with the possibility that sustainability has lost cultural relevance.
«Should We Be Tracking Our Fashion Air Miles?» (British Vogue)	Interrogative; reader inclusion	The modal verb «should» frames the issue as a question of responsibility. «We» invites readers into a shared discussion, while «air miles» condenses a complex transport footprint.
"«Greenwashing is rife': is Amy Powney the most sustainable designer in fashion?» (The Guardian)	Quotation; evaluation; question	The quotation supplies a critical context. The superlative «most sustainable» raises a comparison that the article must substantiate.
«How to dress better for the planet – and your budget» (The Guardian)	Practical framing; parallel benefit	The «how to» construction promises guidance. The pairing of «the planet» and «your budget» connects environmental concerns with personal economic interests.
"«It's the industry's dirty secret': why fashion's oversupply problem is an environmental disaster» (The Guardian)	Quotation; metaphor; crisis vocabulary	«Dirty secret» suggests concealment and wrongdoing, while «environmental disaster» intensifies the consequences. The headline presents overproduction as systemic.
«Legislation, AI and the Ganni playbook: 10 takeaways from the Super Bowl of sustainable fashion» (The Guardian)	List format; cultural metaphor; specificity	«10 takeaways» signals a structured reading experience. «Super Bowl» borrows the language of major sporting events to emphasise the scale of the industry gathering.

3.1. Metaphors and the construction of urgency.

Several examples rely on figurative language to make a broad issue more immediate. In «the industry's dirty secret», «dirty» activates both a literal association with pollution and a moral association with something shameful. «Secret» implies concealment. Together, the words create a compact critical frame around fashion's oversupply. Similarly, «falling behind» presents sustainability as a race in which the industry risks losing its position. «Super Bowl of sustainable fashion» uses a recognisable sporting event as a metaphor for scale and importance, making an industry gathering sound like a major contest or spectacle.

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3.2. Evaluation and the construction of value.

In «the ultimate status symbol», the superlative «ultimate» gives the claim maximum intensity. «Status symbol» connects clothing with social identity and distinction. The headline proposes a cultural interpretation in which sustainability may become a marker of status. Negative evaluation works differently: «environmental disaster» and «greenwashing is rife» signal criticism and urgency. Such language can draw attention to harmful practices, but its legitimacy depends on evidence in the story.

3.3. Questions, idioms and audience involvement.

The British Vogue headlines use questions to present sustainability as a subject for collective reflection. «Has Sustainability Fallen Out Of Fashion?» depends on a double meaning: fashion is both an industry and a synonym for what is currently popular. «Should We Be Tracking Our Fashion Air Miles?» uses «should» to raise a normative issue and «we» to include the reader. «Air miles» is shorter and more accessible than a technical description of transport-related emissions, although the article must clarify what is being measured.

3.4. Practical usefulness and everyday relevance.

«How to dress better for the planet – and your budget» is built around a practical promise. «How to» signals advice, while «better» is broad and positive. The conjunction «and» places environmental benefit and financial benefit side by side. The headline about hidden plastics combines a knowledge gap with a practical route forward: readers are invited to discover an unseen problem and learn how to avoid it.

4. Discussion.

The examples demonstrate that headline strategies rarely operate in isolation. A single headline may combine quotation, evaluation and metaphor, or an interrogative structure with direct reader address. This combination allows the headline to perform several tasks in limited space: identify the issue, establish a tone, suggest why it matters and indicate what the reader may gain from opening the article.

The sample also reveals different editorial emphases. The Guardian examples often foreground structural or industry-level problems, including overproduction,

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greenwashing, climate action and the environmental consequences of fashion business practices. British Vogue's selected headlines more visibly use questions and idiomatic phrasing to connect sustainability with fashion culture and consumer awareness. This observation is limited to the selected examples and should not be generalised to all content published by either outlet.

From a journalistic perspective, the most effective headline is not necessarily the most dramatic one. Its quality depends on the balance between attraction and accuracy. Curiosity can encourage a reader to continue, but the headline should provide a fair indication of the article's content. A quotation must be correctly attributed; a superlative should be supported; and a practical promise should be fulfilled. These principles are especially important in environmental reporting, where exaggerated claims can weaken public understanding of complex issues.

The linguistic dimension is also relevant to translation and intercultural communication. Some English expressions depend on idiom or polysemy. «Out of fashion» can refer to an item no longer being trendy and, at the same time, to the declining popularity of an idea. A literal translation may preserve the surface meaning but lose the wordplay. «Air miles» is concise and familiar in English-language consumer discourse, yet a translation may need to make the environmental context more explicit. The translator or editor must consider connotation, cultural familiarity and the function of the headline in its media environment.

The study has limitations. The sample is small and purposively selected; it does not include a systematic count of all headlines published during a defined period. The analysis also does not include interviews with editors, audience testing or platform analytics. Future research could build a larger corpus, code headline devices according to a transparent scheme and compare the results across outlets, dates and social-media platforms.

Conclusion.

The analysis indicates that English-language online media use a combination of lexical, figurative and syntactic strategies to attract attention to sustainable fashion. The selected headlines employ metaphor, evaluative vocabulary, questions,

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quotations, idiomatic expressions and practical reader address. These devices help translate complex environmental issues into concise and accessible media messages.

Metaphors such as «dirty secret» and «falling behind» create vivid interpretive frames; evaluative words communicate approval or criticism; questions invite readers to consider unresolved issues; quotations introduce attributed voices; and «how to» constructions promise practical value. The examples also show that headline devices often interact rather than function separately.

The central conclusion is that attention-grabbing language is compatible with responsible journalism when the headline remains accurate, proportionate and supported by the article. In coverage of sustainable fashion, headlines should make environmental problems visible without simplifying their causes or overstating possible solutions. The linguistic analysis of headlines therefore contributes to the study of media style and to understanding how journalism frames public discussion of sustainability.

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