

News writing styles not to blame for newspaper readership decline, researchers find

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In the past several years, newspaper readership has shrunk in the tough economic climate, particularly among females. Many have criticized common news writing style used by newspapers as a possible cause for the decline. Now, researchers at the University of Missouri have found that women are engaged by all news stories the same, regardless of the style.

"We found that women are equally engaged in both 'inverted pyramid' and 'chronological narrative' [news stories](#), so there must be another cause for the decline in female readership," said Miglena Sternadori, a former doctoral student at the Missouri School of Journalism. "For example, women could be less interested in crime and negative stories that tend to fill newspapers."

Inverted pyramid style involves placing the most important fact of the story at the top and continuing on with each fact in order of importance. Narrative style is typically chronological and focuses more on story-telling rather than fact listing. Most newspapers prefer to use inverted pyramid style when writing stories.

Sternadori, who is now an assistant professor at the University of South Dakota, along with Kevin Wise, an associate professor of strategic communication at the Missouri School of Journalism, compared the reactions of participants while reading inverted pyramid style stories and chronological narrative stories. Sternadori gave each participant two inverted pyramid stories and two chronological narrative stories, and then conducted tests during and after participants read the stories.

Sternadori gathered data using secondary task reaction times (STRTs), which show how fast participants respond to secondary stimuli, such as

beeping sounds, while they are reading stories. Sternadori observed that men responded quickly while reading the inverted pyramid style stories. However, men's reaction times slowed when reading the chronological narrative stories. She says one interpretation is that they may have been more engaged by the narrative story, but the same result can also mean that men found it easier to [read](#) inverted pyramid stories and respond faster to the secondary stimuli.

Sternadori found that women's overall reaction times were slower than men's, but were very similar, regardless of the style of news story the female participants were reading. She believes that this result shows women are engaged in whatever story they are reading regardless of its style.

More information: This study was published in the *Journal of Media Psychology*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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