

# The ultimate online bait

By [AIMEÉ SERRÃO](#)

15 Feb 2016

Just like the fish is attracted to the hook masquerading as the worm or the same way the moth is drawn to the flame, individuals are tempted to lose their inhibition and click on certain links. So, you may be wondering how a link can have this power over the omniscience human being. Well, if the link is interesting and eye-catching, providing just enough information to generate interest but not too much information to give the plot away, this makes the link the ultimate bait.

This phenomenon is known as clickbait. Click-baiting is the online temptation designed to encourage the reader to click on a hyperlink even though it leads to dubious content. This web content is intended to help increase online advertising revenue through the means of generating clicks, and hopefully shares, from attractive and eye catching headlines.

A clickbait headline usually gives the impression that by clicking on the link informative, interesting and noteworthy content will be found. For example, a headline may state: "I just found the best social media site ever and you won't believe what site it was!" Or, the clickbait headline may leave out valuable information in an attempt to entice an individual to click on the link to find out more. For example: 'Famous actor makes shocking statement!' Individuals that are curious as to what the statement was will click on the link.



Curiosity is a natural human tendency so if just the right amount of information is provided on a headline, the reader becomes manipulated and tantalised to click on the link in an attempt to satisfy their desire to know more. Even if individuals are aware of this manipulation they still find it hard to resist. According to George Loewenstein this is due to the "information-gap" theory. When an individual realises there is a gap between what they know and what they want to know they feel deprived. Individuals are then motivated to acquire the missing information to reduce the feeling of deprivation.

A compelling headline that entices a reader to click on a link may lead to noteworthy content; however, it may also lead to irrelevant content that proves to be a waste of the reader's time. Content in the latter is increasing making most clickbait links disappointing because they build unrealistic expectations that are rarely met.

This is why brands need to pay attention to metrics. Engagement time, for example, gives a good indication of whether or not an article is valuable. Individuals will spend more time on an article if it holds their attention and provides them with insightful information. This enables brands to determine whether or not their audience is satisfied with their delivery of content. The hope is that readers will click on the bait and then share or like the article. If brands want to build high-quality relationships with readers then they must write compelling and eye catching headlines but also make sure the content delivers.

So, now that you know clickbait uses multiple cognitive tricks to get clicks will this make you monitor what you click more closely? Will this knowledge enable you to ignore the hook masquerading as the worm? The sad truth is probably not. Just like gambling, individuals are prepared to accept numerous disappointments as long as they are occasionally rewarded. The clickbait that does deliver rewarding noteworthy content encourages you to click one more time.

## ABOUT AIMEÉ SERRÃO

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