

Hungry for the Truth: Evaluating the Utility of “Truth Sandwiches” as Refutations

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Introduction

Readers appear to rely on false information under many conditions².

Even when a false account of an event is subsequently refuted, readers sometimes continue to endorse the false claim¹.

With concerns of “fake news” in everyday media, it has grown more important than ever to understand how journalists should be reporting on false information.

Recently, the **truth sandwich** has received attention as a potential method of reducing the impact of false claims.

- The proposal is that rather than leading with false information, journalists are advised to “sandwich” incorrect claims between statements describing the truth of the matter³.

The present study investigates the utility of the truth sandwich structure for countering readers’ reliance on false information.

Conclusion

Despite very modest numerical reductions in the appropriate direction, the truth sandwich structure **did not** significantly affect the likelihood of readers’ endorsing false claims relative to a more typical refutation structure. This was observed in both experiments.

Ordering effects in Experiment 2 indicated that readers were:

- more likely to endorse false claims when they appeared last in a text (Top-Loaded).
- less likely to endorse false claims when followed by two refutation sentences (Bottom-Loaded).

For these materials & procedure, recency appears to have had more of an impact than our manipulation of the sandwich structure.

Acknowledgements

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References

¹ Johnson, H. M., & Seifert, C. M. (1994). Sources of continued influence effect: When misinformation in memory affects later inferences. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Learning and Memory*, 20, 1420-1436.

² Rapp, D.N. (2016). The consequences of reading inaccurate information. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 25, 281-285.

³ Sullivan, M. (2017, June). Instead of Trump’s propaganda, how about a nice ‘truth sandwich’? *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com>.

Experiment 1

Participants: 59 participants recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk

Materials: Three versions of 24 different news-like stories

- Claim only:** A false claim presented without refuting evidence
- Refutation:** A false claim followed by refuting evidence
- Sandwich:** A false claim sandwiched between refuting evidence

Procedure (repeated for all 24 stories):

- Read one version of each story
- Presented with central false claim (or, its reverse)
- Indicated whether they agreed with the claim (yes/no)
- Rated confidence from 1 (not confident) to 7 (very confident)

Example Sandwich Item:

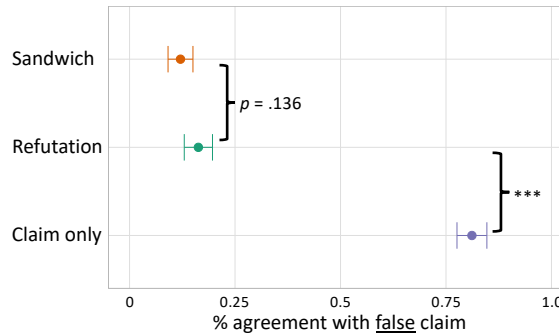
According to consumer watchdog organizations and national economic councils, the price of flour has remained quite stable over the past several decades, matching and even sometimes falling below overall changes in the cost of living.

Still, during a recent news conference at the Nebraska Development Forum, an urban planning representative contended that flour prices have been skyrocketing as compared to national income data. The representative claimed that, “Flour is now becoming more of a luxury than a requisite staple of people’s everyday diets.”

This contention is in sharp contrast to actual agricultural and financial data collected over the last 50 years, which has shown that bulk flour prices have not increased in any worrisome manner.

Claim judgment: Flour prices have (not) risen sharply in recent years

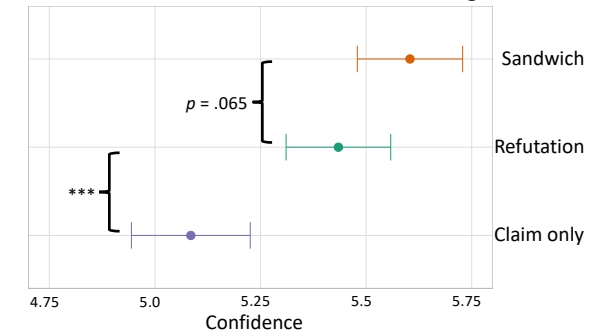
Claim Assessments



Refutation

Claim only

Confidence Ratings



Experiment 2

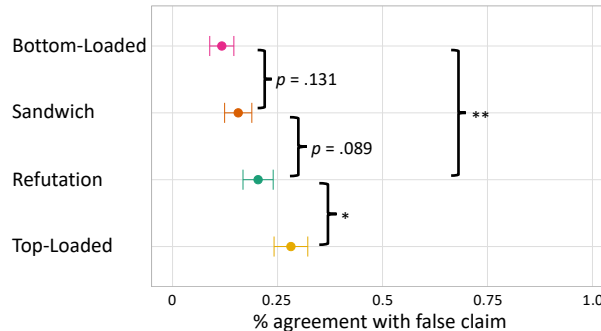
Participants: 80 participants recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk

Procedure: Same as in Experiment 1, with stories modified to examine whether placement of refutation information has any effect

Stimuli Structures



Claim Assessments



Confidence Ratings

