

Five stages of dealing with clickbait

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Anyone who's been online long enough knows that most surface-level content on the internet is hogwash. And the worst of it all—the absolute bottom of the barrel—is clickbait. Yes, it's worse than ads too, because at least advertisements aren't trying to pretend to be something else. Well, fine, they are, that's exactly what most adverts are, but clickbait is just worse. It tries to get you to click without having the content it promises! And unlike adverts that you click by mistake, clickbait that manages to draw you in makes you feel like a complete failure. It's infuriating every time they manage to draw you in! I'm not ranting. Not at all.

After much deliberation and research into the levels of fury I have gone through over the course of the years I've had access to the internet, here's the stages of dealing with clickbait I've documented.

BEGINNER

Also termed as "Parent Level", this is when you're new to the internet and you have no idea that clickbait exists. You tend to believe all the article headlines, and comment on posts without reading the actual contents of the articles. It's unfortunate that there are veteran internet users, people from our very generation, who are still stuck at this level. If you've recently believed that J.K. Rowling randomly decided to wake up one day and sensationalise Dumbledore's relationship dynamics with his teenage crush by calling it intense, or that Priyanka Chopra seriously said she might be a bad wife for Nick Jonas "for this one reason", you my friend have fallen into the same trap.

Thankfully, unlike the blatant lies they put up as article titles, faux news agencies aren't actually allowed to outright lie in their articles. So if you just learn to read before getting triggered, you'll unlock the next level in no time.

INTERMEDIATE

You've reached Level 2. You read the articles now. This is when the frustration starts to build. Every article you read seems pathetically detached from its title. You can't believe some of the things they say are true at all, and that huge seed of doubt will lead you down the dangerous path of trying to fact check clickbait.

You'll Google it first, and if it's famous enough you'll find multiple "news" sites that corroborate the original story. All these sites will have roughly the same article, and will all quote "sources close to" the topic in question that choose to remain anonymous. Sometimes, if you're smart, you'll search for an image to see what might turn up. Finally, you'll find yourself arriving at the conclusion that almost all clickbait is pointless. Congratulations, you've reached Level 3.

STRUGGLING EXPERT

You've realised most clickbait is worthless. You now live your life free of worries, avoiding the trivial hurdles (read: headlines) that come your way. Your newsfeed may still be full of them, but you simply scoff at the titles, almost knowing, without clicking, the kind of tripe it will contain.

However, sometimes an article so ridiculous and unfounded comes your way that you can't help but click on it. At other times it's the "40 steps that cure cancer" article—that one gets me all the time. It's just the human condition. We click, we read, we question our reason for existing. They got us again.

ACTUAL EXPERT

When you have finally managed to stop clicking all clickbait, and can now look down on the plebeians that do. It doesn't matter that you had been doing that since Intermediate level already, because now you are actually qualified. I strive to reach this level, but unfortunately haven't managed to unlock such wisdom. I'm sure it exists though. [curses cancer-curing article]

BOSS

You think you've read so much clickbait by now that you could



probably write great clickbait on your own. Wait a minute...why does that suddenly seem like a good idea? Oh no. You don't know what's happening, but you suppose this was where your entire obsession with clickbait was leading to in the first place. You didn't consent to this, but the idea awakens some deep sadomasochist in you. Are you really doing this? Yes, you are.

And that is how you end up writing clickbait and actually getting paid for it.

So there you have it, the harrowing conclusion to the stages of dealing with clickbait. Personally I would say, stay at Level 3, because Level 4 is just too close to the insanity that is Level 5 for me to feel safe.

PSA

On a more serious note, even though the examples of clickbait here seem harmless, I could provide multiple cases when serious damage was caused by them, in recent times, in our very city. Sharing articles simply by reading the titles is something that hundreds of people here are doing every day. It is a massive tool to generate mob mentality, and prey on the vulnerable. Please think before you share. Literal lives are at risk. Over and out.

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