

# Exploring Relationships of Political Affiliation and Interest in the News

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## Introduction

With limitless news available to consumers, what interests people in reading the news?

- News interest is likely to be a **strong predictor** of consumptions.
- News sources have increasingly **become biased in an attempt to appeal to a more partisan audience** (Stroud, 2011; Knobloch-Westwick et al., 2020), and news consumers have been found to **gravitate toward attitude-confirming news** (Kohurt et al., 2021; Garret 2009; Westerwick et al., 2013).

What happens when headlines do not make clear which perspective—conservative versus liberal—is likely to be adopted in the article?

- ➔ This exploratory research investigates whether political outlook predicts the categories of headlines that capture students' interest if they observe neutral-toned article headlines.

## Methods

### Participants, Stimuli, and Design:

- 183 USF psychology undergraduates
- Two groups, each viewing 40 headlines created to be neutral in tone

### Headline Readability (7-point Likert-type scales)

Participants were presented headlines twice in succession, answering the following questions:

“After seeing this headline, how would you feel about reading the entire article?”

- Interest
- Likelihood to Read

“What is your impression of this article’s headline?”

- Realistic (Headline)
- Fact-Based (Article)

Stimuli Example 1: Interest, and Reading Likelihood

Stimuli Example 2: Realistic, and Fact-Based

\*Participant Sample Question- First Viewing

\*Participant Sample Question- Second Viewing

### Political Affiliation (7-point Likert-type scale)

“In general, what is your political outlook?”

### News Engagement (5-point Likert-type scale)

“How often do you read the news?”

## Results

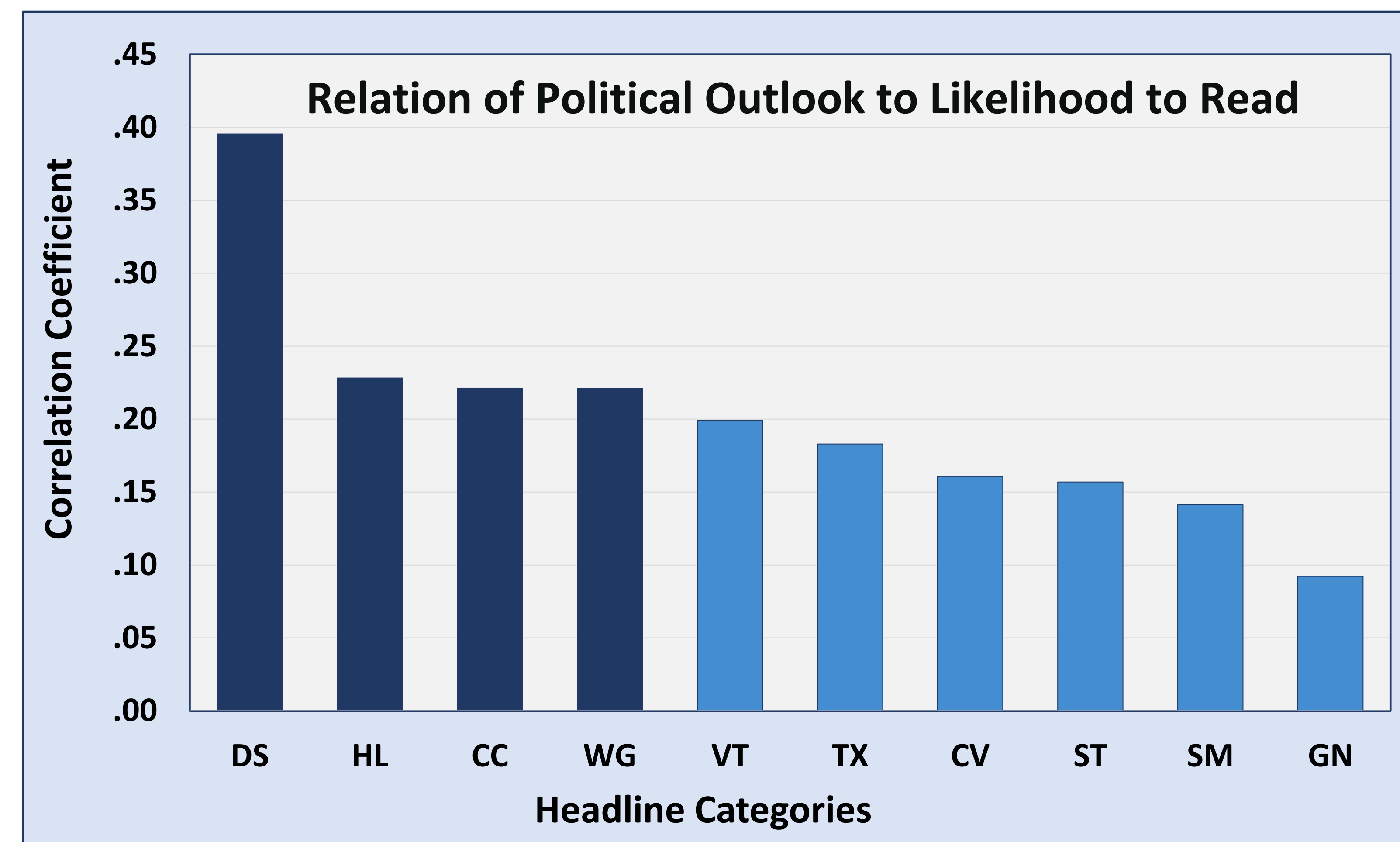


Figure 1: Graph of correlations between political outlook and rated likelihood to read articles from varying headline categories

- Four of the ten headline topics were significantly more popular with liberals than conservatives, and no topics were more popular among conservatives.
- Diversity-related headlines had by far the highest correlation with political outlook.
- Headlines about healthcare, climate change, and wages were also favored by liberals.

**Headline Topics:**  
 DS= diversity  
 HL= healthcare  
 CC= climate change  
 WG= wages  
 VT= voting  
 TX= taxes  
 CV= COVID-19  
 ST= students  
 SM= social media  
 GN= guns

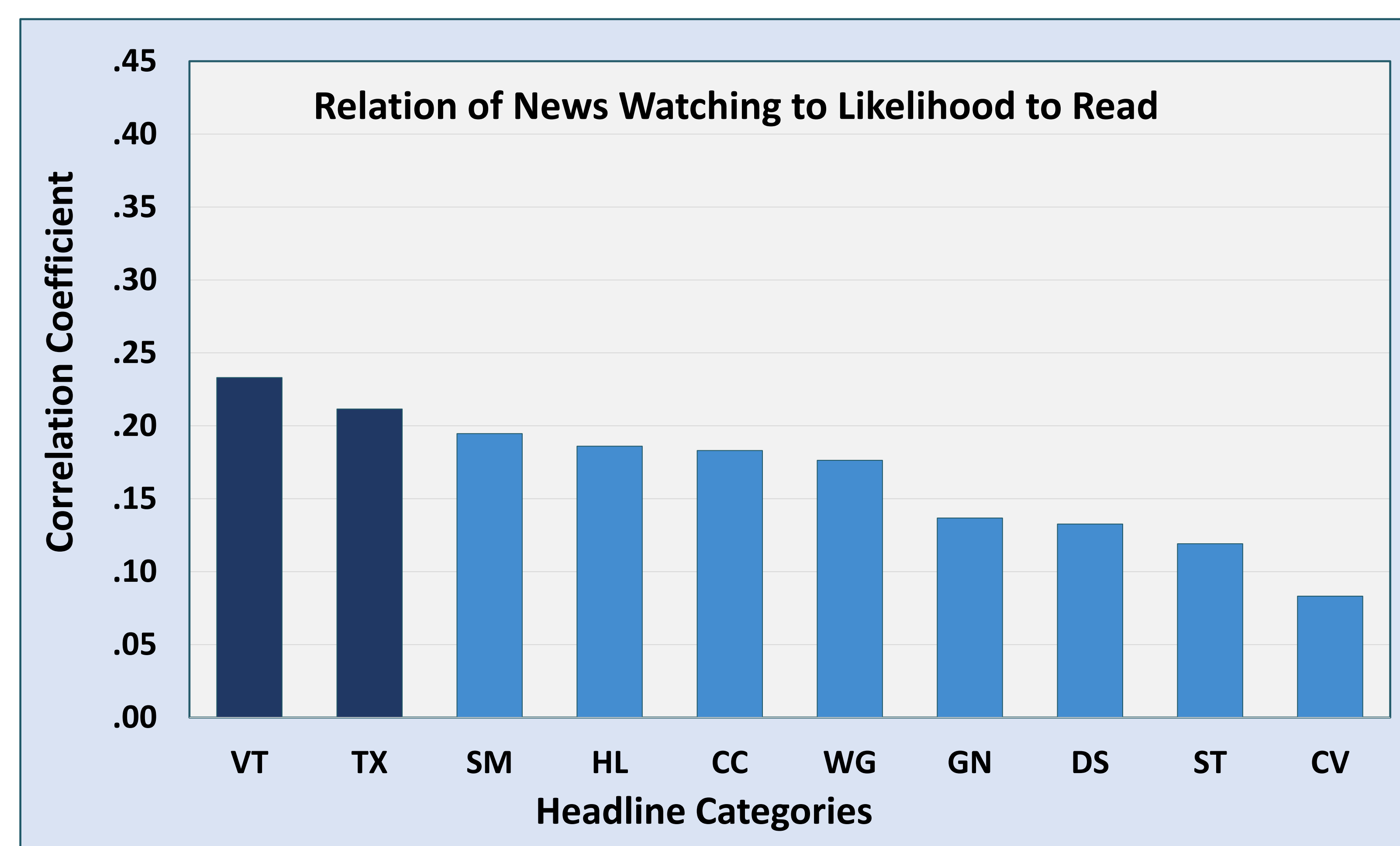


Figure 2: Graph of correlations between news watching tendency and rated likelihood to read articles from varying headline categories

- Only two of the ten headline categories were significant. Those who reported reading news more frequently were more likely than others to be interested in articles about voting or taxes.
- The remaining correlations were ns, suggesting weak or no relationship between topics and news watching.

**Headline Topics:**  
 VT= voting  
 TX= taxes  
 SM= social media  
 HL= healthcare  
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## Example Headlines

### ➤ Political Outlook: Diversity (r)



- Policies on Adoption for Same-Sex Couples (0.50)
- Adoption Center May Change LGBTQ Adoption Policy (0.48)
- The Push for Gender-Neutral Prom Royalty (0.43)
- What You Need to Know about Critical Race Theory (0.43)

### ➤ News Watching: Voting (r)



- Felons Hope to Vote: Crime and Voting (0.32)
- The Debate over Planned Parenthood (0.30)
- Voting-by-Mail and the Future of Democracy (0.29)
- State Laws: Prevent Voter Fraud or Support Voter Suppression? (0.25)

### ➤ Overall: Student Issues (Median Likelihood to Read)



- Legislators Continue to Debate Cancelling Student Debt (5)
- Debt Perception: Student Loan Planning (5)
- Women in STEM: Is the Glass Ceiling the Limit? (4)
- Campus Police: Fighting by Our Side or Behind Enemy Lines? (4)

## Conclusion

- To our surprise, all of the correlations between political outlook and topics were liberal-leaning, with no topics that were more popular among conservatives.

➔ Topics that were significant tended to be more socially oriented, which may be emphasized as liberal interests, whereas other topics are perhaps of more balanced interest across groups.

- The patterns for political outlook and for news watching were very different, with few headline topics being more popular for regular news watchers and then only weakly.

➔ Political outlook seems more strongly associated with likelihood to read news articles than general tendencies to regularly read news.

- Attracting a wide audience to particular news topics may be a challenge if political outlook is not considered.

## References

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