



W. P.: 401

Working Paper

TYPICOLOGY OF HEADLINES

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W P No. 401

December 1981

The main objective of the working paper series of the IIMA is to help faculty members to test out their research findings at the pre-publication stage

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TYPOLGY OF HEADLINES

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Literature on advertising generally recommends that to be effective a headline should a) be able to identify the prospects from the non-prospects; b) contain a promise of reward; c) present an interesting idea; d) be powerful enough to catch the attention of the readers; e) give a brief idea of the message; and f) connect and coordinate illustration, copy text, and other parts of the advertisements such as trade marks and slogans. These characteristics are also regarded as the functions of the headline.

Headlines are broadly classified as direct, indirect, and a combination of both. Direct headlines present a complete message, perhaps at the risk of making the text copy redundant. Indirect headlines, on the other hand, heighten curiosity and tell only half the story, leading the reader to the text copy. A sub-classification includes news headline, command headline, how-to headline, question headline, and a testimonial headline. While such a categorization refers to the structure and construction of the headline, it unwittingly dodges the idea of building a theme-based typology of headlines. Nor does it specify or explain how the content of a headline can be planned, prepared, and positioned.

An attempt has been made here to systematically codify a set of possible and workable themes under different types of headlines, to describe briefly the manner in which a theme can be presented, and to indicate several ways in which a headline can be positioned.

I) Typology of Headlines

Different headlines can be used to convey a variety of ideas and comparable headlines can expose with speed and accuracy many-sided communication objectives. The typology presented here may appear to be unorthodox, but is guided by, and is adaptable to, the day-to-day business needs. Headlines based on this typology can applaud unique contributions, declare corporate strategies, admire completion of targets, promise growth prospects, educate customers, throw challenges at competitors, promote corporate identity, make announcements, offer solutions, justify actions, indulge in fantasy and so on. They are based on questions such as a) what we offer; b) what we do or can do which others don't; c) what we think; d) what others think about us; e) what is our identity; f) what do we mean; g) what you can expect from us; h) what you can do; i) what you are likely to gain; and j) what has happened or what is likely or not likely to happen.

1. Eulogistic Headline

The eulogistic headline magnifies or symbolizes a feature or act of the company which it regards as praiseworthy. For example, a company may want to highlight its record of full utilization of capacity in spite of various constraints, how did they help other companies, or how rewarding were the outcomes of the schemes sponsored, or technology evolved by the organization. It can also signify or imply attributes such as learning attitude, originality, sensitiveness, foresight, stability, taste, tradition, market leadership, creativity, imagination, courtesy, service, knowing

the consumers, being committed, being first, etc. Occasionally, it may also talk about the most discussed and successful operations of the company. Eulogistic headlines can also describe successful product characteristics such as by claiming to be the best product in the country for over a decade or so.

2. Declaratory Headline

It concentrates on the present and future plans and policies of the company and declares its dedication to some aspects of the company's goals. This may be in terms of initiating a particular action, improving past performance, exercising greater control over its operations, exploiting opportunities, putting into practice the company's ideals, etc. This type of headline is usually positive, earnest, notable, specific, and exclusive. For example, a nationalized commercial bank can testify its resolution to serve a particular segment of the population.

3. Accomplishment Headline

The manufacturing, service, business, and government organizations generally accept time bound assignments. In an economy hard pressed for capital and with bulging inflation, completion of projects within the scheduled time can push down the cost factor. This type of headline can talk about fulfillment of contract, execution of critical phases, conclusion of schemes and programmes, despatch of export consignment, achievement of targets, meeting deadlines, successfully attempting technological manoeuvres, and outstanding sales or production.

4. Prospectus Headline

A firm may want to highlight salient points like having a profitable year, peaceful industrial relations, installation of additional production facilities, receipt of new industrial licences, recognition of the managerial cadre, recasting the dealer network, a modernization plan, etc., to underline and forecast its growth prospects. The puffy headline, in the form of anticipation and hope, catalogues promising growth. In a slightly different fashion, a prospectus headline can also outline schemes and projections which are likely to materialize in the course of time. It makes reference to objects or ideas of tomorrow.

5. Cognitive Headline

A cognitive headline gives information to people. It educates readers about the services and products available, their additional features, performance statistics, company assets, number of branches and offices, discounts offered, price advantage, experiences and appreciation of other customers, judgements of experts, etc. It mostly serves to make people aware of something useful and interesting. In doing so, it may also specify some firm or product characteristic, or even reveal a surprising piece of statistics like, "There are over 3,000,000 people alive today who have had cancer."

6. Challenge Headline

Organizations confident about their objectively verified superior performance can unhesitatingly make challenging statements indicating

that no other organization could achieve that kind of performance. A company claiming number one position, market leadership, or range of services that no other company can offer are some examples of this type. The headline can also throw challenges to readers or customers. Claims made in the challenge headlines, however, should be credible and undeniable.

7. Rhythmic or Poetic Headline

Stylistic, melodious, snappy, piquant, vocalic, and spicy expressions often form a part of the headline. Such headlines introduce a theme in a lighter style. The most commonly used sounds are: "hmmmm.....screech..... yoo hoo.....aha.....oh.....huh.....woosh.....sssh.....bah.....wow..... oops.....groovy.....purrrrfection.....hurrah.....ouch.....sigh..... er..er.....sob.....sniff.....gosh.....bang.....zoom.....and hey.....!"

These informal and sketchy headlines, by and large, use a colloquial format. Words involving puns, metaphors, simile, satire, etc., can also be used in such headlines.

8. Nomenclature Headline

Sometimes headlines are composed of the names of the company, or products, brands, places, personalities, trademarks, emblems, etc., as pointers of some attribute. Direct and quick exposure to names does help to attract the attention of prospective customers. Besides serving as means of recognition, nomenclature headlines invite readers to the products or a company. A descriptive attribute goes as adjunct or accessory to the nomenclature. Sometimes, an attribute can branch off into another sentence qualifying the product. An example of a hypothetical product could be: "COOLPLACE - Not an ordinary cold storage. It does more than just cooling."

Announcement Headline

Announcement headlines impart information which is either of recent origin, for immediate use, applicable for limited span of time, revealed for the first time, or launching new opportunities. Announcement headlines are suitable for events marking the beginning of a new activity, inauguration of special programmes, introduction of new products, opening of additional branches, shops, and stock points, commencement of assembly plants, starting of new routes, initiation of new fashions or trends, embarking upon new ventures, laying foundation stones, acquisition of other enterprises, etc. These headlines can also be useful to announce termination, stoppage, dissolution, expiry, conclusion, etc., on the one hand, and changes like change of address, telephone numbers, etc., on the other hand.

10. Solution Headline

Solution headlines indicate how to get more mileage out of the existing levels of inputs such as money, time, energy, space, or labour. They provide answers to problems, defend or cut expenditures, discover alternatives, satisfy requirements, evolve appropriate techniques, trace out bottlenecks, detect deficiencies, unfold investment opportunities, offer a choice, etc. The headline is presented in a manner as if it solves something for the reader.

11. Recommendation Headline

Recommendation headline says what somebody else has to say about the company, product, brand, or an idea. It quotes verbatim the feelings of the party giving the testimonial. It may make reference to some evidence,

facts, or certification, but basically it recommends the services of a company or product by expressing a good opinion, admiring the qualitative aspects, appreciating the services, etc. It is prescriptive in nature.

12. Instruction Headline

Instruction headlines may cover a wide range of shades and formats from a request to preaching an ideal. It may give direction, guidance, orders, commands, counsel, suggestions, advice, notices, hints, sermons, cues, propositions, requisitions, authorization, etc. Normally instruction headlines can be very short and may be in the style of saying "do this."

13. Inquiry Headline

Inquiry headline poses a question and searches an answer. It may call for an investigation, scrutiny or review of one's action so as to lead him to a particular expectation. In doing so, it may raise a doubt, pose a dilemma, point out an uncertainty, make reference to an ambiguity, give a puzzle, etc. Though inquisitive in nature, it can also appear to test the readers' awareness about company performance by putting a question like "Do you know....."

14. Prophetic Headlines

Based on certain calculations, the prophetic headline predicts the events likely to take place. It look into future, anticipates outcomes, forewarns, spells out the prospects, hopes for setting things right, etc. Occasionally, it may also indulge in fantasy.

Commemoration Headline

Commemoration headline recounts and rejoices in what happened in the past. A company, for example, may have been established 75 years ago, or may pay homage to its founder on a particular day. Such headlines mark the occasion of anniversaries, jubilees, birthdays, and festivities.

16. Philosophical Headline

Philosophical headline makes a literary suggestion to reflect upon. It gives a new idea, discards an old notion, conceives a theory, ponders over a view point, meditates on a thought, entertains a line of wisdom, attempts to show a way, deliberates on a profound proposition, extends an alternate interpretation, enlightens through proverbial statements, or submits for consideration a matter of principle. "Think big," "think rare," "small is beautiful," "a stitch in time definitely saves nine," "roots lie in planting," "listening can improve your vision," are some of the examples.

17. Denial Headline

Denial headline refutes the charges made against any company, product, brand, services, or ideas. It opposes a certain point of view, or weakens the arguments of competitors. A tractor manufacturer can plead that tractorization does not lead to unemployment. A pesticide company can contradict the accusation of health hazards caused to agricultural labourers. A pump manufacturer may be interested in invalidating the suppositions of excessive use of energy, while a fertilizer company may want to demolish the myth that it is the sole culprit behind environment pollution.

18. Conversation Headline

Advertisements visualizing meetings, gatherings, lectures, receptions or similar functions, interviews, etc., in the illustration give a part of the dialogue or conversation as headline. It could be a claim, statement, request, reference, question, observation, random utterance, or expression of feeling. Such headlines strengthen the visuals involving interaction situations such as a dealer talking to a customer, sales representative explaining something to a farmer, a customer sharing his experience with another, or a demonstrator with a product can make profitable use of conversation headlines. Other examples would include communication acts between a mother and child, teacher and student, leader and followers, official and clients, and even two strangers.

II) Styles of Presentation

There are different ways of presenting a theme in a headline. One is to create suspense, another is to make it self-evident. Vague and foggy headlines are not necessarily aimless. They aim to perplex the reader. Mystical in appearance, these headlines conceal a part of the information which is unveiled only in the copy text. Self-evident headlines, on the other hand, act as a messenger.

Sometimes one cannot distinguish between a headline and a copy. The first sentence of the copy text is presented in bold letters and is treated as headline. In this case, the headline and the copy are not separated in space and provide continuity.

Now and then, the phrases appearing in a headline are repeated and positioned right below the name of the company as company identification label. An unconventional composition may even include more than one full-fledged, independently representative headlines in the same advertisement, woven in such a fashion that the advertisement does not appear crowded or mutilated. Conversely, a headline is decomposed in small fragments and spread across the full length of the advertisement. At times, only a selective portion of the one-sentence headline is printed in bold letters to make it appear as the main headline. One word or one-phrase headlines are also not uncommon. A headline can also be fabricated by compiling three or four unrelated phrases which are then elaborated in the copy text.

The headline can be placed over or under an illustration or it can be superimposed as a part of the illustration. Standard advertisements prefer the headlines to lead the text. As innovation an advertisement can have its headline at the end of the text if it is of a relatively smaller size. Figure 1 presents predominant styles of positioning the headline and other components of an advertisement.

The size, length, composition, and positioning of the headlines are also pressed in service to rout other competing headlines. Radiant, bright and impressive headlines tend to attract attention of the readers. Predominantly headline-oriented advertisement can devote as much as 50 percent of its working space exclusively for the headline. Advertisements without a headline are also not rare to find.

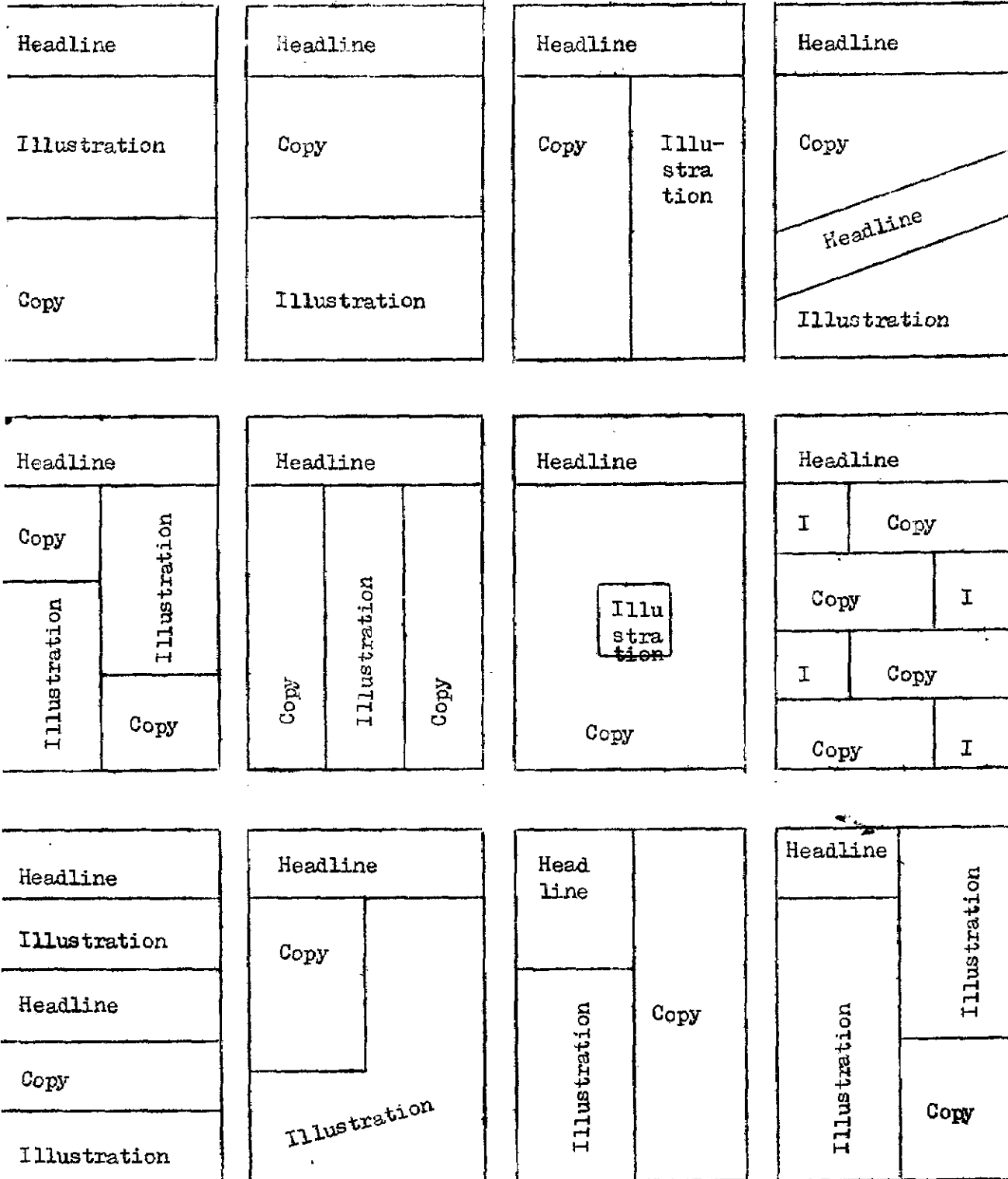


CHART 1 : Possible Positioning of Headlines

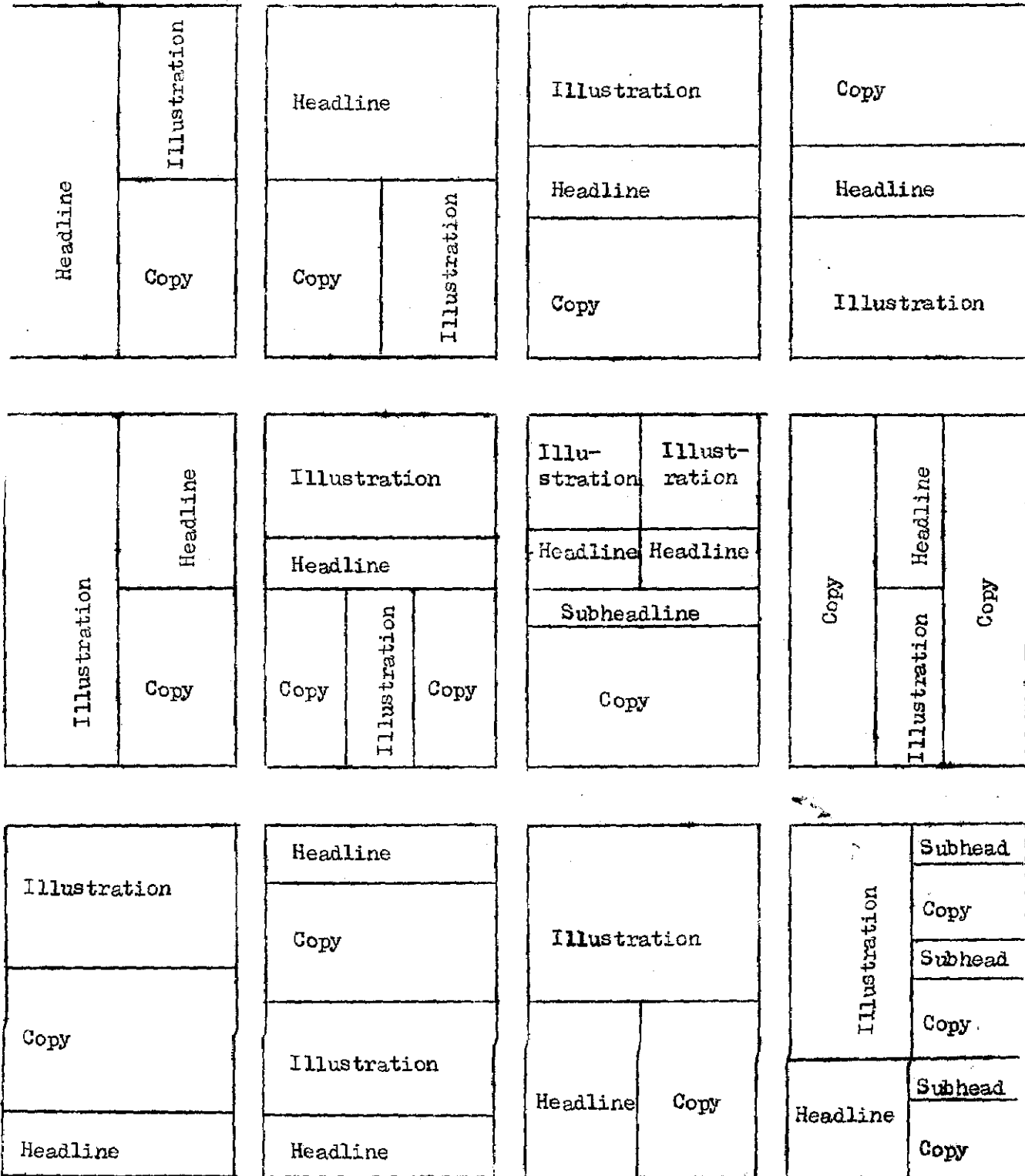


CHART 1 (Contd.) : Possible Positioning of Headlines