

## **NBA and FIBA Basketball News Headlines: A Formality Analysis and Players' Perspectives**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined the formality of 40 basketball news headlines (20 NBA, 20 FIBA) published in 2023 using Heylighen and Dewaele's F-score method via the CLAWS tagger, with NBA headlines totaling 217 words and FIBA headlines 208 words. To capture reader reactions, 41 purposively sampled participants familiar with basketball compared paired headlines (20 NBA–FIBA pairs) and rated each headline's influence on their interest on a 1–5 scale. The analysis revealed that NBA headlines exhibited a marginally higher average F-score (mean difference = 1.05%), although both sources demonstrated moderate formality levels (both > 50% F-score). Participants overwhelmingly preferred NBA headlines (18 of 20 pairs), regardless of which item had the higher F-score, suggesting that slight formality advantages alone do not fully predict reader choice. These results provide practical guidance for sports editors seeking to balance formal tone with audience appeal when crafting basketball news headlines.

**Keywords:** News Headlines, English formality, NBA, FIBA, Basketball News

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## **1. Introduction**

News plays a crucial role in presenting current situations of society or global matters to audiences. Chalaysap (2012) argues that the primary role of news is disseminating updated information to the public, enabling people to keep pace with topics such as economics, politics, and sports. In particular, sports coverage provides excitement and pleasure for audiences for cheering their favorite teams or athletes. Basketball is one of the world's widely recognized sports. Major basketball organizations, such as FIBA (The International Basketball Federation) and the NBA (The National Basketball Association), have become key sources for watching basketball games and retrieving news. The NBA, with 30 teams based in the United States and one in Canada, is hailed as one of the most successful sports leagues (Cuzzolin, 2020). Meanwhile, FIBA comprises national teams from 32 countries, organizing international competitions like the Basketball World Cup and the Olympic Basketball Tournament.

News headlines are among the most critical news elements, because they encapsulate the main idea and capture readers' attention. Reah (1998) points out that headline writers must employ concise and straightforward language organized into readable patterns. Given that many readers now prefer brief yet accurate information, headlines must effectively communicate the core message (Jongyingjaroenwong, 2004). Overly complex headlines can confuse readers and diminish their interest, while clear, well-chosen language can stimulate readers to continue reading.

Since news addresses the public, it generally requires a formal register. Careful attention to pronunciation, vocabulary, and sentence structure is given to formal language (Richards, Platt, and Platt, 1997). Nevertheless, there are some variations in defining formality (Heylighen & Dewaele, 1999). Hence, crafting headlines that remain concise without sacrificing precision is particularly challenging. Writers must convey the central idea succinctly, ensuring that the language is at once interesting, accessible, and suitably formal.

Several studies, e.g. Reah (1998), Prateepchaikul (2010), and Chalaysap (2012), have centered on news language, writing techniques, and comparative analyses. However, there appear to be very few investigations into basketball news headlines, especially focusing on formality analysis. There is, thus, a need for research examining the formality of headlines published by prominent basketball organizations and exploring readers' attitudes toward these headlines.

Accordingly, this study aims to determine how different parts of speech affect the level of formality in basketball news headlines from the NBA and FIBA. Furthermore, it explores whether varying degrees of headline formality influence reader interest and preference among

Thai basketball players, basketball news readers, and those familiar with the basic rules of basketball.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do different parts of speech in headlines affect the formality level?
2. What is the significant degree of the formality differences between NBA and FIBA, two different news sources?
3. How do participants rate their interest based on each basketball news headline that interests them in various categories?

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Structure and Function of News Headlines**

News headlines serve as a crucial element of journalistic discourse, aiming to attract readers while summarizing the core message of an article. According to Stengel (1989), news releases were historically employed as strategic tools by politicians, businesses, and organizations. They typically include lead elements—concise introductory paragraphs answering fundamental journalistic questions: Who? What? When? Where? How? and Why? (Stengel, 1989). Ward (1967) identified six key news values, later refined into three primary elements: prominence, normality, and significance. Prominence pertains to the newsworthiness of individuals or institutions due to achievements or incidents. Normality involves common or extraordinary events, while significance refers to the broader impact on the audience.

Further studies (Itule & Anderson, 1994) refined these criteria, emphasizing newsworthiness based on ten principles, including factual accuracy, clarity, conciseness, and objectivity. These factors reinforce the role of news as an informative yet engaging medium. The linguistic choices in headlines further enhance reader engagement, influencing both perception and consumption patterns (Bedřichová & Urbanová, 2006). Headlines are strategically placed and structured to maximize visibility, often employing curiosity-driven techniques to entice readers (Chen, Conroy, & Rubin, 2015). The effectiveness of a headline, therefore, extends beyond summarization—it operates as a persuasive tool, shaping audience interest and engagement (Bowles & Borden, 2000).

### **2.2 Theoretical Framework of Formality in English**

#### **2.2.1 Definition and Features of Formality**

Formality in language is a multifaceted concept that varies across contexts and discourse types. Heylighen and Dewaele (1999) contend that formality lacks a definitive universal definition but is distinguishable through linguistic characteristics. Formal speech, for instance, is marked by careful pronunciation, precise word choices, and complex sentence structures. In contrast, informal speech is characterized by spontaneity and flexibility in

syntax and vocabulary. According to Richards, Platt, and Platt (1997), three primary factors influence formality: proportion, consistency, and stylistic salience. These dimensions shape the overall tone and appropriateness of language in different communicative settings (Lasan, 2022).

English writing styles encompass both formal and informal registers, depending on the purpose and audience. Formal writing is prevalent in academic, legal, and business discourse, requiring clarity, precision, and structured argumentation (Kaur & Saini, 2018). Informal writing, by contrast, is common in casual conversations, social media, and personal correspondence. Heylighen and Dewaele (1999) highlight that formal language aims to minimize ambiguity through explicit phrasing and well-defined lexical choices. The adoption of formality in professional and academic settings signifies expertise, credibility, and authority (Raximbayevna & Raxmatullayevna, 2024).

### **2.2.2 Characteristics of Formal and Informal Language**

The linguistic features distinguishing formal from informal communication have been extensively analyzed. Sheikha and Inkpen (2021) identify several key markers of formal text, including:

- The use of respectful salutations (e.g., “Sir” and “Madam”)
- Objective presentation of facts
- Complex syntax and vocabulary
- Absence of contractions (e.g., “do not” instead of “don’t”)
- Limited use of acronyms
- Prevalence of passive voice and impersonal pronouns

In contrast, informal texts display more personal and conversational traits, such as active voice, first-person pronouns, colloquialisms, and phrasal verbs. The study suggests that formal and informal registers are not strictly dichotomous but exist along a continuum, influenced by social and contextual factors (Akhtursunova & Aubakirova, 2024). While formal communication maintains structured and hierarchical discourse, informal communication fosters interpersonal rapport and accessibility.

The fluidity between these two modes underscores the adaptability of language use in different domains. Informal communication enhances social bonding, whereas formal discourse ensures clarity and professionalism in structured interactions. The coexistence of these styles within a single discourse community necessitates an awareness of contextual appropriateness and communicative intent (Akhtursunova & Aubakirova, 2024).

## **2.3 Previous Studies on News Headlines and Formality**

Extensive research has examined the linguistic and communicative functions of news headlines. Stengel (1989) analyzed news elements in relation to editorial decisions, emphasizing the role of timeliness and local relevance. Bell (1991) further explored media

language, highlighting the structural and stylistic mechanisms employed in news writing. He posited that the lead paragraph in news stories functions similarly to abstracts in academic writing, summarizing key information concisely. His work aligns with later studies on the persuasive function of headlines, particularly in digital journalism, where clickbait strategies influence reader engagement (Kuiken, Schuth, Spitters, & Marx, 2017).

The semantic interplay between headlines and subheadlines has also been a subject of scholarly interest. Bedřichová and Urbanová (2006) examined discourse patterns in *The Guardian*, identifying news values such as negativity and personalization as factors influencing headline construction. The increasing prominence of social media has further transformed headline consumption, with incidental exposure to news shaping reader perceptions (Segado-Boj, Díaz-Campo, & Quevedo-Redondo, 2019).

In parallel, studies on linguistic formality have provided insights into textual variation across genres. Lasan (2024) demonstrated that social context significantly influences verbal expression formality, with consistency and stylistic salience determining textual tone. Akhtursunova and Aubakirova (2024) similarly emphasized the functional distinction between formal and informal writing, noting that grammatical complexity, lexical precision, and syntactic rigidity characterize formal discourse.

The study by Shie (2010) examined lexical variations in headlines from *The New York Times* and Taiwan's *United Daily News*. Findings indicated that headlines in *The New York Times* incorporated more colloquial and slang expressions, whereas *United Daily News* maintained a higher degree of lexical formality. The study suggested that headline accessibility is strategically managed to balance engagement and credibility.

A quantitative approach to measuring formality was employed by Eriksson (2017), who used the F-measure method to analyze sports reporting. The results indicated that articles on horse polo exhibited higher formality levels than soccer articles, based on noun-to-verb ratios. This methodological framework, initially proposed by Heylighen and Dewaele (1999), remains a reliable metric for assessing linguistic formality in various discourse types. Supporting studies by Finegan (2004) and Biber and Conrad (2009) further corroborate the notion that non-deictic elements elevate formality in written texts.

This review has examined the foundational research on news headlines and English language formality, synthesizing key theoretical perspectives and empirical findings. The studies discussed underscore the role of structural, lexical, and stylistic choices in shaping news discourse. Additionally, the distinction between formal and informal registers highlights the necessity of contextually appropriate language use. The F-measure method provides a viable approach for analyzing formality levels, offering a quantitative dimension to linguistic research. The insights presented in this review form the basis for the methodological framework of this study, as detailed in the subsequent section.

### **3. Methodology**

This section outlines the research methodology employed in the study. It is organized into six main parts: source materials evaluation, news source justification, data collection, framework of analysis, data analysis, and research procedure.

#### **3.1 Source Material Evaluation**

##### **3.1.1 Definition of NBA**

The NBA (National Basketball Association) is widely recognized as one of the most successful basketball leagues in the world, attracting global audiences. The league is based in North America and features a regular season comprising 82 games (Cuzzolin, 2020; Huyghe, Alcaraz, Calleja-González, & Bird, 2022).

##### **3.1.2 Definition of FIBA**

FIBA, officially known as the Fédération Internationale de Basketball (International Basketball Federation), is a globally recognized organization that governs international basketball competitions. For North American players unfamiliar with FIBA regulations, its global nature presents unique challenges (Cuzzolin, 2020). FIBA tournaments involve 32 teams divided into eight groups, progressing through an initial group stage, a qualifying round, and finally, the playoff stage.

For this study, which focuses specifically on news headlines, several potential materials were considered for analysis, including the NBA, FIBA, Sports Illustrated (SI), and the Basketball Champions League. Ultimately, the researchers selected NBA and FIBA news headlines as the primary sources. The rationale for this selection is discussed below.

#### **3.2 News Source Justification**

Given that basketball seasons typically run from October to April, the year 2023 was chosen for this study, as it represents the most recent complete season prior to the study year (2024). Selecting 2023 ensures that the language used in news headlines remains current and reflective of contemporary usage. Furthermore, focusing on a single year allows for a consistent comparison in terms of linguistic features and levels of formality.

The NBA, based in North America, has played a crucial role in popularizing basketball globally. As one of the most successful sports leagues, its influence extends beyond the United States, promoting widespread appreciation for the sport.

Similarly, FIBA is the central authority for international basketball, organizing prestigious tournaments such as the Basketball World Cup and the Olympic Basketball Tournament. It functions as a federation of national basketball organizations worldwide.

This study focuses on news headlines because they serve as key attention-grabbing elements in sports journalism. Headlines encapsulate the main ideas of articles in a concise format, meeting the demands of today's readers who often seek quick and accessible information. Moreover, headlines are suitable for analysis using the F-measure, as they offer

a comparable number of words across different sources, allowing for effective evaluation of formality.

The decision to focus on sports news, particularly basketball, stems from several factors. The fast pace and dynamic nature of basketball games make them exciting to watch and analyze. Fans are drawn to both team performance and individual player statistics, which enhances their engagement with the sport. Factors such as player trades, game strategies, merchandise associated with popular players, and even familial connections of athletes contribute to the sport's broad appeal.

Specifically, the study aims to examine the degree of formality in basketball news headlines to understand how linguistic choices influence reader engagement. Language formality plays a critical role in shaping perceptions of credibility and accessibility. Highly formal or overly casual language can affect how readers interpret and engage with the news.

Finally, the study investigates how varying levels of formality in basketball news headlines attract reader attention. Authors' linguistic choices—whether formal or informal—may influence how approachable and engaging the headlines appear. This approach also helps identify trends in headlines that focus on individual players, teams, or international competitions.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

A total of 40 news headlines were collected from the official websites: NBA headlines from [www.nba.com/news](http://www.nba.com/news) and FIBA headlines from [www.fiba.basketball/news](http://www.fiba.basketball/news). We limited our corpus to all headlines published between January and December 2023. We collected 20 headlines from each source. These headlines were copied into a Google Document for word count analysis. NBA headlines contained a total of 217 words, while FIBA headlines comprised 208 words. The details are presented in Appendix 1 and 2.

To further enrich the analysis, a questionnaire was designed to capture readers' perspectives. Participants selected for this questionnaire were individuals familiar with basketball to ensure informed responses.

#### **3.3.1 Participants**

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, as described by Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016). Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental or selective sampling, is a non-probability sampling technique where participants are chosen based on specific criteria such as availability, geographic proximity, and willingness to participate. Rai and Thapa (2015) also highlight purposive sampling as a widely used method for selecting participants who meet the research criteria.

In this study, 41 participants were selected, all of whom had a basic familiarity with basketball. The criteria for participation were as follows:

1. Fundamental ability to play basketball.
2. Basic understanding of basketball rules.
3. Genuine interest in basketball.

Sample size determination followed the recommendations of Krejcie and Morgan (1970), who propose methods for identifying appropriate sample sizes in research. According to Ahmad and Halim (2017), an alpha level of 0.05 is typically used in educational research. Based on this guideline, a minimum sample size of 36 participants was deemed appropriate for the study, given the total of 40 news headlines analyzed. The final sample consisted of 41 participants.

### 3.4 Framework of Analysis

The primary analytical tool employed in this study is the F-score, developed by Heylighen and Dewaele (1999), which quantifies formality based on word class frequency. Specifically, the F-score calculation is as follows:

**F-score** = ((noun + adjective + preposition + article - pronoun - verb - adverb - interjection + 100) / 2)

Word counts for each part of speech were obtained, and frequencies were expressed as percentages. A higher F-score indicates greater formality (Heylighen & Dewaele, 1999).

Eriksson's (2017) pilot study also utilized the F-score, affirming its suitability for analyzing the presence of eight parts of speech in texts from various fields. Heylighen and Dewaele (1999) demonstrated that informational texts scored highest in formality (61), while interviews scored lower (46). This method has been validated across different text types and is considered effective for analyzing news headlines.

Additionally, Eriksson (2017) employed the CLAWS tagger (Constituent Likelihood Automatic Word-tagging System) from Lancaster University to tag parts of speech. This free tool was also used in the current study to tag each news headline.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted in two main parts: evaluation of news headline formality and participant questionnaire responses.

First, the 40 collected headlines were analyzed using the CLAWS tagger to calculate their F-scores. Results were compared between the two news sources.

Second, after formality analysis, a questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of two sections:

- Participants selected their preferred headline from pairs of NBA and FIBA headlines.
- Participants rated each headline on a 1–5 scale based on its influence on their interest, without knowing the source or formality level.



In total, participants responded to 40 rating items and made 20 choices between headline pairs.

Upon collecting responses from all 41 participants, data were analyzed to determine trends:

- Preference patterns were compared with formality levels to assess whether participants favored more or less formal headlines.
- Interest ratings were analyzed to identify common characteristics among the highest-rated headlines, continuing down to the lowest-rated headlines.

Results were presented in tables and charts for clarity.

### 3.6 Procedure

The procedure for this study is summarized as follows:

1. News headlines were collected from NBA and FIBA official websites.
2. Headlines were selected from all articles published in January–December 2023 (NBA) and January–December 2023 (FIBA).
3. A total of 40 headlines were chosen for analysis.
4. The F-score methodology, based on Eriksson (2017) and Heylighen and Dewaele (1999), was applied to assess formality.
5. A questionnaire was distributed to basketball enthusiasts to gather reader attitudes.
6. Collected data were analyzed, tabulated, and visualized in charts and tables.

## 4. Findings

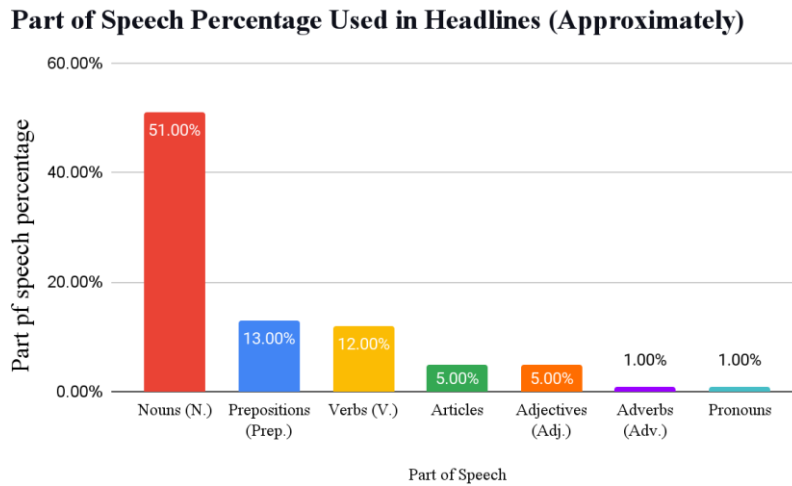
The first objective of this study was to investigate the language characteristics of basketball news headlines, specifically focusing on formality. To achieve this, the F-measure method, as proposed by Eriksson (2017) and Heylighen and Dewaele (1999), was applied to calculate the formality percentage of each headline. The frequency of each part of speech was determined by dividing the total count of each word class by the overall word count of the headlines. The following subsections report the findings in line with the research questions.

### 4.1 Frequency of Parts of Speech in News Headlines

**Research Question 1:** *How do different parts of speech in headlines affect the formality level?*

The findings reveal that three parts of speech—**nouns, prepositions, and verbs**—dominate the construction of headlines across both NBA and FIBA sources. Specifically, nouns emerged as the most frequent, highlighting the emphasis on informativeness and precision, which are key features of formal writing. Conversely, the use of adjectives and adverbs was less prominent, suggesting that headlines prioritize clarity and brevity over embellishment.

These patterns suggest that formal headline writing relies heavily on nouns to convey essential information efficiently. This is consistent with previous findings by Heylighen and Dewaele (1999), who noted that formal writing often features higher noun frequency.

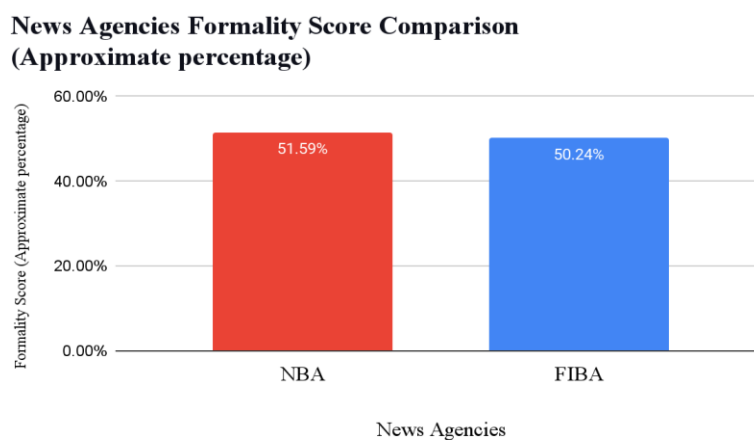


**Figure 1** Overview of part of speech frequency in NBA and FIBA headlines using the CLAWS tagger

#### 4.2 Formality Levels of News Headlines

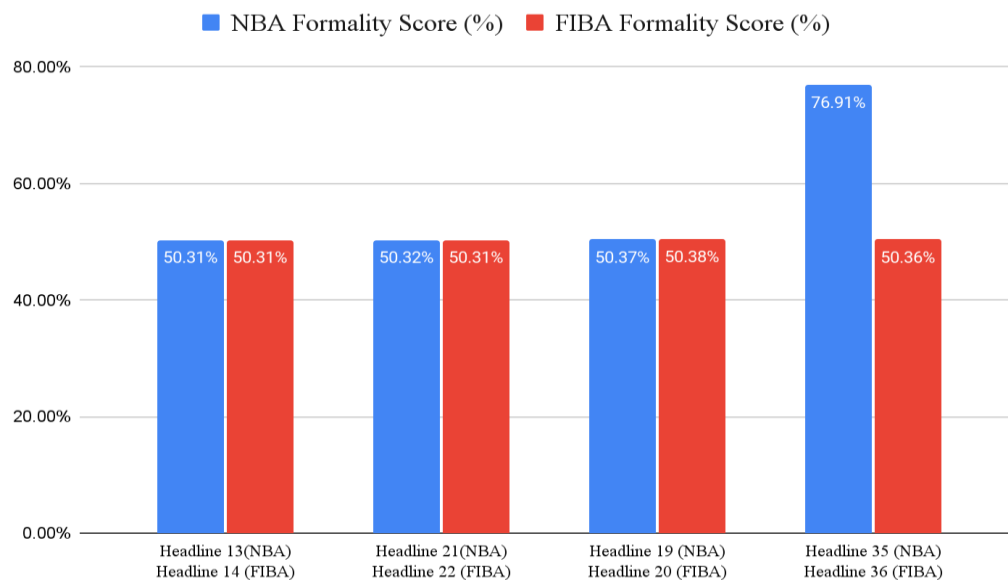
**Research Question 2:** *What is the significant degree of formality difference between NBA and FIBA headlines?*

Although NBA headlines averaged 51.59% formality versus 50.24% for FIBA, this marginal gap should be interpreted cautiously. This suggests that there is no meaningful variation in formality between the two news sources. Both sets of headlines exceed the 50% threshold, indicating that a formal writing style is generally preferred in basketball news headlines, regardless of the source.



**Figure 2** Overall formality comparison between NBA and FIBA headlines

The following figure presents four key pairs of headlines that illustrate significant comparisons of formality scores between NBA and FIBA news headlines. These headline pairs were selected to highlight notable patterns observed in the overall analysis of forty headlines, organized into twenty NBA–FIBA pairs.



**Figure 3** Significant comparisons of formality percentages between NBA and FIBA headlines

This figure highlights three significant findings. First, there is a pair of headlines that share an identical formality score: **headlines 13 (NBA) and 14 (FIBA)**, both scoring **50.31%**. This suggests that in some cases, despite differing sources, the linguistic choices result in highly comparable levels of formality.

Second, two headline pairs demonstrate the smallest gap in formality scores, with only a **0.01% difference**. These are:

- **Headlines 19 (NBA) and 20 (FIBA):** NBA headline “5 takeaways: Nuggets drop Heat for 1st NBA championship” scored **50.37%**, while the FIBA headline “Yuta Tabuse talks Japan’s World Cup and Asia Cup clash with Gilas’ Castro” scored **50.38%**.
- **Headlines 21 (NBA) and 22 (FIBA):** NBA headline “Bleacher Report: Latest Mock Draft as key March action looms” scored **50.32%**, closely matched by the FIBA headline “Gytis the Great - Lithuanian reflections on winning World Cup J9 Predictor Game” at **50.31%**.

Third, the widest gap in formality scores appears between **headlines 35 (NBA) and 36 (FIBA)**. The NBA headline “A healthy Zion Williamson is a boon for the Pelicans (and the

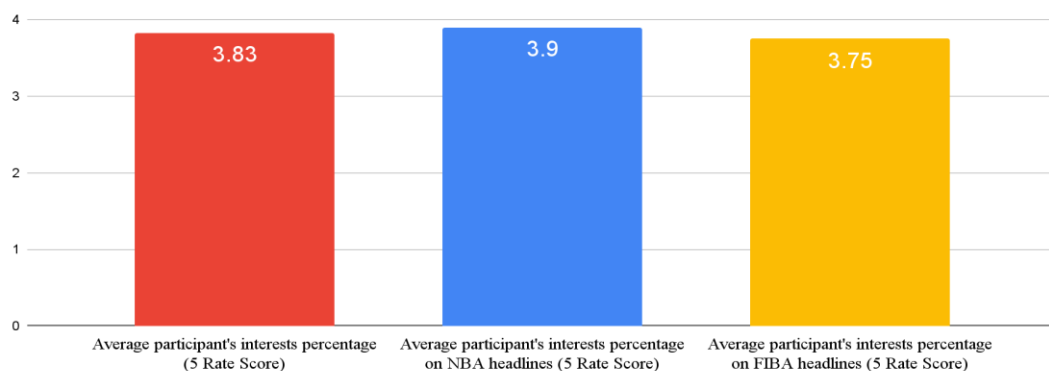
NBA)” scored **76.91%**, while the FIBA headline “Junckers courts catch the eye at the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023” scored **50.36%**, resulting in a difference of **26.55%**.

Overall, the analysis reveals that NBA headlines tend to achieve higher formality scores more frequently than FIBA headlines. Specifically, NBA headlines scored higher in **12 out of the 20 headline pairs**, while FIBA headlines had higher formality scores in **7 pairs**. One pair of headlines exhibited the same score. These patterns are valuable in understanding how differences in language formality between the two sources might influence reader perceptions and preferences in the subsequent questionnaire analysis.

#### 4.3 Participants’ Preferences

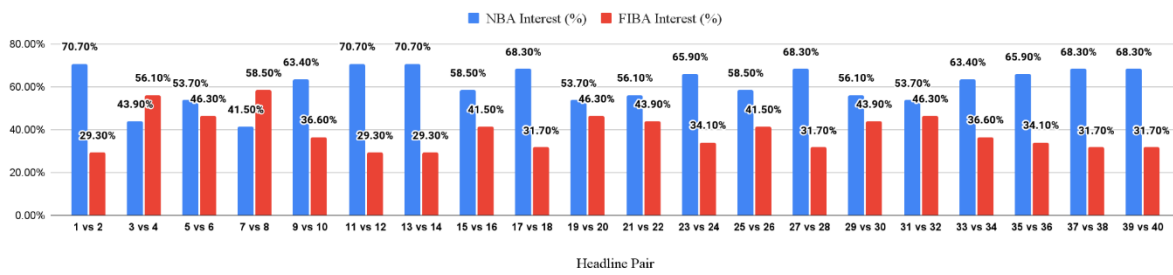
**Research Question 3:** *How do participants rate their interest in various basketball news headlines?*

Participants were asked to compare paired headlines from NBA and FIBA and rate their interest on a scale from 1 to 5. The findings indicate that participants predominantly rated their interest above 3 points, suggesting a general preference for the headlines used in the study. Despite the largely formal style of the headlines, participants showed sustained interest, regardless of the news source.



**Figure 4** *Average participant interest ratings*

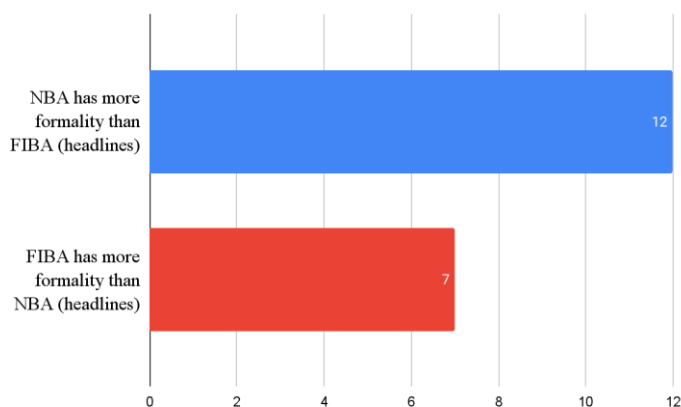
The final objective of this study was to explore participants’ preferences through the questionnaire. With responses collected from 41 participants via Google Forms, the following figure illustrates the results of the first part of the questionnaire, which focused on participants’ headline preferences. In this figure, odd-numbered headlines represent news from the NBA, while even-numbered headlines correspond to FIBA news. The overall comparison of participants’ preferences is presented in Figure 5.

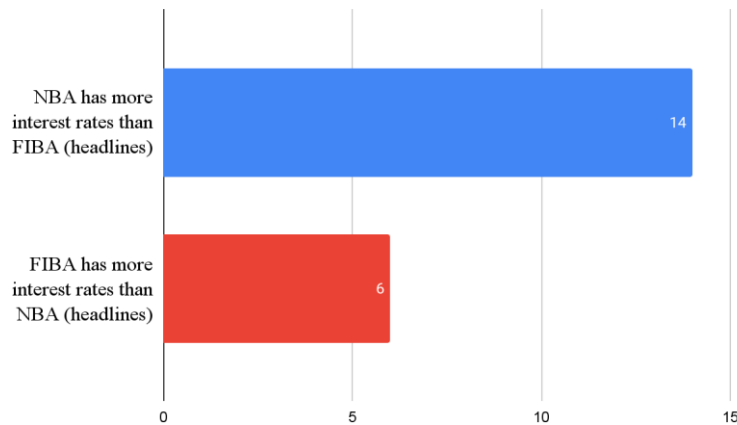
**Interests Comparison between NBA and FIBA headlines****Figure 5** Participant preference comparison between NBA and FIBA headlines

The results illustrated in Figure 5 indicate a clear preference for NBA headlines over those from FIBA. Despite the relatively similar levels of formality in headline writing between the two news agencies, NBA headlines were consistently more appealing to the participants. Specifically, out of the twenty headline pairs presented, NBA headlines were selected in **eighteen pairs**, while FIBA headlines were preferred in only **two pairs**. This suggests that NBA news headlines have greater potential to capture readers' attention and generate interest, even when formality levels are comparable between the two sources.

Figures 6 and 7 show the comparison between the formality scores and the participants' interest ratings by using the F-measure method. The results show that NBA headlines scored higher than FIBA headlines in both the formality levels and participants' interest. Specifically, NBA headlines had higher formality scores in more headline pairs and also gained higher interest ratings from participants.

These findings suggest that a higher level of formality in NBA headlines does not lower the readers' interest. Instead, the results show that formal language in news headlines can still successfully attract readers. In other words, writing headlines with more formal language does not always make readers less interested, and for NBA headlines, it might even help to make them more attractive.

**Figure 6** Formality score comparison using the F-measure method



**Figure 7** Participant interest rating comparison between NBA and FIBA headlines

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

### 5.1 Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to investigate the formality of headline writing in basketball news from two main sources: the NBA and FIBA. It also explored how the formality of these headlines could influence readers' attention, particularly among basketball fans. The research focused on three main objectives:

1. To examine the language use characteristics related to formality in basketball news headlines.
2. To compare the formality levels of NBA and FIBA headlines using the F-measure method.
3. To understand participants' preferences for news headlines from the two sources.

To address these objectives, a total of 40 headlines—20 from each news agency—were randomly selected from their official websites. Additionally, 41 participants familiar with basketball completed a questionnaire to share their preferences and interest ratings for the selected headlines.

This study confirms that both NBA and FIBA headlines employ moderate formality (F-score > 50 %), relying predominantly on nouns for clarity. The slight but significant formality edge in NBA headlines is mirrored in participants' stronger headline preferences. Sports editors should note that moderate formality does not deter engagement—in fact, full-clause constructions and nominal compounds (e.g., “Finals MVP Ladder”) can enhance both clarity and appeal.

### 5.2 Summary of Findings

#### 5.2.1 Language Use Characteristics in Headlines

To answer the first research question, the study analyzed parts of speech in the selected headlines. The results revealed that nouns, prepositions, and verbs were the most frequently

used word classes in both NBA and FIBA headlines. This pattern suggests that headline writing in basketball news emphasizes clarity and informativeness, using nouns especially to deliver concise and direct messages. The limited use of adjectives and adverbs further supports the intention to maintain straightforward language and avoid unnecessary elaboration.

This finding aligns with Eriksson's (2017) framework, which highlights that formal texts tend to use specific parts of speech, like nouns, to enhance clarity and reduce ambiguity.

### **5.2.2 Formality Comparison Between NBA and FIBA Headlines**

Addressing the second research question, the study compared the formality levels of NBA and FIBA headlines using the F-measure method. The analysis showed marginally difference of 1.05 percent, with NBA headlines being marginally more formal. This small gap suggests that both NBA and FIBA adopt a similar formal writing style in their headlines.

However, a closer look at individual headline pairs revealed some interesting variations. One pair of headlines had identical formality scores, two pairs showed a minimal difference of 0.01 percent, and one pair had the largest gap of 26.55 percent. These patterns highlight that while overall formality is comparable, individual headlines may vary in their degree of formality.

### **5.2.3 Participants' Preferences for Headlines**

The third research question focused on participants' preferences and interest ratings. The questionnaire results showed that, despite the small difference in formality levels between NBA and FIBA headlines, participants clearly favored NBA headlines. In most of the headline pairs, NBA headlines were selected more frequently, suggesting that factors beyond formality, such as familiarity with teams or reporting style, likely influenced participant choices.

Furthermore, participants generally rated their interest levels between four and five across the headlines. This indicates that the selected headlines from both news sources were engaging overall, with NBA headlines capturing slightly more interest.

## **5.3 Discussion of Results**

### **5.3.1 Formality of Headlines**

The findings of this study confirm that both NBA and FIBA headlines are typically written in a formal style. This supports Eriksson's (2017) research, which observed that sports news reporting across different sports often maintains a formal tone. The small formality difference found in this study suggests that both sources continue this tradition of formal reporting in sports journalism.

Additionally, the frequent use of nouns, prepositions, and verbs in the headlines corresponds with Heylighen and Dewaele's (1999) explanation that formal texts use non-deictic words to minimize ambiguity. Finegan (2004) and Biber and Conrad (2009) also noted that nouns and explicit structures characterize formal writing, which this study further supports.

Although the researchers initially assumed that less formal headlines might attract more reader interest, the findings revealed the opposite. Participants tended to prefer the more formal NBA headlines. This suggests that formality, rather than deterring readers, may actually enhance the appeal of headlines in sports news.

### **5.3.2 Part of Speech Usage in Headlines**

The analysis of parts of speech directly answers the first research question. The dominance of nouns in both NBA and FIBA headlines emphasizes the role of clear references to players, teams, and locations in sports reporting. This aligns with Prateepchaikul (2010), who observed that sports headlines often highlight names and places to capture readers' attention and quickly convey essential details.

Using nouns helps headlines remain informative and accessible, which supports the goal of making headlines easy to understand and engaging for readers.

### **5.3.3 Functions of Headlines in Capturing Readers' Attention**

The participant ratings addressed the third research question, revealing that headlines from both NBA and FIBA effectively captured attention, with scores mostly between four and five. However, NBA headlines were generally preferred.

This finding supports Bedřichová and Urbanová (2006), who emphasized that headlines are crucial in drawing readers in through specific language choices and compact structure. Headlines act as the first point of contact, summarizing the story and sparking curiosity.

Moreover, as Segado-Boj, Díaz-Campo, and Quevedo-Redondo (2019) explained, incidental exposure to news on social media highlights the importance of well-crafted headlines. In such cases, headlines serve as the deciding factor for reader engagement. This study reinforces the idea that well-designed headlines, even when written in a formal style, can successfully attract and maintain readers' attention.

## **5.4 Conclusion**

In summary, this study found that both NBA and FIBA headlines follow a formal writing style, with only a small difference in formality scores. The analysis confirmed that nouns were the most frequently used part of speech, contributing to the overall formal tone of the headlines. Using the F-measure method, the study showed that while NBA headlines were slightly more formal, both sources shared similar formality levels.

Importantly, the questionnaire results revealed that NBA headlines not only had higher formality scores but also attracted more attention from participants. This suggests that formal headlines, particularly from the NBA, can effectively capture reader interest, especially among basketball fans.



Overall, the study concludes that writing headlines in a formal style does not reduce reader engagement. Instead, clear and informative headlines with a formal tone can successfully draw attention and interest.

### **5.5 Limitations**

This study has some limitations to consider. First, the small sample size of headlines and participants limits the generalizability of the findings to all sports news headlines and basketball fans. Second, it was challenging to target participants with a strong interest in basketball, which may have affected the reliability of the results. Third, the study focused only on headlines, as full news articles vary greatly in length and word count, making it difficult to apply the F-measure method consistently across entire articles.

### **5.6 Recommendations for Future Research**

Building on these limitations, several recommendations are proposed for future research. Future studies should include a wider range of news sources and a larger collection of headlines to allow for broader comparisons. Additionally, researchers could analyze other parts of news articles—such as lead paragraphs, body texts, and conclusions—to compare formality levels across different sections. Finally, involving larger and more diverse groups of participants would provide deeper insights into reader preferences and allow comparisons across different audiences.

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## Appendix 1

### NBA news headlines, date published, and word count

NBA (Headlines)	Published	Word count
1. Bleacher Report: Latest Mock Draft as key March action looms	09 March 2023	10
2. Finals MVP Ladder: Nuggets dominate race after big Game 4	10 June 2023	10
3. 24 thoughts on Game 4 of 2023 NBA Finals	10 June 2023	9
4. Aaron Gordon gets his statement performance to put Nuggets on brink of title	10 June 2023	13
5. After hard-earned NBA journey, Michael Porter Jr. unfazed by Finals shooting woes	11 June 2023	12
6. Finals Film Study: Nuggets' defense puts them one win away from a championship	11 June 2023	13
7. Heat finally meet their match against Nikola Jokic, Nuggets	13 June 2023	9
8. Twitter reacts to Nuggets' 2023 NBA championship	14 June 2023	7
9. Nikola Jokic adds NBA championship, Finals MVP to impressive resume	15 June 2023	10
10. 5 takeaways: Nuggets drop Heat for 1 <sup>st</sup> NBA championship	15 June 2023	9
11. Spurs select victor wembanyama with no.1 pick in 2023 NBA draft	22 June 2023	12
12. Why there are no debates surrounding the No. 1 pick in the 2023 NBA Draft	22 June 2023	15
13. Warriors acquire Chris Paul from Wizards in exchange for Jordan Poole	7 July 2023	11
14. Bucks' massive trade for Damian Lillard puts NBA on notice	1 August 2023	10
15. Germany wins FIBA World Cup for first time, defeats Serbia for gold medal	11 September 2023	13
16. NBA Board of Governors approves new player participation policy	14 September 2023	9
17. NBA players react to Damian Lillard trade to Bucks	28 September 2023	9
18. Grizzlies face an uphill climb while awaiting Ja Morant's return	9 October 2023	10
19. A healthy Zion Williamson is a boon for the Pelicans (and the NBA)	10 October 2023	13
20. Victor Wembanyama becomes youngest with 20 points and 20 rebounds in a game	9 December 2023	13

## Appendix 2

### FIBA news headlines, date published, and word count

FIBA (Headlines)	Published	Word Count
1. Canada fly over Slovenia to reach the Semi-Finals for the first time	6 September 2023	12
2. Serbia and Germany qualify directly to Paris 2024	6 September 2023	8
3. One for the ages: Germany stun USA in a Semi-Final with 224 points	8 September 2023	13
4. Latvia cruise to win over Lithuania in battle for fifth	9 September 2023	10
5. Women's World Cup Global Ambassador Sue Bird excited to make a difference	9 September 2023	12
6. How did they do it? Three takeaways from Serbia's win over Canada	9 September 2023	12
7. Josh Giddey awarded first Wanda Rising Star Award	10 September 2023	8
8. Dennis Schroder named FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023 TISSOT MVP	10 September 2023	10
9. World Cup record owner Arturs Zagars finishes with most assists in 2023. Check the race from start to finish	13 September 2023	19
10. Valanciunas barely beats Milutinov as the top rebounder. Check the race from start to finish	13 September 2023	15
11. Six things we've loved and learned from the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023	15 September 2023	13
12. Junckers courts catch the eye at the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023	15 September 2023	12
13. Advanced stats from the World Cup: find out who was the best player on iso, and more	19 September 2023	17
14. Thunder GM Presti: "Shai will be a better player after playing at World Cup"	6 October 2023	14
15. Yuta Tabuse talks Japan's World Cup and Asia Cup clash with Gilas' Castro	13 October 2023	13
16. Record 125 international players on opening night rosters in the NBA	25 October 2023	11
17. Bogdan Bogdanovic balling, a Serbian summer tradition of excellence	20 November 2023	9
18. Gytis the Great - Lithuanian reflections on winning World Cup J9 Predictor Game	6 December 2023	12
19. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander honored as Canada's top athlete in 2023	12 December 2023	9
20. Nowitzki savors rise of Germany national team, growth of FIBA ball	14 December 2023	9