

# MANIPULATION OF PUBLIC PERCEPTION BY NEWS ORGANISATIONS BY SPREADING PROPAGANDA

## Abstract

As a key source of information, news outlets have a significant impact on how society views the world. The purpose of the media or press is to educate and enlighten the people about events that are or may be happening around them. However, in recent years, the spread of misinformation via news outlets has accelerated. News outlets have a propensity to impose their story on the opinions of individuals. These organizations frequently value sensationalism in today's culture over factual accuracy in an effort to draw viewers and increase their ratings. As a result, information is exaggerated, misrepresented, and sometimes just one side of a story is reported. Most news is editorialized to promote the channel's agenda or chosen viewpoint. The majority of news organizations affiliate themselves with a certain political group or ideology. This is one of the primary causes of biased reporting. News channels exploit public emotions by broadcasting only compelling news items that provoke emotions such as fear, rage, or hatred. These organizations have a tendency to impact public opinion and persuade people to support their agenda. Press agencies have started skipping extensive fact-checking and verification in the rush to be the first to report a breaking news item, which has caused the proliferation of false information. This is one of the most serious challenges to modern society. Propaganda spread through news outlets poses a serious danger to the credibility of journalism and free societies. News Organizations must keep their obligation to the public by promoting ethical journalism, ensuring fact-checking, and offering fair news.

**Keywords:** Misinformation, propaganda, news-outlets, sensationalism, persuade, fact-checking.

## Authors

**Atharva Kshirsagar**  
Student, Jain University  
Bangalore, Karnataka, India  
atharvapkshirsagar@gmail.com

**Dr. Farha Yashmin Rohman**  
Assistant Professor  
Jain University  
Bangalore, Karnataka, India  
farha.yr@jainuniversity.ac.in

## I. INTRODUCTION

Propaganda, misinformation, and false news all share identical meanings. They are often connected to the propagation of a particular moral or political cause or point of view and are used to describe a range of scenarios in which the distribution of information causes harm, either knowingly or subconsciously. Websites, social media, radio, television, e-mail, and blogs all play a significant part in reinforcing prevailing attitudes and views. Social media and mass media may "activate" underlying attitudes and validate them, which encourages individuals to take action. Mass media and social media, to various extents, also play an important role in influencing public opinion and giving political leaders access to large audiences.

In this sense, the media facilitates the spread of public opinion over large populations and geographical areas. Spreading the word occasionally fulfils the same functions as the press and broadcasting, yet at a smaller scale, in places where access to social media is restricted or the mass media is not widely available, such as developing countries or countries where print and electronic media are strictly regulated. It is common in developing countries for literate people to read newspapers to illiterate people, or for large groups of people to gather around a village radio or a community television. Following then, the information is disseminated further through community or market word-of-mouth. In countries where the government restricts important news, rumours are the primary means of information dissemination.

The Oxford Dictionary defines sensationalism as "the presentation of stories in a way intended to provoke public interest or excitement, at the expense of accuracy." This form of narrative is intended to evoke emotions such as dread, rage, or exhilaration. Many media outlets use sensationalism to create eye-catching headlines and thought-provoking content, but it can also increase anxiety. In India, for example, most news channels tend to exaggerate news and try to oversell it, at the expense of accuracy however.

Republic TV is a perfect example of how the news media sensationalizes news. Arnab Goswami, is a popular news anchor and journalist known for sensationalizing and manipulating news. One of the most famous scams that he and his company are known for is the 2020 TRP Manipulation Scam. In 2020, a TRP manipulation fraud allegedly involved certain television broadcasters inflating their viewing figures. The inquiry was conducted as a result of a Mumbai Police complaint. Target Rating Point (TRP) is crucial for television channels, as evidenced by the fact that 70% of their revenue comes from advertising. Police claim that the station paid low-income individuals, particularly those who had trouble understanding English, to keep their televisions on and set them to Republic TV.

With an exaggerated TRP, ARG Outlier Media was able to negotiate additional funds from advertisers. On October 21, the inquiry expanded to include the entire nation and could subsequently involve all Indian news channels under CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation) inspection. TV Today Network Ltd (Aaj Tak and India Today) was fined 5 lakh by the Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) for manipulating viewership. The BARC Disciplinary Council (BDC) was instructed by the Bombay High Court to take disciplinary action against TV Today Network until the company paid a fine of Rs. 5 lakh.

In the United States, the Sinclair Editorial Scandal is one of the most popular. Dozens of anchors delivered an identical message to millions of viewers in March 2018 on local news stations around the nation. They asked viewers to comment on the station's website, "if you believe our coverage is unfair" and included a warning about fake news, a vow to report honestly and properly, with a false news disclaimer. To certain viewers, it might not have appeared unusual. However, Timothy Burke, the Deadspin video director, had seen an article from CNN the previous month that identified local station anchors that seemed concerned with the address. Burke located the stations and discovered the times that each had broadcast what he referred to as a "forced read." Then he pieced together the multiple broadcasts to make a super cut of anchors who oddly repeated the identical sentences. The nation's largest broadcaster, Sinclair Broadcast Group, which controls or operates 193 television stations, provided the script. Regulators are delaying the \$3.9 billion acquisition of Tribune Media by the business due to antitrust concerns. Burke's video and a like one made by the left-leaning news source Think Progress swiftly gained popularity on social media over the weekend, drawing harsh condemnation of Sinclair. Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation's long standing president and media investor Peter Chernin referred to it as "insidious."

David E. Price, a Democratic North Carolina congressman, called the video "pro-Trump propaganda". The nation's largest broadcaster, Sinclair Broadcast Group, which owns or runs 193 television stations, provided the script. The corporation was attempting to acquire Tribune Media for \$3.9 billion, but authorities prevented the deal due to antitrust concerns. The weekend that followed saw widespread social media condemnation of Sinclair as a result of Mr. Burke's film and a similar one produced by the left-leaning news organization Think Progress.

## II. MEDIA MANIPULATION AND POLITICAL LOBBYING

Lobbying, any attempt by people or private interest groups to influence government decisions; in its original sense, it refers to efforts to influence legislators' votes, often in the lobby outside the legislative chamber(Chen, 2023b). Any political system is bound to involve some type of lobbying. In media discourse, the persuasive process makes conscious and intentional efforts to affect the general public's opinion in favour of the goals of the state or non-state entities providing the messages.

One of the most famous examples of media persuasion or propaganda is the Radia Tapes Controversy. The controversy surrounding the Radia tapes concerns phone conversations recorded by the Indian Income Tax Department in 2008–2009 involving major journalists, politicians, and business entities and Niira Radia, an Indian political lobbyist, A. Raja, the country's (then) telecom minister, and Radia. The tapes were leaked to the press, where they finally appeared in publications and on television. Many of these individuals accused one another of misbehavior in response to the tapes' revelations, which also acted as a prelude to the 2G scam and tougher controls for the media. The CBI conducted investigations into Niira Radia's former public relations company, "Vaishnavi Communications."

In November 2010, OPEN magazine published an article that included transcripts of some of Nira Radia's phone conversations with top journalists, politicians, and business entities. Many of the people Radia spoke with have refuted the claims. Radia's attempts to

arrange transactions in connection with the sale of the 2G spectrum are detailed in part of the 5,851 recordings of phone calls that the Central Bureau of Investigation claims to hold. According to the tapes, Radia attempted to influence the selection of A. Raja as telecom minister by using various members of the media, notably Barkha Dutt of NDTV.

The lobbying action opposing Dayanidhi Maran's reappointment to the position of Union IT and Communications Minister under the UPA administration in India was mentioned in the transcripts of the recordings. At 0948 IST, a conversation with journalist Barkha Dutt took place. In a subsequent discussion at 1047 IST, Barkha claimed that it was "not a problem" to send the message to the Indian National Congress, which was in power at the time. She also stated that she would speak with Ghulam (Nabi Azad), an Indian politician and Congress member. Later, Ranjan Bhattacharya, who also seemed to be serving as a conduit to the Congress, was the subject of a conversation with Radia (Kumar & Kumar, 2018). She also noted during the conversation that Airtel CEO Sunil Bharti Mittal had been lobbying (Desk O.W., 1970). Barkha Dutt always denied being involved in this incident, emphasising that it was just a case of poor judgment. Despite this Dutt is the subject of an investigation by the CBI.

### **III. MEDIA NEGLIGENCE**

It is a well-known fact how Barkha Dutt made a tremendous error during the Kargil conflict. Everyone believed that Kargil's experience would have helped the alleged journalist gain maturity in these areas since the mistake was made. During the Mumbai terror attack on November 26th, she made the same error once more, digging her own grave. Due to her negligence, hundreds of civilians stranded in terrorist-attacked areas were put in danger. The former NDTV journalist can be heard reporting that "her sources are on the 19th floor where the terrorists are currently in their murderous frenzy" in one of the films of the coverage of 26/11. Before sharing such an important piece of information live, she did not stop or hesitate for a split second. She acknowledged in an interview that by failing to exercise restraint during the broadcast, the media were contributing to the risk to both the lives of civilians and security officers. Barkha admitted that during the Mumbai siege, possibly in hindsight, journalists committed errors. She then made another attempt to downplay the situation by claiming that the media was unaware that the terrorists' managers were watching news broadcasts. Later, when questioned about her involvement in the attacks by a journalist at Newslandry, Barkha didn't offer any regrets. She spoke without expressing regret or making an acknowledgment of error. Blogger Chaitanya Kunte questioned her journalistic ethics, and the "journalist" responded by serving him with a legal letter and threatening to remove the post. Speaking about this in the interview, she stated that she did not regret sending Kunte a legal notice because the site had accused her of being responsible for a Mumbai terror attack victim's death.

Fascinatingly, the Supreme Court concurred that the media's involvement during the events of September 11, 2008, was reckless and hazardous. It had dedicated an entire section to criticising the media for its part in amplifying the seriousness of the assaults. The apex court stated on August 29, 2012, in the case of Md. Ajmal Md. Amir Kasab vs. the State of Maharashtra, "From the transcripts, especially those from Taj Hotel and Nariman House, it is evident that the terrorists who were entrenched at those locations and more than them, their collaborators across the border, were watching the full show on TV." The media reports and

the images on the TV screen are frequently mentioned in the transcripts. The transcript further mentions that the accomplices informed the terrorists inside the Taj Hotel that the building's dome was on fire. Unaware of this were the terrorists who had taken up residence in a room. The terrorists' accomplices also persuade them that the greater the fire, the better it will be for them. The court went on to explain that because of how the security forces' activities were shown on the TV screen, it is impossible to determine if they truly suffered any casualties or injuries. But there is no question that the security forces' mission was made more difficult, hazardous, and dangerous by the manner their actions were openly displayed. Ironically, Barkha Dutt received the Padma Award 2009 for her journalistic style from the Sonia Gandhi-led Manmohan Singh administration just a few months after the 26/11 blunder (NewsBharati, 2022b). This is a fitting example of media negligence, showcasing how journalists and news channels sensationalize news with total disregard for human lives and emotions, for their viewership's.

#### **IV. AIM OF THE STUDY**

This research seeks to demonstrate definitively how news organisations and channels sway public opinion by disseminating disinformation and seeking out substitutes. The study's objective is to identify alternative news sources that a general literate public may use in place of news channels. These sources should primarily be trustworthy, objective, and free of any bias or tendency to shape general perceptions. The study's primary goal is to understand and analyze popular perceptions on the manipulation of public perception by news channels and journalists and the sources most of the people, in the present day trust. This study has applied a quantitative method with the use of cross-section survey methodology by the circulation of a survey questionnaire to a specific demographic group. The conclusions drawn were based on the majority opinion obtained from the questionnaire.

#### **V. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

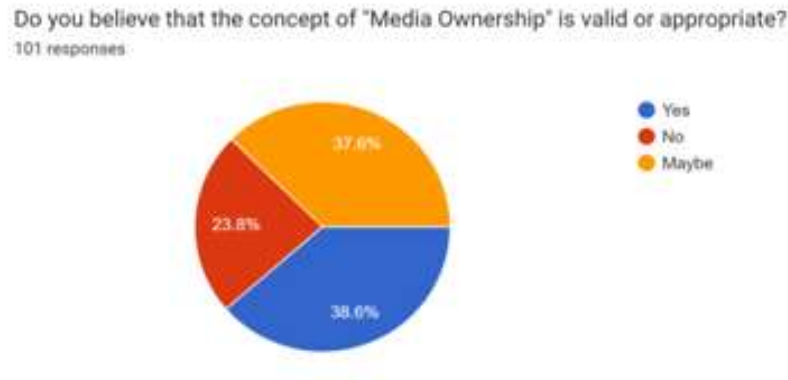
The study's objective is to identify alternative news sources that a general literate public may use in place of news channels. These sources should primarily be trustworthy, objective, and free of any bias or tendency to shape general perceptions.

#### **VI. METHODOLOGY**

In order to understand and examine the opinions of the public regarding the manipulation of public perception by news channels and journalists and identify alternative news sources that a general literate public may use in place of news channels which are trustworthy, objective and free of any bias or tendency to shape general perceptions, the researcher took over a quantitative method along with the use of cross-sectional survey, by the circulation of a questionnaire to a specific demographic group. The study was carried out online using Google Forms by the researcher, who circulated a survey questionnaire consisting of 10 questions to 101 members, consisting of whatsapp contact list i.e. college students, educators, medical professionals, lawyers and employees from IT and software firms make up this group.

## VII. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

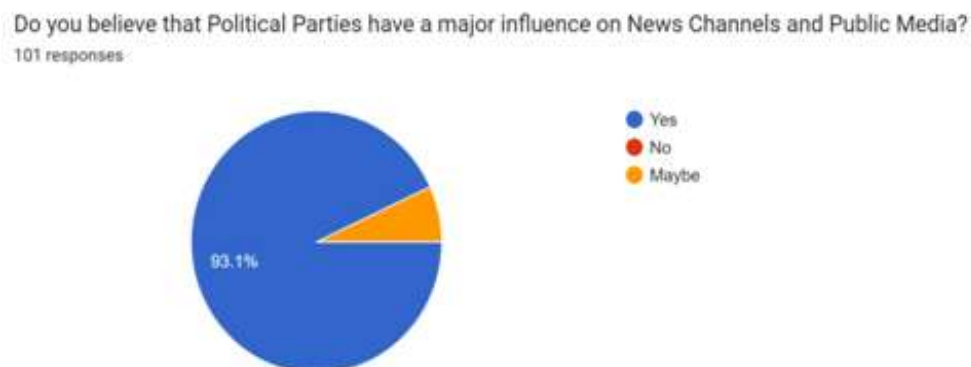
People were asked whether the concept of "Media Ownership" is appropriate or necessary in the first question of the survey questionnaire.



**Figure 1**

The majority of the respondents i.e. 38.6% of the people agreed with the concept of "Media Ownership" while the percentage of people that disagreed is about 23.8% , while 37.6% only partly agreed with the concept.

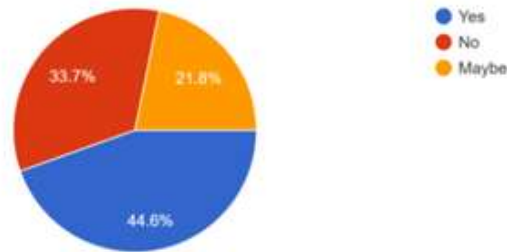
In the next two questions of the questionnaire people were asked whether they believed political parties have a major influence on news channels and then asked about their opinions about "Media Censorship".



**Figure 2**

For the first question, as we can see, the majority of the people, roughly around 93.1%, which is the majority of respondents, agreed that political parties have a major influence on news channels, whereas 6.9% only partly agreed with the statement.

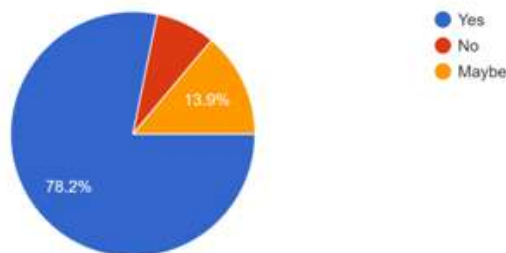
Do you believe that "Media Censorship" should be allowed?  
101 responses



**Figure 3**

For the next question, when questioned about their views on media censorship, mixed responses were received from the public. The majority of the people (44.6%) agreed with the concept of “media censorship” while about 21.8% of the people only partially agreed with this concept and 33.7% of the people disagreed with it.

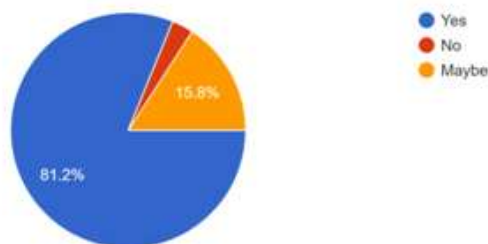
Do you believe that News Channels have their own personal propaganda?  
101 responses



**Figure 4**

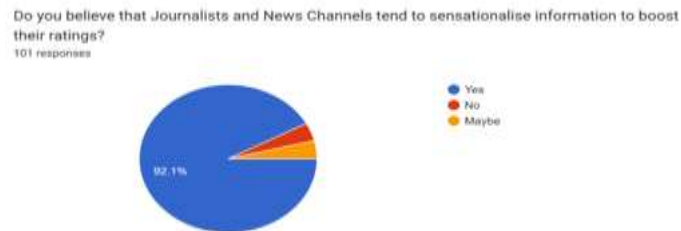
Upon inquiry, the majority of the people i.e. 78.2% believed that news channels have their own personal propaganda, whereas about 7.9% disagreed with the statement while 13.9% relatively agreed with the statement.

Would it be appropriate to say that News Channels and Organisations manipulate facts and figures to favor their personal agenda?  
101 responses



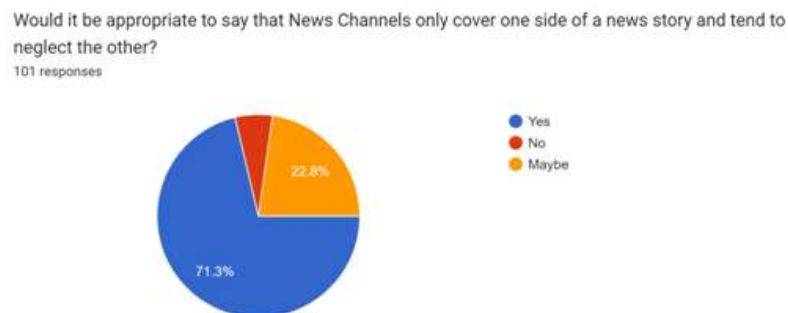
**Figure 5**

When called into question, the majority of the people (81.2%) concurred that News Channels and Organizations manipulate facts and figures to favor their personal agenda, when in fact 3% of individuals outright rejected the question, leaving 15.8% of the people conflicted with their opinion.



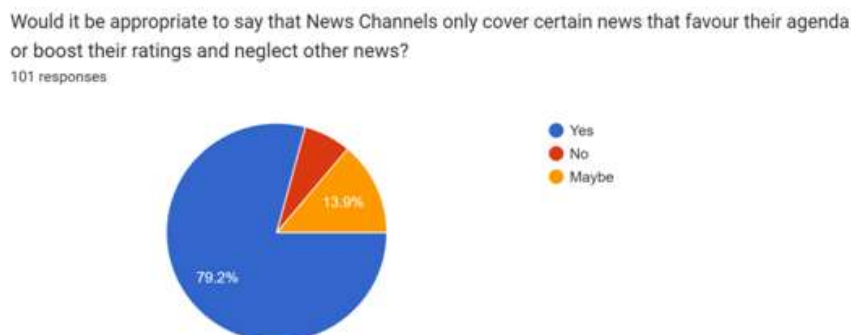
**Figure 6**

After examination, 92.1% of individuals, which is the majority of respondents, scrutinized Journalists and News Channels for sensationalizing information to boost their ratings, in contrast to the 4% of individuals who did not believe so? This left 4% of people, who remained neutral on the topic.



**Figure 7**

Individuals were asked whether News Channels only cover one side of a news story and tend to neglect the other. The results showed that the majority (71.3%) of the public undoubtedly agreed, 22.8% were hesitant and 5.9% failed to agree.

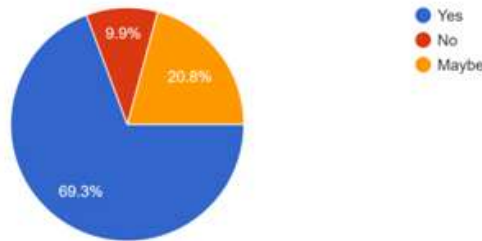


**Figure 8**



Majority of the respondents i.e. 79.2% of people found it appropriate to say that News Channels only cover certain news that favor their agenda or boost their ratings and neglect other news. On the contrary, 6.9% of people did not believe so while 13.9% chose to remain impartial.

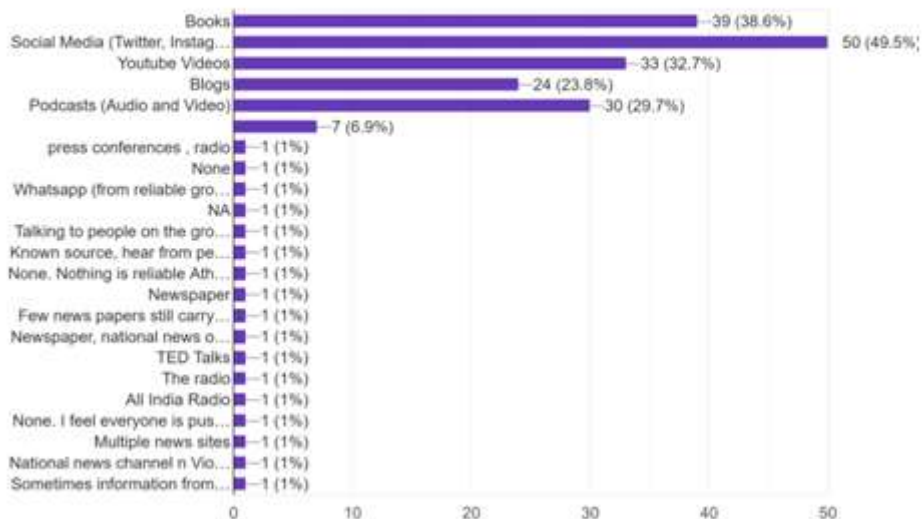
Do you believe that News Channels misuse fear in people to enforce personal beliefs?  
101 responses



**Figure 9**

Individuals were cross-questioned to understand whether they believe that News Channels misuse fear in people to enforce personal beliefs. The majority (69.3%) of people were in harmony with the question whereas 9.9% did not see eye to eye. Yet 20.8% of individuals remained disinterested in taking a side.

What other News Sources apart from News Channels and Newspapers do you find reliable for any news information?  
101 responses



**Figure 10**

To discern other sources of reliable information, individuals were asked an open-ended question to state their personal references for news information. The majority of results were directed towards books (38.6%) , social media (49.5%), Youtube Videos (32.7%), blogs

(23.8%) as well as both audio and video podcasts (29.7%). The minority consisted of various different sources such as radio, press conferences, TED Talks.

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate decisively how news organisations and channels affect public opinion by disseminating incorrect information and to provide possible alternatives. The project's aim is to identify alternative news sources that an educated general audience may use in place of news channels. These sources must be trustworthy, objective, free of bias, and without a tendency to sway public opinion. A cross-section survey methodology was applied in this investigation. The study was conducted via Google Forms, and 101 people who fit a particular demographic were given a survey form with 10 questions. This group included university students, educators, medical professionals, and employees from IT and software personnel. According to the findings of the study, social media may be used as an alternate channel for news information. The second-most popular choice, which may be used as a substitute for media organizations, was books. Following Social Media and Books, respectively, YouTube Videos and Podcasts (Audio and Video) were the next most popular choices. Additionally, it was shown that most individuals think political parties have a significant impact on news organizations. The majority of journalists and media outlets are not reliable because they may be swayed by political lobbies. Information may be manipulated in a variety of ways by news outlets and organizations to achieve certain agendas, change public opinion, or boost reading and viewership. Sensationalism, prejudice, and financial interests are just a few of the variables that might lead to manipulation in particular situations. A minority percentage of the group also believes that reputable sources include radio, press conferences, and TED Talks. A few individuals additionally believe that speaking with witnesses or getting firsthand accounts might be reliable sources. However, this might not be feasible or practical in every situation or for every person. News outlets and groups are also prone to sensationalizing information, which must be avoided, and facts and data must be presented as they are. Hence, finding an objective, reliable, and trustworthy news source has become vital during these times.

Future research might address the limitations of the presented study because the responses were only gathered from a small population (101 participants) in the study. The research focuses only on the negative parts of the media and demonstrates how often news organizations sensationalize and misrepresent the truth in order to sway public opinion in favor of their own ideology. Only literate people have been investigated by the researcher, thus future research can be done on other populations.

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