

---

## **Manipulation of Public Perception by News Organisations by Spreading Propaganda.**

**Atharva Kshirsagar**

Student, Jain University, Bangalore

+91 8008804983

atharvapkshirsagar@gmail.com

**Farha Yasmin Rohman**

Assistant Professor, Jain University, Bangalore

+91 7086892202

farha.yr@jainuniversity.ac.in

---

### **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 organisations 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 editorialised to promote the channel's agenda or chosen viewpoint. The majority of news organisations 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 organisations 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 Organisations 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.

---

## Introduction

Propaganda, misinformation, and false news all share identical meanings. They are used to describe a variety of situations in which the dissemination of knowledge results in harm, either consciously or unconsciously, and are frequently related to the advancement of a certain moral or political cause or point of view. Websites, social media, radio, television, e-mail, and blogs play a vital role in reiterating preexisting attitudes and ideas. Social media and mass media may "activate" underlying attitudes and validate them, which encourages individuals to take action. Another crucial role is played by mass media and social media, to varied degrees, by providing political leaders with enormous audiences and by informing individuals of others beliefs.

In this sense, the media enable public opinion to span vast populations and extensive geographic regions. Word-of-mouth occasionally serves the same purposes as the press and broadcasting, however on a smaller scale, in regions where the mass media aren't widely accessible or where the availability of social media is restricted, such as in developing nations or in nations where print and electronic media are closely monitored. In developing nations, it is typical for literate people to read newspapers to those without literacy or for big crowds of individuals to assemble around a village radio or a community television. The knowledge is subsequently spread further through word of mouth in the community or market. Much information is spread by rumours in nations where the government censors significant news. Thus, in authoritarian or totalitarian countries, word-of-mouth (or other forms of person-to-person communication, like text messaging), even though these processes are slower and typically involve fewer people than in nations where the media network is dense and uncontrolled, becomes the vehicle for underground public opinion.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, sensationalism is "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 sensationalises news. Arnab Goswami, is a popular news anchor and journalist known for sensationalising 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. The station allegedly bought low-income people, including those who could not understand English, to keep their televisions

on and tuned to Republic TV, according to police allegations. 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. The Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) imposed a 5 lakh penalty against TV Today Network Ltd (Aaj Tak and India Today) 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. It included a warning about fake news, a promise to report fairly and accurately and a request that viewers go to the station's website and comment "if you believe our coverage is unfair." 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 supercut of anchors who oddly repeated the identical sentences. The script came from Sinclair Broadcast Group, the country's largest broadcaster, which owns or operates 193 television stations. The company is seeking a \$3.9 billion deal to buy Tribune Media, a move that's being held up by regulators over antitrust concerns. Burke's video, along with a similar one created by ThinkProgress, the left-leaning news outlet, spread quickly on social media over the weekend, leading to prominent criticism of Sinclair. Peter Chernin, a media investor and longtime president of Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, called it "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 organisation ThinkProgress.

## **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 misbehaviour 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 judgement. Despite this Dutt is the subject of an investigation by the CBI.

## 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. "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 apex court stated on August 29, 2012 in the case of Md. Ajmal Md. Amir Kasab vs. the State Of Maharashtra. 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. The terrorists who were camped out in a room were ignorant of this. The terrorists' collaborators additionally inform them that the stronger the fire is, the better it would 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 sensationalise news with total disregard for human lives and emotions, for their viewerships.

### **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 primary goal of the study is to understand and examine the opinions of the public regarding 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.

### **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.

### **Methodology**

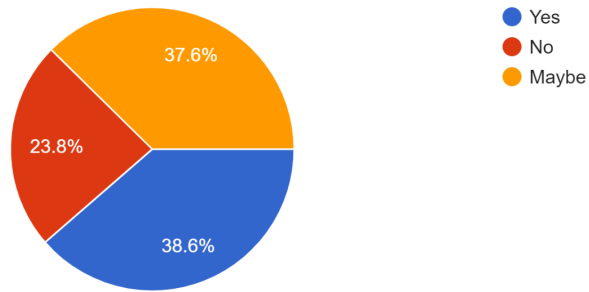
In order to understand and examine the opinions of the public regarding the manipulation of public perception by news channels and journalists and identify alternative news sources that a general literate public may use in place of news channels which are trustworthy, objective and free of any bias or 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.

### **Findings and Discussion**

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

Do you believe that the concept of "Media Ownership" is valid or appropriate?

101 responses



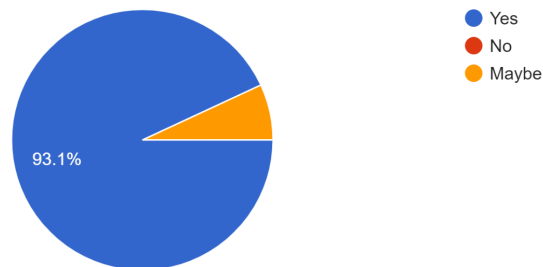
(Fig.1)

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”.

Do you believe that Political Parties have a major influence on News Channels and Public Media?

101 responses

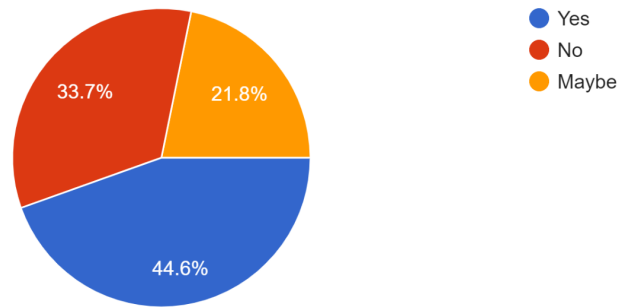


(Fig.2)

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

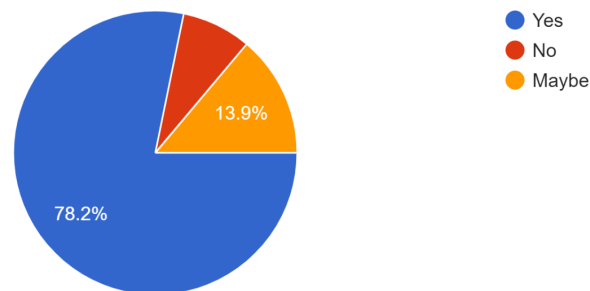


(Fig.3)

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



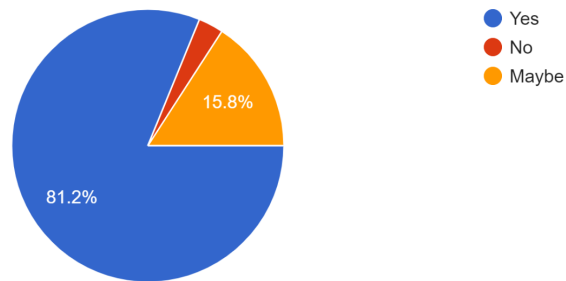
(Fig.4)

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

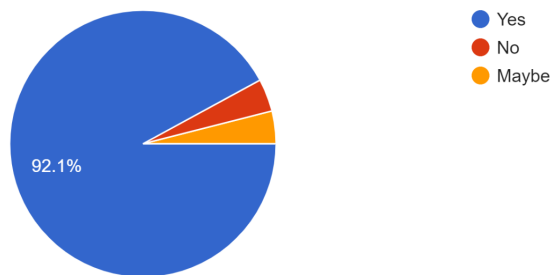


(Fig.5)

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

Do you believe that Journalists and News Channels tend to sensationalise information to boost their ratings?

101 responses

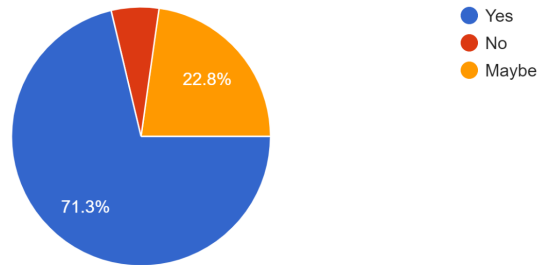


(Fig.6)

After examination, 92.1% of individuals, which is the majority of respondents, scrutinised Journalists and News Channels for sensationalising 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.

Would it be appropriate to say that News Channels only cover one side of a news story and tend to neglect the other?

101 responses

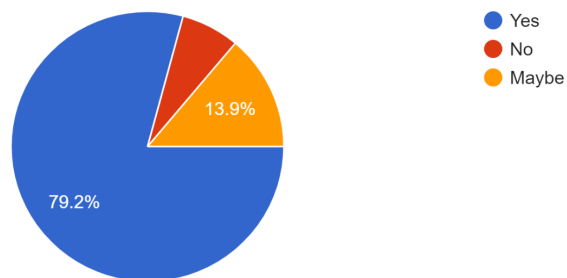


(Fig.7)

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.

Would it be appropriate to say that News Channels only cover certain news that favour their agenda or boost their ratings and neglect other news?

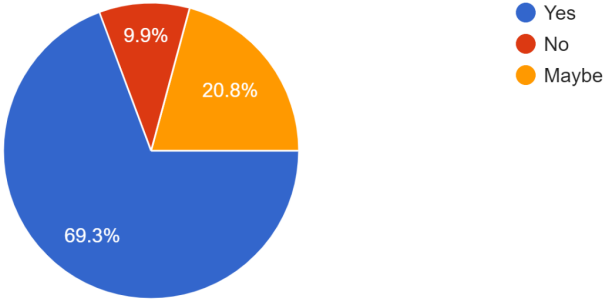
101 responses



(Fig.8)

Majority of the respondents i.e. 79.2% of people found it appropriate to say that News Channels only cover certain news that favour 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.

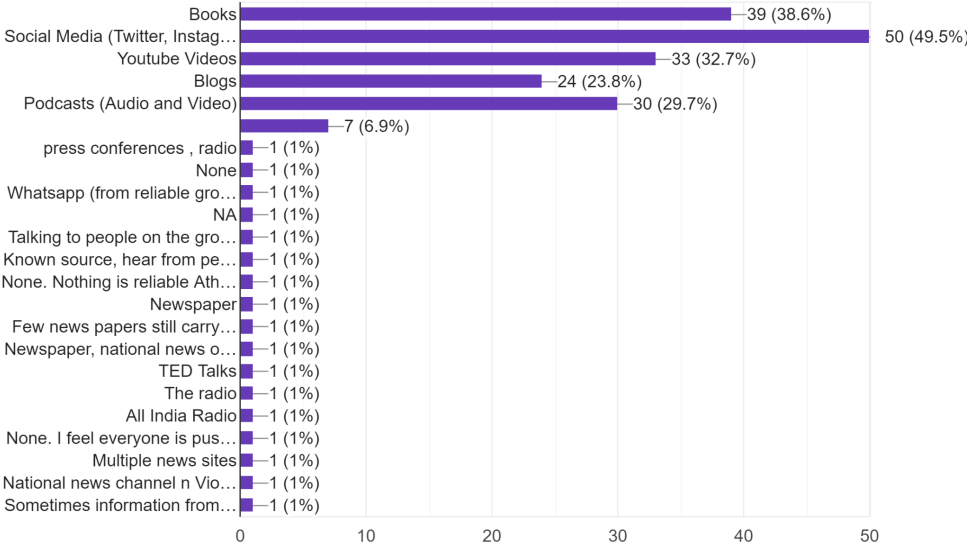
Do you believe that News Channels misuse fear in people to enforce personal beliefs?  
 101 responses



(Fig.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



(Fig.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 organisations, 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 organisations. 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 organisations 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 sensationalising 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 organisations sensationalise and misrepresent the truth in order to sway public opinion in favour of their own ideology. Only literate people have been investigated by the researcher, thus future research can be done on other populations.

## REFERENCES

- Plus, C. (2021). The impact of social media on public opinion. CC Plus.  
<https://cc-plus.com/articles/2021/08/23/the-impact-of-social-media-on-public-opinion/>
- McNary, D. (2018, April 4). Variety. Variety.  
<https://variety.com/2018/tv/news/sinclair-fake-news-scandal-sag-aftra-1202743846/>
- Dealing with propaganda, misinformation and fake news - Democratic Schools for All -  
www.coe.int. (n.d.). Democratic Schools for All.  
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/campaign-free-to-speak-safe-to-learn/dealing-with-propaganda-misinformation-and-fake-news>
- sensationalism noun - Definition, pictures, pronunciation and usage notes | Oxford Advanced American Dictionary at OxfordLearnersDictionaries.com. (n.d.).  
[https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american\\_english/sensationalism](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/sensationalism)
- Bishop, I. (2022). Sensationalism: How to avoid it — Groov | Workplace Mental Wellbeing Platform. Groov | Workplace Mental Wellbeing Platform.  
<https://www.groovnow.com/blog/sensationalism-how-to-avoid-it>
- Cross-Sectional Survey Research - ProQuest. (n.d.).  
<https://www.proquest.com/openview/8983376f0ff904653bbc4c0e27a89374/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=30764>
- Quint, & Quint. (2021, June 23). TRP Scam Case | Arnab named accused: Key allegations, evidence. The Quint. <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/mumbai-police-names-arnab-goswami-as-accused-in-trp-scam-case>
- Correspondent, D. (2023). Radia Tapes, note-for-vote scam exposed traditional media credibility: Shashi Shekhar. Deccan Chronicle.  
<https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/in-other-news/170623/radia-tapes-note-for-vote-scam-exposed-traditional-media-credibility.html>
- Desk, O. W. (1970, January 1). The Raja-Radia tapes. <https://www.outlookindia.com/>  
<https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/the-raja-radia-tapes/268064>
- Fortin, J., & Bromwich, J. E. (2018, April 3). Sinclair made dozens of local news anchors recite the same script. The New York Times.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/02/business/media/sinclair-news-anchors-script.html?auth=login-google&login=google1tap>

NewsBharati. (2022, November 26). When “journalist” Barkha Dutt ended up endangering the lives of 100s during the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack! News Bharati.  
<https://www.newsbharati.com/Encyc/2022/11/26/Barkha-Dutt-reporting-during-the-26-11-Mumbai-terror-attack.html>

Anderson, C. W. (2021b). Propaganda, misinformation, and histories of media techniques. Harvard Kennedy School ; SPECIAL ISSUE: PROPAGANDA.  
<https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-64>

Chen, J. (2023). Lobby: What it is, How it Works, Examples. Investopedia.  
<https://www.investopedia.com/terms/l/lobby.asp>

Sensationalism: breaking news! Watch this video now! (2022, August 18). Academy 4SC.  
<https://academy4sc.org/video/sensationalism-breaking-news-watch-this-video-now/>

Quick, J., & Hall, S. (2015). Part three: the quantitative approach. *Journal of Perioperative Practice*, 25(10), 192–196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/175045891502501002>

Schulz, A., Fletcher, R., & Nielsen, R. K. (2022). The role of news media knowledge for how people use social media for news in five countries. *New Media & Society*, 146144482211089. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221108957>

Google Forms | Online tools for teaching & learning. (n.d).  
<https://blogs.umass.edu/onlinetools/assessment-centered-tools/google-forms/>

Meadows, K. (2003). So you want to do research? 4: An introduction to quantitative methods. *British Journal of Community Nursing*. <https://doi.org/10.12968/bjcn.2003.8.11.11823>