



## SCREENS TO MINDS: IMPACTS OF MEDIA TRIALS ON INDIAN YOUTH

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### ABSTRACT

*This research examines the impact of media trials on Indian youth, focusing on how they shape opinions, influence decision-making, and affect trust in the legal system. With increasing digital media consumption, media trials often distort facts, creating public judgments before legal verdicts. Using a mixed-method approach, the study analyses survey data from 150 young respondents along with secondary research. Findings show that media trials contribute to misinformation, emotional manipulation, and declining trust in justice, negatively affecting youth perceptions and mental well-being. The study highlights the need for responsible journalism, stricter media regulations, and media literacy to prevent misinformation and ensure fair reporting.*

**Keywords:** Media Laws, Youth, Media Trials.

### OBJECTIVES

1. To analyse the impact of media trials on Indian youth.
2. To examine the role of media trials in contributing to youth-related issues.
3. To explore conflicts between media laws and the practice of media trials.
4. To assess youth perceptions and opinions regarding media trials.

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Media Trials are one of the reasons behind the current youth issues in India.

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## HYPOTHESIS

India has a vast youth population, accompanied by numerous challenges and struggles. The energy they possess, the sense of purpose they should cultivate, and the roles they are expected to play in their formative years are gradually diminishing. Among the many contributing factors, one crucial yet often overlooked reason is the influence of media and media trials. These trials have become a significant force shaping young minds, often leading them astray. Media trials not only impact the career prospects of the youth but also shape their lifestyle, perceptions, and overall outlook on life, altering their thought processes and decision-making.

## METHODOLOGY

This research uses a mixed-method approach to ensure that the analysis is both primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire called a 'sample collection' of 150 young candidates. This would give the real opinions of the youth on the impact of media trials. It provides first-hand insights into their perceptions, concerns, and experiences. Secondary data were collected from a variety of scholarly sources, which included research papers, published articles, books, and expert opinions. In addition, discussions with scholars and professionals in the field further enriched the study. In this way, the research makes sure that a well-rounded understanding of how media trials influence Indian youth is created, balancing empirical data with the existing academic discourse.

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, human curiosity has been the driving force behind collective advancement. The innate desire to understand ourselves and the world around us has led to the development of various means of communication. The term "media" finds its roots in the Latin word "medium," meaning "middle" or "intermediary." Over time, this has evolved to represent channels that bridge the gap between information and the public.<sup>1</sup>

In contemporary India, youth are the primary consumers of the media. A significant 98% of adolescents engage in screen-based media daily, with television being the most prevalent, accessed by 96.5% of this demographic. On average, these young individuals spend about 3.8 hours per day in front of screens, surpassing the recommended limits.<sup>2</sup> This study delves into

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<sup>1</sup> [Etymlne](#)

<sup>2</sup> [https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6293917/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.c](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6293917/?utm_source=chatgpt.c)

the intricate relationship between Indian youth and media consumption. It examines the role of the judiciary and the legal frameworks governing the media in India, aiming to shed light on the implications of media engagement on the younger population.

## **HISTORY OF MEDIA & MEDIA TRIALS**

Intermediaries have played a crucial role in conveying messages and information throughout human history. In various religious traditions such as Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, angels are depicted as divine messengers sent by God to guide and assist humanity. For instance, in Christianity and Islam, angels serve as intermediaries between the divine and humans, delivering God's messages and performing specific tasks. In Ancient Times, during the era of monarchies, designated individuals were responsible for communicating the decrees and decisions of rulers to the general populace. These messengers would relay information from the king's court, including official proclamations and judgments. In certain contexts, such announcements were referred to as 'fatwas,' which are legal opinions or decrees issued by Islamic scholars.

Oral communication methods were prevalent in the Medieval Period. A practice known as 'Davandi' involved appointed individuals making public announcements in villages. This person, selected by village leaders, disseminates various types of information, such as news, invitations, deaths, government schemes, and updates on available facilities. The Modern Era has witnessed the emergence of written forms of communication. Individuals, political parties, and authorities began issuing written announcements that evolved into newspapers, editorials, and articles. In India, the press played a significant role during the freedom struggle, serving as a tool for political expression and mobilisation. The first newspaper in India, 'The Bengal Gazette,' was published in 1780 by James Augustus Hickey.<sup>3</sup>

The Post-Independence Period, particularly during Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's tenure, saw the media flourishing. Nehru championed press freedom, stating, "I would rather have a completely free press with all the dangers involved in the wrong use of that freedom than a suppressed or regulated press." In Contemporary Times, the media, which originated as a service to inform the public, has faced criticism for various reasons. Concerns have been raised

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nimc-india.com/history-mass-media-india.html>

about its impact on society, particularly on the younger population in India. This research aims to explore how certain aspects of modern media adversely affect Indian youth.

The Law Commission in its 200th report, 'Trial by Media: Free Speech versus Fair Trial Under Criminal Procedure (Amendments to the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971)' the commission has said, "Today there is feeling that because of the extensive use of the television and cable services, the whole pattern of publication of news has changed and several such publications are likely to have a prejudicial impact on the suspects, accused, witnesses and even judges and in general on the administration of justice."

## **MEDIA LAWS IN INDIA**

In India, the freedom of the press is not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution. However, it is encompassed within the broader right to freedom of speech and expression guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution. Articles ensure that citizens have the right to express their thoughts and opinions freely. (Constitution of India)

The fundamental rights, including the right to freedom of speech and expression, are outlined in Part III of the Constitution. While these rights are fundamental, they are not absolute. Article 19(2) allows the State to impose reasonable restrictions on the exercise of this right in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality, or concerning contempt of court, defamation, or incitement to an offence.<sup>4</sup>

The progression of a democracy is often judged by the independence of its media and the environment in which it operates. A free and independent press serves as a watchdog, holding those in power accountable and providing citizens with the information they need to make informed decisions. However, the freedom of the press must be balanced with the need to maintain public order and protect individual rights. This balance is achieved through the reasonable restrictions outlined in Article 19(2).<sup>4</sup> Lawmakers are tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that one's exercise of the right to freedom of speech and expression does not infringe upon the rights of others. The Supreme Court of India has emphasised that freedom of expression cannot be suppressed unless the situation created by allowing the freedom to press and the community interest is endangered. This principle ensures that right is exercised responsibly and do not lead

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.constitutionofindia.net/articles/article-19-protection-of-certain-rights-regarding- freedom-of-speech-etc/>

to disorder or harm to the public.<sup>4</sup> In addition to constitutional provisions, various statutory bodies regulate the media in India. The Press Council of India, established under the Press Council of India Act of 1978, governs the conduct of print media. Similarly, the News Broadcasting Standards Authority oversees the electronic media. These bodies issue guidelines to ensure that the media operates within the framework of the law while maintaining journalistic ethics.<sup>5</sup>

In conclusion, while the Indian Constitution does not explicitly mention freedom of the press, it is derived from the broader right to freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a). This right is subject to reasonable restrictions to ensure that its exercise does not harm the interests of the state or infringe upon the rights of others. The legal framework governing the media in India seeks to balance the need for a free and independent press with the need to maintain public order and protect individual rights.

### **WHAT ARE MEDIA TRIALS?**

Trials are usually conducted by judicial bodies to decide specific cases. Similarly, when the media conducts parallel trials before the court delivers its judgment, it is called a 'media trial'. Media trials occur when the media conducts its parallel investigation and coverage of legal proceedings, often before or during official judicial processes. While the media plays a crucial role in informing the public, such practices can raise important questions about ethics, fairness, and the rule of law.<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Reetika Bansal & Ms. Vertika Bansal, “Media Trial and Violation of Fundamental Right to Reputation” (2020). Authors in this article clarify that although every person of the country has the freedom to communicate his or her thoughts over several mass media, subject to reasonable restrictions provided under Article (19) 2 of the Indian constitution, the author of this paper emphasizes that if it trespasses on the constitutional rights or character of any individual, it amounts to a violation of the fundamental right to life. The authors wrote this paper with all of the constitutional and legal issues of the Media Trial and its impact on society in mind.<sup>6</sup> (Sharma, 2022).

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<sup>5</sup> <https://blog.ipleaders.in/media-trials-and-its-impact-on-society-and-judiciary/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/535403>

## MEDIA TRIALS & YOUTH

India's substantial youth population is increasingly immersed in social media, with significant implications for their perceptions and mental health. A study by the Dergipark organisation, conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic, revealed that approximately 65% of teenagers spent more than six hours daily on social media platforms.<sup>7</sup> Given the pandemic's acceleration of digital engagement, this figure has likely risen. This extensive exposure means that young individuals often turn to the media as their primary source of information and perspective on various issues. Media trials, where the media conducts its parallel investigations and publicises opinions before judicial verdicts, have become prevalent. While such trials can raise awareness, they often present information in a biased or sensationalised manner, potentially distorting young minds. The constant barrage of unverified or emotionally charged content can lead to misinformation, shaping youths' perceptions inaccurately.

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**Impact on Youth Perception:** The pervasive nature of media trials can significantly shape the perspectives of young individuals. Constant exposure to sensationalised news and biased reporting can lead to the formation of prejudiced opinions, potentially undermining the principles of justice and fairness. This is particularly concerning as the youth rely heavily on media for information, making them vulnerable to adopting skewed viewpoints presented during media trials.

**Mental Health Implications:** Prolonged engagement with media content, especially that which is emotionally charged or distressing, can have adverse effects on the mental health of young individuals. Studies have linked heavy social media use to increased risks of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem among adolescents.<sup>9</sup> The intense scrutiny and public shaming

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<sup>7</sup> <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/683176>

<sup>8</sup> <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/60-children-spend-3-hours-a-day-on-social-media-study/articleshow/103878956.cms>

<sup>9</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11438920/>

often associated with media trials can exacerbate these issues, leading to heightened stress and mental health challenges among the youth.

## THE NEED FOR MEDIA LITERACY

Given the profound impact of media trials on young minds, there is a pressing need to promote media literacy among the youth. Educating young individuals on how to critically evaluate media content can empower them to discern bias, recognise sensationalism, and understand the ethical implications of media coverage. This, in turn, can foster a more informed and resilient youth population capable of navigating the complexities of modern media landscapes.

While the media serves as a vital tool for information dissemination, the phenomenon of media trials poses significant challenges to the mental well-being and ethical development of India's youth. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort to enhance media literacy and promote responsible media consumption among young individuals.

## CASE LAWS

**Yakub Memon:** Yakub Abdul Razak Memon, a Mumbai-born Commerce graduate and Chartered Accountant, later established an export business dealing in raw materials. He was charged under TADA (Section 21) for aiding, abetting, and facilitating terrorist activities, including the illegal possession and transportation of arms and ammunition. He was also accused of financing the training of 15 youths in Pakistan for terrorist operations and had alleged ties with Dawood Ibrahim.

His conviction sparked intense media coverage, leading to a media trial that significantly influenced public opinion, resulting in widely divided perspectives on the case.<sup>10</sup>



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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ndtv.com/opinion/hanging-yakub-memon-makes-us-murderers-too-1202042>

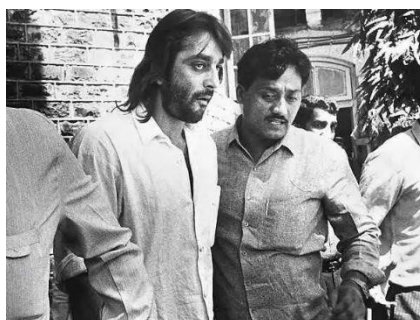


Courtesy: PTI

Independent MLA Sheikh Abdul Rashid, along with Awami Itihaad Party leaders and workers, holding a banner and black flags, shout slogans during a protest against the hanging of Yakub Memon in Srinagar.

**Sanjay Dutt vs. State of Maharashtra:** Sanjay Dutt was sentenced to five years in prison by the Supreme Court for his involvement in the 1993 Mumbai serial blasts, charged under Section 5 of the TADA Act for possessing illegal ammunition. After serving 18 months, he was granted bail. Eleven years later, the TADA court acquitted him, stating he kept a gun for self-defence. However, he was still convicted under the Arms Act and sentenced to six years. His sentence was reduced to five years, ending on February 27, 2016.

The media extensively covered his case, often portraying him as a terrorist, which damaged his reputation and fueled public outrage. This media trial raised concerns about the impact on the presumption of innocence in the justice system.



Courtesy: Filmfare, Sanjay Dutt at the time of his arrest in 1990

**Sunanda Pushkar Murder Case:** Sunanda Pushkar, wife of former Union Minister Shashi Tharoor, was found dead in a hotel suite on January 17, 2014, under mysterious circumstances. A day before, she had a Twitter dispute with Pakistani journalist Mehr Tarar, accusing her of an affair with Tharoor. The autopsy suggested an overdose of sleeping pills, but later, the medical team claimed pressure to alter the report. Police suggested poisoning, but no suspects were identified.

In May 2018, Tharoor was charged with abetment of suicide and marital cruelty, which he denied. However, in August 2021, a Delhi court discharged him of all charges.



The case became a media trial, with the media speculating on Tharoor's involvement, causing significant controversy.

**Nirbhaya Rape Case:** On the night of December 16, 2012, a 23-year-old woman was brutally gang-raped, tortured, and beaten by six men on a moving bus in New Delhi while travelling with a male friend. In addition to the assault, her friend was also beaten. The victim was admitted to the hospital, but after 11 days, she was transferred to a hospital in Singapore for emergency treatment. She died two days later. The victim became widely known as "Nirbhaya," meaning "fearless."

The incident sparked nationwide and international outrage, leading to widespread protests against the government for failing to ensure women's safety. In response to public pressure, significant legal reforms were made, including amendments to the Juvenile Justice Act, lowering the age for punishments in heinous crimes from 18 to 16.

**Pradyumn Thakur Murder Case:** In the Pradyuman Thakur case, a seven-year-old boy in Haryana was found dead with multiple injuries. Initially, the bus conductor was wrongfully charged with murder, but the CBI later identified a 16-year-old student as the true culprit.

## IMPACT OF MEDIA TRIAL

The media prematurely labelled the bus conductor as guilty, damaging his reputation before any judicial proceedings. This led to his removal from his job, with no lawyer willing to represent him. The case illustrates the harmful effects of irresponsible media coverage.

Indian courts have acknowledged the challenges posed by media trials, urging the media to adhere to ethical standards and avoid influencing legal proceedings. The Supreme Court emphasises that press freedom should not interfere with justice.

## DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

For this research work, a sample of 150 young candidates was taken into consideration for the following questionnaire. The data significantly shows how the media trials are impacting the Indian youth. According to you, who provides the most information to the public during an ongoing case?

POLITICAL PARTIES	0.7%
MEDIA	92.8%
COURTS	5.9%
FRIENDS	0.7%

Which age group do you think is most influenced by media narratives?

CHILDREN (BELOW 18 YEARS)	12.4%
YOUNG (18-28 YEARS)	65.4%
ADULTS (28-38 YEARS)	10.5%
MIDDLE AGE AND OTHER ADULTS (38+ YEARS)	11.8%

How reliable do you think the information provided by the media is?

COMPLETELY RELIABLE	1.3%
PARTIALLY RELIABLE	81%
NOT RELIABLE AT ALL	12.4%
PREFER NOT TO SAY	5.2%

In your opinion, which group or institution is most impacted by the role played by the media?

JUDICIARY	9.8%
YOUTH	84.3%
CHILDREN	2%
WOMEN	3.9%

Do you think 'Media Trials' of sensitive cases (e.g., Nirbhaya Case, Sushant Singh Rajput Case, Yakub Memon Case) contribute to an increase in crime?

NO, THEY DO NOT CONTRIBUTE	15.7%
YES, THEY CONTRIBUTE	27.5%
THEY CONTRIBUTE IN SOME CONTEXTS	46.4%
PREFER NOT TO SAY	10.5%

Do you think the public opinion created by the media influences judicial proceedings?

STRONGLY AGREE	10.4%
AGREE	50.3%
DISAGREE	30.7%
STRONGLY DISAGREE	8.5%

How does the portrayal of sensitive issues by the media affect your mental well-being?

POSITIVELY -I FEEL MORE INFORMED	16.3%
NEGATIVELY – IT MAKES ME ANXIOUS OR DISTRESSED	53.6%
NEUTRAL – IT DOES NOT AFFECT ME	13.1%
PREFER NOT TO SAY	17%

In your view, does the media prioritise sensationalism over accuracy?

ALWAYS	58.2%
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SOMETIMES	30.7%
RARELY	8.5%
NEVER	2.6%

Do you think media sensationalism plays a role in shaping public opinion about legal cases?

YES, TO SOME EXTENT	47.7%
YES, TO A GREAT EXTENT	40.5%
NO, NOT AT ALL	7.8%
PREFER NOT TO SAY	3.9%

Should there be stricter regulations on media reporting during ongoing judicial trials?

STRONGLY AGREE	50.3%
AGREE	37.3%
DISAGREE	10.5%
STRONGLY DISAGREE	2%

How often do you verify the information you receive from the media?

ALWAYS	39.9%
RARELY	22.9%
SOMETIMES	34.6%
NEVER	2.6%

When the media trial of a rape case is going on, what do you feel?

THE GUILTY WILL BE PUNISHED	22.9%
THE GUILTY WILL GET RELEASED	3.9%
IT WILL TAKE AGES TO GET JUSTICE	60.8%
PREFER NOT TO SAY	12.4%

If the trial of murder trial is going on, what do you think about it? What do you think about the trials in the terrorist cases?

MEDIA BECOMES VIOLATIVE	23.5%
MEDIA JUDGES BEFORE COURT PROCEEDINGS	58.2%
MEDIA LEADS TO ENCOURAGE SUCH ACTS	4.6%
I DON'T KNOW	13.7%
MURDERS ARE IMMORAL	45.8%
MURDERS ARE A VERY CASUAL ACT OF CRIME NOWADAYS	21.6%
THE MURDERER WILL BE RELEASED	13.7%
I DON'T KNOW	19%

Answer your preference for the following statement.

“Media trials lead to negative impacts mostly on the Indian youth.”

AGREE	32.7%
STRONGLY AGREE	19.6%

PARTIALLY YES	40.5%
DISAGREE	7.2%

## CONCLUSION

Media, often regarded as the fourth pillar of democracy, holds immense power in shaping public discourse by highlighting both the positives and negatives of society. However, this tool, originally intended to serve the people, is increasingly becoming a silent disruptor of young minds in India. Through screens, media trials sensationalise events, distort narratives, and prematurely shape public opinion, often bypassing due process. Instead of fostering informed perspectives, they manipulate emotions, influence thought patterns, and erode trust in the judicial system. This unchecked influence not only misguides the youth but also alters their perception of justice and accountability. To safeguard young minds, there is a pressing need for responsible journalism, stricter media ethics, and enhanced media literacy. Only then can the media fulfil its true role, informing rather than manipulating, empowering rather than misleading.

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