

Study Guide for 2024 Public Forum Debate

Resolved: Media outlets bear a greater responsibility than viewers in combating sensationalism.

The phenomenon of sensationalism, a tactic where news stories are presented in an exaggerated or provocative manner, has become increasingly common. It raises a critical question: To what extent should media outlets versus viewers be held accountable? Supporters of media outlets bearing greater responsibility claim that these outlets hold power to shape public opinions and ought to counter the prevalence of sensationalism. However, critics assert that content reflects audience preferences, and thus, viewers should consume news more responsibly by evaluating news sources and supporting outlets that prioritize accurate reporting. This debate hinges on the comparative impact of media outlets and viewers. Which side has a more significant role to play in reducing sensationalism?

The word "sensationalism" in the resolution refers to the practice of presenting news stories in an attention-grabbing manner to generate interest in the audience. As opposed to media, which refers to methods or channels of communication used to transmit information (e.g. TV, radio, and print), "media outlets" specifically denote organizations (e.g. CNN, BBC, and Formosa News) that produce and distribute news, information, and entertainment through various channels. "Viewers" are individuals who consume media content through media platforms. Also note that the word "greater" is vague, and thus, the debaters should set up a comparative framework from the outset. This can be done by arguing that one impact is bigger (in terms of magnitude), faster (in terms of time frame), or more likely (in terms of probability) than another. Such a framework provides a set of standards that will weigh into the judges' decision.

As this is a public forum debate, the emphasis should NOT be placed on how sensationalism can be curtailed. The pro side thus need not detail a plan for media outlets to fight sensationalism, nor should the con side ask questions concerning that issue. Instead, the debaters should focus on arguing the reasons and presenting evidence for more responsibility on the part of either media outlets or viewers.

Following is a list of references meant to serve as some groundwork for debaters, which means it is by no means comprehensive or flawless. Many of the references also contain information or arguments that may not be directly relevant and thus warrant closer examination. Students are still encouraged to continue researching in order to deepen their understanding of the issue and strengthen their arguments in preparation for their debate rounds.

References

How to Combat Fake News and Disinformation

www.brookings.edu/articles/how-to-combat-fake-news-and-disinformation

Nudging News Consumers and Producers

www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/West-Stone_Nudging-News-Consumers-and-Producers.pdf

It's Time to Hold the Media Accountable

<https://mhschronicle.com/staff-editorial-its-time-to-hold-the-media-accountable/>

Sensationalism in Media

<https://reporter.rit.edu/news/sensationalism-media>

How Sensationalist Journalism Obscures Views of Reality

<https://news.bahai.org/story/1605/>

The Disadvantage of Sensationalism in the Media

<https://www.sjuhawnews.com/the-disadvantage-of-sensationalism-in-the-media/>

Fighting Fake News

www.defindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Whose-Responsibility-Is-It_V7.pdf

Educating for Democracy in a Partisan Age: Confronting the Challenges of Motivated Reasoning and Misinformation

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.3102/0002831216679817>

What's Exactly Wrong with Taiwanese Media

<https://taiwaninsight.org/2022/05/26/whats-exactly-wrong-with-taiwanese-media/>

Research Says Taiwan's Local Media Free But Not Well Trusted

<https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4895688>