

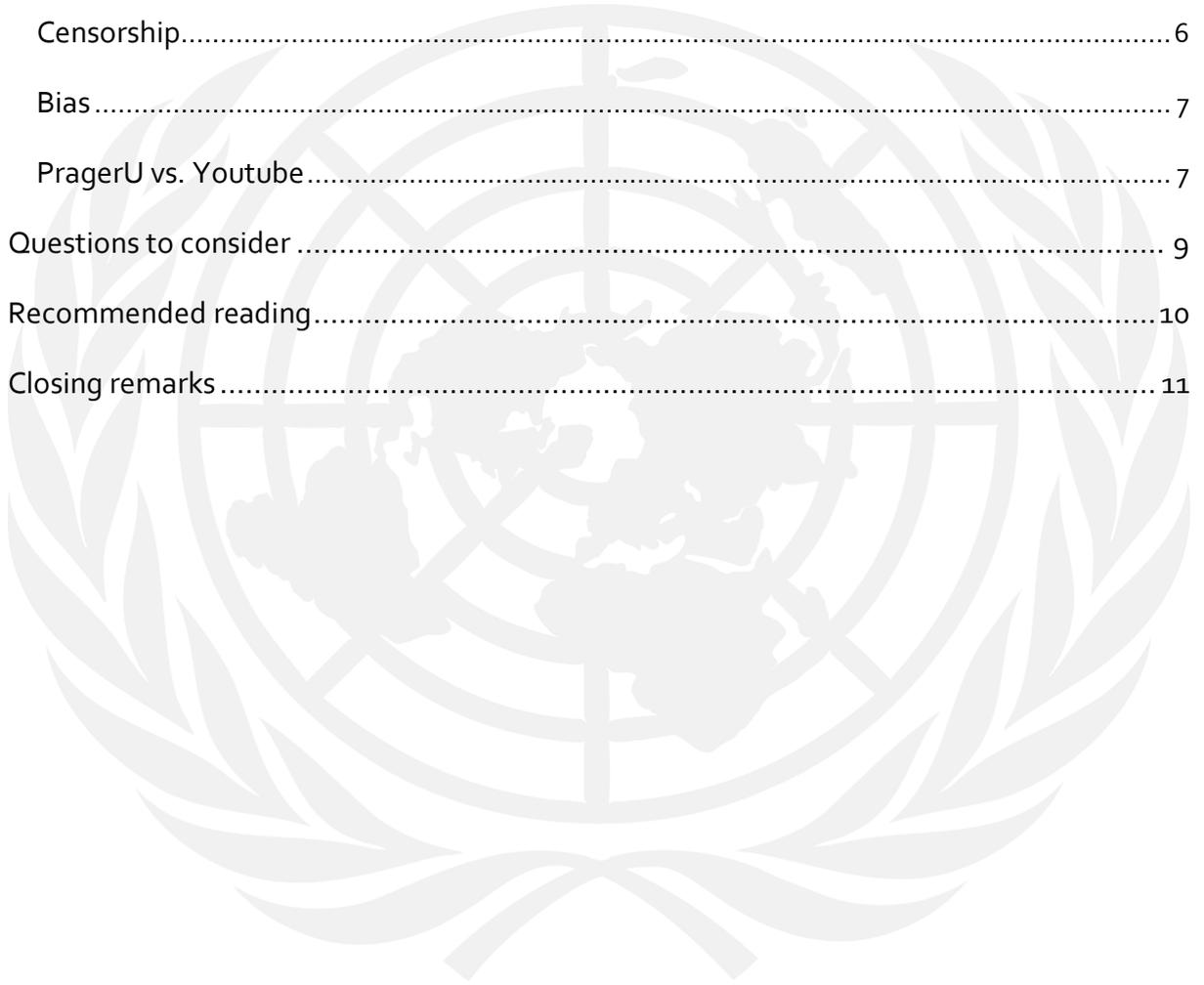
BratMUN

STUDY GUIDE

COI 2018

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Letter from the chair

Honourable delegates,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to Bratislava Model United Nations 2018! My name is Samuel Šulovský and I will be chairing the United Nations Committee on Information. I'm sure an interesting debate and many productive caucuses will be had in this committee. This year, our committee will be addressing a global issue with far-reaching consequences: politicisation of news and bias in media in the information age.

Are you left wing or right wing? Are you liberal or conservative? Are you a republican or a democrat Are they "Undocumented immigrants" or "Illegal aliens"? Do you think Donald Trump should be burned at the stake?

Don't answer these questions. Now ask the same questions about your preferred news source and try to find the answers. Have you found them? If you have, do you think your preferred news source is unbiased?

This is a very difficult question to answer. In the modern age, where everyone has an opinion, and everyone can express that opinion, how do we keep our news sources unbiased? Recent events have split the media, showing that unbiased reporting is a thing of the past. The immigrant crisis in Europe was covered differently and painted differently in almost every newspaper. It divided the people - each and every person would state different studies, statistics and most of all cite different news sources. The election of Donald Trump and the campaign coverage were another story that almost divided a nation and continues to do so even after his election.

Another important issue arising from all of these recent events is that a multitude of opinions is surfacing, mostly on social media. Widely divisive, widely different but equally visible. Or are some opinions more visible than others? Are some opinions purposefully censored or restricted? In a landmark case you will read about further into the study guide a media outlet lost a court case over censorship against Google and continues to claim unrightful censorship. Do social media platforms have the right to delete or restrict content of an opinion the company dislikes? Are some opinions more politically correct than others? In an age where social media is the be all end all of information, with many people not venturing

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outside of their news feeds to read news this kind of opinion silencing or censoring is dangerous. If social media platforms choose to censor certain opinion pieces or prefer certain opinion pieces they shape the viewpoints and ideas of their user base in an unrightful yet completely legal way. Or should opinion pieces just be discarded in favour of reliable, unbiased news? As I have written a few paragraphs earlier, such media is hard to find and with biased media ubiquitous, finding unbiased news sources is increasingly difficult.

The Committee on Information assembles at BRATMUN 2018 to hopefully solve these two difficult and divisive issues. You will be discussing the value of information, free speech and the right to be heard. This will in no way be an easy debate, so I hope you all will prepare adequately.

On a lighter note, I would like to remind you that even though we all will look tremendously serious with our formal clothes and polished speech, that MUN is not just something to look good on your resumé, but instead something to look at as an opportunity for personal growth and an opportunity to meet new people and forge life-long friendships. So please, do use your coffee breaks to the fullest.

I'm looking forward to our time in this committee.

Sincerely,

Samuel Šulovský

Chair of the Committee on Information

Committee on Information

At its 34th session, the General Assembly decided to maintain the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities, established under General Assembly resolution 33/115 C of 18 December 1978, which would be known as the Committee on Information.

In its resolution 34/182 of 18 December 1979, the General Assembly outlined the mandate of the Committee on Information as follows:

- To continue to examine United Nations public information policies and activities, in the light of the evolution of international relations, particularly during the past two decades, and of the imperatives of the establishment of the new international economic order and of a new world information and communication order;
- To evaluate and follow up the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications;
- To promote the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better-balanced dissemination of information and to make recommendations thereon to the General Assembly.

Topic Description

In the past years, many cases of alleged censorships have arisen in court (e.g. PragerU vs. YouTube) as well as struck the news (e.g. the case of Nasim Najafi Aghdam). Many content creators, activists and public figures feel discredited in discussing world news. As humanity stands afront the discussion of net neutrality, how should news outlets, independent content creators and people in general ensure that their voice will be heard in the global information world? How will the United Nations stand to ensure that global citizens have access to all information and can shape their own opinions?



Definition of key terms

Freedom of Speech or Freedom of Expression

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers"

Freedom of speech is a very important topic and is routinely discussed in the news. Many political activists on the right wing, especially in the USA routinely mention freedom of speech when talking about expressing their opinions online, I'm sure the committee will base its decisions and actions on this very definition above all others.

Censorship

Borrowing from Wikipedia, censorship is defined as "[Censorship] is the suppression of speech, public communication, or other information, on the basis that such material is considered objectionable, harmful, sensitive, or "inconvenient" as determined by a government or private institution, for example, corporate censorship."

Censorship is much more than just deleting opinions or views. Censorship can be labelled direct or indirect.

Direct censorship is a type of censorship which directly and completely obstructs or removes certain information or imagery, etc. Indirect censorship, also referred to as soft censorship, is much more common and more often viewed as harmless. Indirect censorship appears in a variety of different media and may purely relate to radio broadcasters being censored from using obscenities or discussing certain topics on air, for example to protect children or vulnerable groups.

Many countries provide protection against censorship, while many others utilise censorship in one way or another. Regardless of any laws regarding to censorship, none of the measures taken against censorship are absolute or all-encompassing. One specific case in which censorship is becoming alleged in the modern era is search engine preference and algorithmic preference. Advocates of these theories claim that algorithms on certain platforms, e.g. YouTube, Facebook, being controlled by their corporate owners, may be

subject to tampering. To put it simply, a corporation that creates their own algorithms to search and or process data may choose to tamper with the algorithm to impart bias on its decision making. In turn, this bias may be used to censor certain views and other data.

While this may sound as a sinister thought, it is common practice. Such censorship prevents, for example, child pornography from surfacing on these platforms.

Bias

Bias is a disproportionate treatment of one thing, person or group against another. Biases may be targeted at individuals, cultures, ethnic groups, sexual or gender identity, nationalities, social classes, political views or parties and many more. Bias can come in many forms and is inherent to society. A truly unbiased media is one that provides purely factual information and whose journalists have no stance to the given topic. Paraphrasing a response to a documentary on Unreported World about [the conning of young football players in Cameroon](#) “[...] To some degree you could feel [The reporter] wanted to help stop [the victim’s] mother losing money to a fraudster, but from another perspective he probably realised he (as a journalist) cannot get too involved and is primarily there to report on the issue, not fix the issue.” Such is the nature of unbiased journalism. I recommend further researching bias as a cognitive process.

With the influx of social media and news presence based on social media, opinion pieces have become more common than unbiased news pieces and some argue even the largest media companies are politically biased. The main division quoted is the [division between the media preferences of republicans and democrats in the USA](#). The study shows that people lean to news sources that support their views. Funnily enough though, news outlets should not support any viewpoint, as I have stated above.

This division is one that is very important to the topic on hand.

PragerU vs. Youtube

PragerU is an educational non-profit organisation that publishes videos on their Youtube channel. Recently, some of their videos have been placed into restricted mode, effectively censoring them from certain demographics. For example, they state that their videos are

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unable to be viewed on computers in public spaces that use restricted mode to prevent viewing pornography etc. They claim "Google dominates the internet search with over 75% of the market. If you disappear on Google, your ability to voice your opinion disappears too. You will be silenced..."

PragerU produces short educational videos on a multitude of topics. These videos are animated and narrated by a person who interacts with the animation. The narrator is a person knowledgeable in the field dealt with in the video and their list of narrators includes MIT, Stanford, Harvard professors, Pulitzer prize winners and many others.

After pressing for an official response from Google, Google stated "[...] at this time, your videos aren't appropriate for the younger audiences and hence they're not appearing in the restricted mode search results." PragerU goes on to claim this is as an act of censorship directly violating Google's own mission, which is, "[Our mission is] to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful." The case was dismissed after a judge found the case was not in violation of the First Amendment. To quote, "[...] presiding U.S. District Judge Lucy Koh ruled [Monday] that, inherently serving as a privacy company, Google has no obligation to equally apply its services, or in this case, its ostensible penalties."

Questions to consider

- What characteristics does an unbiased media source have to have?
- How would an unbiased media source report?
- How could an unbiased media source benefit the international community?
- Could unbiased media help solve current political divisions?
- Should social media companies be forced to remove bias from their search/display algorithms?



Recommended reading

- [PragerU vs. YouTube Complaint \(official document\)](#)
- [PragerU official YouTube channel](#)
- [PragerU case official response](#)
- I expect you to read your country's national newspaper/news networks
- Research how social media earn revenue and how they create algorithms



Closing remarks

You might be wondering why the study guide is so short. Plain and simple, I want you to do your own research. The study guide should serve as a basis for research and I want you, delegates, to bring information to the table, not to be spoon fed information through a study guide. After all, we talk about unbiased reporting and freedom of speech, so let us see how you yourselves find researching in this media climate. And above all, have fun you lot.

Finally, please note that the delegates are expected to send a position paper approximately in the length of 400 to 600 words no later than November 2nd to the email address coi.bratmun18@gmail.com. It should typically contain four sections: Background of Topic, Past International Actions, Country Policy, and Possible Solutions.

With all that said I'm looking forward to meeting you all and watch you discuss and debate this topic.

See you soon.

Samuel Šulovský
Chair of the Committee on Information