



Received: 21-04-2025
Accepted: 01-06-2025

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

ISSN: 2583-049X

Courts on TV: The Legal Issues Surrounding Recording Courtrooms

¹ Karim Salehi, ² Shoaib Sabbar

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Law, Shahrekord Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shahrekord, Iran

² MA in International Commercial Law, Azad University, Tehran, Iran

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62225/2583049X.2025.5.3.4424>

Corresponding Author: Shoaib Sabbar

Abstract

The public are always interested in following up courtroom procedures, particularly if it is about celebrities and public figures. Media organizations have developed numerous ways to send their camera crewmembers inside courts because they know the value of more eyeballs in the continuation of their life. However, how ethical, or legal, is to record court procedures and even broadcast them? This

article tries to investigate legal issues and dilemmas regarding recording courtrooms. We will explore the history of the presence of TV cameras in the American courts to see how not the law itself but the relentless zeal of the public to know what happen inside the trials that has always determined the presence of cameras inside the courts.

Keywords: Television, Trials, Televised Trials, Law

Introduction

The world is witnessing great changes, and these changes are comprehensible in the realm of performance of "identity", "boundary", "geographic concept" (place) and "time". Identities are now segmented, boundaries passed over, and places and time compressed. Television is one of the effective factors in making this happen. However, it seems like television, which itself is one of the evidences of globalization, has now acquired new characteristics. With a little care while reading texts related to globalization and media, we realize the four words "reality", "identity", "power" and "hyper-reality" are constantly repeated in these texts, and very few people doubt the close relationship between television and these topics (Hosseyonov & Zolghadr, 2013, 131-159)^[18].

The highly publicized trial of O.J. Simpson, his acquittal, and the role TV cameras played in that are still subject of many debates. Everything about the O.J. Simpson murder story was mega. The killing of Nicole Brown Simpson, and her friend was one of the most publicized murders in US history, and the subsequent trial of ex-footballer and movie star and media celebrity O. J. Simpson for homicide was called "the trial of the century." TV cameras made the courtroom spectacle the longest trial ever held in California (Kellner, 2003)^[20]. The mega-spectacle that was played to one of the largest audiences in TV history haunted the whole year of 1995. From the initial accounts of the double homicide in Nicole Simpson's Brentwood residence on the evening of June 12, 1994, the media zeroed in on the event, treating it as a major spectacle within media culture. Media narratives wield immense power in framing societal discourse, legitimizing or challenging institutional actions through selective representation (Emamzadeh & Sabbar, 2017)^[11]. Early reporting emphasized that Nicole Simpson was the spouse of O.J. Simpson, a celebrity and member of the football hall of fame. Contemporary research confirms that media platforms systematically reshape personal relationships into public narratives, privileging sensational elements over substantive truths (Nosrati *et al.*, 2023)^[32]. O.J. Simpson had first gained fame as a standout African American college football player at the University of Southern California and later had a stellar career as a professional running back with the Buffalo Bills. Following his retirement from football, he maintained his celebrity status through roles as a sports commentator, starring in widely seen Hertz TV advertisements, and featuring in TV shows and films like *The Naked Gun* series (Petrocelli & Knobler, 2016)^[36].

Interestingly, the media circus that enveloped the O.J. Simpson trial was a relatively recent phenomenon. Until the 1980s, American courtrooms largely forbade both television cameras and still photography. The trial became a high-profile event that touched on various sensitive issues, including race. While the legal team of O.J. Simpson initially claimed they would not introduce race as a factor in the trial, it inevitably became a focal point. This was due to Simpson's status as a well-known African American sports icon and celebrity, the racial background of the murder victims, and allegations of racial bias against

one of the key police officers, Mark Fuhrman (Gaines, 1995)^[13]. Moreover, the racial dimensions of the event were further underscored by varying perceptions among different racial groups. The sight of Simpson being handcuffed before any formal charges contributed to racial tensions, as did the dramatic chase involving Simpson on the LA freeway. This media framing reflects a well-documented pattern where powerful institutions shape narratives to serve predetermined agendas (Sarfi *et al.*, 2021)^[46]. Time magazine's choice to darken Simpson's mug shot on its cover after he was implicated only heightened the racial dynamics. These factors collectively contributed to pronounced racial divisions in public opinion regarding the O.J. Simpson trial (Kellner, 2003)^[20].

Three decades before, in 1954, Dr. Samuel Sheppard was found guilty of killing his wife, a verdict that was highly influenced by pervasive media coverage that prejudiced the community. Critics also pointed out that the trial judge's lenient approach towards the media contributed to a chaotic courtroom environment. A decade later, in 1964, the U.S. District Court of Ohio concluded, via a writ of habeas corpus, that Sheppard's trial had been unfair. However, this decision was overturned by the Court of Appeals in a split vote, leading the Supreme Court to take up the case. Ultimately, the Supreme Court determined that the trial judge's inability to shield the proceedings from damaging media exposure had compromised Sheppard's right to a fair trial, in line with the principles of due process. The Court emphasized that the courtroom failed to maintain the "judicial serenity and calm" that Sheppard was owed. This case, cited as *Sheppard v. Maxwell*, 384 U.S. 333 (1966), stands as a seminal instance illustrating the problematic impact of media interference on the judicial process (Heflin, 1977)^[16]. As a result of advancements in mass communication technology, there has been a notable rise in such disruptive influences on court proceedings in recent times. Recognizing this troubling trend, the Supreme Court, through its decision in the Sheppard case, offered guidelines aimed at mitigating prejudicial elements in future trials (Drechsel, 1989)^[10].

Long before the landmark 1960s Supreme Court rulings on the tension between a fair trial and freedom of the press, concerns were already prevalent about how media—particularly cameras and broadcasting equipment—could disrupt courtroom decorum. One seminal case that highlighted this issue was the 1935 trial of Bruno Hauptmann, accused of kidnapping and murdering Charles Lindbergh's young son. Despite the lapse of more than two years since the kidnapping, the courtroom was inundated with journalists and photographers, creating an environment that was often too chaotic for proper judicial proceedings. The media also generated an enormous amount of sensational publicity surrounding the case—precisely the kind of high-stakes narrative distortion that media literacy research warns can override factual accuracy and critical judgment (Soroori Sarabi *et al.*, 2020)^[52]. After Hauptmann's conviction and subsequent execution, a Special Committee on Cooperation between Press, Radio, and Bar was formed to develop standards for media conduct in judicial settings. In its conclusive report, the committee labeled the Hauptmann trial as an egregious example of inappropriate media interference and professional misconduct in American criminal law (Belmas, Shepard & Overbeck, 2017)^[3].

Reacting to the challenges posed by the Hauptmann trial and others like it, the American Bar Association (ABA) amended its Canons of Judicial Ethics in 1937 to discourage broadcasting and photography within courtrooms. Although these rules were later revised to permit more expansive television coverage, they initially set off a prolonged struggle between journalists and the judicial system for greater media access to courtrooms. These ABA rules served as guidelines rather than compulsory directives for both state and federal courts. Nevertheless, by the 1960s, every state—with the exceptions of Colorado and Texas—had implemented regulations largely prohibiting camera and broadcast coverage of court proceedings. Moreover, Rule 53 of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure was enacted in 1946, banning radio broadcasts and photography in federal courts. This rule was eventually extended to cover television broadcasting and further expanded to include restrictions on photography or broadcasting in the areas surrounding federal courtrooms. Such historical instances underscore the long-standing tension between maintaining the sanctity of the judicial process and upholding the principles of a free press. Over the decades, this tension has necessitated various forms of regulation and ethical guidelines to strike a balanced compromise (Belmas, Shepard & Overbeck, 2017)^[3].

The tension between media freedom and judicial propriety came to a legal climax in the 1965 Supreme Court case, *Estes v. Texas* (381 U.S. 532). The case revolved around Billie Sol Estes, a Texas grain dealer with political ties, who was convicted for defrauding a group of investors. This conviction was ultimately overturned by the Supreme Court, as the Court found that the media coverage during the preliminary hearing and portions of the actual trial was obtrusive and compromised Estes' right to a fair trial (Boyd Jr, 1977)^[4].

In particular, television crews had deployed bright lights and bulky equipment, leading to an atmosphere that could hardly be described as conducive for a fair judicial process. Although some restrictions were put in place before the actual trial commenced—confining television cameras to a booth at the back of the courtroom—the presence of media was palpably felt, casting a shadow over the proceedings. Five justices concurred that the intrusive media coverage had infringed upon Estes' right to a fair trial. Among them, four justices argued that the mere presence of television cameras inherently compromised a defendant's right to a fair trial. Justice John Marshall Harlan, the fifth justice in the majority opinion, offered a nuanced view, suggesting that while ordinary trials might potentially be televised, high-profile cases like Estes' should not be. Interestingly, the Court also speculated that future technological advancements could eventually render television cameras unintrusive enough to be deemed acceptable in a courtroom setting. This acknowledgment highlighted the Court's awareness that while current technology posed a threat to the sanctity of the judicial process, advancements could eventually reconcile the need for public access with the preservation of courtroom decorum and fairness (Boyd Jr, 1977)^[4]. The *Estes* case serves as an important milestone in American jurisprudence, illuminating the complexities and ethical considerations surrounding the integration of media coverage within the judicial system.

Ted Bundy's trial in 1979 was a watershed moment in American jurisprudence for a variety of reasons, not least of

which was the extensive television coverage it received. Bundy, a charming, articulate, and at times charismatic figure, was accused of a string of horrifying murders that had captivated the American public. The trial was held in Miami, Florida, and was among the first to be nationally televised. The presence of television cameras in the courtroom during the Bundy trial had both immediate and long-lasting implications for the American legal system, raising questions about the delicate balance between the First Amendment rights of the press and a defendant's Sixth Amendment right to a fair trial (Michaud & Aynesworth, 2000)^[26].

The use of television cameras in courtrooms had been a contentious issue, as exemplified by cases like *Estes v. Texas*. Critics worried that the media circus could distract from the gravitas of the proceedings and potentially bias the jury. The Bundy trial seemed to encapsulate all of these concerns. Media swarmed the area; the public was thoroughly engrossed, and the courtroom was charged with palpable tension. Despite the potential for prejudicial exposure, Bundy himself seemed to welcome the media attention, often playing to the cameras and even taking on some of his own defense, despite having legal representation. As the trial unfolded on national television, Americans were given an unprecedented look into the complexities of the legal process. Prosecutors presented harrowing evidence, including dental records and graphic photographs, all shared in real-time with a public not accustomed to such raw exposure to the mechanics of justice. Meanwhile, Bundy attempted to charm the court, often looking directly into the cameras and at times even cross-examining witnesses himself. The legal community was split on the media coverage's impact. Some believed it offered educational value and transparency, demonstrating the intricacies and challenges of the American justice system. Others felt it turned the courtroom into a theater, undermining the solemnity and decorum expected in such a setting (Nield, 2020)^[31].

Ultimately, Bundy was convicted and sentenced to death, but the debate over televised trials did not end with his case. Those in favor of televised coverage argued that the public had a right to see justice in action, an extension of the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of the press. Detractors, however, continued to argue that such exposure could compromise the judicial process, echoing the sentiments of earlier Supreme Court justices who worried about the impact of media on a defendant's right to a fair trial. The Ted Bundy trial set a precedent for how high-profile criminal cases could be covered in the media, but it also prompted ongoing debates that are far from settled even today. As technology continues to evolve, the tension between open access to court proceedings and the preservation of the integrity and fairness of the judicial system remains an ever-present concern. The Bundy case serves as an enduring symbol of this tension, encapsulating the ethical and legal dilemmas that emerge when the spectacle of media coverage collides with the solemnity of judicial proceedings.

By 1980, advances in broadcast technology, notably due to solid-state electronics, had made cameras more compact and less dependent on lighting than in the past. This shift led to a change in rules; an increasing number of states started to allow photographers and video crews in courtrooms. Around 10 states had rules that permitted televised coverage of trials

even without the defendant's agreement, a situation the *Estes* ruling would not have allowed in significant cases. This evolution signaled a need for an updated stance from the Supreme Court. In 1981, the Court did just that in the case of *Chandler v. Florida* (449 U.S. 560). Two police officers, Noel Chandler and Robert Granger, had been found guilty of committing burglary using their police equipment. Despite their objections, portions of their trial were televised, as Florida was testing televised coverage of criminal trials. The officers appealed, arguing that the TV coverage violated their right to a fair trial. The Court unanimously ruled against them, stating that the mere existence of television cameras in the courtroom doesn't inherently compromise a defendant's right to a fair trial. However, the Court left open the possibility for a defendant to prove otherwise in specific instances. The justices did not overturn Florida's experimental rule but indicated that states had the freedom to enact such rules if they chose. Chief Justice Warren Burger argued that an outright constitutional ban on televised coverage couldn't be justified solely based on the potential for prejudicial coverage. Burger underscored that defendants could challenge their convictions if they could prove actual prejudice from the media (Belmas, Shepard & Overbeck, 2017)^[3].

Burger pointed to the significant technological changes that had occurred since the 1960s to justify the Court's updated position. He clarified that the *Estes* case had not forbidden all camera experimentation in courts and noted that Chandler and Granger failed to demonstrate that their trial was unfairly influenced by the media presence. In the wake of the Chandler ruling, states already allowing media in courtrooms continued to do so, and additional states began to permit electronic and photographic coverage. Some even removed the requirement for defendant consent. While the Chandler case was undoubtedly a win for the media, it didn't grant them any exceptional rights to courtroom access. It merely stated that states could allow cameras if they saw fit and reiterated that defendants could seek a new trial if they proved that media exposure led to an unfair trial (Hughes, 1982)^[19].

The response to the Chandler decision came quickly. In 1982, the American Bar Association recognized the new trend and revised its rule which previously urged the states to impose severe restrictions on broadcast and photographic coverage of criminal trials. As rewritten, the rule says the states may allow judges to permit photographic coverage if certain safeguards are met. It specifies that the coverage must be "consistent with the right of the parties to a fair trial" and must be handled so that cameras "will be unobtrusive, will not distract trial participants, and will not otherwise interfere with the administration of justice." However, this rule is still voluntary and not all states adhere to it (Belmas, Shepard & Overbeck, 2017)^[3].

The federal court system has been notably resistant to the integration of cameras, standing out as the final significant exception. Yet, there has been escalating pressure from Congressional members and media advocates urging the federal courts to be more accommodating to electronic media. This institutional resistance reflects broader tensions in the digital age, where traditional governance structures face challenges from technological transformation and shifting power dynamics. Research on AI governance demonstrates how established institutions must navigate complex relationships between maintaining traditional

authority structures and adapting to technological realities that transcend conventional jurisdictional boundaries (Sharifipour Bgheshmi & Sharajsharifi, 2025) ^[45]. In 1990, U.S. Chief Justice William Rehnquist expressed an openness to the idea of cameras in federal courts, indicating he was "by no means averse to the idea." This stance starkly contrasted with that of former Chief Justice Warren Burger, who had firmly declared that cameras would gain entry into federal courts only "over my dead body" (Belmas, Shepard & Overbeck, 2017) ^[3].

The trial of Lyle and Erik Menéndez, the brothers convicted for the 1989 murders of their wealthy parents in Beverly Hills, became a significant cultural event in the early 1990s, not least because of the pervasive role played by television cameras in broadcasting the proceedings. Their trial, much like other high-profile cases of that era, reflected the burgeoning influence of media, especially television, on the American judicial system and the public's perception of it (Sittenauer, 1995) ^[50]. Cameras were allowed in the courtroom and they created an immense effect after Erik's emotional claim that he had been molested by his father.

In 1991, the U.S. federal judiciary embarked on a three-year trial, permitting cameras in two U.S. Courts of Appeals and six federal district courts. However, this experiment was limited to civil trials and appellate proceedings, excluding criminal cases. This initiative was extended for an additional year until 1994 by the U.S. Judicial Conference. Yet, after 1994, the conference chose not to prolong the initiative or institutionalize it. Consequently, the presence of cameras in the vast majority of federal court processes was once more restricted. This stance saw a slight revision in 1996 when the Judicial Conference introduced regulations that granted each federal appellate court the discretion to decide on allowing cameras during appellate proceedings (Belmas, Shepard & Overbeck, 2017) ^[3].

The trial of Timothy McVeigh for the Oklahoma City bombing, which occurred on April 19, 1995, remains one of the most pivotal events in the history of American justice, both legally and in the realm of media coverage. The act itself, the detonation of a truck bomb outside the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, led to the death of 168 people, including 19 children, and left hundreds more injured. McVeigh was apprehended shortly after the bombing and eventually charged with conspiracy and the use of a weapon of mass destruction, among other charges. Given the gravity of the crime and its profound national impact, it was a prime candidate for extensive media scrutiny, raising questions about the potential influence of publicity on the proceedings and the accused's right to a fair trial. In order to protect McVeigh's right to a fair trial, the trial was moved from Oklahoma City to Denver, Colorado. The intention was to find a venue where jurors would be less influenced by pretrial publicity and the emotional toll the bombing had taken on Oklahoma City. However, despite these precautions, the demand for public and media access to the trial was overwhelming. While cameras were not allowed in the courtroom, the trial was still closely followed through traditional reporting means, and a closed-circuit television feed was set up in Oklahoma City to allow survivors and family members of the victims to watch the proceedings (Rapping, 2003) ^[39].

At the time, some legal experts and commentators feared that the media attention would jeopardize McVeigh's right to a fair trial. However, Judge Richard P. Matsch, who

presided over the trial, implemented strict controls to ensure the proceedings were conducted with the highest level of integrity. Media credentials were carefully vetted, and a pool system was implemented for journalists to share information, thus minimizing the number of reporters inside the courtroom at any given time. Moreover, Judge Matsch maintained a no-nonsense courtroom demeanor, frequently admonishing attorneys for both the defense and prosecution when he felt they were grandstanding or veering off course. This strict judicial oversight contributed to a trial that was viewed as being largely fair and well-conducted, despite the massive public interest (Thomas, 1997) ^[53].

Interestingly, the McVeigh trial was one of the earliest tests of how the media, especially television, could cover a major criminal trial in the modern era without necessarily impeding the defendant's right to due process. While the Court was cautious about media access, acknowledging that the omnipresence of cameras could be detrimental to the judicial process, the proceedings illustrated that a middle ground could be achieved between public demand for transparency and the necessity for judicial propriety. The McVeigh trial serves as a case study in the complex relationship between media and the American justice system. It emphasized that while public interest and media coverage of court proceedings are inherent to the principles of a democratic society, they must be balanced with the constitutional imperative of a fair trial. In doing so, it set a precedent for managing high-profile trials in the age of mass communication, offering lessons that remain relevant today (Sloviter, 1997) ^[51].

By the first decade of the 21st century, every state in the U.S. permitted either television or still photographic coverage of certain judicial proceedings. South Dakota was the last to join this trend, with its state supreme court deciding in 2001 to allow both video and audio coverage of oral arguments. Nevertheless, only 41 states permit cameras during criminal trials, as opposed to appellate court cases. Even within these 41 states, a few only allow camera presence if the defendant consents, which is infrequently the case. Some states have such stringent regulations that they essentially prohibit cameras in the majority of trial courts. Conversely, in at least 35 states, the decision to allow cameras lies with the trial judges, even if the defendant opposes their presence (Belmas, Shepard & Overbeck, 2017) ^[3].

The trial of Michael Jackson, famously known as the "King of Pop," remains one of the most sensationalized legal events of the early 21st century. Being himself a product of media, Jackson had achieved sales of over 750 million records globally. He produced eight albums that went platinum or achieved multiplatinum status, along with 13 top singles, and 47 songs that made it to the Billboard Hot 100. He earned 13 Grammy Awards and got two inductions into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (once with the Jackson 5 and once as a solo performer). He was honored with the American Music Awards' Artist of the Century Award. His 1982 record, *Thriller*, holds the record as the highest-selling original album ever, closely rivaled by the Eagles' *Greatest Hits* compilation. The "Guinness Book of World Records" recognizes him as the Most Accomplished Entertainer in history (Mtv., 2009) ^[30]. Accused of multiple counts of child molestation, now Jackson had to experience another media fever, albeit in a different angle, and his legal team navigated a trial process that was as much about the

allegations at hand as it was about the global superstar's public image. One of the most influential elements in this legal saga was the presence and role of TV cameras, which had profound implications for the trial's conduct, public discourse, and the broader intersection of celebrity with the judicial process (Gomez-Barris & Gray, 2006)^[14]. From the outset, the allegations against Jackson drew an unprecedented level of public interest. Every development, statement, or piece of evidence became breaking news in what researchers describe as a 'media-saturated environment' - a context where media literacy skills are essential for separating factual reporting from sensationalism (Sakhaei *et al.*, 2023)^[44]. This challenge has become even more complex in the digital age, where AI-generated content and algorithmic curation can amplify sensationalism while obscuring factual accuracy, highlighting the urgent need for critical AI literacy frameworks that prepare citizens to navigate algorithmically-mediated information environments (Khodabin *et al.*, 2024)^[23]. The world's media outlets, sensing the immense public intrigue, stationed themselves outside the Santa Barbara County courthouse, turning it into a near-constant media hub. While cameras weren't allowed inside the courtroom, the daily recaps and analyses of the trial's proceedings dominated news cycles. These segments became a primary source of information for millions, framing the narrative and intricacies of the case for those not privy to the courtroom's proceedings (Epstein & Steinberg, 2007)^[12].

This spotlight, facilitated by TV cameras, played a significant role in shaping public perception. Media framing consistently demonstrates how selective emphasis on specific visual and narrative elements reconstructs reality for audiences, privileging dramatic interpretations over complex truths (Kharazmi & Mohammadi, 2020)^[21]. How Jackson appeared, the people he was with, his demeanor – every detail was scrutinized. The media's choice of which moments to highlight and which to downplay inevitably influenced public opinion. A frail Jackson, contrasted against assertive moments from his legal team, painted a multifaceted picture of the star. Such images, broadcasted globally, fed into discussions, debates, and speculations about Jackson's innocence, health, and state of mind (Whannel, 2010)^[56].

Beyond the specifics of the trial, the omnipresent TV cameras highlighted the spectacle that often surrounds celebrity trials. Jackson was no ordinary defendant; his global stardom meant that every aspect of the trial was amplified. Fans from across the world congregated outside the courtroom, their vigils, dances, and vocal support for Jackson turning the trial into a larger-than-life event. Research confirms such spectacles demand robust public media literacy to maintain the boundary between entertainment and justice (Sakhaei *et al.*, 2024)^[45]. This convergence of fandom and serious legal proceedings, all captured on camera, underscored the complexities of trying a global icon. New research reveals how such mediated spectacles can systematically reshape public understanding of judicial processes, conditioning audiences to expect entertainment rather than sober justice (Zamani *et al.*, 2021)^[60]. The line between entertainment and solemn judicial process seemed to blur, raising questions about the nature of celebrity trials in the age of round-the-clock media coverage. Millions of viewers tuned in to watch the not-guilty verdicts in Michael Jackson's child molestation trial,

although the ratings didn't reach record-breaking levels. Nielsen Media Research reported that from 1:43 p.m., when broadcasts began showing Jackson's vehicle heading to the courthouse, until 3 p.m., an average of 30.6 million people were watching. Of this audience, 28.1 million chose to view the verdicts on one of the 11 English-speaking networks that covered the event. This included major networks like ABC, CBS, and NBC, as well as all-news cable channels like Fox News Channel, CNN, MSNBC, and Headline News. Additionally, Court TV, E! Entertainment, and two MTV channels provided coverage. On the other hand, nearly 2.5 million opted to watch the proceedings on Spanish networks Univision and Telemundo (Collins, 2005)^[7].

Casey Marie Anthony's trial in 2011, concerning the disappearance and death of her two-year-old daughter, Caylee, was one of the most intensely followed court proceedings in recent U.S. history. Broadcast in its entirety, the trial's daily proceedings were the subject of widespread media attention, and the role of TV cameras inside the courtroom became central to public discourse surrounding the case. The trial, often referred to as the "social media trial of the century," showcased how TV cameras could influence public opinion, the conduct of a trial, and broader perceptions of the justice system (Moran, 2019)^[28]. The presence of TV cameras allowed the public to witness the trial firsthand. This unfiltered access provided viewers an opportunity to draw their conclusions based on evidence, testimonies, and the behavior of those involved. However, this accessibility demands sophisticated media literacy skills to properly evaluate the flood of information and distinguish factual reporting from sensationalized narratives (Arsalani *et al.*, 2025)^[2]. The transparency offered by such direct coverage was seen by many as a way to ensure the public's trust in the judicial process (Carson, *et al.*, 2016)^[6]. While TV cameras allowed for direct transmission of court proceedings, they also turned the trial into a daily spectacle. The complexity of managing public understanding in such mediatized environments underscores broader challenges in technology-mediated communication, where effective engagement requires comprehensive literacy spanning technical, ethical, and critical thinking dimensions (Khodabin *et al.*, 2022)^[24]. News outlets provided round-the-clock coverage, and nightly TV shows dissected the day's events, often with panels of legal experts, former prosecutors, and defense attorneys. The continuous coverage created a relentless news cycle where every detail, no matter how minute, became a point of discussion, debate, and speculation (Burton, 2019)^[5]. The TV coverage had a profound impact on shaping public perception. New media dramatically changed the way things had been done previously (Shahghasemi, *et al.*, 2023; Sarfi, Nosrati & Sabzali, in press)^[49, 47]. How Casey Anthony appeared, the way witnesses responded, the reactions of the gallery - every detail was scrutinized and became a topic of water-cooler conversations across the nation. Surveys and polls were conducted regularly to gauge public opinion on the guilt or innocence of Anthony, with results often swayed by the most recent televised testimonies or revelations. The constant presence of TV cameras placed immense pressure on everyone involved. From the judge ensuring decorum and fairness in a fishbowl environment to the attorneys adjusting strategies based on public reactions, the cameras influenced the trial's conduct. Witnesses, too, were aware of the millions watching, potentially affecting their testimonies

and demeanor. The televised trial stirred debates about the justice system in the age of mass media. As research demonstrates, such high-profile cases reveal society's pressing need for critical media engagement skills to properly contextualize emotionally charged content (Hosseini *et al.*, 2025) [17]. Questions arose about whether a fair trial is possible when proceedings are broadcast to millions and whether public opinion can unduly influence the outcome. Casey Anthony's trial also blurred the lines between a legal proceeding and a reality show, with Anthony, unintentionally, at the epicenter of this media storm. When Casey Anthony was found not guilty of first-degree murder (though convicted on four counts of providing false information to law enforcement), the verdict led to an immediate and visceral reaction from the public (Mann, 2011) [25]. TV cameras captured massive gatherings outside the courtroom, with many individuals expressing shock and anger. This media spectacle mirrors how international film festivals frame sociopolitical critiques—where contested representations reveal societal tensions rather than defamatory intent (Sabbar *et al.*, 2023) [40]. The role of the media was both lauded for its transparency and criticized for its potential influence on the trial's outcome.

In 2006, during a Senate session, Justice David Souter expressed his reservations about introducing cameras into the Supreme Court. Similarly, Justice Anthony Kennedy voiced analogous concerns in his 2007 address to Congress, albeit with a different choice of words. Yet, the trend of Supreme Court justices giving televised interviews has increased notably since John G. Roberts assumed the position of chief justice. Antonin Scalia, who in 2003 declined media presence at an award ceremony recognizing his defense of freedom of speech, conversely participated in numerous media interactions in the years 2007 and 2008. Furthermore, Roberts had conversations about potentially permitting cameras inside the Supreme Court with members from the Radio Television News Directors Association.

In a notable incident from 2012, two senators, heading the Judiciary Committee, drafted a letter to the Supreme Court. They urged the justices to allow the televising of their verdict on the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, commonly known as “Obamacare”. The senators, Patrick Leahy from Vermont and Charles Grassley from Iowa, emphasized to Chief Justice Roberts the immense public interest and the constitutional implications surrounding the case (Belmas, Shepard & Overbeck, 2017) [3].

C-SPAN, in their spring 2012 survey, revealed that a staggering 95% of Americans were in favor of the Court adopting a more open and transparent stance. However, the possibility of cameras entering the Supreme Court in the foreseeable future seems bleak. The year 2013 saw opposition from four justices. While Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan had once shown a semblance of agreement towards the idea during their confirmation hearings, their perspectives have since shifted. Sotomayor, during an interview with Charlie Rose, mentioned that most viewers might not immerse themselves in the intricate legal details, which might compromise their understanding of the court's actions. Similarly, Justices Stephen Breyer and Anthony Kennedy expressed skepticism during a House Appropriations Committee subpanel meeting. Breyer warned about the potential misuse of images on prime-time television, suggesting that it could lead to distorted representations and consequently making justices more

cautious in their expressions (Belmas, Shepard & Overbeck, 2017) [3].

During the session on March 15, 2016, the Judicial Conference reviewed a report from the CACM Committee. The committee concurred to abstain from suggesting any alterations to the Conference policy during that particular session. Collaborating with the Judicial Conference, the Ninth Circuit Judicial Council granted permission to the three districts within the Ninth Circuit that had been part of the camera trial (California Northern, Washington Western, and Guam) to extend the pilot program. This extension aimed to provide the CACM with more extensive data and insights. The standing policy regarding cameras in trial courts was as follows:

Judges have the discretion to allow the broadcasting, television coverage, recording, or photography within the courtroom and its nearby areas during ceremonies like investitures or naturalizations. Furthermore, judges can permit such activities in the courtroom or its proximate areas during different sessions, or during breaks in those sessions, exclusively:

- 1) for the presentation of evidence;
- 2) for the perpetuation of the record of the proceedings;
- 3) for security purposes;
- 4) for other purposes of judicial administration;
- 5) for the photographing, recording, or broadcasting of appellate arguments; or
- 6) in accordance with pilot programs approved by the Judicial Conference.

When such broadcasting, televising, recording, or photography is allowed in the courtroom or its neighboring spaces, judges must ensure it:

- 1) be consistent with the rights of the parties,
- 2) not unduly distract participants in the proceeding, and
- 3) not otherwise interfere with the administration of justice (United States Courts, n.d.).

Discussion

The debate over whether television cameras should be allowed in courtrooms has persisted for decades. On one side of the argument is the democratic ideal of transparency and the public's right to know, which argues for broadcasting court proceedings to ensure that justice is not only done but seen to be done. On the other side are concerns about potential disruptions, the rights and privacy of those involved, and the potential for proceedings to be sensationalized. Allowing cameras into the courtroom would serve the principle of open justice. Courts are public institutions, funded by taxpayer dollars, and as such, their workings should be transparent and accessible to the public. Broadcasting trials can provide an educational function, demystifying the judicial process and ensuring the public remains informed about crucial legal decisions that might affect society at large. The presence of cameras can also act as a deterrent, discouraging potential judicial misconduct or bias, as judges and attorneys are aware that their actions and decisions are under public scrutiny.

Moreover, in an age dominated by digital communication, there's an argument to be made that restricting cameras is anachronistic. Internet is widespread and each day a new public entity or service becomes online (Sarfi, Nosrati & Sabzali, 2021; Nosrati *et al.*, 2020) [46, 33]. However, research on digital transformation in other sectors demonstrates that

successful technology adoption requires not just infrastructure, but also institutional readiness, strategic planning, and comprehensive digital literacy training across all organizational levels (Khodabin *et al.*, 2023) ^[22]. Virtual education has become a critical tool in ensuring that every individual has access to high-quality education, with the United Nations and UNESCO emphasizing its role in promoting sustainable development and addressing global challenges, including environmental sustainability (Dastyar *et al.*, 2023) ^[9]. Moreover, studies show that increased access to global communication channels positively correlates with civic awareness and behavioral engagement, reinforcing the notion that media exposure can play a pivotal role in shaping public responsibility and ethical actions (Mousavi & Dariush, 2019) ^[29]. Other public institutions, from legislative bodies to city council meetings, are routinely broadcasted. The architecture of media dissemination systems fundamentally shapes public understanding of institutional processes, with technological capabilities determining the scope and quality of civic engagement (Mohammadi & Kharazmi, 2021) ^[27]. Why should courts be the exception? By leveraging modern technology, courts can reach a broader audience, ensuring that citizens, regardless of their location, can witness the judicial process in action. Similarly, as demonstrated in other institutional settings—such as higher education—the successful incorporation of new technologies requires more than just technical capability or broad access. It also depends on institutional readiness, stakeholder support, and well-crafted ethical frameworks to manage challenges related to privacy, bias, and professional adaptation (Rahmatian & SharajSharifi, 2021) ^[37].

Overall, we should note, that these benefits do not come without potential drawbacks. However, the primary concern is the impact on the participants in the trial. Interestingly, recent research also suggests that intrinsic factors like personal ambition may outweigh socioeconomic constraints in determining motivation, indicating that external pressure—like media presence—might not uniformly affect all individuals in high-stakes environments (Dariush *et al.*, 2017) ^[8]. The presence of cameras can exert undue pressure on witnesses, making them more reluctant to testify or less likely to be candid (Goodman *et al.*, 1998) ^[15]. Studies reveal that individuals under observation experience heightened stress levels that can negatively impact their performance and willingness to participate fully in proceedings (Toosi, 2025) ^[54]. It can also affect the behavior of attorneys, judges, and even jurors, who might play to the camera rather than focusing solely on the facts and legal arguments. There's a real risk of trials turning into media circuses, detracting from the solemnity and importance of the proceedings. Some commentators object that sensational trials could dominate news cycles, focusing public attention on lurid details rather than substantive legal issues. This can lead to skewed public perceptions, where high-profile cases receive disproportionate attention, while equally important but less "newsworthy" cases are overlooked. Research shows this mediated exposure creates psychological effects parallel to other high-visibility environments, where constant scrutiny compromises mental well-being through distorted reality perception (Nosraty *et al.*, 2021) ^[34]. Such challenges mirror institutional adaptation patterns across sectors, where technology integration remains uneven and fraught with ethical, infrastructural, and preparedness

concerns, demanding adaptive and inclusive reforms (Rahmatian & SharajSharifi, 2022) ^[38]. Another significant concern is the potential violation of privacy. Organizational research also suggests that the mental and physical well-being of individuals directly influences institutional performance, underlining the need for policies that not only promote transparency but also protect the health of all participants (Zamani *et al.*, 2025) ^[59]. Not all individuals involved in a trial – be they witnesses, jurors, or even the accused – have voluntarily entered the public eye. The psychological toll of being forced to perform identity under societal scrutiny mirrors the pressures documented in performance-driven industries (Nosraty *et al.*, 2020) ^[35]. Broadcasting their faces and testimonies can lead to unintended and lasting consequences, from public judgment to potential harm. There's also the potential for misinterpretation. Edited clips from trials, devoid of full context, can circulate on social media, leading to misinformation (see for example (see for example Shahghasemi, 2019; Zohouri *et al.*, 2020; Zohouri *et al.*, 2021; Sabzali *et al.*, 2022) ^[48, 57, 58, 42]. These challenges mirror the broader need for critical thinking skills when engaging with media content, particularly when high-stakes legal proceedings become public spectacles (Arsalani *et al.*, 2022) ^[1]. Weighing these opposing perspectives, the decision to allow TV cameras in courtrooms should be approached with caution and nuance, especially at a time that "mass of media" (that is myriads of digital devices in the hands of billions of people) can have a much greater impact than "mass media" (Sabbar & Matheson 2019) ^[41]. Instead of an all-or-nothing approach, a middle-ground solution can be sought. Cameras might be permitted, but with strict guidelines in place. For instance, sensitive testimonies could be off-limits for broadcasting, and judges could retain the discretion to turn off cameras if they feel the proceedings are being disrupted. Alternatively, instead of live broadcasts, recorded summaries of trials could be aired, ensuring that the public remains informed without turning trials into real-time spectacles.

References

1. Arsalani A, Sakhaei S, Zamani M. ICT for children: The continuous need for media literacy. *Socio-Spatial Studies*. 2022; 6(1):1-11. Doi: 10.22034/soc.2022.211944
2. Arsalani A, Rahmatian F, Hosseini SH. Media literacy for business personnel: A strategic approach for better efficiency. *Code, Cognition & Society*. 2025; 1(1).
3. Belmas G, Shepard J, Overbeck W. *Major principles of media law*. Nelson Education, 2017.
4. Boyd Jr JA. Cameras in Court: *Estes v. Texas* and Florida's One Year Pilot Program. *U. Miami L. Rev*. 1977; 32:815.
5. Burton T. Courtroom cameras and the Casey Anthony trial. *Orlando Sentinel*, April 5, 2019. <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/2011/05/16/courtroom-cameras-and-the-casey-anthony-trial/>
6. Carson V, Hunter S, Kuzik N, Gray CE, Poitras VJ, Chaput JP, *et al.* Systematic review of sedentary behaviour and health indicators in school-aged children and youth: An update. *Applied physiology, nutrition, and metabolism*. 2016; 41(6):S240-S265.
7. Collins S, S C. 30.6 million watched, but total was no record, *Los Angeles Times*, 2005. Available at:

- <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2005-jun-15-et-ratings15-story.html> (Accessed: 12 October 2023).
8. Dariush B, Dastyar F, Dastyar M. A Study on Socio-economic status Effects on Private Universities Architecture Students' Educational Motivation. *Socio-Spatial Studies*. 2017; 1(1):1-22
 9. Dastyar M, Dariush B, Dastyar F. Virtual Education, a Complementary Element of the Puzzle of Holistic Education in The Relationship Between Humans and Environment or Iranian Citizens. *Journal of Cyberspace Studies*. 2023; 7(2):237-252. Doi: 10.22059/jcss.2023.356702.1088
 10. Drechsel RE. An Alternative View of Media-Judiciary Relations: What the Non-Legal Evidence Suggests About the Fair Trial-Free Press Issue. *Hofstra L. Rev.* 1989; 18:1.
 11. Emamzadeh Z, Sabbar S. How Can Cinema Justify Wars-A Qualitative Study on War Justification in American Cinema. *J. Pol. & L.* 2017; 10:18.
 12. Epstein D, Steinberg DL. The face of ruin: Evidentiary spectacle and the trial of Michael Jackson. *Social Semiotics*. 2007; 17(4):441-458.
 13. Gaines Jr SO. OJ Simpson, Mark Fuhrman, and the moral "low ground" of ethnic/race relations in the United States. *The Black Scholar*. 1995; 25(4):46.
 14. Gomez-Barris M, Gray H. Michael Jackson, television, and post-op disasters. *Television & New Media*. 2006; 7(1):40-51.
 15. Goodman GS, Tobey AE, Batterman-Faunce JM, Orcutt H, Thomas S, Shapiro C, *et al.* Face-to-face confrontation: Effects of closed-circuit technology on children's eyewitness testimony and jurors' decisions. *Law and human behavior*. 1998; 22:165-203.
 16. Heflin HT. Fair Trial v. Free Press: Time for a Rehearing. *Judicature*. 1977; 61:154.
 17. Hosseini SH, Nosraty N, Tomraee S. Children, Healthy Lifestyle and Media Literacy. *Journal of Cyberspace Studies*. 2025; 9(1):1-23. Doi: 10.22059/jcss.2024.387609.1120
 18. Hosseynov S, Zolghadr Hf. RIPH: A Model for Representing the Reality in the Global and Local Television. *Journal of Iranian Cultural Research*. 2013; 5(4):131-159. Doi: 10.7508/ijcr.2012.20.006
 19. Hughes RL. Chandler v. Florida: Cameras get probation in courtrooms. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*. 1982; 26(1):431-444.
 20. Kellner D. Media spectacle. Psychology Press, 2003.
 21. Kharazmi Z, Mohammadi S. Persian-Language Media Overseas as the Western Tools of Public Diplomacy: Framing COVID-19 Pandemics in Iran by VOA and BBC. *Journal of World Sociopolitical Studies*. 2020; 4(1):1-36.
 22. Khodabin M, Zibaei F, Piriyaee F. AI literacy and digital readiness in Iranian media. *Journal of Cyberspace Studies*. 2023; 7(2).
 23. Khodabin M, Sharifipour Bgheshmi MS, Movahedzadeh F. Critical AI literacy: Preparing learners for algorithmic societies. *Journal of Cyberspace Studies*. 2024; 8(2).
 24. Khodabin M, Sharifipour Bgheshmi MS, Piriyaee F, Zibaei F. Mapping the landscape of AI literacy: An integrative review. *Socio-Spatial Studies*. 2022; 6(1).
 25. Mann C. Casey Anthony lawyer asks that cameras be barred from trial. CBS News, April 18, 2011. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/casey-anthony-lawyer-asks-that-cameras-be-barred-from-trial/>
 26. Michaud SG, Aynesworth H. Ted Bundy: Conversations with a killer. Authorlink, 2000.
 27. Mohammadi S, Kharazmi Z. The Remote Higher Education over COVID-19 Pandemic: The Case Study of Provisions and Priorities of the University of Tehran's Official Website. *Journal of World Sociopolitical Studies*. 2021; 5(2):255-294.
 28. Moran R. Casey Anthony and the social media trial. *Women Leading Change: Case Studies on Women, Gender, and Feminism*. 2019; 4(1).
 29. Mousavi SY, Dariush B. The effect of communication globalization on citizen's tendencies towards environment protection: Case study of Tehran citizens. *Socio-Spatial Studies*. 2019; 3(5):66-77. Doi: 10.22034/soc.2019.84454
 30. Mtv. Michael Jackson's Groundbreaking Career, By The Numbers. MTV, June 26, 2009. <https://www.mtv.com/news/0ths0k/michael-jacksons-groundbreaking-career-by-the-numbers>
 31. Nield MN. Charming Child-Snatchers: Forming the Bogeyman in The Pied Piper, Peter Pan, and The Ted Bundy Tapes. Brigham Young University, 2020.
 32. Nosrati S, Sabzali M, Arsalani A, Darvishi M, Aris S. Partner choices in the age of social media: Are there significant relationships between following influencers on Instagram and partner choice criteria? *Revista De Gestão E Secretariado*. 2023; 14(10):19191-19210. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.7769/gesec.v14i10.3022>
 33. Nosrati S, Sabzali M, Heidari A, Sarfi T. Chatbots, counselling, and discontents of the digital life. *Journal of Cyberspace Studies*. 2020; 4(2):153-172. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.22059/jcss.2020.93910>
 34. Nosraty N, Sakhaei S, Rezaei R. The impact of social media on mental health: A critical examination. *Socio-Spatial Studies*. 2021; 5(1):101-11. Doi: 10.22034/soc.2021.212042
 35. Nosraty N, Tomraee S, Zamani M. Beauty business in Iran: Does beauty make you healthy? *Socio-Spatial Studies*. 2020; 4(1):1-11. Doi: 10.22034/soc.2020.211920
 36. Petrocelli D, Knobler P. Triumph of Justice: Closing the Book on the OJ Simpson Saga. Graymalkin Media, 2016.
 37. Rahmatian F, SharajSharifi M. Artificial intelligence in MBA education: Perceptions, ethics, and readiness among Iranian graduates. *Socio-Spatial Studies*. 2021; 5(1).
 38. Rahmatian F, SharajSharifi M. Reimagining MBA education in the age of artificial intelligence: A meta-synthesis. *Socio-Spatial Studies*. 2022; 6(1).
 39. Rapping E. Law and Justice as Seen on TV. In *Law and Justice as Seen on TV*. New York University Press, 2003.
 40. Sabbar S, Hosseini R, Nosrati S, Sarfi T, Sabzali M. Sociopolitical problems on the screens of film festivals: A qualitative content analysis of recent Iranian and South Korean award-winning films. *Positif Journal*. 2023; 23(6):56-79.
 41. Sabbar S, Matheson D. Mass media vs. the mass of media: A study on the human nodes in a social network and their chosen messages. *Journal of Cyberspace Studies*. 2019; 3(1):23-42. Doi: 1105

- 10.22059/jcss.2019.271467.1031
42. Sabzali M, Sarfi M, Zohouri M, Sarfi T, Darvishi M. Fake News and Freedom of Expression: An Iranian Perspective. *Journal of Cyberspace Studies*. 2022; 6(2):205-218. Doi: 10.22059/jcss.2023.356295.1087
 43. Sharifipour Bgheshmi MS, Sharajsharifi M. Managing the crisis: AI and the demise of national sovereignty? *Journal of World Sociopolitical Studies*. 2025; 9(3).
 44. Sakhaei S, Aarsalani A, Nosraty N. Media Literacy for Children: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Cyberspace Studies*. 2023; 7(2):277-298. Doi: 10.22059/jcss.2023.101606
 45. Sakhaei S, Soroori Sarabi A, Alinouri S. Teaching IT Use to Elderly: A Media Literacy Solution. *Journal of Cyberspace Studies*. 2024; 8(2):295-316. Doi: 10.22059/jcss.2024.101608
 46. Sarfi T, Nosrati S, Sabzali M. The new celebrity economy in cyberspace. *Journal of Cyberspace Studies*. 2021; 5(2):203-228. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.22059/jcss.2021.93903>
 47. Sarfi T, Nosrati S, Sabzali M. Trust, Information, and COVID-19 Conspiracy Theories: Cross-Cultural Implications for Crisis Management and Public Health. *Migration Letters*, in press.
 48. Shahghasemi E. Dumbing Down or Reaching Out? Facebook in Kurdistan and Nasser Razazi. *International Conference on Future of Social Sciences and Humanities*, Warsaw, 2019. Doi: <https://www.doi.org/10.33422/fshconf.2019.06.342>
 49. Shahghasemi E, Sabbar S, Zohouri M, Sabzali M. New Communication Technologies and the Demise of 'Natural' Education. *Digitalization and Society Symposium*, Istanbul, 2023.
 50. Sittenauer TH. Television Cameras Ever-Present in the Courtroom. *Women Law. J.* 1995; 82:6.
 51. Sloviter DK. If courts are open, must cameras follow. *Hofstra L. Rev.* 1997; 26:873.
 52. Soroori Sarabi A, Aarsalani A, Toosi R. Risk management at hazardous jobs: A new media literacy? *Socio-Spatial Studies*. 2020; 4(1):13-24. Doi: 10.22034/soc.2020.212126
 53. Thomas J. After 2 Years, Bombing Trial Is Set to Begin. *The New York Times*, 1997.
 54. Toosi R. A survey examination of psychological support in the workplace. *Journal of Cyberspace Studies*. 2025; 9(2).
 55. United States Courts. History of cameras, broadcasting, and remote public access in courts, n.d. Retrieved October 13, 2023 from: <https://www.uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts/judicial-administration/cameras-courts/history-cameras-broadcasting-and-remote>
 56. Whannel G. News, celebrity, and vortextuality: A study of the media coverage of the Michael Jackson verdict. *Cultural Politics*. 2010; 6(1):65-84.
 57. Zohouri M, Darvishi M, Sarfi M. Slacktivism: A critical evaluation. *Journal of Cyberspace Studies*. 2020; 4(2):173-188. Doi: [HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.22059/JCSS.2020.93911](https://doi.org/10.22059/JCSS.2020.93911)
 58. Zohouri M, Darvishi M, Sarfi M, Nosrati S, Zamani M. Google's University? An exploration of academic influence on the tech hiant's propaganda. *Journal of Cyberspace Studies*. 2021; 5(2):181-202. Doi: [HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.22059/JCSS.2021.93901](https://doi.org/10.22059/JCSS.2021.93901)
 59. Zamani M, Nosraty N, Soroori Sarabi A. Towards a business healthy lifestyle: Reducing risks while increasing efficiency? *Code, Cognition & Society*. 2025; 1(1).
 60. Zamani M, Nourbakhsh Y, Nayebe H. Presenting a pattern for promoting social health through social networks (Case study: Instagram social network). *New Media Studies*. 2021; 7(28):42-1. Doi: 10.22054/nms.2022.63698.1277