

7th Grade

1st Place

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Q: Suppose that jurors are using their cell phones to Google for background information while serving on jury duty. Should jurors in Michigan be allowed to use electronic communications during a trial?

Flash... Click... Flash! News reporters are surrounding the court house, attacking anyone entering or leaving the premises, firing questions left and right. The trial has the full attention of the news media. The jury is bombarded with conjecture about the trial. Reporters are able to drum their prejudices against the accused into the minds of the jury. The jurors are influenced by the voices of others. They are no longer impartial to the crime in question. In order to keep biased information away from the jury, any form of electronic communication, including Googling background information about the accused, should be banned during a trial.

Our Pledge of Allegiance ends with the lines, "...with liberty and justice for all." Everyone has the right to justice, whether innocent or guilty. We all have the right to a fair trial with an impartial jury. Nobody should be denied this right. In England and in the American colonies, the King had the right to interfere in the jury's decisions. Our Founding Fathers thought this unfair, so the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution was created. When a jury receives information from outside of the court, they are no longer impartial. If the accused is prosecuted, they were convicted under the inadequate use of information. The jury should not be manipulated; the final verdict must always remain impartial.

July 4, 1954, when most Americans would be celebrating Independence Day, a pregnant Marilyn Sheppard was brutally beaten to death. Her husband, Sam Sheppard was accused of her murder. A "media circus" surrounded the trial's proceedings. Before the jurors started deliberations, they were available to all of the news media. Sam Sheppard filed for habeas corpus, arguing that his trial was unfair. He appealed and was allowed certiorari by the Supreme Court. Sheppard stated that publicity and lack of privacy surrounding his trial was unfair and that slanderous accounts from reporters had rallied the jurors against him. The Supreme Court ruled in his favor. Justice Clark presented the opinion of the court: "Sheppard was deprived of a fair trial... because of the trial judge's failure to protect Sheppard sufficiently from the massive, pervasive and prejudicial publicity that attended his prosecution." Sheppard was denied his rights in accordance to the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Jurors shouldn't be using electronic communication devices during a trial, for they may be able to Google background information about the indicted that should be irrelevant to the trial. Information presented outside of the court is harmful to the trial and the accused.

President Thomas Jefferson once said, "I consider a trial by jury as the only anchor yet imagined by man by which a government can be held to the principles of the Constitution." A jury must stand as the voice of the people during a trial. They are a group of neutral citizens, remaining impartial at all costs. This is why it is my unwavering belief that jurors shouldn't be able to use electronic communication devices during a trial. Better yet, they should be banned from the courtroom.