Developing a Strategic Model of Public Relations Promotion with an Emphasis on Media Literacy System

Hossein Arab [1]   **Mehrdad Matani** [2]
Mojtaba Tabari [3]   **Ali Fallah** [4]

Abstract   Media literacy is a topic that is concerned with the audience's power of understanding of the way in which media works and how they make sense thereof, and seeks to make this analysis a habit and a task for the audience. In this regard, present research provides a model for promotion of public relations with an emphasis on media literacy among managers and employees of Mazandaran Gas Company. In this paper, the data were sorted out through three stages after introduction of the concept media literacy using the qualitative method of grounded theory and holding 15 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the academics and experts of the field, and following a content analysis. Based on the findings, the model is made up of five components: 1. The elements promoting media literacy at three macro (i.e. formulation of educational rubrics, changing educational methods, culture building with media literacy potential, adopting a problem-oriented approach, creating a national Internet, coherence and consistency in policy making and planning, and media content monitoring), intermediate (i.e. group interaction with colleagues and management training), and micro (i.e. technological knowledge, cognitive knowledge, media knowledge, and content production); 2. Decisive factors (categories of macro, intermediate, and macro level factors); 3. Interfering factors (including government intervention, lack of legislation or regulations); 4. Strategies (including policy and planning strategies,

Introduction

The era in which we live now, the life is encircled with different and new media forms. This means that media has become an integral part of people's life so as we see each day a large amount of information and news is produced which affect our life moments (Pernisco, 2021, p. 19). Considering the impact of media on human's life, it is clear that the way the media is used and interacted with is an important factor for improving human social life, since it helps them learn how to maintain their authority and independence in the face of media culture (Hobbs, 2021, p. 41). In the meantime, media literacy has a crucial role in the quality and degree of people's interaction with media. In defining media literacy, it can generally be said that media literacy often uses an inquiry-based educational model which encourages people to question what they watch, hear, and read (Kelleher, 2020, p. 43). Teaching media literacy provides a tool to help people critically analyze messages and develop their creative skills in constructing their media messages and provides language learners with the opportunity to extend their experience with media (Potter, 2019, p. 22). In other words, critical analyses may include author identification, purpose and viewpoint, study of construction technique and genres, study of media representation models, discovery of advertisement, censorship and bias in news programs and public relations (and reasons for these instances), hence media literacy may reveal how the structural features, such as media ownership or its financing model, affect provided information (Potter, 2016, p. 79). The main issue here is the functioning and application of media literacy among companies and institutions. That is to say apart from the high importance of media

literacy among individuals and families, nowadays it also plays an important role in large national and international companies and cartels and NGOs. It is for this reason that today many large Industrial and commercial companies such as Volkswagen, Toyota, Hitachi, Samsung, British Petroleum and tens of other large multinationals profit from media literacy for training and better performance of their employees and managers and further promotion and development of their industries (Lopez, 2020, p. 56). Meanwhile, the importance of media literacy can be examined from another perspective. In reality, we see that media is significantly dominating human life. This, especially in social media, is felt much stronger; an issue that in addition to different economic opportunities for people and organizations, has, at times, at times, brought about some potential threats, especially in the area of culture and identity, for individuals and their families (Kellner & Share, 2019, pp. 163-164). Therefore, media literacy cannot be viewed merely in terms of economy, entrepreneurship development, and job creation, but it can also be considered as an important means for promotion of cultural levels.

Background

Prior research include a range of numerous books, articles and dissertations published on media literacy and its effects. Among the studies conducted inside the country, it can be referred to the works of Farhangi, Gharaguzloo, and Salavatian (2010) on the constructive economic effect of media literacy, Malekan and Javadieh (2014) on the direct effect of media literacy on realization of resistive economy, Soleimani, Makki Aale Agha, and Etemad Ahari (2020) on the crucial role of media literacy in raising family social position among high school students, Shojaee, Dehdari, Behnaz, Noori, and Shojaee (2019) on the direct effects of media literacy on reducing social violence, Rastgari, Navvah, and Hazbavi (2019) on the growing effects of media literacy on political and citizenship rights, Raadmaan, Qodsi, and Haditabar (2021) on the growing impact of media literacy on embezzlement and

misappropriation, Nemati Anaraki, Ziayeeparvar, and Sadeghi (2020) on the constructive effect of media literacy assessment the news occupation employees of the National Radio and Television Agency, and Ghanbari Baghestan on the constructive role of media literacy in knowledge promotion and creation. And some of the major studies conducted abroad on the role of media literacy are the works of Bechtold (2020) on the constructive role of media literacy on virtual terrorism, Caplan (2021) on the increasing effect of media literacy on reducing social tensions, Ozman (2021) on the effect of media literacy among European actors and artists, Bowman (2020) on the relationship of media literacy with crisis management by managers of Royal Petroleum Co., Donovan (2019) on media literacy education and its (direct) impact on social and legal knowledge of the prisoners in Florida, the United States, and Peter Coe (2020) on the direct and significant effect of the user media literacy on their love of freedom. The above studies, inside and outside the country, mostly supported the significant role of media literacy in various areas. *Cognitive dimension* is associated with subjective or mental processes. It is determined by cognitive merits (competences) which include a range of abilities from identification of simple signs to understanding of the most complex messages and discovering the reasons for the special way of their presentation. This is the very rational dimension which results in rich content in the sense making process. In other words, this dimension can be viewed as overlooking this definition of communication (Akcayoglu & Daggol, 2019). *Analysis and evaluation* concern the interaction of people with printed and audio-visual media and depend on a set of analytical abilities. In the audio-visual area, it is the ability to understand the subject (factor), categories, technologies, languages, representations, and media audience. Currently, the similar use of the Internet-aided analytical skills are developing well, and the general public, too, needs to keep on developing these skills and make the most of online opportunities. Analysis and evaluation are the two main elements of critical thinking and individual independence skills. In this

dimension, the limit and purpose of analysis and evaluation are discussed: distinguishing good from bad, reliable from unreliable, information and communication (Simon, 2017, p. 10). *Access* is the opportunities or possibilities for the use of media. We should make a distinction between (a) physical access to media and media content and (b) practical and cognitive ability for the proper use of media. Access is based on a social and dynamic process not a preparation once for all. Once the initial access has taken place, developing literacy makes users continuously and significantly change their access condition (i.e. update, upgrade, develop or extend their software applications and hardware). Problematically, given the existing demographic and social inequalities in information, social and symbolic sources, the inequality in access to knowledge, communication, and online participation will continue. The lack of adequate access to media is itself a contributing factor to the digital gap (Murray, 2020, p. 14). *Critical thinking*. The relationship between media literacy and critical thinking, in its modern sense, goes back to early decades of the 20th century. Education of media literacy pursues different goals, one of the most important of which is creation of creative, critical, and meticulous thinking in individuals. Creative thinking is defined as the "systematic mental process associated to active and skillful conceptualization, application, analysis, combination, and evaluation of the information collected through observation, experience, contemplation, reasoning, and communication as a guide for belief and action" (Binyamin, 2020, p. 50). *Purposive and intelligent interaction with media*. In a condition of intense competition between media and continuous changes, audience's tastes and interests need to be predicted and directed. In order for to study audience media preferences, we need first to address the concept of audience, because audience is the key and central concept to all forms of written and audio-visual communications for all age and professional groups in every temporal and spatial condition, and knowledge of the audience and their expectations is one of the major research fields in communication (Hallaq, 2016, p. 73).

Method

In this research, the qualitative method of grounded theory was used. Grounded theory is one of the research strategies through which a theory is formed based on the main concepts resulted from the obtained data (Heidi, 2021, p. 23). This strategy profits from an inductive approach, that is the theory formation process is from parts to whole which allows researcher to develop a theoretical report of general characteristics of the subject, while simultaneously solidifies foundation of this report in empirical observations of the data. Grounded theory is a method used to produce a theory based on systematic data collection and analysis. Grounded theory is developed in the course of research and is resulted through continuous interaction between data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2014, p. 36). The data collection tool was an in-depth interview with the experts of communication and media literacy. The statistical population included the experts and academic in the field of media literacy and social networks to whom theoretical sampling was applied. Data collection continued until reaching the saturation point. In this study, 15 interviews were held, 4 instances of which did not lead to creation of new codes, indicating reaching the saturation point and sampling adequacy. The data were analyzed using open coding, axis and selective processes in the grounded theory method. Given the use of the qualitative content analysis method in this study, the interview coding was done along with conduction of the interviews until when the theoretical saturation was reached and the interviews ended. After extracting the codes or open indicators, axial coding was performed by merging or combining of several open codes into one concept.

Findings

The resulted data from qualitative content analysis were obtained in three steps.

First step was the open coding. At this stage, preliminary coding took place. In the next step, secondary coding was conducted as follows.

In this process, the points on which the interviewees placed more emphasis were extracted from the interviews and then the secondary codes were created from the initial codes. Next, the secondary codes were conceptualized. Finally, categories were formed. The results of the performed 3-step qualitative content analyses of the interviews' answers i.e. open coding, secondary open coding (subcategories), and main categories, are then drawn. In answering the research questions. The obtained qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews with the research examinees in the form of open coding were analyzed. The open coding process of the collected qualitative data first resulted in extraction of 428 initial open coding (concepts). Next, the initial open codes (concepts), due to their large number, were transformed into 82 secondary open codes (subcategories). And finally, based on the secondary open codes (subcategories), 26 main categories were created. Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 provide a summary of the performed open coding process and the results thereof.

Table 1

Open, Secondary and Main Coding of Public Relations Promotion Components

Main category	Subcategory	Concepts
Skills in intellectual and cultural areas	Validation logic	Content validation which includes content analysis and distinguishing right from wrong
		Selecting power (i.e. accepting or rejecting message with awareness
		Multiple skills for making validating distinction
	Critical thinking power	Critical thinking skill of thinking versus media content

Main category	Subcategory	Concepts
		In-depth, accurate, and serious thinking versus visual, audio, and written messages
		Purposive and reasonable dealing with media with a critical and analytical view
		Discerning positive and negative aspects of each message
	Ethical awareness	Content republication considering the surveillance ethics
		Observing user ethics
	Analytical power	Content evaluation and analysis
		Discovering and unveiling of messages inner and lower layers
	Producing professional and public content	Producing public content given tacit knowledge and using experiences of others
		Audience knowledge in producing message
	Vaccination against attack of media messages	Vaccination against media massive waves
		Increasing media knowledge
	Managing media consumption	Optimum consumption
		Paying attention to security considerations for consumption
Technical skill	Access in technical or technological	Necessity of citizens access to media and message

Main category	Subcategory	Concepts
	terms	Access as the first component of media literacy
	Knowledge or skill of working with technology	Skill to work with technology and tools
		Ability for familiarity with environments and capabilities
Training (education)	Changing methodology of management and employee training and education	Necessity for study of modern training models and technical projects for creating new opportunities
		Learner-orientation of training (education)
		Education (training) one of the main processes of knowledge society
Analytical knowledge, knowledge and attitude towards media	Public and professional knowledge together with political, social and cultural awareness	Higher knowledge and information, less affectability
		Public and professional knowledge together with social, political and cultural awareness
	Epistemological knowledge	Knowledge of mediated realities
		(Knowledge of) media ideology, insight and policy

According to table 1, in order to create the main category in the first question in the open coding process, first, 95 initial open codes (concepts) were extracted. Next, initial open codes (concepts), too, due their large number, were changed into 12 secondary open codes (subcategories), and finally, based on the secondary open codes (subcategories), four main categories were identified.

Table 2

Open, Sub-coding and Main Dimensions of Public Relations Promotion

Main category	Subcategory	Concepts
Media literacy dimensions	Increased access	Access to information
	Analysis	Message analysis
		Selectivity
	Evaluation	Active and intelligent connection of message evaluation
	Technology access and knowledge	Skill for profiting from media
		Acess path
	Critical thinking	Quisitive vi8
		Diagnostics (pathological) view
	Publication	Publication power
		Producing healthy, effective and useful content
	Producing skill	Producing in-depth content
	Managing consumption	Media consumption control
		Distinction in consumption of media division outcome
Media literacy in cognitive terms	Cognitive knowledge	Understanding and identifying path and goal
	Esthetic dimension	Beautifully performing social criticism
	Emotional dimension	Emotional dimension

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Main category	Subcategory	Concepts
	Ethical dimension	Dialogue within value and normative framework of society
Media literacy by attention to contextual texture	Contextual texture	Contextual texture
	Hypertext dimensions	Consumer hypertext texture
Dimensions in terms of knowledge: analytical and educational	Primary (preliminary) training	Education of content complexities
		Education of media forms
	Advanced training	Academic topics
		Professional training: detailed and more complex concepts of media (academics and experts of society)

By performing open coding, first, 83 initial open codes (concepts) were extracted. Next, the initial open codes, owing to their large number, were converted into 16 secondary open codes (subcategories). Finally, based on the secondary open codes (subcategories), 4 main categories were identified.

Table 3
Open, Secondary and Main Coding of Public Relations Knowledge and Skills

Main category	Subcategory	Concepts
Objective (technological)	Technology use skill	Ability of familiarity with environments and capabilities
		Skill of using media tool
	Communication skill	Communication skill in the area of education

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Main category	Subcategory	Concepts
	Consumption management	Consumption regime by hours and the link with basic knowledge in particular area
	Memory strengthening skills	Auditory skill
		Seeing well
Subjective	Analytical skills	Ability to encounter, analyze and process
		Teaching identification and distinction of right from wrong
	Evaluation	Evaluation (identifying positive and negative points of message)
	Media knowledge (understanding)	Making user familiar with harmful uses (applications)
		Knowledge of media capacities
	Creative & critical thinking	Critical thinking (criticizing and questioning of the existing paradigm)
		Creative thinking
	Knowledge-based and cognitive skill	Knowledge of rhetoric techniques
		Knowledge-based and cognitive skill

According to table 3, in order to answer the question in the process of open coding, first, 41 initial open codes (concepts) were extracted. Next, initial open codes (concepts), too, were converted into 9 secondary open codes (subcategories), and finally, based on secondary open codes (subcategories), two main categories were identified.

Table 4

Open, Secondary and Main Coding of Causal Conditions for Public Relations Promotion

Main category	Subcategory	Concepts
Macro level factors	Social structure (social and discourse sphere)	Constructive role of social planning in creating awareness
		Social discourse management
	Economic structure	Economic ability
		Factors of power and capitalism
	Cultural structure	Promotion of public literacy and knowledge and tacit knowledge
		Cultural approach
	Government structure	Media literacy of managers of organizations and institutions
		Preparing written document to specify movement path
Intermediate (meso) level factors	Family	The effect of family on understanding and belief, and even acceptance
		Social capital in family institution
	Office	Changing type and method of training in the gas company
		The impact of top managers on understanding, belief, and even acceptance (reception)

Main category	Subcategory	Concepts
	Colleagues and peers	Attitude of colleagues and peers
	Media	Enhancing media audience-orientation and moving away from economic issue and producing content in the form of film and animation
Micro level factors	Consumption management	Consumption arrhythmia
		Hedonism (Epicureanism)
	Passivity	Audience self-passivity
	Individual characteristics	Education - position - gender
	Individual background	Non-professional (non-technical) studies
		The type of management and employee attitude
Interfering factors	Government	Filtering and Internet weakening
		Misalignment of view and approach
	Laws & regulations	Lack of legislation
	Education system	Lack of sufficient educational sources (lack of adequate education)
		Lack of trained and professional trainers (coaches)
	Celebrity	Celebrities' behavior and lacking media literacy

According to table 4, in order to create main categories in answering the question regarding the contextual and interfering causal conditions (cultural, economic, social, religious, etc.) in formation of public relations with an emphasis on media literacy, in the open coding process, first, 85 initial open codes (concepts) were extracted. Next, initial open codes (concepts), too, due to their large number, were converted into 16 secondary open codes (subcategories), and finally, based on secondary open codes (subcategories), 5 main categories were identified.

Table 5

Open, Secondary and Main Coding of the Consequences of Promoting Public Relations

Main category	Subcategory	Concepts
Economic consequences	Increase of national income	Growth of national per capita income
		Gross domestic production (GDP)
	Job creation	Creating and encouraging growth of startups
Social consequences	Preventing damaging and changes	Preventing damages
		Change in social condition
	Social responsibility	Creating social responsibility and care ethics
	Social justice	Social justice
	Promotion of social development	Creative society with high human development
		More vigilant society
Political consequences	Political awakening	Creating awareness

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Main category	Subcategory	Concepts
	Activism	Absence of mass behavior with critical thinking
		Moving out of passivity
Media consequences	Strengthening content processing	Raw data processing and producing healthy, useful and effective content
	Reducing media dependency	Reducing dependency and message undesirable effect
Cultural consequences	Preventing intellectual changes	Preventing numerous attitude changes
	Preventing lifestyle changes	Preventing lifestyle changes
	Preventing value and religious changes	Preventing value changes
Technological consequences	Technology development	Technology development and reaching technology edges
Environmental consequences	Clean ecosystem	Achieving clean ecosystem
Individual consequences	Transforming into media producer	Transforming passive individuals into active individuals
		Reducing dependency and undesirable effects of media messages
	Promotion of desire and taste	Promoting cultural wishes of managers and employees
	Media consumption regime	Planned use and preventing time wasting
	Reinforcing critical	Critical thinking

Main category	Subcategory	Concepts
	thinking	Enhancing dialogue power and socialization and interaction
	Health promotion	User individual health mentally and physically
		Preventing lack of concentration in managers and employees

According to table 5, in order to create main categories in answering the question regarding the consequence of promoting public relations for managers and employees of Mazandaran Gas Company with an emphasis on media literacy, in the open coding process, first, 61 initial open codes (concepts) were extracted. Next, initial open codes (concepts), too, were converted into 20 secondary open codes (subcategories), and finally, based on secondary open codes (subcategories), 8 main categories were identified.

Table 6

Open, Secondary and Main Coding of Public Relations Promotion Strategies
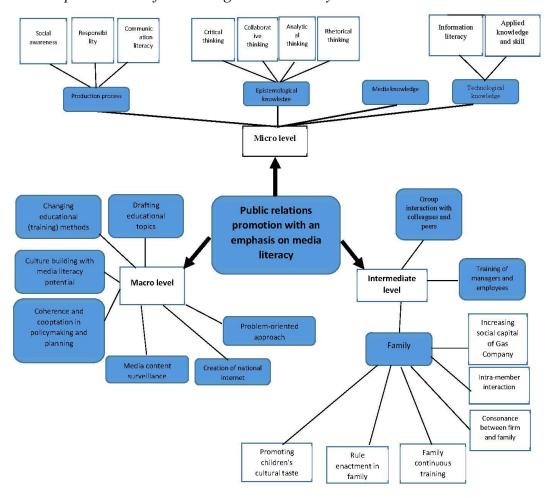
Main category	Subcategory	Concepts
Education strategies, policymaking and planning, and culture- and discourse building	Education (training) at all levels	Continuous training of different corporate levels
		Skill enhancement at different levels
	Top managers training	Skill enhancement for senior (top) managers
		Training of officers

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Main category	Subcategory	Concepts
	Enhancing management and employees capabilities	Promoting audience knowledge in communication
		Making the youth familiar with epistemology and ontology to prevent them from missteps
	Improving training methods	Adopting applied teaching approach together with a critical approach
		Adopting continuous and lifelong education approach
	Culture building and current building of media literacy	Discourse- and current building
		Attention to media literacy as a common issue in formal and informal education
	Regular planning and formulating national document	Employing all the required potential in media
		Intervention of public and private sectors for education
	Synergy and institutional mapping	Increasing knowledge and ability of managers for support and provision of the necessary means
		Redefining the tasks of the existing institutions
	Codification of required laws and regulations	Production and support of content producer as the most important strategy
		Promoting rein formation system with promotion of independent and pluralistic

Main category	Subcategory	Concepts
		media
	Adopting appropriate model of media literacy for managers and employees	Observance of media consumption by parents themselves
		Drawing continuous guidelines for managers and employees
		Specifying reward and punishment system

According to table 6, in order to create main categories in answering the question regarding the strategies for achieving the intended outcomes from promotion of public relations in Mazandaran Gas Company, in the open coding process, first, 63 initial open codes (concepts) were extracted. Next, initial open codes (concepts), too, due to their large number, were converted into 9 secondary open codes (subcategories), and finally, based on secondary open codes (subcategories), 3 main categories were identified. After extraction of the concepts (initial open codes), summarizing the concepts into subcategories (secondary open codes), and conversion of subcategories into main categories, in open coding process, next, using axial coding procedure, the categories identified from the open coding stage were drawn in the forms of the paradigmatic model in the grounded theory systematic approach based on specification of the mentioned categories in the form of effective and interfering factors, outcomes, and strategies. Figure 1 shows the paradigmatic model of public relations promotion with an emphasis on media literacy among managers and employees of Mazandaran Gas Company in axial coding stage.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of Promoting Media Literacy

Conclusion

The current paper attempted to provide a model of public relations promotion among managers and employees of Mazandaran Gas Company with an emphasis on media literacy. Hence the main question this paper sought to answer was: can we provide a strategic model for promotion of public relations among managers and employees of Mazandaran Gas Company with an emphasis on media literacy? If yes,

what the constituents of this model are. And in the following, having realized this model, what the outcomes and feedbacks will be which can be predicted. The authors of the paper, following introduction of the concept of media literacy using the qualitative method of grounded theory and conducting 15 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with academics and experts in the related areas and after content analysis, have organized the obtained data into three phases. In the final designed model, three groups at three macro, intermediate and micro levels in regard to promotion of public relations with an emphasis on media literacy were identified. At the intermediate level, training of managers and employees and group interaction with colleagues and peers can both directly and indirectly through influencing of the factors (at micro and macro levels) affect promotion of public relations. In addition, in the mentioned model, the macro level, with the components *improving training methods, media content surveillance, coherence in policymaking and planning, creation of national Internet, problem-oriented approach* to comprehension of literacy necessity and effectiveness and efficiency and their relationship with GDP, *culture building* using all potentials of social media, and *drawing comprehensive education and training programs* profiting from opinions of the prominent experts of the field, can play the role of a dependent variable affecting promotion of public relations. The next level is the micro level which is also of high importance for promotion of public relations especially among top managers. The possibility of behavioral changes, dialogues, arguments, expression of views, and employee critical views strengthen this belief as well.

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