

Relationship between media literacy and performance of staff of public relations departments in Mashhad municipality

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between media literacy and the performance of the staff of public relations departments in the Mashhad Municipality. This research is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive-survey in terms of the data collection method. The statistical population consists of all staff of public relations departments in the Mashhad Municipality, including those working in the center, municipalities of 13 regions, and subsidiary organizations (N=101). The sample size was 81 based on the Morgan table. The data was gathered by two scholar-made questionnaires, one for measuring staff media literacy consisting of 20 items and the other to evaluate staff performance with 8 items. The validity and reliability of those questionnaires were confirmed. To analyze the research data, descriptive and inferential statistical methods were performed. Findings indicate a significant relationship between media literacy and the performance of the staff of public relations departments in the Mashhad Municipality. In other words, the higher the media literacy of the staff, the better their performance in communication with people, using the media, advertising, and cyberspace.

Keywords: Media Literacy, Public Relations Departments, Performance, Mashhad Municipality

Introduction

Today, it can be boldly claimed that communication is one of the most fundamental sciences and the cause of human progress which makes a basis other sciences of the present century, if not the first element and the most basic principle needed by human beings.

Various media, including television, radio, internet, movies, videos, newspapers, and magazines, provide more and more information, entertainment, and advertisements to us and our children every day, all of which significantly influence our culture, values, views, and beliefs.

Organizational management requires an efficient public relations department to shape a coordinated organization with impressive leadership. Managers must be able to coordinate the attitudes and interests of people inside and outside the organization so that their interactions will be consonant with on the overall organizational goals and strengthen its survival. The public relations department has an obvious role in achieving this goal. Public relations departments can utilize necessary tools and support - including the transcendent view of managers to the position and role of the public relations department, appropriate budget allocation, use of new communication technologies and facilities within and outside the organization

with strategic plan communication attachments - to identify and analyze requirements of the organization target audience and help the management to meet it. The media literacy level of staff of the public relations department is vitally important, especially in organizations like municipalities that have extensive communication with the public. Given the current state of information technology infrastructure in Iran and the quality of operation of public relations departments in terms of electronic and Internet activities, it can be said that among all forms of modern public relations, we are now in the middle of electronic public relations and digital public relations. In this condition, utilizing media literacy is inevitable.

Media literacy is a set of approaches that audiences actively take to selectively confront the media and to critically analyze media contents to interpret the meaning of received messages. "Media literacy is a set of perspectives that we actively use to expose ourselves to the media to interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter" (Potter, 2006, p. 17). Media literacy turns media threats and challenges to opportunities and benefits, and in an age of web governance and widespread use of social media, which necessitates the presence of public relations, it diminishes worrying about potential risks in the hope of achieving maximum benefits. Maximum changes. Media literacy is the ability to access the media, and to understand and critically evaluate various aspects of media content to create communication in a variety of contexts.

As mentioned, municipalities have the highest level of communication with the audience compared to other executive departments, and the future of their organizations depends on their staff's level of participation and how they interact with citizens. Undoubtedly, the quality of the staff's media literacy can greatly affect the municipality's achievements and future.

Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the relationship between media literacy and staff's performance in the public relations department of Mashhad Municipality. The performance of the staff of the public relations department in this organization will be monitored through indicators of communication with citizens, informing through the media, advertising and publishing, and digital public relations. Therefore, the main question of this research is whether there is a relationship between media literacy of performance of the staff of the public relations department in the Mashhad Municipality?

Theoretical Foundations

Due to the complexity of contemporary societies, organizations try to have a full understanding of their target community and to make fact-based decisions to achieve their goals. Organizations have concluded that their activities will be effective if they benefit all the organizational capacities and necessary facilities, and demonstrate an active and effective presence in society. Public relations departments have a decisive role in achieving this goal and by implementing the process of information retrieval, information processing, and informing, help organizations to reach their aims and implement their grand strategies.

The public relations department helps managers to establish a two-way relationship with other organizational components including the staff, audiences, and society through various activities like publishing, advertising, information, opinion polls, and communication with social partners at both intra-organizational and extra-organizational levels. The purpose of this two-way connection is to facilitate media access to timely information, remove barriers, and strengthen business links.

Undoubtedly, the most important task of the public relations department in an organization is to establish two-way communication. But its two distinct roles are more prominent in intra-organizational and extra-organizational communication. Today, public relations departments can not perform their main tasks without the principled use of the media, such as radio, television, and newspapers since it is almost impossible to communicate with a large group of audiences and convey information to them without benefiting the media. In an efficient public relations department, there is an independent section that deals with "connection with the media ". Besides, respect for the professional dignity of media agents is considered as a principle, and connection with the media is based on the belief in the mutual needs of public relations and the media.

Also, the creation and expansion of communication infrastructure, construction of sites and information networks, recruitment of specialized personnel, and training of the current staff in public relations departments will help to establish the first steps of an electronic public relations department and paves the

way to enter the electronic public relations space. If public relations departments fail to synchronize with current media databases, they will be deprived of effective communication. Today, E-citizens and E-audience need electronic public relations (Bohloli, 2017).

Media literacy

The advent of digital technologies has highlighted important new opportunities and challenges for media educators. On the one hand, these technologies provide a new set of objects and processes to study and to make various aspects of media production more accessible (Rahim, 2011).

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Most scholars have accepted this definition of media literacy: Media literacy means the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and transmit information in written or unwritten forms. Just as traditional literacy includes reading and writing skills, so does media literacy include reading or decoding skills (comprehension) as well as writing or coding skills (creation, design, and production; Hatami, 2013).

Public Relations departments and media literacy

In traditional public relations departments, roles were performed traditionally, but with the emergence of social networks and their entry into the public relations profession, many of the tasks in this section are performed by social networks. If all the staff have media literate, there is a tremendous opportunity, while the lack of media literacy imposes web threats on organizations.

Social media helps public relations departments build newer relationships on a larger scale. It also enables public relations staff to maintain the quality of relationships, media influencers, customers, and their partners no matter who they are (Bohloli, 2017).

The most important challenges of using social media for public relations agents are:

- 1- Lack of control over social networks and not knowing what people do and what they know.
- 2- In general, the staff of public relations departments face internal and external crises. Internal crises include deficits in property and assets, organizational management crisis, and disturbing staff's behavior that can distort the organization brand. Criticism, misinformation, and activist groups are the biggest external concerns.
- 3- Many staff of public relations departments are pessimistic about the function of social media in their organizations, and many do not know how to use social media in their public relations activities.
- 4- Rapid changes in social networks make the situation more difficult for users. This challenge is more pronounced for older staff that cannot easily accustom to these changes.
- 5- Other staff are more focused on practical applications and they faced with questions such as:
 - How to use social media for specific groups like internal groups?
 - How to train the staff?
 - How to provide sufficient capital and resources for the media?
 - How to assess the credibility of personal media?
 - How to use social media in a completely transparent and meaningful way? (Marathoner, 1997).

Research background

Koushki (2016) in "*The Role of Media Literacy Education in Citizenship Education*", states that: One of the most sustainable processes of human society is the process of urbanization, which accelerated in the twentieth century. The rapid growth of this event in the twentieth century led to the phenomenon of "urbanization of the world." The antiquity and importance of urbanization led thinkers of all ages to try to understand the laws of life and to achieve urban design and planning based on their findings and to find solutions for urbanization problems. The migration of large numbers of rural people to cities and overcrowding has caused cities to face numerous cultural, environmental, health, economic, social and psychological problems.

On the other hand, the media has caused the world to shrink and a global village to emerge. The media has such a prominent role in today's world that few people ignore its impressive effects on governing affairs. This prominent role can strengthen or weaken the authentic culture of a country's citizens. The results of this research indicate that urban management should prioritize media literacy education in citizen education programs to use the beneficial capacities of new media to prevent the collapse of the religious and national culture of its inhabitants.

Salari and Salari (2016) investigated the relationship between media literacy and creativity of high school teachers in Esfarayen in 2016-2017. They reported that media literacy and creativity of the teachers were significantly correlated (correlation coefficient=0.79 and $p > 0.05$). In other words, the higher the media literacy of Esfarayen teachers, the more creative they were.

Karimi and Karimi (2016) examined the role of public relations departments in promoting the level of media literacy of citizens and found that media literacy is a key issue in citizenship education to provide better living conditions in the new era. Media literacy is a very complex issue that strongly depends on the individuals' creativity. This dependence refers to the inseparable link between public relations and media literacy as a subset of citizenship education. The public relations department, as a link between organizations and society, has a vital function. Public relations works are highly diverse and profit a more extensive space for using creativity compared to other areas of organizational works. In this regard, this study tries to examine the role of the public relations department in promoting the level of media literacy of citizens, analyze its pros and cons, and study ways to use public relations effectively in citizenship education.

Methodology

This an applied study performed by descriptive and correlational methods.

The statistical population consists of all the staff of public relations departments of Mashhad Municipality, including the staff of the center, municipalities of 13 regions, and subsidiaries organizations (N=101)

The total sample size was specified by the Morgan table. Since the total number of members of the statistical community is 101, according to Morgan table, 81 people were randomly selected from among the employees of 13 regions. Before sampling, first, the staff of all these organizations were classified in terms of regions, and then questionnaires were randomly distributed in each class (region) in proportion to the number of staff. Finally, 70 questionnaires were analyzed to test the hypotheses.

Data collection tools

To gather information, the field study was used. Library methods (including reading books, treatises, and research articles) were performed to formulate the theoretical foundations. The staff's level of media literacy was assessed using a 20-item questionnaire, and their performance was evaluated by an 8-item questionnaire. Both questionnaires are scholar-made.

1-1) Questionnaire reliability:

In the present study, in order to determine the reliability of the questionnaires, 30 questionnaires were distributed among the statistical population and the Cronbach's alpha value was calculated using SPSS software. The results are shown in the table below. As this table shows, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients obtained for the questionnaire variables is higher than 0.7, which is a sign of the high reliability of its questions.

1-2) Questionnaire validity (confirmatory factor analysis):

The structure validity of the questionnaire was evaluated by confirmatory factor analysis.

It was revealed that the factor load is close to 1 in most cases and the t-statistic for all factor loads is greater than 1.96. Therefore, the selected questions provide appropriate factor structures for measuring variables in the research model.

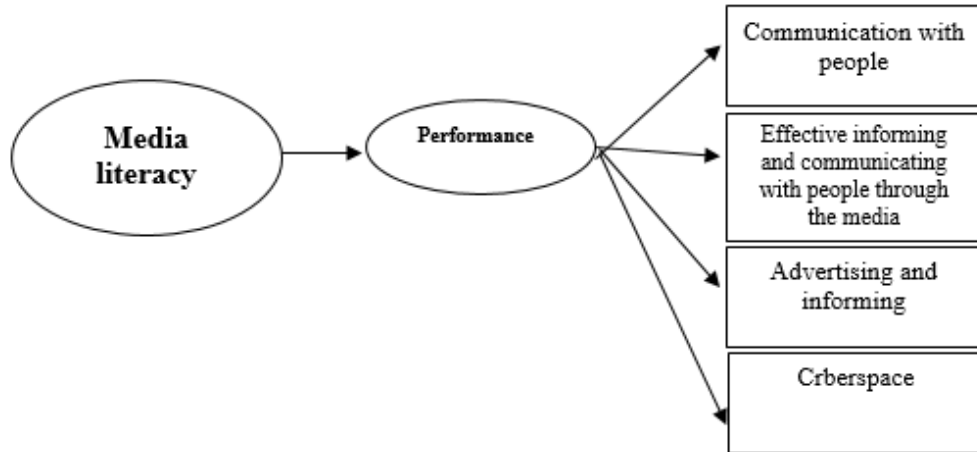


Figure 1: Suggested Conceptual Model

Data analysis method

In this study, two methods of descriptive (e.g., mean and standard deviation), and inferential statistics (e.g., path analysis and structural equations) were used to analyze the data. SPSS and LISREL software were performed to apply the above tests.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Table 1: Demographic information of the participants

Gender	Frequency	%
Male	27	31%
Female	43	69%
Total	70	100%
Studies	Frequency	%
Diploma	13	% 19
Associate degree	8	% 11
Bachelore degree	34	% 49
Master's degree	15	% 21
Totale	70	% 100

According to Table 1, 69% of the participants are male and 31% are female. Their studies level included 19% diploma, 11% associate degree, 49% bachelor degree, and 21% master's degree.

Descriptive analysis of variables

According to the results of Table 2, the average media literacy, the staff's performance in various dimensions including communicating with citizens, effective informing through the media, effective advertising, and effective use of cyberspace are 3.92, 3.79 and 4.007, 4.12, 3.09, and 3.033, respectively.

Table 2: Indexes of data description for the variables (participants = 70)

Variables	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Media literacy	1	5	3/93	0/91
Performance	2/33	5	3/80	0/67
Communication with citizens	1	5	4/007	0/89
Effective informing through the media	1	5	4/13	0/81
Effective advertising	2/33	4/33	3/09	0/49
Effective use of cyberspace	2	4/33	3/033	0/52

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test

Considering that the significance level of the test in all variables is higher than 0.05, the normality of the variables is accepted and the likelihood ratio method can be used in modeling structural equations (Table 3).

Table 3: Results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test

Variables	z	p	Result
Media literacy	0/074	0/085	Normal
Performance	0/073	0/074	Normal
Communication with citizens	0/080	0/092	Normal
Effective informing through the media	0/080	0/110	Normal
Effective advertising	0/093	0/098	Normal
Effective use of cyberspace	0/097	0/120	Normal

Inferential statistics and testing the hypotheses
Evaluating the fitness of the suggested model
Table 4: Indexes of the suggested model fitness

Indexes	CFI	IFI	AGFI	GFI	NFI	RMSEA	χ^2/df
Values	0/93	0/93	0/90	0/90	0/91	0/07	2/9
Acceptable values	higher than 0.90	higher than 0.90	higher than 0.90	higher than 0.90	higher than 0.90	Less than 0.08	Between 1-3

As Table 4 shows, the fitness indexes confirmed the excellent fitness of the suggested model. So, path analysis in structural equations can be used to test the research hypotheses.

Testing the main hypothesis
The media literacy level of the staff of the public relations department in the Mashhad Municipality has a significant effect on their performance.

Given Table 5, the path coefficient between the level of media literacy staff of the public relations department in Mashhad Municipality, and their performance is 0.95, which is a positive value. The t-statistic is 11.12 which is more than 1.96, so with 95% confidence, it can be concluded that this path coefficient is significant at the error level of 0.05. In other words, a significant positive relationship between the media literacy of staff of the public relations department in Mashhad Municipality and their performance is approved.

Table 5: Results of path coefficients and t-statistics to test hypotheses

Hypothesis	Pathes	Path coefficient	t	Result
First	Media literacy → Communication with citizens	0/96	9/99	Confirmed
Second	Media literacy → Effective informing through the media	0/96	10/04	Confirmed
Third	Media literacy → effective advertising	0/94	7/33	Confirmed
Forth	Media literacy → effective use of crberspace	0/84	7/49	Confirmed
Main	Media literacy → staff's performance	0/95	11/12	Confirmed

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, the relationship between media literacy and the performance of the staff of the public relations department in the Mashhad Municipality was investigated.

Findings showed that the level of media literacy of the staff of the public relations department in Mashhad Municipality has a significant effect on their performance in the cyberspace.

The outcomes manifest that there is a positive significant correlation between the two variables with 99% confidence. So, the increment of the staff's media literacy leads to the improvement of their performance in cyberspace and vice versa. This finding is confirmed by Rahim (2015), Goshani (2011), Rajabi and Afkhami (2013), Ansari, Oskooi, and Hakim (2010), Kamalipour (2011), Shaygan (2011), Shokarkhah (2011), Salari (2016) and Karimi and Karimi (2016) is consistent.

This finding can be explained by the importance of the public relations department in any organization. The dynamic activities and creativity of this department can transfer mobility and vitality to the whole organization. Innovation in various programs of the public relations department is one of the key components of an organization's success. With a world that is changing every moment, public relations departments will inevitably have to move towards new ideas.

The quality of communication between a public organization, especially a municipality, and the general public that deals with it, is a key factor promoting organizational positions and helping it to achieve its goals. The organization is not defined by its boundaries, but by the network of its stakeholders and audience. On the other hand, staff and human resources have a vital role in the success of the public relations department because they create a reciprocal link between the organization and its audience. Undoubtedly, a correct understanding of the media and media literacy of the staff as one a serious issue in the age of wisdom greatly affects their performance and thus fortifies citizen satisfaction, which is the ultimate goal of municipalities.

Media literacy considers the process of mass communication from two perspectives: 1) What literature and techniques the media messages use to produce media products, and 2) Does the audience is also familiar with this literature and techniques, and is he/she able to decode media messages? Media literacy, as a main phenomenon of the information age, helps people to improve their knowledge so that they do not use the media only as a habit or for entertainment, but to produce and interpret messages with the necessary insight and knowledge. On the other hand, media literacy aids the staff of the public relations department in municipalities to exactly comprehend the function of different media, and to use each media in a desirable way and in line with the organizational goals. Therefore, it both promotes individual and organizational performance.

Given the important role of media literacy in the efficiency and performance of the staff of the public relations department as the language of people-centered groups such as municipalities, it is suggested to hold courses for promoting media literacy of the staff.

In similar studies, it is suggested that scholars examine the effect of each various demographic characteristics including gender, age, education, work experience on the variable of media literacy, and staff's performance.

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