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## Relationship between Media Literacy and Social Skills among Citizens in Isfahan

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### Abstract

The aim of the present study was to explore the relationship between media literacy and social skills among citizens in Isfahan. To this end, a descriptive-correlation methodology was employed. The population under study consisted of all citizens living in Isfahan who were reported to be 1796967 persons in 2013. Using Cochran formula, 384 persons were selected by stratified sampling and were included in the research sample. The instruments used in the study were Karaman's and Karataş's (2009) Standard Media Literacy Questionnaire and Standard Social Skills Questionnaire (Oldmeadow et al., 2013). The validity of the questionnaires was confirmed using content validity and factor analysis. The reliability values of Media Literacy Questionnaire and Social Skills Questionnaire were determined by Cronbach's alpha coefficient and were reported as 0.876 and 0.896, respectively. The results of the study indicated that media literacy with an influence rate of 0.39 affects social skills. Besides, media knowledge (critical thinking) as a component of media literacy with an influence rate of 0.37 affects social skills. It was also found that analysis and reaction as a component of media literacy with an influence rate of 0.68 affects social skills. The same was the case with judgment and observation of hidden messages as a component of media literacy which affects social skills with an influence rate of 0.53. Media literacy with an influence rate of 0.33 was found to affect the expression social skill feelings. Finally, based on the findings of the study concerning the relationship between research variables, some suggestions were offered to improve media literacy and social skills of people living in Isfahan.

**Key Words:** media literacy, social skills, critical thinking, social discourse, social control, social sensitivity, emotional control, emotional expression

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## Introduction

In the today's world, power indicators have undergone significant developments to the extent that culture is seen as the most important underlying element for the formation of individual's, group's, and community's existence dimensions. Media are among the most powerful cultural tools. After the development of the printing industry, it opened its way into all human affairs so that with the formation of social media, they turned into as the most powerful man-made. To communicate with this huge power, a precise and efficient approach had to be found and it was nothing but media literacy that made such communication possible. Media literacy provides a regular framework for making efficient communication with media that have dominated the whole human life. Individuals' social relations in the modern era where media have taken over time and place have extended greatly to the extent that their management requires attaining social skills. Media literacy along with the appropriate management of the use of media as the most important communication tool can influence the formation of social skills. As such, the present study seeks to explore the relationship between media literacy and social skills among citizens in Isfahan.

### Statement of the problem

One of the requirements of the information age including the twentieth century is the need for education especially media literacy. Media literacy refers to the ability to explore and analyze messages we receive or entertain us every day. According to some experts, media literacy means to learn how to produce messages using printing, audio, and visual media (Sepasgar, 2005: 122). Media literacy is a focus on the fact that despite the common a perception, understanding media messages and how to respond to media requires special knowledge and skills. In other words, media literacy refers to the use of argumentative and critical thinking skills so that the audience can have an independent judgment about media

content (Arjmandi, 2005: 5). Theorists have provided different views about media literacy components. According to Karaman and Karataş (2009), media literacy components are as follows:

-Media knowledge (critical thinking): It includes a set of skills gained by individuals by which they can assess messages provided by media more easily, respond to the accuracy-inaccuracy of the messages contained in media, and discover political, economic, and social orientations of mass media (Karaman&Karataş, 2009: 799).

- Judgment and observation of hidden messages: It refers to those abilities and skills by which the audience can understand the impact of financial and media sponsors on messages through media and detect hidden and implicit messages transferred through mass media (Karaman&Karataş, 2009: 802).

- Analysis and reaction: It refers to those abilities and skills by which the audience can understand biased messages sent by mass media and respond appropriately to harmful messages received from mass media (Karaman&Karataş, 2009: 801).

These components can affect individuals' communication abilities and their social skills. According to Hops (1983), social skills refer to behavioral styles in social situations. As suggested by Durkim (1986), social skills mean performing efficient behaviors against others and social norms in given situations (Yüksel, 2001).

Gresham and Eliot (1990) perceive social skills as accepted behaviors acquired by an individual which facilitate their interactions with others. According to Yüksel (2004), different dimensions developed for social skills have been formed based on this definition. A model developed by Riggio (1986) is one of the most acceptable models worldwide. According to Riggio, several secondary factors comprise social skills. Six core components in Riggio's Social Skills Questionnaire are as follows (Akti & Gurol, 2012):

**-Emotional expression:** It refers to a set of abilities and skills that lead to expression of effective emotional states in communications. These states include showing emotions, attitudes, and mental conditions (Riggio, 1986: 650).

**-Emotional sensitivity:** It refers to skills and abilities that lead to a correct understanding of others' feelings and emotions and people's nonverbal messages and attitudes. Therefore, individuals with higher emotional sensitivity are able to decode others' feeling and emotions more effectively (Riggio, 1986: 651).

**-Emotional control:** It refers to an individual's ability to control and regulate his/her feelings and emotions. It also includes a set of the individual's nonverbal communication skills that are employed in different situations (Riggio, 1986: 650).

**-Social discourse:** Social discourse covers a set of abilities and skills that facilitate an individual's conversations with others. It also helps them to join social interactions and relations and develop a clear understanding of the current discourse in the company of other people (Riggio, 1986: 651).

**-Social sensitivity:** It includes those skills that result in understanding social norms, people's social discourse, verbal messages, and their social behaviors (Riggio, 1986: 651).

**-Social control:** It includes a set of skills that make a person adaptable to social conditions. An individual with the ability for social control can understand social situations very quickly and perform his social role very well (Riggio, 1986: 651).

The results of various studies indicate that social skills bring about significant outcomes in work and personal life including participation in social activities that can lead to the development of feelings such as a sense of attachment, acceptance, and self-confidence. Social skills help individuals to communicate with others more easily, have a better feeling in relation with them, and be able to lead and manage big projects (Pettry, 2006).

Johnson and Johnson (1996) introduced six important outcomes of social skills. The first is individuals' personal and identity development as a major part of individuals' identity is formed by communicating with others. In addition, social skills improve individuals' productivity and their progress in their professional fields. Social skills also help people to cooperate with others, lead their subordinates, confront complex situations, and solve work related problems more efficiently. The quality of life is another positive outcome of social skills. Each individual needs friendly and close relations in their life. In addition, physical health is promoted through positive and supportive relationships with others. It has been demonstrated that the establishment of positive relations with others reduces mental and psychological pressures a person faces. The last significant outcome resulting from social skills is the ability to cope with stress. Positive and supportive relations will reduce the intensity of stressful events. Besides, such relations help people to manage stressful situations through information, resources, and feedback (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Based on what was mentioned, the main problem addressed in this study is: What is the impact of media literacy and its components including media knowledge (critical thinking), judgment and observation of hidden messages, analysis and reaction on social skills and their components? Accordingly, the research hypotheses are stated as follows:

#### **Main research hypothesis**

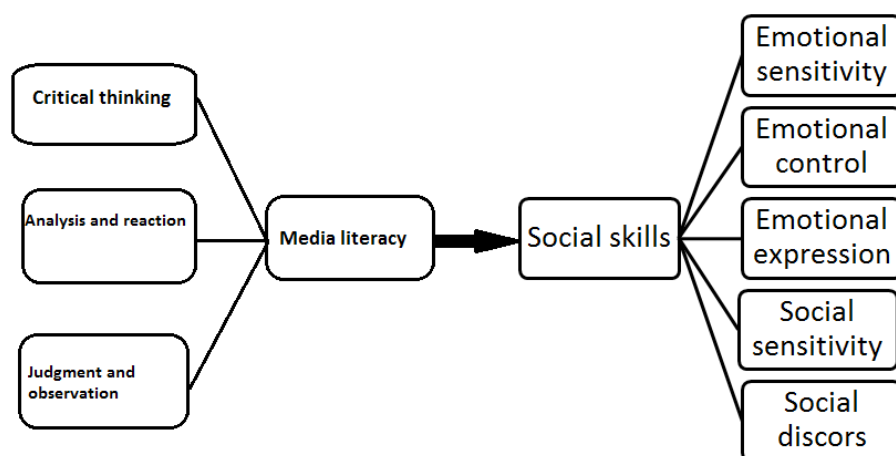
-There is a significant relationship between media literacy and social skills and its components.

#### **Sub-hypotheses**

-There is a significant relationship between media knowledge (critical thinking) and social skills and its components.

-There is a significant relationship between judgment and observation of hidden messages and social skills and its components.

-There is a significant relationship between



▲ Fig 1. Conceptual model of the study

Research variables	Components	Items	Total	Explanation
Social skills	Emotional expression	18-21	23	Oldmodov et al., (2013)
	Emotional sensitivity	22-25		
	Emotional control	26-28		
	Social sensitivity	29-32		
	Social control	33-36		
	Social discourse	37-40		
Media literacy	Media knowledge (critical thinking)	1-6	14	Karaman and Karatash (2009)
	Analysis and reaction	8-12		
	Judgment and observation of hidden messages	7, 13-17		

▲ Table 1. Distribution of questionnaire items

analysis of and reaction to media messages and social skills and its components.

Fig 1. Shows the conceptual model of the study developed based on the research hypotheses.

### Methodology

This section addresses the methodology, instruments, research population, and sample. As the aim of the present study is to examine the relationship between media literacy and social skills and their components, it is considered as an applied research that employed a descriptive-correlational research design. The instruments used to collect the data were

a questionnaire with 45 items and two sections. The first section contained items on the respondents' demographic characteristics (5 items for gender, education, marital status, job, and age). The second section included items with regard to the research variables on a likert scale as shown in Table 1:

To test the reliability of the questionnaire, 30 questionnaires were pretested on a pilot sample and then based on collected data; the reliability was calculated using Cronbach alpha. The related values for media literacy and social skills were 0.876 and 0.896, respectively, showing that the questionnaire had an accept-

Research variables	Factors	Explaining variance	Results of confirmatory factorial analysis
Social skills	Emotional expression 8.920	49.585	X2/df = 1.15, GFI = 0.96, AGFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.16
	Emotional sensitivity 8.641		
	Emotional control 8.565		
	Social sensitivity 8.234		
	Social control 8.197		
	Social discourse 7.026		
Media literacy (14 items)	Media knowledge (critical thinking) 21.117	55.689	X2/df = 1.76, GFI = 0.96, AGFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.37
	Analysis and reaction 20.446		
	Judgment and observation of hidden messages 14.126		

▲ Table 2. Results of exploratory and confirmatory factorial analysis

Region	Population	Sample size
1	79966	17
2	66590	14
3	111889	24
4	128030	27
5	161543	35
6	111464	25
7	151191	32
8	240644	51
9	74336	16
10	213547	46
11	59555	13
12	126884	27
13	121032	26
14	145276	31
Total	1796967	384

▲ Table 3: Sample size based on the population of different regions in Isfahan

able level of reliability. Besides, exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis was run to check the validity of the questionnaire items. The results indicated that the adequacy coefficients for all questionnaires were greater than 0.5 and the results of Bartlett test indicated that the significance levels of the questionnaires was higher than 1.96. It should be also noted that some items were excluded due to low consistency and irrelevance in the factor analysis.

### Research population and sample

The population under study consisted of all citizens living in Isfahan who were reported to be 1796967 persons in 2013. The sample size was determined using Cochran formula as follows:

$$n = \frac{N(t_{\alpha/2})^2 s^2}{(N-1)s^2 + (t_{\alpha/2})^2 s^2} = \frac{1796967(1.96)^2(0.5*0.5)}{(1796967-1)(0.05)^2 + (1.96)^2(0.5*0.5)} = 384$$

Therefore, given the sample size, the sampling was performed in proportion to the population of different areas in Isfahan as shown in Table 3.

Finally, 384 questionnaires were collected back. The process of distributing and collecting the questionnaires took 3 months from different regions in Isfahan. Table 4 shows the respondents' demographic characteristics:

### Results

Inferential statistics including Pearson correlation were used to test the research hypotheses. This section addresses the results of testing research hypotheses.

### Main research hypothesis

- There is a significant relationship between media literacy and social skills and its components.

As it can be seen in the above table, media literacy has a positive significant correlation with social skills and its components such as social control, social discourse, emotional sensitivity, and social sensitivity ( $P < 0.05$ ).

Sub-hypotheses 1: There is a significant rela-

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Variables		Percentage
Gender	Males	67.6
	Females	32.4
Media used		
	Newspapers	15.5
	Books	17.5
	Magazines	5.3
	TV	41.6
	Radio	2.5
	Internet	26.9
	No response	0.8
Marital status	Single	68.7
	Married	30.5
	No response	0.8
Age (year)	Less than 25	34.9
	25-30	43.5
	30-35	16.9
	Over 35	3.6
	No response	1.1
Education level	Under diploma	27.3
	Diploma and associate	23.2
	Bachelor	36.7
	Master	12
	PhD	0.8

Table 4. Respondents' demographic characteristics

relationship between media knowledge (critical thinking) and social skills and its components. As it can be seen in Table 6, media knowledge (critical thinking) has a positive significant correlation with social skills and its components such as social control, social discourse, emotional sensitivity, and social sensitivity ( $P < 0.05$ ).

Sub-hypotheses 2: There is a significant relationship between judgment and observation of hidden messages and social skills and its components.

As it can be seen in Table 7, judgment and observation of hidden messages has a positive significant correlation with social skills and its components including social control, social discourse, emotional sensitivity, and social sensitivity ( $P < 0.05$ ).

Sub-hypotheses 3: There is a significant relationship between judgment and observation of hidden messages and social skills and its components.

As it can be seen in Table 8, analysis of and reaction to media messages has a positive significant correlation with social skills and its components including social control, social discourse, emotional sensitivity, and social sensitivity ( $P < 0.05$ ). The following section presents a discussion of the results of the study.

### Conclusion

The results of the study concerning the main research hypothesis stating that there is a significant relationship between media literacy and social skills and its components showed that media literacy has a positive significant correlation with social skills and its components such as emotional expression, emotional control, emotional sensitivity, social control, and social discourse with coefficient values of 0.1, 0.492, 0.1, 0.198, 0.294, 0.258, and 0.406, respectively. This finding is consistent with the results of studies conducted by Zelsdorf (2014), Francis et al., (2013), Aktı and Gurol (2012), and O'Neill (2010) who found that media literacy can affect social skills and its components. One possible explanation is that when a person acquires media literacy, his critical thinking improves and thus he is able to understand what is implied in messages received from mass media, analyze them, and make a rational judgment about them, and show appropriate reactions to them. This makes the person to gain his emotional control, increase his social sensitivity more than before, and thus improves his social skills.

The findings of the study regarding the first sub-hypothesis stating that there is a significant relationship between media knowledge (critical thinking) and social skills and its components showed that media knowledge (critical thinking) has a positive significant correlation with emotional sensitivity, social sensitivity, and social control as compo-

Variable	Statistics	Emotional expression	Emotional sensitivity	Emotional control	Social sensitivity	Social control	Social discourse	Social skills
Media literacy	Pearson coefficient	0.098	0.492	0.086	0.198	0.294	0.258	0.406
	Sig.	0.019	0	0.041	0	0	0	0
	Number	384	384	384	384	384	384	384

▲ Table 5. Pearson correlation for the main research hypothesis

Variable	Statistics	Emotional expression	Emotional sensitivity	Emotional control	Social sensitivity	Social control	Social discourse	Social skills
Media knowledge (critical thinking)	Pearson coefficient	-0.043	0.389	-0.044	0.085	0.18	0.209	0.227
	Sig.	0.305	0	0.292	0.044	0	0	0
	Number	384	384	384	384	384	384	384

▲ Table 6. Pearson correlation for the first sub-hypothesis

Variable	Statistics	Emotional expression	Emotional sensitivity	Emotional control	Social sensitivity	Social control	Social discourse	Social skills
Judgment and observation of hidden messages	Pearson coefficient	-0.045	0.423	0.060	0.169	0.233	0.24	0.335
	Sig.	0.283	0	0.152	0	0	0	0
	Number	384	384	384	384	384	384	384

▲ Table 7. Pearson correlation for the first sub-hypothesis

Variable	Statistics	Emotional expression	Emotional sensitivity	Emotional control	Social sensitivity	Social control	Social discourse	Social skills
Analysis of and reaction to media messages	Pearson coefficient	0.245	0.418	0.199	0.24	0.324	0.193	0.454
	Sig.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Number	384	384	384	384	384	384	384

▲ Table 8. Pearson correlation for the first sub-hypothesis

nents of social skills with coefficient values of 0.389, 0.085, and 0.18, respectively. This finding is in line with the results of a study by Zelsdorf (2014) who concluded that there is a significant relationship between media knowledge (critical thinking) and emotional sensitivity, social sensitivity, social control, emotional control, emotional expression, and social discourse. This can be explained by the fact that when a person with media knowledge (critical thinking) is able to easily make decisions about the accuracy/ inaccuracy of messages contained in the mass media, understand the intentions behind such messages, and discover useful/harmful points implied by them. In addition, such a person is able to analyze critically the content of messages provided by the mass media and this may enhance the person's social sensitivity to his communication skills as he is able to analyze the public understanding and discover the community's orientations. Such awareness also affects the process of social control as a person with reasonable level of media knowledge is often introduced as the group spokesman and plays the role of an intellectual leader. Therefore, the person with media knowledge raises people's social and emotional sensitivity and social control.

The findings of the study with regard to the third research hypothesis stating that there is a significant relationship between analysis of and reaction to media messages and social skills and its components, showed that analysis of and reaction to media messages has a positive significant correlation with all social skills components including emotional expression, emotional sensitivity, emotional control, social sensitivity, social control, and social discourse with coefficient values of 0.425, 0.418, 0.199, 0.34, 0.324, and 0.193, respectively. In addition, analysis and reaction have a significant relationship between social skills with a correlation coefficient of 0.454. This finding is supported by Aktı and Gurol (2012) who observed that between analysis of and reaction to media messages is positively and sig-

nificantly correlated with all components of social skills including emotional expression, emotional sensitivity, emotional control, social sensitivity, social control, and social discourse. This finding can be explained by the fact that people with the ability of analyzing and responding to the content of media messages are empowered and can easily react to useful/harmful messages exposed by the mass media and their reactions can affect social control, social discourse, and social sensitivity. When a person can identify useful/harmful content of media messages, he can easily affect social discourse and influence the public opinions as an intellectual leader and play an active role in changing public opinions and their orientations as an influential person in social systems. Therefore, when a person acquires the ability to analyze and respond to media messages, he can efficiently control social discourse and lead it in a useful direction.

### Suggestions

Before presenting implications of the study, it should be noted that the present study suffered from some limitations that must be taken into account by future research, the most important of which are as follows:

The present study was conducted among people living in Isfahan and since it is possible to observe different results on other populations, the generalization of the results to other communities must be done with cautious.

In addition, there are many variables that are out of researchers' control and they may affect the relationship between media literacy and social skills. Examples of such variables include cultural conditions in the community, the impact of personality factors on responding to questionnaire items, differences related to demographic variables. Therefore, these variables and especially cultural variables may constraint the results of this study.

Based on the findings of the study, following measures are recommended in order to improve media literacy:

- Television as an inclusive media is recom-



mended to broadcast programs in appropriate time periods for improving media literacy and social skills among citizens in the community

- Similar to what is implemented in developed countries such as Canada, Japan, the U.S, and Australia, media knowledge courses are recommended to be included in school curricula in the educational system of Iran to improve students' media knowledge

- Universities as institutes responsible for the development of media knowledge can make planning so that medial knowledge including media literacy spread in the community more rapidly and with higher quality.

- Providing social skills training to children in their early years of their life by families and kindergartens and the improvement of social control skills, social discourse, and social sensitivity should be operationalized for improving children's personal and communication skills.

- Cultural campaigns through mass media including TV, radio, and social networks must be implemented to promote the culture of studying and raising public awareness as one of the most important reasons for underdevelopment of cultural, social, and communication skills, and development of cultural capital is the poor culture of studying. This is also reflected fully in demographical studies.

- Holding training workshops on critical thinking in the community for all age groups including children and adults through media, schools, and cultural-scientific seminars must be taken into account.

- Implementing training programs for analyzing social, political, and economic content of messages to the audience must be considered by related institutes and organizations.

- Holding continuous and regular meetings and professional conferences on media literacy by institutions responsible for culture such as Department of Education, cultural centers in municipalities, and the Islamic Guidance Bureau should be taken into account.

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