




The Impact of Mothers' Media Literacy on the Media Education of Adolescents Aged 14-17 in District 5 of Tehran

Parisa. Saeedfar¹, Seyed Naser. Hejazi^{2*}, Shapour. Behyan³

¹ PhD Student of Department of Sociology, Dehaghan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Dehaghan, Iran

² Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Dehaghan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Dehaghan, Iran

³ Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Mobarakeh Branch, Islamic Azad University, Mobarakeh, Iran

* Corresponding author email address: parisasaedfar19@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to determine the relationship between mothers' media literacy and the media education of their children aged 14-17.

Methods and Materials: The present study was a descriptive-analytical cross-sectional study. Multistage cluster sampling was conducted. A total of 249 students from public middle and high schools in District 5 of Tehran, who were enrolled in the 2022-2023 academic year, were selected. The demographic characteristics questionnaire, Tammen's (1995) media literacy questionnaire, and a researcher-developed media education questionnaire were distributed, completed, and collected in compliance with research ethics. Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation, multiple regression analysis, t-test, and path analysis methods via SPSS 26 and PLS software.

Findings: The correlation results indicated a statistically significant positive relationship at the 95% confidence level between mothers' media literacy and the media education of high school students in District 5 of Tehran ($r = 0.593$, $P < 0.05$). A direct and significant relationship was found between consumption patterns and deep awareness ($r = 0.357$, $P < 0.05$) and responsible use ($r = 0.380$, $P < 0.05$). Additionally, there was a direct and significant relationship between message characteristics and deep awareness ($r = 0.380$, $P < 0.05$) and responsible use ($r = 0.366$, $P < 0.05$). A significant relationship was also observed between mothers' ability to criticize message content and their children's deep awareness ($r = 0.283$, $P < 0.05$) and responsible use ($r = 0.109$, $P < 0.05$).

Conclusion: Mothers' media literacy and its components (consumption patterns, message characteristics, and message critique) are recognized as influential variables in the media education of their children.

Keywords: Media Literacy, Media Education, Message Critique, Responsible Use, Mothers, High School Students

1. Introduction

In the modern world, media create a virtual world where each individual has multiple means of communication. As a result, an individual's personality is shaped by their network of communications, leading to the concept of "mediatization of culture and society" (Nirumand & Latifi, 2016). In recent years, Iranians' engagement with various social media and their programs has increased (Mohammadi & Khāliq Panāh, 2018). Today, influenced by media and information technologies, we live in a new era of human relationships (Khodayari et al., 2014). With the expansion of social networks and various communication media, how individuals use and trust these media, as part of digital and electronic resources, has become particularly important. The necessary skills to identify, use, and evaluate electronic media and digital resources, or media in general, are referred to as media literacy. Media literacy involves purposeful interaction with media, leading to increased awareness among the public as media consumers, fostering a reciprocal and participatory relationship with media on one hand, and on the other, strengthening the democratic structure of society concerning active participation in the media domain (Zare Kohan, 2014).

Although science and technology, and the discovery of new technologies, are among the primary goals of every nation, it is crucial to use this technology correctly and appropriately. Many families, by exposing all members to unethical channels and giving unrestricted access to these networks, cause irreparable harm. Various moral harms, such as runaway girls, improper veiling, and school violence, can be considered as part of the damages caused by satellite media in society (Nirumand & Latifi, 2016). Therefore, given the positive and negative impacts of media and social networks in various fields, including cultural, moral, familial, and psychological disorders, this research aims to investigate the impact of mothers' media literacy on the media education of adolescents. Through this, feedback will be provided to media and family policymakers to initiate changes or revisions in policies, planning, and appropriate content production—a small but significant step forward.

Since the family is the foundation of cultural development in all societies and the cultural foundation of children is formed within this fundamental institution and is then developed further upon entering society, the importance of media literacy within the family, where children learn the first principles of life, cannot be overstated. Undoubtedly, parents' media literacy is crucial in ensuring that their

children use media appropriately (Fathi et al., 2018). Among parents, mothers play a more pivotal role in media literacy and have a more significant influence on the cultural and cognitive foundations of their children (Rohmiyati & Irhandayaningsih, 2018). Mothers' media literacy and their supervisory methods serve as a protective factor against several negative outcomes, including substance use (Islam, 2023).

The study by Montazer Qaem and Haj Kazem Tehrani (2014), which examined the role of mothers in controlling their children's media consumption, shows that mothers' education and awareness regarding the positive and negative effects of media, as well as the necessity and methods of supervising media usage, are the most important factors in selecting mothers' strategies for media education or the type and amount of their children's media consumption (Montazeri Qaem & Haji Kazem Tehrani, 2014). Additionally, Bahrami Rad (2016) demonstrated that program selection in families with higher economic and educational status is entirely under the parents' control. However, among parents with lower educational and economic status, this control is less significant or even nonexistent. Mothers place more importance on critical viewing than fathers and surpass them in accompanying their children, answering their questions, and analyzing and interpreting content. Parents with higher socioeconomic status attribute excessive television watching to the lack of other forms of entertainment (Behrami Rad, 2016).

Upon reviewing the existing research, it appears that the subject of mothers' media literacy, despite its significant and influential role in childrearing, has been less emphasized and studied. Most of the focus has been on the shared role of parents, educational centers, and other influencing factors, which are considered secondary. Therefore, this study aims to specifically examine the role of mothers' media literacy in their children's media education. The study seeks to answer the question: Does mothers' media literacy affect the media education of children aged 14 to 17 in District 5 of Tehran?

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study is a descriptive-analytical study using correlation and regression model analysis and path analysis (structural equations). The statistical population included all male and female students of public middle and high schools in District 5 of Tehran who were enrolled in the 2021-2022 academic year. In this context, 249 students were selected

through multistage cluster sampling. The inclusion criteria were being within the studied age range (middle and high school levels), absence of specific physical and psychological disorders, and consistency in questionnaire responses. The exclusion criterion was the lack of willingness to continue participating in the study. The sampling method in this research was a multistage cluster approach. District 5 of Tehran, which includes 49 neighborhoods, was randomly divided into five main clusters (Shahran-e Jonoubi, Shahrak-e Naft, Boulevard Ferdows-e Gharbi, Jannatabad-e Shomali, and Sadeghiyeh). From each neighborhood, two boys' and two girls' high schools were randomly selected, making a total of 20 high schools. Subsequently, five boys' and five girls' high schools (a total of 10 high schools) were selected as the study sample. Since the unit of measurement was determined to be the school, 249 questionnaires were distributed among the students and their parents in these 10 schools. Since the research included two groups—Group 1 consisted of the students, and Group 2 consisted of their parents—each student selected in Group 1 had one of their parents chosen as the sample in Group 2. In other words, the parents were selected through the selection of their children. Thus, for 249 students, 249 parents were also considered in the study. The questionnaires were provided to the participants in person by the researcher, and they randomly completed the media literacy questionnaire, which takes approximately 15 minutes to complete, and the media education questionnaire, which takes about 10 minutes to complete.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Media Literacy

To measure media literacy, the standard Media Literacy Questionnaire by Tammen (1995) was used, which is a self-assessment scale. This questionnaire, which was developed and validated in Iran by Sherbetian and Eskandari in 2017, consists of 20 items. Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "very low" (1) to "very high" (5). The questionnaire has subscales of consumption patterns, message characteristics, and message critique. The content, face, and criterion validity of this questionnaire have been evaluated as appropriate. The Cronbach's alpha calculated in Sharbetian and Eskandari's study (2017) for the total reliability score and the subscales of consumption patterns, message characteristics, and message critique were 0.83, 0.72, 0.73, and 0.74, respectively, which were statistically significant ($P < 0.001$) (Fargani & Khodamoradi, 2019).

2.2.2. Media Education

To measure the media education variable, a researcher-made questionnaire was used. This questionnaire includes 15 items and three subscales: deep awareness (5 items), selectivity (5 items), and technological proficiency (5 items). To assess the content validity of the questionnaire in this study, five experts and specialists in the field of social sciences were consulted, and the overall Content Validity Ratio (CVR) of all items was 0.99 and 1, indicating acceptable validity. For the reliability of the questionnaire, confirmatory factor analysis results showed that the items of each factor could adequately measure the intended factor and had both internal and external consistency. To evaluate the fit of the factor structure of the questionnaire based on exploratory findings, confirmatory factor analysis with the maximum likelihood method was used. The fit indices, including Comparative Fit Index (0.941), Normed Fit Index (0.912), Tucker-Lewis Index (0.917), Incremental Fit Index (0.942), Parsimony Comparative Fit Index (0.669), Parsimony Normed Fit Index (0.649), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (0.076), and the Chi-square ratio to degrees of freedom (2.78), indicated that the model had an appropriate fit.

2.3. Data analysis

Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation, multiple regression analysis, t-test, and path analysis methods via SPSS 26 and PLS software.

3. Findings and Results

The demographic characteristics of the study sample are as follows: The majority of mothers (61.40%) were between the ages of 45 and 50 years, with 28.50% being under 44 years old, and 10.10% being over 50 years old. Regarding the gender of the students, 57.40% were male, and 42.60% were female. In terms of the educational level of the mothers, 55.10% had a high school diploma or lower, 32.50% held a bachelor's degree, and 12.40% had a master's degree or higher. Additionally, the minimum and maximum scores, along with the mean and standard deviation indices for the variables of media literacy, media education, and the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for examining the normality of scores for each research variable, are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Mean and Standard Deviation of Research Variables

Variable	M	SD	Min.	Max.	Z (K-S)	df (K-S)	p-value (K-S)
Media Literacy	177.90	20.54	129	223	0.595	248	0.870
Consumption Pattern	58.82	7.10	43	77	1.140	248	0.149
Message Characteristics	59.97	7.52	42	78	1.147	248	0.144
Message Critique	59.10	7.56	43	78	0.597	248	0.868
Media Education	177.03	18.13	136	240	0.616	248	0.842

To examine the research hypothesis, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to investigate the relationship between media literacy and its related variables in mothers and the media education of their children.

To test the research hypothesis that "there is a relationship between mothers' media literacy and its dimensions and the media education of their children," Pearson's correlation test was used. The results from this test are presented in [Table 2](#).

Table 2

Correlation Coefficients of Media Literacy and Its Dimensions with Media Education

Variable	r-value	p-value
Media Literacy	0.781	0.022
Consumption Pattern	0.618	0.010
Message Characteristics	0.553	0.028
Message Critique	0.215	0.037

The results from [Table 2](#) indicate that media literacy has a positive and significant relationship with media education ($r = 0.781$) at the level of $p < 0.05$. Additionally, the dimensions of consumption pattern ($r = -0.871$), message characteristics ($r = -0.112$), and message critique ($r = 0.781$) also have positive and significant relationships with the media education of children at the level of $p < 0.05$.

To examine the contribution or the extent of each predictor variable—consumption pattern, message characteristics, and message critique—in explaining the criterion variable (media education), stepwise multiple regression analysis was used. The results of the regression analysis are presented in [Table 3](#).

Table 3

Results of Stepwise Regression Analysis to Examine the Role of Mothers' Media Literacy Dimensions in Predicting Students' Media Education

Criterion Variable	Step	Predictor Variables	Beta	t-value	sig	R ²	F-value	p-value
Children's Media Education	1	Consumption Pattern	0.630	35.601	0.000	0.433	1267.461	0.000
		Consumption Pattern	0.638	27.814	0.000	0.491	21.732	0.000
	3	Message Characteristics	0.486	2.912	0.004	0.533	228.648	0.000
		Consumption Pattern	0.633	12.611	0.000			
		Message Characteristics	0.490	10.649	0.006			
			Message Critique	0.309	26.945	0.003		

According to the results in [Table 3](#), in the first step, the variable of consumption pattern entered the regression equation and explained 43% of the variance in children's media education ($R^2 = 0.433$). In the second step, with the inclusion of the variable of message characteristics, the predictive power increased by 6%, and together these two variables could predict 49% of the variance in children's media education ($R^2 = 0.491$). In the third step, with the

inclusion of the variable of message critique, the predictive power increased by 4%, and together these three variables could predict 53% of the variance in children's media education ($R^2 = 0.533$). Additionally, in this model, mothers' consumption pattern played a more significant role in predicting children's media education ($\beta = 0.633$).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results from data analysis indicate that the dimensions of media literacy have a positive and significant relationship with media education in students. This means that as media literacy increases in mothers, their children's media education also improves, and vice versa. This finding aligns with previous research. Aslani et al. (2019) found that a warm relationship and appropriate control by parents foster greater trust among family members. A child who feels this environment is more comfortable expressing their needs regarding the internet, the challenges they face while using it, and asking questions or discussing problems encountered during internet use with their parents, leading to a deeper understanding of media use (Aslani et al., 2019). Soltani et al. (2016) demonstrated that the extent and quality of media use by mothers with children aged 4 to 7, along with their social identity, are related to reduced media use among children (Soltani et al., 2016). Eidi Zadeh (2012) concluded that parents' media consumption habits could influence their children's choice of games and the use of electronic or online games (Eidi Zadeh, 2012). Fauziah et al. (2023) showed that parents' required technological literacy could regulate children's digital consumption in terms of content selection and media tools (Fauziah et al., 2023). Broll et al. (2013) found that media literacy education provided to mothers under the supervision of the Canadian Public Health Organization led to meaningful and purposeful media consumption in children (Broll et al., 2013). Javadi and Eqbali (2007) concluded in their research that active parental supervision over their children's television and other media usage was effective (Javadi & Eqbali, 2007). Fathi et al. (2018) demonstrated a significant relationship between children's television viewing patterns in terms of duration and parents' media literacy (Fathi et al., 2018). Fargani and Khodamoradi (2019) demonstrated that media literacy education impacts media usage, increases the ability to analyze and evaluate, improves the ability to produce media messages, enhances communication with media message producers, and promotes critical thinking in students when dealing with media messages (Fargani & Khodamoradi, 2019).

To explain this dimension of media literacy, specifically the significant relationship between mothers' consumption patterns and their children's media education, it can be inferred that purposeful and intelligent media usage by mothers, as role models for their children, can be transferred and encouraged in their children. This influence motivates

children to engage more specifically with the internet or electronic games. According to Elizabeth Tammen et al. (1995), media literacy acts as a filtering mechanism, allowing the dense world of messages to pass through the layers of media literacy filters, making the encounter with the message meaningful. Media messages operate on three levels. The first level is the consumption pattern, which emphasizes the importance of personal planning in media usage. This means that the audience pays more attention to selecting and watching various programs and engages in specific media use, such as television, video games, films, and other media, thereby reducing overall consumption (Hosseini, 2013). It appears that family media habits, especially those of mothers, create a significant dependency in their children, which serves as a deterrent to making choices based on individual will and autonomy. The extent and type of media usage are typically controlled by the family, and children are usually compelled to endure family choices, internalizing media habits aligned with family norms, making changes in these habits difficult or even impossible in the future. The alignment of family and maternal media habits with children's media needs accelerates the influence and modeling of behaviors and norms from mothers, leading children to use media more consciously and responsibly. By "responsible," it is meant that children strive to adhere to family and societal norms when using various media content. They will more professionally and skillfully protect themselves against potential harm from certain media messages. This finding can be explained by the acculturation theory, which discusses the impact of media on the culture and values of societies, particularly children, adolescents, and youth, and how they perceive these issues. According to this theory, media can alter values, create stereotypes, and shape biased perspectives on social realities, leaving a lasting and rigid imprint of violence on the audience. Based on this theory, a specific type of media culture (often through films in cinema or television) can create the illusion among young audiences that certain behaviors are effective and valuable in solving everyday problems. In this context, the phenomenon of imitation is also relevant. Imitation is one of the tools humans use during socialization. Imitation of parental consumption behaviors or media can take root in children's behavior. Any actions and behaviors of reference groups are always imitated, and the positive or negative nature of behavior depends on the behavior of media reference groups. The modeling theory, based on Albert Bandura's social learning theory, emphasizes the audience's imitation of

behavioral models presented by visual media. The audience observes a behavioral model, and if they identify with or aspire to identify with it in a similar situation, they recall and reproduce (imitate) the behavior. If the reproduced behavior results in rewards, the likelihood of repeating this behavior in similar situations increases. The cultural influence of parents or media can impact not only the behavior and attitudes of the audience but also their subconscious, leading to long-term and deep effects on the individual's personality and behavior. Therefore, it can be concluded that mothers' media consumption patterns directly influence their children's choices and preferences in media usage.

To explain this dimension of media literacy, specifically the significant relationship between mothers' message characteristics and their children's media education, it can be inferred that mothers' awareness of different types of media messages, their curiosity about the intentions of the message sender, understanding the benefits or harm of the messages, and their overall interpretation of media messages empower them. This capability can play an important role in deepening their children's media awareness. According to Potter's cognitive model of media literacy, media literacy is primarily focused on readiness and awareness in receiving and interpreting messages, which Elizabeth Tammen et al. (1995) refer to as the second layer of media literacy, the message characteristics. At this level, the audience pays attention to the more subtle aspects of media and delves into deeper questions and topics such as who benefits from the message, who is harmed, and who sends the media messages (Harianto et al., 2022). Tammen (1996) identified four essential stages for acquiring adequate "media literacy," with the first stage involving gaining awareness and sensitivity regarding the amount and conditions of individuals' exposure to various media messages. The activities in this stage include measuring the amount of media usage, discovering the satisfaction gained from media messages, and learning the necessary strategies for managing media use. Therefore, paying attention to media message characteristics and strengthening and developing this in parents, especially mothers, is effective for the proper and rational behavior of children concerning the internet and productive use of it because a significant portion of students' learning is taking place through the virtual space. With the guidance and leadership of parents who are proficient in information and communication technology, this can be utilized correctly and optimally, leading to better learning and stabilization of children. Disturbances in media usage can lead to disruptions in learning as well. Media-based

educational processes, if not guided, directed, controlled, and supervised by parents, can cause serious harm to children. Therefore, parents' media literacy on one hand and media-based educational processes focusing on various information technologies for children on the other hand are of great importance. Additionally, by integrating James Potter's cognitive theory and the knowledge gap theory, the impact of media message characteristics on children through their mothers can be explained. In other words, media literacy leads to awareness and understanding of media owners (responsible managers) and their goals in producing content, critical thinking towards media message dissemination, analyzing and processing mass media messages, and acquiring cognitive skills, thereby protecting women, who form the largest group of media and social network users, from media messages. On the other hand, this ability in mothers, in light of Bandura's modeling theory and their role as models in their children's media education, can help children make more informed choices and constructively deal with various media messages, effectively safeguarding them against media messages (Broll et al., 2013; Eidi Zadeh, 2012).

To explain this finding, it can be argued that the critical use of media by mothers has successfully influenced their children's responsible use of media. The decision to receive or not receive a message, focusing on the useful aspects of the message while ignoring the rest, involves evaluating the utility of the received message in the environment. This finding aligns with Elizabeth Tammen et al.'s (1995) theory, which posits that media literacy, in its third layer, emphasizes message critique (Hosseini, 2013). In this layer, the necessary skills for critical media viewing are provided. With these skills, the audience engages in analyzing and questioning the structure of the message and the omitted aspects. In this layer, understanding the omitted facts and aspects of the message becomes crucial. In other words, the audience's comprehension of the text depends on identifying the overlooked dimensions of the message.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

One of the primary limitations of this study is the reliance on self-reported data from both mothers and students, which may introduce biases such as social desirability or inaccurate recall. Additionally, the study was conducted within a specific district in Tehran, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other regions or populations with different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The cross-

sectional nature of the research also restricts the ability to infer causality between media literacy and media education outcomes.

Future research should consider expanding the sample size and including participants from diverse geographic locations and socio-economic backgrounds to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal studies would be valuable to establish causal relationships and examine how media literacy in parents influences media education in children over time. Furthermore, exploring the role of fathers or other guardians in media literacy and education, and incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups, could provide deeper insights into the dynamics of media usage within families.

The findings suggest that enhancing media literacy among parents, particularly mothers, can positively influence their children's media education. Therefore, educational programs and workshops aimed at improving parents' media literacy skills should be implemented in schools and community centers. These programs should focus on practical strategies for media consumption, critical evaluation of media messages, and responsible media use. Policymakers and educators should collaborate to integrate media literacy education into the broader curriculum, ensuring that both parents and children are equipped with the necessary skills to navigate the digital world effectively and safely.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

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