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## Presenting a Model to Understanding the Mentality of Audiences

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### Abstract

As one of the key elements of mass communication process, the audience has always been of interest to mass media researchers and practitioners. The audience is important considering the realization of the economic goals of the media and the originality of the media content. This study used the ideas of previous studies in the field of communication and cultural studies, presented a model for understanding the public perception (PP), and modified the production of television programs using Delphi method according to the opinion of the experts that was finally approved by them. Experts' views and opinions were obtained with the questionnaire tool, the model was presented and with a total 78% of the opinions was confirmed in three parts of the accuracy of the components, relationship, and the explicitly of the model in describing the process. Thus, considering the fluidity and history of PP, it is suggested that PP should be constantly monitored and examined according to three factors - mass media contents, opinions of the experts, and published contents of social networks.

**Keywords:** Public perception (PP), Audience, Television program, Audience-orientation.

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## **Introduction**

The issue of addressing and attracting audience has always been a serious concern for media authority. Producing media content with any quality, with no audience is futile and useless. Thus, media practitioners always try to use the produced content by producing the audience's desired content. According to Marshall McLuhan, the media itself (not the message and its content) fondles the audience. Hence, one can state that the audience is the center of attention and media activity (Majidi & Ghanbari, 2012, p. 156).

Since its economy depends on it, the media examines how to meet the demands and needs of audience, advertisers and society (Picard, 2008, p. 42). Thus, media practitioners always raise their revenues from advertisers by increasing the number and quality of the audience's contact with their media. Therefore, the problem of recognizing the audiences and their tastes are seriously considered.

Regarding the scope of this study, one should state that in Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcast (IRIB), despite the fact that funding is provided from the budget of the entire country, the number and extent of impact on the audience is influenced by the amount and manner in which the organization allocates it. Thus, the number and quality of the audience in this organization is also of great importance.

On the one hand, the number of audience and the viewer or listener of a medium is not considered in terms of the media economy, and on the other (Storey, 2007) believes that any media content must set the "people" as its reader to be included in popular culture. In other words, such a medium should raise people's talk about news and content and enter the cycle of oral distribution and re-distribution. As Fisk explains, top-down or official news should re-emerge from public power through new content; otherwise, that news will not be related to everyday life. As with all other things that the media and cultural industries provide for us, popularity should be created in these media (Storey, 2007, p. 191).

Regarding the importance mentioned to the audience, the main reason for the failure of the television programs was the inadequate knowledge of the intellectual features and audience beliefs, and as the television audience is considered by the public, recognizing their image has a significant role in creating attraction in media contents, and producing audio and video for the audience.

Some of the media contents produced in IRIB have found a good match in attracting and reaching their audience, but as these programs have not been continuously produced, it seems that audience-orientation and identifying the subject audience depend on its producer. The individual effect of various production factors on the production of a television program is undeniable, and these skills and ingenuity of individuals in programming cause differences and excellences, but assuming that the skills are the educable and transferable. The purpose of the study is to achieve a model to identify the mindset of the media audience and to clarify its interests and tastes.

## **Research background**

Various research papers on television and the audience of television programs have been studied, which generally can be categorized into two broad categories;

The first group of studies is the ones carried out by researchers of communication and culture, which eventually led to media policy suggestions.

The second group was mostly TV production researchers who considered the production of a television program as an artwork. In this regard, the audience is not seen as one of the components of the communication process, which is considered as the consumer of the artistic product. Thus, it seems that the attitude towards the audience of the television program and providing a model for identifying it are new in Iran.

## Literature Review

Generally, media organizations try to collect and attract people's attention and sell the attention to advertisers by the nature of their product, the media product. This advertisement may be ideological or commercial, depending on the type of media office.

Nowadays, the audience is not limited to a particular medium and has hundreds of ways to access the information. It is only necessary to choose from among the thousands of media that the flow of information send to them at any given time and pay attention to a limited number of them (Farhangi, Gharagozlou, & Salavatian, 2010, p. 93). Media organizations are also competing with each other to increase the reach of their audience for their media content, and by selling their attention to advertisers or authorities to reach their media's economic goals. Hence, the production of media products or, in other words, media contents to attract more audiences is always a daily matter of the media.

Any media content however superior in terms of content, it still needs some factors to attract the audience. Television programs fight every moment to attract their viewers against other programs. It should be noted that the TV is a mass media and that it is not useful to make a program that does not have a viewer economically and artistically. For a topic or content with high quality values, there is a need for equivalent demand for those values (Tyrrell, 2011, p. 107).

The precise identification and definition of the mass media audience is difficult because the term "audience" is abstract and continuously changing, and is usually not visible but rather in a sporadic and indirect way. Thus, the audience is defined in different ways, say, location, people, the specific type of media using content type, based on time, sociobiological status of the individuals, and based on tendencies and beliefs (McQuail, 2001, p. 141).

Considering audience theories, there is no coherence and consistency in the classification of audiences in different sources. For example, in the book "An Introduction to the Theories and Concepts of Mass Communication," taken from McQuail's Theories book, four theories are listed:

- Audience as a group of spectators, readers, and listeners: The main emphasis of this theory is on the number and demographic characteristics of the people, and the audience is nothing but the receiving or paying attention to the message to the audience.
- Audience as the mass: In this theory, the emphasis is on the great multitude of elements, heterogeneity, dispersion, and obscurity, lack of organization and social feeling among the elements of the audience.
- Audience as all or a social group: In this theory, there is an active, interactive, and independent social group receiving services from some media, but its existence is not related to the media.
- The audience as the market: The economic development in the nineteenth century led to the development of the theory of "audience as the market." This theory considers the relationship between the audience and the media as a consumer-commodity relationship, ignoring the social relationships within the audience and addresses the socio-economic criteria of the audience more closely (Mehrdad, 2009, pp. 143-146).

When television appeared as a new phenomenon in the 1960s, some sociologists hurriedly stated that television, as a "mass communicational tool," would lead to massive audiences (Bourdieu, 2011, p. 51). However, the subsequent studies showed that audiences evaluate the content of television actively; or in other words, the TV audience is an active audience (Tankard & Severin, 2002, p. 393).

A perspective is for the audience to be classified as an active and passive audience something that is more challenging than any other categorization, debatable, and difficult to identify. Nonetheless, implicitly it can

be stated that the audience is in a range of passivity to being active. Several sources of communication have referred to the active and passive audience (McQuail, 2001, pp. 8-10).

Frank Biocca has identified five characteristics for identifying an active and passive audience:

1. Selection: The audiences, who select, discriminate the media and their contents, use media in a planned way, and have a visible selection model are the active audiences. Otherwise, audiences are passive, especially if they over-use TV.
2. Beneficiaries: Here, the active audience is the one who considers the applications expected after using the media and uses a rational choice based on experience.
3. Intention: In this type of activity, which is carried out simultaneously with the use of the medium, the person engaged actively in the processing the information and experiences received is an active audience, otherwise passive.
4. Resistance to Impact: Here, when an audience of members of an audience is exposed to unwanted effects or training, the active responder is not easily influenced and has discretion.
5. Involvement: As the audiences involve more in their media experience, they can talk about their involvement. The involvement was also shown in a conversation with other audience about the broadcasting program (McQuail, 2001, pp. 89-91).

Regarding the behavior of the audience in dealing with media contents, we seem to face two main groups of communication theories.

The idea evaluating the audience passive considers the audience as the object and the media as the sender, the subject. This is exactly the same cognitive device that started from Descartes and reached its peak by Kant. In this perspective, the sender is superior to the audience, and the sender performs the meaningfulness. The sender sends a message to the audience and the receiver decrypts it. Communication failure occurs if the respondent does not find out the contents of the message that was encoded.

In the view that the audience is considered as an object, passive and does not play a role in the production of the meaning of the television program, it does not matter with what cultural, historical, and geographical background the audience is watching television. It seems that culture and history, and geography do not affect human understanding (Fayyaz, 2010, p. 28).

The researchers have tried to define and facilitate the process of affecting with small changes. For example, Roger Brown (1958), with the distinction between advertising and persuasion tried to cope with this problem. Brown defined persuasion as the manipulation of the symbol to create action in others. He then reminded that when the personal judgment is that the act, whose purpose is persuasive endeavor, is in the interest of the pursuant, but not entirely in the interest of the one being persuaded that persuasive efforts are called advertising. As far as the techniques are concerned, persuasion and advertising are one. Only if a person feels that the source of the persuasion is benefited, but not the recipient of the message, that action or message can be called advertisement (Tankard & Severin, 2002, p. 149).

The view that considers the audience active believes that the audience plays a role in the production of meaning. The sender is not superior to the audience. The sender only sends his media to the audience and the audience should say what this media content might mean. Although in general "the role that the content prescribes to the reader is stronger than the reader's tendency..., the reader's tendency will never be completely eliminated." (Storey, 2007, p. 97).

Osgood (1954) believes that a person acts as the source and destination as well as the receiver by decoding the messages he encrypts through feedback mechanisms (Tankard & Severin, 2002, p. 180). Thus, the

cognitive system in this view is as subject-subject, i.e. the senders and receivers are the subjects. Recognition in such a model is between the minds as the sender produces the content and is in the common area.

Storey (2007) believes that people do not try to digest the program in its entirety without any creativity or mental activity. They want to be involved in producing what they are watching and use their knowledge to add to the implications or meanings of the content (Storey, 2007, p. 57).

According to Dahlgren (2006), media content alone is meaningless. He believes that valid meaning domains are more social in the media research than unique, so the subtle differences between meanings derived from different interpretations should have a socio-cultural aspect rather than an individual aspect. In this way, with some humility, we have to say that to us, the content is a kind of "raw material" in the production process, awaiting the contact with the mass audience (Dahlgren, 2006, p. 57).

One of the most important aspects of reading every media work is the interaction between the structure of the work and its recipient. In the study of a work, in addition to the content itself, attention should be paid to the reader's actions in response to that content. The content itself provides only "general aspects" through which the subject of the work can be produced, whereas the actual production is accomplished by defining the content (Storey, 2007, p. 96).

This textual determination appears to be on the side of the audience. Jackson Brown writes, "We do not see things as they are. We see things as we are. This is the "I" behind the eye that sees, goes inside our minds and inside our nervous systems. What we see is a reaction to what we look at (Tankard & Severin, 2002, p. 134).

Storey (2007) goes further and believes that the content changes in the face of the audience. The content does not have an original and untouched quality when read, but the reader's knowledge - or the background of the content - affects the meaning (implied) of the content (Storey, 2007, p. 92).

The content alone has no meaning or some ideas have uneven meanings. The instability of meaning is to some extent reflected in the material properties of the content itself. It is only in contact with the audience that the meaning of a television program is activated, and that content "revives" (Dahlgren, 2006, p. 56).

A great part of what these people say about television is the result of the thoughts and beliefs that they had before they watch each program. The message is not exclusively in the "content," but the audience, by interpreting themselves from any program, can change that message or "work on it" (Storey, 2007, p. 54).

The meaning of the content is always implemented in a field; the nature of the field is "both clarifies the meaning and stabilizes it" (Storey, 2007, p. 97) the audience tries to replicate the information it receives, and if it cannot adopt, it is probable that the information is set aside without replication (Tankard & Severin, 2002, p. 109). It is exactly at this point that it loses the audience attention and selects another source for communication. Thus, the media practitioner will try his best to ensure that his shared messages in the interpersonal space are most consistent with the contact information.

In the definition of the audience, what is the most important point is that audiences are both the product of social contexts and a response to a particular model of media condition (McQuail, 2001, p. 4). Public opinion is also affected by media activity and social environment (Dehghan, 1999, p. 6).

Inattention to the social environment is one of the most damaging factors in the production of media content, and many media content publishers that have ignored or neglected it have been disregarded or misunderstood (Tankard & Severin, 2002, p. 420).

This view of communication science researchers places them at a two-way movement between the social environment and the media. If the social, economic, political, and cultural relations between the various

countries and societies are considered, then the scope of the social environment can be considered far beyond the national boundary.

There are two known methods for understanding the social environment.

### **1. Common Sense**

All individuals acquire knowledge of their environment through life and activity in the community. This recognition is sometimes the result of one's own experience and is sometimes the result of others' experiences. The more one experience a person has, the wider the scope of his knowledge will be. Media practitioners always carry out this method.

### **2. Scientific Knowledge**

Scientific knowledge cannot be achieved only through life in society, but the systematic and accurate study of the behavior and actions of humans and the lives of various societies and their developments, along with logical thinking, bring the scientific knowledge of society to the scholar.

Common sense is useful and the scientific knowledge can complete and even correct it. It seems that by registering, reviewing, and compiling the system and structure in the methods of common sense, we can achieve a systematic way of understanding the social environment. According to Walter Lippmann, the mass media forms the images of our minds. Thus, in fact, with the review of media contents, one can understand the general mental context. Alvin Toffler says, "I have read the newspaper's first page as a story, a distorted map of a land, very complicated, and very fast, yet it is the story we are living with." (Tankard & J Severin, 2002, p. 144). Thus, community-based media contents can be considered as a source for understanding the context of PP. An analysis of these contents identifies which subjects are important for community-based discourse and how they think about each other.

In addition to the media, the Office of Applied Social Studies at Columbia University stated that personal influences are more and more effective compared to any of the mass media (Tankard & J Severin, 2002, pp. 304-306). Thus, studying the views and opinions of beneficiary individuals can also help identify in this field. Intellectual leaders in any society can be effective factors in shaping PP and form the base of media messages. It is in contact with these people that the public determines what and how to think.

Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey (1984) studied the effect of "Television News Broadcasting" content on public opinion concerning the national policy issues. They acknowledged that editorials of experts had the most effect on public opinion (Tankard & Severin, 2002, p. 249).

Thus, conducting reviews for the opinion of intellectual leaders reveals another part of the effects imposed upon the people's minds. Direct referring to these people or reviewing the contents of their produced media, including the book, the press, etc., determine which side the society and PP are tended towards.

Social networks are one of the most important Web tools increasingly growing over the last few years in the Web world (Jalali & Saboori, 2007, p. 12). In similar, Tarkashi (2007) argues that social networks are among the most promising Web technologies in exploiting collective intelligence. Mohammadi Najm believes that collective intelligence is a blend of what public people think about different subjects (2009, p. 12).

Hence, it seems that information is produced and consumed by the community on social networks and can be analyzed as a medium. The analyses of social networks are an important part of what makes PP about issues clear. In the Iranian society, especially in recent years, the social networks show the inner intentions and PP to an acceptable level. The analysis of what is published and transmitted in these networks in various subjects is acceptable to the public, as it is the subject of PP as a background to the audience.

Considering these three categories, i.e. the media, the views and opinions of the experts and social networks, it seems to be possible, their points of interest can be considered as important issues of interest to the public or the social context of media literacy.

**Methodology**

This study implements both documentary and survey (observation and interview) methods. The primary model was extracted from literature, books and research works and evaluated by experts using Delphi method with structured interview and then a questionnaire.

As the data of this study was descriptive and qualitative, the analysis of data of this research is descriptive and interpretive and inferential statistical methods have not been used.

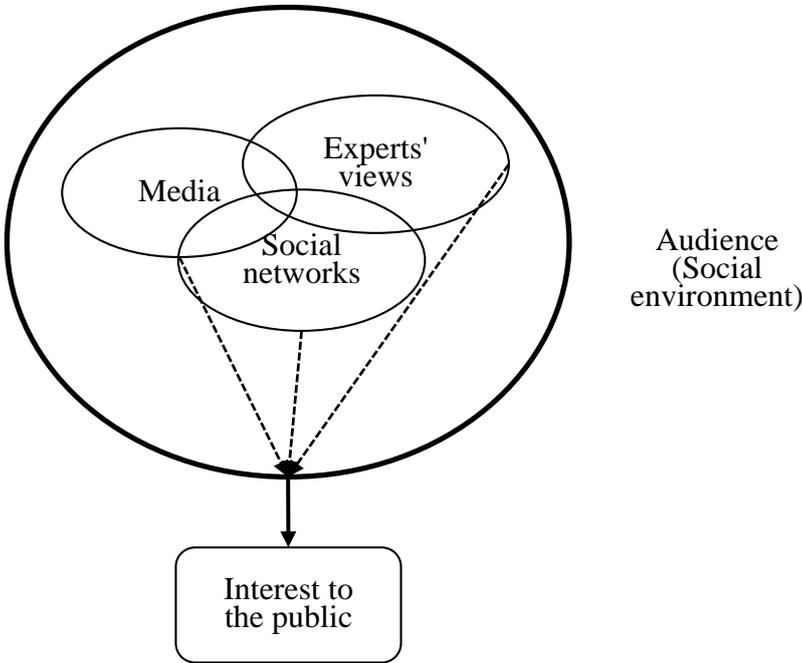
The most important requirements for using Delphi are the need for expert judgment and wide range of opinions, team agreement in achieving results, the existence of a complex, large and interdisciplinary problem, and the disagreement or incompleteness of knowledge. Moreover, the requirements are the availability of experienced professionals and specialists, geographic dispersion, anonymity in data collection, lack of time constraints, and lack of another cost-effective method (Ahmadi, 2008, p. 166). Therefore, in this study, the Delphi method was used considering the innovativeness of the conceptual model and the lack of theoretical and research resources.

In Delphi, there are no strong and explicit rules on how to choose and the number of specialists, and the number of participants is usually less than 50 people and mostly in the range 15 to 20 people (Ahmadi, 2008, p. 171). In this study, 14 experts were considered as sample size.

Snowball method was used to select two of the most popular program producers of IRIB, selected at the "Three Stars" television festival as the initial samples and the rest were selected with guidance and introduction of them.

**Results and observations**

In this study, the following conceptual model (Figure1) was first designed based on library studies and data collection.



**Figure 1.**

Then, without knowing the model, the experts' views were taken in the process of identifying the audience's mindset and tastes with in-depth interviews. The interviews were implemented and the sentences were coded. Semantically ineffective sentences were deleted. After integrating similar opinions, these comments became the proposition. The propositions extracted from their comments are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.**

Row	Extracted statements
1	The communication channels of the audience with the television program are effective in understanding PP.
2	The views of the audience are important in choosing the topic of the program.
3	In virtual communication, people are not worried about the consequences of their opinions; their expression is closer to their true ideas.
4	The main problem with the media is lack of comprehensive understanding of the views of its current audience.
5	PP processing is important for the current and ongoing audience of IRIB.
6	Through survey, people should be aware of the views of people who are not the target audience of television programs.
7	Cyberspace can be used to get people's opinions.
8	Creating waves on issues that are untrue is great in cyberspace.
9	In cyberspace, a high volume of comments is produced by a few people.
10	Cyberspace alone cannot be the right way to get to the public's point of view.
11	The perception of the audience is relevant to issues related to the subject of the program in producing content.
12	The content of the television program should be effective in enhancing the beliefs and minds of the audience about the issue.
13	The content of the television program should be effective in correcting the beliefs and misconceptions of the audience about the issue.
14	The television content should be effective in creating a new attitude and attention to the forgotten needs of the audience.
15	The content of the television program follows the audience literature and its publishing network.
16	PP is influenced by mass media.
17	The extent to which people are affected by the media is different in different societies and media.
18	The producer of television program should be of the experts community.
19	The community elites are connected with the public and are aware of their views.
20	The mindset of the audience is very influential in the production of the television program.
21	By manipulating the imagery of the mindset of the audiences, they can be made in line with the television program.
22	Selecting the subject and theme of the television program is most effective factor in its attractiveness.
23	To understand PP, people's opinions should be scrutinized by scientific methods.
24	Each of the messages extracted from the media and individuals should be analyzed according to its context.

## Questionnaire

After the corrections made, a questionnaire was developed based on the final model and sent back to experts.

The experts expressed their opinions on the accuracy of the components of the model, the relationships between the components, and the efficiency of the model in describing the research hypotheses in response to a 5-option Likert spectrum. The questionnaire was constructed and used to evaluate the model.

The questions of the questionnaire were designed in three general categories of evaluation of the model components (the correctness of their presence as components effective in understanding PP), the model's effectiveness evaluation (the correctness of the components of the model), and the explanation (the model's clarity in the process description). These are given along with aggregate answers of experts in Table 2 and Figure 2.

**Table 2.**

Evaluation components	Question	Very high	High	Low	Very low	No idea
Evaluation of the model components (the correctness of their presence as components effective in understanding PP)	Do you consider the proposal and order from the media managers enough in producing a television program?	0	11	3	0	0
	Do you consider the elite idea enough in producing a television program?	0	10	4	0	0
	To understand PP, media review is not enough. Do you agree?	6	8	0	0	0
	To understand PP, reviewing virtual social networks is not enough. Do you agree?	3	11	0	0	0
	To understand PP, elite reviews are not enough. Do you agree?	6	8	0	0	0
	To what extent can the topic of choice, based on the subjective state of the public, be effective in attracting television viewers?	8	6	0	0	0
	How much topic selection based on discourse can be effective in attracting TV audience?	0	7	7	0	0
	How much will the audience welcome the topic based on the value system of the media organization?	0	5	7	2	0
	To what extent will selecting a topic based on the opinion and vote of the producer or editor of a program affect the audience?	0	13	1	0	0
	To what extent do you consider the important issues in PP and the people's view of them as historical?	11	3	0	0	0

	How important is the view of people in a television program?	13	1	0	0	0
	In the idea and theme suggested by a producer desired in producing a TV program?	5	9	0	0	0
Evaluation of effectiveness (correctness of the components relationship)	In your opinion, how much is PP affected by the media?	2	7	5	0	0
	In your opinion, how much is PP affected by virtual social networks?	6	8	0	0	0
	In your opinion, how much is PP affected by experts and specialists?	0	3	6	5	0
	How much can media review represent PP?	3	6	0	5	0
	How much can reviewing virtual social networking represent PP?	4	3	2	5	0
	How much elite reviews and opinions can represent the PP?	1	12	1	0	0
	Do people's opinions affect elite's ideas?	0	9	5	0	0
	How much is the effect of the media on the opinions of the elites?	0	13	0	1	0
	Do the ideas and issues raised on virtual social networks affect the opinions of the elites and experts?	0	4	10	0	0
	How much is the media affected by elite opinions?	3	5	4	2	0
	How much do the topics in virtual social networks affect the media?	12	2	0	0	0
Explicating (the degree of the model being explicable in explaining the process)	In order to produce a television program, do you consider people from the community proposing themes and ideas right?	9	3	0	2	0
	Is it enough to refer to the views of the elites, along with the analysis and analysis of media contents as well as the examination of social networks to understand PP?	11	3	0	0	0

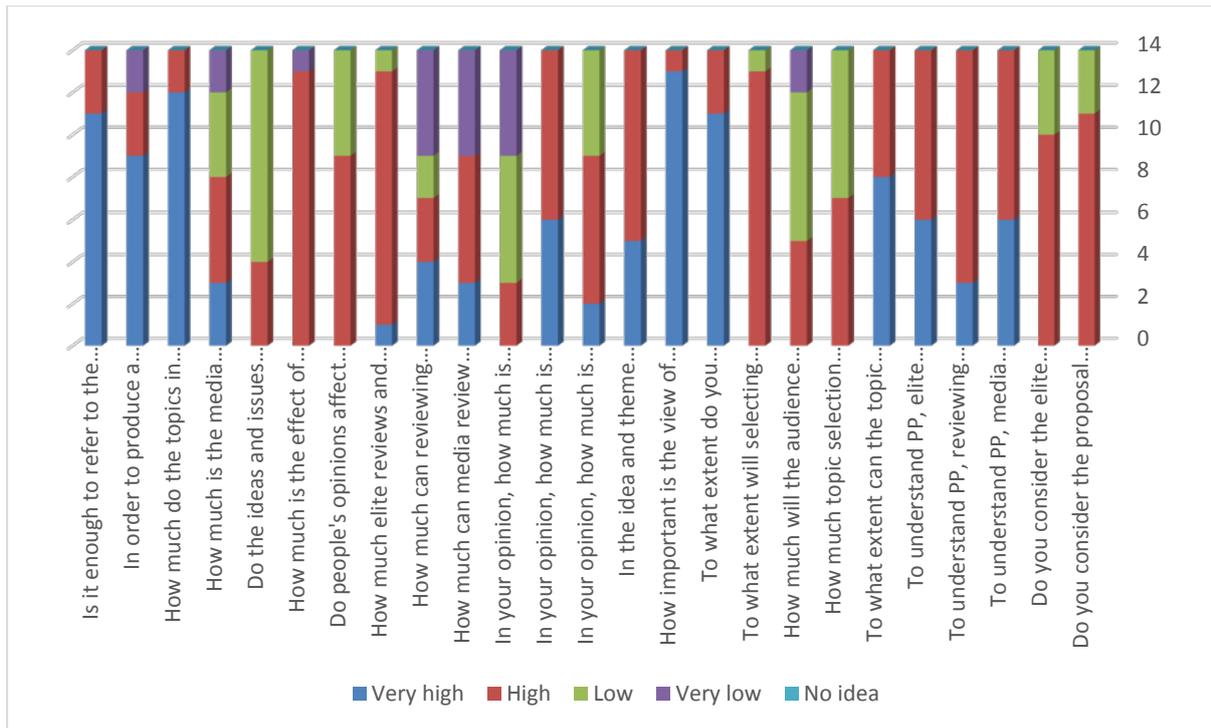


Figure 2.

Finally, for conclusion on the correctness of the model, the responses very high and high show agreement and the low and very low responses show disagreement. No idea means remaining as original. The aggregated votes are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Evaluation components	Agree	Disagree	No idea
Evaluation of the model components (the correctness of their presence as components effective in understanding PP)	85.71	16.67	0.00
Evaluation of effectiveness (correctness of the components relationship)	66.88	49.51	0.00
Explicating (the degree of the model being explicable in explaining the process)	92.86	7.69	0.00

Finally, by aggregating experts' opinions, the overall accuracy of the model was measured by the ratio presented in Table 4.

Table 4.

Do you confirm the authenticity of the model for understanding PP?	Agree	Disagree	No idea
	78.00	22.00	0.00

### Conclusion

The present study was conducted to increase the number of audience attention and increase its attention to the messages on the television. After reviewing the research references and obtaining the views of 14

TV experts, who are mostly among the producers of successful television programs in Iran and former manager of IRIB, their views are seen as follows.

- The most important factor in measuring the success of a media is the number and quality of its audience.
- The quality of the audience is the attention of the audience to the media messages and accompanies that medium.
- The audience tastes and opinions have the most critical role in the success of a television program, and the identification of the PP is one of the most important activities of a media practitioner.
- PP is historic and constantly changes due to time, so monitoring PP is also a continuous process.
- Understanding PP is important according to the experts, and they consider program production as an important factor in attracting the audience.
- In designing a television program, the first priority in designing an idea is with the planners and then with the people. Television managers and experts are in the next positions, respectively.
- Respondents consider the three elements of the experts' opinion, media contents as well as virtual social networks enough to understand PP. Moreover, they consider the views of the experts and the media as well as the media and cyberspace interaction as mutually effective.

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