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Introducing PACT Model of Transformative Persuasion: Re-emergence of Learning Approach to Persuasive Communications

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Abstract

The learning approach to persuasion was considered obsolete following the emergence of new paradigms such as cognitive and constructive approaches. However, according to the evolutions of learning theories and especially the re-emergence of the connectivism paradigm, mainly due to what new technologies have provided, the learning approach to persuasion seems to have reappeared as a powerful approach that has a lot to offer yet. Based on research conducted on transformative learning patterns and algorithms, this paper investigates: i) the applicability of using the patterns and algorithms as well as techniques developed in the transformative learning approach for transformative persuasion, ii) how media can be used in the transformation process. The components of a persuasive transformation model, the factors involved, and major elements of each factor are extracted by constructivist grounded theory (CGT), which is used for theory building, accumulating knowledge and experiences of scholars, practitioners, and experts in adult learning. We show how media can use these factors and elements and notions and techniques developed in transformative learning for the persuasive transformation of their respective audience. Borrowing the concepts of transformative learning concerning the states of mind of the adult students in different stages of the transformation process, we suggest how media can appropriately act in each stage to facilitate a transformation through persuasion.

Keywords: liminal space, media persuasion, PACT model of transformative persuasion, persuasive technologies, transformative learning, threshold concept.

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Introduction

United Nations Development Program considers strategic communication as "...linking the right message with the right target audience in the right manner" (UNDP, 2015: 4). This emphasis on the role of message content and context, the target audience, and how it is communicated compacts the important factors of strategic communication, where conveying an effective message is the aim. This compact form of different factors is used to influence the targeted audience of the communication and persuade them to have certain attitudes or act in a certain way. According to Miller (1980), communications exert three different persuasive effects: shaping, reinforcing, and changing responses (Perloff, 2010: 25). Shaping is considered constructing of perception or response about a concept while reinforcing refers to consolidating a certain perception and changing means a change or transformation of the attitude and behavior of the targeted audience into a new form.

It is expected that a persuasive transformation strategy is able to change and transform the targeted audience into new beings. It must be able to make the audience susceptible to change and be prepared to cross the threshold of understanding. In fact, a new form of understanding is shaped through persuasion. A transformative persuasion aims to apply a strategy that pushes the targeted audience into a transformation threshold and liminal space, where "you can think otherwise and to some extent that is what threshold concepts provoke you into doing, into thinking otherwise and letting go" (Land et al., 2014: 5).

Learning approach to persuasion is considered the oldest approach in persuasive strategy, where the literature goes back to the time of Aristotle with his famous book "Rhetoric". It was a prevailing paradigm up to recent decades when new paradigms and approaches were developed. Transformative learning as a product of evolution in adult learning is also considered a very useful approach to change and transform the targeted audience (e.g., students). The contribution of our paper is to examine whether tools, techniques, algorithms, and patterns of transformative learning could be used efficiently for devising a persuasive strategy aimed at transforming the audience of broadcasting media? How can we model the transformative persuasion, elaborate the components of the model and processes involved in such transformation?

Literature review

The literature of learning approach to persuasion goes back to ancient times. Kennedy (1994), in his book *A New History of Classical Rhetoric*, shows that Aristotle was the first scientist who proposed that there

are mainly three ingredients in persuasion. Aristotle called them: ethos (credibility of the communicator), pathos (emotional state of the audience) and logos (logic of the message). Perloff in his valuable book *The Dynamics of Persuasion*, provides a collection of concepts related to persuasion and persuasive attempt. According to him Aristotle contended that “speakers had to adapt to their audiences by considering in their speeches those factors that were most persuasive to an audience member” (Perloff, 2010: 28). Huali, in his paper, states that “From the time of Aristotle to contemporary history and Hovland’s propositions, the learning (or teaching) approach to persuasive communication was the prevailing paradigm” (Huali, 2016: 71). Later on, it has been classified as a classical approach, which considered the audience as a passive element.

Perloff also reviews the US WWII media campaigns against Nazis and elaborates the works of Hovland and his associates as refined techniques with scientific experimentation. Perloff also explains how Hovland experimented on persuasive communication effects and how he and his colleagues took concepts invented by Aristotle—ethos, pathos, logos—to examine their effect systematically (Perloff, 2010: 29).

Nonetheless, as we know, the learning (classical) approach as one of the first communication models was criticized by many scholars pointing to the fact that it assumes the communication process is unidirectional, and the audiences are passive elements. These critics argued that the audiences of messages are active elements whose beliefs, values, norms and assumptions will create a dynamic reflection to the message received; so, the classical approach is not valid in many instances.

Different scholars proposed many new models based on different disciplines; however, almost all future communication models and inputs from different disciplines differed from the classical approach. This led to more rejection of the learning approach to persuasion. Moreover, its supporters were considered as diehards (Burgoon et al., 1981) and stubborn. While the new communication theories somehow rejected the classical learning approach to persuasion, transformative learning concepts emerged as one of those progressing concepts which have a lot to offer, as Burgoon, Burgoon, & Miller (1981) have predicted in their research about the potentiality of learning approach to re-emerge.

Literature shows that the model introduced by Cugelman et al. (2009) can be considered as one of the most compact models and introduces new elements to the previous communication models developed for persuasive communication. The model considers eight elements: the newly added concepts, were feedback, feedback interpretations, and social and physical context. Figure-1 shows this model and its elements.

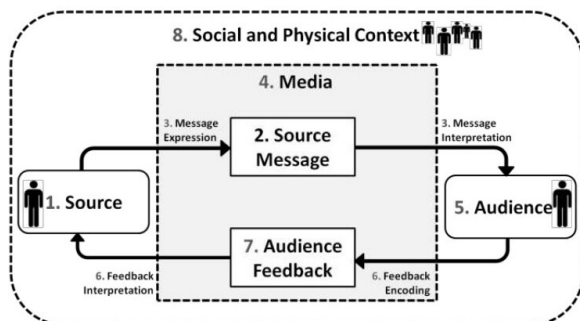


Figure 1. Persuasive Communication Model (Cugelman et al., 2009)

There is very rich literature on transformative learning. Its different applications in the teaching environment have created a unique platform for numerous researchers to study the different features of this concept. Jack Mezirow can be considered as the father of this concept and his major contribution to this concept is undeniable. Mezirow has defined transformative learnings “learning that transforms problematic frames of reference-sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mind sets- to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change” (Mezirow, 2003: 58). Thus, in order to be transformative, learning must be able to change the behaviour, mental model, or attitude of the subjects through learning. Mezirow’s early perception and propositions on transformative learning has been criticized by other scholars like Boyd and Myers (1988), Taylor and Cranton (2013) etc., stating that it is too focused on rationality as the only source for transformation. Boyd and Myers argued that rationality is not the only dynamic of perspective transformation; they claim the other dynamics are initiated by entities within the psyche that have their own content and agendas. In their own terms,

“... to understand ourselves it is necessary to be aware not only of the conscious dynamics in our lives but also as far as we are able, the dynamics arising from other more hidden components of the Self that influence our behaviour. A knowledge of the Self is basic to an understanding of transformative education” (Boyd & Myers, 1988: 268).

Other researchers also had contributions to the evolution of transformative learning concept and added values to Mezirow’s propositions (Kitchenham, 2008; Jones, 2016; Cranton et al., 2006; Taylor, 2007), emphasizing on the role of other factors such as culture, unconscious mind, and social values, archetypes, etc.

The transformative learning approach uses a disorienting dilemma to create troublesome knowledge in the respected audience to prepare them for a new way of looking at the presumed concepts. It uses the notion of creating an “Aha Moment” for the students to help them see and understand the concepts from a new angle and eventually make a change in attitude. Different models for elaborating the transformation process were developed by different scholars like that of Land et al. (2014), Van Geppes (1960), Kuhn (1970), Bridges (1980), where all have certain ideas in common such as the variety and nature of stages involved (Robertson, 1997).

McWhinney and Markos (2003) reviewed the stages of transformation within education and learning in liminal space, in cultural and religious forms. According to the framework of Kurt Levin (1946) for the process of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing, liminal space called by Victor Turner (1969) refers to a stage that the change is happening – a place that is on the threshold but neither here nor there. They explain the process as “Existing in this liminal middle space are the archetypal conditions that vessel transformations of individuals, communities, and societies. There, learning transforms in radical, irreversible, and often unexpected ways. The conditions for such change may occur by accident or intentional plan, or may emerge from the natural rhythm of human life” (McWhinney & Markos, 2003: 21). Ray Land et al. (2010) also propose a three-level stage of transformation in threshold: Pre-liminal, Liminal and Post-liminal; where, the learner (subject) experience different types of features. They suggest that the subject encounters troublesome knowledge in the pre-liminal stage, where new concepts challenge his previous knowledge. The subject will start to reconstitute his understanding of the concept in a new form in his ontological and epistemic level in the second stage. In the final stage, i.e., the Post-liminal stage, he will understand the concept in a new form and reach an irreversible transformation. Land et al. also consider liminality as a part of the threshold concept and suggest that liminality is a flux type of space, which is provoked by some encounters with threshold concepts. They consider the liminal space as: “This is a space where things can be re-thought, re-authored, where, as we discussed earlier, one can undo the script of self and re-script” (Land et al., 2014: 5).

Douglas L. Robertson quoting Van Gennep’s studies on transition rituals in tribal societies, identify three phases in transformation: separation, transition and incorporation. Quoting Bridges in the conformation of these phases, Robertson shows the similarity of what contemporary American society proposes in human’s psychological adaptation of change. He also shows the same pattern of change in Kuhn’s description of paradigm shift (Robertson, 1997: 110).

According to Ray Land and others, Vivien (2012) simulates the liminal process as a “tunnel rather than a threshold, in that for most of the time the learner cannot discern the exit” (Land et al., 2014: 6). Vivien suggests that the teachers use signs to help students understand the concepts. And, new signs are used as signifiers to help to change the perceptions of the students. The student’s understanding of these new signs or altered signs depends on how several conceptual elements are brought together coherently, “... Perhaps the threshold concept is so troublesome not because the concept is so difficult but because it challenges the learner’s understanding of its component concepts and this is why it acts as a check point for the learner’s progress” (Land et al., 2014: 6).

Methodology

In this research, interviews were conducted with academicians and professional practitioners of three different disciplines:

- cognitive science and psychology experts, with academic and experimental background,
- media and communication experts, from cultural studies experts to TV and communication scholars,
- teaching and learning experts (with experienced scholars focused on adult learning and virtual learning expertise).

Participants of the selected interviews were typical in their profound experience in teaching adults and witnessing the reflections and reactions of their attendees and students, who were mostly consisting of managers and experienced experts. The research questions (presented in the appendix of this paper) were aimed at extracting the lifelong experiences of interviewed scholars and practitioners regarding the reflections, modes, and stages of learning in the subjected adult audience (students), and examining common patterns and algorithms within such experiences.

Kathy Charmaz’s constructivist approach to the grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) was used for this investigation. The grounded theory can be considered one of the best approaches for qualitative and interpretative studies and an efficient method in theory building, especially where social phenomena are concerned. As Charmaz posits out, “Constructivist grounded theory assumes relativity, acknowledges standpoints, and advocates reflexivity... use of constructivism assumes the existence of an obdurate, real world that may be interpreted in multiple ways. I assume that people make their worlds but do not make them as they please. Rather, worlds are constructed under particular historical and social conditions that shape our views, actions, and collective practices. Constructivist grounded theory (Bryant, 2002; Charmaz, 2000, 2002, 2005, 2006; Clarke,

2003, 2005, 2006) has fundamental epistemological roots in sociological social constructionism” (Charmaz, 2008: 409). In this research, rich data was collected and classified from the experts and a back and forth process of literature reviews, coding, and memo writing was conducted to help the researcher to co-create and construct a theory.

The interviewees were asked questions about five main topics related to the research. Keeping in mind the responses must be kept within the scope of the research, a semi-structured process of question and answers were conducted and interviews were repeated when necessary. Sixteen interviews with 14 participants were conducted and recorded. The records were written down and categorized into 600 open codes, out of which 93 focused codes were extracted later. Memos were written, and a cross-reference was done with the literature on each subject. Finally, the findings were classified into 9 different themes.

Appendix I provides a translation of the research questions and a table elaborating focused codes and 9 related themes extracted from an accumulation of memos and codes. Themes 2-8 present the collection of extracted focused codes and memos about factors and elements involved in the transformative persuasion.

The research reached the saturation point in the first ten interviews. However, to ensure that no new concept would be raised, the interviews were continued to sixteenth (two of them were repeated with the same interviewees for clarification purposes). Many clarifying sub-questions were asked from the interviewees to refrain from any ambiguity. All ethical issues were observed through recording or referencing (the recorder was turned off when interviewees wished); therefore, in the end, the findings are based on expressions that were publishable.

Factors involved in a Transformative Persuasion Model through media were extracted and elements of each factor and their role were classified. Policy implications were also provided for the Iranian National TV (which was one of the research targets). Finally, the results of these findings were analysed and compared with the literature.

Findings

According to the findings of the research, there are four main factors involved in a persuasive transformation strategy:

Presentation: What content is to be transferred, how and in what context is it to be raised, what channel is to be used, who is going to present it, what technology and special effects are to be used, when would be the best appropriate timing for the presentation of the message, etc.?

Audience: Who is the targeted audience of the message, what are the audi-

ence’s characteristics, what are the cultural norms and value system of the involved society or community, what motivates them more effectively, etc.?

Content and context: What is the content required for transformation purpose, what would be the appropriate context for the content to place, what concepts are affiliated to, or aligned with making the message meaningful (to be used as an indirect approach to persuading the audience through peripheral roots of cognitions), how to make a concise message out of the concept, etc.?

Technologies applied: What are the suggested technologies to be applied for the persuasion, i.e. special effects to be used, tools and techniques, software and hardware required, etc.?

To set a persuasive strategy, the persuader should consider these factors and find answers to the abovementioned questions in each. The PACT model of transformative persuasion through media compacts all these factors and elements, elaborating each factor’s details and explaining how they should bind together for such strategy to work effectively.

Figure 2 shows the suggested model and factors involved in devising a persuasive strategy and the components of each factor.

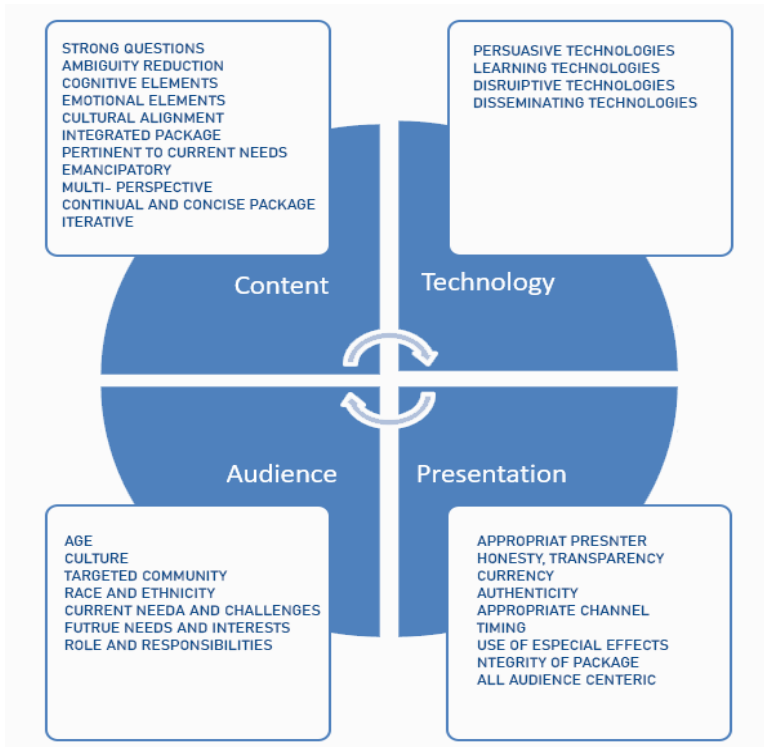


Figure 2. PACT Model of Transformative Persuasion

How does it work

In order to use these factors in a transformative persuasion attempt, first, the media should be able to grab the attention of the targeted audience. According to focused codes extracted from the interviews and classified in suggested themes, the following remarks can be made about how this model is expected to work in application and operation:

1. The research suggests using emotional factors such as national pride, hope, joy, fear appeals, or a combination of them in contexts (or Genre) of the content presented for grabbing the attention. The way the message is presented, the credibility of the source, image of the presenter can help in this stage.
2. After the attention-grabbing, according to the transformative learning approach, creating Aha Moments for the audience would be the next target. Aha moments should help the audience enter a condition that is called liminal space where he should doubt his previous assumptions and perceptions related to the subject of the message. The content of the message should be able to persuade the audience to listen more carefully to what is being proposed.
3. Applying the transformative approach suggests transforming the target audience to achieve a new form of understanding of the concept. Leading the audience across the transformation threshold and stages within the liminal space is what the media has to achieve in this process.
4. The findings propose that this is done in three distinguishable stages of the liminal space of transformation threshold. In the premier stage (also called the pre-liminal stage), the aim is to create doubt about prevailing perceptions and pre-assumptions. It suggests using strong questions to cast doubt, prepare the audience for looking at the subject from a new perspective, and eventually change their attitudes. The question must be designed to challenge the logic and alignments of the related issues, hence disintegrating the previous understanding of the proposed concept.
5. The findings put forth that in the second stage of transformation (also called the liminal stage) the audience should see alternative forms of interpreting the proposed concept in the message. This must facilitate crossing the threshold so that the audience is expected to find multiple interpretations in understanding reality.
6. In the final stage (also called the post-liminal stage), new forms of alignments and logic behind the new perception must be shaped. The addressed audience is expected to say Aha when learning occurred and a new form of understanding is shaped. The creation

- of such aha moments should mean that the audience of the message can see the concept from a different perspective.
7. The outcome of the research offers that such a process can be used for inoculation purposes, i.e. when the content provider aims to establish a frame of reference for a new event or concept. Biasing the audience with a certain angle of looking at the concept can have a vaccinating effect against other interpretations about the same subject.
 8. The findings posit that media can help facilitate such a process in each stage and the success of the transformative persuasion process depends much on how the factors of the model and elements within each factor are used appropriately. For example, after attention-grabbing is achieved, the media contents presented in a proper context are more likely to facilitate the transformation process if they are somehow related to the targeted audience's current and future needs or interests.
 9. The same concept prevails in all other items mentioned in the model: the context of the message, what the assessments tell us about the targeted audience, their culture, needs, desires, etc., how the message is presented, and whether the technologies used all the tools and means for a more efficient transformation process.
 10. There are limitations within this process when the persuasive transformation targets deep layers of the audience's value system. The findings show that experienced individuals and adults are much more resistant to transformation and their learning process is much more complicated than that of youngsters.
 11. Grabbing the attention, and helping the audience to move across the transformation process, needs media to follow a persuasive strategy, where new forms of contents in different contexts are produced to change the understanding of the respective audience through a cycle of production and presentation, reiterated in different forms for different audiences.

Analysis & Discussions

In order to verify the authenticity of the factors collected in the model and the elements within each factor, the research reviewed the literature and compared the findings of this study with what were already noticed by others. This section is the result of the cross-checking of the findings and an evaluation of what others suggested in the literature about the same subjects.

Our findings suggest an attention-grabbing procedure as a pre-requisite of transformation attempt. Stagnor emphasizing such procedure,

posits: “In order to be effective persuaders, we must first get people’s attention, then send an effective message to them, and then ensure that they process the message in the way we would like them to” (Stangor, 2011: 214). Also, Robert Cialdini, referring to the crucial moments before a persuasive attempt or what he calls influencing the audience, emphasizes the role of creating a suitable condition for the audience using every opportunity to help their minds ready to accept what is being proposed (Cialdini, 2016: 15). Harry Mills, referring to two different approaches of persuasion, i.e. emotional root and logical root, shows that emotional factors are more efficient and much faster than the logical approach (Mills, 2000: 2).

As stated in the literature review section, Aristotle was the first one to show that the audience factor, the message content, and how to convey the message are all important factors in a persuasive attempt. In consonance with this look, our findings suggest a new classification of the factors and introduce the technology used in content provision, dissemination and persuasion (persuasive technologies) as a new factor.

Presentation factor

When it comes to media and especially TV, as the means of presentation of learning material, what the viewer watch and hear plays a very important role in the attention-grabbing process– as Thyagarajan et al. (2002: 26) emphasized that active listeners and learners are more comfortable with visuals. In this regard, according to our findings, an effective presentation consists of these elements:

Presenter: A proper presenter, face, tone of voice, accent, the art of fluent speaking, and use of appropriate language all play important roles in choosing a perfect presenter. Overall, the presenter must have all the skills necessary to present the provided message; at the same time, he must be intelligent enough to improvise when necessary. The presentation is all about gaining the trust of the audience. Using an attractive presenter who is an expert in presenting messages is an effective technique. Different scholars have emphasized the role of the presenter in a persuasive attempt, “A message would be more effective if it is delivered by a more persuasive communicator” (Stangor, 2011: 214). The presenter of the message (content) through media should be appropriate for the job in all its dimensions. For example, the handling of voice, which is the base of fundamental expression of the audio-visual contents (Rodero, 2007: 209), is an important factor of the effectiveness in television communications. The presenter’s physiology and body language are of importance (Ilieva, 2014); looking confident and straight forward will help gain the audience’s trust (Stangor, 2011: 215).

Ethics, Honesty and Transparency: Ethical issues must be observed to gain the audience's trust and prepare them for listening and accommodating the message sender. Findings show that observing ethical issues like honesty, transparency, and truth plays a very important role for a media channel to grab the attention and influence its audience. The audience is likely to pay attention to the media, which has transparency as its conduct. Different researches confirm this and represent the significance of these items in a persuasive attempt. "Related notions of trust and truth are central in media professional activities" (Davies, 2008). Media ethics is becoming more and more important in modern societies (Khan, 2011). Transparency is a double sided issue for the media. Media can force different policy makers, institutions and the government to be transparent (Ballestros et al., 2017) and at the same time media itself must be transparent in its reports.

Addressing Current Challenges: The audience is more likely to pay attention to the contents that are about current issues, problems, and challenges. According to our findings, people would like to see how the media reflect them. They need to know the future challenges and the solutions to their daily problems. According to Wurff & Schoenbach (2014), the audience expect the media (journalism) to reflect their civic demands.

Authenticity: Authenticity and credibility of a channel is not acquired overnight. It takes a long time and lots of effort to prove honesty, transparency and neutrality in reporting the facts in order to build the fame of being authentic. People tend to believe the content provided by a media if the media is famous for its credibility. The same goes for the credibility of the presenter. According to Stangor, "*using credible and trustworthy figures in presenting is likely to help the audience's acceptance*" (Stangor, 2011: 214).

Appropriate Channel: The wide variety of media channels due to the emergence of social media drives the persuader to consider the best channel to use to present the content. Naturally, the audience of the channel and their social and personal interests and needs would be major factors in deciding which channel to be used. Using the right channel for a better impact is emphasized by Berezan et al. (2016).

Timing: Appropriate timing, especially in broadcasting media, would ensure better accessibility and a better chance of getting a larger audience. Timing within the day or night as well as timing in the week—whether on the weekend or weekdays— can determine what type of audience would receive the content. For example, content broadcasted during working hours would probably grab the attention of housewives more than those on duty. This concept has been studied for different situations like political campaigns (Rice & Atkin, 2009: 457).

Appropriate special effects for presentation: How and what technology is used would play a major role in presenting content effectively and increase the chance of being more attractive. The special effects can be used for persuasive purposes in the content generated by the current advanced media technologies. Studies conducted on the impact of such technologies show that they positively affect comprehension of the persuasive contents (Morrison & Vogel, 1997).

Integrity of the package: According to our findings, the presentation content, context, timing, the channel used and all other factors must be in an integrated form. Coherency and synergy of the different elements can increase the effectiveness of a message at the presentation time. In transformative persuasion, after creating doubt about the integrity of the previous understanding of the concept, the new perspective must be presented in a wholesome and integrated form. Literature also confirms that the integrity of the components mentioned above shall have a positive synergetic effect, while their dissonance would have a negative one.

Audience factor: Audience plays the most important role in any persuasive attempt. All other factors are only at work to grab the attention of the targeted audience. However, as Feezell (2017: 1) describes, “Increased sensitivity and fragmentation of audience in today’s digital media environment threaten the traditional agenda-setting power of the mass media”. Thus, having a clear understanding about the audience, his/her world views, interests, feelings, anxieties, motivators, deep beliefs and value system, etc., is of great significance. At the same time, current social media platforms have acquired the ability to collect such information through artificial intelligence and have the capacity to provide valuable intelligence on how to specifically influence a certain targeted audience.

The traditional media usually lacks such platforms and must develop and use their own means of collecting such information about their audience. Our model suggests that age, culture, race and ethnicity of the audience; their current needs, challenges and interests, future challenges and interests, their role and responsibilities are important elements of the content creation process. The finding was inconclusive on the role of audience’s sex in their reactions.

Age: In the learning approach to persuade the audience, the audience’s age is of much importance. So, the age of the targeted audience is an important element in the preparation and presentation of the respected content. The content must consider an appropriate context and apply a proper technology suitable for the target audience’s age. In congruence with this, Knowles, Holton and Swanson (2005) point out the difference between the adult learning processes with that of young stu-

dents. The term Andragogy was proposed by Knowles for adult learning, against pedagogy for youngsters, to show this difference. Stangor also suggests, "When an advertisement is made to sell a product to teenagers, a teen ager is selected and for elders an elderly figure is more appropriate" (Stangor, 2011: 214).

Culture: Cultural elements such as value system, archetypes, proverbs, social norms and conventions, etc., of the targeted audience are so important in a persuasive attempt. Like what Boyd and Myer (1988) suggested and as discussed in coming sections, proper persuasive content shall consider these elements in order to prepare and persuade the audience for a change.

Targeted community: Different communities have different sub-cultures and local values. They have different needs and interests accordingly; so, knowing about these needs and interests can help the persuader to devise a proper persuasive strategy. The local language and accent of the target audience are also important for the creation of proper content. In consonance with our findings, there are several research works in the literature that have been conducted on this subject and on how the communities' cultural values and norms matter (WHO, 2009; Latif, 2020; Linkenbach, 2009-2017).

Race and Ethnicity: Although different races and ethnic groups usually have their own challenges, needs and priorities, our findings did not have any concrete evidence on the role of race and ethnicity in compliance with a persuasive strategy. Interviewees suggested that such a role can be studied in the future. However, as indicated in the previous clause, it can be concluded that the audience's race and ethnicity can be considered as important factors in persuasive attempts as different races and ethnicities may have different sub-cultures, archetypes and norms.

Current Needs, Challenges and Interests: If a message is related to the current issues in society or is aligned with the solution to some challenges, it is likely to be more attractive. Different communities of the audiences may have their own challenges and interests. However, a more effective message is the one that addresses the current challenges of the respected audience or is created to maintain their interests. Literature shows that relating the news subjects to the current needs of the society and showing solutions to the current challenges have been a mission for new journalism (McIntyre, 2017: i). The prevailing moods of the audience has also been indicated to be a significant source for better attention towards the messages (Stangor, 2011: 219).

Future Needs Challenges and Interests: Technology as an effective factor is the driver of change in the audience's interests, since it can influence their future life. The confusion about the uncertainties and the need

to come out of ambiguity is a reason for needing to know about the future. What the future events or paradigms are bringing to daily lives and businesses is an interesting topic for the audience. This has been approved by other research works as well. Whereas Scoons (2019) posits, "People, governments, firms etc. like to be able to plan for their future and reduce the uncertainties involved", it can be concluded that the audience of media also tends to know about the future, "Consumer's interests in new technologies is a source of product development of hi-tech companies" (ARM, 2020).

Role and Responsibilities: Social factors like the roles and responsibilities of the targeted audience are really determinative in how they think and behave. It was suggested that persuasion is effective if the audience agrees with what they read, hear, or watch. However, people might agree with what is being told to persuade them to act in a certain way, while their social role or responsibility could prohibit them from behaving accordingly. Stagnor also points out that social situations and the tendency to blend in the society can influence the behaviour of people (Stagnor, 2011: 210).

Content and Context Factor

According to our findings, the use of appropriate content in an appropriate context is crucial for any persuasive attempt to be effective. The audience's attitude e.g. world view, value and belief system, habits of mind, etc. must be targeted using a transformative learning approach in a persuasive attempt. The attempt should use a direct or systematic route of reasoning, logic and rationality as well as indirect or emotional, heuristic and affective route to have an effective, sustainable and transformative result. Contextual factors of a created content are also of great importance. Whether content should be shaped in a rational context, it is more appropriate to use emotional context like fear appeal, excitement, or it would be better to use a context using a mixed approach of rationality and emotions, is a major question to be addressed per case. This section of the paper elaborates on elements concerning the content (and context) factor of the persuasive approach using transformative learning algorithms.

Strong questions: A learning approach to transformation uses learning theories for persuasion. Transformation through learning needs the learners (here the audience) to question his/her pre-assumptions, frames of references, habits of mind and perceptions about previous experiences to go for a change in his/her world view. Our findings show that asking a reasonable strong question to force the audience to review and revise his pre-assumptions can be an effective factor. It can be a question about the alignment of different concepts in the audience's minds and help them think that those concepts might be aligned with

other forms and lead them to the new perceptions. The strong question actually tends to help the audience be ready to analyse different versions of the same concepts reflected in a new representation. Thus, it is expected that they learn to interpret their experiences in a new form. Strong questions direct the adult audience to research their memories for related experiences. Finding such experiences would enable the persuader to help the audience interpret their experience from a new angle and facilitate a change in the reference frames.

As stated in findings, adults with a profound experience about a concept are likely to resist accepting new forms of interpretations. As Malcolm Knowles et al. (2005: 4) puts forth, learning in adulthood is different and is based on six criteria:

- learner's need to know – why, what, and how,
- self-concept of the learner – autonomous or self-directing,
- prior experience of the learner – resource or mental models,
- readiness to learn – life related or developmental task,
- orientation to learning – problem centered or contextual,
- motivation to learn – intrinsic value or personal payoff.

Therefore, in order to change a targeted adult audience through teaching, one should bear in mind that adults are resistive to change and their motivations to change are different. However, as Mezirow (1981) posits, a disorienting dilemma can be a determinative factor in such transformation through transformative learning theory. Mezirow (1981: 6) argues, "The traumatic severity of the disorienting dilemma is clearly a factor in establishing the probability of a transformation". He indicates that tragic events such as death of a mate or divorce can cause (or expedite) such transformation. Our findings, however, suggests that a strong question designed for the targeted audience following their mental characteristics considering a proper knowledge of their mental biases and frames of references can exert doubt and create confusion. This would prepare the audience for the transformation through proper use of all factors and elements proposed by PACT model. Models, such as what Boyd and Myers (1988) proposed, also suggest that the use of appropriate content designed in affiliation with the cultural and social traditions of the targeted audience is likely to be more effective for the persuasive purpose. According to the model, other effective elements of content and context factors in this transformation are as follows:

- **Ambiguity reduction:** Audience tends to trust the media that provides them with the messages answering their questions and helps to clarify their ambiguities. The message's content can shape the audience's perception regarding any new event or development if a proper

context constructs it. As Chadee (2016) states, “Individuals are motivated to reduce informational ambiguity via media exposure.”

- **Cognitive elements:** Cognitive elements in content creation use rational routes and logic of the audience in order to persuade them. These elements let the audience think and internalize the presented message within their perception system and analyze it accordingly. Referring to Chaiken (2014), a direct route uses rationality and logic to persuade the audience and admit a new perception about a given issue.
- **Emotional elements:** Use of emotional elements in content development can be an effective element in any persuasive attempt, “Emotional contexts can have spontaneous effect on the audience and can persuade them to do or act upon what was presented” (Stangor, 2011: 218). This characteristic is particularly used in donation campaigns and epical speeches. In this regard, heuristic or spontaneous approach using emotional elements has been considered a powerful and effective persuasive attempt (Chaiken, 2014). Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) has the same approach by utilizing cognitive and emotional elements as central and peripheral routes, which can be used for persuasion or routes to shape the mindset (Perloff, 2010: 133).
- **Cultural affinity:** As elaborated in the audience section, the cultural aspects of the content are important for grabbing the attention of the targeted audience. The use of culturally familiar concepts for transformative content provision is a delicate and important element. The cultural affinity of the content can make a persuasive message easy to accept. Any culture has its own archetypes, proverbs, norms and traditions. One can find different versions of the same subject, even in contradictory forms. A proverb in culture can encourage the addressees to attempt hard for gaining something, while another proverb in the same culture might be found to encourage leaving everything to fate. The same goes with archetypes, poems, etc. Therefore, persuaders can only find the right content and context for any target culture from their own proverbs, stories and archetypes. The audience with less resistance can accept such familiar content since they are already within their value systems. For example, the audience’s feelings about their own country are usually positive (Stangor, 2011: 205); these feelings can be a good context for creating persuasive content regarding certain behaviour to be fed to the audience.
- **Integrated and concise package:** According to our research findings, the contents created must be in an integrated form and all parts of it must follow a comprehensive logic to convey a coherent concept.

It cannot have a contradictory nature, where certain parts contradict others. It must also come in a concise form; long and tedious contents are unlikely to attract attention. Metaphors, proverbs, archetypes and poems are different types of conveying a compressed and concise message in alignment with cultural and socially accepted values. The use of metaphors, proverbs and concise forms of content is a usual practice of advertising agencies. The effects of such cognitive elements for persuasive messages have been studied in several research works such as (Kantharaju et al., 2018; Ferrari, 2007).

- **Pertinent to current needs, interests and challenges:** As mentioned in the audience factors, our findings showed that if the content is pertinent to the current needs and challenges, interests and livelihood of the respected audience, it is likely to be more effective. Persuasive content can be integrated into a message that addresses a current need or challenge faced by the audience (society) and encourages them to behave in a certain way or perceive the challenge from the viewpoint of the content creator.
- **Emancipatory:** Content to be persuasive can have an emancipatory nature. This covers relieving the audience from ambiguity showing them how to tackle a crisis or solve a problem and look at a complicated issue from a calming perspective. Transformative education & learning is an example of emancipatory learning that focuses on freedom from a personal point of view rather than societal constraints (IGIGlobal, 2020). It helps when the human mind is enabled to have a new reflection or perception about the truth or logic behind the phenomena. Transformative impacts of emancipatory concepts in educations have been emphasized in works and interviews by Habermas (1971), Mezirow (1996) and Freire (1975).
- **Multi-perspective:** The best persuasive content must be developed for a specific audience after knowing his/her interests, needs, values, etc. However, as this is not possible for the broadcasting media yet, a persuasive attempt is better to have a multi-perspective context to include as much audience's preferences as possible. Studies show that using multiple agents to persuade the subject audience can be more effective (Kantharaju, De Franco, Pease, & Pelachaud, 2018). A persuasive content provider must bear in mind that the mental models of the audience vary and try to create something that can influence different mindsets in the form of using fear, humor, pride, pity, etc., appeals (or in a combined form). Obviously, creating such multi-perspective content using different contextual appeals is a delicate and professional task that needs both creativity and expertise.

- **Iteration:** our research outcome illustrates the effectiveness of iterating a concept in different forms and contexts to change the attitudes behaviors of the targeted audience. To cover a broader audience, persuasive content can be presented in different contexts and forms and uses different appeals (fear, humour, logic, etc.). The effectiveness of repeating the same concept in speaking (and not writing) has also been emphasized in “Classical Rhetoric” (Kennedy, 1994: 227). While reiterating the content in different forms can be helpful, repetition of the same content can be tedious and with adverse effects. The persuasive content must follow a rule to convey a meta-perception to the audience in different forms and logics brought by different disciplines, experts, and contexts. Findings are also in consonance with the Cultivation Theory; despite the arguments and counter-arguments involved in this theory, it is stated that the repetition of concepts in TV can have continuous effects on viewers. Different studies have confirmed such effects (Dainton & Zelle, 2019: 193; Meschtscherjakov et al., 2016: 56).

Technology factor

Technology can be considered as the platform, driver and a trigger in a persuasive attempt. It can also act as a monitoring and prescribing tool for persuasive purposes. Technology as a platform can facilitate and provide a venue for collecting data from the audience, providing the appropriate channels for assessing and processing these data and the respective reactions of the audience to certain contents, and analyzing their reflections to a persuasive strategy. It can also act as a platform for the dissemination of content. Persuasive technologies such as smart-watches and mobiles can act as drivers of change of behaviors; they can push (or persuade) their owners to have specific behavior (like observing certain diets, starting walking, etc.).

Technology as an enabler can provide means and tools for better content creation, provide customized content for any targeted audience, and help other aspects of our PACT model to function correctly and effectively. It can enable providers to present their contents with robust tools and techniques and engage different audience senses. Providing special effects in image building and environmental decorations such as lights and colors, sounds, etc. modify and improve the narrator’s tone or presenter, omitting annoying frequencies and giving many other factors necessary for a better presentation. Artificial Intelligence can find a proper audience for content using semantic webs and audience-based content provision. Technology has been proved to be helpful in content

creation as well. Technology also can act as a monitoring and suggestion system for persuaders, decision-makers, and policymakers in media.

Based on the outcome of our research, people are submissive to new technologies, especially those that can facilitate their wellbeing, communications and businesses. When the audience encounters a new paradigm created by the new technologies, they tend to wander and be submissive to what the message is raising. Therefore, using new technologies and their impact on daily lives in creating content is likely to grab the audience's attention more effectively and encourage them to be more inclined to change. According to our model, the elements that play important roles under the technology factor are as follows:

- **Persuasive technologies:** Persuasive technologies are new software applications and hardware tools increasingly being used for an attitude and eventually behavioral change. From established technologies such as smartwatches or mobiles that show owner's heartbeat and fitness and smart apps that help reduction of energy and water consumptions to many other emerging technologies such as the adoption of biking for sustainable urban mobility practice (Wunsch, 2016) and technologies for learning purposes (Luca Chittaro, 2016), all are utilized for persuasion and behavior changes. "Persuasive Technology is a vibrant and highly interdisciplinary research field that focuses on the design, development, and evaluation of interactive technologies with the aim of changing users' attitudes and behaviours" (Meschtscherjakov et al., 2016: III). It is expected that special purpose robots and wearable technologies are to be developed in different forms for the same purpose shortly.
- **Learning technologies:** Children and students can now learn through searching on the Internet and this is a big reason that new technologies have changed the learning paradigms. Learners can learn collectively in a dialectical environment and interactive space. Online learning technologies, virtual reality apparatus, and many new technologies have changed the learning environment from a teaching platform to a learning one. New technologies have also been used for teaching more effectively, leading to a better understanding of new concepts in teachings. New technologies also changed the habits of mind in elders. Now, the elders like to learn how to use social networks like WhatsApp and Telegram in order to be able to talk with their grandchildren. How people behave in a fully automated environment and monitored is different from that of an ordinary one and can be a vast area for future research. As Siemens states, "The life of knowledge was measured in decades.

Today, these foundational principles have been altered. Knowledge is growing exponentially. In many fields, the life of knowledge is now measured in months and years” (Siemens, 2005: 1).

- **Disseminating technologies:** Media industry has been revolutionized through new communication technologies. The emergence of the Internet, multimedia, IPTVs, social platforms and YouTube, weblogs, etc. is changing the media culture on the one hand and the daily life on the other hand. Media is no longer a unidirectional platform of news dissemination. Almost everyone is a reporter, a content developer and a disseminator of the news and analyses. “Technology has become the word most closely associated with new media” (Smith & Hendricks, 2010: 5). Now, when the families gather together, one can see that everybody is playing with their smartphones, communicating with their own communities and friends (McClue, 2010: 31). This has created new platforms for persuasive attempts as well as venues to prevent it. Every media user can now report, edit, contradict the story, or show the ideas behind a persuasive attempt (McClue, 2010: 162). So, in devising a persuasive attempt for a targeted community, one should bear in mind that the audience’s choice is not limited and the channels and content providers are no longer in the hands of a few specific entities. Semantic webs and Artificial Intelligence have been used for finding the right audience for the contents to be delivered (Buchholz & Briggs, 2020: 13).

On Transformation Process

A cyclic form of content creation, in various contexts and in different formats of presentation using all the components suggested, and reiterating the process after receiving the feedbacks of each cycle, is likely to address and convince/transform a broader audiences of different mindsets. While repeating the same message over and over again may lead to boredom and reduce the effectiveness, moderate repetition, in new contexts may be beneficial (Petty et al., 2009: 139). As the research has shown repeating can have a positive effect in transformative learning approach and its potential to change (the audience) has to be taken into account (Brinkmann, 2016).

Future trends and policy implications: TV networks are facing new challenges in almost every aspect of their traditional functions. Audience’s choice in selecting the content and program has dramatically been increased. Future trends of this industry show a more important role of “Video on Demand” to prevail, “Digitization” to be the main factor of content production, “Advertisements” to be more personalized,

and “Rules and Regulations” to be more moderate (Deloitte, 2020). This would make it difficult for national TV broadcasters to confine their audience to a certain channel and, in turn, reduce the chance of effective persuasive attempts. Disruptive technologies in this area cannot be ignored as they are likely to emerge and bring new, unexpected paradigms along (Buchholz & Briggs, 2020: 11).

Our findings also suggest different layers of understanding exist, where deep layers of perceptions and beliefs are harder to change. However, this interesting subject can be addressed in future research works about the topic.

Concluding Remarks

This research proposed the PACT model of transformative persuasion and showed how it could be used to shape, reinforce, and change the attitudes and behaviors of the audiences of media. The proposed model examined the applicability of transformative learning patterns, algorithms and experiences, in transformative persuasion and suggested the role media can play in each stage of the transformation process. We also showed that, like what is practiced in transformative learning that starts with raising a disorienting dilemma, strong questions could be created to question the logic of the prevailing perception and understanding and cause disintegration about targeted concepts by the audience. This should push the audience into a wonderland when looking for other forms of understanding would be the result.

In the next stage, like what is done in transformative learning, changing the frames of references of the audience can be achieved through proposing alternative interpretations about a concept or general understanding, or through promoting media literacy showing what the intentions and aims of mainstream media regarding their biased interpretations and techniques used in content and context provision are.

In the final stage, the transformative learning algorithms were considered to consolidate the new form of understanding of the concept in the targeted audience. Our findings suggested proposing an integrated package of concise affiliated concepts that aligns the new form of understanding of the subject to all other related issues and perceptions, e.g., articulating a new umbrella that covers and integrates all affiliated perceptions creating a new understanding of the concept.

Ethical considerations

The authors have completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or

falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc.

Conflicts of interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Appendix: The research Questions and Extracted Themes

1. How do you think people learn? Can we say that learning process has different stages and layers?
2. What are the main factors in changing the mindsets of others? How does transformation occur?
3. How can we persuade people through learning and teaching? What are the role of sex, age experience and culture in learning process?
4. How can we use media for persuasion purposes? What sort of contents can influence audience more effectively?
5. How can we make Aha moments (moments of learning or finding a new concept or perception about something) for others? What are the main factors in creation of such moments?

Focused Codes and the Relevant Themes Extracted

	Themes	Focused or Axial Codes
1	Paradigm Change in Communication & Technology	Development of Information Communication Technologies
		Change in Content Development Technologies
		Change in Media Technologies
		Change of Information Providing to Concept Sharing
		Transformation of Media Audience to User-Content Provider
		Increase of Distribution and Dissemination Channels
		Increase in Volume of Contents Available
		Emergence of Global Norms of Behavior and Conducts
		Diminishing Role of National Media as Sole Source of Information
		Emergence of Intelligent Content Providers

	Themes	Focused or Axial Codes
2	Characteristics of Adult Audience	Resistant to New Concepts
		Judging New Concepts Based on Their Experiences
		Compliance with the New Concept Based on Their Cognitive Model
		Checking the Messages on Their Personal and Social Needs
		Assessing the Messages Based on their Knowledge and Academic Background
		Assessment of Messages Based on Situational Factors like Timing and Hermeneutics
		Assessment of Messages Based on Personal and Social Benefits
		Assessment of Messages Based on Presenter (Seder of the Message)
		Assessment of Messages Based on Motives and Emotional Factors
		Assessment of Messages Based on Logics and Reasoning Factors
3	Characteristics of Iranian Audience	Strong Belief in National Pride and Sovereignty
		Emotional
		Visual
		Naïve, One Dimensional in Perception
		Seeking for Heroes
		Cautious in Accepting New Concepts
		Deterministic Approach to Phenomena (Zero- One Looking way of Perception)
		Easy to Satisfy
		Lack of Being Explicit
		Culturally Social

Themes	Focused or Axial Codes
4 Characteristics of a Persuasive Message	New Messages Are Becoming of a Sharing Meaning Nature
	Persuasive Messages tend to Take the Audience to a Transformation Threshold
	Effectiveness of Using Metaphors
	Effectiveness of Being Joyful
	Effectiveness of Puzzles and Games
	Effectiveness of Using Emotions and Motivational Factors
	Coherent with Ambiguity Reduction about the New Paradigms
	Being Appropriate for Current Prevailing Paradigms
	Being Appropriate for the Age and Life Periods
	Being Appropriate for the Social Status of the Audience
	Being Appropriate for the Knowledge and Academic Status of the Audience
	Being Appropriate with the Current State of Affairs
	Effectiveness of Persuasive Technologies
	Being Appropriate with the Needs of the Society (Providing solutions for current challenges)
	Being Concise
Being Emancipatory	
Removing Ambiguity	
Effectiveness of Inoculations	
5 Characteristics of an Influential and Effective Media	Transparency
	Honesty
	Reflecting The Needs of the Society and Problems Faced by the People
	Supporting The Prevailing Policies
	Supporting National Cultures
	Utilizing Reference Groups in the Society
	Use of Authenticated Sources and Documents
	Being Neutral in Providing Analytics and Interpreting News
6 Ways for Mental Transformation	Doubting the Current Beliefs
	Questioning the Perceptual Frameworks
	Asking Powerful Questions
	Creation of Appropriate Circumstances for the Audience
	Presenting an Integrated New Framework and Perceptual Pattern
	Using New Technological Concepts
	Using Cognitive Dissonance Concepts

	Themes	Focused or Axial Codes
7	Threshold Concept (Creation of Aha Moments)	Focused or Axial Codes Aligning the New Concepts to the Old Perceptions (Experiences) Noticing Differences Between Aha Moments with Transformation The Impact of Depth of Cognition on Tendency to go to Threshold Phase Differences in Threshold Layers Creation of Aha Moments Through Solving Mental Puzzles Differences of Aha in Inner and Outer Layers (Spaces of Mind) Possibility of Using Archetypes and Metaphors for Creating Aha (Threshold) Possibility of Defining Breakout Moments (Points) Use of Joy in New Findings and Explorations
8	Learning & eLearning Concepts	Dependency of Learning with Social Needs Differences Between Learning Motivations Alignment of Learning in Quantum Space with Media Need for an Interactive Environment for Learning Need to Present in a Understandable form (for everyone) Transformative Learning and Scientific and Operational Layers Impact of Audience (Characteristics and Culture) on Learning Need to Direct the Learners to adopt a Self-Learning approach in ELearning New Learning is Sharing Concepts and Meaning
9	Policy Implications for IRIB	Need for a change in Copying Prevailing Models Need for Defining a National Identity for our Media Need for Increase in Number Venues and Channels for Assessment of Audience Reflections Need for a Change in Content Provision Processes Need to Promote Media Literacy and Critical Approach Need to Produce Transformative Contents for Audience Need to Adopt a more Moderate Policy in Content Provision Need to Permit more Creativity and Innovations in Content Provision Need to Assess the Impacts (Pros and Cons) of Providing Local Contents for Different Provinces

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