THE IMPACT OF MEDIA LITERACY ON ADVERTISING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

In a time when media, advertising, and public relations are all converging, media literacy has become a crucial indicator of effective communication and audience engagement. By examining people's perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors in response to persuasive communication, this study seeks to understand how media literacy affects advertising and public relations.

The study used a mixed-methods approach and recruited 300 participants for a quantitative survey while holding 12 focus group discussions (FGDs) to gather qualitative information. While theme analysis was performed on the FGDs, descriptive statistics were used to evaluate the survey data. The sample included people from a variety of demographic backgrounds, ensuring a thorough understanding of the study's goals. The survey's findings revealed a range of attitudes about advertisements, with the majority exhibiting favorable attitudes and a willingness to interact.

The focus group discussions gave complexity to these findings by demonstrating the complex processes impacting participants' opinions, even while dissatisfaction with commercials was indicated at various frequencies. It should be noted that media literacy has become a significant factor in determining attitudes, permitting selective engagement, and building resistance to manipulative tactics. The study also found a significant link between media literacy and purchase intent, with participants attributing their media literacy to better decision-making and greater faith in commercials.

Similarly, it has been discovered that media literacy influences public relations engagement patterns by enabling people to assess the veracity of communication initiatives, particularly in times of crisis. Overall, this study advances our knowledge of how media literacy fits into the changing world of persuasive communication. The mixed-methods approach allows a comprehensive assessment of the effects of media literacy on advertising and public relations by merging quantitative and qualitative findings. This study emphasizes the necessity of media literacy as a critical ability for navigating the complex media environment and successfully engaging with persuasive messages as media continues to affect perceptions and behaviours.

Keywords: media literacy, advertising, public relations, impact, comparative study

Introduction

The merger of media, advertising, and public relations in the digital age has fundamentally changed the field of persuasive communication, altering both the means by which messages are disseminated and the very nature of audience involvement. In order to fully understand how media literacy, advertising tactics, and public relations efforts interact to construct the contemporary communication ecology, it is urgently necessary to go through this shift(Holladay & Coombs, 2013).

People are exposed to an unprecedented volume of communication in a world where information is constantly and effortlessly exchanged across numerous digital channels. A more sophisticated set of abilities is required to deal with this deluge, and media literacy has emerged as a crucial competency. Media literacy encompasses the ability to analyze, decode, and critically evaluate the complex layers of media communications. It goes beyond passive viewing. Media literacy equips people to navigate the complex web of content, picking out subtleties that could escape the less astute eye, such as visual signals, linguistic subtexts, implicit narratives, and underlying ideologies(Malmelin, 2010).

A greater comprehension of the symbiotic relationship between media literacy, advertising techniques, and public relations efforts is required due to the complexity of modern communication. An audience that is media literate greatly benefits from advertising, which aims to capture brand identity and elicit customer response within fleeting seconds. These abilities allow people to analyze commercials in depth, identifying the emotional cues intended, underlying prejudices, and persuasive strategies that are frequently hidden from passive consumers. On the other hand, public relations depend on creating rapport, controlling reputation, and encouraging open communication. Here, media literacy serves as a link that makes it easier for the audience to assess the sincerity and reliability of public relations efforts(Xie et al., 2018).

The importance of media literacy goes beyond that of a simple cognitive tool in the context of this paradigm shift. Individuals are transformed from passive recipients to knowledgeable participants in the communication process as a result of it acting as a catalyst for active participation. This transformation is in line with the democratic principles of the digital age, in which the lines between producers and consumers are blurred and interaction is a two-way street rather than a static one(Tully et al., 2020).

This research sets out on a quest to understand the complex interactions between media literacy, advertising tactics, and public relations initiatives in the face of this sophisticated web of interactions(Tugtekin&Koc, 2020). This study aims to shed light on how media literacy, as a cognitive construct, influences not only how people receive and react to messages but also the fundamental nature of how persuasive communication is conceptualized and carried out through empirical exploration and analysis. This study has the potential to give light on how media literacy functions as a perceptual filter, changing the

course of public relations and advertising campaigns and, in turn, enhancing our understanding of the changing media landscape.

Background and Context

The fundamental skill of media literacy enables people to comprehend and engage with a wide range of media. This skill set is essential in a time where text and visual content are seamlessly combined and viewers are continuously bombarded with information. It is crucial to incorporate media literacy into public relations and advertising strategies because it enables customers to participate meaningfully, recognize persuasive tactics, and make informed choices. Additionally, media literacy fills the gap between communicators' goals and audiences' interpretations, potentially influencing the outcomes of public relations and advertising campaigns(Sarwatay et al., 2021).

As the two main forces in persuasion, public relations and advertising have developed to take advantage of these shifting dynamics. Advertising deliberately uses storytelling, visual cues, and emotional appeals to draw viewers in and influence their behavior(Dhillon & Deepak, 2017). In contrast, public relations rely on trustworthiness, openness, and stakeholder involvement to control impressions and uphold an organization's reputation. A fascinating question arises in the midst of this transformation: How does media literacy, as a perceptual filter, affect the efficacy of public relations and advertising initiatives across various audience segments?

Statement of the Research Problem

The intricate and diverse relationship between media literacy, advertising, and public relations is explored in this study. Uncovering the extent to which media literacy affects the reception, interpretation, and response to advertising messages and public relations initiatives is the main goal of the research. The core of this study is the interaction between people's media literacy levels and their participation with persuasive communication.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is twofold. Firstly, it contributes to the academic understanding of how media literacy acts as a filter that shapes the audience's decoding of advertising and public relations messages. Secondly, from a practical perspective, the findings offer valuable insights to advertisers and public relations practitioners, enabling them to tailor their strategies to effectively resonate with diverse audiences. In an environment characterized by information overload and media saturation, this research illuminates how media literacy can serve as a bridge to meaning-making.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to explore and analyze the multifaceted influence of media literacy on advertising and public relations effectiveness. To achieve this overarching goal, the study aims to address the following research questions:

1. To study the impact of varying media literacy levels across demographics on the comprehension and interpretation of advertisements.
2. Analyze the influence of media literacy on emotional engagement, attitude development, and intentions concerning advertisements.
3. Investigate the relationship between media literacy and credibility assessment, trust formation, and active participation in public relations activities.

Literature Review

In the modern information age, media literacy has become a crucial concept, including the abilities and knowledge required to navigate, critically assess, and evaluate the massive amount of media content that daily bombards people(Hobbs, 2018). This section explores the many facets of media literacy, including its impact on public relations campaigns, its involvement in consumer views of advertising, its influence on prior demographic research, and its connections to trust, credibility, and ethical communication.

Defining Media Literacy and its Components

According to(Ng, 2012), media literacy includes the capacity to use diverse platforms and formats to access, analyze, evaluate, and generate media material. Its components include textual literacy, which means analyzing and decoding written material, and visual literacy, which entails comprehending the visual features in media ((Finucane et al., 2018)). Critical literacy equips people to examine media messages for underlying biases, viewpoints, and intents, whereas digital literacy also includes the ability to explore and evaluate online content(Hobbs et al., 2013).

The Role of Media Literacy in Shaping Consumer Perceptions of Advertising

Media literacy has a significant impact on how consumers interact with advertising messages. People who are highly media literate are better able to spot persuasive strategies, comprehend covert objectives, and critically assess the veracity of claims presented in commercials(Schivinski&Dabrowski, 2016). They are more likely to engage in cognitive processing, recognizing the intended emotional triggers and potential biases within the commercials, and are less likely to be affected by overt pleas (McMillan & Hwang, 2002)

Media Literacy's Impact on Public Relations Campaigns and Crisis Communication

In the field of public relations, media literacy is crucial in determining how communications are received. Audiences with more media literacy are better able to evaluate the reliability of information sources, distinguish between truth and opinion, and recognize possible manipulation(Jin et al., 2014). Additionally, media literacy has an impact on audiences' responses to crisis communication attempts. People who are more media literate are more inclined to look for supporting evidence and hold companies responsible for ethical and open communication amid crises(Sturges, 1994).

Previous Research on Media Literacy Levels Across Demographics and its Implications

Significant differences in media literacy levels among demographic groups have been revealed through research on this topic. Due to their experience with digital platforms and materials, younger generations—often referred to as "digital natives"—tend to demonstrate higher levels of media literacy(Maksl et al., 2015). On the other hand, elderly people could find it difficult to understand the rapidly changing media landscape. These variations have significant ramifications for communication tactics, demanding specialized solutions that take into account varied degrees of media literacy.

Relationship Between Media Literacy, Trust, Credibility, and Ethical Communication

The nexus between media literacy, trust, credibility, and ethical communication is fundamental. Media literacy equips individuals with the tools to critically assess the credibility of information sources, thereby influencing their levels of trust(Huda & Hashim, 2022). Ethical communication, rooted in transparency, accuracy, and fairness, resonates more strongly with media-literate audiences who actively seek reliable information. This interconnectedness underscores the importance of fostering media literacy to promote trustworthy and responsible communication practices.

Research Methodology

To reach its goals and gain an in-depth understanding of how media literacy affects public relations and advertising, this study used a mixed-methods strategy that included both survey research and focus group talks. These techniques were used in the study to collect information from a wide range of participants, giving it a comprehensive view of the research issue.

Survey

To explore the research aims quantitatively, a survey was created. A structured questionnaire was used in the survey, which had 300 participants. The survey's questions probed respondents' opinions regarding advertisements, engagement patterns, levels of irritability, and other pertinent variables. To facilitate data processing, the Likert scale was used to collect respondents' perspectives on a variety of responses.

Focus Group Discussions

In addition to the poll, focus groups were held to examine participants' experiences and perspectives in greater detail. These conversations offered qualitative information that enhanced the survey results. A total of 12 focus group meetings with participants from various demographic backgrounds were planned. To adequately capture the opinions of the participants, these sessions were moderated.

Sampling

A sample size of 300 respondents for the survey was chosen using a combination of convenience and random sampling techniques. To ensure the representation of a range of

viewpoints, the respondents were chosen from a variety of age groups, educational institutions, and occupations.

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select 12 participants for the focus group talks who satisfied certain requirements, including varying degrees of media literacy, age, and occupation. Through a variety of perspectives, this strategy attempted to ensure a thorough comprehension of the research objectives.

Data Analysis

Utilizing statistical methods like descriptive statistics and inferential analysis, quantitative data from the survey was examined. To graphically represent the outcomes and patterns, the findings were presented as tables and graphs.

The focus group talks' qualitative data was transcribed and thematically analyzed. To glean significant insights from the participant tales, emerging themes and patterns were found, classified, and arranged.

Integration of Findings

The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data made possible by the mixed methods technique improved the validity and breadth of the research findings. The focus group discussions added qualitative subtlety to the quantitative patterns supplied by the survey results, resulting in a thorough grasp of the effects of media literacy on advertising and public relations.
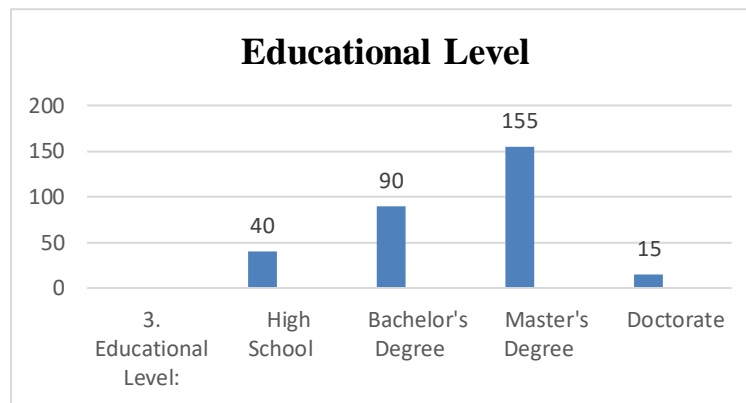
Through the integration of the advantages of survey research and focus group talks, this methodology made sure that the study objectives were thoroughly explored. It enabled a thorough examination of the effects of media literacy and allowed for a complex interpretation of the findings.
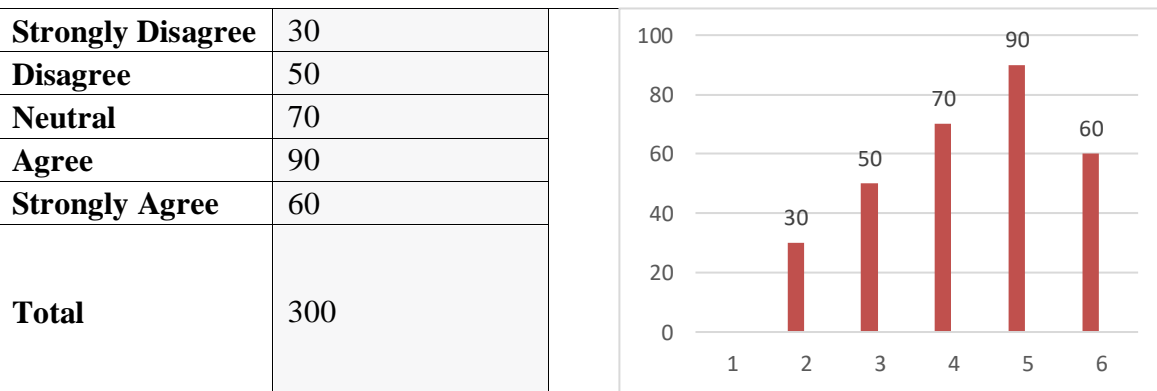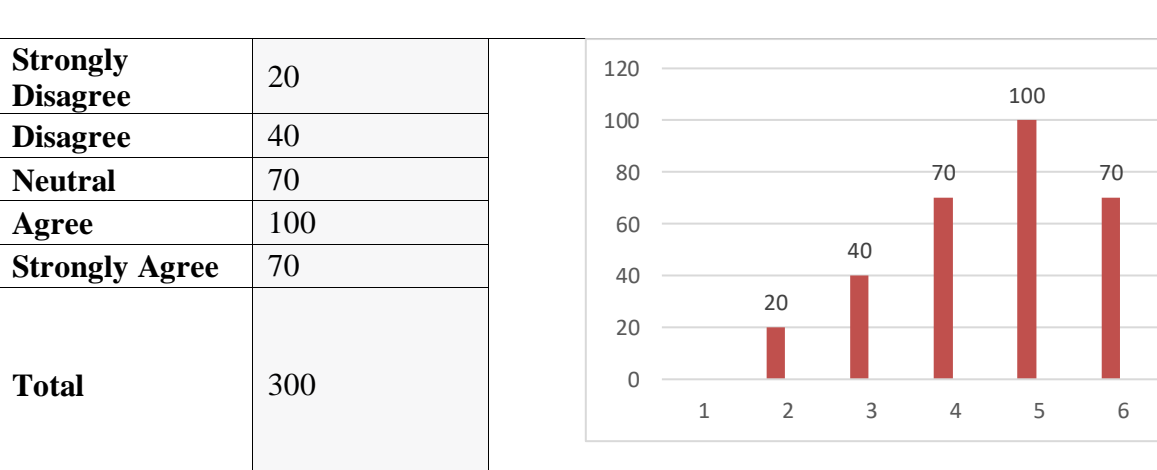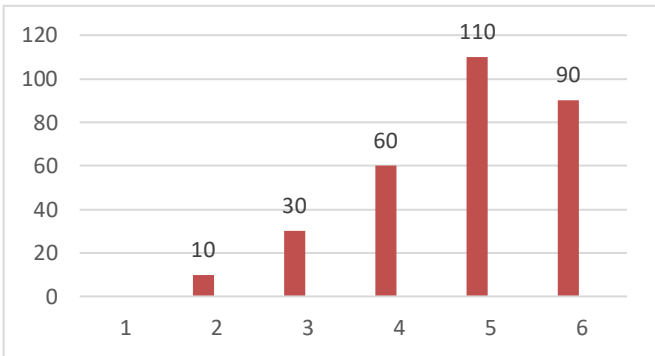
Data Analysis

Survey Analysis

Demographic Data

Educational Level
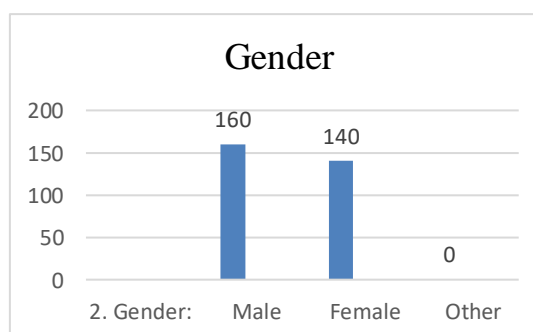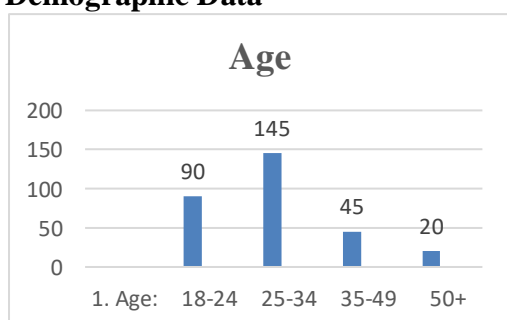
1. **I can interpret the meanings of various visual elements used in media content.**

Strongly Disagree	30
Disagree	50
Neutral	70
Agree	90
Strongly Agree	60
Total	300
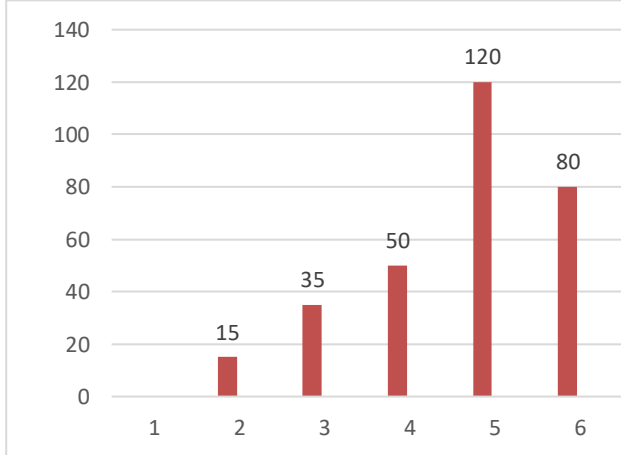
2. **I can identify the techniques used to manipulate visual elements in advertisements.**

Strongly Disagree	20
Disagree	40
Neutral	70
Agree	100
Strongly Agree	70
Total	300
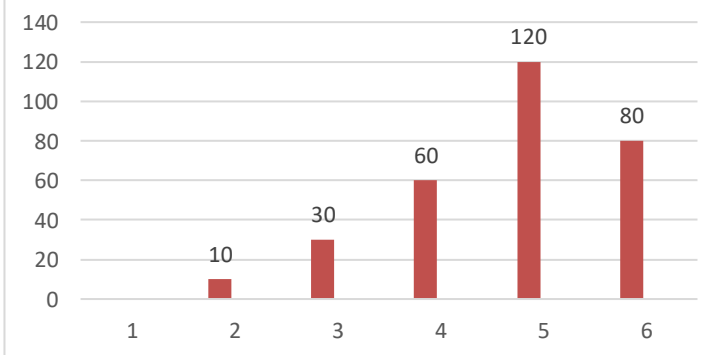
3. I can understand the main message of written content in media.

Strongly Disagree	10
Disagree	30
Neutral	60
Agree	110
Strongly Agree	90
Total	**300**

4. I can critically analyze the language and tone used in advertisements.

Strongly Disagree	15
Disagree	35
Neutral	50
Agree	120
Strongly Agree	80
Total	**300**

5. I am comfortable using different digital platforms and technologies.

Strongly Disagree	10
Disagree	30
Neutral	60
Agree	120
Strongly Agree	80
Total	**300**

6. I can distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources of information online.

Strongly Disagree	15
Disagree	40
Neutral	60
Agree	120
Strongly Agree	65
Total	**300**
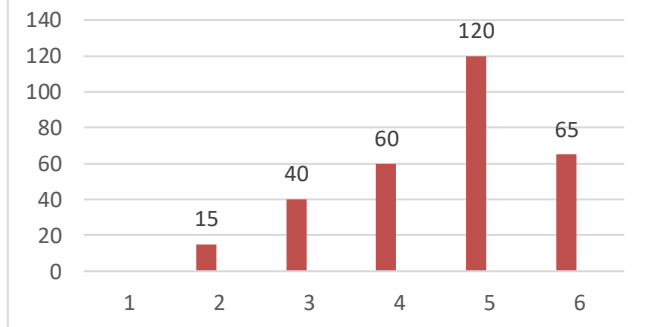
7. I can identify potential biases and perspectives present in media content.

Strongly Disagree	20
Disagree	40
Neutral	70
Agree	110
Strongly Agree	60
Total	**300**
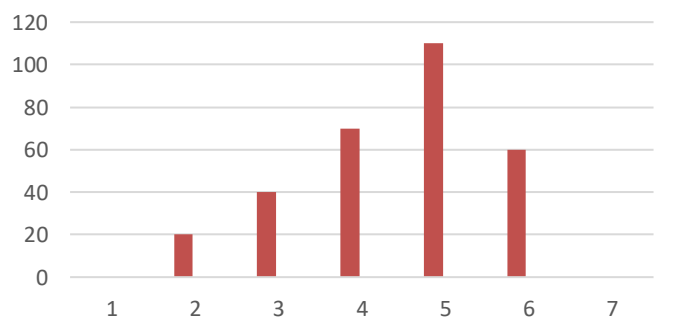
8. I can recognize when media messages are trying to persuade or manipulate me.

Strongly Disagree	15
Disagree	30
Neutral	60
Agree	120
Strongly Agree	75
Total	**300**
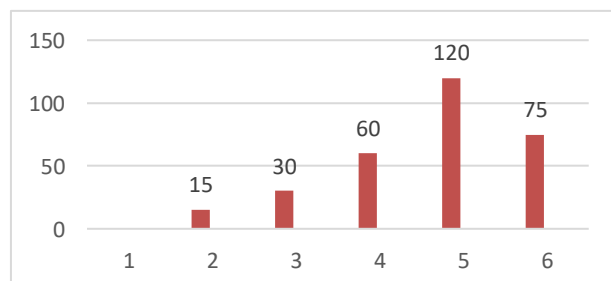
10. I actively seek out different perspectives before forming opinions based on media content.

Strongly Disagree	20
Disagree	40
Neutral	70
Agree	100
Strongly Agree	70
Total	**300**
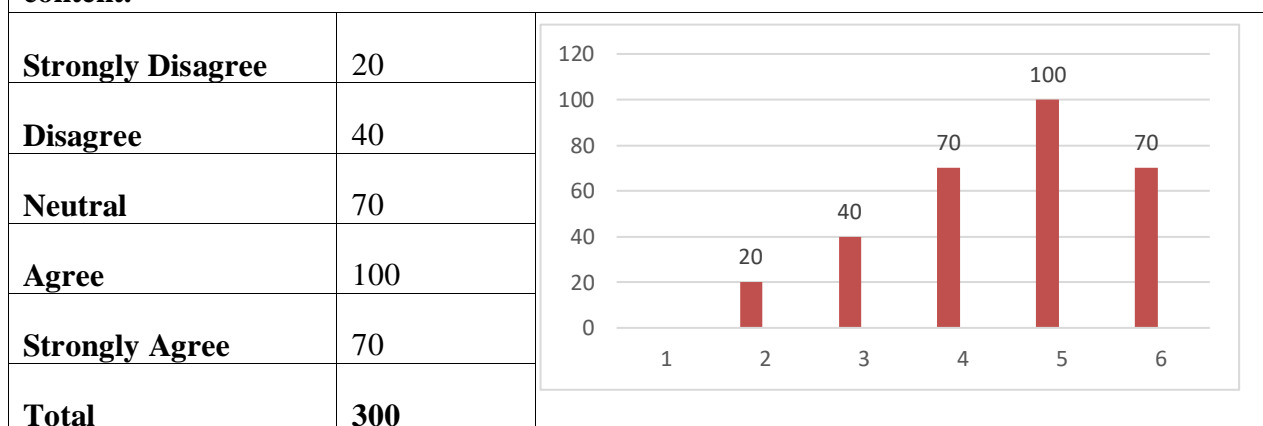
9. I feel confident in my ability to navigate and understand various forms of media content.

Strongly Disagree	10
Disagree	20
Neutral	40
Agree	120
Strongly Agree	110
Total	**300**
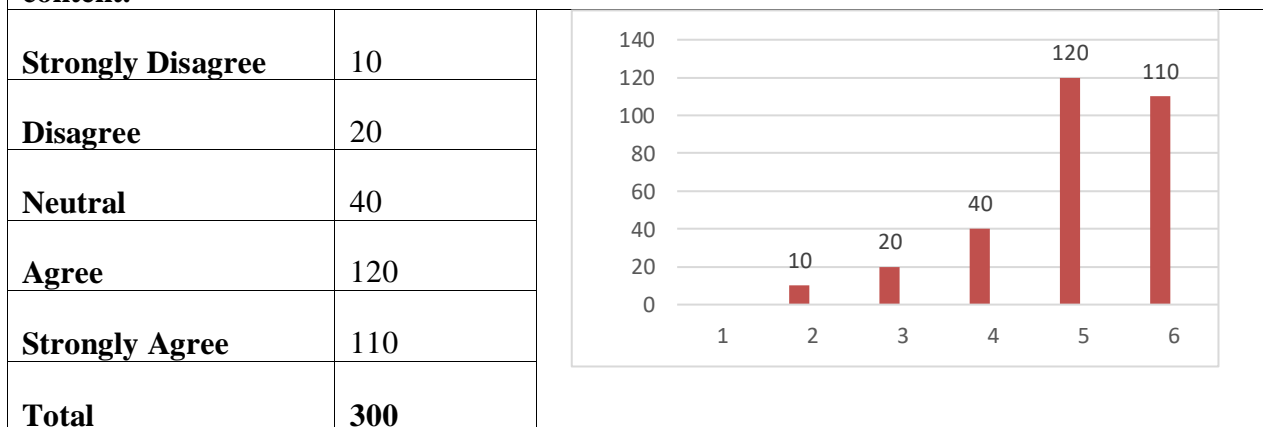
11. On average, how many hours per day do you spend consuming media content (e.g., TV, social media, news)?

|	
Less than 1 hour	40
1-2 hours	70
3-4 hours	90
5-6 hours	60
More than 6 hours	40
Total	300
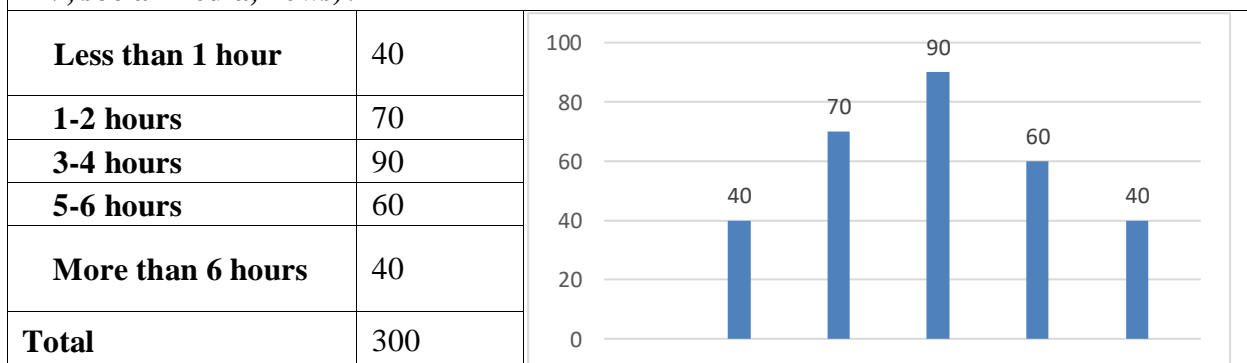
12. Which of the following types of media content do you consume most frequently? (Select all that apply)

Television	180
Online News	120
Social Media	220
Print Newspapers/Magazines	40
Radio	30
Podcasts	50
Total	**300**
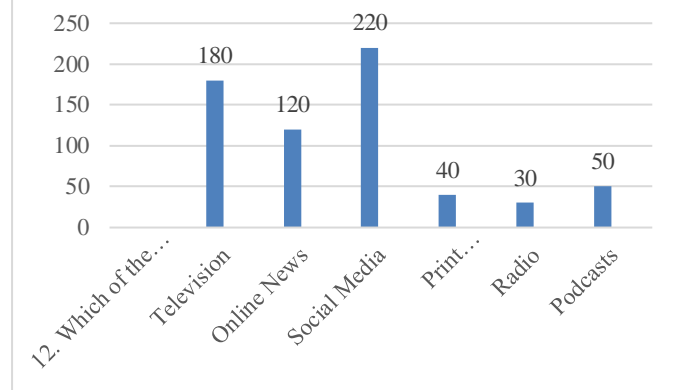
13. How often do you fact-check information you come across on the internet or social media?

Very Often	70
Often	100
Sometimes	80
Rarely	40
Never	10
Total	**300**
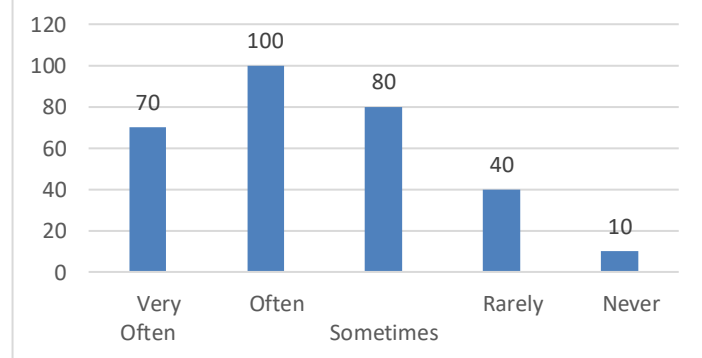
14. How often do you critically analyze the advertisements you see or hear?

Very Often	90
Often	120
Sometimes	70
Rarely	15
Never	5
Total	300
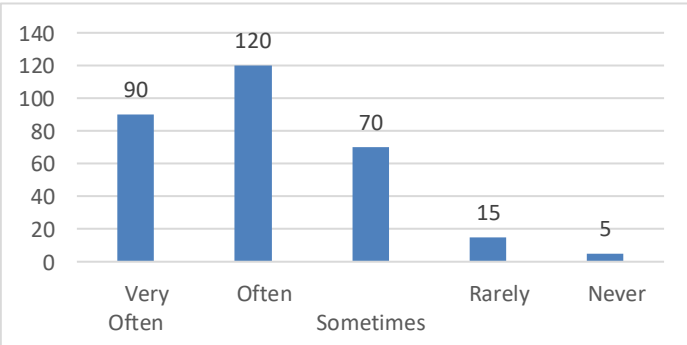
15. When you see an advertisement for a product or service you're interested in, how likely are you to consider purchasing it? (Circle one)
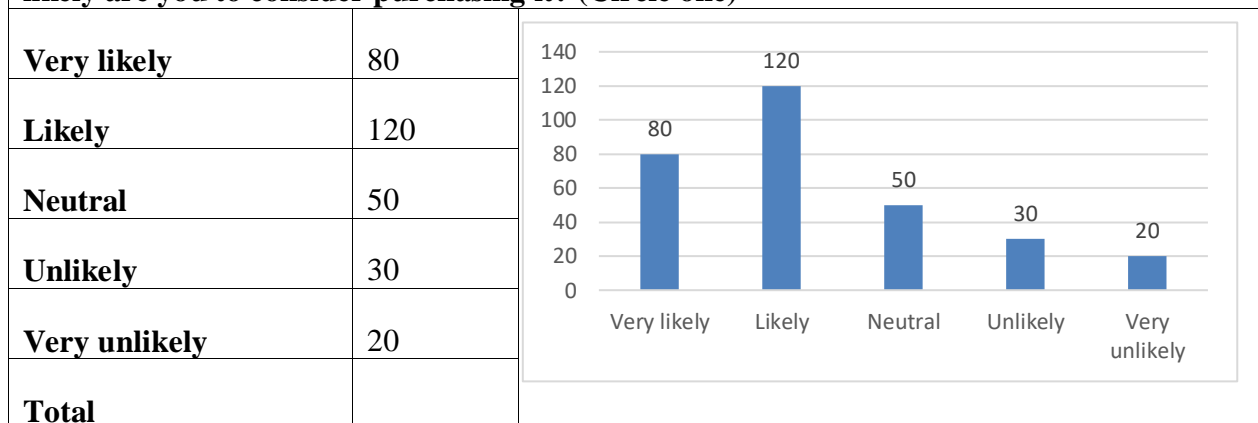
Very likely	80
Likely	120
Neutral	50
Unlikely	30
Very unlikely	20
Total	

16. Have you made a purchase based on an advertisement you've seen recently? (Circle one)

Yes, definitely	70
Yes, maybe	90
Not sure	40
No, probably not	60
No, definitely not	40
Total	300

17. Have you made a purchase based on an advertisement you've seen recently? (Circle one)

Yes, definitely	70
Yes, maybe	90
Not sure	40
No, probably not	60
No, definitely not	40
Total	300
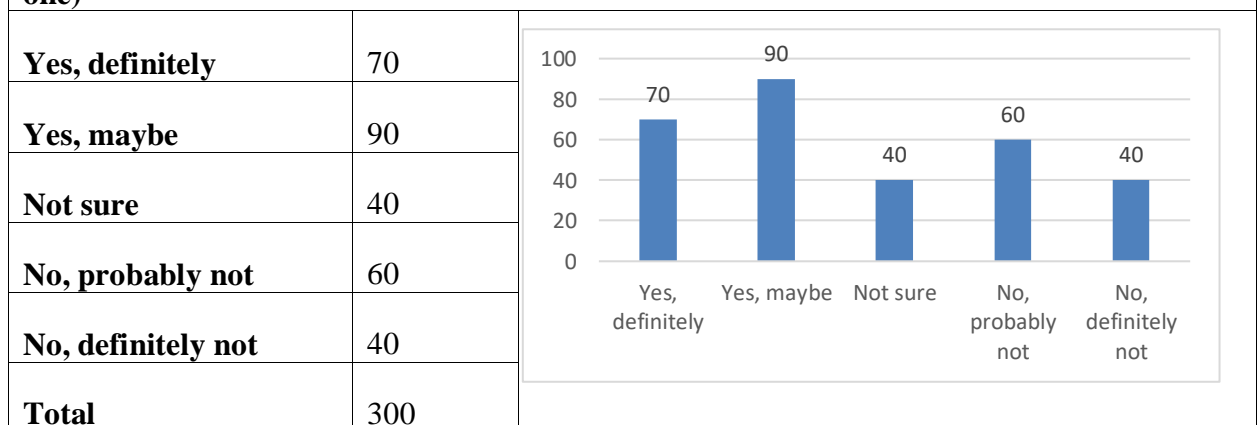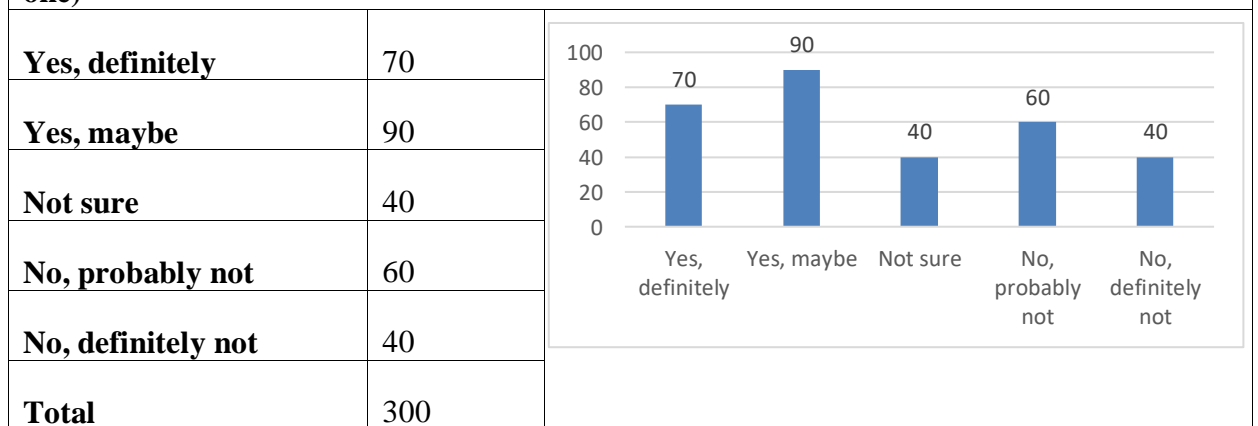
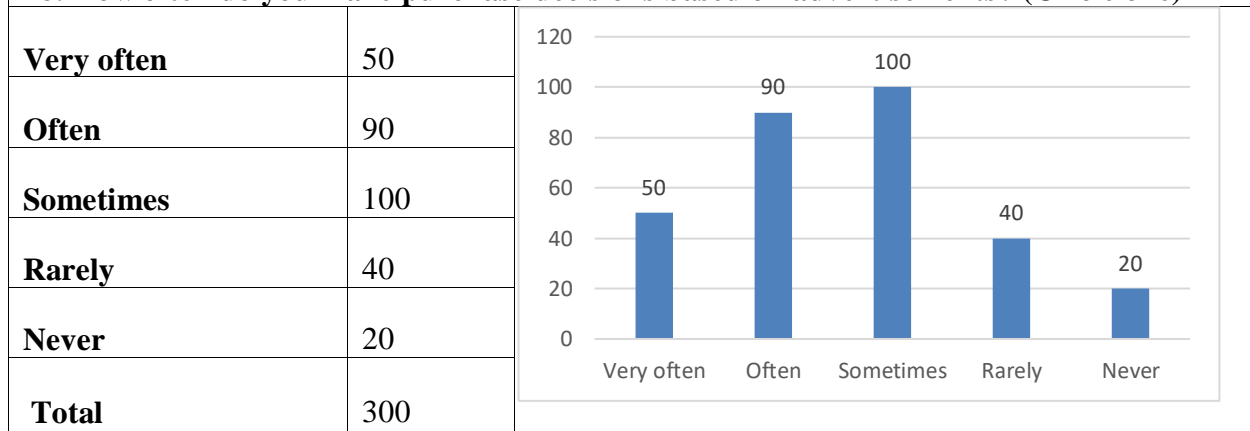**18. How often do you make purchase decisions based on advertisements? (Circle one)**

Very often	50
Often	90
Sometimes	100
Rarely	40
Never	20
Total	300

19. How do you generally feel about advertisements you encounter in various media? (Circle one)

Like them a lot	60
Like them somewhat	100
Neutral	80
Dislike them somewhat	40
Dislike them a lot	20
Total	300
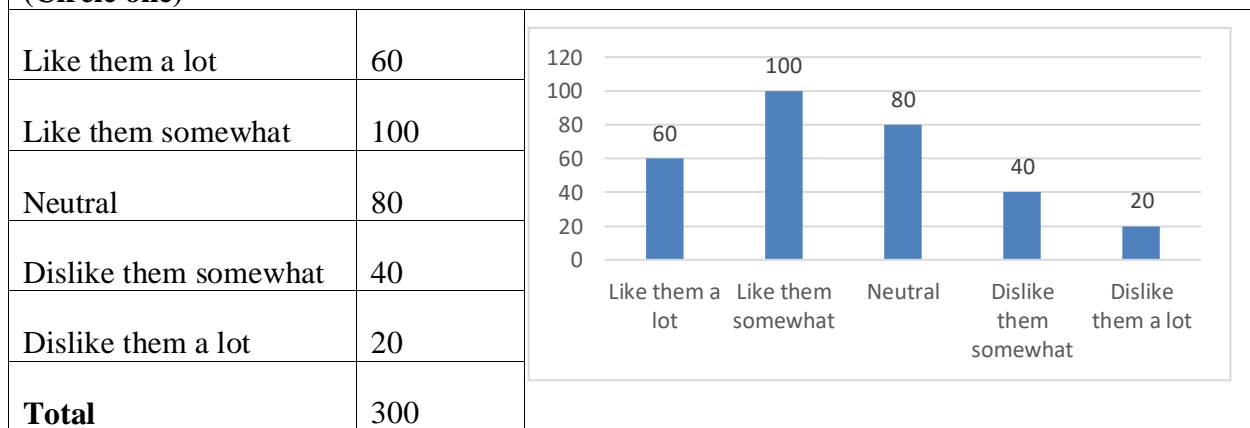
20. When you see an advertisement, how likely are you to engage with it? (Circle one)

Very likely	70
Likely	110
Neutral	70
Unlikely	30
Very unlikely	20
Total	300

21. How often do you find advertisements annoying or intrusive? (Circle one)

Very often	40
Often	80
Sometimes	100
Rarely	50
Never	30
Total	300
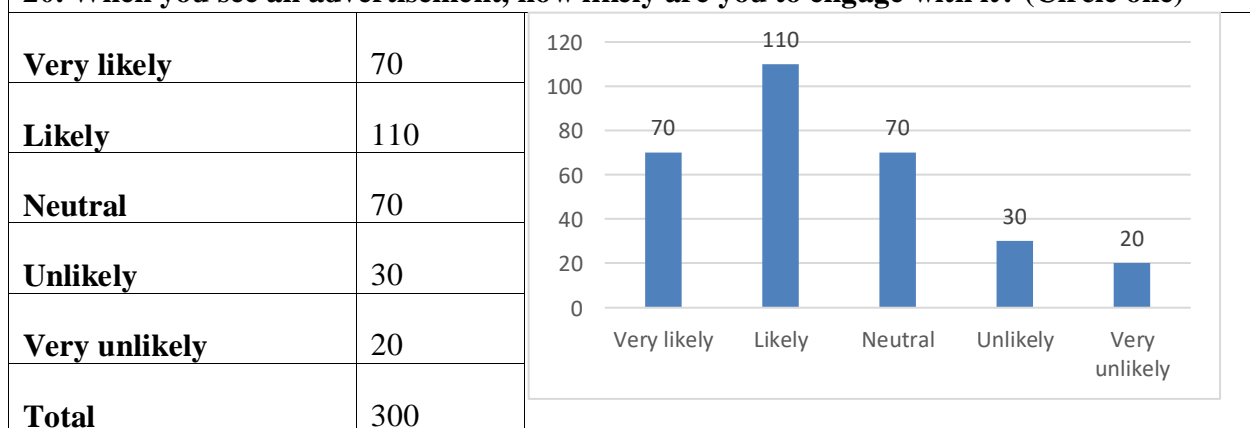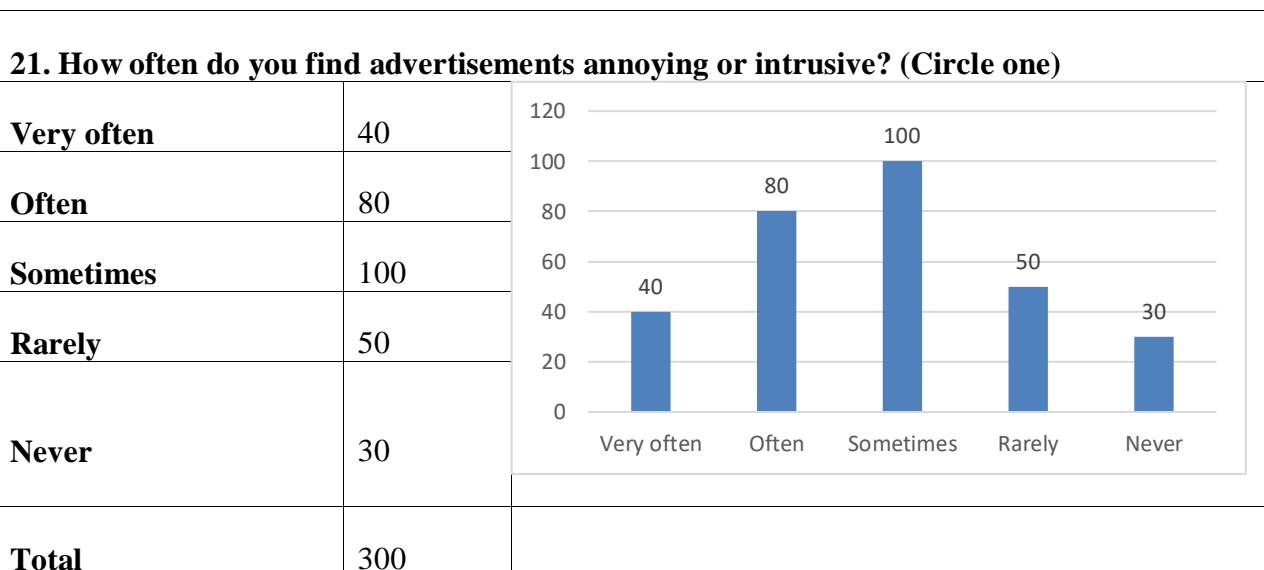
Analysis of Focus Group Discussion

Q1: Understand the Perceptions of Media Literacy and Advertising

Themes Emerging from FGDs:

- Positive Reception: Participants from all groups agreed that media literacy has a beneficial impact on their capacity to understand and critically assess commercials. They felt more comfortable deciphering the language, imagery, and persuasive strategies used in advertisements.

- Selective Engagement: A few participants mentioned that media literacy enables them to engage with commercials just when they want to. They indicated that they are more likely to interact with advertisements that reflect their values and interests.

Q2: Explore Media Literacy's Influence on Attitudes Towards Ads

Themes Emerging from FGDs:

- Enhanced Attitude Formation:- Improved Attitude Formation: A number of participants noted that they are better able to generate complex and educated attitudes toward commercials thanks to their media literacy abilities. They admitted to being more open to advertisements that present accurate information and link to reliable sources.

- Resistance to Manipulation: Participants discussed times when they used their media literacy abilities to spot manipulation in commercials. When they recognized persuasive tactics, they said they felt empowered to reject them.

Q3: Investigate the Relationship Between Media Literacy and Purchase Intent

Themes Emerging from FGDs:

- Informed Decision-Making: Making Informed Decisions: Participants said that their purchasing decisions are greatly influenced by their media literacy. Before making a purchase, they underlined the value of carefully examining the ad content and gathering further information.

-Impact on Trust: Several participants talked about how media literacy and trust in advertisements are related. People with greater media literacy were more likely to believe advertisements that contained honest information and mentioned reliable sources.

Q4: Understand Media Literacy's Influence on Public Relations Engagement

Themes Emerging from FGDs:

- Influence on Credibility Assessment: - Participants discussed how media literacy affects how they assess the credibility of public relations initiatives. They said that they were more willing to interact with PR information that was open, thoroughly investigated, and backed up by reliable sources.

- Empowerment in Crisis Communication: Some participants reported occasions in which their media literacy abilities helped them evaluate public relations messages during crises. They claimed that being media literate helped them distinguish between accurate information and spin.

Research findings:

1. Attitude Towards Ads:

A sizable portion of respondents said they liked commercials only somewhat, which is a moderate level of optimism. A smaller group expressed more negative feelings and, to some degree, disliked advertisements. These results imply that the community under study has a wide range of attitudes toward advertisements.

2. Engagement with Ads:

The majority of respondents reported that they were likely to or very likely to engage with advertisements, indicating that there was usually a positive tendency among respondents to do so. The proportion of individuals who were unlikely to participate was substantially smaller, even though a neutral position also showed up, indicating a degree of apathy.

3. Annoyance with Ads:

The majority of participants reported either a moderate or low level of aggravation with commercials, indicating that they only sometimes find them to be invasive or bothersome. This shows that, despite the fact that some respondents do have this opinion, it is not a widely held one.

4. Trust in Public Relations:

The distribution of trust across different levels was identified by the examination of public relations initiatives. A sizable percentage of respondents reported high or very high trust in PR campaigns, demonstrating a favorable opinion of their veracity and authenticity.

5. Engagement with Public Relations:

Results for participation in public relations initiatives showed that respondents were eager to become involved. A sizable portion stated that they frequently or very frequently engaged with public relations content, whereas a smaller portion reported only occasionally engaging or completely disengaging.

6. Response to Crisis Communication:

   The results of research into the efficiency of crisis communication tactics showed a largely favourable response. A sizeable percentage believed that crisis communication was either extremely effective or effective, indicating that properly performed public relations activities can help to lessen unfavourable opinions during crises.

Conclusion

A new era of persuasive communication has begun in the digital age as a result of the convergence of media, advertising, and public relations, altering how people interact with content. This change has highlighted the critical function of media literacy in understanding and navigating the complex terrain of information distribution. Several significant findings have been revealed via the lens of our study, which looked at how media literacy affects public relations and advertising.

Our research goals compelled us to explore the influence of media literacy on a variety of levels. We discovered a range of attitudes toward advertising content by examining respondents' attitudes toward advertisements, engagement patterns, and perceptions of annoyance. Despite certain instances of stated displeasure, a sizable number of participants had positive attitudes and a willingness to interact with advertisements. This variation demonstrates how media literacy and advertisement receptivity interact.

In addition, a complex relationship between media literacy and public relations was shown by our analysis. While a sizeable majority of respondents showed high levels of trust in PR efforts, participation in such programs varied. This emphasizes the significance of customized communication tactics that connect with people at various degrees of media literacy.

The importance revealed literacy in crisis communication was also revealed by our study. The success of effective crisis communication tactics highlights how media literacy may improve stakeholder participation, trust-building, and information sharing in time of need.

Finally, our study illuminates the complex interactions between media literacy and its effects on public relations and advertising. The various attitudes, levels of involvement, and reactions highlight the necessity for flexible communication tactics that take into account audiences' various levels of media literacy. Understanding the dynamic interplay between media literacy and persuasive communication is more important for efficient information dissemination and engagement as the media landscape continues to change.

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