

# Investigating the Effects of Mass Media on Student's modernist socio - political attitudes (A case of Isfahan University's students)

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**Abstract:** The present study investigated mass media as an independent variable that affect on student's modernist sociopolitical attitudes: a case study in Isfahan University. This study performed by using survey method. The population of study consisted of all Isfahan University's students. A number of 360 students were selected as the participants using quota sampling method. Data analysis was done using SPSS and Amos software. In the theoretical section of research, we proposed that some kinds of mass media has more changing effect on student's attitudes toward new ideas and some other types of mass media, have the reinforcing effects on existing attitudes. Also, we claimed that the amount of using mass media is related to attitudes. Students who use more new types of mass media such as satellite, internet and applications have more modernist attitudes comparing to those who use domestic and state radio and television. The results show that the mean score of students who use satellite, Internet and applications in modernist attitudes are more than nonusers. The result of the fit indices of the structural equation modeling shows that, the model has goodness of fit. Model fit indices such as CMIN/DF ratio, IFI, NFI, CFI, PCFI, RMSEA, were inspected. The fit indices indicate that the collected data well confirmed the developed model.

**Keywords:** Mass media, modernist, attitudes, students, structural equation modeling.

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## I. INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Few concepts have enjoyed as long and influential a role in social psychology and the social sciences more generally as the attitude construct (Allport, 1935). Over the years, some social scientists have used the term very broadly to refer to a wide range of subjective judgments, whereas others have used the term more precisely to refer to relatively general evaluative judgments of targets (Baumeister and Finkel, 2010:177). There is general agreement that attitude represents a summary evaluation of a psychological object captured in such attribute dimensions as good-bad, harmful-beneficial, pleasant-unpleasant, and likable-dislikable (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2001: 28). This paper examines how mass media affect student's modernist sociopolitical attitudes. In other words, what is the effect of the mass media on attitudes? To answer this, Oskamp and Schultz (2005) says; in the early days of opinion research, this was viewed as a simple question with a simple answer, but now we know that it is a very complex question with many different answers, depending on the circumstances.

The term media refers to the main forms of large-scale public communication in contemporary society, especially the so-called 'mass media' of press, television and radio. These now extend to embrace a range of 'new media' based on computers and telecommunications, especially the internet. The mass media serve many functions for people – not just providing new information or attitudinal persuasion. This fact has been recognized and studied by the approach called "uses and gratifications" research (e.g., McLeod and Becker, 1981; Rubin, 2002). Among the other basic needs which the mass media serve, three main clusters stand out: the media help to provide self identity (e.g., comparing oneself with

media characters), social contact (discussing recent episodes with friends), and diversion and entertainment (Oskamp and Schultz, 2005:184).

However specifically we want to know how is mass media related to modernist attitudes? This entry is primarily focused on the national level of political life, although democracy and media are also interconnected at regional and local levels and in other contexts. The beginnings of modern democracy are associated almost by definition with freedom of the press to report and comment on proceedings of parliament and acts of government. Although political life and the media have their separate institutional existence, there is now an intimate and even inextricable interdependence between the two. The rise of modern political parties depended on polemical journalism and the wide dissemination of competing claims and visions as well as of information. A polity could not claim to be a democracy without realizable rights to free publication and to access to media and this remains true (Barry Clarke and Foweraker, 2001: 532).

Besides, one trend in media theory refers to ideas about a 'public sphere' that have their primary origin in the work of Habermas (1962). As later developed, this version of social theory envisages a 'space' somewhere 'in between' the sphere of private and public life and that of the state and government. This notional space is occupied by many voluntary associations and activities, including discussion, debate and opinion formation. The media are considered a primary institution of the public sphere. The present study, primarily aims to examine the role of mass media on student's modernist sociopolitical attitudes. Besides this primary goal, the study also pursues the following goals:

- Investigating modernist sociopolitical attitudes and its dimensions among Isfahan University's students.
- Investigating how much Isfahan students use mass media.
- Investigating what types of mass media Isfahan students use.

## II. INVESTIGATING THE CONCEPT OF MODERNIST SOCIO-POLITICAL ATTITUDES

People's worldviews are important: they clearly affect the way people think and behave, at the personal, social and societal level. Insights into the nature of people's sociopolitical orientation. Sociopolitical attitudes refer to a general ideological tendency based on attitudes and beliefs about sociopolitical issues (Hastie, 2007: 259). In this paper sociopolitical attitudes based on four dimensions include; democratic attitudes, liberalism, critical thinking and individualism. Alexander (2006) believes that to form a democracy we need special motives which are counter codes to nondemocratic ones. As he put it, democracy depends on self control and individual initiatives, the people who compose it are describe as being capable of activism and autonomy rather than as being passive and dependent. They are seen as rational and reasonable rather than irrational and hysterical, as calm rather than excited, as controlled rather than passionate, as sane and realistic rather than fantastical or mad (Alexander, 2006: 57). One type of approach to the culture and psychology of democracy is on the insights of psychoanalysis. Harold Lasswell has gone furthest in specifying the personality characteristic of the "democrat." In his list of democratic character qualities he includes (1) an "open ego," by which he means a warm and inclusive attitude toward other human beings; (2) a capacity for sharing values with others; (3) a multivalued rather than a single-valued orientation; (4) trust and confidence in the human environment, and (5) relative freedom from anxiety (Almond and Verba, 1989: 10).

Democracy is more than voting; it also entails public discussion and debate. That in turn requires freedom of political expression. If the members of a demos are prevented from either expressing hearing certain views on public matters, their autonomy as democratic decision makers is impaired (Barry Clarke and Foweraker, 2001: 364). However, people should enjoy these freedoms as equal freedoms. Democracy requires not merely that people should have the right to participate but that they should have the right to participate equally, so that the freedoms that are essential to the functioning of democracy are freedoms that democratic citizens should enjoy equally (Barry Clarke and Foweraker, 2001: 364). In Hegel's thought also, human determination is freedom. For Hegel freedom is neither a faculty given by nature nor a capacity of the self, but rather is a structure of interaction between individuals where in the self-determination of each is constitutively related to that of others through mutual recognition and respect (Luther, 2009: 119). For Hegel, each individual's identity as a free person depends on the rational unity of the whole. And also the most important discussion of liberalism is its emphasis on the equality of woman and men as human beings, though psychological and physiological differences are accepted.

Besides, Alexander (2006) believes that the attitude of democratic person toward authority is critical rather than deferential. A modern mind related to a critical thinking. Analyzing and evaluating everything in a rational way is the key point of critical thinking. Unlike the traditional people, modernists are active and not used to accept words without arguing. "Critical thinking" is a skill which should be learned.

In this paper individualism is the fourth dimension of modernist sociopolitical attitudes. Modern person want more privacy and autonomy. An individual is any particular, the criterion of which is that it can be sorted, enumerated and picked out from the background. Individual may be abstract or actual. Individuals are 'historical occurrences, material objects, peoples and their shadows and all particulars; whereas qualities and properties, numbers and species are not' (Strawson, 1959: 15). Philosophically the most significant change occurred at the beginning of the Enlightenment with Descartes's first-person examination of the self. His famous claim that 'I think therefore I am' centers the individual and makes the mind transparent to itself. Thus Augustine's claim that 'I have become a question to myself' becomes, 'I can answer that question for myself by internal reflection upon myself (Barry Clarke and Foweraker, 2001: 438-439). Historically, individualism and democracy have gone hand in hand but it does not follow from this historical tie that they are logically tied together. Then, Barry Clarke and Foweraker (2001) ask this question; is it possible for there to be a non-individualistic democracy? On the face of it the answer would seem to be pessimistic and negative. Democracy takes the individual as its core value. It does seem as if democracy that denied the value of individuals would be a contradiction in terms.

### III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 3-1- Introduction

Early attitude theorists proposed a number of properties of attitudes, beyond their valence and extremity, that were important to understanding the impact of attitudes on related thinking and behavior as well as how attitudes could be changed. However before discussing this relationship, we first investigate the nature of attitudes. There are several main theoretical viewpoints about the essential nature of attitudes. One of these, called the tri componential viewpoint, holds that an attitude is a single entity but that has three aspects or components: affective, behavioral, and cognitive. An affective (emotional) component refers to the feeling and emotions one has toward the object. A behavioral component, consisting of one's action tendencies toward the object. A cognitive component, consisting of the ideas and beliefs that one has about the attitude object (Oskamp and Schultz, 2005:9).

Attitude theorists have long postulated that people hold attitudes because they can serve many useful functions. Various theorists proposed somewhat different, but often overlapping functions for attitudes. However, functions that have received the most attention include the knowledge function (i.e., the management and simplification of information processing tasks), utilitarian function (i. e., the achievement of desired goals and avoidance of negative outcomes), ego defensive function (i.e., the maintenance or promotion of self-esteem), the value expressive function (i.e., the expression of values and the self concept), and the social adjustive function (i.e., the facilitation of identification with similar others and the maintenance of relationships with them (Baumeister and Finkel, 2010:181).

#### 3-2- The impact of Mass media on Modernist socio-political attitudes

The relationship between tow variables is also a strained and contested one, and there are negative as well as positive ideas about the impact of mass media on modernist sociopolitical attitudes. Media like other phenomena has contradictory impacts on its audience. On one hand, media reinforce the existing attitudes and opinions and on the other hand, tend to change the existing attitudes.

Research on attitude bases has generally supported the idea that affective or cognitive communications are more persuasive when they match the affective or cognitive basis of the attitude and when they match the perceived basis of the attitude (Baumeister and Finkel, 2010:196). Generally, five principles concerning the influence of mass media:

- 1- The influence of mass communication is mediated by factors such as personal predispositions, personal selective processes, group memberships, etc.
- 2- Because of these factors, mass communication usually serves to reinforce existing attitudes and opinions, though occasionally it may serve as an agent of change.

- 3- When mass communication does produce attitude change, minor change in the extremity or intensity of the attitude is much more common than is "conversion" from one side of an issue to the other side.
- 4- Mass communication can be quite effective in changing attitudes in areas where people's existing opinions are weak.
- 5- Mass communication can be quite effective in creating opinions on new issues where there are no existing predispositions to reinforce (Klapper, 1960).

However, the question here is how mass media related to modernist sociopolitical attitudes. As Barry Clarke and Foweraker (2001) argued that; Aside from fundamental political RIGHTS (such as those of speech, assembly and belief) the working conditions of a democracy, irrespective of different forms and models, cannot be met without diverse and extensive channels of public communication. The main condition is that all citizens have information and an awareness of alternative points of view sufficient to make rational choices between policies, candidates and parties. There is more to it than this, since political democracy is a collective enterprise and depends on the existence of *publics* and of public opinion, both of which are in turn dependent on media for their formation and continuity. The media provide platforms for the expression of opinion by the politically active and give publicity to the issues around which political debate centres.

The negative view of the influence of mass media on politics also has several strands. While freedom to publish was a necessary condition for early democratic movements, by the late nineteenth century, the growing concentration of a commercialized press in the hands of powerful owners was already seen as a threat to democracy. The power of the press was thought to be mainly on the side of bourgeois governments and conservative or nationalistic ideologies and generally against labor and any form of dissidence. Subsequent developments have not greatly changed this perception, although media commercialization now seems to go hand in hand with depoliticisation rather than with right wing ideology.

Accordingly, a more complete version of the relevant media roles and services to democracy can be put summarily as follows:

- To provide full and reliable information about the political environment;
- To provide platforms for the expression of alternative points of view and a forum for public discussion;
- To provide independent explanations and background commentary on the news;
- To facilitate in various ways the working of the political process, especially at election times;
- To act as independent critic of government, politicians and policies (the watchdog or adversarial role);
- To mobilize political opinion and participation, whether or not in the service of the official opposition (Barry Clarke and Foweraker, 2001: 533-534).

Also, there are a widespread agreement that the various media have differing advantages and disadvantages. Print media (books, magazines, and newspapers) and computerized on-line media allow readers to determine the time and pace of their exposure and also permit easy reexposure if desired. The broadcasting media (radio and television) are harder to escape than the print media, as exposure can occur whenever they are within view or earshot, without any conscious action of their recipient (Oskamp and Schultz, 2005:185). The broadcasting media are mostly used by young children, and people with low education. Unlike these people students are not passive audience. They tend to use media which give them more freedom and choice. So, day by day we notice that young people particularly educated people become more and more interested in using Internet, social networks and social applications. Applying these kinds of media make students more open-minded than using the state Radio and TV. Students in the cyberspace are able to develop their own interests and creativeness which is not possible in the old forms of media (Radio and TV). To explain this process we can refer to "audience ethnography" that belongs to Hall's "encoding-decoding" model from it create the basis for a most fruitful and innovative approach to media research. Above all, it was John Fisk who emphasized the polysemic character of television programmes in order to reveal the heterogeneous potential of plural forms of appropriation. This was in his synthesizing works at the end of the 1980s, which started from a deconstructive analysis of television. These forms of appropriation meant that the programmes were seen differently depending on the social and historical position of the viewer. Reception and appropriation of texts become, in his version, a context-based social practice in which texts are not messages sent out with a fixed meaning, but are given meaning on the basis of social experience in everyday life (Winter, 2005: 164). Therefore, children and young people, who are increasingly socialized by the commercial consumer culture,

should, above all, develop a critical agency, acquire cooperative relationships, and direct themselves by democratic values (Winter, 2005: 166). A Critical media pedagogy should empower the viewer to decode the messages, ideologies, and values in media texts, in order to escape manipulation and be able to develop one's own identity and forms of resistance. In addition, it should initiate and support politically engaged media activism in order to produce alternative forms of culture and counter public spheres, which are of decisive significance in a living democracy (Kellner, 1995: 337). The uses and gratifications approach also stresses the active role of viewers or readers in choosing what media to consume and in interpreting the content of messages in accordance with their own interests, needs and fantasies. Uses and gratifications research sees a medium message as variably active communicators, rather than passive recipients of messages (Rubin, 2002). So, according to these theories we can propose our hypotheses.

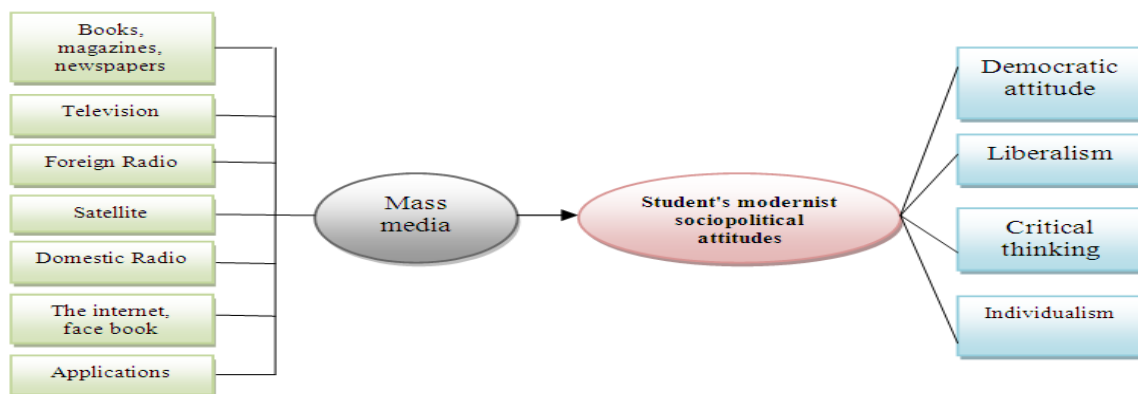
### 3-3- Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical framework and putting findings together, the following hypotheses are formulated:

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between the amount of mass media use and students' modernist socio-political attitudes.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant relationship between the type of mass media and students' socio-political attitudes.

**Figure (1) Theoretical model of the research**



## IV. METHODOLOGY

This study performed by using survey method. The population of study consisted of all Isfahan University's students. The sample size was calculated based on the indices  $t=1.96$ ,  $P=0.05$  and  $q=0.5$  using Cochran's formula. Finally, a number of 360 students were selected as the participants using quota sampling method. In some of the scales, a number of questions were deleted to provide an acceptable value of alpha.

### 4-1- Definition of the key concepts

#### Dependant variable

##### - Modernist Socio-political attitudes (MSPA)

(MSPA) refers to a general tendency based on beliefs about sociopolitical issues like democracy, freedom, critical thinking, and individualism. The dimensions of MSPA including (1) democratic attitudes, (2) liberalism, (3) critical thinking, and (4) individualism. Scale of MSPA was made of 29 questions. After 2 questions were deleted, reliability coefficient reached to 8.7. Higher scores showed higher modern attitudes of students.

#### Independent variable

##### - Mass media

This variable was to measure how much and what types of mass media use by the respondents. To this end, a list of mass media including non-academic books, magazines, newspapers, domestic television and radio, satellite, the Internet, social networks and social phone's applications were presented to the respondents. After answering that if they use each one of them or no, they answer to how many hours they use each media. Then, the respondents checked one of the alternatives

(at all, low, somewhat, and a lot) to report how much influence get from every source. The scores on every item ranged from 1 (at all) to 4 (a lot). The total score of every respondent on this variable was obtained by adding up the individual scores on every item.

#### 4-2- Reliability and validity of the questionnaire

Face validity of questionnaire was determined by expert's viewpoint. For measuring the reliability of the scales (modernist sociopolitical attitudes, using mass media), Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated. In some of the scales, a number of questions were deleted to provide an acceptable value of alpha. The minimum acceptable alpha coefficient was considered to be 0.70 in order to confirm the reliability of the variables.

**Table 1: Validity and reliability of the scales**

variable	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
Modrnist Attitudes	0/87
Democratic attitudes	0/77
Liberalism	0/81
Critical thinking	0/67
Individualism	0/59
Mass media	0/65

#### 4-3- statistical Findings

Table 2 shows that the highest total percentage (33.6) of student's modernist sociopolitical attitudes (SMSPA) belongs to the 'medium' and the high levels and the lowest percentage (32.8) belongs to the low level. That means most of the Isfahan University's students have modern attitudes.

**Table 2: sample distribution and percentage of student's modernist sociopolitical attitudes**

	distribution	percentage
<b>Low</b>	118	32.8
<b>Medium</b>	121	33.6
<b>High</b>	121	33.6
<b>Total sum</b>	360	100

Table 3 shows that the highest total percentage (83.1) of students uses non-academic books, magazines, newspapers and domestic television. The lowest percentage (16.1) belongs to the foreign radio. Also, 164 (45.6) of students use satellite, 149 (41.4) use domestic radio, 289 (80.3) use the internet and face book and finally, 192 (53.3) of students use applications.

**Table 3: sample distribution and percentage of the amount of using mass media**

The types of mass media	Yes		No	
	Distribution	percentage	Distribution	percentage
Non-academic books, Magazines Newspapers	299	83/1	61	16/9
Domestic Television	299	83/1	61	16/9
Satellite	164	45/6	196	54/4
Domestic Radio	149	41/4	211	58/6
Foreign Radio	58	16/1	302	38/9
Internet, Face book...	289	80/3	71	19/7
Applications such as WeChat, Viber...	53/3	53/3	168	46/7

#### 4-4- Inferential Findings



Here, the research hypotheses are tested, and varying statistical tests are being used based on the type of variables. Table 4 shows that the differences among users and nonusers of different mass media on the SMSPA. Because the distribution of variables are not normal so, we used the Mann-Whitney U Test. As we see, the relationship between satellite, domestic radio, Internet, applications and SMSPA are meaningful. The table also shows that the mean score of students who use satellite, Internet and applications in modernist attitudes are more than nonusers.

**Table 4: Differences among users and nonusers of different types of mass media in MSPA**

Variables	Mean Users	Mean Nonusers	Mann-Whitney U Test	sig
Non-academic books, Magazines Newspapers	125/33	126/02	8683/00	0/555
Domestic Television	125/29	126/21	8148/5	0/190
Satellite	127/77	123/51	12809/5	0/001
Domestic Radio	124/21	126/32	13760/5	0/04
Foreign Radio	125/83	125/38	8663/5	0/896
Internet, Face book...	126/44	121/41	7881/5	0/002
Applications such as WeChat, Viber...	126/95	123/74	13440/5	0/006

Table 5 shows that the correlation between amount of different types of using mass media and SMSPA. As the Spearman's rho correlation coefficient (0.147) with (sig= 0/005) showed there is a significant correlation between Satellite and SMSPA. A significant correlation was observed between domestic radio and SMSPA. The correlation coefficient between two is -0/128 with (sig = 0/01). The direction of relationship is negative which means as much as students use more domestic radio they have less modernist attitudes. Between the internet, face book (0/192), applications (0/131) and SMSPA is also significant relationship with positive direction which means as much as students use more these mass media they have more modernist attitudes. All significant levels between these relationships are more than 0/05.

**Table 5: Correlation between amount of different types of using mass media and MSPA**

Variables	Spearman's rho Correlation Coefficient	sig
Non-academic books, Magazines Newspapers	-0/087	0/099
Domestic Television	-0/061	0/250
Satellite	0/147	0/005
Domestic Radio	-0/128	0/01
Foreign Radio	0/01	0/783
Internet, Face book...	0/192	0/000
Applications such as WeChat, Viber...	0/131	0/013

#### 4-5-The structural equation modeling

To test the theoretical model and research's hypotheses we used structural equation modeling. We preferred structural equation modeling framework because it provides the researchers with tools to test the fit of the model to the data and directly test the significance effects (Kline, 2005). In the tested model Attitudes and mass media are latent variables. Model fit indices such as CMIN/DF ratio, IFI, NFI, CFI, PCFI, RMSEA, were inspected.

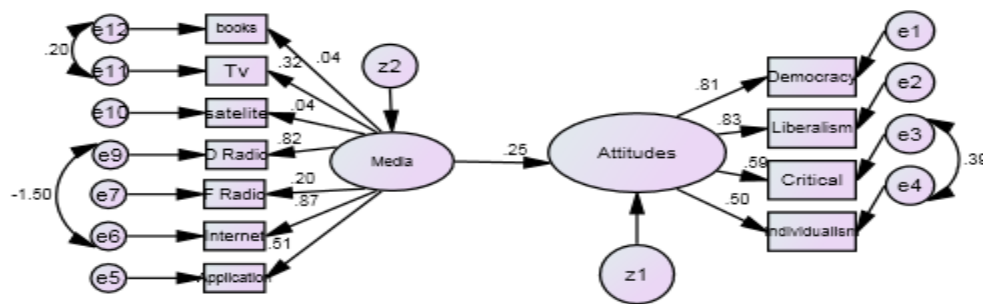


Figure (2) standardized coefficient of structural equation modeling

As table 6 shows the fit indices of the model has goodness of fit. Since RMSEA value is smaller than 0.08 and NFI value is 0.88 and close to 1, we can confirm the developed model. Other indices such as Incremental fit index IFI and CFI values were larger than 0.9. The index PCFI value also was larger than 0/05. Thus; the developed model has goodness of fit and is supported by the data obtained from the population. The t-value of all standardized coefficients in the model were larger than 1.96. Therefore, all standardized coefficients written on the arrows are significant.

Table 6: model fit indices and information criteria values for the model

Indices	df	CMIN/df	CFI	IFI	NFI	PCFI	RMSEA
Value	40	2/315	0/932	0/933	0/888	0/678	0/061

## V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper examines how mass media affect student's modernist sociopolitical attitudes: a case study in Isfahan University. Media has contradictory impacts on attitudes. On one hand, media reinforce the existing attitudes and opinions and on the other hand, tend to change the existing attitudes. However, in this paper we consider the amount and type of and their effects on the attitudes. We proposed that some kinds of mass media has more changing effect on student's attitudes toward new ideas and some other types of mass media, have the reinforcing effects on existing attitudes. Also, the amount of using mass media is related to attitudes. Students who use more new types of mass media such as internet and applications have more modernist attitudes comparing to those who use domestic and state radio and television. As mentioned in the theoretical section, the uses and gratifications approach stresses the active role of viewers or readers in choosing what media to consume and in interpreting the content of messages in accordance with their own interests, needs and fantasies. Uses and gratifications research sees a medium message as variably active communicators, rather than passive recipients of messages (Rubin, 2002). That is why students more and more have been caring about new mass media which give them more freedom, privacy and the right of choosing. . The results show that the mean score of students who use satellite, Internet and applications in modernist attitudes are more than nonusers. The highest total mean score of students is 127/77 which belongs to users of satellite. Then, Belongs to users of applications which mean score is 126/95. The users of internet (face book) placed in the third highest position in modernist attitudes with 126/44 mean score. Meanwhile, domestic radio has negative relationship with modernist attitudes. Spearman's rho correlation coefficient between using domestic radio and student's modernist sociopolitical attitudes, is -0/12. Also, the mean score is 124/2. That shows students who use domestic radio have the lowest level of modernist attitudes.

It was suggested that future research should move beyond analyzing a simple link between mass media and SMSPA, search for other potential mediators which play an important role in this relationship is suggested.



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