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# The Opinions of Energy Journalists on the Techniques of Psychological Operations in Dissemination of Energy News

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**Abstract:** *Psychological operation planners have generally established their campaign on propaganda, and the main purpose of the psychological operation is to influence minds and thoughts of the audience. The purpose of the present study is to investigate the opinions of energy journalists on PSYOP techniques in the dissemination of energy news. Regarding the purpose of the study, it is an applied research and in terms of nature, it is a descriptive-survey one. The research population consists of the journalists of energy field of some news agencies and the students working in communications field in Tehran. Using Cochran formula, 148 individual were selected as the samples. A researcher-made questionnaire consisting of 36 items was used for data collection. Data were analyzed by SPSS, one-sample t-test and one-sample Chi square test. The results indicated that the use of censorship techniques and the technique of partial dissemination of facts were used in dissemination of oil energy news, and according to the energy journalists, the use of psychological operations techniques affects audiences.*

**Keywords:** *Techniques of Psychological Operations, Journalist, Censorship Technique, Technique of partial dissemination of facts.*

## INTRODUCTION

Today, through the improvement of communication, societies have undergone various changes. Mass media such as television has occupied a position in community that has increasingly been introduced through it both at the national and international levels. Since education and culture are progressed through mass media, different forms of life are also developed in the same way. In this regard, it can be said that media affect the public life style and tact in the community. Nowadays, due to the importance of mass media, this field has been carefully and precisely investigated more than ever. In recent decades, much attention has been paid to communication, especially mass communication, and the relation of media with the community and its social effects and interaction have been more emphasized. By the development of communication and communication devices, their importance in human life is increased. More information means more power. Therefore, people need more information to survive. Media, especially television, has more impact on people in their leisure time (Khoshnevis, 2010, p.14).

In the today's world which is the age of communication and information, production, distribution and dissemination of professional and specialized information are important and require skills, expertise and training. Today, we are living in an age that every day we encounter thousands of news in media, including written, visual and audio, and the more modern are the communication tools and technologies, the more the number of networks and selectable options to receive news and get important information on events of the day (Mirfakhraei, 2009, p.73).

On the other hand, media war is one of the issues much considered in the communication era. The aim of the psychological operation is to impress and impose one's will on a person or group. This group

necessarily includes one of the followings: adherents, opponents, and impartial individuals. With this perspective, the main purpose of the psychological operations is to strengthen the adherents, attract indifferent and impartial individuals, and draw off or create uncertainty in the opponents' positions, in such a way that distrust to the leaders of the country or the opposite faction will increase and hope will diminish in the society. Some of the most important tactics of psychological war include censorship, distortion, making one or more supposed enemies, test for confirmation, pretension instead of truth, exaggeration, division, rumor, partial dissemination of facts, and the like. Successful implementation of the PSYOP scenario by the media requires their correct and proper understanding of the audience, the techniques, methods, and tools used to persuade and convince the audience. Therefore, PSYOP planners should be aware of the socio-political characteristics and conditions of the audience (Ghadiri Abyaneh, 2013, p.11).

Oil as one of the most important challenges of the current world has a growing importance in economic and political equations. Many still believe that the main cause of the past 100 years of conflict is the emergence of this vital material in the world and its entrance into political equations and never-ending competition of powers to dominate the regions and countries bearing this great trouble. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the opinions of energy journalists on PSYOP techniques in the dissemination of energy related news.

## **Theoretical foundations of the research**

### **Importance of the media**

In the current situation, media is one of the most important improvements of human and one of the most valuable means of public awareness that is continuously and rapidly growing due to its key importance and according to the requirements of the applicants. Thanks to the media providing information, the geographical barriers and, to some extent, political and cultural barriers are eliminated, and the vast world and billions of people are linked through the media, and can easily obtain information from distant areas and, in general, world has become a small village by the media. Media are the agents and the organizations transmitting ideas, information, the communications and pictures of our world. The media form the symbolic foundation of our social life. In the today's world, the position of media regards illuminating public opinion and creating appropriate spaces for dialogue and sound and constructive treatment of opinions and several other major roles (Bay, 2012, p.17).

The public opinion is systematic and media play an important role in its formation. Public opinion has a communicative structure that intellectual leaders play an essential role in its formation. In Iran, television and radio, both as the main and governmental media, play a principle role in the development of the country. If we accept that "it is the goal and means of human development" and requires fundamental changes and transformations, then, media play an essential role in the country development (Khoshnevis, 2009, p.12). It is obvious that media as a communication tool can greatly influence the minds and thoughts of the audience. This is further discussed in the next section.

### **News and Psychological Operations**

Psychological operations are considered to be the most efficient, dynamic, and at the same time the most effective measures that each country uses its efforts in order to neutralize the effects of these measures. Since, based on their wide scope and effectiveness, they are capable of influencing people of a nation or nations. Throughout history, using psychological warfare techniques, many have achieved significant victories and overcome opponents. In cases military tactics in all their dimensions have not succeeded to disturb the motivation and will of enemy forces, the psychological warfare has been used to defeat the will of the nations and the enemy fighters. The danger of this war is due to targeting thought, insight, intellect, heart, and ultimately the behavior of the involved forces or audiences and weakening their morale and will and then defeating them and on the other hand, promoting the morale of their own forces and nation and its audience leading to unity and solidarity. Most governors, especially military commanders, have not overlooked the effects of psychological warfare over the history, and have been particularly dedicated to implement it in war or even peace (Nasr, 2001, p.17).

The psychological operation is the process of proper and designed utilization of all political, social, economic, military, cultural, propaganda and media facilities in order to influence the minds, beliefs, feelings, desires, wills and behavior of the target groups, in order to support goals or to achieve them (Soltani Far and Hashemi, 2003, p.49).

### **Types of Psychological Operations**

#### **1. Censorship**

The international system today, especially in the era of globalization, is the battleground of media. Media have bidirectional function according to their unbiased approach to convey realities to the people of the world. But in reality, the big mass media today serve the interests of their shareholders, which provides grounds for censorship. In the emergence of censorship, in addition to the abovementioned items, the following factors are also involved (Ziaei Parvar, 2008, p.78):

- Fear
- Attention to inter-organizational relationships: that is, if this news, report, discussion, article, analysis, image, book, film, etc. be disseminated, it may lead to dissatisfaction of government officials, politicians, and religious people, etc.
- Attention to intra-organizational relationships (the messenger including author, journalist, etc. applies the followings since the dissemination may cause discomfort to the manager and his colleagues in the organization).
- Attention to the interests of the organization
- applying self-interests
- The probability of job loss
- Lack of understanding
- Psychological effects (such as having continuous anxiety, indifference, one-sidedness, etc.)
- The habit of censorship

#### **2. Tactics of Psychological Operations**

Media and psychological operation tools are divided into three or four groups that in this paper, due to their abundance and widespread use by soft war leaders, they can be divided into six groups (Surrey, 2006, p.29):

- 1) Visual Tools: TV, cinema, news agencies, CDs, and films
- 2) Audio Tools: radio, music, lecture, music track, news agencies, hymn and chants
- 3) Written Tools: press (newspapers, publications), pamphlets, posters, leaflets, tract, books, and newsletters
- 4) Electronic Tools: the internet, mobile, phone, telex, fax and so on
- 5) Subsidiary Tools in Psychological Operations: balloons, cars, symbols, decorative instruments and flags and other propagation tools and so on
- 6) Human being as a tool: face to face, spy, declaration of positions, artistic face, and sports

#### **3. Technique of Partial dissemination of facts**

Sometimes a particular news or talk is stated that in terms of the source, the content of the message is an interconnected collection that if a part of it is not told, the direction of the message will be distorted. This is a common practice of the media that they usually do not describe a part of the news, depending on the political position they tend to. The news is complete when the news elements are presented in general. But if one of the six news elements (who, where, when, what, why, how) is not reported in the news, it is incomplete. In the tactic of partial dissemination of facts, the removal of one of the elements is deliberately done, and most of the time, the element "why" is removed (Soltani Far, 2003, p.47).

#### **4. Extremism**

The words and terms used in extreme generalization are emotionally and virtually associated with valuable concepts and beliefs that proving them does not require any particular information or reasoning.

Of course, such words and phrases make different conceptions in the minds of different people, but their implicit concepts have always been desirable and effective (Mohammadi Najm, 2005, p.48).

**Methodology**

The present study is an applied research in terms of purpose and in terms of nature, it is a descriptive one. The research community consists of the journalists of energy field of some news agencies and the students working in communications field in Tehran. Using Cochran formula, 148 individual were selected as the samples. A researcher-made questionnaire consisting of 36 items was used for data collection. In a preliminary study, before conducting the research, the face and content validity of the questionnaires were examined and confirmed by ten professors and experts of the field. Cranbach's alpha was used to determine the reliability of the tool.

**Table 1.** Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficient of the Questionnaire

number	Item	Alpha Coefficient
1	Censorship	0.73
2	Dissemination of facts	0.76
3	The effect of psychological operation	0.79

**Research Questions**

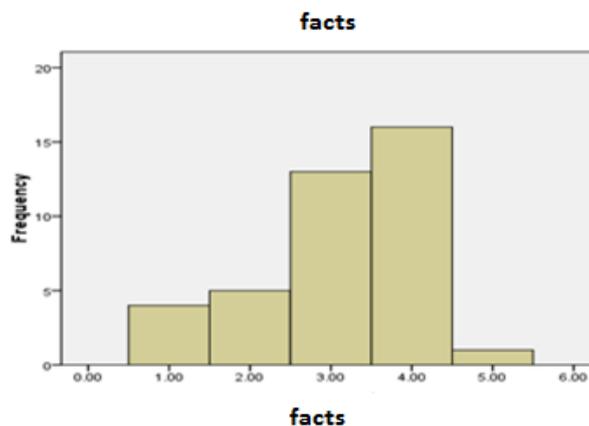
- 1) In the opinion of the energy journalists, are all of the facts of this field disseminated?
- 2) In the opinion of the energy journalists, are the tactics of psychological operations used to disseminate the news of this field?
- 3) From the energy journalists’ viewpoint, what is the position of using censorship technique in dissemination of news in this field?

**Findings**

**Table 2:** Descriptive Indicators for the Dissemination of Facts

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	The lowest score	The highest score
Dissemination of Facts	9.33	7.42	0.40	0.66	7.00	18.00

According to the values in Table (2), the obtained mean of the “dissemination of the facts” variable is 9.33. The lowest score is 7.00 and the highest score is 18.00. The values of skewness and kurtosis obtained in this variable indicate the normal distribution.

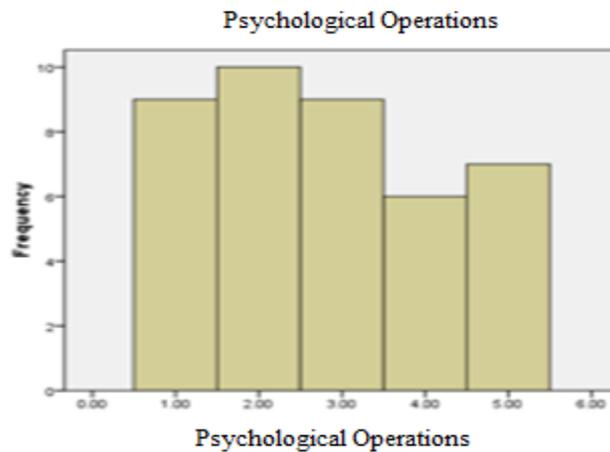


**Diagram 1:** Histogram of Facts’ Dissemination

**Table 3:** The Descriptive Indicators of PSYOP Tactics

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	The lowest score	The highest score
PSYOP Tactics	15.32	6.53	-0.01	0.16	8.00	19.00

According to the values in Table (3), the obtained mean of the “PSYOP tactics” variable is 20.32. The lowest score is 8.00 and the highest score is 19.00. The values of skewness and kurtosis obtained in this variable indicate the normal distribution.

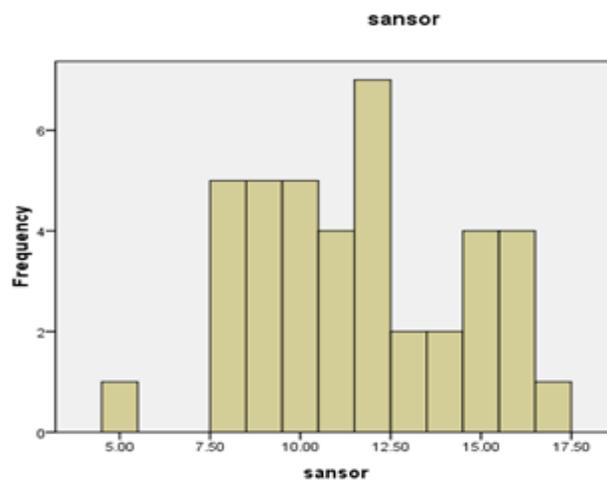


**Diagram 2:** The Histogram of Psychological Operations Tactics

**Table 4:** The Descriptive Indicators of Censorship

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Lowest score	Highest score
Censorship	15.55	3.18	-0.10	0.14	9.00	17.00

According to the values in Table (4), the obtained mean for “censorship” variable is 15.55. The lowest score is 9.00 and the highest score is 17.00. The values of skewness and kurtosis obtained indicate the normal distribution.



**Diagram 3.** The Histogram of Censorship

Question 1: In the opinion of the energy journalists, are all of the facts of this field disseminated?

**Table 5:** The Output of One-Sample T-Test

Groups	Experimental mean	Theoretical mean	Variance of means	df	t	sig
Dissemination of all facts	9.33	12	-2.66	137	-3.60	0.030

According to Table (5), the experimental mean value obtained for the “dissemination of all facts” is 9.33, which is 2.66 lower than the theoretical average, and this value is significant at  $P \leq 0.05$ . Therefore, the obtained mean value is significantly different from the theoretical mean, and according to journalists of the energy field, all the facts of this field are not published.

**Table 6:** One-Sample Chi-Square test

Disemination of all facts	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
Observed frequency	7	9	49	41	32
Expected frequency	27.6	27.6	27.6	27.6	27.6
X <sup>2</sup> : 21.11		df: 4	sig: 0.02		

The obtained Chi-square value in the “dissemination of all facts” is 21.11 and this value is significant at  $P \leq 0.05$ . Therefore, the observed frequencies are different from the expected frequencies and, according to the journalists of energy field, not all of the facts of this field are published.

Question 2: In the opinion of the energy journalists, are tactics of psychological operations used to disseminate the news of this field?

**Table 7:** The Output of One-Sample T-Test

Groups	Experimental mean	Theoretical mean	Variance of means	df	t	sig
PSYOP Tactics	15.32	12	3.32	137	3.80	0.001

As it is observed in Table 7, the value of obtained experimental mean in psychological operations tactics is 15.32, which is 3.32 higher than the theoretical mean and this obtained value is significant at  $P \leq 0.01$ . Therefore, the obtained mean value is significantly different from the theoretical mean, and according to the opinion of energy journalists, techniques of psychological operations are used in dissemination of the energy news.

**Table 8:** One-Sample Chi-Square Test

PSYOP Tactics	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
Observed frequency	4	12	39	47	36
Expected frequency	27.6	27.6	27.6	27.6	27.6
X <sup>2</sup> : 23.38		df: 4	sig: 0.003		

The obtained Chi-square value in psychological operations tactics is 23.38 and this value is significant at  $P \leq 0.01$ . Therefore, the observed frequencies are different from the expected frequencies and, according to the opinions of energy journalists, the tactics of psychological operations are used in dissemination of news in this field.

Question 3: From the energy journalists’ viewpoint, what is the position of using censorship technique in dissemination of news in this field?

**Table 9:** One-Sample T-Test

Groups	Experimental mean	Theoretical mean	Variance of means	df	t	sig
Censorship technique	15.55	12	3.55	137	3.77	0.040

According to Table (9), the obtained mean value in the “censorship technique” is 15.55, which is 3.55 higher than the theoretical average and this value is significant at  $P \leq 0.05$ . Therefore, the obtained mean value is significantly different from the theoretical average, and according to the opinion of the energy journalists, the censorship techniques are used in dissemination of the oil energy news.

**Table 10: One-Sample Chi-Square Test**

Censorship	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
Observed frequency	8	7	55	38	30
Expected frequency	27.6	27.6	27.6	27.6	27.6
X <sup>2</sup> : 19.17		df: 4		sig: 0.03	

The obtained Chi-square value of “Censorship” is 19.17, and this value is significant at  $P \leq 0.05$ . Therefore, the observed frequencies are different from the expected frequencies, and according to the opinion of the energy journalists, the censorship techniques are used in dissemination of the news in this field.

## Discussion

### Research Question 1

The results indicated that, according to the opinion of the journalists of energy, all the facts of this field are not disseminated. Nasrollahi and Soltan Pour (2011), Pour Anvari (2013), Hasani Rostam Abadi (2013), Rajabi (2011), Taherian (2013), Dirdari et al. (2013), Gui (2009), Shoemaker and Cohen (2006), and Douglas and Perse (2004) have also conducted research on the dissemination of news. In the today’s world which is the age of communication and information, production, distribution and dissemination of professional and specialized news are considered important and require skills, expertise and training. We are living an era that every day we face the dissemination of thousands of news from media, including written, visual, and audio, and the more modern communication tools and technologies, the more the number of networks and selectable options available to receive news and information on important events of the day.

The media, and specifically news agencies, are effective means to present facts to the audience, including facts about oil energy. In the today’s world, regarding the importance of disseminating news based on reality and facts in all fields, and especially in the field of energy, it is important to pay attention to the principle of disseminating facts in various news agencies. But what is observed in practice, is the little attention to this important issue, and according to the opinion of energy journalists, news of energy are not fully published.

### Research Question 2

According to the results of this study, regarding the opinion of the energy journalists, techniques of psychological operations are used in dissemination of oil energy news. In this regard, Hasani Rostam Abadi (2013), Rajabi (2011), Taherian (2013), Dirdari et al. (2013), Gui (2009), Shoemaker and Cohen (2006), and Douglas and Perse (2004) have conducted related research. Psychological operations are among the most effective actions that every country uses all its efforts and facilities to neutralize their effects, because due to their wide dimension and effectiveness, these operations can affect the individuals of a nation or nations. The psychological operations are the precise and planned use of all political, social, economic, military, cultural, propaganda and media facilities in order to influence the minds, beliefs, feelings, desires, wills and behavior of the audience groups to support goals or to reach them. The techniques, methods, and tactics of psychological operations are referred to as practical tactics of the executors (experts of psychological operations) to achieve the desired goals.

Therefore, based on the findings and opinion of energy journalists, the techniques of psychological operations are used in dissemination of oil energy news. Based on what has been stated, news agencies apply different types of psychological operations to influence the minds, beliefs, feelings, tendencies, wills and behaviors of target groups to support goals or to achieve them. Therefore, the psychological operations

are the practical tactics of psychological experts in dissemination of energy news to help them achieve the desired goals utilizing these techniques.

### Research Question 3

According to the findings of the present study, based on the opinion of energy journalists, censorship techniques are used to disseminate energy news. The obtained results are consistent to those of Rajabi (2011), Taherian (2013), Dirdari et al. (2013), Gui (2009), Shoemaker and Cohen (2006), and Douglas and Perse (2004).

Censorship is the deliberate elimination of items in the passage of knowledge, in order to shape the opinions and actions of others. Censorship, in its simplest sense, is the consideration and testing of various messages by the authorities to omit items that are regarded as undesirable. This form of censorship is the creation of a previous or practical barrier to prevent the dissemination of unfavorable items, which can include, for example, the omission of words, phrases or specific sentences by a censor. But censorship in its broader form may include any attempt to weaken or prevent the dissemination of undesirable items according to the opinion of authorities. Therefore, a government may prevent the dissemination of news that can have adverse or unfavorable reflection on the authorities of that government.

The results indicated that based on the opinion of energy journalists, censorship technique is used in dissemination of energy news. Therefore, in disseminating oil energy news, the authorities deliberately omit items from the passage of knowledge, in order to shape opinions and actions of others. In fact, according to the opinion of journalists in the relevant field, the related authorities consider and test the news of the energy and omit what they regard as undesirable. Therefore, in this form of censorship, the related authorities use the censorship technique to eliminate specific words, sentences, or phrases of energy news. Considering what has already mentioned, the related authorities completely prevent the dissemination of a news in the energy field that could have an unpleasant reflection.

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