

*Original Research*

## **Analysis of the Strategic Role of Public Libraries In Iran's Geopolitics of Information**

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### **Abstract**

The main purpose of this study is to analyze the strategic role of public libraries in Iran's Geopolitics of Information. This is applied research adopting a mixed-method (qualitative-quantitative) approach. A semi-structured interview was used to collect qualitative information. In the quantitative part, a researcher-made questionnaire was designed based on the results of the qualitative part. The statistical population of the research in the qualitative section included 13 experts and university professors who were selected purposefully based on a set of criteria. The qualitative data were analyzed using the qualitative content analysis method. The findings of the quantitative part were analyzed using factor analysis. The population of the quantitative part included the general managers and deputies of the general administrations of Iran's public libraries (70 people) and the librarians of the provinces that had the central public libraries from five clusters of north, south, east, west, and center of Iran, including 10 provinces and 160 librarians. Some 201 completed questionnaires were received. The findings showed that libraries had an implicit role in strengthening cultural identity and increasing public awareness, especially in strengthening Iranian-Islamic identity, as one of the three main components of geopolitics. However, this role is neither deliberated for a specific mission nor clearly explained in the upstream documents. Moreover, based on the findings, the acquisition of the centralized resources by the Iran Public Libraries Foundation for all public libraries is managed in an integrated manner such that there is not any clear role of user needs in the selection process. This is inconsistent with the Free-Flow of Information approach. The findings also suggested that national policymakers should pay attention to the role of public libraries as a public discourse space in transmitting culture and information and a base for strengthening the power of soft defense, training and explaining the specific role for librarians, developing

technological infrastructure of libraries, providing resources based on local needs and the audience needs, continuous and purposeful monitoring of activities, and increasing the number of service recipients from public libraries.

**Keywords:** Geopolitics of information, Cultural identity, Public libraries, Islamic Republic of Iran.

### Introduction

A public library is a non-profit library maintained for public use and funded by the government or public sources. Unlike other libraries, a public library satisfies general public information needs by providing all kinds of knowledge and information available to all community segments regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic, and employment status. It may also provide other community services such as storytelling for children, after-school programs, language learning, seminars, workshops, and other community services (UKEssays, 2018). As such, libraries serve as vital locales for democratic active citizenship, social capital, social inclusion, and trust within a community and need to be preserved as such (Aabø & Audunson, 2012; Johnson, 2010; Varheim, 2011). However, due to the enormous acceleration of information in various fields, the boundaries of information have been dismantled and become a source of power in the domestic and international spaces. The debate over the flow of information in different societies and the hidden and overt powers that control are geopolitical issues of information or the geopolitics of information (Bigdeli & Zare Farashbandi, 2007). The term geopolitics, which today means the study of political geography, was first coined and used by the Swedish political scientist, Rudolf Kjellén (Shaghaghi, 2018). Geopolitics of information is a new perspective in the geopolitics and information science, which is based on the power of information in the contemporary system and is based on the importance of geopolitics in the present age and its role in the international system and imagined developments. On the other hand, information control is one of the important elements of developing and industrialized societies. Whereas the "desire for survival" and the "desire for well-being" are the focus of actors in political geography, they are important through "recognizing the current situation, especially in the power foundations and power relations", "evaluating the interests and materials in the current and future situation", and "having a strategy to maintain the current situation or change it". In geopolitics, which studies the interaction of politics (power) and geography (space, place, and territory), it is power relations that are the focus of research in the form of coexistence, rivalry, tension, and war. The tendency for survival and well-being is the common institutional existence of all human beings. Therefore, throughout history, power relations have also played a role in consolidating and stabilizing the mentioned tendencies and human groups in the form of family, tribe, clan, and nation. They have chosen one of the options of power relations according to their perception (Kavianirad, Mottaghi & Aref, 2017). Accordingly, geopolitics of information, considering that it is one of the increasing necessities of the coming years and one of the important issues in the formation of intelligence powers, analyzes the factors affecting the information flow structure in the world and its effect on geographical location. Payments and practical tools and media as well as relations between countries in relation to the status of information exchange is one of its main topics (Doroody, 2009). According to McQuail (1979), in geopolitics of information, the factors that guide the flow of information in the media play an important role in creating attitudes and changing the micro and macro orientations of individuals in a society.

This influence leads to changes in societies, from the smallest geographical unit to countries, regions, continents and the world. According to this view, public libraries are one of the most important media in this regard. It is according to their will and interests. This will is realized through the implementation of information policies and the tools of the media. Therefore, from the point of view of countries and in order to realize their national and group interests, the world needs to be restructured, and the task of the media is to create space in order to create such an order (Brown-Siyd, 2009). The constituent components of the geopolitics of information and communication, as power is the subject and basis of geopolitics, and all perceptions, approaches, examples and components of geopolitics revolve around the axis of power, and the element of power is hidden and manifested. Power has no meaning (Hafeznia, 2000). In information and communication geopolitics, the key issue is information superiority, information advantage, information differentiation, and in a word, power. The task of an information and communication geopolitician is to evaluate information power, and a nation's communication (analysis of a nation's information and communication opportunities and possibilities) is to expand its power in the world and digital space, that is, the extent to which a country can influence other political units in information and communication. The extent of such capability can place a country in the category of information and communication technology in geopolitical isolation, geopolitical challenge, and geopolitical transformation. Today, it is no longer possible to resist digital development, and in this forward movement, only societies with a strong presence can maintain their independence (Shah Mohammadi, 2007). Reasons for the importance of public libraries can be summarized as follows: *a.* The need for access to growing and evolving knowledge and influencing culture, employment, production of goods and services, etc; *b.* Creating access to knowledge as one of the sources of power (according to the emphasis of contemporary thinkers on non-physical aspects of power); *c.* Manifestation of people's daily life in local public libraries; *d.* The impact of public libraries in the culture; *e.* The role of public libraries as a creator of social image and reality among the people (Parsazadeh & Shaghagi, 2009). Public libraries serve as treasures of collective memory consisting of books and other codified resources, which, according to their defined functions, serve all people through educational, social policy, information, cultural, and economic functions (Greenhalgh, 1993). As a social institution, it has a duty beyond information and education. Functions such as social, cultural, and economic policy-making, defined in the context of public library functions, oversee its social impact function so that public libraries act as a contemplative and scholarly (rather than journalistic) circle of influential mass media. It is social, and it is a burden that, while respecting the individual's choice, creates a healthy atmosphere for raising the level of intellectual and cognitive abilities. Functions such as cultural, political, informational, and entertainment functions have been assigned to the media (Meriji, 2005). On the other hand, in various studies, the library is considered as an important media. Ghafari-Ghadir and Shaghagi (2010) suggest that paying attention to social systems as active social structures such as family or community that have goals, norms, maps, powers, social ranks, performance guarantees, facilities, and special territories is another view raised in the communication media including public libraries.

In this view, communication media is defined as the process through which information, decisions, and guidelines are transferred to the social system and through which cognitions, ideas, and behaviors are formed and changed, and, with the concept of the social system, the communicators can be informed about the close correlation with other elements and processes

of society (Mohsenian Rad, 2017). Quail (1979) stated that from the perspective of the political geography of information, the factors that guide the flow of information in the media play an important role in creating attitudes and changing the micro and macro orientations of individuals in a society. This influence leads to a change in societies, from the smallest geographical units to countries, regions, continents, and the world. Hence, the public library as an effective social media can play a role in information geopolitics. Geopolitical analysis sees power as managing the realm of information based on knowledge, information control, and techniques that influence public opinion (Maliukevičius, 2007). Accordingly, it seems that public libraries as a public database and venue for lifelong learning have assumed a more central role in the geopolitics of information because the public library, as a democratic aspect of society, is based on the argument that there is free access to information from all perspectives and all opinions. Information has become more valuable throughout history and parallel with the development of competition between states. This value is important not only from the economic point of view of states but also from power and theories related to political philosophy. In this regard, they have turned their attention to UNESCO and have been able to establish their desired order under a strategic alliance: the "New World Order of Information and Communication Order" (NWICO). Creating an information balance through the creation and development of its media to neutralize the octopus of Western media was one of the concerns of southern countries and UNESCO, which has come close to reality in recent decades. Increasing the level of awareness and knowledge of people in society improves their attitude and behavior and the manifestation of hidden abilities and talents in order to smooth and accelerate the process of development of the society and the need for comprehensive development of a country, having knowledgeable people with wisdom, and correct thinking (Hashemzadeh, Dehghani Raini & Nowkarizi, 2016).

### **Literature Review**

A review of the research literature shows that some studies are done on the public libraries' functions as political and social acts. Geopolitics of information is the study of a moving territorial space in which the production, distribution, and consumption of information are considered the factors that are shaping its territory's boundaries. In this moving space, the position of any political entity depends on its effectiveness in the process of production, distribution, and consumption it has. Nemati Anaraki (2009), in her research, showed that information is an important and decisive commodity in the destiny of nations and is influential in social, political, economic, and cultural relations in the age of information and communication. Parsazadeh and Shaghghi (2009) concluded that public libraries could bring their cues into the interpersonal discourse through books. Other print sources are publications and other non-print sources. Books are the most important vehicles that convey the signs well. With Ghaffari Qadir and Shaghghi's (2011) conclusion, convergent theory, as a unifying model, can be liberating in the flow of global information for the social function of public libraries as a media communication institution. Tasic and Lazarevic (2010) concluded that cultural tourism had multiplied in the past few decades due to more income, higher levels of education, globalization processes that make the world a smaller place, technology, the effects of media, and telecommunications and new types of cultural attractions. Libraries, as cultural institutions, may contribute significantly to the development of cultural tourism. According to the library directors interviewed in Varheim (2011), classes successfully generated trust and

social capital: people “come back” to the library. Public libraries are promising arenas for generating social trust, and follow-up studies looking at the attitudes of immigrants who participate in these programs are important for increasing our knowledge on the mechanisms creating trust and social capital, that is, for theory development and library practice. Hafeznia, Ahmadipour & Boyeh (2012) acknowledged that, in the formation of Iran's geopolitical territories, the "ideology" factor had had the greatest impact, and the "economic factor" had the least impact. According to Nematollahi (2012) and Ferguson (2012), if part of the collection budget, along with the centralized collection method, is given to libraries, the focus on the collection process will be reduced, and the role of the librarian and client in the collection will be more realistic. The advantages of the centralized collection method also remain strong. Public libraries have a growing role as developers of social capital, which brings to bear some of the growing body of research into public libraries and social capital. They review definitions of social capital by writers outside the LIS sector and outline the main strategies taken by public librarians who attempt to contribute to social capital, such as community outreach, provision of meeting places, and provision of universal services to the public. Mossalanejhad (2015) asserts that signs of change in the balance of power have become more pronounced in identity struggles. Jaeger, Bertot and Gorham (2013) contend that public libraries are heavily affected by political and policy-making processes that shape libraries' funding, activities, and roles in society. The explosion of information policy decisions in the past two decades significantly increases the responsibilities of libraries while also increasing limitations on their activities. If libraries are to effectively advocate for the interests of their institutions, patrons, and communities, researchers need to engage more strongly in the problems of politics and policymaking that impact libraries. With greater amounts of data and analysis in this area, libraries will be better situated to advocate for their needs in political and policy-making processes and better articulate their positions to members of the public. Ebrahimi and Alipour-najmi's (2013) research findings showed that public libraries could play a role in creating and promoting social trust in society by creating a sense of equality and social interaction. This can be done using both institutional and social approaches. However, less manifestation of this role is now observed in the studied libraries. Afzali, Badiie Azandahi, Zaki and Kiani (2015) discussed that the concepts of space, power, and identity, the three elements of the discourse realm, are special in critical geopolitics; all three have special nature elements have the nature of social constructivism. Identity is the third dimension of the discourse realm. Toth's (2016) research entitled “the role of public libraries in Lifelong Learning in a multicultural and digital context” showed that public libraries function as low intensive meeting places where people with different ethnical, cultural, and religious backgrounds can be exposed to other values. Findings of a research article by Mohammad Esmaeil and Ghorbani (2018) in terms of geopolitical research information showed that 82.2% of the study population believed the satellite TV has the highest efficiency compared with other tools of the soft war. About 66.7% stated that changing beliefs is the most important goal of soft war, while 84.4% stated that young people are the most important target group of the soft war. Moreover, 80% stated that increasing public awareness is the most effective strategy to address soft war. Finally, 64.4% believed that librarians and information specialists have the main role in creating current awareness services to deal with soft war. The results also showed a significant relationship between the importance of war objectives and general strategies. From the results of this article, it is obvious that the role of librarians and information specialists is momentous in strengthening

the incentive and awareness-raising strategies. At the same time, these groups must act and be effective in modifying, controlling, and limiting policies that can sometimes lead to resilience and negative impacts. In a research paper by Hashmi (2019), the findings showed that public libraries of Islamabad did not facilitate opportunities for the community to be consulted, empowered, or involved in political discourse. Analysis of GIS characteristics, library services, and community perspectives suggests that improvements in planning and commitment (especially infrastructure, budget, and human resources) would enable public libraries to increase opportunities for Islamabad communities to engage in political discourse. Ebrahimi, Riyahinia, Akhshik and Vahid (2020) analyzed the content of policy documents in Iran's public libraries. They found out that, in the studied documents, policies were made for five issues including "reading promotion policies", "management of financial and administrative affairs of public libraries of the country", "construction and development of public libraries of the country", "management of library services", "and "designation of actors in the public libraries in Iran". Examination of the documents showed that the issue of reading promotion policies was taken into consideration in the "Document of Beneficial Reading Movement" and the "Sanctioned regulation of Iran's Public Culture Council regarding the promotion of book and book reading culture", and many actors and stakeholders have been taken into account by policymakers in these documents. One of the benefits of this research is to offer proposed solutions and lay the groundwork for developing a model for playing a strategic role of public libraries in the geopolitics of information as a tool to measure the performance of libraries in this regard, and the results can be used in public libraries and other relevant trustees. Accordingly, the present study aims to analyze the strategic role of public libraries in the geopolitics of information of Iran.

### Research questions

1. According to experts, what is the role of public libraries in strengthening cultural identity and free flow of information in the geopolitics of information?
2. From the experts' point of view, what are the policy criteria in Iranian public libraries for influencing the geopolitics of information?
3. According to experts, what is the role of librarians in the geopolitics of information in public libraries of Iran?
4. What is the role of user needs in the geopolitics of information in Iranian public libraries, according to experts?
5. To what extent do librarians in Iranian public libraries play a role in information geopolitics?
6. To what extent do users' needs in Iranian public libraries play a role in the geopolitics of information?
7. To what extent do strategic factors in Iran's public libraries play a role in information geopolitics?

### Methodology

The present study is an applied research with a mixed method (qualitative-quantitative) approach in terms of purpose. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative information. The statistical population of the research in the qualitative section included 13 professors, researchers, and senior managers in the public libraries at the national level. The

sampling of this section was purposeful based on a set of criteria. In order to analyze the qualitative data obtained from the interviews, the method of qualitative content analysis and deductive categorization was used. The statistical population in the quantitative section included general managers and deputies of general administrations of public libraries in Iran, as well as experienced librarians of central libraries of 10 provinces, which were divided into 5 clusters: north, south, east, west, and center. The researcher-made questionnaire was distributed quantitatively throughout the community. Table 1 shows the population statistics of the quantitative research section.

Table 1  
*Clustering of country libraries based on geographical location*

| Cluster | Province                  | Number of Central/Main libraries | Number of librarians |
|---------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| North   | Gilan – Mazandaran        | 2                                | 21                   |
| South   | Hormozgan – Khuzestan     | 2                                | 29                   |
| East    | Kh.Razavi – Kerman        | 2                                | 38                   |
| West    | Hamedan – East Azarbaijan | 2                                | 50                   |
| Center  | Tehran – Isfahan          | 2                                | 20                   |
| Total   |                           |                                  | 160                  |

**Validity and reliability of research tools**

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), in terms of positivism and post-positivism, the appropriate criteria are the conventional benchmarks of "rigor": internal validity (isomorphism of findings with reality), external validity (generalizability), reliability (in the sense of stability), and objectivity (distanced and neutral observer). These criteria depend on the realist ontological position; without the assumption, isomorphism of findings with reality can have no meaning, strict generalizability to a parent population is impossible, stability cannot be assessed for inquiry into a phenomenon if the phenomenon itself can change, and objectivity cannot be achieved because there is nothing from which one can be "distant". In this research, these four criteria have been used to measure the accuracy and reliability of the research, which is presented in the Table 2 lists the criteria of reliability and strategies used in the research.

Table 2  
*Research reliability criteria*

| Criterion        | Research strategy   |
|------------------|---|
| Validity         | The transcripts of the interviews were provided to the interviewees. Excerpts from the interviews were also reviewed with the cooperation of some research colleagues. The accuracy of the extracted codes was assured by re-reading the interviews by the researcher at two different times. In addition, to increase the reliability and reduce the possible error in coding, some of the interviews were studied by the research colleagues, and the codes were extracted and compared with the researcher codes. Therefore, the validity of the research was achieved by controlling the interviewees and exchanging views with colleagues. |
| Generalizability | The generalizability of the research is achieved by thoroughly describing the research process and providing complete details about the research.   |

| Criterion   | Research strategy   |
|-------------|---|
| Reliability | According to the research mixed method approach (qualitative-quantitative), a questionnaire was designed and distributed to assess the quantitative part after conducting the interviews and based on the components extracted from the interviews. Interviews were also recorded with the permission of the interviewees. Therefore, the reliability of the research is achieved through the interview guide and the recording of the interviews.  |
| Objectivity | A researcher has been working in public libraries for more than 12 years as staff, library manager, national headquarters expert, member of librarians' associations, and public libraries expert in television programs and non-governmental organizations in the librarianship and libraries. He has also been in constant contact with the research environment; thus, the validity of the research has been achieved through the researcher's continuous contact with the research environment, continuous observation of the research environment, and exchange of views with peers. |

A 34-item researcher-made questionnaire was designed based on the key components extracted from the experts' opinions in the qualitative section of the interviews to collect information in the quantitative section. The validity of the questionnaire is of the content type because its sections and items were developed through paradigms obtained from interviews with experts. The reliability of the quantitative instrument was measured and confirmed using Cronbach's alpha calculation. Amous software was used to analyze the quantitative information. Considering the use of the questionnaire in the quantitative part of the research, to obtain the Cronbach's alpha coefficient and the validity of the questionnaire, the variance of the scores of each subset of the questionnaire and the total variance should be calculated first. The coefficient value will be obtained using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient formula in the next step. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients obtained for the questionnaires used in the study are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Cronbach's alpha coefficients obtained for the questionnaire used in the research*

| Factors  | Cronbach's alpha coefficients |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Strengthening cultural identity and information flow | 0.91                          |
| Policy   | 0.90                          |
| Role of librarians                                   | 0.92                          |
| The role of needs assessment                         | 0.94                          |
| Total  | 0.91                          |

Most researchers believe that the minimum Cronbach's alpha coefficient should be 0.70, but values of 0.60 and even 0.555 are acceptable (Aghajani & Ganjehkhor, 2010). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the whole questionnaire was 0.91, an appropriate and acceptable value.

### Findings

In order to answer the research questions through the analysis of the findings of interviews with university professors and experts in the public libraries, selective coding, categorization, and extraction of concepts were performed using MAXQDA analytical software. In order to ensure the accuracy of extracting information from the interview data, the implemented results



were reviewed by several interviewees, and the result was confirmed. Then, by entering the open coding stage and paying attention to the repetition of the concepts and categories raised during the interviews and the analysis of the categories and findings of the interview, four major categories were extracted as follows by summarizing the data extracted from the interviews, samples presented in Table 4.

Four recurring central categories were extracted throughout the interviews. Then, based on the obtained components, a questionnaire of 34 questions was designed and distributed among general managers, deputies of general administrations of public libraries, and experienced librarians of the central libraries of ten provinces located in the five clusters mentioned in the research method.

Table 4  
*A sample of the initial codes extracted from the interviews*

| Interviewee code | Keywords in interviews   | Initial code  |
|------------------|--|---|
| P.1              | In the first stage, the free flow of information in society depends on the macro policies of governments.  | Government policy on the flow of free access to information |
| P.2              | Libraries will provide a presence for the customs and cultures of the people.  | Presence of customs and traditions                          |
| A.P.5            | Given the global-local mission of public libraries, these libraries must provide their users with a general awareness of the achievements of human civilization. | The need to provide public awareness of users               |

**Question 1: According to experts, what is the role of public libraries in strengthening cultural identity and free flow of information in the geopolitics of information?**

Interviews were conducted with experts and senior managers related to public libraries and information science to answer the first question of the research. Experts' opinions on the role of public libraries were extracted and summarized in

Table 5 using qualitative content analysis,

Table 5  
*The role of public libraries in strengthening national identity and the free flow of information in the geopolitics of information, according to experts*

| Current position and role  | Obstacles and weaknesses   | Suggested solution   |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geographical distribution of public libraries</li> <li>• Providing the ground for the presence of various ethnic customs and traditions</li> <li>• A public library is a place for the conflict of opinions and public opinion</li> <li>• The public library is a lifelong learning base, but there is no specific program for this role as a mission.</li> <li>• Ability to increase strategic impenetrability in the shadow of increasing public awareness</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Lack of proper distribution of cultural facilities</li> <li>•Lack of explanation of job roles appropriate to the flow of information</li> <li>•The centralized acquisition system conflicts with the free flow of information</li> <li>•Lack of skill in librarians in providing information advice to the audience</li> <li>•Lack of public discourse spaces in public cabinets</li> <li>•Lack of explanation of clear mission along with monitoring</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate and neutralize the government in free information flow policies</li> <li>• Assign a mission to public libraries to strengthen national identity</li> <li>• Strengthen the technological infrastructure in public libraries to facilitate the free flow of information</li> <li>• Paying attention to ethnic diversity in Iran in providing indigenous information resources</li> <li>• Develop an action plan</li> </ul> |

| Current position and role   | Obstacles and weaknesses   | Suggested solution  |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The discourse function of the book strengthens the components of identity</li> <li>• Special attention of public libraries to strengthening Islamic culture</li> </ul> | for public libraries to strengthen the components of national identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversity of ethnicities and multiculturalism</li> </ul> | based on lifelong learning in libraries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The need to provide transnational information in public libraries</li> </ul> |

**Question 2: What are the policy criteria of public libraries in Iran to influence the geopolitics of information from the experts' point of view?**

After identifying the key points of the interviews and extracting the initial codes, the semantically similar codes were combined, and inductive formative categorization was performed. The results of inductive formative categorization of effective factors in the category of public libraries policy in the geopolitics of information are illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6

*Policy criteria in public libraries of Iran to influence the geopolitics of information from the point of view of experts*

| Current position and role  | Obstacles and weaknesses  | Suggested solution  |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compilation of Nahzat-e-Motale-Mofid document</li> <li>• Compilation of Horizon 1404 Vision Document for Public Libraries of Iran</li> <li>• Land management plan of public libraries in Iran</li> <li>• In-service training of librarians</li> <li>• Initiate activities related to the interaction of public libraries with the elite and the university</li> <li>• Pay attention to the development of public libraries and book reading in villages and low-income areas</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of proper distribution of cultural facilities</li> <li>• Centralization in resource provision and human resource management</li> <li>• Lack of continuous evaluation of librarians' skills based on the training provided</li> <li>• Instability of managers</li> <li>• Weakness in training managers for the organization using the forces within the organization</li> <li>• Lack of user training system</li> <li>• Weakness in the organizational knowledge management system</li> <li>• Lack of specific and codified budget allocation</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government support</li> <li>• Attention to strategic coordination and synergy of cultural facilities</li> <li>• Decentralization</li> <li>• Designing a two-way information flow system in public libraries</li> <li>• Information evaluation</li> <li>• Increase the quality of services</li> <li>• Provide infrastructure for the implementation of objectives</li> <li>• Determine a specific budget line for public libraries and budget missions</li> </ul> |

**Question 3: What is the role of public library librarians in Iran's geopolitics of information, according to experts?**

Every strategic and geopolitical activity is composed of elements such as power, space, and identity, while role players in these areas, also referred to as strategic players in various texts, have a special place. In the geopolitics of information, librarians are expected to play a key role as information intermediaries. Based on inductive formative analysis of interviews with experts, 45 codes were summarized and extracted as the main concepts illustrated in Paradigm Figure 1.

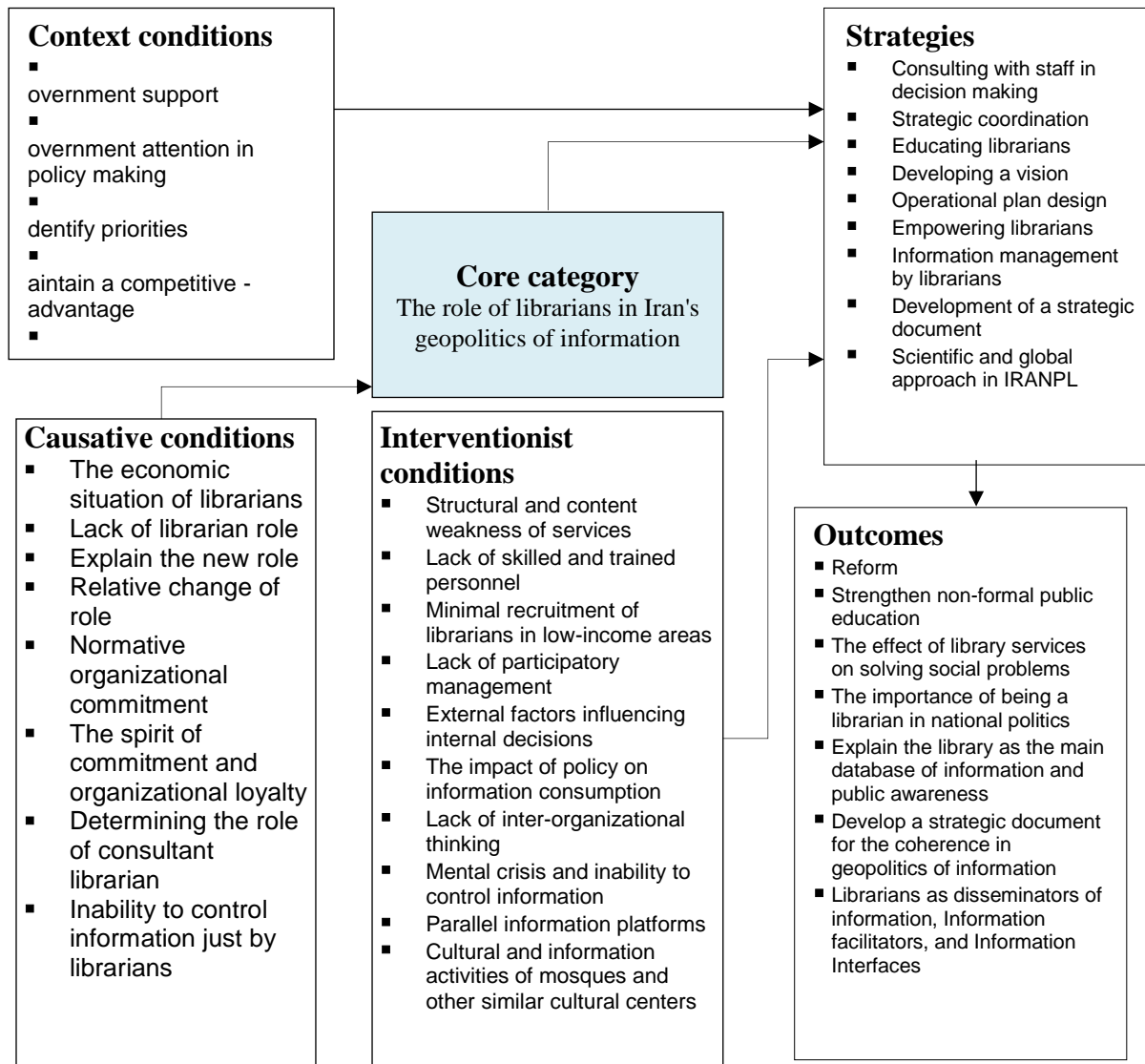


Figure 1: The role of public librarians in Iran's GI

**Question 4: What is the role of public library users needs in Iran's geopolitics of information from the experts' point of view?**

In various topics and scientific management texts, including supply chain and any activity that deals with the audience, knowing planners have considered the audience's needs as the main activity. In order to acquire this knowledge in the public libraries from the experts' opinions by summarizing the concepts taken from the interviews, 27 main concepts were obtained, as illustrated in Figure 2.

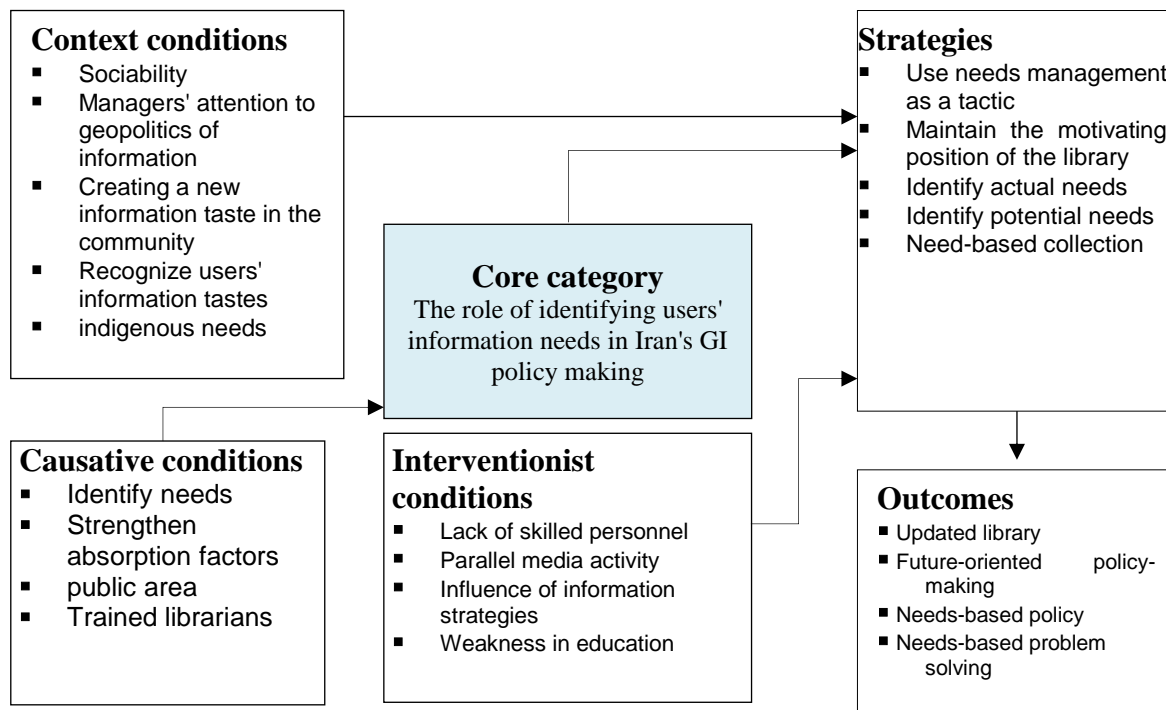


Figure 2: The role of needs of public library users in Iran's geopolitics of information

### Question 5: To what extent do librarians in Iranian public libraries play a role in information geopolitics?

The analysis of results obtained in the quantitative section through questionnaires distributed among managers and librarians showed that the factor loadings of all the reagents variable "Role of Librarians" were in good condition. In other words, the correlation of the "role of librarians" with the introduction of this component is estimated at an average level. In terms of senior managers and librarians, library, and public library, it is moderate in the geopolitical sphere of information. The roles are analyzed by factor analysis, and the results are illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7

*Estimation of overall evaluation indicators of librarians' role model*

| Indicator | CMIN / DF | CFI   | PCFI  | RMSEA | Helter |
|-----------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| Value     | 2.147     | 0.983 | 0.386 | 0.06  | 251    |

The evaluation indicators of the model as a whole show that the collected data support the developed model. In other words, the data fit the model. Most of the indicators are in the acceptable range. Relative chi-square index (CMIN / DF) is less than 3, adaptive fit index (CFI) is equal to 0.983, adaptive fit index (PCFI) is equal to 0.386, square root of mean squared estimation error (RMSEA) is equal to 0.06, and the helter index is 251, all of which indicate that the model is desirable.

Table 2

*Confirmatory factor variable loading values of the librarians' role in the geopolitics of information regarding the general managers, assistants, and librarians*

| Identifier (question)   | Factor load | CV     | Std. Dev | Sig. level |
|---|-------------|--------|----------|------------|
| Survey of librarians in decision-making is fundamental                            | 0.77        | -      | -        | 0.001      |
| The amount of training to improve the ability of librarians                       | 0.78        | 5,563  | 0.075    | 0.001      |
| Librarians play a vital role in the processes of policy –making                   | 0.81        | 4,184  | 0.082    | 0.001      |
| The role of librarians in information management                                  | 0.63        | 3,219  | 0.073    | 0.001      |
| The extent of providing information consulting services and reading by librarians | 0.33        | 9,033  | 0.090    | 0.001      |
| Fit the skills of librarians for advice   | 0.42        | 11,750 | 0.083    | 0.001      |
| Librarians' efforts to improve their skills                                       | 0.36        | 11,715 | 0.085    | 0.001      |
| The amount of librarian reference interviews for users' needs                     | 0.30        | 5,162  | 0.072    | 0.001      |

The values estimated in

Table 2 (factor loadings, critical values, and significance level) indicate that the factor loads for all variables of "librarians' role factor" are in good condition. In other words, the correlation of "Librarians' role factor" component is estimated to be moderate with the references of this component. As a result, the tool for measuring this component has a factor validity. In addition, the highest factor loading is related to the third question with a value of 0.81, while the lowest factor loading is related to the component of the eighth question with a value of 0.30.

### Question 6: To what extent do the needs of users in Iranian public libraries play a role in the geopolitics of information?

Based on analysis of the results of a questionnaire distributed among librarians and managers of public libraries, the estimated values indicate that the factor loadings of all the reagents variable "Recognizing the need for operation" are in a favorable condition. In other words, the solidarity component of "recognizing the agent's need" to represent the average component is estimated to be effective. Therefore, the findings suggest that understanding the needs in information geopolitics influences public libraries in Iran. The results of factor analysis are as follows.

Table 3

*Estimation of evaluation indicators of the overall model of the impact of needs recognition on geopolitics of information*

| Indicator | CMIN/DF | CFI   | PCFI  | RMSEA | Helter |
|-----------|---------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| Value     | 2.201   | 0.983 | 0.468 | 0.07  | 253    |

Most of the indexes are in an acceptable range. Relative Chi-square index (CMIN / DF) is smaller than 3, comparative fit index (CF) is equal to 0.983, the fit index comparatively frugal (PCFI) is equal to 0.468, the root mean square error of estimate (RMSEA) is equal to 0.07, and the Helter index is equivalent to 253, all of which indicate that the model is desirable.

Table 4

Variable factor loading values of needs recognition factors

| Identifier (question)   | Factor loading | CV    | Std. Dev | Sig. level |
|---|----------------|-------|----------|------------|
| The task of providing a supply of resources with access to free information                   | 0.54           | -     | -        | 0.001      |
| The attention for the library and the culture of the natives                                  | 0.70           | 7,693 | 0.140    | 0.001      |
| The diversity of the library in accordance with the ethnicity of the tastes of the region     | 0.79           | 7,368 | 0.160    | 0.001      |
| The management of needs as tactics  | 0.87           | 8,394 | 0.171    | 0.001      |
| Interest rate advantage of identified needs, potentials, and needs in policy-making resources | 0.38           | 4,949 | 0.152    | 0.001      |
| The amount of surveys of clients in providing resources                                       | 0.60           | 6,916 | 0.151    | 0.001      |
| The participation of librarians in selection of books in the process of financing             | 0.75           | 7,799 | 0.179    | 0.001      |

Estimated values in the table above (the factor loading and the critical significance level)

indicate that the factor loadings of all the reagents variable "Recognizing the need for operation" are in a favorable condition. The highest factor loading in the fourth question has a value of 0.87, and the lowest factor loading is related to the components of the fifth question with a value of 0.38.

**Question 7: To what extent do strategic factors in Iran's public libraries play a role in the geopolitics of information?**

When a large structure comprises several hidden variables, the second-order confirmatory factor analysis is used. In the second-order confirmatory factor analysis, the relations of the latent variables with their original structures need to be checked out and examined the relationship of observed variables with the latent variables. Analysis of the factor loadings relating to all of the reagents variable "strategic factors libraries, public information geopolitical arena" showed they were in a favorable condition. In other words, the correlation of "the strategic role of the public library in the geopolitics of information" with the introduction of this component is estimated at a moderate to a high level. This means that concerning the strategic role of public libraries in the geopolitics of information, the higher the average assessment is, the more significant the libraries' role can be. However, the implementation of the development strategy of specific missions and purposeful design documents are subject to the results of the second-order factor analysis, which is illustrated in Table 11.

Table 5

*Estimation of general evaluation indicators of the model in second-order factor analysis*

| Indicator | CMIN / DF | CFI   | PCFI  | RMSEA | Helter |
|-----------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| Value     | 2,958     | 0.981 | 0.689 | 0.09  | 94     |

Indicators for evaluating the overall model indicate that the model developed by the collected data is in good fit. In other words, the model fit is established. Most indexes are in an acceptable range. Relative Chi-square index (CMIN/DF) is smaller than 3, comparative fit index (CFI) is equal to 0.981, thrifty comparative fit index (PCFI) is equal to 0.689, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is equal to 0.09, and the Helter index is equivalent to 94, all of which indicate that the model is desirable.

Table 6

*Variable factor loads of the role of strategic factors of public libraries in the geopolitics of information in Iran*

| Identifier / component                                    | Factor load | CV    | Std. Dev | Sig. level |
|---|-------------|-------|----------|------------|
| Strengthen national identity and free flow of information | 0.88        | -     | -        | 0.001      |
| Policy  | 0.87        | 4,494 | 0.227    | 0.001      |
| The role of librarians                                    | 0.68        | 7,321 | 0.185    | 0.001      |
| Identify needs  | 0.65        | 6,134 | 0.150    | 0.001      |

Estimated values in the table above (the factor loadings and the critical significance level) indicate that all the reagents variable "public library strategic role in the geopolitics of information" are in good condition. In other words, the correlation between the components of

“public library strategic role in the geopolitics of information” and the introduction of this component is estimated to be moderate to high. The components of “strengthen national identity and free flow of information” have the highest factor loading (0.88), and the components of “identify needs” have the lowest factor loading (0.65) (Table 12).

### Discussion

Centralized system of providing resources, i.e., centralized purchase and distribution of resources by the public libraries of the country to all public libraries in Iran in an integrated way where users do not have a prominent and effective role in the selection process, is somewhat inconsistent with the definitions of free flow of information. Preserving and strengthening identity is one of the essential components in geopolitical issues. Iranian public libraries implicitly have an active role in strengthening national and religious identity to improve the quality of life, resist cultural invasions, and strengthen soft defense. The current cultural programs in libraries confirm this, but it has not been prominently explained by purposeful and continuous societal missions and has become less visible. Moreover, in the research findings, the function of the library was mentioned as a public discourse venue and local space for informal and lifelong education, which was presented with the concepts in Hafeznia (2012) and Mossalanejad (2015). The role of discourse in the formation of critical identity and geopolitics is consistent with Afzali et al. (2015). Thoth (2016) also believes that the most important institution in any country that is responsible for meeting the cultural and information needs of all classes - regardless of age, gender, religion, and race and other personal characteristics and abilities - is the public library. In his study, he emphasized the role of public libraries, focusing on four areas: 1) provider of information, 2) cultural intermediaries, 3) source of lifelong learning services, and 4) a place for recreation and entertainment. The digital and multicultural context is both an opportunity and a threat to public libraries, with items 2, 3, and 4 matching the answer to the first question. Findings of Hashemzadeh, Dehghani Raini and Nowkarizi (2016) also showed that the role of public libraries in strengthening cultural identity - which includes sub-elements of attention to national literature, prevention of cultural invasion, and preservation of indigenous culture - is very important and has received low attention in libraries. In general, strengthening cultural identity is very important. Undoubtedly, public libraries are the center of intellectual and cultural exchange. But in the policy of providing resources for public libraries in Iran, resources related to all opinions and views are not necessarily included in the collection of public libraries. Library homelessness as a public space or sphere mentioned in interviews is consistent with the findings of UKEssays (2018), Tosic and Lazarevik (2010), and Kavianirad et al. (2017).

Various study projects are being carried out by the institution, including the public planning of public libraries. However, the need for national policymakers to pay attention to the role of public libraries as a public discourse space in transmitting culture and information and a base for strengthening soft defense is another point emphasized in interviews. Now, this vacuum of attention has reduced the strategic role of public libraries in the geopolitical field of information. Fadaei (2018), while emphasizing the review of public library strategies, showed that many of the goals, strategies, and general policies of development programs are directly or indirectly related to public libraries. They are achievable, but unfortunately, the people involved in this program are unaware of this or have ignored it. The position of public libraries in the development programs that have been developed so far is implicit in the sense that the vital role



of public libraries has not been considered in the development and writing of these programs. Hashemzadeh, et al. (2016) also stated that the need for comprehensive development of a country is to have an informed people, with insight and the proper thought, which is consistent with the present research findings. Varheim (2011) and Jaeger, Bertot and Gorham (2013) emphasized the geopolitical aspects of information as power and authority in the management of various spheres of life (politics, economics), building social trust, social policy, and cultural enrichment, and problem-solving. Cultural and political roles have been emphasized in public libraries, which correspond to the findings of the second research question.

Based on the findings, librarians do not have a missionary and purposeful role in information geopolitics. In addition, lack of clear explanation of librarians' mission in the geopolitics of information and lack of proper monitoring system to monitor the progress of goals and policies were identified as other disadvantages regarding the lack or poor role of librarians in public libraries the geopolitics of information. However, activities and programs such as reader counseling and outstanding projects are being implemented in the country's public libraries. Outcome-based evaluation is based on a planning model for improving public library services and measuring their performance. Outcome metrics are designed to enable evaluation based on the human experience. Performance metrics focus on the impact on individuals, often extracted from participants' statements. This feedback shows the effectiveness of services and helps improve programs, stop inefficient programs, and design new programs. This type of evaluation and planning model can also pave the way for librarians to create a role in information geopolitics. The values estimated in the quantitative part also indicate that the factor loads related to all variables of "librarians' role factor" are in good condition. In other words, the correlation of "librarians' factor" component with the indicators of this component is in the average estimation of librarians' role as an information consultant and information intermediary. This is confirmed in Mohammad Esmaeil and Ghorbani (2018), Oyelude and Bamigbola (2012), which is consistent with the present findings.

The centralized collection system of public library resources was analyzed from two perspectives. First, this system provides coherence and unity of procedure in the transfer and strengthening of cultural foundations and national identity in alignment with macro policies and preserving national integrity in the face of cultural invasions and internal and external threats. Second, the damage of inattention or little attention to the tastes, the level of awareness, and subcultures becomes more prominent in the shadow of centralized collection, which senior managers in policy-making should consider. In addition to formulating visions and policies, the principled implementation of these documents should be monitored. The book selection plan selected by librarians is a relatively good step in considering users' tastes, but it is not systematically and continuously included in resource policies. The findings showed that the collection department has the most important role in public libraries. If librarians do not have access to public library resources and a centralized collection lacks a codified policy, public libraries will stray from achieving their goals. Analysis of quantitative findings also confirmed this. Nematollahi (2012) and Fahimifar and Farzin Yazdi (2014) focused on the need for librarians to participate in the collection along with the collection method and the need to pay attention to the needs of the audience in the collection practice, which is consistent with the findings of the present study. Besides, the present study's findings regarding the need to pay attention to users' information need assessment as one of the important components of the geopolitics of information have alignment with the research of Zerehsaz and Pazooki (2012).

Rahmani, Abbasi and Sanatjoo (2016) also reported on the lack of a clear pattern of organizational structure in the collection, lack of codified policy, and lack of information sharing for the majority of citizens. They emphasized this role in the areas of power and strategy and the lack of resources tailored to users' needs.

The analysis of the findings obtained in the quantitative part through a questionnaire distributed to managers and librarians shows that the factor loads related to all variables of "librarians' role factor" are in good condition. In other words, the component correlation of "librarians' role factor" with the introduction of this component is estimated to be moderate. According to senior managers and librarians of public libraries, librarians have a moderate role in the geopolitics of information. This is in line with Ebrahimi and Alipour Najmi (2013) findings and Bazrafshan, Abazari and Azimi Khabazan (2018).

According to the findings from the questionnaires distributed among librarians and senior managers of public libraries, the estimated values indicate that the factor loads related to all variables of the "understanding needs' factor" are in good condition. In other words, the component correlation of the "need factor" identification with the indicators of this component is estimated at a moderate level. Thus, the findings indicate the effective role of such understanding in the influence of public libraries in the geopolitics of information in Iran. The findings of Zardari, Atapour, Majidi and Akbarnejad (2019) are consistent with this part of the research. Based on the findings of the quantitative section, the factor loads related to all variables of "strategic factors of public libraries in the geopolitics of information" are in a favorable condition. In other words, the component correlation of the "strategic role of public libraries in the geopolitics of information" is estimated to be above average and has factor validity. This confirms the role of libraries, but the implementation of strategies developed in upstream documents depends on the design and continuous monitoring of specific and purposeful missions. This finding is consistent with the findings of Shaghghi (2018), Bazrafshan et al. (2018), Zardari, et al. (2019), and Ebrahimi et al. (2020).

### Conclusion

Information is now considered the main source of power by governments. Public libraries are one of the most important public databases in any community, which can strengthen the soft defense infrastructure of the community by disseminating information about the identity and national values of their community and raising public awareness. Public libraries, whether they like it or not, operate in a political environment and are undoubtedly influenced by the macro-policies of that society. To develop the boundaries of the geopolitics of information, governments should focus mainly on identity. The necessity of understanding people and awareness of their national identity as power is recognized to prevent cultural interference and the infiltration of foreign identities that may change the behavior and culture of a society. This can help make it more consumer-oriented and thus increase soft defense.

On the other hand, public libraries are the centers of lifelong learning in the community. Thus, if special attention is paid to these centers by providing the necessary resources to fertilize ideas and strengthen the people's ideology, a strategic position can be given to these centers in the geopolitics of information. In order to achieve these goals, it is necessary to consider a few essential points: 1) due to the geographical dispersion of public libraries in Iran, more people must use the services of libraries, 2) a comprehensive program and strategic plan for audience attraction are needed, and 3) designing and implementing the public libraries should be done in

a purposeful and mission-oriented manner. It is also necessary for librarians to receive the targeted and necessary training to provide appropriate counseling and guidance services so that they can, in addition to general librarianship services, perform their duties as advisors to guide users in the right direction. The third important point is to pay attention to the information resource system required by libraries, in which the diversity of ethnic and cultural needs should be considered to gain more power through the saturation of cultural information in the community memory.

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