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### EXPLAINING THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN REDUCING AND CONTROLLING ECONOMIC CORRUPTION (AN ANALYSIS ON THE BASIS OF GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH)

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#### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to investigate how the media influence the reduction and control of economic corruption. In terms of data, our research is qualitative exploratory and is cross-sectional in terms of data collection time and a survey in terms of data collection method. The statistical population of the research includes economists, sociologists, communication and media experts, Political Science Specialists; Senior economic managers such as economic deputies of ministries; Senior private sector executives from the Chamber of Commerce and the editors of economic newspapers and magazines. Purposeful non-random sampling method was used to determine the samples of this research. To ensure the validity of the tool in the qualitative part of the research, we benefited from the valuable opinions of professors familiar with this field and university experts who were experts in this field. The method of data analysis in the qualitative part was theoretical coding. The results showed that among the 405 indicators extracted from interviews with experts, 21 main components can be extracted that can be categorized in the form of main phenomena, causal conditions, and consequences.

#### INTRODUCTION

Corruption is the abuse of public trust for personal gain, which appears usually in the form of bribe, embezzlement, fraud, extortion and swindle (Fisman, Golden, 2018). Accordingly, to show that we are facing the problem of economic corruption in Iran, we refer to global statistics in this regard. Based on the calculations made on the Corruption Perception Index, Transparency International (TI) and looking at Iran's score in the Corruption Perception Index (CPI), we can see that Iran has experienced a

declining trend in the score of corruption over the past 17 years (2019-2009). For this reason, during the years 2003 to 2019, according to the CPI index, Iran's ranking among the countries of the world has decreased from 78 to 146. This shows that during recent two decades, the situation of economic corruption in Iran has become much worse than before, and Iran is among the 30 countries with the highest level of corruption.

In studying the causes and reasons for the emergence and occurrence of corruption in different countries of the world, researchers have mainly considered it in four general categories. First: Economic reasons such as large monopolies, rentier government structure and the involvement of power institutions in the economy to gain wealth, as well as government efforts to rent or boast; second: Political reasons such as lack of meritocracy, lack of party freedom and limited media activity and weakness of civil society; third: cultural and social reasons such as non-compliance with the law, general willingness to pay bribes, nepotism and ethnicity; fourth: due to structural reasons and management of formal institutions and organizations such as low quality laws and widespread lack of transparency of administrative decisions and complex bureaucracy; of course, most researchers consider the inefficiency of the administrative system as belonging to economic reasons (Rose Ackerman, 2006, p. 12-1). Based on this division and considering the breadth of the subject, analyzing and studying all these causes and reasons in this research is not possible and among the various economic and political, cultural and managerial reasons, we pay attention only to the restriction of the free activity of the media in creating and spreading corruption. In fact to limit the subject of research, we only deal with the relationship between the degree of media freedom and the level of economic corruption, and the main focus of the study is on playing this role in the country. We note that when a society is faced with economic corruption and its trend is increasing, researchers and scholars, in addition to investigating the causes of corruption, also pay attention to various factors affecting the reduction of corruption. Empirical studies show that one of the most important and effective factors in reducing economic corruption in the world is the existence of political freedom for civil institutions, widespread freedom for media activity as well as the rule of law. Civil organizations include parties, unions and trade unions, guild, occupational, scientific and cultural groups and media that operate relatively outside the power of political sovereignty. But in Iran due to the weakness of civil society and the lack of strong parties, the role of the media as a pillar of civil institutions is high (Khaniki, 2018). However, according to experts in the field of economic corruption, one of the reasons for the spread of corruption is a lack of public and social oversight, and one of the most important methods of public oversight is the existence of independent and free publications. The experience of different countries reflects the fact that due to the complexity of administrative and political systems, formal and governmental monitoring methods are not sufficient, and in the absence of media monitoring, formal oversight loses its effectiveness and efficiency. Therefore, we can say without any doubt that if the media are free and independent in monitoring the affairs of society, we can expect the level of corruption in society to be reduced (Fisman, Golden, 2018).

However, based on the political priorities of the government in some underdeveloped countries, limiting the activity of the media is on the agenda, and in the opinion of the ruling powers of these countries, it may also have benefits. But the negative economic and political consequences of such an action are so great that it can become a great threat to the governance of a society and will lead to far more problems than the political criticisms for the sovereignty of a country. That is why the developed countries, instead of restricting media freedom, despite the inconveniences for the governing body, promote it; because the public interest in the freedom of the media is so great that it is not comparable to the troubles made for its rulers. If we accept the definition of Amartya Sen, a leading Indian economist and winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics, that the main goal of development is achieving real freedom of the people, so the governing bodies in developed countries have a special focus on the principle of media freedom. It is so institutionalized that the possibility of restricting media freedom at least directly by the ruling powers have become almost impossible; because the continuation of good governance and the realization of the path of growth and development is impossible without media freedom (Amartya Sen, 1998, pp. 17-25). In this regard, Christophe Deloire, First Secretary of Reporters without Borders, believes that no major human problem, from global warming to extreme climate change to corruption or inequality between men and women, cannot be solved without free, independent and accurate information, ie without having free and professional media (Reporters without Borders, 2019). Therefore, considering that Iran is facing the problem of economic corruption, one of the basic solutions for this problem is to examine the state of media freedom and how the media play a role in the face of economic corruption. Therefore, the main question of this research is economic corruption and the role that the media can play in reducing and controlling corruption in the country. According to what has been said, an attempt is made to answer the important question: how the media play a role in in reducing and controlling economic corruption in Iran? In this context, we also consider the situation of media freedom and the global ranking of media freedom in Iran and the position of media freedom in playing the role of social control.

## LITERATURE

### **Economic corruption**

The complexity of economic corruption as a socio-political and economic problem has caused researchers to offer different definitions of it. Like broad concepts such as culture and religion in the study of economic corruption, we are faced with a multitude of definitions; so, some researchers have come to the conclusion that there is never a single and universal definition of economic corruption. Some are confident that researchers and experts in the field of economic corruption studies will never reach a single definition of economic corruption and there will be no agreement on this case (Dadkhodai, 2011). Of course, the fact is that, given the multiplicity and complexity of the causes and reasons for the occurrence of this social phenomenon, social studies on corruption have made it difficult to give a single definition of this subject. In the UN negotiations in

early 2002, it was decided that corruption should never be defined and instead actions leading to corruption should simply be listed (Langst, 1999). Of course, some experts in the field of economic studies, such as Oscar Corer, believe that any definition of the concept of corruption will be very effective in analyzing and modeling corruption research (Corer, 2005). In this regard, Hayden Heimer as a researcher of economic corruption has paid attention to this important fact that the word economic corruption has different meanings in different languages and cultures. He believes that economic corruption is a historical phenomenon that carries different meanings and people's understanding of the meaning of corruption is not the same in different societies with different cultures and even they have different values of corruption (Hayden Heimer and Johnson, 2005).

Since economic corruption is the main subject in the study of political economy and due to the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon of economic corruption and since the institutionalist economics considers the historical roots of socio-economic phenomena such as economic corruption, it seems to be useful for economic corruption studies to benefit from an analytical framework of institutionalist economics. Therefore, in the institutional economics approach to economic corruption, a distinction is made between opportunistic exchanges at the micro level and systematic economic corruption at the macro level, which affects the overall structure of government from top to bottom. Because low-level corruption occurs within an institutional framework in which the basic rules and regulations are in place and employees seek their own benefit. The employer-agent model applies here, and corruption generally occurs in the face of employers with government agencies. However, although macroeconomic corruption has common features with low-level and microeconomic corruption, it does a deeper damage to the functioning of the government and pushes governments to the brink of collapse, weakening the economy as a whole. Therefore, unlike microeconomic corruption, in the macroeconomic corruption, the institutional structure can be changed by senior managers and politicians in a way that increases the value of corrupt transactions and minimizes costs. One of the points of the present study is the waste of resources allocated to the fight against corruption, as most of the budget allocated to anti-corruption departments is spent on bureaucracy. The most common method for calculating embezzlement is the differential method. Consider one scale before corruption occurs and another scale after corruption - this difference indicates the amount of rent received by government officials. According to Renika and Sonson (2004), the Ugandan central government's budget for higher education was compared to that received by universities, with a deficit of 87%. Therefore, relying on field studies, we can acknowledge that large-scale corruption shows itself in the first stage in the allocation of the country's budget.

Historical evidence in Iran shows that with the domination of tribal life over the political system for a thousand years, the lack of a vast market and the absence of private property and the primitive life of the tribal system, caused technology and industrial production to not expanded and professional organizations not be formed. What is clear is that the basic institutional framework formed in this political-economic structure of the tribal government has made only the redistribution of income the most

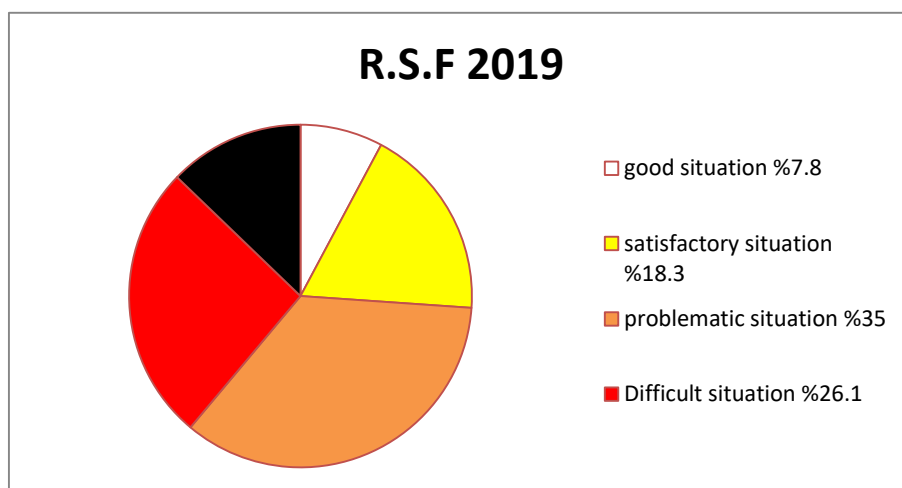
preferred economic opportunity. Redistribution of income means all kinds of rent-seeking, bribery, theft and looting, and what is now called economic corruption. Therefore, in such a structure, everyone prefers to turn to economic activities which will give them maximum redistribution of income and rent, instead of production in agriculture, industry and mining; in this situation the so called brokerage has been formed in today's Iranian literature. Historical evidence also shows that Iran's past institutional framework clearly did not prefer the production and development of technology and knowledge storage. The dominant and noteworthy aspect was a brokerage life and the possibility of migration if necessary, rather than investing in land. The agricultural sector, as well as in the industrial and mining sectors, are where capital should be screwed to the ground and not be easily transferred and hidden. This is a sign of extreme insecurity of investment in this land and determines the institutional framework of economic corruption. Another important point is the legitimacy of sovereignty as a third party in exchanges. If the structure of the laws of the political system seems fair to the people, the costs of concluding and executing contracts will decrease, but if the political system is unfair to the people and does not have the necessary legitimacy and acceptance, the costs of concluding and implementing contracts will increase. Iranian historical evidence proves that after the Arab invasion of Iran from the west of the country and their domination of Iran for more than 200 years and then the collapse of northeastern Iran and the invasion of Turan nomadic tribes and domination for several hundred years, the Iranian governments throughout history usually do not have the necessary legitimacy in the eyes of the people, either religiously or nationally. Therefore, non-payment of government rights, taxes and duties is not only not considered a sin and theft, but also has religious justifications and national encouragement from the public point of view. This has been the people's confrontation with the government in Iran for more than 1000 years, which have not seen the government as a cause of development and prosperity and considered any kind of payment and assistance to the government illegal. On the other hand, due to the lack of legitimacy and political stability, the rulers also consider their political position and power as an opportunity to plunder and gain wealth, and during their rule, they make every effort to gain wealth. Hence we have witnessed always looting governments in this land. (Rezagholi, Ali, 2006). However, political structure can lead to macroeconomic corruption, and it is usually much more difficult to overcome this type of corruption due to the political structure, because in this type of economic corruption the beneficiary groups usually have the power of the political system and prevent any Structural and democratic reforms to reduce economic corruption. In the same context, Peters (2015) states that one of the characteristics of developing countries today is the existence of economic corruption; because in the framework of institutional economics, economic corruption occurs where private wealth and government power overlap.

### **Media Oversight Role**

In addition to three common functions that include information, education and entertainment, Media experts and specialists believe in a

fourth function. It is the role of the media in monitoring the activities of the public and private sectors to protect the national interests of a society (Sadati, 2010, pp. 185-217). Harold Laswell believed that the first role of the media was to monitor the human environment. Wilbur Schramm also considered the role of media watchdog to be the most important function of the media. Nowadays, the development and expansion of information and communication technology has provided the breadth and depth of this monitoring and has provided a good opportunity for public participation in this matter. Such a role will lead to transparency in the functioning of the political, economic and social systems of countries. By monitoring and criticizing malfunctions and lawlessness, the media can strengthen law enforcement and prevent economic corruption (Saei, 2013). But in Khaniki's study (2018) it is stated that one of the most important reasons for the spread of economic corruption is the lack of social control. Social control is usually realized through two important groups in a society. The first is through broad and powerful civic institutions and the second is through free and independent media, provided there is a free political space in a society. The fact is that without political freedom, social control will not be possible. In Iran, due to the lack of strong parties and the absence of strong and independent trade unions, the media should play a greater role as a pillar of civil institutions; because one of the most important methods of public monitoring is the existence of independent and free media (Khaniki, 2018). Wells (1974) also states in this regard that although the media as the most important factor in the development of civil society play an effective role in current human social life, but the study of this role is possible only in the context of political systems in which the media operates. It is on this basis that media systems are defined. In other words, the type of media system of any country is largely based on the type of political system and the degree of freedom and democracy in that system and even the economic, social and cultural situation prevailing in that country. Therefore, to recognize the influence of the media in a political system, it is inevitable to understand the media system formed in that society and how to use the media and the field of action of the media, the state of freedom and especially the degree of financial and economic independence of the media in shaping socio-economic change. (Wells, 1974)

The media need freedom for their professional activities in order to play their oversight role properly. Any restrictions on the establishment of media institutions or government controls to prevent the dissemination of information and the free operation of the media minimize the possibility of their oversight role. Therefore, in order to know whether the media can play this supervisory role properly, we use one of the international indicators in the field of media freedom. It is prepared annually by Reporters without Borders. Based on that, the situation of media freedom in the countries of the world is ranked. According to the International Index of Media Freedom, we examine Iran's position in the map of media freedom.



**Diagram 1:** Press Freedom Map (Reporters without Borders, 2019)

The Global Media Freedom Ranking shows the state of media freedom in 180 countries each year. This ranking in 2019 indicates the unfavorable conditions for media freedom and free activity of journalists in the world, especially in Iran. Some governments seem to be openly working to restrict media freedom. According to a 2019 report by Reporters without Borders, less than 8% of the world's population lives in countries with good conditions for media freedom and independence. In other words, only 26%, or just over a quarter of human society, live in countries where the status of media freedom is good or relatively good by the standards of Reporters without Borders, ie countries that in the global media freedom rankings of 2019 are shown in white and yellow. 37% namely more than a third of the world's population live in countries whose situation is red and black, that is, countries where media freedom is bad and very bad, and in fact media freedom is suppressed in these countries. Meanwhile, 12.7% of the world's population is still in very bad and dangerous conditions (black) and politically they are authoritarian. There is usually minimal media freedom in these countries, or the media is subject to severe controls and overt and covert restrictions of the sovereignty (Reporters without Borders, 2019). Unfortunately, for several years now, Iran has been classified in a very inappropriate position in the world press freedom map. This means that instead of overseeing the government and governing institutions by the media, it is the government that oversees and controls the activities of the media. This has led experts in the field of communication and media and politicians and those involved in executive affairs to acknowledge that in the current situation, the people and the elites have not been on speaking terms with the press and radio and television or the domestic media in general. News and Analytical Sources, an important part of society, is no longer the official domestic media. Because excessive control of the government has led the people to a media-free society, and it is an important fact that the media-free society is gradually corrupting. Experts emphasize that in a situation where the number of presses in a country is declining sharply, the reason is that the freshness of news in that society has disappeared. Because newsmakers are limited, the diversity of tastes in information production has disappeared, and in short, more than ever, the

media in that society has been forced to be out of alignment. Therefore, political austerity and sometimes judicial actions and intensification of insecurity in the activities of the country's media are not compatible with the nature of the media. Because, according to social science and communication experts, the most important function of the media is to criticize and monitor the government and the governing body in all areas. It is an undeniable fact that wherever the possibility of expert criticism of the media and their specialized and meticulous supervision was limited, the general public also reacted passively to issues and withdrew. The consequence of such conditions is an increase in economic corruption in society. Of course, it should be noted that the media always have problems and may cause social and political troubles, but there is no doubt that if the authorities show tolerance and freedoms increase and the diversity of tastes increases, this fact will be manifested for everyone that their good is more than their evil. If the media is loud, all officials have to control their behavior. This means that corruption will be limited and the hands of the corrupt will be cut short. Conversely, if the media is restricted and their voice is weakened and they lose their supervisory and critical role, then every statesman and every official wants to do anything and the society in such a situation loses its public control and gradually becomes corrupt (Tavakoli, Communication and Media, 2019).

## RESEARCH METHOD

Since the present research seeks to explain the role of the media in reducing and controlling economic corruption by the use of the grounded theory approach, the research is qualitative based on the nature of data; it is a library-field research, in terms of environment; in terms of purpose it is applied research and cross-sectional in terms of time and a survey in terms of research implementation. The statistical population of the research included experts in the fields of economics, sociology, communications, political science, senior economic managers of the public sector, senior managers of the private sector and chief editors of economic newspapers and magazines. In the qualitative part, the sampling method was goal-oriented. 23 samples were considered as interviewees because after interviewing no new code was added and the sample size became saturated. It is worth mentioning that the interview process was conducted at the beginning of summer 2020. In this research, in order to collect data, the library method and semi-structured interviews were used. In individual interviews with the interviewees, six interview questions were used for a preliminary examination. In addition, other sub-questions were asked along with each question to understand the experiences of the participants during the interview. During the interview, the researcher checked the accuracy of his perception of the interviewees by asking guiding questions. In the process of sampling participants, the researcher analyzed the data to complete the cases that were incomplete by receiving new information from the new participant. After 23 interviews, the main and sub-factors were repeated in previous interviews and the researcher was saturated. During the interview, opinions were collected and the main and secondary factors were examined and finalized. The interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes.



In order to ensure the validity of the qualitative part of the research and in order to ensure the accuracy of the findings from the researcher's point of view, we used the valuable opinions of professors who were knowledgeable in this field. Participants also assisted simultaneously in analyzing and interpreting the data. The Inter coder reliability (ICR) was used to calculate the reliability. In an interview through Inter coder reliability (ICR), the professors familiar with coding were asked to participate in the research as secondary coders. With the collaboration of these research colleagues, the researcher then coded three interviews and calculated the percentage of inter-thematic agreement that is used as an indicator of the reliability of the analysis. The reliability of the two coders was obtained according to the calculations below 75.1%, which indicated good reliability. Grounded theory method was used to analyze the research data. In this project, the steps of analyzing the collected qualitative data have been done through open coding and axial coding.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research questions we seek to answer are:

1. What are the indices, criteria and indicators of economic corruption (main phenomenon)?
2. What are the indices, criteria and indicators of the media in reducing and controlling economic corruption (causal conditions)?
3. What are the consequences of reducing and controlling economic corruption (consequences)?
4. What are the executive (strategic) mechanisms in media-based reducing and controlling economic corruption?
5. What are the interfering factors in media-based reducing and controlling economic corruption?
6. What are the facilitators (platforms) in media-based reducing and controlling economic corruption?

This question has been answered using the grounded theory approach and the MAXQDA software. In the following, we can see the interview questions and the checklist of interview results in separate tables. The answers to each question are given in a table after content analysis and coding by the researcher and two statisticians. These tables represent the main indices and components of the research. According to the data collected in the interview format, which has reached the theoretical saturation point with the process of continuous adaptation, after defining the main research questions (interviews) for which a small scale is defined, we have done the coding of the collected interviews by defining their characteristics, dimensions and diagrams of these features.

After coding the semantic units and reaching the saturation limit (when no new categories or codes are obtained from new text analysis or interviews), they were categorized according to the similarity of the codes. Finally, the output of the analysis can be seen in the table below. This table is the result of axial and selective open coding that has been done with the opinion of supervisors and consultants as well as research literature.

MAXQDA software output:

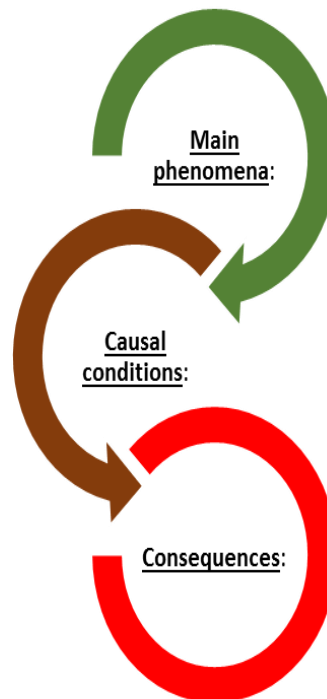
**Table 1:** Frequency of codes

ITEM	NEEDED
Main phenomenon	236
Causal conditions	104
Consequences	65
Mechanisms	107
interfering factors	113
facilitating factors	67

The results of the analysis show that among 692 indices (items) obtained from the research, and based on the existing literature, background and theories, 21 main dimensions can be identified, which are listed in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Dimensions identified after using the existing literature

Structure	Dimension	Items
Main phenomena	Development indices	14
	Macroeconomic indices	55
	Administrative indices	19
	Indices of economic structure	72
	Indices of the justice system	15
	Index of Freedom of Expression and Media	19
	Cultural backgrounds	18
	Indices of political structure	24
Causal conditions	Freedom of the media	15
	Specialized power of the media in combating corruption	21
	Power of the media in society	68
Consequences	Improving ethical variables and business ethics	5
	Strengthening social values and individual values	5
	Increased public trust	5
	Strengthening social capital	3
	Increased national productivity	9
	Realization of meritocracy	3
	Increased national production	14
	Reduced poverty and increased distributive justice	10
	Increased domestic investment and attracting foreign investment	6
Accelerating the process of economic development	5	

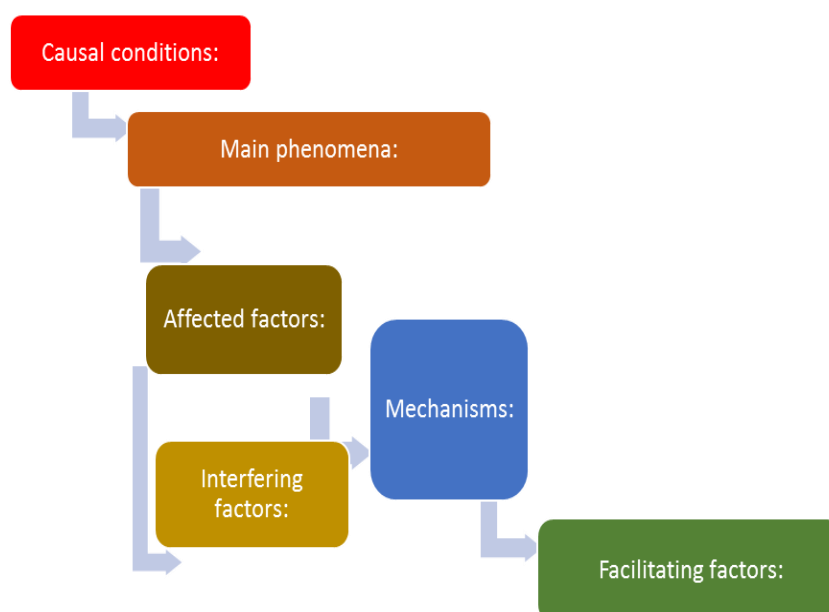


**Figure 2:** Final conceptual model

Finally, the conceptual model of the research based on the grounded theory model with a systematic approach is as follows:

- A: Causal conditions:
  - 1- Freedom of the media,
  - 2- Specialized power of the media in combating corruption,
  - 3- Power of the media in society
- B: Main phenomena:
  - 1- Development indices,
  - 2- Macroeconomic indices,
  - 3- Administrative indices,
  - 4- Indices of economic structure,
  - 5- Indices of the justice system,
  - 6- Index of Freedom of Expression and Media
  - 7- , Cultural backgrounds,
  - 8- Indices of political structure
- C: Facilitating factors:
  - 1- Reforming the structure of the media and information to fight corruption;
  - 2- Influence of the media on the government, parliament and the judiciary;
  - 3- Reforming the economic structure;
  - 4- Political reforms to combat corruption; Administrative structure reform;
  - 5- Improving public culture in the fight against corruption.
- D: Mechanisms:
  - 1-  Increasing the freedom of the media to monitor government managers;

- 2-  Independence of the judiciary and the custodian of the fight against corruption;
  - 3-  Amending laws and regulations,
  - 4-  Transparency and reduction of ambiguity of laws and regulations;
  - 5-  Establishing independent economic and political support for media activities;
  - 6-  Promoting legal awareness of the general public;
  - 7-  Reduction of government ownership
  - 8-  Strengthening the private sector;
  - 9-  Reforming economic structures to prevent corruption;
- E: Interfering factors:
- 1-  Media barriers to free activity;
  - 2-  Barriers of centralized power structure for the media to deal with corruption;
  - 3-  Political barriers to the media in the fight against corruption;
  - 4-  Barriers of economic structure for the media to deal with corruption;
  - 5-  Inefficiency of laws and regulations;
  - 6-  Cultural problems of society
  - 7-  Lack of a healthy organizational climate.
- F: Affected factors:
- 1-  Improving ethical variables
  - 2-  Strengthening social values
  - 3-  Increased public trust
  - 4-  Strengthening social capital
  - 5-  Increasing national productivity
  - 6-  Realization of meritocracy
  - 7-  Increasing national production
  - 8-  Reduce poverty and deprivation
  - 9-  Increase equitable distribution of income
  - 10-  Increase investment
  - 11-  Accelerating the development process



**Figure 3:** Final research model

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Referring to the studies and global experiences in the fight against corruption, the first solution to combat corruption is transparency, ie paying attention to the principle of free flow of information and transparency of all activities of government agencies and the private sector. This very important first step requires the strict implementation of the Freedom of Information Act so that the public has equal access to this information. This can remove restrictions on the disclosure of financial and economic corruption and even prevent corruption. Because one of the most important areas for the formation and spread of economic corruption is the covert actions of government officials and the secrecy of government agents and even the private sector. Therefore, the existence of media freedom is necessary to achieve this transparency. The second step in the practical fight against corruption is public oversight. Given that one of the most important tools for preventing economic crime is optimal monitoring of processes, the use of monitoring tools is considered very important and sensitive due to its complexity. Although monitoring is a tool to prevent corruption, it can itself become a factor in complicating business processes or hidden abuse and corruption. Therefore, the global experience shows that social oversight is the responsibility of civic institutions with the help of the media. The important media institution provides very clear conditions for monitoring the performance of the government and the private sector, and in a free and democratic system, no political authority or organization or public or private institution is safe from the risk of media exposure. Therefore, according to the results of the present research, one of the effective ways to reduce economic corruption in countries is material and moral support of the media that expose corruption. In fact, journalists, reporters and the media in their various forms can be the main arm in the

fight against corruption. Of course, in addition to these protections, the legal infrastructure must be provided to pave the way to the activities of whistleblowers so that individuals, civil organizations can, with the help of the media, stay away from any challenges and fears of criminal gangs or pressure from political and security officials, investigate and expose cases of corruption and make transparent activities and decisions in society.

Of course, it should be noted that although one of the main tasks of journalists is to be transparent and to be the eyes of the society, but fighting corruption requires economic, financial, legal and technical knowledge and skills in various fields. One of the most important forms of journalism, especially for combating economic corruption, is the investigative journalism style, and many of the world's leading newspapers consider the best teams of journalists to do so. Unfortunately, in Iran, the media are less likely to pursue this style due to various financial and legal challenges and, most importantly, the governing red lines. In practice, journalists who sometimes work in these fields also face many problems and double standards. On the one hand, their researches do not attracted the attention of people and society, but on the other hand, they face coercive actions and the formation of court cases. For example, in recent years, the media has played an important role in exposing some important cases of economic corruption in the country. These include cases of astronomical real estate, unconventional salaries, misuse of government currency allocation, import of cars and goods with government currencies. However, in some of these cases, we have witnessed that after the formation of judicial and legal cases for the main perpetrators of economic corruption, the judiciary did not leave the media unattended, and instead of rewarding for exposing economic corruption, legal cases were filed against the media and journalists and even it has also issued prison sentences for journalists and exposing media. This event could and can have negative effects on the role of media disclosure and freedom of expression and bring discouragement and fear to the media, especially the country's press.

To better understand why and how to create and develop corruption and achieve effective solutions to eradicate it, we should note that the fight against corruption is like crossing the dangerous precipice and it is necessary to fight it in a correct and rational way. On the one hand, if the struggle does not take place, corruption will become more entrenched day by day, and on the other hand, if the struggle is carried out irrationally, it will frighten investors and undermine investment security. Another important issue is the priority of controlling macro-corruption over micro-corruption. Because without controlling large-scale corruption, there is no hope of solving the problem of micro-corruption. Macro-corruption is corruption committed by individuals and some administrative officials, the system of planning and allocation of government resources, and decision-makers for granting budgets and loans to various projects in a gang and with significant digits. Replacement of electronic systems through the full establishment of e-government, development of civil society and removal of restrictions on the establishment and operation of media as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and their access to information and regular reporting and accountability of executive and government bodies in economic and financial affairs are some of the most important initiatives

that can be done in this regard. An objective example, according to the Deputy Coordinator of Economic Affairs and Regional Development of the Ministry of Interior, is the existence of 78,000 semi-finished projects in the country (Dinparast, 2019). They have been implemented under influence of political decisions and by the pressure of high-positioned officials and because they do not have the necessary economic justification, they have been abandoned or imposed on the country's development budget.

According to the indicators and components identified based on research documents and interviews with economic and social experts and the field of communications and media, we identified the media-based model of reducing and controlling economic corruption according to the indicators of the main phenomenon called "reduction and control of economic corruption", and by considering the factors influencing or causal conditions (media) of it and the factors affected by it (consequences) as well as mechanisms, facilitators and deterrents. In the framework of the institutionalist approach, the formulation of economic corruption to provide solutions to control and reduce economic corruption through the media provides guidance that can answer three basic questions about economic corruption in Iran; so we explain the role media plays in such a structure to reduce and control economic corruption.

The first question: what are our mental structures regarding economic corruption? Do we condemn economic corruption and consider it as an obstacle for the growth and development, or do we consider it the oil of the rusty wheels of the administrative bureaucracy and necessary to expedite work and overcome dysfunctional administrative structures? What we addressed in this research was that in the structure of political economy where the government and the ruling laws are not accepted by the society and are considered oppressive, any action in gaining wealth and not paying the right of the government is considered wise and itself causes pride of the individual. People proudly say that by paying a bribe, they have succeeded in breaking the law or not paying government rights such as taxes or customs duties, and this is a sign of a kind of mental structure of the society regarding economic corruption. Therefore, the issue of the legitimacy of the government as a third party in exchanges in the formation of the mental structure of society regarding economic corruption is of considerable importance. If the structure of the rules of the political system seems fair for the people, the costs of concluding and implementing contracts will decrease, but if the political system is unfair for the people and does not have the necessary legitimacy and acceptance, the costs of concluding and implementing contracts will increase. Iran's historical evidence suggests that the Iranian government has historically lacked the necessary legitimacy in the eyes of the people, both religiously and nationally, after the Arab invasion of Iran. Therefore, non-payment of government rights, taxes and duties was not only not considered a sin and theft, but also had religious justifications and national encouragement from a public point of view. In such a situation, the media have a difficult role to play and they should mainly try to create a cultural foundation in order to change this mental structure. The course of developments in the political and economic history of Iran indicates that after the period of relative domination of the Arabs over Iran and the collapse of the northeastern borders, with the invasion of

Turanian tribes and nomads living in the northeast and the formation of the government of these nomadic tribes from 700 years ago to the beginning of the twentieth century and the domination of tribal life over the political system during these years and the political and economic obstacles and the lack of economic security to form a large market and the lack of private property and the continuation of primitive tribal life, serious obstacles were created to the formation of technology and industrial production, and production based on creativity has not been formed or expanded. Professional organizations also have not been formed to administrate the country. Therefore, we can say that the institutions and organizations formed in the political economy system bear most of the title and appearance of an official organization, while they do not have the functions of those organizations in principle. What is clear, then, is that the historical institutional framework formed in this structure of tribal government political economy has only made income redistribution the most preferred economic opportunity. Income redistribution means different types of rent-seeking, bribery, theft and looting and what is now called economic corruption. Therefore, in such a structure, everyone prefers the economic activities instead of production in agriculture, industry and mining; they will give them maximum redistribution of income and rent; so a thing has been formed that is called brokerage in today's Iranian literature.

In this situation, in order to reduce and control economic corruption, the media should try to create a cultural foundation to value the national creativity and technology and focus their information on establishing and maintaining economic security for investment and national production. With a wide and specialized observation of deviant policies for weakening national production and promoting the import of manufactured goods or the export of raw materials, they should confront and fight rent-seeking and redistribution of income under any name and title. The media have important responsibilities in this field. In the information sector by highlighting important and infrastructural production measures and productive investments of the private sector, and in the entertainment sector by instilling the right culture of national production and efforts to create investment security and promoting the culture of correct consumption and avoiding historical distortions in evading taxes, customs duties and other government rights or circumventing laws and lack of adherence to ethical principles and rules and regulations in private transactions and covenants, they should prepare the cultural space of the society to avoid economic corruption and the adherence of individual economic actors and all those involved in business. Of course, the difficult task of the media is to confront the statesmen and politicians of the three powers and the overt and covert men of the security and military institutions and in some cases the seemingly religious powers that use their position to rent bribes and economic corruption and destroy national production. They take and distort the behaviors of the society as political models.

Another key point in formulating concepts and analyzes in the framework of the institutionalist approach is to pay attention to the official and non-official regulation system regarding the economic corruption. Therefore, the second question is whether the formal and informal norms and laws, regulations and customs that govern society are aimed at



strengthening economic corruption or are aimed at limiting and combating it. Are the laws governing activity in the Iranian business environment and the main actors and its arbitration system aimed at controlling and limiting economic corruption or are they aimed at encouraging and spreading economic corruption? Historical evidence suggests that Iran's past institutional framework clearly did not favor the production and development of technology and knowledge storage, and that the dominant and noteworthy face was brokerage and the possibility of migration if necessary, rather than investing in land. This is a story of the extraordinary insecurity of investing in this land. Governments are short-lived, and with the overthrow of any government, new rulers seek to gain wealth quickly by seizing and looting the property of former men and their appointees and even private investors; this historical behavior determines the institutional framework of economic corruption. In the institutional economy approach to economic corruption, a distinction is made between opportunistic exchanges at the micro level and systematic economic corruption at the macro level, which affects the overall structure of government from top to bottom. Because low-level corruption occurs within an institutional framework where the basic laws are in place and employees seek their own personal gain. However, although macroeconomic corruption has features in common with low-level and microeconomic corruption, it does a deeper damage to the functioning of government and pushes governments to the brink of collapse, weakening the economy as a whole. Therefore, unlike microeconomic corruption, in macroeconomic corruption, the institutional structure can be changed by senior managers and politicians in a way that increases the value of corrupt transactions and minimizes their costs. It is important to note that in the context of macroeconomic corruption, people are not in a position to correct the problem of corruption and will not have the power to make structural changes. Now, how can the media play its role in combating economic corruption in this business environment that is prone to economic corruption and dominates Iran's political economy? Can the media have a proper role and position both as actors in this business environment and as independent observers? What can be stated based on the historical evidence from the beginning of the media activity in Iran until now is that, except for very limited periods, the media has always been under the complete control and supervision of the government. Instead of the monitoring the government and various sectors of Iran's political economy by media, it has been the government that has controlled the media. Hence, there is no expectation that the media will play a serious role in combating economic corruption until the media can operate freely and independently as a profitable activity. What can be considered as a media solution to combat corruption here is that efforts should be made to create a suitable foundation for media activities in a completely free manner and with minimal restrictions. This only makes sense in the context of achieving freedom of professional activity by the media in order to create the conditions for it to play a key role in overseeing the economic activities of the public and private sectors. In other words, the key to this fundamental change lies in the statement that the media should monitor all powers of the country. The three important powers of the country and the government in general in Iran should be monitored by the media, not these powers over the

media. In this case, economic corruption can be controlled and reduced. Another key point in formulating concepts and analyzes in the framework of the institutionalist approach to economic corruption is to pay attention to the distribution system of profits and losers and winners of the Iranian business market. Therefore, the third important question is whether, despite widespread economic corruption, we can hope to win if we follow the law and adhere to ethics, or to maintain business and achieve a good position in transactions, we must face all kinds of economic corruption. According to a saying, when in Rom, do as the Romans do. Is the system of distribution of benefits in the economic framework of the country such that it gives them a fair share for the efforts of the people, or is it unfair that some people get billions of wealth effortlessly and some live in suffering for their lives? What is the role and position of the media in this situation and how do they fulfill their role of observation? How can the media be the voice of the losers of such unjust mechanisms? Will the media itself be able to play a watchdog role in such situations when the media themselves are among the losers? Institutional changes that increase the benefits of corrupt transactions and reduce the costs of corruption ultimately lead to a greater prevalence of corruption. Therefore, the behavior of managers of public organizations and private companies that may reorganize their organization in order to create a centralized or decentralized structure and even eliminate or increase the hierarchy, can be studied by institutional economists through raising the question of the impact of bureaucratic reorganization on the performance of government agencies and private companies in terms of economic corruption. Such behavior is very common in developing countries. For example, the implementation of the privatization policy, which is done to reduce the size of government and reduce unnecessary costs and increase national productivity, becomes a tool for rent-seeking and corruption in very unusual ways. Eventually, the state economy gives way to the statesmen's economy, whose costs and inefficiency is more than the state economy, and in addition to the lack of government oversight, does not benefit the government and the general public. In other words, with this method of corrupt privatization, which replaces the state economy with the economy of statesmen or quasi-government officials (public institutions that are not supervised), the country pays much more for the state economy than before, and the economy continues to be managed by inefficiencies and various monopolies and the people do not benefit from this method of privatization and national interests; because this method of privatization does not lead to productivity growth and increase in national production. Therefore, the media have a very difficult task to deal with such institutionalized corruption, and making transparent such measures imposes heavy costs on the media. On the other hand, in the economic analysis of corruption, the individuals and private companies outside the government are not passive, but as activists, they secretly interact with employees and politicians in order to maximize their interests. In fact, on a large scale, individuals usually respond to incentives and punishments (sticks and carrots) created by the institutions that govern political economy. In this situation, the media face many difficulties in reducing and controlling economic corruption. Employing expert teams to analyze economic events and political economy decisions of the sovereignty and the rent-seeking

behaviors of political officials are part of the challenges of overseeing corruption; this changes it from a simple media activity to a complex scientific mechanism for analyzing political economy decisions. The extent to which the media benefit from the scientific strength and employment of political economy elites, as well as the existence of free space for the media to interact with each other and interact with the country's official decision-making centers and the existence of a suitable atmosphere for different views and criticism of government economic policies are considered by the media as the requirements of the fight against corruption. Another point is the degree of freedom of action of the media in dealing with the winners and losers of the decisions of the ruling political economy, and the degree of independence of the media that can be the voice of the losers in the unfair atmosphere of macroeconomic decisions and provide the conditions for controlling and reducing the distortions of the ruling political economy. Undoubtedly, if the media themselves are the losers of this polluted business environment, they will not have the necessary professional ability and financial independence to fight economic corruption and will become the mouthpiece of corrupt political officials or the seemingly private companies of corrupt statesmen and they will not be able to deal with the widespread economic corruption in the country. Perhaps a fundamental and important solution for Iran's political economy is to subsidize independent media for at least a decade or two in order to monitor the country's political economy to seriously confront by the media and expose political corruption without regard to political officials. This does not require a new budget and can only be provided from the budgets of the supervisory bodies of the three powers that do not have a good record in combating economic corruption, such as the National Audit Office, the Court of Audit, the Audit Organization and Security agencies of government offices. With 30 percent of the budget of these organizations, it can provide a fundamental change in the oversight of the three powers and quasi-governmental economic institutions. In general, according to global statistics, Iran has gradually become one of the countries with high economic corruption over the past two decades. But the point is that there may be few countries in the world whose political officials have spoken as well as Iran on the fight against corruption, but nevertheless economic corruption in the country has spread unprecedentedly and is increasing. According to official statistics, Iran's economy over the past 15 years, along with low economic growth and high inflation, has also struggled with severe economic corruption. According to the latest Transparency International report, among 177 countries in the world, Iran is among the 30 countries with the most economic corruption. Therefore, considering that one of the most important tools for preventing economic crimes is optimal monitoring of processes, the use of monitoring tools is considered very important and sensitive due to its complexity. But it should also be noted that although monitoring is a tool to prevent corruption, it can itself be a factor in complicating business processes or highly covert misuse and corruption. Therefore, as mentioned before, if part of the budget of important monitoring organizations in the country is allocated to the media, there will be a serious change in the fight against economic corruption and there will be significant success in playing the role of media monitoring.

### **Research suggestions**

In addition to the mechanisms derived from the previously presented research model for reducing corruption, the suggestions resulting from the research findings are as follows:

1. Assigning all radio and television networks to the private sector and removing any kind of license to establish different media.

2. Allowing the publication of various news and articles and criticisms to all political officials without exception, so that the media should only be accountable to private plaintiffs for slander.

3. Passing the law of whistling against corruption and awarding rewards (for example, 10 to 20% of the value of corruption occurred) to the media, people and employees who whistle against corruption

4. Reforming the structure of the media and information to fight corruption in such a way that one of the tasks of the media is to pursue economic corruption and to provide annual subsidies and low-interest bank loans to media active in the fight against corruption.

5. Passing the Law on Freedom of Criticism and reviewing the life issues and assets of political officials and their families and relatives.

6. Passing the law granting the highest judicial immunity to journalists and media journalists to fight against economic corruption

7. Allocating 30% of the budget of monitoring centers to active media in order to expand public oversight against economic corruption

8. Passing the law obliging all the officials of the three powers of the country to answer to the media. The heads of the three powers should be held accountable for public opinion and transparency in this regard, and the Court of Administrative Justice should be able to remove the official within 10 days if there is no response.

9. Prohibition of employment in government positions or candidacy for general elections of all persons with a history of economic corruption

10. Reforming public culture in order to provide intellectual and cultural background to fight economic corruption in schools, universities and public media

11. Increasing the freedom of action of the media in supervising government managers by providing permits for journalists to attend official meetings of the three powers and the possibility of media access to government documents and statistics and government approvals.

12. Independence of the judiciary and the custodian of the fight against economic corruption from the pressures of political officials and security and military institutions

13. Competitiveness of the country's media space and the possibility of the presence of various foreign media and creating the necessary platform for cooperation at the international level with foreign media and using the experiences of international media in the fight against economic corruption.

14. Establishing an institution to protect the media and enjoying media freedom rights in accordance with international standards.

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