

Media freedom in Qatar: Conceptual and methodological challenges of studying Qatari journalism

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Abstract

Qatar General Broadcasting and Television Corporation was established in 1970 and is Government owned. It airs in Arabic language and has two domestic, and one satellite channel. Al-Jazeera was established in 1996 . It airs in Arabic language via satellite. Al-Jazeera International was established in 2006 and is privately owned by Al-Jazeera Network. It airs in English and is satellite.

Despite the abolishment of media censorship in 1995, direct and indirect media censorship (e.g. self-regulation) still exists within Qatar.

Social media:

1. Qatar is very engaged in video viewing and sharing. YouTube is Qatar's top social media site. Over 200,000 Qataris are active Facebook users while over 500,000 Qataris are active Twitter users.
2. Google.com.qa is the most popular search engine in Qatar.
3. Qatar News Agency: News agency transmitting mainly in English and Arabic with a daily service in other languages.

According to ictQATAR (2011) Qatar ranks among the top three in the Arab world in terms of combined performance in basic ICT indicators, such as the numbers of computer users, Internet users, mobile telephone, fixed telephone lines, and broadband Internet subscribers. In terms of internet and broadband penetration, Qatar is already near the European level and also growing steadily. However, this doesn't include expatriate workers who constitute a large part of the Qatari population.

*TV and computer penetration levels are high - mobile penetration is top-of-the-world as there are 1.2 - 1.3 mobile subscriptions per citizen

*The usage of internet focuses mostly on simple applications, such as email. Online banking and government e-services are still underdeveloped

Methodological issues

Studying journalism in Qatar is a complicated issue as we can observe some important signs. For example, we have Qatari journalism but very few Qatari journalists and this may affect the general attitude of journalists towards journalism freedom and whether this attitude represents the journalist's opinions about journalism freedom in their home country or in the country where they work.

Major Issues to be discussed:

- *There is a huge gap among Qatari media freedom as we can classify Al Jazeera network in one category and other media (Print- Radio - Television and online journalism) in another one.
- *The Qatari media, especially Al Jazeera was one of the main supporters of the Arab Spring revolutions and this situation affected on its editorial policy.
- *There is no independent newspapers .
- *There is no syndication or any form of journalism association.
- *Journalists are working as expats according to renewed annually contract and sponsorship law (we have about 75 nationalities are working in journalism industry and 28 nationalities relevant to editorial process.
- *Journalists have to be committed to advertising pressures, societal regulations, media editorial policy and self-censorship
- *All these controversial issues affect the journalist's insights and feedback about journalism freedom in Qatar.