Changing roles of traditional and online media as trusted news sources in Qatar and their relationships with perceived important issues and interest in politics

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Abstract

This paper analyzes changes in media consumption patterns for trusted news sources over a three-year period among Qatari Nationals and expatriate residents living in Qatar, using data from the 2010, 2011, and 2012 Omnibus Surveys of Life in Qatar, administered by the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI). Results show that television remains the strong favorite for local news and international news for both Qatari Nationals and expatriate residents, but that reliance on television is declining, especially for international news. Consumption of daily newspapers as the preferred source of local news remained stable among Qataris, but declined among expatriates. Internet news sites as the preferred source for local news increased during the three-year period. Additional analyses suggest weak agenda-setting effects between trusted news sources and perceived most important issues, and positive correlations between use of Internet sites and interest in political news.

Keywords: *online media trends, Qatar, agenda-setting*

The adoption rate of Internet technologies by individuals and media organizations since the 1990s has been unprecedented as a major technological revolution. As early as the 90s, scholars and technologists have been investigating how the Internet is changing people's lives (e.g., Kraut, Lundmark, Patterson, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay, & Scherlis, 1998). This study looks at combined trends of how people are using both traditional media and online media to investigate how usage rates are changing over a three-year period in Qatar.

Social media in particular appear to be driving much of the changes in the media people interact with, affecting consumption for both traditional and digital information sources. These social media have become major forces in how people across the globe spend their time, interact with each other, and find out about what is happening in their communities and the world at large. If Facebook were a country it would be the third most populated country in the world (Internet World Stats, 2014). Of the two most popular social media platforms, Facebook boasts approximately 1.15 billion users; Twitter has 218 million (Koh & Vranica, 2013). Increasingly, social media also disseminate news in addition to their functions as social outlets.

News organizations and individual journalists have gradually embraced social media as a way to interact with audiences and, they hope, drive traffic to their news sites. News organizations have found the latter goal (increasing visits to their own websites) to be elusive, however, and that readers who do visit news sites via social media links "have far lower engagement with that outlet than those who come to that news site directly (Pew Research Center, 2014). Doctor (2010) estimated that Facebook users spend 10 times as much time on Facebook as they do on news websites. And for the most part, people's exposure to news on social media appears to be incidental, meaning that they are primarily using the social media sites for other

reasons but often happen to encounter news information while they are on social

media sites (Pew Research Center, 2014). In some cases, however, audiences do use

social media to follow the news, with social networks therefore becoming a populist

form of news publishing. For example, a survey by Aref (2013) found that Egyptian

college students were more likely to go to Facebook than Google to find information

on breaking news.

As the number of social media users has increased, so has the potential for

social media to have an impact on political processes and outcomes. Mass media

research has a long history of investigating the relationships between news media

consumption and political knowledge and attitudes (e.g., Herring, 1938). Not

surprisingly, scholars are now turning their attention to investigating similar effects

with social media usage (e.g., Gueorguieva, 2007; Williams & Gulatti, 2007). For

example, Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign was widely credited for its

shrewd use of social media in helping empower and mobilize young voters. And the

effective use of social media by activists and ordinary citizens during the Arab spring

in 2011 has spurred considerable scholarly activity in a short period of time (e.g., El-

Shaarawi, 2014)

Though published research focusing on how Arab or Middle East media affect

public opinion or political views has a more brief history, the body of literature in this

area is growing. Most of this research has applied interpretive social science or

critical-cultural epistemologies, though a few researchers have recently started using

public opinion survey techniques on samples in these regions (e.g., Elareshi &

Gunter, 2012; el-Nawawy, 2006; Meeds, et al., 2013). In the MENA region, the role

of social media use during the Arab Spring has received much attention, but scholarly

views about its effects are disparate. While major news networks and some scholars

(e.g., Khondker, 2011) have emphasized social media as a key driver of the Arab

Spring demonstrations, empirical content analyses of social media data suggests a

more complex role and "that social media use was not dominant in demonstrations,

but may have played an important role in connecting and motivating protestors"

(Wilson & Dunn, 2011, p. 1248). Social media also provide a conduit for those who

may have a hard time getting their story told in traditional media. For example, Najjar

(2010) described young Palestinians using social media to define a Palestinian

identity during the 2008-2009 War on Gaza.

The general research findings related to social media and politics are mixed. In

addition, very little empirical research has attempted to measure these effects in

Middle Eastern countries or Arab societies.

Qatar, the focus of this study, is a small, conservative Arabian Gulf country of

approximately 12,000 square kilometers, bordering eastern Saudi Arabia and

proximal to Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. Qatar has been ruled by the Al

Thani family since the mid-1800's. A former British protectorate, Qatar gained its

independence in 1971. Ethnically diverse, approximately 2.1 million people live in

Qatar, with Qatari nationals comprising only about 13 percent of the total population.

The major ethnicities are Arab (40 percent), Indian (18 percent) and Pakistani (18

percent). Approximately three-quarters of Qatar's residents are Muslim and about 90

percent of these are Sunni Muslims. The small country boasts some of the world's

largest oil and natural gas reserves, and as a result, has the highest per capita income

of any country in the world. This high level of prosperity enjoyed by many expatriate

workers in Qatar as well as Qatari nationals has likely contributed to the political

stability of the country during a period of relative instability in the MENA region as a

whole. However, Qatar has also increasingly been the subject of international scrutiny

and criticism for its treatment of workers and for its regional political stances.

(Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook, 2015).

Declining traditional media

As data from a 2013 survey by e-Marketer confirms for U.S. audiences, the

average adult is now spending more time with digital media than with television,

marking a sea-change in television's long dominance as the primary mass medium. In

particular, the average U.S. adult spends about 4.5 hours daily watching television,

which is about the same as in 2010. The increase in digital media usage over the same

time period, though, has been phenomenal. In 2010, the average adult spent 3:11

hours with digital media (2:22 online / 0:24 mobile / 0:26 other). In 2013, however,

these rates jumped to 5:16 (2:19 online / 2:21 mobile / 0:36 other), an increase of 66

percent over a three-year period. Most of this increase is due to mobile (e-Marketer,

2013). Over the same three-year period, adult usage of traditional print media

declined by 36 percent from 50 minutes per day to 32 minutes, barely a half hour.

Most of this decline in print media usage is due a 40 percent three-year decline in time

spent reading print newspapers, from 30 minutes per day to 18 minutes per day (e-

Marketer, 2013). This type of media use research is rarely conducted in the MENA,

but one recent source reported current average usage for adults among eight Arab

countries (Qatar, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Tunisia and United

Arab Emirates) and found time watching TV and time spent on the Internet using

wireless devices to be similar at about three hours per day, while time spent reading

newspapers averaged just under one hour per day (Dennis, Martin & Wood, 2014).

Additionally, an ITC blog in Qatar reports that the average person in Qatar who uses

social media spends 3.1 hours per day on social media sites and that approximately 35

percent do so using mobile devices (Radcliffe, 2014).

The declining usage of traditional media, especially print media, cannot be

attributed entirely to the public's fascination with new technology. Advertising

revenues for traditional media continue to fall or remain flat. U.S. ad revenues for

television in 2013 remained about the same as the year before (-0.6 percent), radio

revenues dropped 1.2 percent, magazines dropped 5.1 percent and newspapers

dropped 8.2 percent. Projections for 2014 print advertising revenues remain bleak,

with another 7 percent drop predicted (MAGNA Global, 2014). While traditional ad

media revenues fall, however, digital media advertising revenues grew by 17 percent

in 2013 (MAGNA Global, 2014). Reports on MENA region advertising spending by

type of media are not readily available, but some experts expect digital ad spending to

triple in the MENA region from 2013 to 2018 (Jones, 2014).

Evidence is accumulating that as advertising revenues for traditional media

have fallen or at least stagnated over the last decade, the evaporating revenue stream

is causing publishers to cut back on their investments in news content. As the PEW

research center reports, "Nearly one-third – 31% – of people say they have deserted a

particular news outlet because it no longer provides the news and information they

had grown accustomed to" (Sterling, 2013).

Evolving agenda-setting roles in a changing media landscape

Agenda-setting provides a cogent theoretical framework to examine how

changing media consumption patterns might affect public perception of important

issues, political participation, and personal network levels of influence within

societies (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Though early research in agenda-setting focused

on ways in which traditional vertical media set the agenda for public opinion about what issues were most important (now known as first level agenda-setting), much of the agenda-setting research in the last two decades has focused on the salience of issue attributes (second level agenda-setting) and, more recently, on the roles of media networks in establishing issue importance (third level agenda-setting) (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2014). Third level agenda-setting is most relevant to understanding the relationships between changing media uses and preferences in an increasingly digitized media environment, and how public issues gain importance among a variety of networked audiences.

In an analysis of media systems evolution published more than a decade ago, Lehman-Wilzig and Cohen-Avigdor (2004) argued that the Internet as a communications medium was transitioning between the late growth and early maturation stages of the product life cycle. And a decade, one could argue, is a lifetime in today's media environment. Social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook are no longer a novelty. Social media play a well-documented role for adults in western countries—especially younger adults—actively acquiring information about social issues. This role is much less pronounced among older adults, however (Duggan & Smith, 2013). Election season studies have shown this increased use of social networks, as well as political blogs, suggest a stronger agenda-setting role for social media and a "weakening influence of elite, traditional media as a singular power in influencing issue interpretation within networked political environments" (Meraz, 2011, p. 107). These changing patterns of inter-media and inter-network influence, in turn, can create an "agendamelding" effect, in which each audience, with its different values and issues, now has a greater ability to form its own blended set of issues and orientations to them based on selecting the mediated and

networked information sources they find most comfortable (Shaw, McCombs, Tran &

McKeever, 2010). Vargo (2014), for example, found support for the agendamelding

concept in an election study in which Democrat supporters were more influenced by

vertical media on Twitter while Republican supporters relied more on Tweets from

horizontal media. Even though social media represent an increasingly higher

proportion of time spent with media, research still shows that adults consistently use

news media to acquire information about issues that represent a high need for

orientation (e.g. Matthes, 2008).

Within this framework, this study addresses the general research questions of

how traditional and digital news media consumption patterns in Qatar are changing

and whether the changes mirror those being observed in the United States. This study

also examines whether the types of news media and social networks people rely on

are associated with their assessments of what issues are most important in their

country and their interest in political issues. Additionally, if Qatar residents exhibit

different views about issue importance, media consumption and the roles of

traditional news media and social networks could point to first, second, or third level

agenda-setting effects.

RQ1: Are Qatari nationals and expatriate residents increasingly relying on

Internet news sites and decreasing their reliance on traditional news media as U.S.

residents are?

RQ2: Are Qatari nationals' and expatriate residents' traditional media and

social media usage associated with their levels of interest in politics and their opinions

about what social issues are most important?

Method

The methodology for this study is a secondary analysis of the 2010, 2011 and 2012 Omnibus Surveys of Life in Qatar, a general social survey conducted annually in Qatar since 2010. Interviews for the survey were conducted in May and June of each year. Trained interviewers used Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) technology. In 2010, a total of 2139 interviews were completed, of which 689 were Qatari nationals, 768 were resident expatriates, and 682 were labor migrants. In 2011, there were 2854 completed interviews (992 Qatari nationals, 1008 resident expatriates and 854 labor migrants). In 2012, a total of 2854 interviews were completed, of which 813 were Qatari nationals, 851 were resident expatriates, and 722 were labor migrants. The three subsamples were operationalized as follows: Qatari national participants were people who were Qatari citizens (generally by birth) and comprise approximately 15 percent of the population in Qatar; resident expatriates were people who live and work in Qatar, maintain private households, with heads-of-households working primarily in professional and service occupations; labor migrants were people who work as laborers and mostly live in communal housing. Labor migrants were not asked the set of questions regarding media usage and were therefore dropped from subsequent analysis.

In terms of gender, 48 percent of the Qatari participants were females; 50 percent of the resident expatriate participants were females. The response rates and survey-wide maximum sampling error estimates among the subsamples were 64 percent for the Qatari sample (sampling error ± 3.9 percent), and 75 percent for the resident expatriate sample (±3.4 percent). By comparison, the U.S. General Social Survey response rates average around 70 percent (General Social Survey, 2013).

The primary utility company in Qatar (Qatar General Electricity & Water Company) provided the sampling frame that included all known households in Qatar. The survey sampling design used stratified systematic samples based on the estimated population proportions for each of the three subsamples. In addition to stratifying based on residence type (Qatari national, resident expatriate, and labor migrants), the sample was also stratified by municipality and zone, and was clustered at the city block level.

Interviews were conducted in-person using Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) technology, and were done in Arabic or English, depending on the preference of the participant. Participants' level of fluency in either Arabic or English was not gauged, so the extent to which each participant understood each question cannot be determined. However, all interviewers were fluent in both Arabic and English and were instructed to help participants if some questions posed difficulty in comprehension.

All data were weighted prior to analysis using a weighting variable based on known population parameters and calculated by the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) at Qatar University. The weighting variable took into account estimated sampling error for the survey strata to adjust for the probability of selection and non-response within strata. Funding for the survey was provided to SESRI by the Qatar Foundation, a large government supported foundation based in Qatar.

Measures

Most trusted news sources were based on the question "Which of the following news sources do you trust most for local news/international news?" and

contained the following choices: TV, radio, daily newspapers, magazines, Internet, SMS, Majlis and friends. Across both local and international questions, only the response frequencies for TV, newspapers and Internet were high enough to include in inferential statistical analyses, so radio, magazines, SMS and Majlis and friends were dropped from further analysis. The local news question was asked in all three years (2010-2012) while the international news question was asked in two years (2010 and 2012).

In the 2011 and 2012 surveys, the following questions were asked related to Internet news and social media consumption: "In a typical week, how many days do you (find news on the Internet/log on to Facebook/use Twitter)," with possible responses ranging from zero to seven. Also in these two years, interest in politics was measured on a four-point scale in response to the question, "How interested would you say you are in politics?" (very interested, somewhat interested, not very interested, not at all interested). Interest in political news was also measured on a four-point scale (very often, often, sometimes/rarely, never) in response to the question "How often do you follow local political news in Qatar?" And importance of democracy was measured on a 10-point scale ranging from "not at all important" to "absolutely important" in response to the question, "How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically?" An additional question (used in these analyses to measure third-level agenda-setting) asked respondents to choose what they considered to be the most important issue facing Qatar from among the following options which were based on a related question asked in the 2010 survey: maintaining order (stability, security and the rule of law) in the nation; giving people more say in government decisions; fighting rising prices; and protecting freedom of opinion.

Results

Most trusted sources for local and international news

The questions that were common across the three surveys asked respondents

what medium was their most trusted source for local news. The 2010 and 2012

surveys included an additional question asking people which medium was their most

trusted source for international news. In general, the trends showed that fewer people

in Qatar rely on traditional media as time progressed and more people rely on Internet

news sites. (See Tables 1 and 2, and Figures 1 and 2).

Table 1: Most trusted sources for local news 2010-2012

	Which of the following news sources do you trust most for local news?		
	TV	Newspapers	Internet
2010[a]			
Qatari	498 (81.8%)	93 (15.3%)	18 (3.0%)
Expat	377 (71.7%)	115 (21.9%)	34 (6.5%)
2011[b]			
Qatari	743 (83.5%)	117 (13.1%)	30 (3.4%)
Expat	547 (61.1%)	256 (28.6%)	92 (10.3%)
2012[c]			
Qatari	590 (83.3%)	81 (11.4%)	37 (5.2%)
Expat	582 (73.8%)	61 (7.7%)	146 (18.5%)

Cell entries are frequency counts with row percentages in parentheses.
[a] $X^2_{(2)} = 18.01$, p < .001
[b] $X^2_{(2)} = 113.08$, p < .001
[c] $X^2_{(2)} = 63.60$, p < .001

In contrast to the United States, people in Qatar appear to be more reliant on

traditional media for news. Not only is television still the dominant news medium in

Qatar, but it far outpaces all other news media. During the three-year period from

2010-2012, the rate of people saying television was their most trusted source for local

news actually increased from 81.8% to 83.3% among Qatari nationals and increased

from 71.7% to 73.8% among expats. When it came to international news, however

television declined as the most trusted source, with 92.0% of Qataris choosing

television in 2010 compared with 81.6% in 2012. For expats, television also declined

as the most trusted news source with 84.4% choosing television in 2010 and only

68.4% choosing it in 2012. Overall, the number of people who rated television as their

most trusted news source declined somewhat during the three-year period. Television

is still a powerful medium, however, with more than two-thirds of the population

preferring it for news.

Table 2: Most trusted sources for international news 2010 and 2012

Which of the following news sources do you trust most for international news?		
TV	Newspapers	Internet
2010[a]		
Qatari 564 (92.0%)	34 (5.5%)	15 (2.4%)
Expat 456 (84.4%)	41 (7.6%)	43 (8.0%)
2012[b]		
Qatari 563 (81.6%)	96 (13.9%)	31 (4.5%)
Expat 533 (68.4%)	143 (18.4%)	103 (13.2%)

Cell entries are frequency counts with row percentages in parentheses.
[a] $X^2_{(2)} = 21.07$, p < .001
[b] $X^2_{(2)} = 43.52$, p < .001

Print newspaper reliance was overall the second most trusted news source, but

the medium exhibited an unusual pattern in Qatar from 2010-2012. Similar to

declining preference for newspapers as a trusted news source in U.S., 15.3% of

Qataris and 21.9% of expats chose newspapers as their most trusted source for local

news in 2010, compared to only 11.4% of Qataris and 7.7% of expats in 2012, an

aggregate drop of 10.6% in three years. When it came to the most trusted news source

for international news, however, the preference for newspapers actually increased

slightly, rising from 5.5% of Qataris and 7.6% of expats preferring newspapers in

2010, compared to 13.9% of Qataris and 18.4% of expats in 2012. Though the reasons

why newspapers' reputation as a trustworthy news source decreased for local news

but increased for international news cannot be ascertained from the questions asked in

these surveys, the data suggest the reliance on print newspapers in Qatar is

decreasing, but at a more gradual rate than in the United States.

Figure 1: Preferred sources for local news, 2010-2012
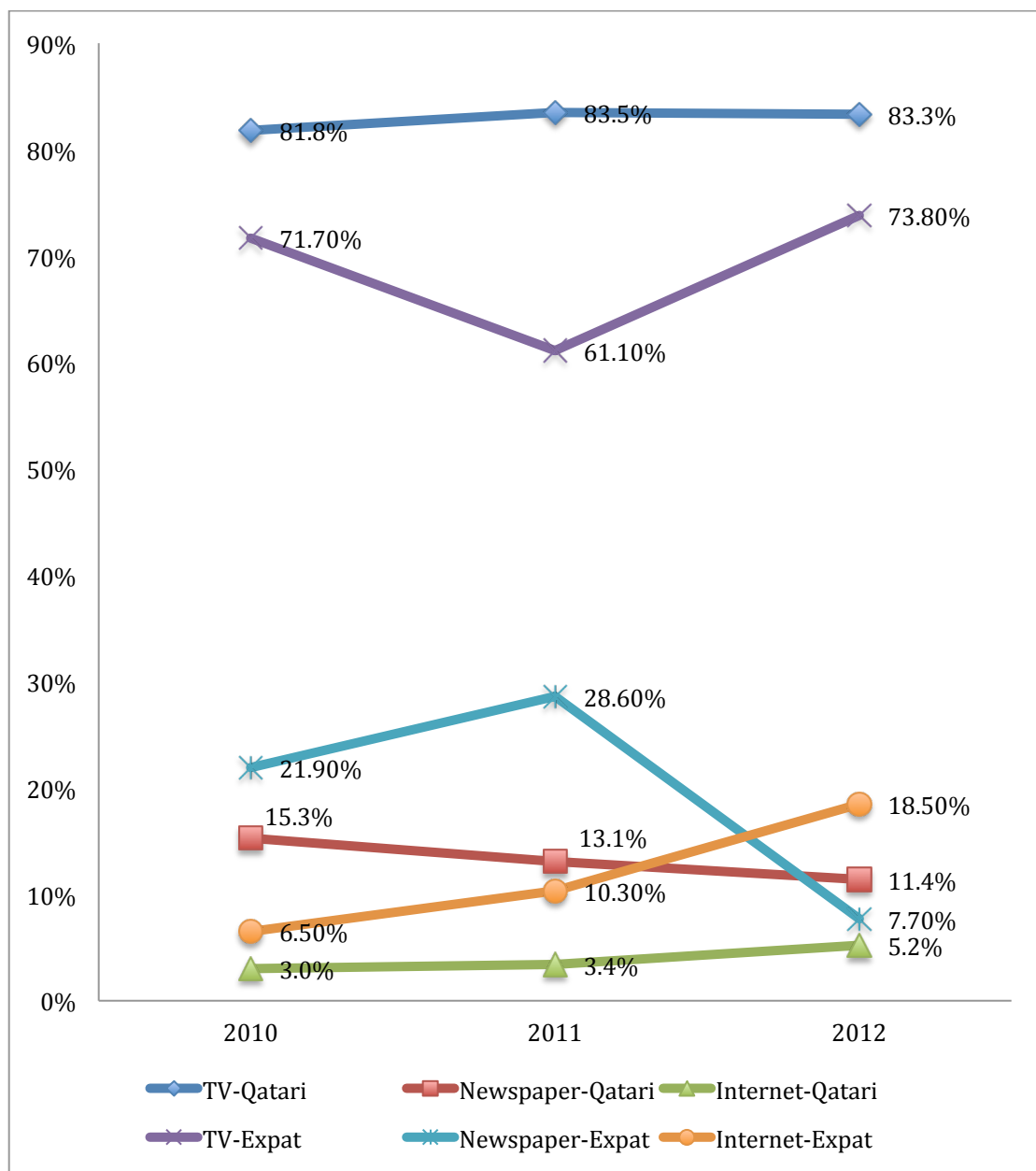
The Internet was the third most trusted news medium in Qatar from 2010-12, but, similar to the United States, its prominence as a news medium in Qatar is on the increase, especially among expats. In 2010, only 2.4% of Qataris and 8.0% of expats cited the Internet as their most trusted source for international news, but these rates increased to 4.5% of Qataris and 13.2% of expats in 2012. A similar pattern occurred for local news, with 3.0% of Qataris and 6.5% of expats saying the Internet was their most trusted local news source in 2010, and 5.2% of Qataris and 18.5% of expats choosing the Internet in 2012.

Figure 2: Preferred sources for international news, 2010, 2012
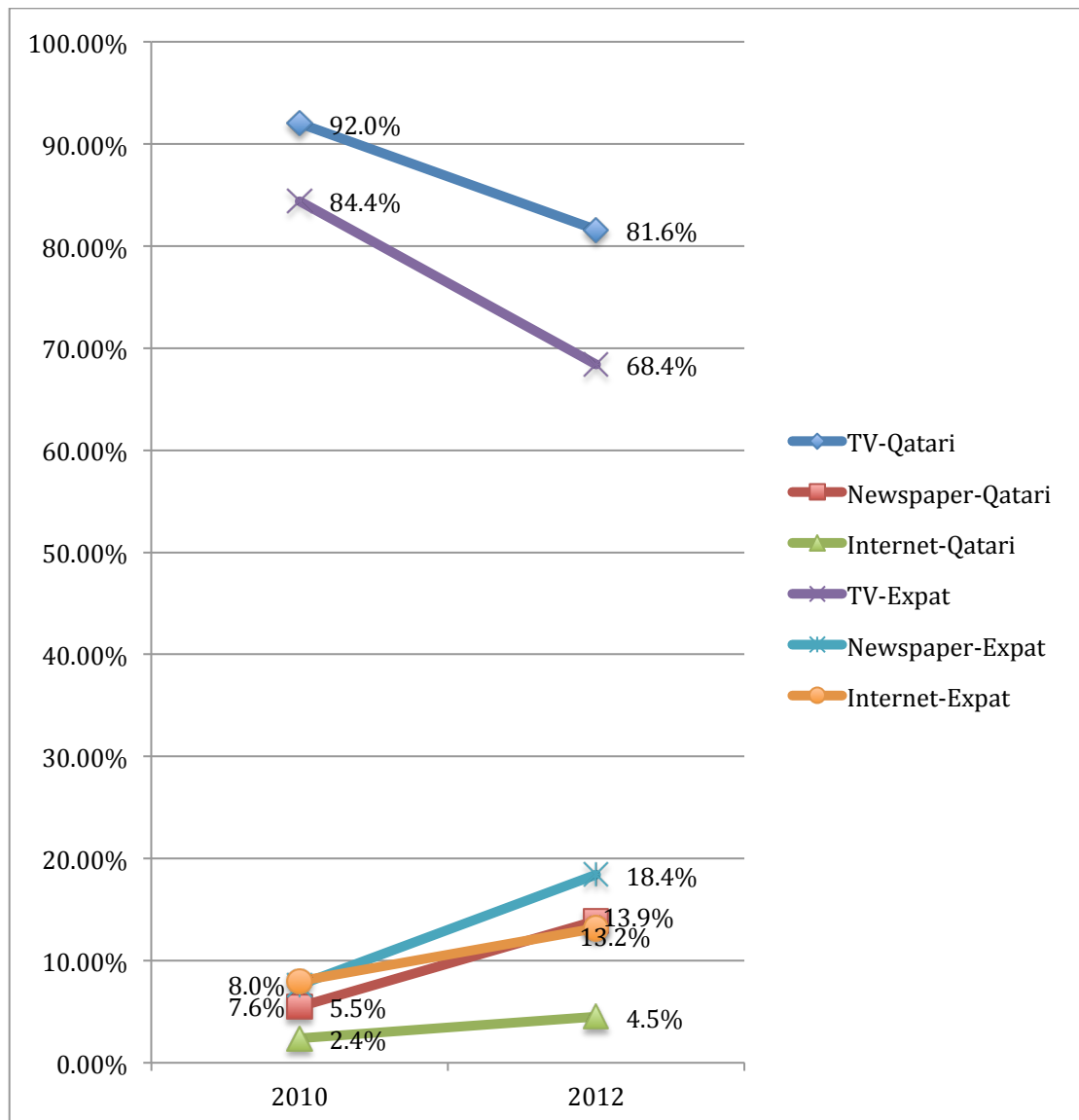
For most trusted sources for international news, television was also the primary source, but the preference dropped from 90% to 75% between 2010 and 2012 among Qatari nationals and from 80% to 69% among expats. Print newspaper reliance actually increased among Qatari nationals (from 4% to 10%) and held steady at 7% among expats. For Internet news sites, only 3% of Qatari nationals trusted this medium most for international news in 2010, raising slightly to 5% in 2012. The reliance and increase was more marked among expats for the Internet as the most trusted source for international news, increasing from 9% to 17%.

Most important issues facing Qatar

Overall, in 2011, 72.3% of respondents chose television as their most trusted local news source, while 20.9% chose print newspapers, and 6.8% chose the Internet. In 2012, these numbers were 74.6% for TV, 16.3% for newspapers and 9.1% for the Internet.

In response to the multiple choice question with four options regarding the most important issue currently facing Qatar, in 2011 42.6% of the survey respondent said it was fighting rising prices, 41.2% said it was maintaining order, 11.0% said it was giving people more say in government decisions and 5.1% said it was protecting freedom of opinion. In response to the same question in 2012, 57.2% of respondents said the main issue facing Qatar was maintaining order, 31.0% said it was fighting rising prices, 6.1% said it was giving people more say in government decisions and 5.7% said it was protecting freedom of opinion. In terms of the rank orders then, from 2011 to 2012 fighting rising prices went from first to second and maintaining order went from second to first, while giving people more say in government decisions and protecting freedom of opinion remained the third and fourth most important issues in

both years respectively. Rank order analyses are typically used in agenda-setting

research to gauge possible media or network agenda-setting effects. When the rank

orders of the important issues are analyzed separately by most trusted local news

medium, two changes emerge in the rank orders of the important issues from 2011 to

2012. Maintaining order was the most important issue in both years for those who

trusted print newspapers and those who trusted the Internet as their preferred news

medium; it was the second most important issue in 2011 for those who trusted

television news. For respondents whose most trusted local news medium was the

Internet, protecting freedom of opinion moved up from the fourth most important

issue in 2011 to the third most important issue in 2012.

Table 3: Most important issues facing Qatar by most trusted local news medium

	maintain order	more say in govt. decisions	fight rising prices	freedom of opinion
2011[a]				
TV	490 (38.5%)	132 (10.4%)	580 (45.6%)	70 (5.5%)
Newspapers	177 (48.5%)	52 (14.2%)	119 (32.6%)	17 (4.7%)
Internet	57 (47.5%)	10 (8.3%)	50 (41.7%)	3 (2.5%)
2012[b]				
TV	648 (59.7%)	55 (5.1%)	329 (30.3%)	53 (4.9%)
Newspapers	126 (52.9%)	22 (9.2%)	76 (31.9%)	14 (5.9%)
Internet	59 (44.4%)	12 (9.0%)	46 (34.6%)	16 (12.0%)

Cell entries are frequency counts with row percentages in parentheses.
[a] $X^2_{(6)} = 26.17$, p < .001
[b] $X^2_{(6)} = 24.79$, p < .001

Bivariate correlations were run to look more closely at the relationships

among the types of online news sources people in Qatar use and their views about

politics. The measures were the average number of days per week participants used

Internet news sites, Facebook and Twitter. Views about politics also included three

questions: how interested participants were in politics, how closely they followed

local political news, and how important it was to live in a democracy. Both sets of

questions were asked in both the 2011 and 2012 surveys.

In general, high usage of online news sources was positively correlated with

interest in politics in Qatar. People who frequently visited Internet news sites were

significantly more likely to be interested in politics (r_{2011} = .20, p < .01, r_{2012} = .23, p <

.01). They were also significantly more likely to follow local political news (r_{2011} =

.17, p < .01, r_{2012} = .13, p < .01), though the correlations were somewhat lower. Days

spent with online news sources were not significantly associated with opinions about

the importance of democracy.

For Facebook, participants who more frequently logged on to this social media

site were significantly more likely to be interested in politics (r_{2011} = .09, p < .01, r_{2012}

= .10, p < .01), though the correlation was weak. Facebook usage was not

significantly associated with following local political news or support for living in a

democracy in either year.

Weak, but significant, relationships for frequency of Twitter usage were found

for all three political interest variables. Participants who logged on more frequently to

Twitter were more likely to say they were interested in politics (r_{2011} = .06, p < .01,

r_{2012} = .09, p < .01), more likely to report that they followed local political news

closely (r_{2011} = .05, p < .05, r_{2012} = .08, p < .01), and more likely in 2011 to believe it

was important to live in a democratically governed country (r_{2011} = .08, p < .01, r_{2012} =

-.03, p > .05).

Table 4: Correlations of Internet news and social media usage with political interest

	2011					
	Internet news sites	Facebook	Twitter	Interest in politics	Follow local political news	Importance of living in a democracy
Internet news sites		.39**	.16**	.20**	.17**	-.01 (ns)
Facebook	.39**		.32**	.09**	.01 (ns)	-.02 (ns)
Twitter	.16**	.32**		.06**	.05*	.08**
Interest in politics	.20**	.09**	.06**		.62**	.05*
Follow local political news	.17**	.01 (ns)	.05*	.62**		.05*
Importance of living in a democracy	-.01 (ns)	-.02 (ns)	.08**	.05*	.05*	
	2012					
	Internet news sites	Facebook	Twitter	Interest in politics	Follow local political news	Importance of living in a democracy
Internet news sites		.46**	.28**	.23**	.13**	.02 (ns)
Facebook	.46**		.30**	.10**	-.02 (ns)	-.02 (ns)
Twitter	.28**	.30**		.09**	.08**	-.03 (ns)
Interest in politics	.23**	.10**	.09**		.61**	.07*
Follow local political news	.13**	-.02 (ns)	.08**	.61**		.13**
Importance of living in a democracy	.02 (ns)	-.02 (ns)	-.03 (ns)	.07*	.13**	

* Two-tailed Pearson correlation significant at p < .05.
** Two-tailed Pearson correlation significant at p < .01.

Discussion

Though the reliance on Internet news sites is increasing in Qatar, particularly among expats, it is somewhat surprising that television is still the dominant medium and reliance on print newspapers has changed little in three years. Reliance on television as an overall trusted news source decreased between 2010 and 2012, but it actually increased slightly as the most trusted source for local news. This counterintuitive finding may be partially explained by the Qatar TV network's expansion of local news programming and talk shows during this time period. Reliance on television as the most trusted source for international news declined substantially from 2010-2012, though the overall percentages remain high. Qatar, of course, is home to the Al Jazeera network, which focuses primarily on international news and is a key source of national pride, especially among Qatari nationals. This does not mean, however, that residents of Qatar are more loyal to television news than residents of other Arab countries. In a recent survey of eight Arab countries (Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and the UAE) conducted by researchers at Northwestern University in Qatar, Qatar residents were less likely to agree than other survey respondents that television was an important source for news and current events and were more likely than average to rate the Internet as an important source for news and events (Northwestern University in Qatar, 2013).

Similarly, the number of participants who rated print newspapers as their most trusted source for news appear to be experiencing a less rapid decline in Qatar than their counterparts in the United States. Seven daily newspapers (four in Arabic, three in English) compete for readership in Qatar and have stepped up distribution efforts for their print products in recent years.

As expected, reliance on the Internet as the most trusted source for news is increasing, but still lagging behind television and print newspapers. The low levels of Internet news usage in Qatar are not due to a lack of Internet access. Qatar boasted a 2013 Internet penetration rate of 85.3%, which places it 27th in the world and 3rd in the Middle East (Internet World Stats, 2014). Clearly, Qatar residents have access to the Internet and spend plenty of time using it. But they also display an enduring loyalty and habit to traditional media for their news. Part of this paradox may be due to the fact that some of the local traditional news outlets have not fully embraced news convergence. Some of the Arabic print newspapers' online sites, for example, only publish PDFs of the printed newspaper pages, failing to take advantage of the inherent strengths of Internet news delivery such as immediacy and interactivity. Though the data analyzed in this study do not measure the availability of online news content in Qatar, limited access to online news and a dearth of alternative online news sites focused on Qatar (especially in Arabic) could also play a role in the types of news content residents of Qatar seek and find on the Internet. In a 2012 study conducted by the Open Net Initiative to assess Internet censorship in more than 70 countries, researchers found evidence of selective filtering of political content and content related to conflict and security issues in Qatar, along with pervasive filtering of social content and Internet tools (Reninsland, 2012).

When participants were asked to choose which of four issues they thought was most important in Qatar, the issue of maintaining order was the top issue both years overall, but it was only the second most important issue in 2011 for people who rated television as their most trusted local news source. By 2012, though, even those who trusted television the most rated maintaining order as the most important issue. These correlations are suggestive of a traditional first-level agenda-setting effect since the

effect observed here, though small, (as is often the case with agenda-setting and

media effects studies) was consistent and statistically significant across multiple years

with television as the most dominant news medium. It is not appropriate to suggest a

reliance on television news caused people to underestimate the importance of

maintaining order in 2011, but the ways in which the social and political conflicts that

are so prominent in several of the MENA countries are portrayed in the different news

media certainly could contribute to a variance in feelings about the importance of

maintaining order.

For interest in politics, frequent use of Internet new sites, Facebook and

Twitter were all positively related to interest in politics and following local political

news. This result does not necessarily mean Qatar residents are actively seeking

political news information through social media, but they may be encountering this

kind of news incidentally while using social media for other purposes. Interestingly,

Twitter usage was a more stable predictor of interest in politics and following political

news than Facebook was, a finding that makes sense as Twitter's platform does not

distinguish news organizations from journalists from private citizens, which may

contribute to more interactive political discussions in real time. Belief in the

importance of democracy was not significantly related to use of Internet news sites or

Facebook usage, though it was positively correlated with Twitter usage. In both years,

however, the importance of democracy question scored very high and showed little

variance (mean $_{2011}$ = 7.8/10.0, mean $_{2012}$ = 7.9/10.0). These differential findings

between expatriate residents and Qatari nationals and between heavy Facebook users

and heavy Twitter users are suggestive of a third level agenda-setting effect, in which

people's social and interpersonal communication networks influence their perceived

importance of issues.

Overall, the findings reported here suggest that people in Qatar are increasingly trusting various Internet platforms to provide them with the news information they seek. They also are becoming somewhat less reliant on traditional news media, but the decline for traditional news media may be occurring at a slower rate than in the United States.

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