

Globalization's Effect on Qatari Culture

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Abstract

Qatar has a rich national and cultural identity. Particular customs and traditions characterize the Qatari cultural heritage. Globalization, though, has generated a lot of controversy with regard to the rise of a global culture. Western norms and practices are gradually being transported across the globe and becoming the accepted way of behaviour. The purpose of this article is to examine the effect of globalization on Qatari culture. The sample in this study consisted of (36) participants of Qatari nationality. Employing the focus group interview technique, a semi-structured questionnaire was used as a research method. Participants confirmed that globalization has had a significant effect on the country's culture. From the participants' viewpoints, globalization had a negative impact on religion, family connections, customs, manners and language. One the other hand, there has been a positive impact on the educational system and women's rights.

Keywords: Qatar, globalization, culture, education, values

Introduction

In any of the well-known malls in Qatar, you can recognize Qatari people by their traditional dress, taking lunch at KFC, carrying a cup of Pepsi, sitting in a Starbucks cafe speaking in English and drinking coffee. Downtown, you notice Qatari women in their black *abaya* smoking shisha and their hair flowing out from underneath their veils. All of these phenomena are indications of a huge change in the country's culture. Caesar (2003) stipulates though that the effects of Western-style consumerism are merely superficial among the Gulf citizen locals due to the strong attachments to their cultural and traditional heritage. People carry cell phones and wear jeans and baseball caps without feeling that their culture is threatened because of their strong sense of identity stemming from family and religion. The following study will analyse how true this statement is in the case of Qatar.

The State of Qatar is a small country, but it has carved out a significant global profile in the past decade. The country is considered one of the wealthiest countries in the world, with a population of only 2,334,029 at the end of February 2015. Qatar's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the highest worldwide at \$227 billion, with the largest per capita income per person, \$94,744 as of 2015 (Ministry of Planning and Statistics, 2015).

Qatar's traditional culture follows the Arabic heritage, but the country is gradually becoming very westernized. Qatar has always been known for its strong nationalism and sense of regional pride because of its Muslim cultural influences, which are similar to those of other GCC nations like the UAE. Recently, due to hosting the FIFA World Cup 2022, Qatar made large investments in construction, infrastructure and the new Qatar railway. These projects have attracted many foreigners seeking employment opportunities in the country (Seddiqi, 2012).

Generally, globalization became an important issue in the academic world especially after the Soviet Union fell. During the past two decades, globalization expanded with the help of the information and technology revolution. However, globalization has two sides, an optimistic and a pessimistic one. The optimists relate to the concept of the global village, through which knowledge becomes widely available and easy to access. On the other hand, the pessimists relate it to destruction of the environment and local culture (Friday, 2002).

In academic literature on the subject, the majority of researchers discuss globalization from economic and political viewpoints. The cultural methodology of examining global theory has only relatively recently entered this area of study (e.g. Al Khazraji, 2009). Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the effect of globalization on the culture of the Qatari people.

The article at hand examines globalization and its impact on the state of Qatari culture along the following questions: What is the impact of globalization on Qatar Culture? What is the effect of globalization on the Qatari local language, its education system, the local language, religion and values and customs?

The Concept of Globalization

Globalization is a contested concept that evokes a range of images and responses, depending on the context in which it is used and who is using it (Wood, 2008). According to Waters (1995, p.3) globalization is defined as a "social process in which geographic obstacles to social and cultural arrangements lose importance and where people are becoming increasingly aware that they lose importance". From an economic prospective, globalization is defined as the creation

of a “globally integrated economy” characterized by increased international trade, capital, and labour movements of foreign direct investment and global trade, foreign exchange, speculative capital flows which lead to a multination cooperation (Burbules and Torres, 2000). Globalization refers to the increasing interconnectedness of people, products, information, and processes throughout the world and the consequences that arise from such interconnections (Abdul Hadi et al, 2013). Held and McGrew (2003) highlight the importance of technology and identify globalization as “a result of entering the era of information technology and communication revolutions that invade the world in the end of the twentieth century”.

According to Heron (2012), globalization has contributed to shifting traditional societies and cultures across the globe. For some societies, globalization means opportunity while in others it means exploitations (Prilleltensky, 2012). GCC countries have similar cultural, values, social and political dimensions. Thus, globalization studies are not focused on one single Gulf country only and the majority of studies are represented as “Gulf studies” (Abdul Hadi et al, 2013).

Culture

Culture has been defined in many different ways depending on the differences in the orientation of people. From a wider perspective, culture includes the “total repertoire of human action which are socially transmitted from generation to generation”. Within the same concept, culture is the way of life of a group of people that has been developed, shaped and practiced over many years (Kwame, 2010).

According to Dimmock and Walker (1999), culture is defined as encompassing the values, traditions, customs and way of life which distinguish one group of people from another. Later, Gillespie et al. (2004) identified the culture elements including religion, language, history, and education. On the other hand, Cateora (2005) defined culture by listing five elements (values, rituals, symbols, beliefs and thought processes). Recently, Hollensen (2011) identified values, language, customs, Technology, social institutions, education, religion and aesthetics as the main eight (8) elements that are commonly included in the perception of culture. While there is clearly no consensus on what culture is, all these definitions help to create a constellation of cultural attributes, many of which will find entry into the study below.

Values

Values are consider as one of the important culture elements, and it they differ from individual to individual and from society to society. One of the most important roles of the cultural community members is to keep and maintain their values (Ragab, 2014). Values help to identify what is desirable and what is vital, moreover, its guide people to determine what people think is right or wrong. Values are socially hereditary as they are gained from elders, books and parents, transmitted from one generation to another. When a natural object is imbued with meaning, it becomes a value (Farooq, 2011).

According to Dasgupta (2004), the values of the locals in the state of Qatar have been affected negatively by globalization, for example, in how the holy month of Ramadan has become increasingly commercialized rather than celebrated as a spiritual occasion. On the other hand, Abdul Razk (2011) confirmed that, in Arab societies, globalization has a positive impact on women's rights. Problems many women faced are now addressed, for example, the ability for women to drive a car in the Saudi kingdom. Similarly, Al Khazraji (2009) found that Qatari women expressed a strong desire to select their husband, as opposed to their mothers' generation where arranged marriages between families were still the norm.

Recently, in the state of Qatar, the situation of women has improved. The percentage of full-time housewives has decreased from 69.2% at the end of 2007 to 55% at the end of 2009 (Jakobsen, 2010). Moreover, the number of women as a percentage of the adult labour force in Qatar increased from 4% in 1970 to 12% in 1995. Finally, the author speculates that because of the increased participation of women in education and the workforce, the social status of women, in general, has improved and has begun to move away from the more historically traditional roles, i.e. that the place of women is in the household only.

Customs and Manners

Customs and manners should be carefully monitored to determine exactly what is different among cultures. An example of this element is where “in so-called right-hand cultures (Middle East, amongst others) the left hand is the ‘toilet hand’ and using it to eat, for example, is considered impolite” (Yalcin and Cimendag, 2012). Furthermore, in Qatar the national dress is very distinct, but it has the same features as all other GCC countries. The national dress of Qatari women consists of an *abaya*, a long black dress-like coat that covers the entire body, and a *hijab/sheyla*, which is a black head cover. Some women also wear a thin black veil hiding their face, and/or gloves. As for Qatari men, they wear the *thobe* (white full-length shirt dress) with a white, or red-and-white checkered, headdress (*gutra*).

In Qatari culture, hospitality is an important feature. The local Qataris receive their male guests separately in a reception area, the *majilis*, where traditionally the guests are seated on large cushions on the floor. Currently, the *majilis* has become a more contemporary living room with the latest technologies, for example, televisions, PlayStations and DVD players, etc. as well as modern furniture (Seddiqi, 2012).

Customs are important. They coordinate everyday interactions and special occasions and they let people know what to expect, as noted by Caterora (2005). People's lives are full of learned and repeated customs, the most obvious associated with major events in life, for example, marriage ceremony or funerals. In the Qatari marriage ceremony, gender segregation still exists, but the style has been affected by globalization. Nowadays a music DJ plays not only Arabic, but also English and Indian and songs at most of these ceremonies. Moreover, all the ceremonies have shifted from homes to luxury hotels.

Education

Education consists of the procedures of transferring ideas, skills, attitudes and training in a particular branch of knowledge. One of the main purposes of education is the dissemination of the existing culture, customs and religion to the new generation (Abdul Razak, 2011; Yalcin and Cimendag, 2012).

In the state of Qatar, the number of students enrolled in public education rose to 136,575 in 2007 compared with 78,343 in 1990 and numbers are still going up today. However, the table below displays an increase in the ratio of female students at university level. Moreover, Qataris can take advantage of further education and training opportunities after they have joined a government or government-owned organization. That may be part of the reason why the majority of males reported wanting to seek work first (Salem, 2008). On the other hand, in Qatar a large percentage of women prefer to continue their studies at university level. Women in Qatar do not like to take up employment in the government sector and work with high school degrees only. Their attitudes have been changing and the ambitions have become very high. Moreover, the government universities that are funded and maintained by Qatar (such as Qatar University and the Community College) have played significant roles in the increased

participation of females in higher education. As per university of Qatar statistics at the end of 2014, the graduation figures for Qataris were as shown in Table 1.

	Male	Female
Undergraduates	64	490
Masters	1	15
Diploma	0	4
PhD	0	1
Total	65	510

Table 1: Graduation Figures in Qatar

Several research studies have investigated the effects of globalization on education in Arab countries. According to El Arini (2007), the positive impact of globalization in providing students with high quality knowledge and skills is that they are prepared to compete with those with skills and experience coming from abroad. On the other hand, some educational leaders perceive globalization as a threat to their culture and values (Lieber and Weisberg, 2002). Accordingly, the Higher Education Supreme Council in Qatar licensed numerous foreign colleges and universities, for example, Georgetown and Texas universities, to set up branches in Qatar because of the strong cultural pressure for female students to stay with their families (Al-Khazraji, 2009).

According to Abdul Razak's 2011 study of the impact of globalization on education and culture, educational knowledge available through the internet is being overshadowed by the relentless pounding current of globalization. Thus, the idea of education among society is still available, but the perception and the reason why parents send their children to school has been forgotten due to globalization and modern-day lifestyles. On the other hand, globalization might be a chance for interaction between “national heritage” and “contemporary needs” and an opportunity to be exposed to the global educational system (Bloom, 2004).

However, the question of how educational changes have influenced Qatari culture is still something that requires a brief examination in order to determine the effects globalization has had on this society and culture.

Language

Language is a source of communication and can be described as a reflection of a culture (Yalcin and Cimendag, 2012). Unfortunately, the number of spoken languages continues to decline worldwide (Cateora, 2005). One of the main challenges of globalization is its threat to the national language of the Arab world (Ateyat and Gasaymeh, 2015). Languages crossed official barriers a long time ago. Governments have little or no control over the spread of foreign languages (Al Hassan, 2007). Moreover, information technology, the internet and the communication revolution, much of which was developed in the United States, has made the English language a necessary part of the daily lives of all Arab communities.

The dominance of the English language in higher education has been perceived as a threat to the culture of the Arab countries (Kilani, Dhyat and Abu Odeh, 2007). According to Al Hassan (2007), globalization has had a significant effect on the Arabic language; the “English” language has undergone a complete change to become an item of economic value, due to the constant advertisements from for instance the British Council available in the Arab countries and the availability of international schools and global universities. Consistent with the same

concept, Ateyat and Gasaymeh (2015) note that the English language “should continue to be the language of instruction in medical, engineering and science fields”. Most of the textbooks and research journals are in English and it will be difficult to find updated Arabic resources on the Internet.

In Saudi Arabia, a study carried out by Al Muhadib (2006) about the advantages of using the Arabic language in the local universities, revealed that 90% of the participants confirmed that studying the course material in the Arabic language enables faster and deeper understanding compared with studying in English. Moreover, 82% of the respondents declared that using the English language reduced discussion and sharing abilities during lectures. It is very clear then that while there is great global gain in applying English, especially local differentiations, as contained in and expressed by local languages are being lost.

Technology and Media

Technology is seen as one of the initial contributors to globalization, which in turn brings people into closer and more intense contact, making the world “smaller” (Vesajoki, 2002). Technology has been the main reason for popularising the trend of globalization. Indeed, the Internet is widely attributed to be the primary agent in making this world a smaller place and leading to the coinage of such terms as “Global Village” (McLuhan). It is technology that refers to a tangible culture including the aspects that are very clear in the society, for example, computers, television, cars and iPads.

The marketing of television is the best example to address the power of technology in globalization. When the United States introduced black-and-white television, it took more than 15 years to achieve a level of market share in Europe similar to that in the United States. However, the marketing for the colour television and the power of technology reduced the period for similar adoption in Europe to five years (Yalcin and Cimendag, 2012). This makes clear that markets have very much come together of the last decades.

According to Frank (2014), new technologies of communication have had an even more significant impact on culture. The influence of the Internet has been most significant in the way it has transformed the lives of young people. Mobile phones, the Internet, friendship interaction and peer-to-peer relations are increasingly conducted online or through text messaging and social media. Such interactions have had major cultural consequences (Frank, 2014). According to Al Saggaf (2004), the internet and social media have a positive impact on the Saudi Arabian culture. Saudi women have become more open-minded, more confident and the social media in Saudi Arabia create an environment in which they can have “intellectual discussions’. On the other hand, the new social and internet technology have impacted negatively on the individual attitude and the direct interaction within the family (Fahd, 2011)

Social Institutions

Social institutions such as businesses, political institutions and family members influence behaviours in any culture (Yalcin and Cimendag, 2012). Most of globalization research focuses on its economic nature and the implications of this process for markets and nation-states, and other aspects have been ignored (Tarsek, 2010). Thus, in this research, focus lay on the family as the centre of social change. According to Trask (2010), “The relationship between globalization and families, however, is even more profound and complex than economic or political perspectives reveal. Globalization is the critical driving force that is fundamentally restructuring the social order around the world, and families are the centre of this change”.

The family in Qatar refers to a group larger than the domestic unit. After marriage, women remain members of their father's lineage but are partially integrated into the lineages of their husbands and children. The Qatari people still have a connection with their families. But this is changing: according to Nadia (2014), the Qatari culture is not like before. Globalization has had a great effect and the connection with family has become very weak; everybody is busy and unable to accept criticisms from family members. Moreover, family visits have been reduced largely to national and religion occasions.

Due to the vast influx of oil wealth into the Gulf countries' communities, local culture has been compromised (Sulayman, 2005). The old city centres and outlying villages have been demolished to make way for modern developments and key infrastructure projects, thereby eliminating the very few physical and visual reminders of cultural architecture and ways of life in the past. Moreover, the skewed ratio of local to foreign populations (as of the end of 2015, 70% of the total population in Qatar are expatriates). This also has led to the abandonment of some traditional values and beliefs, given the influence that foreign populations bring with them from their own cultures (Sulayman, 2005).

The public social institutions in Qatar are trying to preserve local culture by applying several rules and activities. The government built the "Souq Wakif" in downtown. This souk is designed in the old traditional fashion, selling traditional garments and souvenirs. Moreover, the Authority of Culture and Arts in Qatar has exerted much effort to preserve the culture and the country traditions, building three museums focusing on national culture and Islamic history. Also, on an annual basis, the Ministry of Culture holds several ceremonies and festivals related to traditional activities, for example, the 5th Katra Traditional Festival.

Religion

Islam is the predominant religion in Qatar. According to the 2004 census, 77.5% of the population are Sunni Muslim and about 4% Shi'a Muslim; 8.5% are Christian; and 10% are other. Some religious tolerance is granted and foreign nationals are free to affiliate with faiths other than Islam so long as religious duties are carried out in private and do not offend public order or morality. In March 2008, a Roman Catholic church, Our Lady of the Rosary, was consecrated in Doha. No missionaries are allowed in the community. The church has no bells, crosses or other Christian symbols on its exterior or premises. In Qatar, religion is not only a means of communication; it also carries beliefs, values, ideas and customs (Helble, 2008). Religion is not only related to worship, but beliefs and moral conduct are considered main components of the religion; the believer might believe in God, but his/her attitude, own lifestyle and interaction with others might differ greatly from that of others, even if they share the same faith (Hutter, 2005).

Aesthetics

Today, in the Doha Katara district, there is a big theatre where Tango dances are performed. Furthermore, there are several art shows displaying the works of Louise Bourgeois, Takashi Murakami, and Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang – nothing like this ever happened before. Qatar has established the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra, which is composed of a large number of European musicians and performs a mostly classical European repertoire.

Conversely, traditional folklore dancing is another important aspect of Qatari heritage and culture. The government and social institutions are playing an important part in trying to save and protect Qatari folklore. People are still celebrating National Day in the traditional old way, including traditional music and dancing the *Ardha*, one of the most popular folklore dances

where the dancers carry swords and the one performed at celebrations in Qatar. It is a dance performed to “display the unity and strength of the group and is a display of alliance to the Emir and the society. It combines dance and poetry, with a poet moving back and forth between two lines of singers and dancers” (Siddiqi, 2012). Again, a clash of cultures can be observed and this clash would also be present in the research detailed.

Research Methods

In order to examine the effect of globalization on Qatari culture, 36 participants were selected for interviewing purposes by using the convenience sampling technique. The participants were 20 males and 16 females, aged between 20 and 40 years old.

Three semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants. Fifteen interview questions (see Appendix 1) were constructed to investigate participants’ perceptions of the phenomenon of globalization and its effect on Qatari culture. Qualitative data analysis techniques were used to analyse participants’ responses. The sets of data thus obtained were organized, themes were identified, and an interpretation undertaken.

Discussion

Based on the respondents’ reactions, it is clear that globalization has had a significant impact on Qatari culture. The study revealed that globalization has had a negative impact on the Arabic language, consistent with the findings of Ateyat and Gasaymeh (2015). All participants confirmed that the English language has become common and important in schools and universities. Participant (1) mentioned that, “Everywhere you can see English signs and when you travel, you also need a language to contact people.” Participant (4) confirmed that, “in Qatar there are many workers from different countries, so if I don’t know English, how do I communicate”. Moreover, as a result of technology and social media, participants believe that usage of the English language has become more common and easier in most communication. Eighty percent of the participants confirmed that English should continue to be the language of instruction in the universities and higher education, which is in contrast to the study results of Al Muhadib (2006). One might speculate that the time difference of ten years between the two studies has probably contributed to the difference in results.

When looking at the effect of the globalization on the education system in Qatar, most of the participants believed that globalization has had a positive effect on the educational system. Participants noted as positive that many international universities are now available in Qatar, providing better education and knowledge. This is consistent with the conclusions of El Arini (2007) study. Participant (6) declared that, “it’s easy now to select among different universities and take your own decision, rather than traveling abroad to get your higher education”. Moreover, 80% of the participants confirmed that the availability of different foreign universities, encourage Qataris to continue their higher education. Participants (7) and (9) confirmed that before “due to the high cost we are unable to travel outside and continue our higher education...”.

The interviews findings revealed that globalization has had a negative impact on the Islamic religion: people have become less religious and more interested in the joys of life. According to the participants, technology, the internet and social media have contributed to this trend. Moreover, in Qatar there are more than forty (40) international schools, where religious subjects and related materials are not high on the agenda, which impacts negatively on the level

of Islamic knowledge among the pupils. Participant (30) mentioned that, “in the international schools, my kids are taking only one lesson per week which is not enough”. Participant (20) added that, “I have to hire an external teacher to cover the school gap in teaching the religion”.

Globalization therefore has had both positive and negative impact on Qatari values and customs. From a positive perspective, there are significant improvements in women’s rights, which is consistent with Abdul Razak's findings (2011). Women can now apply and work in all business entities; they have the right to select their husbands and have been elected to join the parliament. On the other hand, there is negative impact as well. For example, family connections have become weaker and family visits have become less frequent than before, which is consistent with the findings of Nadia (2014). The relations with neighbours have been reduced, taking place only during religious and public occasions. Moreover, the *majilis* of homes have become smaller and, according to the participants, soon will disappear completely.

Based on the interviews, the effect of cultural globalization is also very clearly visible in the commercialization of culture. Qatari markets are increasingly bombarded with new images, new music, food, new clothes and new values. The image of the national dress has been affected, becoming more western. Moreover, the Qatari people’s consumption behaviour has also changed. According to the participants, they are replacing their personal cars and mobiles on a yearly basis. Most of the participants prefer American and Indian movies, and they listen to English songs. Nowadays, Qatari people are celebrating Valentine’s Day and New Year's Eve, which constitutes a huge cultural change. Finally, based on the interviews, 84% of the respondents eat fast foods at least once a week. There is still a local culinary culture, but nowadays, it is much more influenced by Indian spices and tastes. Three-quarters of the participants preferred Indian foods like majboos and biryani; on the other hand, 20% preferred Mediterranean cuisine.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of globalization on Qatari culture. Based on the interview findings, globalization has had a significant impact on the Qatari culture. The conclusions of the study are as follows:

- Globalization has a negative impact on the quality of written and spoken Arabic. English has become dominant among the schools, universities and in daily life communications.
- Globalization has a positive impact on the quality of the education system, the availability of different universities and the quality of education.
- Globalization has a negative impact on the teaching and spreading of Islamic religion among the society.
- Globalization positively affects women’s right and economic advancements.
- Globalization negatively affects family connections and neighbors’ social connections
- Globalization has a negative impact on the Qatari people values, attitudes and customs.

Globalization has both positive and negative effects on the Qatari culture. As demonstrated above, there are explicit indications that globalization has changed Qatari culture. Higher education levels have become the ruler and the situation of the Qatari women has been improved; but, on the other hand, globalization negatively affects the local language, family connections, values, attitudes and customs.

It is clear that Qatar cannot live in isolation, running away from globalization. The Qatari people will have to find the ability to deal with these new challenges, examine different cultures and choose the most relevant to their needs. The interest of the government in improving the education system is an excellent indication that the country is supporting the same concept – modernization and globalization, while at the same time continuing to support local customs and value systems.

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Appendix 1

Interview Questions

1. What type of channels you are regularly watching on the TV?
2. What kind of language you are using when chatting and talking with friends?
3. What kind of music you prefer? And what kind of movies you prefer?
4. What about your connection with you family, did you visit them on regular basis?
5. What about your opinion on the national dress?
6. What type of restaurants you regularly visit and what kind of foods you prefer?
7. How many mobile do you have? Type? And last time you change it? And why?
8. How many car do you have? Type? And last time you change it? And why?
9. Do you travel abroad and how many time per year?
10. What about your level of education? And do you interest to continue?
11. Did you pray in daily basis? How many chapter from Quran you memorize?
12. How do you spend Ramadan time?
13. Did you prefer to marriage at which age? And the wife/husband you prefer to choose by yourself or through the family?
14. The marriage ceremony will be in hotel or at home? And you will stay in the family house or in a separate house?
15. Did you agree with giving the Saudi women the right to drive her car alone?