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### **A Profile of Journalists in Qatar: Traits, Attitudes and Values**

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The Qatari media system is emerging rapidly to cater for the rapid socio-economic change and sustainable development the country is witnessing since its independence in December 18th, 1997. Since the accession of H.H Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani to the reins of the country, the media have been promoting freedom, democracy and social change. Qatari media are fostering Arab and Islamic heritage and morals as well as national, Arab and Islamic causes. Established in 1971, Qatar continues to undergo a period of intense socio-economic change.

Although Qatar is a small nation in terms of area (4,416 sq mi) and population (2,116,400), it has one of the best media infrastructure in the region for press, broadcast, and electronic media. The country has four dailies in Arabic, three in English, and more than two hundred magazines of both general and specialized interest. Qatar also has several satellite television channels and radio stations, as well as the famous Al Jazeera network and be INSPORTS channels. Internet penetration in Qatar is 85.3% (<http://www.internetsociety.org/map/global-internet-report/>), which puts the state of Qatar third among the Arab countries and among the highest in the world. Journalism education and training is also expanding rapidly with the establishment of Northwestern university Qatar in 2008, besides Qatar University which started offering a minor in journalism back in 1982 and whose department of Mass Communication enrolls over 600 students during the academic year 2015–2016 and has graduated several hundreds of media and public relations practitioners since its establishment. Finally, there is great interest from government media officials in the qatarization of media profession.

The rationale behind this study is to find out who the journalists practicing in Qatar are, where do they come from, how do they perceive their job and role in society, and how do they fit as expatriates in a media system and a country which is not theirs. Over 90 percent of the practicing journalists in Qatar are foreigners. This study addresses the issue of their educational background, working conditions and professional orientations.

The other importance of this study lies in the fact that expatriate employees are making the majority of the working journalists in Qatar as it is the case in many other sectors of the economy. This is one of the rare situations in the

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world except for some other Gulf countries; and one wonders what are the perceptions, ideas, philosophy of these journalists who come from different countries with different schools of thoughts, backgrounds, culture, education, political systems, religious beliefs, and convictions.

The questionnaire was patterned after similar surveys of journalists in other countries, including those done in the Arab world, the United States, and England (Johnston, Slawski & Bowman, 1973, 1976; Kirat 1993, 1998, 2000; Tash 1983; Tunstall 1977; Weaver & Wilhoit 1986, 1996; and Weaver et al. 2007), while taking into the characteristics and peculiarities of journalism in the state of Qatar. A pre-test was administered to 20 journalists to ensure validity, reliability, adequacy of measures, and clarity of terms and language. The final questionnaire was distributed to journalists and media managers by two research assistants – senior students- at the department of Mass Communication, Qatar University.

The survey targeted a census of the population of Qatar journalists, estimated at about 850, and covered the daily press, radio and television networks, and the national news agency (QANA). Aljazeera network channels' journalists were excluded from the research due to the fact that Aljazeera has a different coverage area than that of mainstream media in Qatar. Journalists working for specialized publications were not included in the survey. Despite skepticism on the part of journalists and media organization managers who declined to participate, the author collected questionnaires from 125 journalists. Respondents represented 13 media organizations, including the national news agency, radio and television, and the daily press (both Arabic and English language).

Thirteen media organizations were represented in this study. They included Qatar News Agency (QNA) (21.6%) Al Sharq (18.4%), Qatar Tribune (10.4%), Alwatan (8.8%), Gulf Times (8%), The Peninsula (7.2%), Alrayyan TV (7.2%), Sawt Alkhaleej Radio (7.2%), Qatar TV (4%) and Alraya (3.2%), Alkas TV (1.6%), Qatar Radio (1.6%), and Alarab (0.8%). The daily Arabic press is represented by 39 journalists (31.2%); the daily English press by 32 journalists (25.6%), the national news agency by 27 journalists (21.6%), the television networks by 16 journalists (12.8%); and the radio stations by 11 journalists (8.8%).

The findings from this survey offer a detailed and current profile of the demographics, education, job satisfaction, working conditions, roles, news values, ethics, professional orientations, and perceived impact on public opinion. More than half (58.4%) of the surveyed journalists in this study fall in the 35–45 age bracket with a median of 37.94 years old. Journalists in Qatar have 12.42 years of experience in the field and work an average of 40.21 hours per week. One-third of journalists in Qatar are female (34.4). Over three-quarters of the journalists surveyed are married (80.6%), while 15.4% are single and have never married. More than two thirds of the journalists surveyed (68.8%) hold a bachelor's degree, and 12.% hold advanced degrees. Over half of those holding a bachelor's degree have a major in journalism and mass communication (52%), while other majors include social sciences (19.3%), political science (8.8%), business (6.9%), natural sciences (3.8%), and humanities (3.1%). Concerning continuing education, 73.6% of the surveyed journalists expressed interest in additional training in journalism. The majority of the respondents would like to have training in writing techniques (60.1%), followed by an interest in learning more about media technology (40%), multimedia (26.3%), new media (16.5%), and training abroad (15.5%). The findings suggest that age and experience are the key factors in determining whether the journalist is interested in having more training and continuous education. Younger and less experienced journalists were more likely than older and more experienced journalists to opt for additional education. More than half of the surveyed journalists had journalism training before entering the profession (60%), and almost three quarters would like to have the opportunity to take training courses and workshops related to the profession (73.6%).

Only 10% of the surveyed journalists are Qataris. This fact is due mainly to the very young age of the country and its need for foreign workers in all sectors of the economy. The bulk of foreign journalists working for Arabic media organizations in the country are from the Middle East, led by Egypt (39.4%), Sudan (8.1%), Syria (8.1%), Jordan (7.5%), and Lebanon (4.4%). On the other hand, journalists working for English news organizations are predominantly Indian (62.5%).

Responses also indicate that journalists in Qatar show strong support to their roles as mobilizers and interpreters. Roughly, three out of four journalists agreed with the extreme

importance of the “mobilizing” role, as indicated by three questions: the concentration on news of a wide interest (86.4%), the goal of enhancement of Islamic values (80.6%), and the goal of education and formation of modern Qatari citizens (80.8%). Furthermore, most journalists surveyed agreed with the “interpretive” role, as indicated by three questions: providing analysis and interpretations of complex problems (89.6%), developing intellectual and cultural public interests (87.2%), and avoiding stories in which facts cannot be verified (72.8%). Journalists in Qatar view news in a national context and along the lines of the policies in practice in the country. Our data show that more than half of the journalists reported changing their conceptions of news since they began their careers. More than half of journalists surveyed indicated a high level of job satisfaction, and three-quarters said that their job conditions are either good or very good. Journalists also expressed satisfaction with their freedom in practicing their daily tasks. However, more than half of them showed some dissatisfaction concerning their relations with sources when investigating sensitive issues. And those surveyed were unhappy with their news organizations’ policies towards continuing education and refresher courses. The majority of them have never been given the chance to enroll in training workshops, seminars, and courses, although many expressed an interest in continuing education and training.

About three-quarters of the surveyed journalists responded that they are either satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs, the stability of their jobs, the use of their talents and creativity, and their peer relationships. Overall, these findings suggest that journalists in Qatar are satisfied with their job conditions, which is a positive and healthy sign for the media practice in the country. On the other hand, findings from the interviews revealed that journalists are aware of some weaknesses and common criticisms of journalism in Qatar, such as lack of in depth reporting, and too often being viewed as a megaphone and a spokesperson for the government. Journalists in Qatar were also aware that they may be seen as concentrating too much on routine government activities, and they rated highly their power to manipulate public opinion on some issues. The findings confirmed that journalists in Qatar highly value adhering to their standards of professionalism. Their beliefs and philosophies regarding the role of the media are compatible with the information policy of the country, which emphasizes national unity and national development.

In terms of media ethics, the study showed that the media practitioners learn mostly from day-by-day practice, from peers and colleagues, and from their family and religious upbringing. Seventy eight percent of the surveyed journalists consistently objected to the use of a range of questionable methods to get news. Journalists in this study also expressed strong support for the idea that the media are influential in forming public opinion and in influencing government decisions. These beliefs are reflected by and intersect with strong opinions on the mobilizing and interpretative roles of the media in Qatar. Asked if “the Qatari system of regulations is conducive to freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity of the media”, over half of the journalists answered positively (61.6%); and almost two thirds said that there is plurality and diversity in the media in Qatar. Asked if the media in Qatar serve as a platform for democratic discourse, half of the respondents said yes. The majority of the journalists (83.2%) think that journalists in Qatar need a professional association and are satisfied with the use of media technology (87.2%) and believe that there is self censorship practice in the country (80.8%).

Looking to the future of journalism in Qatar, these findings reveal the need for training and continuing education with specific concentration on modern technology such as databanks, multimedia, and the Internet. Also, there is a need to concentrate on learning different languages, especially English for Arab journalists who do not master English to communicate effectively in a multicultural media environment, and Arabic for non-Arab journalists. Finally, more native Qatari citizens should be encouraged to enter the industry and become leaders in a media field currently dominated by expatriates. Media officials in Qatar are urged as well to motivate and encourage young Qataris to enter the media industry through higher salaries and better incentives.