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Facebook Use Among Qataris Remarkably Low

NU-Q forum gathers industry leaders to discuss Qatar-specific findings revealed by six-country Middle East entertainment media survey

Doha, May 12 2014 – Media professionals from across Qatar recently gathered at the Qatar Media Industries Forum—a biannual gathering of industry leaders hosted by Northwestern University in Qatar—to discuss findings of a first-of-its-kind survey on Entertainment Media Use in the Middle East. Jointly overseen by NU-Q and Doha Film Institute, the media survey spanned six Arab nations; findings on Qatar specifically were in focus at the forum.

One of the most outstanding trends revealed by the survey was that Qatari nationals are less than half as likely as nationals of other countries studied to use Facebook. The survey also revealed that Qatar is unique to other Arab countries in that its residents express a strong interest in news as a mode of entertainment.

“Through this forum, which continues to inform media experts across Qatar, we can start to see how these survey findings can be applied, said Dean and CEO of NU-Q Everette E. Dennis. “While Facebook use is down, the use of other social media is high, signaling the likelihood that Qataris may prefer other platforms. Overall, differences in the data from Qatar signal the need for tradition and modernity as well as the continuing importance of newspapers and print.”

Efforts by Qatari newspapers to increase their social media presence have paid off among younger audiences, explained Sara Al-Derham, an NU-Q graduate, who worked with the researchers to validate the Qatar results through her own interviews and qualitative analysis,

“People my age who are online follow Qatar’s dailies on social media for regular updates and headlines,” she said, adding that open access to PDF versions of the newspapers online provides a popular blend of electronic and traditional.

Al-Derham also noted that Facebook in Qatar is facing heavy competition among her peers, who are more likely to use Instagram and Twitter.

The survey also found that nearly half of Arabs watch American films, yet most want more regional content. This rang particularly true in Qatar, which has the highest percentage of nationals who agree that more should be done to preserve cultural traditions (survey average: 78%/ Qatar: 94%) and the lowest percentage of nationals who watch TV produced in their own country (survey average: 94%/ Qatar: 51%).

“It is time we portray ourselves with our own voices,” said Fatma Al-Remaihi, Director of Ajyal Youth Film Festival & Programmes, Doha Film Institute. “We have to balance preserving culture with talking about present-day issues in our society and bringing them to the surface.”

The survey revealed another interesting trend: while print is broadly considered a dying medium around the world, in Qatar readers still have a rich appetite for newspapers and books—richer still than their neighbors in other Arab countries.

“When you travel abroad where outlets are mourning their print days, it is amazing to come back to Doha and see newspapers being sold on the main roads every morning,” commented Mary Dedinsky, Director of NU-Q’s journalism program. “The fact is that stories in Qatar break in the local Arabic newspapers, and audiences who want to stay up to date have to read them.”

According to the findings, eight in 10 Qatar residents read newspapers regularly and half do so on a daily basis. Comparatively, two-thirds in the region (survey-wide) read newspapers, and only a quarter do so daily.

Northwestern University in Qatar and Doha Film Institute launched the survey as a collaborative effort in November. An interactive display of the survey findings is available at mideastmedia.org.

The results are based on 6,035 face-to-face interviews with adults in six Arab countries—Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates—and provide a base of knowledge for executives across all sectors, including entertainment, sport, children’s programming and culture.

Nahil Al-Askari, a senior museum specialist at Qatar Museum Authority who attended the Forum commented: “I believe a research project of this magnitude is the main motivation behind Qatar hosting universities of the caliber of Northwestern University in Qatar.

“My work at the Qatar Museum Authority is closely involved with audience preference research and the Entertainment Media Survey conducted by NU-Q will provide everyone in the media industry with a viable reference point,” he added.

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About Northwestern University in Qatar

Northwestern University in Qatar draws from its parent organization, [Northwestern University](#) (Evanston, Illinois), a distinguished history, famous programs and an exceptional faculty. Founded in partnership with Qatar Foundation, NU-Q provides a framework through which students explore the world and, ultimately, shape its future through its distinguished schools of [communication](#), [journalism](#), and [liberal arts](#).