

NATION BRANDING: COVERAGE AND PERCEPTIONS OF QATAR IN MAJOR WORLD NEWSPAPERS

John Mark King, East Tennessee State University
johnking@etsu.edu

ABSTRACT

A content analysis of mentions of Qatar published in more than 70 major newspapers in 18 nations in 2006-2007 was conducted. Comparisons were made between newspapers located in or associated with the West (North America, Europe, Australia/New Zealand and Israel) and the East (Asia, the Middle East and Africa). Tone toward Qatar was more positive in the East than the West. Qatar more frequently landed on section front pages and in prominent story positions in the West than the East. Sports and Qatar's population/geographic facts were the most frequent topics. Terror/war/violence and Al Jazeera were the least common topics.

I. INTRODUCTION/LITERATURE REVIEW

Qatar, a micro-state with a population of 907,229 and slightly smaller than the state of Connecticut in the United States, borders the central Arabian Gulf and Saudi Arabia on the Arabian Peninsula (CIA, 2008). Qatar, which gained its independence in 1971, has gas reserves of 900 trillion cubic feet, second largest in the world after Russia, and oil reserves of 13.2 billion barrels. The nation also boasts the highest per capita income in the world (Qatar Tourism Authority, 2008).

The Emir of Qatar, His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, has chartered ambitious policies for the nation including using its financial resources to invest billions of dollars in sports, education, infrastructure and tourism initiatives, among others. Qatar has become a major venue on the international sport circuit, has hosted numerous major international conferences such as the continuing Doha round of World Trade Organization trade negotiations and has contributed \$100 million in relief for Hurricane Katrina victims. The strategically located nation has also hosted the United States Central Command regional military headquarters during the Iraq War, which began in 2003 (Petersen, 2006).

"These policies seem to have been deliberately designed to put Qatar on the map. Few countries seem to have taken the lessons and importance of branding to heart more thoroughly than Qatar has in recent years (Petersen, 2006)."

Mere exposure and branding theories all relate to nation branding. Merely exposing consumers to brand names, such as Qatar, may stimulate purchases according to mere exposure theory, which also states that the more exposure a person has to a stimulus such as a brand, the more a person will remember it, like it and choose it (Zajonc, 1968). Repeated exposure of a stimulus has also been shown to increase its attractiveness (Kunst-Wilson and Zajonc, 1980). Balasubramanian (1994) states that editorial placements, such as mentions of Qatar in newspaper articles, are remembered considerably longer than expensive and obtrusive advertising messages.

Branding of a product, company or nation has been shown to affect consumer awareness (Rossiter and Percy, 1987), recall and recognition (Bettman, 1979), and association (Chattopadhyay and Alba, 1988).

One scholar summarized the idea of the rise of a brand state. "A brand is best described as a customer's idea about a product; the brand state comprises the outside

world's ideas about a particular country. Image and reputation have become essential parts of a state's strategic capital. Like branded products, branded states depend on trust and customer satisfaction. And they are the harbingers of a postmodern politics based on style as much as substance (Van Hamm 2001).”

Just as Germany has built a reputation for fine automobiles and Italy is known for its food and art and France is renowned for its wine and fashion, Qatar appears to be actively working to establish itself as a leader in sports, education, finance, tourism and other attributes. Widespread positive newspaper mentions about Qatar may help the nation build its reputation as a unique entity among the Gulf nations. This research aimed to measure the coverage and perceptions of Qatar in major world newspapers, one indicator of Qatar's branding success.

II. HYPOTHESES AND EXPLORATORY QUESTIONS

The research project was designed to measure news coverage and perceptions of Qatar in major newspapers around the world. It was expected that newspapers geographically located in or associated with the West (North America, Europe, Australia/New Zealand and Israel) and the East (Asia, the Middle East and Africa) would differ in tone, story and page prominence and prevalence of topics. To measure these effects, a content analysis of newspaper mentions of Qatar was conducted in March, 2008. Three hypotheses and one exploratory question were developed.

H1: Newspaper mentions of Qatar in the East will be more positive in tone than newspaper mentions of Qatar in the West.

H2: Newspaper mentions of Qatar in the West will more frequently appear in prominent page positions than newspaper mentions of Qatar in the East.

H3: Newspaper mentions of Qatar in the West will more frequently appear in prominent story positions than newspaper mentions of Qatar in the East.

EQ1: Will newspaper mentions of Qatar in the West differ in the prevalence of topics from newspaper mentions of Qatar in the East?

III. METHODOLOGY

The LexisNexis database was used to conduct the content analysis of newspaper mentions of Qatar over a two-year time period, Jan. 1, 2006 to Dec. 31, 2007. Any mention of Qatar published in any non-advertising portion of the newspapers was the unit of analysis. Researchers used the search term “Qatar” under “all newspapers” in the LexisNexis database. This yielded 14,244 newspaper articles that mentioned Qatar during the time period studied.

A simple random sample of 400 newspaper articles, generated using a reputable online random number generator (Urbaniak and Plous, 2008), was used to ensure that each of the newspaper articles had an equal chance of being selected. A total of 706 mentions of Qatar were published in the 400 articles; each mention was analyzed separately.

The newspaper articles in the sample came from 18 nations including Australia, Canada, China, England, France, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Korea, Lebanon, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russia, Scotland, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand and the United States.

More than 70 different newspapers were included in the sample. A few of the major newspapers in the sample were *Belfast Telegraph*, *Canberra Times*, *China Daily*, *Daily Mail (London)*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Jerusalem Post*, *Korea Times*, *New Straits Times*, *Newsday*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Australian*, *Globe and Mail*,

Guardian (London), Independent (London), Irish Times, Moscow Times, New Straits Times, Philadelphia Inquirer, Toronto Sun, New York Times, Washington Post and Wall Street Journal.

Two limitations of the study, which could have affected the results, were that only English language newspapers were searched from the LexisNexis database and that newspaper articles were only drawn from the LexisNexis database and not other sources. This likely resulted in more newspapers geographically located in or associated with the West than the East being selected. It is also possible that non-English language newspapers, which were not included, may have covered Qatar differently than English language newspapers.

The independent variables were the nation and East/West regions of the world in which the newspaper was published. Nations in the West were Australia, Canada, England, France, Ireland, Israel, New Zealand, Russia, Scotland and the United States. Nations in the East were China, Japan, Korea, Lebanon, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa and Thailand.

Dependent variables were tone toward Qatar itself (neutral, negative or positive), page placement (inside page, section front or front page), story placement (headline, lead paragraph, paired with a photograph/graphic or in the body of the story) and topic (economics, sports performance, sports business, general government, Al Jazeera, terrorism, war/violence, tourism/travel, celebrities, entertainment industry, food/culture, education, technology, religion, energy/oil/ gas exploration, energy/oil gas business, the Emir, transportation/airlines, the Sheika and population/geographic facts about Qatar).

The data was coded by three coders. Because of difficulty achieving 90 percent agreement or better on tone and topic after three coding trials, the three coders coded all items in the entire sample separately and then conferred on items in which there was disagreement throughout the coding process until agreement was reached among the three coders. Less than five percent of the coded items required discussion among the coders, effectively rendering about a 95 percent overall agreement rate.

Chi-square tests for statistical significance were used to test all hypotheses. With a sample size of 706 mentions of Qatar, the probability level was set at .05.

IV. RESULTS

Since all data were nominal, chi-square analyses were used to test the three hypotheses and address the exploratory question. Data were collapsed in some cases due to the number of low frequency cells; this was done to improve the accuracy of the statistical analyses.

H1: Newspaper mentions of Qatar in the East will be more positive and less negative in tone than newspaper mentions of Qatar in the West.

Table 1 presents evidence that the first hypothesis was supported. Newspaper mentions of Qatar in the East were significantly more positive (12.8% in the East compared to 8.2% in the West) and significantly less negative (3.4% in the East compared to 8.0% in the West) than newspaper mentions of Qatar in Western newspapers.

TABLE 1: WORLD REGION BY TONE

World Region	Negative	Neutral	Positive
West	42/8.0%	442/83.9%	43/8.2%
East	6/3.4%	150/83.8%	23/12.8%

Note. n= 706; chi-square= 7.33; df= 2; p= <.05

H2: Newspaper mentions of Qatar in the West will more frequently appear in prominent page positions than newspaper mentions of Qatar in the East.

As evident in Table 2, the second hypothesis was also supported. Newspaper mentions of Qatar in the West did appear on section front pages of newspapers significantly more frequently than newspaper mentions of Qatar in the East. In fact, none of the newspaper mentions of Qatar in the East appeared on section fronts. No mentions of Qatar in the entire sample appeared on the front page of any of the newspapers.

TABLE 2: WORLD REGION BY PAGE PLACEMENT

World Region	Inside Page	Section Front
West	502/95.3%	25/4.7%
East	179/100.0%	0/0.0%

Note. n= 706; chi-square= 8.8; df= 1; p= <.01

H3: Newspaper mentions of Qatar in the West will more frequently appear in prominent story positions than newspaper mentions of Qatar in the East.

The third hypothesis was not supported, as seen in Table 3. There was a larger percentage of mentions of Qatar in headlines/lead paragraphs/paired with a photograph or graphic in newspapers in the West than in newspapers in the East, but this difference was not statistically significant.

TABLE 3: WORLD REGION BY STORY PLACEMENT

World Region	Body	Headline/Lead Paragraph/ Paired with Photo or Graphic
West	476/90.3%	51/9.7%
East	166/93.9%	11/6.1%

Note. n= 706; chi-square= 2.08; df= 1; p= n.s.

EQ1: Will newspaper mentions of Qatar in the West differ in the prevalence of topics from newspaper mentions of Qatar in the East?

The exploratory question revealed significant differences between mentions of Qatar in newspapers in the West and newspapers in the East concerning the prevalence of topics, as Table 4 indicates. Topping the list as the most frequent topic associated with Qatar in newspaper mentions in the West and the East, was sports performance or sports business. A third of the mentions in newspapers in the East associated Qatar with sports and a fourth of newspapers in the West did the same. Population figures and geographic facts, such as where Qatar is located, represented the second most frequent topic. Economics was third on the list, followed by tourism/travel/transportation/airlines. Surprisingly, energy/oil/gas exploration and business was only the sixth most frequent topic in newspaper mentions of Qatar in the

West and the fifth most frequent topic in newspaper mentions of Qatar in the East. Even more unexpected, terrorism/war/violence and Al Jazeera television, which is headquartered in Doha and is largely funded by the Emir of Qatar, rounded out the bottom of the list.

TABLE 4: WORLD REGION BY TOPIC

Topic	West	East
Sports Performance/Sports Business	136/25.8%	60/33.5%
Population/Geographic Facts	126/23.9%	54/30.2%
Economics	104/19.7%	26/14.5%
Tourism/Travel/Transportation/Airlines	53/10.1%	17/9.5%
General Government/the Emir/the Sheika	40/7.6%	5/2.8%
Energy/Oil/Gas Exploration and Business	29/5.5%	10/5.6%
Entertainers/Celebrities/Entertainment Industry/ Arts/Food/Culture/Education/Technology/Religion	17/3.2%	3/1.7%
Terrorism/War/Violence	13/2.5%	0/0.0%
Al Jazeera Television	9/1.7%	4/2.2%

Note. n= 706; chi-square= 17.50; df= 8; p= <.05

V. DISCUSSION

The research has shown that Qatar's effort to make its mark on the world's radar screen has had some success. The fact that there were 14,244 mentions of Qatar in more than 70 newspapers published in 18 nations in two years is the first evidence that Qatar is taking actions that result in getting noticed by major newspapers published around the world.

The tone of newspaper mentions about Qatar also provides support for Qatar's strategy. Only 42 (8.0%) of the mentions of Qatar in Western newspapers were negative and an even smaller number, 6 (3.4%) of newspaper mentions of Qatar in the East were negative. This means that the overwhelming majority were either neutral or positive (92% in the West and 95.6% in the East). This suggests that newspapers in the East and the West may view Qatar as a serious contender in gaining the world attention the nation seeks.

While Qatar is enjoying good frequency of mentions in newspapers, prominent placement on newspaper pages will require more effort. Qatar only showed up on section front pages, such as the first page of the business section or the first page of the sports section, 25 times. That all of these occurrences were in Western newspapers suggests that Qatar may command more interest in the West than the East. On the other hand, it may be the case that newspapers in the East are more familiar with Qatar than newspapers in the West and do not find the news out of Qatar to be as novel and therefore, do not assign it the same newsworthiness. The fact that Qatar did not show up on any front pages may suggest that there is little strongly negative or catastrophic news, both of which command prominent attention from newspapers, coming out of Qatar, which is generally a positive.

Prominent placement of Qatar within newspaper stories fared better than prominent page placement. Almost 10% of mentions of Qatar in Western newspapers (51/9.7%) and Qatar newspaper mentions in the East (11/6.1%) were in prominent story positions such as in headlines, lead paragraphs or paired with photographs/graphics. Newspapers in the West may be judging news items out of Qatar to be more newsworthy than newspapers in the East.

Topics associated with newspaper mentions of Qatar revealed some interesting trends. Qatar's efforts to promote sports events and investment in sports infrastructure are clearly reflected in the fact that sports appeared as the most frequent topic associated with mentions of Qatar in the newspapers. A fourth of the mentions in the East were about sports and a third of the mentions in the West were about sports.

Interestingly, the second most frequent topic was population figures and geographic facts about Qatar. Many newspapers included these topics as a way to explain basic facts about the small nation and where it is located. Such coverage works to educate newspaper readers and provide basic facts about Qatar, which does help the nation gain brand and name recognition.

Given continuing large investments in infrastructure and general economic growth of Qatar, it is not surprising that economics landed third most frequently on the list of topics.

Surprisingly, energy/oil/gas exploration and business news about this industry only constituted about 5 percent of newspaper mentions of Qatar in the West and the East, despite the fact that Qatar is one of the major Middle East suppliers of natural gas.

Terror/war/violence and Al Jazeera landed at the bottom of the list of topics. Newspapers may understand that violence in the Middle East region has not spilled over into Qatar and Al Jazeera may be so well known that newspapers do not feel a need to connect it with Qatar.

Overall, it appears that newspapers in the West and the East are covering Qatar in ways that help the progressive nation gain more positive notice around the world, a key to its success.

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