



Global Media and Cultural Identity: Opportunities and challenges for Morocco in the Digital Era

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Received: 12/08/2021	Abstract
Accepted: 03/09/2021	<i>Anthropologists and media analysts have long recognized the Internet and satellite channels as some of the most powerful tools that add tremendous value to the knowledge and experiences of youth. A common interpretation of this idea is that new media technologies have become an important source for information, news updates, cross-cultural communication, socializing, and entertainment. The effects of these tools on young people have predominantly been studied with respect to academic as well as health features. Drawing on data from a survey capturing the digital behaviors of Moroccan students, this article complements previous studies by examining the impact of Internet and satellite channels on the behaviors of Moroccan students. It explores the implicit and denotative consequences of modern media upon the values, behaviors, and lifestyles of young Moroccans. Further, the paper addresses the effects of the massive dissemination of global cultural products on teenagers' attitudes towards their cultural values. Additionally, the research assumes that inducing behavioral change is overlooked once media outlets start demonizing the uniqueness of local cultures, thus ignite resistance to unconventional values among youth.</i>
Keywords: Global media, Virtual world, Cultural identity, Identity politics, Digital transformations.	

1. INTRODUCTION

Global communication technologies have transformed the world into a global village and turned attention to external events at the expense of local realities. According to some Arab intellectuals, while these technologies can youth thrive in an interconnected world, they can also have a disturbing impact on their behavior and mental health (Abdelhalim,1998; Assahmarany, 2002). The Internet, also known as a global system of computer networks and information superhighways, has become an extremely significant tool for disseminating global cultures and for distracting individuals from issues related to domestic and local events. This condition can be described as “cultural disaffection” where families and societies are endangered by the alienation and dislocation effects that are associated with different global media. They contribute effectively in diffusing foreign rebarbative cultural messages, undermine local values, contort local identity, and alienate young audiences. Consequently, they attenuate local values and trivialize teenagers' attachment to the culture of their communities. Besides, “our sense of identity who we think we are- and of immediate situation-where we think we are- have become powerfully linked with forms of culture which are mediated from beyond geographical and temporal confines of every day and the personal” (O’Sullivan and Jewkes, 1996, p. 1).

In the second half of the 1990s, Morocco witnessed a massive invasion of global media products. The proliferation of satellite channels and the dissemination of internet services have extended and facilitated Moroccan youth's consumption of culturally offensive media materials. Even Pan-Arab Satellite channels seem to be premeditatedly obliterating local identities, thus distracting individuals from major political, economic, and social issues. However, while data on the programs that Moroccan youth watch on TV abounds, absent are their Internet habits as well as the reasons why they choose particular channels and shows.

2. GLOBAL MEDIA, THE INTERNET, AND THE END OF GEOGRAPHY

Global media and the internet raise concerns in public discourse. In terms of digital media use and youth, the most common recommendation has been to monitor and limit access to digital devices to downplay the negative effects of the massive dissemination of digitized products (Boulianne & Theocharis, 2020). What we are specifically interested in is not media effects per se, but the more complex and adverse impacts on the physical and psychological wellness of young people in Morocco as most research warns us about the damaging consequences of digital media on all aspects of youth's life. The young generation is described as technology addicts who are vulnerable to online 'sexploitation' and hostile digital content that can harm the conduct of children and youngsters. (Jenkins, Ito, & Boyd, 2016).

In most research, the impact of different amounts of media content or even the forms of the media (McLuhan, 1995-1996) has been analyzed to determine what was likely to have influenced audiences' behaviors. It was the globalization of the media and the Internet that enriched the mass communications agenda with such expressions as "the death of distance," "the end of geography," and a "broadcasting without borders."

Amongst the most persistently asked questions by social researchers, and perhaps the least answered, concern the cultural effects of various media on audiences. For Manuel Castells (1997), the Spanish sociologist, the world as we see it and our private lives are molded through two diametrical trends: globalization and integrity of identities. We cannot deny that the localization and adaptation of global media content to meet the needs of local identity has a pragmatic and economic nature. At the same time, we must admit that the globalization of media has done more than just inform and entertain audiences; it has also promoted a Westernized way of life. Consequently, in Straubhaar and LaRose's words, the long-term outcome of such "revolution" is the creation of consumer culture "in which the acquisition of goods and services is the foundation of values, pleasures, and goals" (2004, p. 336). The publicity of weird behaviors and irregular conduct have tantalized young people by glimpses of the artificial reality and the luring world of lecherousness (Assahmarany, 2002). These media, Mankekar (2004) asserts, reinforce the legitimacy of western cultural systems by emphasizing the message that laxity and promiscuity are a top priority, while circuitously impairing local value systems.

The information revolution has itself created a new social order that could be called the "network society" (Castells, 2005). The most important characteristics of this "wired" society are its fluid and voluminous digital habits that have been established by a massive and all-inclusive media system. In fact, in the last decade, terms like 'national TV' and "local media" have been replaced by new notions like 'wired society', 'digital generation' and 'information society.' Yet, this new rhetoric that we hear now and then has paid little attention to the potential effects of this digital mutation on young viewers, although they argue on their behalf. Of course, it would be premature to assess the consequences of these global processes but we cannot deny that there is a dialectic relationship among the national and the international, the global and the local, the transnational and the regional, traditional media and new media in a technology-saturated environment, loaded with a globalized production and distribution of cultural products, including

movies, television programs, and music videos. Besides, possible influences of the proliferation of global sources of information are not only related to politics and economy, as the Arab Spring proved, but they are also related to culture and cultural values, especially that the digital divide has widened the gap between parents and children although it is argued that “as more time elapses and television systems develop further, it begins to seem that relevance to local culture may give many kinds of local or national programming an advantage” (Straubhaar, p. 77).

Today, the different manifestations of identity are becoming more and more influenced by power struggles that have an extremely fundamental contributing source for its inception: global media. However, it is feared that the increasing diversification of media outlets may result in youth’s aggregation under the form of (re)constructed identities. They gainsay the role of the family, shake up the traditional order of transferring cultural principles from one generation to another, and shake the cornerstones of personal relationships. Worst still, this growing unfitness of most families to respond to this immense flow of televised assaults might lead to what we may call a “cultural contortion.” in the collective consciousness of Moroccan youth.

The globalization of mass communication technologies, Chris Barker (1999) says, has provided a proliferating resource for both the construction and reconstruction of identities (p. 3). In other words, it could be argued that global media outlets have become a leading resource for the construction of an “identity project” whereby Giddens (1991) means that identity is not fixed: [identity is] created and built on, always in process, a moving towards rather than an arrival. Such a project builds on what we think we are now in the light of our past and present circumstances together with what we think we would like to be, the trajectory of our hoped-for future. (Cited in Barker, 1999, p. 3).

Indeed, the more media resources that are accessible to us, the more multifaceted the weave of our identities becomes. This process provides us with a mass of cultural resources through which we can all have access to varied, multicultural material more than ever before. Such ongoing changes in the media environment raise new and important questions as few people would deny that the new technologies play a central role in our lives: our homes are saturated with media, and we live in a digital sphere where teenagers carry miniaturized portable media with them wherever they go. Some media critics are even condemnatory of these modern ongoing changes in youth’s social spheres. They claim that only short-sighted people or groups with certain ideologies would deny “the massive upheavals” taking place in consumerist societies via modern media.

This novel situation threatens traditional social institutions and alters both culture and collective identity. Simultaneously, it creates wealth and poverty and thus introduces fresh threats and opportunities.

3. MOROCCAN CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE INFORMATION ERA

Castells (1997) defines *Identity* as “the process of construction of meaning based on a cultural attribute, or a related set of cultural attributes, that is given priority over other sources of meaning” (6). This definition has been redefined with the advance of the information and communication revolution as well as the emergence of new technologies. They are regarded as important players in the globalization process. They exert their power and influence to alter the nature and essence of human societies (Rapping, 1997).

Globalization works to transcend and even, at times, to supersede national cultures, it also creates a common cultural world “where everyone who is ‘connected’ has access to the same messages, the same icons, and the same calligraphy, produced and disseminated through the tightly controlled transnational corporate networks of television and film” (Cameron & Stein, 2000, p.

20). It would be a mistake, then, to overlook new forms of social connectedness between global cultural flows of media materials and the possibility for transformation in local cultural values (Ekström & Östman, 2015; Kahne & Bowyer, 2018; Vissers & Stolle, 2014).

Some scholars (e.g., Chomsky, 1992 and Giddens, 1999b), go even further in emphasizing the significance of media and consider the globalized media and the Internet as battlefields where media regimes fundamentally affect, and usually determine the meaning and realm of politics and shape the power structure within countries. At most points in time, the structure of this process is largely invisible and supremacy is entrusted to those who produce, control, and diffuse information more effectively (Mowlana, 1998).

4. RESEARCH SETTING AND TARGET POPULATION

4.1. THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

These research participants belong to what is called “the cyber generation”. They can be defined as Moroccan teenagers who go online approximately daily, and who spend less time in front of the TV set. They are unlikely to have home computers and use mobile phones regularly. The project focused predominantly on how the Internet and transnational channels affect youth’s social and cultural experiences.

4.2. THE INSTRUMENT

The major instrument of this study was a questionnaire that is divided as follows: section one includes questions relating to general background information on the respondents and asks questions about teenagers’ definitions of culture and identity as well as the type of media they use the most. Section two includes questions relating to the Internet usage of the respondents and their feedback on the existing Internet habits (since many Moroccan TV programs suggest that young Moroccans are addicted to cyberspace although remarkably little research has been conducted in the field). Section three includes questions relating to teens’ attitudes vis-à-vis transnational channels. The content was based on the literature review and included both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Confidentiality of the data was maintained and respondents’ names were not collected as part of the survey procedure.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the site (<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>), which is an International website that features up-to-date global Internet usage, population, and social media statistics, Morocco is ranked amongst the top African Internet countries (It has Africa’s third-largest Internet user population: 15.7 million). This is dependable evidence that the number of Moroccan cybercasts is noteworthy. For Talal Abu-Ghazaleh (2010), the president of Global Alliance for ICT and Development (GAID), this growth in Internet use among Arab users shows that “the number of Internet users increased by 300 percent in the world between 2000 and 2008, while in Arab countries the ratio is reaching 1200 percent.”

In her article “Youth in Morocco: How does the Use of the Internet shape the daily life of the youth and what are its repercussions?” Ines Baune (2005) stipulates that the Internet provides new dimensions, which offer Moroccan adolescents “countless opportunities and experiences beyond national and cultural boundaries” (p. 128). She also reports that:

The young generation in Morocco today is the first to use the Internet extensively, but it is important to realize that it is mostly in public cybercafés and not in the home. Internet access is still rare in private homes, and the same applies to access in the school, university, or workplace. As cybercafés are occupied mainly by young

people, we can speak of a new field of culture: it is where they spend their time, meet each other, have experiences in real or virtual life. (128)

Ines Baune (2005) notes, this real or virtual experience that cyberspace provides confronts adolescence with an endless worldwide flow of information, ideas and values force them to find their position in Morocco and to define their identities (p. 137). At the same time, Moroccan teenagers do not have the cognitive skills needed to navigate the Internet safely as knowledge of search strategies is limited if not nonexistent, and parental control is rarely present. Yet, they are extremely skilled at using several pages at the same time, check e-mail accounts, and chatting. These factors tend to increase young people's potential exposure to culturally and politically multifaceted material on the Internet.

While it is reasonable that many teenagers have access to the Internet today, I believe that this use of culturally loaded online material creates a mini-revolution as, in Andrew Hammond's words, all types of "repressed, hidden debates and sociopolitical groups have been afforded space, from arguments over who built the Pyramids to Islamist politics to belly dancing" (Andrew Hammond, 2007, p.121).

Compared to their parents, Moroccan youth are more knowledgeable about how to do miscellaneous tasks on the Internet, be they positive or negative. Therefore, at a time when family ties become weaker and more ambiguous and children's lives become more complicated and technology-bound, modern technologies and schools assume the educational role that families are supposed to be responsible for, which increases the dissociation of teenagers from family life. Global media technologies showcase the trends that run around the world and make it difficult to communicate because the traditional opportunities to interact have shrunk or have simply been destroyed.

Youth's activity, curiosity, audacity, urgency, emotional volatility, and more importantly, the unpredictability of their actions, are all properties of natural growth that make their upbringing in the digital era hard work. At the same time, multinational communication corporations are trying to influence consumer societies like Morocco by using typical western cultural products which, they claim, aim at bridging the gap between the West and the rest of the world. Most Moroccan parents are neither capable of following the pace of modern technology nor can they supervise youth's access to sources and networks (by restricting online time or using filters). Research results in Europe also concur with the main concern expressed by Moroccan parents, which has to do with the number of time children spend online, taking precedence over fears related to the content or the social contacts that young people may be maintaining, as reported by Garmendia et al. (2021).

Given the magnitude of the issue and the crucial role that the family plays in positive child development, this article considers parental regulation to be a practicable strategy for reorienting youth towards culturally and ethically safe information sources. Parents have to use huge efforts to implement the Internet for some positive change and to "foster individuality, self-regulation, and self-assertion by being attuned, supportive, and acquiescent to the child's special needs and demands" (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62). At the cultural level, it is hard to claim that Moroccan youth are savvy Internet users who are capable of deciphering culturally and socially hostile material while they do not have enough local sources from which they can gather information. As a result, parenting in the age of the Internet becomes immensely challenging. The obvious conflict between what teenagers are taught at home and what the Internet offers them needs to be better explored and understood by educators and policymakers (Jenkins et al., 2016; Twenge, 2017). Parents' knowledge about healthy media habits and appropriate Internet behaviors is not consistent with

the body of knowledge applied by media professionals. Therefore, understanding how and with what effectiveness parents mediate Internet use is of extreme importance.

Table 1. Web sites where Moroccan youths spend most of their time

Websites you surf	Frequency
No answer	0,48%
Educational sites	23,62%
Sports sites	12,65%
Pornographic sites	3,12%
Social media	20,50%
Forums	10,57%
Entertainment, jokes and games Sites	29.06%

The majority of respondents (23, 62%) say that they surf educational sites regularly while 20,50% of young people tend to trust social media, the third majority of youth (29.06%) report they tune into entertainment, jokes, and games sites. The other websites that youth surfs are sports sites (13, 29%), forums (10, 57%), and pornographic sites (3, 12%). Only 0, 48% of the respondents did not specify why they surf the Net.

The worldwide web is important to youth in itself as it is one of the most dominant ways of directing youth, with both educational sites and social media being the main objectives behind Internet use. The results above (table 1) show that youth are more and more interested in acquiring knowledge through educational sites as well as using social media apps for several communication purposes. The popular perception is that young people are immersed in gadgets and technology in a hazardous manner. However, table 1 above disconfirms this myth by showing that young people's immersion in their devices and the time spent on them is not due to an obsession with the technology per se, but largely due to the Internet's ability to facilitate communication and to enhance young people's pursuit of educational material. For most, the focus of their passion is not so much pornography or sports, as it is usually stipulated, but rather how this medium can help them communicate with others, learn or have fun. The statistics show pornographic sites in themselves are "invisible" to most young respondents, although it might be claimed that young Moroccans are not comfortable and are even reticent speaking about any bad sites they might surf, simply because the collective conscience of Moroccans abhors that. Nevertheless, although the percentage of young people who surf pornographic sites (3,12%) seems to be insignificant, from both ethical and religious perspectives, the number should be startling, especially that the age group in question is significant (16 to 21). Arguably, this percentage is statistically more significant if we bear in mind that, as table 2 below shows, the majority of the pupils (55.90%) say their Millennial parents do not care about their internet usage in addition to the fact that in Morocco, laws, and procedures curtailing freedom, notably Internet access, are, though enacted, seldom implemented.

Table 2: Internet usage and parents' views about internet use

Parents Attitude	Percentage
Parents are not concerned about teenagers' Internet use	55,90%
Parents are confident in knowing the appropriate amount of Internet time for their children	27,50%
Parents Limits on Internet Usage	15,30%
Did not specify	1,30%

With all this in mind, it seems that teenagers in modern societies, as Jan Jagodzinski (2008) suggests, are faced “with the task of mastering digitized technologies and becoming media savvy to deal with the online culture that now shapes their lives” (p. 6). The challenges to both families and governments are even graver than before, particularly concerning Internet usage. Global and regional cultural contents unfavorable to local cultural peculiarities are accused of exacerbating Moroccan identity. Under these conditions, local identities are, according to Stuart Hall (cited in Ines Baune, 2005), “de-centered, dislocated and fragmented” (p. 132).

It is worth mentioning that Internet use in Morocco is the highest among urban, middle- and upper-class groups (Baune, 2005). Besides, the growing emergence of cybercafés and game nets facilitates wide access to the obnoxious cultural products to young generations, opening space for social critique and discussions of the destabilizing effects of networked information technologies on local identity:

The crisis of identity manifests itself in a loss of a stable ‘sense of self’ in a set of double displacement, which Hall describes on the one hand as “the displacement of the individual from his social and cultural world”, and on the other hand, as the “displacement from themselves” (p.132).

As a consequence, identity is no longer seen as involving the self’s relationships within a single tradition; rather it is regarded as the self’s acquisition of a multitude of abilities through the experiences with the outer, different, and ambiguously miscellaneous world, along with its masses of cultures and values. In other words, in the development of Moroccan youth’s identity, the Internet plays a central part as “it constitutes our daily life, and secondly, its potential to exceed geographical boundaries makes the territorialization and de-territorialization of identities possible” (Baune, p. 132). Thus, Webster et al. (2020) assert, it has become obvious that thanks to the massive digitization of public spheres, individuals and social groups together with their activity are becoming more and more the main “carriers of public meaning, history, and art” (p. 6).

For Ferrucci (2018), the influence of globalized media on the change in communications between members of the family, and even between society and the state is also an indicator that there is a “changing role of society within the hierarchy of influence models when producing content” (p. 6). Furthermore, according to Wukich (2021), digital spheres have also changed the process of developing and transmitting traditional content, “which has resulted in improving users’ awareness and changes in government collaboration strategies with social networks and society” (p. 187).

6. CONCLUSION

Despite the restraints that families might impose on young people's Internet habits, the globalization of the Internet and TV programming through miniaturized digital devices like smartphones, iPhones, and iPads has certainly demonstrated that parents can no longer interfere with their children's viewing preferences. Besides, the establishment of rules related to TV viewing and Internet usage (when, with whom, where, and how much) and restricting certain programs or stipulating conditions to TV viewing are merely impossible.

A defining struggle for the Moroccan society should be fought by parents, intellectuals, and media elites to maintain their conventional power to direct and determine the cultural values that are deemed significant for young people. They should express their interest in the future age of media culture and examine if young people are yielding too easily to the authority of transnational cultural values.

Global media products have potentially longer shelf lives and stronger impressions on youth. All too often, the paternal perception of the material that is disseminated through the internet and television is one of fuddle, uncongenial, and ill-assorted popular culture. Therefore, because some Moroccan parents belong to a technologically and linguistically illiterate generation that will hardly manage to catch up with the fast-paced world of globalized media, they will ineluctably find it difficult to decode many of the culturally loaded notions that are broadcast through dubbed programs and Internet platforms.

Ironically, while many countries have become primarily concerned with the ecology of the media, Morocco has not yet considered the moral consequences of several digital environments that champion pandemonium while openly portraying local cultures as backward and corrupt. The implication is that the unprocessed digitized cultural products could be dysfunctional and dangerous and may even become an acceptable and legitimate substitute for local cultural values.

It is now time to incorporate effective measures to provide a fresh perspective and contribute to the ongoing discourses about the cultural meaning of the Information Age (Al-saedi, 2020). It is not apparent if well-established social contexts and values of family life mean that youth's use of television and the Internet is still patterned in conventional ways. Whether they are preserving or undermining social ties within families is a controversial issue. This conclusion does not substantiate any claims for or against the modern-day cyber spheres. Therefore, as modern media use continues to increase and become an everyday form of communication, there is a need to continue research.

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