

THE SOCIAL-CULTURAL DIMENSION OF GLOBALIZATION IN KUWAIT: IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUNG KUWAITI ADULTS IDENTITY NEGOTIATION

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Abstract

Globalization has meant an important conceptual change in the way we think about our world. The interconnectedness (on an unprecedented scale) that globalization engenders has implications for how individuals organize their lives in response to the new social realities of the world we live in. In view of the above, this presentation examines the following issues: (a) the extent of globalization in Kuwaiti society, with a specific focus on social globalization, (b) young adult Kuwaitis self-reported experiences of selected indicators of social globalization, (c) the associations between the selected indicators of social globalization and an index of bicultural identity, and (d) finally, the implications of social globalization for identity negotiation among young Kuwaitis.

Much of the literature on globalization has used the nation as the unit of analyses

However, this presentation takes a social-psychological slant on the globalization debate and investigates the relations between aspects of social globalization and young adult Kuwaitis sense of bicultural identity. This is premised on the argument that the younger generation in the Arab world may be more exposed to Western and other non-Western worldviews and cultures (Solberg, 2002).

Arnett (2000) offers two lines of argument on why in attempting to understand the effects of globalization on identity development, adolescents and young adults should be the foci. First, Arnett (2000) argues that youths and young adults' identities are still in flux and may not have fully committed to a way of life. Second, adolescents and young adults are more likely to be exposed to the global media and consumerism through movies, internet, music, and TV.

Taylor (1991) also contended that globalization has given rise to a more self-centered form of individualism that emphasizes, almost exclusively, the fulfillment and authenticity of the individual. However, as identity theorists such as Erikson (1968) and Tajfel (1981) point out, identity negotiation is not solely an individual undertaking.

On the other hand, identification with social groups are, however, also complicated and eroded by the increasing prevalence of ideas that individual identity is seen as a product of self-construction, open to free choice. Consequently, group identification has also become largely a matter of individual choice (Calhoun 1994). The interaction of cultures via globalization can lead to the transformation of identity (Arnett, 2002) through a process of bicultural identity formation – adoption of a global identity and a local identity that is defined by traditional values and family obligations (Arnett, 2002). These views suggest that the forces that shape identity are no longer restricted to a locality, but have a complex mixture of both local and global elements (Pieterse, 2009).

Methodology

This presentation relies on a secondary analysis of data collected on a sample of 146 undergraduate university students in Kuwait who are able to read and write English were used. Of the sample, about 53 percent were females, while about 47 percent were males. The males were slightly older (21.35 years) than they females (20.68 years).

Measures

Social globalization. The eight questions chosen for this analyses, were intended to represent the three dimensional structure of social globalization: information flows, personal contact, and cultural proximity

Bicultural identity

An adapted version of the AHIMSA acculturation scale (Unger et al., 2002) was used to assess bicultural identity.

Results.

Globalization in Kuwaiti society. Using data from KOF, it shows that Kuwait has been penetrated by forces of social globalization in the three domains of information flows, personal contact, and cultural proximity.

Reported experiences of social globalization. The means of some of the items used to assess social globalization on an individual level were relatively high with high variability. Example, items such as using (a) the Internet to exchange information, (b) the Internet for non-Kuwaiti entertainment, (c) the Internet for social networking, and (d) non-Kuwaiti TV for entertainment.

Correlations between index of biculturalism and social globalization. Some of the items used to assess social globalization also exhibited significant association with the index of bicultural identity. Specifically, using (a) the Internet for exchange of information, (b) the Internet for non-Kuwaiti entertainment, (c) the Internet for social networking, and (d) Internet for getting the news were all positively associated with the index of biculturalism. As well, watching Non-Kuwaiti TV for international news was also linked with biculturalism.

Implications for Identity Formation

Young Kuwaiti adults are traversing multiple worlds – the local and the global. Given that Kuwaiti culture is a collective one, pursuing individuation could have repercussions for the individual and family (Dwairy, 1998).

In negotiating identity, one could have a both a public and private identity. The public identity would conform to the general standards and mores of Kuwaiti culture; the private, would only be exhibited in the company of like-minded individuals away from the public scrutiny.

Furthermore, a focus on cultural and social processes is necessary to understand identity negotiation and construction (e.g., Jacobson, 1997, Peek, 2005).

Keywords: Identity, Kuwait, Sociocultural; Social Globalization, Young Adults

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has meant an important conceptual change in the way we think about our world. The interconnectedness (on an unprecedented scale) that globalization engenders has implications for how individuals organize their lives in response to the new social realities of the world we live in.

In view of the above, this presentation examines the following issues: (1) The extent of globalization in Kuwaiti society, with a specific focus on social globalization. (2) Young adult Kuwaitis self-reported experiences of selected indicators of social globalization. (3) The associations between the selected indicators of social globalization and an index of bicultural identity, and (4) Finally, the implications of social globalization for identity negotiation among young Kuwaitis.

As an organizational framework, I first offer an operational conceptualization of globalization, followed by some selected theoretical work linking globalization to identity issues. Pursuant to that, the methodological approach employed will be summarized, after which the results and implications of the results will be discussed.

Conceptualizing Globalization

Globalization, a multidimensional construct, can be conceptualized as both a process and an outcome. As a process, globalization is seen as taking place across geographic and national boundaries to produce patterns of connections and interdependence among economies, cultures, and governments that are mediated through the free flow of goods

and services, capital, people, information and ideas, and technology to enable an almost instantaneous communication across space and time (Clark, 2000; Keohane & Nye, 2000; Norris, 2000; Sirgy, Lee, Miller & Littlefield 2004).

As an outcome, the effects of globalization have been conceptualized in two main ways (Helliwell, 2002). First, for among its critics, globalization is viewed among other things, as economic hegemony (over local and national governments) by transnational corporations (Helliwell, 2002) and cultural homogenization (Restrepo, 2000). Proponents of globalization, on the other hand, see globalization as a means to the promotion of (a) competitiveness (Helliwell, 2002) and (b) enhancing human well-being (Tsai, 2006), especially in the developing world (Johnson, 2002).

Measuring globalization.

As a multidimensional construct, the first attempt at a quantitative assessment of globalization was the Kearney globalization index (KOF) (Kearney, 2007) which measures the dimensions of (a) economic integration, (b) personal contacts, (c) technology and (d) political integration at the national level. The KOF index of globalization, has indices for the three dimensions: (a) economic globalization – conceptualized as long distance flows of goods, capital and services, information and market exchanges; (b) political globalization – perceived as the diffusion of government policies; and (c) social globalization – characterized by the spread of ideas, information, images and people (Dreher, 2006; Dreher, Gaston & Martens, 2008).

Social globalization, as conceptualized is composed of three dimensions: personal contact, information flows, and cultural proximity. The dimension of personal contact as conceptualized was meant to assess direct interaction among people from different countries. “Information flows” was intended to assess the potential flow of ideas and images. Cultural proximity was not clearly defined in Dreher (2006) or Dreher et al. (2008). However, it appears that cultural proximity was intended to assess the consumption of cultural goods, and can be thought of as reflective of material that is reinforcing of traditional identities and includes images, dress, and lifestyle (Straubhaar, 1991, 1997, 2003; Sinclair, 1999). In essence, then, the social-cultural dimension of globalization includes the link between globalization, culture, and identity (Gunter & van der Hoeven, 2004).

Globalization and the Identity Discourse

Much of the literature on globalization has used the nation as the unit of analyses (e.g., Dreher, 2006; Dreher, Gaston, & Martens, 2008; Perkarskiene & Susniene, 2011; Sirgy, Lee, Miller & Littlefield 2004; Tsai, 2006), and examines its effects at the individual level (e.g., Javadi & Javadi, 2008; Kerimova, 2009; Wheeler, 2000; Zahid, 2007). However, this presentation takes a social-psychological slant on the globalization debate and investigates the relations between aspects social globalization and young adult Kuwaitis sense of bicultural identity. This is premised on the argument that the younger generation in the Arab world may be more exposed to Western and other non-Western worldviews and cultures (Solberg, 2002).

Arnett (2000) offers two lines of argument on why in attempting to understand the effects of globalization on identity development, adolescents and young adults should be the foci. First, Arnett (2000) argues that youths and young adults’ identities are still in flux and may not have fully committed to a way of life. Second, adolescents and young adults are more likely to be exposed to the global media and consumerism through movies, internet, music, and TV.

Restrepo (2000, p. 62) argued that globalization also has an impact of the culture, the “socially patterned human thought and behavior which is learned and shared . . . and consists of symbols, ideas, and patterns of behavior which are interrelated.” And, as observed by Bauman (2001), the changes associated with globalization have eroded most of the bases on which people used to anchor their identity. Thus acquiring an identity has become a struggle. Taylor (1991) also contended that globalization has given rise to a more self-centred form of individualism that emphasizes, almost exclusively, the fulfilment and authenticity of the individual. However, as identity theorists such as Erikson (1968) and Tajfel (1981) point out, identity negotiation is not solely an individual venture. On the other hand, identification with social groups are, however, also complicated and eroded by the increasing prevalence of ideas that individual identity is seen as a product of self-construction, open to free choice. Consequently, group identification has also become largely a matter of individual choice (Calhoun 1994).

Global flow via cultural interaction through increased movement of workers across national boundaries provides locals the opportunities for interaction with people of diverse cultural, racial, and religious backgrounds (Sirgy et al.,

2004; Restrepo, 2000). Such exposure may enrich the cultural well-being of local people (Sirgy et al., 2004; Restrepo, 2000). Through the internet it is possible to create a network of communications and solidarity which brings together people from different parts of the world into a virtual reality of relationships and linkages (Restrepo, 2000). Additionally, through travel, email and social networking, a global identity can be developed via the exposure to different ideas, customs, and cultures (Arnett, 2002).

The interaction of cultures via globalization can lead to the transformation of identity (Arnett, 2002) through a process of bicultural identity formation – adoption of a global identity and a local identity that is defined by traditional values and family obligations (Arnett, 2002). These views suggest that globalization has increased the options for identity negotiation and formation. Specifically, the forces associated with identity formation are thus no longer restricted to the local space, but have their origin on different levels varying from the local to the global. Individuals' identities have consequently become a complex mixture of both local and global elements (Pieterse, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

Participants

This presentation relies on a secondary analysis of data collected on a sample of 146 undergraduate university students in Kuwait who are able to read and write English were used. Of the sample, about 53 percent were females, while about 47 percent were males. The males were slightly older (21.35 years) than they females (20.68 years).

Measures

Social globalization.

Questions chosen for this analyses, were intended to represent the three dimensional structure of social globalization. The dimension of personal contact was examined using two questions that asked during the week, the number of hours of internet usage for (a) exchange of information and (b) social networking. The domain of information flows was assessed using four items that focused on two areas: television viewing habits and internet usage habits (through mobile and computer technology). The items were: During week hours of (a) non-Kuwaiti TV viewing for international news, (b) non-Kuwaiti TV for general information, (c) internet usage for general information, and (d) internet usage for getting the news.

All these items to some extent proxy people's potential for receiving news from other countries – they thus contribute to the global spread of ideas. The dimension of cultural proximity was assessed with two items focused on individuals' behaviors related to entertainment. The question asked: during week hours of (a) non-Kuwaiti TV viewing for entertainment, and (b) internet usage for non-Kuwaiti entertainment.

Bicultural identity.

An adapted version of the AHIMSA acculturation scale (Unger et al., 2002) was used. The AHIMSA includes questions that are relevant to adolescents, including their choice of friends, favorite music and television shows, favorite holidays, foods eaten at home, and general ways of thinking

RESULTS

Factor Analysis

Prior to data analysis, all the eight item values were transformed to a scale with the highest value equal to 10 and the lowest value equal to 0, by using the following simultaneous equations (Schriesheim & Novelli, 1989):

$$0 = a + b(x_{LT}), \text{ and} \quad (1)$$

$$10 = a + b(x_{HT}), \quad (2)$$

where,

x_{LT} = the lowest scale value in the expression being transformed, and

x_{HT} = the highest scale value in the expressions being transformed.

Principal axis factoring with oblique rotation was used to analyze the globalization items. Three factors were obtained (Table 1).

Table 1. Factor Analysis of Items

Items	Construct	Factors		
		1	2	3
Internet exchange of information	Personal Contact	0.81		
Internet for non-Kuwaiti entertainment	Cultural Proximity	0.69		
Internet for social networking	Personal Contact	0.55		
Non-Kuwaiti TV for entertainment	Cultural Proximity		0.56	
Non-Kuwaiti TV for international news	Information Flows		0.62	
Non-Kuwaiti TV for general information	Information Flows		0.88	
Internet for general information	Information Flows			0.56
Internet for getting the news	Information Flows			0.83
	Variance	21%	21%	15%

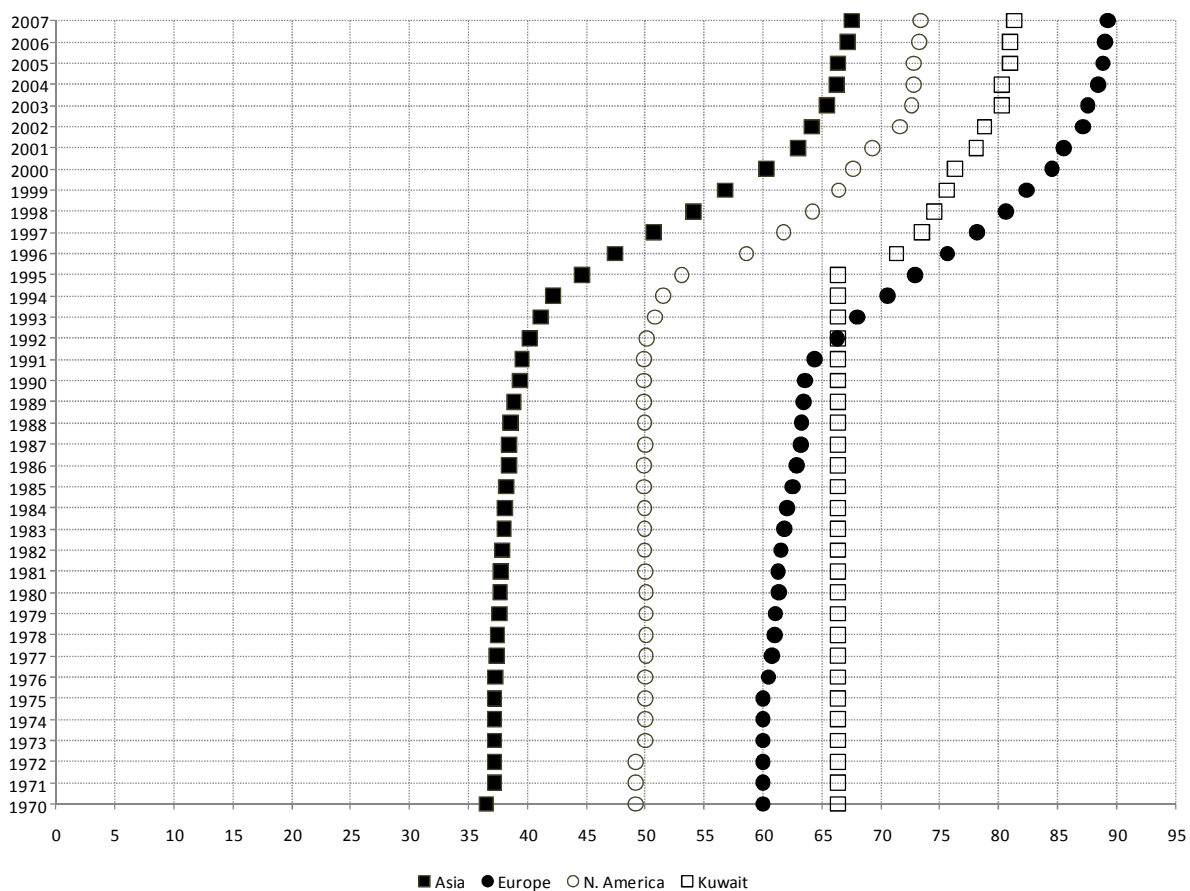


Figure 1. KOF Index of Information Flows, Kuwait

Evidence of Social Globalization in Kuwait

I use data from the KOF index to examine the dimension of social globalization. Information flows was derived from: Internet users (per 1000 people), television (per 1000 people), and trade in newspapers as percent of GDP. Figure 1 shows that for the data period in question, only Europe has higher information flows than Kuwait.

In terms of Personal contact assessed using the following items from the KOF: Telephone traffic, transfers, international tourism, foreign Population as percent of total population, and international letters per capita. The data shows that Kuwait has higher levels of personal contact than the other regions – Asia, Europe, and North America. This is because of the great number of expatriate workers in Kuwait.

Finally Cultural proximity was assessed with Number of McDonald's Restaurants, Number of IKEA (per capita), and trade in books as percent of GDP.

Individual Level of Analysis

The means of some of the items used to assess social globalization on an individual level (Table 2) were relatively high with high variability for using a) the Internet to exchange information, (b) the Internet for non-Kuwaiti entertainment, (c) the Internet for social networking, and (d) Non-Kuwaiti TV for entertainment.

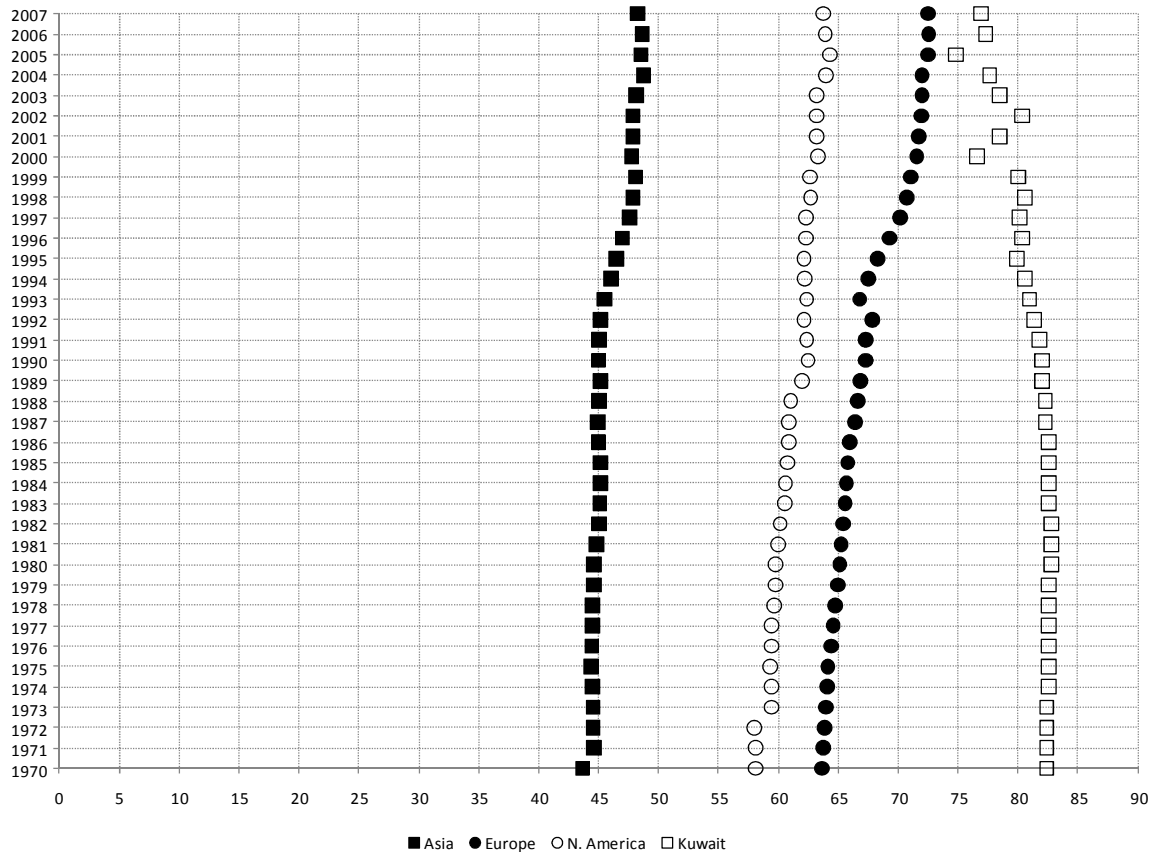


Figure 2. KOF Index of Personal Contact, Kuwait

Some of the items used to assess social globalization also exhibited significant association with the index of bicultural identity. Specifically, using (a) the Internet for exchange of information, (b) the Internet for non-Kuwaiti entertainment, (c) the Internet for social networking, and (d) Internet for getting the news were all positively associated with the index of biculturalism. As well, watching Non-Kuwaiti TV for international news was also linked with biculturalism.

Implications of Social Globalization for Identity Negotiation

For the young Kuwaiti adult, the results suggest that they are traversing two worlds, involving a hybridization of identities – the local and the global.

The argument that will be advanced here is that given that Kuwaiti culture is a collective culture, pursuing individuation could have repercussions for the individual and family. Individuation may be seen as destructive to cohesiveness and harmony (Dwairy, 1998).

Additionally, it is suggested then that individual in negotiating his or her identity, would have a both a public and private identity. The public identity is what would conform to the general standards and mores of Kuwaiti culture. On the other hand, the private identity would only be exhibited in the company of like-minded individuals away from the public scrutiny in order not to disturb the social fabric.

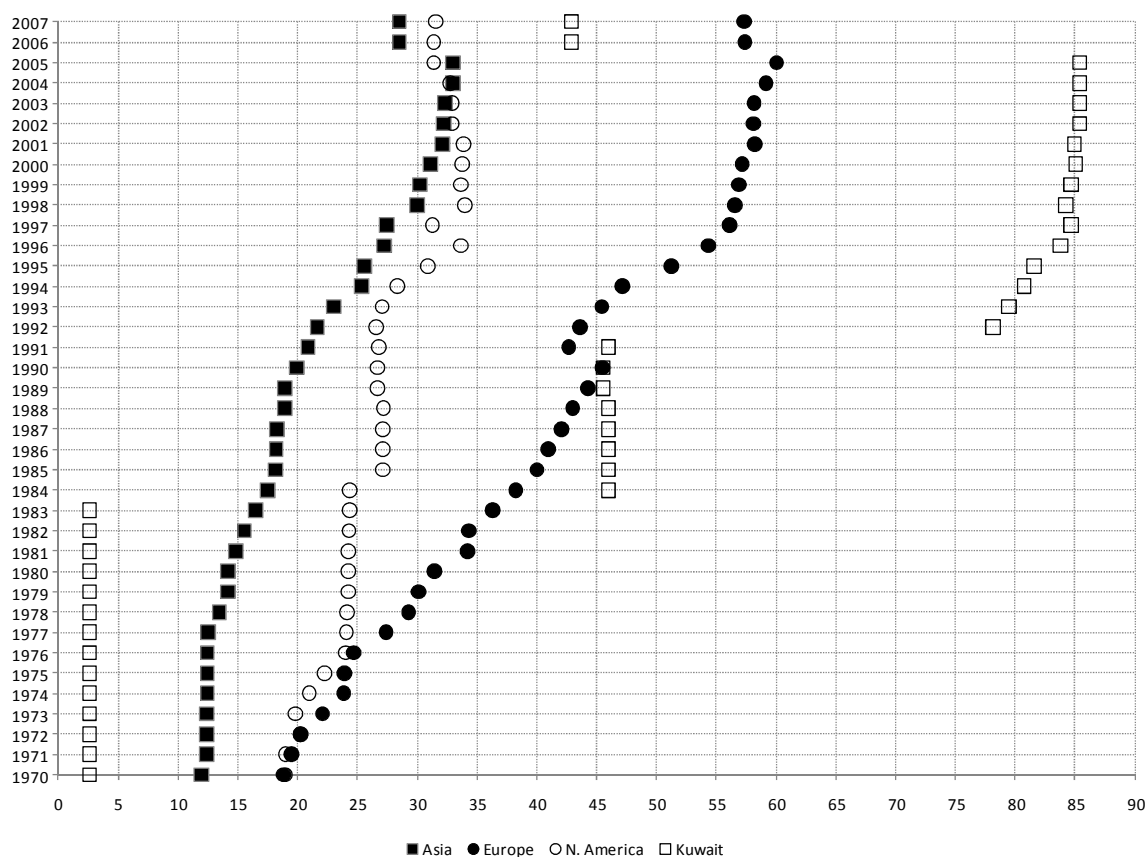


Figure 3. KOF Index of Cultural Proximity, Kuwait

Table 2. Means of Items and Inter-Item Correlations

Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Index of Biculturalism	1	.26**	.21**	.19*	0.11	.18*	0.11	0.14	.17*
2. Internet for exchange of information		1	.62**	.51**	.33**	.27**	.25**	.27**	.28**
3. Internet for non-Kuwaiti entertainment			1	.40**	.37**	.20*	.30**	.35**	.24**
4. Internet for social networking				1	.46**	.28**	.31**	.31**	.30**
5. Non-Kuwaiti TV for entertainment					1	.41**	.54**	.28**	0.14
6. Non-Kuwaiti TV for international news						1	.63**	.32**	.31**
7. Non-Kuwaiti TV for general information							1	.43**	.26**
8. Internet for general information								1	.54**
9. Internet for getting the news									1
MEAN	3.21	4.75	4.05	3.90	3.58	1.23	1.76	2.53	1.74
STD DEV	2.30	3.90	3.70	3.85	3.48	1.90	2.29	3.05	2.45

** p < .01; * p < .05

Furthermore, arguments will be used show how identity negotiation will take place. It will not follow classic Eriksonian paradigm involving a developmental process, but one that is negotiated. However, drawing on sociological work (e.g., Jacobson, 1997, Peek, 2005) focus on cultural and social processes that impact upon the construction of identities.

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