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The Relationship of Culture and Conflict in the Middle East at the globalization Era

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Abstract

Identity and culture are important factors in globalization era. They influence and affected by internal, regional and global material and ideational structures. Identity and culture are not solely the matter of cohesion and interdependency in domestic and foreign relations. we can see the improvement of the integration and interdependency in most regions of the global political economy through creation of common cognitive region and same inter subjectivities. But, in some regions, the issue is more complex. In fact, in some places and spaces, we see the escalation of tension and conflict instead of peace and interdependency. The Middle East is one of the turbulent regions of the world that, witness the escalations of war and conflict in the globalization era. The main question of this article is that: What is the impact of Complex Identities and Cultures on the Middle East international relations in globalization era? The hypothesis of the research is that: Complex Identities and Cultures in the Middle East leads to the escalation of antagonism in the

region in the context and framework of public diplomacy and social media as the dominant trends of globalization. As a matter of fact, culture and identity in it's all kinds and aspects, especially the religious and ethnic kinds, is the causes of conflict and war in the middle east in the globalization era. The most important tributary of what is called "killing in the name of religion, nationality and etcetera".

Keywords

Middle East. Globalization. Identity. Culture. Complexity. Conflict.

1. Introduction

Culture is defined as a set of values and practices that leaves meaning for society; it can come in many forms, such as elite culture (literature, art, higher education), or like populist culture that appeals to the masses, Blechman (2004) Culture and identity are closely related to public diplomacy in international affairs. Culture has been described as the backbone of soft power. We can consider the role of culture extremely important for three considerations. First, because it is the bearer of ideas and, as a result, ideologies. Second, by looking at the effectiveness of penetrating ideas and images, so that jump on the boundaries. Third, the historical experience has established the position of culture as a vital sector that has always accompanied expansion campaigns, similar to the colonial campaigns that were preceded by intensive charitable, research, and exploration missions, in order to create a mental and missionary environment. But the function of culture in international relations of all regions and countries is not the same. In this regard cultural diversity and complex identities may lead to the different effect of it in relations of actors.

The Middle East is one of the regions in global political economy that, it's trends and events are in the opposite of the main stream of globalization process. While we see the increasing process of cooperation and peaceful coexistence in most regions of the world, like europeao union integration, South East Asia cooperative relations, but, the Middle East is witness of conflict and escalation of tensions. The main idea and argument of this research is that the abnormality of events in the Middle East is rooted in the consequences of globalization process in this unique region. The expanding of some trends of globalization especially the usage of media and public diplomacy and the cultural complexity of the middle East create a security dilemma in the region. In fact the culture lead to the counterproductive result in the region in globalization era. It involves cultural misunderstanding about communication patterns leading to tensions, antagonism and conflicts among countries. This research shows the relationship between the escalation of conflict and war and complexity of cultures and identities in the Middle East in the way that actors encounter to each other in the framework and context of public diplomacy and social medias usage.

1-1. The Question of Research

The main question of this research is *What is the impact of Complex Identities and Cultures on the Middle East international relations in globalization era?*

1-2. The Hypothesis of Research

Complex Identities and Cultures in the Middle East leads to the escalation of antagonism in the region in the context and framework of public diplomacy and social media as the dominant trends of globalization.

1-3. Research Methodology

The methodology of this research is analytical-descriptive and it uses theoretical framework of Public Diplomacy and the Soft Power of Joseph Nye and Arjun Appadurai perspective to globalization. Research data has been collected based on the library method.

Theoretical framework of the research

This study is conceptualized in the framework of Joseph Ney and Arjun Appadurai propositional theoretic. According to the neoliberal approach to international relations in globalization era, the soft power and public diplomacy lead to friendship and co-operations among actors (Toth, 2006) . In fact the neoliberalism theory has optimistic approach to applying public diplomacy and its effects on the relations of actors in globalization era. Although the argument of neoliberal theorists are correct about the new dimensions of power and tools of communications, but this theory is simplify the relations of actors and regions in all parts of the world politics. In fact we don't see the improvement of interdependency, cooperation and peace in all regions in globalization age. Neoliberal theorists neglect the different perspective and usage of new possibilities of globalization in some regions. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the problem closely in a more complex theoretical view. Appadurai (2015) as one of the theorists of globalization describes the importance of culture in globalization age. The main article of Appadurai (2015) is, "In the Global Cultural Economy, Disjuncture and Difference. In his research, Appadurai (2015) highlighted five different dimensions of cultural flux, namely five escapes: Mediascapes, Ethnoscapes, Technoscapes, Financescapes and Ideoscapes . Appadurai (2015) note that "the central problem of global interaction is the tension between cultural homogeneity and heterogeneity (Appadurai, 2015). He describe the globalization in the framework of several escapes. Appadurai (2015) argues that, the technoscape and mediascape may lead to different outcomes in different regions and cultures.

We believe that through the synthesizing of the key concepts of Appadurai (2015) thought with Joseph Nye's perspective, we can reach to a more effective and comprehensive theory and analytical model to conceptualize the different outcome of the expanding of social media in the international relations of the Middle East. By this analytical model, we argue in this research that, because of the diversity and differential position of cultures in the Middle Eastern countries, we encounter with a distinguished situation that could be conceptualized by the concept of heterogeneity. Therefore, when public diplomacy and soft power are used in the Middle East, public diplomacy and soft power collide with this cultural diversity leading to tensions, conflicts and rivalries among the countries of the Middle East.

2. The Literature Review

There are some theoretical, descriptive and case study researches that related to our article. Nye Jr (2008) research's about the public diplomacy and soft power are the main ones. But as mentioned above, his works are also based on an optimistic perspective to globalization and its outcome in the world. The other near research to our article is the work of Melki and Jabado (2016), *Islamic State's Mediated by Public Diplomacy in Syrian and Iraq: The Synergistic Use of Terrorism, Branding, and Social media*. This paper examines ISIS's mediated by public diplomacy approach in Syrian and Iraq, as well as its ability to combine terrorism methods with communication strategies to gain media access and publicity, push news frames that fit the group's objectives, and aid the group. Finally, enlist allies and repel adversaries.

The work of Uzun and Barghandan (2017), *Public Diplomacy of Turkey and Iran: The Syrian Case*, discussed the public diplomacy of Turkey and Iran regarding their foreign policies towards Syria from 2010 and 2016. The authors explain the media's role in both countries. The other research in this area is the works of Appadurai (2015) as the part of theoretical framework of this research.

These studies are close to the subject of our paper, although none of them focuses on the impact and function of public diplomacy and social media in the cultural complex environment of the Middle East.

3. The Cultural Diversity and Conflictual Ethnic Identities in the Middle East

Any analysis about trends and events of the region, especially in globalization age, must consider complex characteristics of the region of the Middle East. The Middle East is one of the most complex cultural regions of the world. The major nationalities in the Middle East today include Arabs, Iranians, Turks, Kurds, and Jews. Most of the countries in this region are multi-ethnic. There is no homogenous country in the Middle East. They consist of many ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic minorities. However, they were not

successful in developing a national identity that reflected their heterogeneity. The problem is pervasive. Whether it is democracies (Israel and Turkey), developing democracies (Iraq and the Palestinian regions), republican regimes (Egypt and Syria), semi-liberal monarchies (Jordan and Bahrain), or Islamic regimes (Iran). the region suffers from the inability to recognition, integration and reversal of ethnic and cultural diversity. Without exception, all of the countries of the Middle East have tried to impose an identity from above. Whether these attempts are ideological, religious, dynastic, or power-centered, they have always failed and often lead to division and sectarian tensions. The region has not been able to address the core issue of national identity and resolve. The countries of the Middle East have not been able to build a nation. (Kumaraswamy, 2006)

The states that are composed of multiple ethnicities cannot impose the state's identity, national identity, or a partial trait on its components, because this raises racial and sectarian strife . Ethnic conflict is considered as a factor influencing the emergence of the phenomenon of globalization, which, on the one hand, is a response to the conditions imposed on ethnic groups by regimes and governments, and on the other hand, is affected by the awareness of the ethnic elites amid the changes taking place today. The important point is that the issue of identity and culture is very important and sensible for any actor in the region. In addition, each actor uses the mentioned elements to intervene and influence the others. There for we will face a turbulent and distrustful region.

4. Conflict of Identities in the Middle East

The issue of identity in the Middle East is a complex of the political, social, and ethnic structures in the region. The identity of the individual is determined loyalty to the homeland, institutions and customs. In the Middle East, individuals usually acknowledge a multi-layered identity at the national and sub-national level. The complex nature is manifested, for example, an Iraqi may see himself as an Arab, an Iraqi, a Sunni, or a Shiite at the same time when he is asked about the sub-identity that becomes the primary identity and the driving force of individuals. Associating with a basic identity at a higher level, whether at the national level or at the regional or global level, can lead to the achievement of greater unity. The belief that one is Iraqi or Arab first highlights general similarities around the fundamental differences that first highlight sub-national identities. However, in practice, it ties to national identity, and its subsequent institutions tend to be flimsy at best, whether privately or overtly. Many people in the region tend to fundamentally acknowledge their sub-national identity as Sunni or Shiite, Christian or Kurdish (Vitale & Keagle, 2014)

This practice is predominantly characterized in Syria and Iraq as strong local identities tend to fracture. It leads to violence and conflict. These divisions dovetail with the crises in Syria and Iraq, a crisis largely fueled by sectarian tensions. ISIS, a Sunni Jihadist organization, is targeting Shiites in its military

campaign to avenge sentiments of marginalization. The sub-national divide inculcates ISIS with more power, one of the best group tools private or overt.

In external conflicts among countries, national identity is required to add to its dimensions to arouse enthusiasm and be an entry point for mobilizing the market to fight it and draw scenarios for its management. As for internal conflicts in the states themselves, they require the same purpose to invoke other identities of secondary importance, some of which may not be known outside the borders of these states. There are many identities that one finds on this or that occasion captive to its hegemony or the hegemony of its godfather for the role it plays in narrow alignments within society itself in the absence of the original identity, the identity of the homeland. Identities in a country are as diverse as ethnic, religious, sectarian, regional, tribal, and cultural demographics. They are hereditary identities that the individual did not choose, as he was forced to carry them and bear the consequences of that by others.

However, there are other identities that give the individual traits, but do not give him inherited identities, because they are among his options, such as his professional identity that matches his desires and abilities, or his intellectual identity if he has contributions in organizations or political parties or activities in civil society organizations or public benefit associations

5-1 Religious Identity

5.1.1 The Islam Sunni and The Islam Shiite and the Conflict of Influence

The Middle East region is witnessing something like a cold war between the two axes, the first (the Sunni axis) Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, and the second (the Shiite axis) Iran, Syria and Iraq. This cold war in the Middle East preceded several years before the Arab Spring and after the revolution of the Iranian regime was keen to export its revolutionary model to the Arab world and Iran created Hezbollah, its ally, as well as strong friendship with Syria. However, with the beginning of the new century, Iran was able to penetrate the Middle East, after the American invasion of Iraq where the policy of the United States left a political vacuum for it, which coincided with the arrival of Ahmadinejad to the presidency in 2005, which he restored Imam Khomeini's speech. Thus, Iran enjoyed general influence in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq.

Before the Arab Spring: The Saudis failed to limit Iranian influence on Iraq at a time when Iran united its influence with the newly powerful Shiite groups. Saudi Arabia was unable to support its natural allies in the Sunni Arab community in Iraq, even in 2006 the awakening councils appeared. Saudi Arabia found an Iraqi ally whom they can work with, a Sunni ally hostile to Iranian influence on Iraq, but cooperates with the United States, especially after it was able to limit the influence of Al Qaeda. In 2010, the Saudis provided financial and media support to Allawi, and the Iraqi List won the majority of seats, but Maliki with coalition State of law was able to preserve the cohesion of the Shiite parties

(Ismael & Ismael, 2010). After the Arab Spring: When the Arab Spring began, Iran was in a position to win and will remain in a winning position in the cold war of the Middle East, and the fall of the secular Sunni regimes contributed to the achievement of more victories for Iran, which is called the Islamic awakening, and Iran has sought and seeks to fight ISIS in the region gathered the popular crowd in order to liberate the region from terrorist movements and entrusted that task to General Qassem Soleimani, and that the war will bring about a geopolitical shift in the Middle East that is arguing towards developing an American-Iranian relationship. This is what directed the nuclear agreement in June 2015, which made Saudi Arabia doubts the role of the United States, but asserts that the United States of America in its relationship with the Sunni world from the Gulf to Africa, as if it had made sure that the American policy was manipulating the Arab region and leading to division and fragmentation and granted it to the dominant powers (i.e. Iran, Israel and Turkey)

At the same time, the victories of the regular Syrian army over the moderate or Islamic opposition increased, which made Saudi Arabia work on two fronts, the northern front, by supporting all kinds of opposition, whether Islamic or secular, and establishing an axis (Turkish, Egyptian, Saudi, Qatari, Jordanian, Emirati) to confront the Axis (Iranian, Syrian, Iraqi). At the same time, Saudi Arabia announced, the establishment of a Sunni alliance to confront the Houthi group in northern Yemen on March 26, 2015, after it felt that Iran was encircling it from the north, especially with the increasing Iranian influence on the Middle East.

King Abdullah II declares that Iran has established a "Shiite Crescent" and Assad's survival has become more assured than before. It is the Russian entry as a world power alongside the Syrian army which of course has strengthened In the face of all these matters, Saudi Arabia announced the Decisive Storm, which was rejected by Iran and sought to support its Houthi allies. Thus, the sectarian conflict continues in the Middle East

5.2 political identity

5.2.1 The Iran-Arab Conflict

The Middle East region is witnessing a cold war between the two axes, the first (the Sunni axis) Saudi Arabia and the Arab countries that follow it, and the second (the Shiite axis) Iran. The conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia has been based on ideological and geopolitical foundations for many years. This conflict intensified and diplomatic relations with Iran were cut off when the Saudi embassy in Iran was attacked by Iranian demonstrators protesting the execution of Sheikh Al-Nimr by the Saudi authorities, which angered the Iranians. Other countries followed to cut their diplomatic ties with Iran, such as the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt. In addition, Iran continued support for the Islamic resistance, which

angered Saudi Arabia and other countries, making Saudi Arabia always feel that Iran is a danger to it and the region, and this has generated mistrust in them.

5.2.2 Arab-Turkey Relationships

Tensions increased between Turkey and several Arab countries on many issues, since the Arab Spring revolutions, and several Arab countries were disturbed by the Turkish policy of continue interference in their affairs, especially in the uprisings that occurred in Egypt and support for the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as the Syrian civil war and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in addition to the Sunni-Shiite conflict in the region.

5.3 language identity

Language is one of the most prominent components of identity, as in addition to the communicative function of language, it is a controversial social, cultural, and political process that takes a form commensuration with the environment in which it resides. It is engaged in parallel struggles with the political and cultural struggles in its environment. The Arabic language is in the center of an external and internal cultural conflict. In Palestine, it is subjected to an attempt at linguistic purification in the context of its conflict with the Hebrew language. In the Arab countries, colloquial and vernacular dialects are wrestling with, and in every environment that reflects the type of existing conflict, it becomes one of the weapons used in that conflict.

Likewise, language in many cases is a precursor to religion, and the linguistic issue in Syria is one of the issues directly related to the Kurdish issue, as the Kurds were subject to the unity language policy applied by the Baath on them. However, we see that the new Kurdish authorities de facto in Syria tend to adopt some policies. Therefore, learning about the experiences, features and problems of others will be useful for overcoming the problems of the Syrian reality.

5.4 Historical identity

5.4.1 Kurdish Issue

Kurds are the largest Nationalist group or minority in the Middle East after the Arab, Iran and Turks. The Kurdish population is distributed in Syria, Iraq, Iran and Turkey.

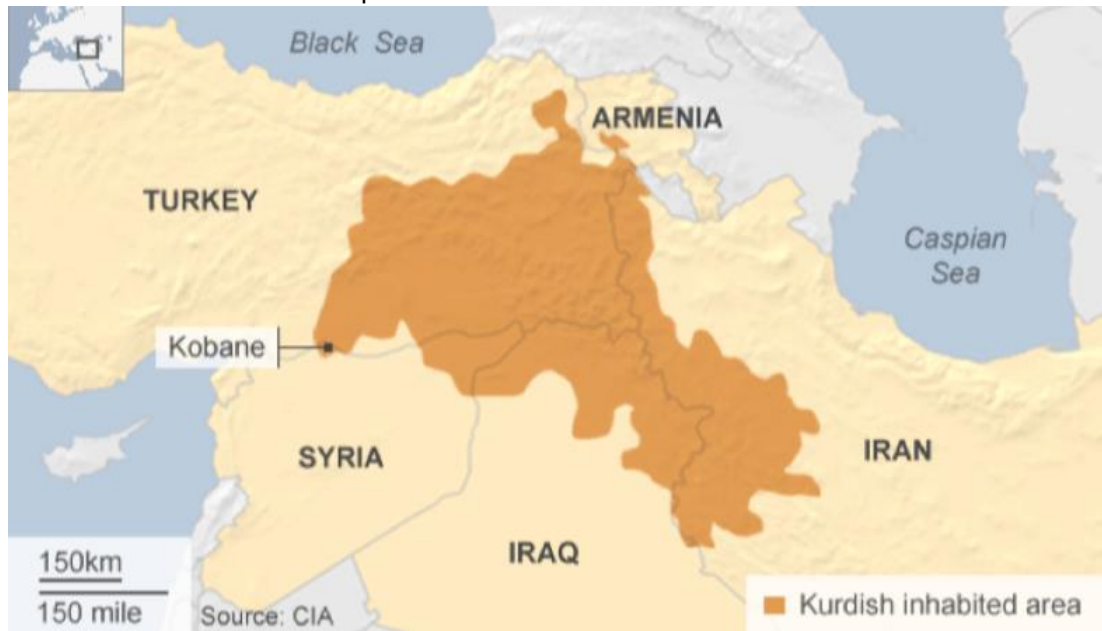
The number of Kurds, according to estimates, ranges from (25-45) million, and 85% of all Kurds live in Kurdistan and the rest live outside Kurdistan in different regions of the world.

The Kurds of Turkey represent nearly 50% of the total number of Kurds, ranging from 13-15 million.(Allan, 2002)

The Kurds seek political independence from the host governments, albeit to varying degrees. Iraqi Kurds aim to establish a complete state. As for the

Kurds of Iran, Turkey and Syria aim for equal political representation with security and freedom of cultural expression. In the Syrian peace agreement brokered by Russia, the Kurds of Syria may achieve their political goals. Map (1) below shows the distribution of Kurds in the Middle East as follows:

Map1. The distribution of the Kurds



(Babbitt, Bell and Lempereur 2017)

A- Turkish Kurds

Turkish Kurds reside in the southeastern part of the country. They represent an estimated quarter of the Turkish population (25%). In the 1980s, the Kurds were subjected to brutal assimilation tactics, such as banning the Kurdish language in schools and appropriate political representation. Where the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was engaged in an armed struggle with the Turkish government in 1983 until now, there are intermittent ceasefire agreements, then a vicious cycle of violations

B- Syrian Kurds

They are a distinct Nationalism living in northern Syria, and they represent 12 % of the total number of Syrians population. They are located in three main cantons, Afrin cantons, Jazira canton, and Kobane canton. They are made in the region known as Rojava. These cantons are not contiguous, but the Kurds speculate to join them. In 2016, the Syrian Kurds created Federasyona Bakurê Sûriyê, or the Union of Northern Syria - Rojava

The Syrian Kurds have historically been subjected to abuse, displacement, and marginalization by the Syrian regime. Since the 1930s, Arabization has been imposed on the Kurds in a systematic way that suppressed their culture and their social and economic mobility.

C- Iraqi Kurds

There is a distinct ethnic group living in northeastern Iraq. They represent approximately 15% of Iraq's population. One of four groups of Kurds is predominantly moderate Sunnis seen as a stable, progressive, and Western-looking society. Historically, they have been persecuted by oppressive governments they seek security and independence

D- Iranian Kurds

Iranian Kurds reside in northwestern Iran. They are the second largest minority in Iran representing approximately 7% of Iran population. Although they did not endure the same horrors as The Kurds of Syria, Turkey, or Iraq, it appears to be less likely to promote pro-autonomy political parties than their counterparts in Greater Kurdistan. The Kurds of Iran also have a unique side to them.

The largest percentage of Shiite Muslim Kurds live in Iran. This creates an internal dynamic among the Kurds, like the Kurdish Shiites to some extent sympathize with the Iranian Shiite regime, and some even prefer to live under it. (Babbitt et al., 2017)

5.4.2 The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Several ethnic, national, historical and religious factors led to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; religion plays a fundamental role in the conflict, especially with regard to the sanctity of the holy places and the stories of the end of the world narrated by each of the two religions of the Islam and Jewish. These factors put an end to any possibilities for a permanent peace between the two sides. Extremist religious Zionists in Israel see themselves as guardians of the Jewish state; on the other hand, Islamic groups in Palestine and elsewhere in the Islamic world defend the need to liberate "holy" lands and places for religious reasons, and spread violence and hate against Israel and the Jewish people

This unrest is heightened by religion-based rumors spread by extremists in the media and social media about religious agendas masked by the other side. Some examples include rumors about a "Jewish plan" to destroy the Al-Aqsa Mosque and build the third Jewish temple on its remains, and rumors that the extermination of the Jews is at the core of the Muslim belief on the other hand. Besides, Israel plays a prominent role in fueling sectarianism between Sunnis and Shiites in the Middle East region through the media as well as social networking sites.

The Confrontations between Israelis and Palestinians continue, and the highest number of victims reached in 2018, when the number of wounded and dead reached about 31,558, compared to 130 on the Israeli side, as shown in the figure (5) below.



Figure 1. The human cost of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (Statista, 2021)

6- The effect of public diplomacy and soft power usage in the region

Soft power goes on influencing the choices of others through the power of attraction and persuasion that one side possesses to subjugate and coerce another. Like any other kind and forms of power, soft power has a positive effect and also negative consequences in interaction of state and non-state actors. Although the positive effects of this shape of power take a long time to reap its fruits, but its negative effects take a much shorter time to appear in the field. The negative effects of soft power on most of the Middle East countries relations appear through the following

- Distorting the Image of the State in the International Public Opinion
- Submission to the Culture of Others
- Weak Foreign Policy (Kumaraswamy, 2006)

7- Terrorists and Social Media: ISIS, and fourth Generation Wars

Globalization has played a great role in influencing those wars as it helped in the spread of terrorist groups on a large scale and their use of unconventional methods to confront international peace and security. Besides, it took advantage of the use of tools resulted from globalization, especially in the field of technological progress, as it worked to provide internet networks to facilitate the process. They also use various media to promote their ideas to wage psychological wars on the residents of the targeted areas, such as publishing videos on YouTube, social media sites, or websites of terrorist groups on the Internet. (Haugstvedt & Jacobsen, 2020)

7.1 The Tools used in those Wars

There are many tools that are used in that war including terrorism and demonstrations under the pretext of peace, attacks on public and private facilities, indirect financing for the establishment of a non-national terrorist base inside the country with religious or ethnic pretexts, preparation for psychological warfare through the media and verbal manipulation, the use of stations and a satellite channel that works on falsifying facts and images, using traditional and modern media including social media sites, facebook and twitter, using guerrilla tactics, and hitting each other in society.

Conclusions

Theorizing what is the impact of complex identities and cultures on the Middle East international relations? was the problem of this research. The current study hypothesizes is that complex identities and cultures and application of public diplomacy and social media by state and non-state actors in the Middle East leads to the escalation of antagonism in the region. In fact, there is a direct relationship between the growth of public diplomacy and social media using and the escalation of conflicts and antagonism in the Middle East. The context of the dysfunction of globalization process in the Middle East is the complexity and variety of culture and identity in the region

The differences in cultures and complex identities in the Middle East, in one hand, and the traditional perspective of power, interest and communication in the region, on the other hand, lead to the dysfunction of globalization elements, especially public diplomacy and social media in the region. Thus, we see not only cooperation and integrity in the Middle East in the light of public diplomacy and social media using, but also the deterioration of relations, escalation o antagonism, chaos and war in the region. So, the failure of public diplomacy due to Cultural diversity and complex identities in the Middle East may lead to counterproductive. It involves cultural misunderstanding about communication patterns leading to tensions, antagonism and conflicts between main actors of the region, both states and none states actors. There is no homogenous country in the Middle East. They consist of many ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic minorities. However, they were not successful in developing a national identity reflected their heterogeneity. At the same time, social media occupy an important place in the cultural and political reality of the Middle East and plays an important role in the international relations of the region. The negative impacts of public diplomacy and social media sites among Middle Eastern countries are confined as follows:

- The role of social media in political mobilizing inciting from external agendas

- The role of social media in hate speech and sectarian incitement between different cultures and identities.

-The role of social media in tarnishing the reputation of others and strengthen of othering in the region

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