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ISSUES AND MOTIVATIONS SURROUNDING INTERNET USE IN KUWAIT

Key Words

*Internet; Internet
Usage; Internet Issues;
Ethics; E-Commerce.*

Abstract

Advances in the Internet world wide have brought about an information revolution which has influenced various aspects of our daily life. Although the internet has the advantage of modernizing societies, it raises at the same time a number of problems and issues- technical, political, ethical, and social. The purpose of this study is to investigate the prevailing Internet problematic issues and challenges resulting from the use of the Internet in Kuwait. The results indicate that a sizable majority of Kuwaiti Internet users are new to the Internet world, their level of Internet use proficiency is low, and, more significantly, they do not use the Internet as an important source of information. Pornographic materials on the Internet, viruses, and Internet crimes are the most perceived problematic issues facing the Internet users in Kuwait. To exploit the potentials of the Internet more fully, it is important that leading forces in the Arab society be aware of and effectively address problems and issues pertaining to its use.

Introduction

The Internet has brought about an information revolution and as a result various aspects of our every day life have been effected. For example, the Internet is rapidly changing the way people think, act, and communicate. While the Internet has played a significant role in facilitating

the realization of the global village, it has also given rise to several problems and issues pertaining to its use. A number of problems--technical, political, ethical, and social, have been identified in the academic literature which seem to hinder the optimal utilization of the Internet (Ang and

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Nadarajan, 1996; Bhimani, 1996; Laudon, 1995; Mason, 1995; Radcliff, 1999; Clarke, 1999; Gitlin, 1999; Deckmyn and Sliwa, 1999; Wonnacott, 1999). In general, the issues and problems that have been suggested in the MIS literature to hinder the greater utilization of the Internet can be summarized around the following points:

- Market forces prevent the delivery of affordable access of everyone to the Internet
- Networking infrastructure not suited for the demands of today's data communication requirements.
- E-mail communication monitoring
- Offensive materials such as porn sites
- Online fraud with doing business online
- Fewer local-language web sites (such as Chinese or Arabic compared to that in English)
- High computer illiteracy among people
- Many countries do not have the necessary IT infrastructure to share as equal partners in worldwide enterprise knowledge platforms
- Set-up costs are much higher in the developing countries compared to that in the developed world
- Operating costs relating to different aspects of the proper running of Internet services are high

- Lack of low-cost regional IP backbones
- National values concerns
- Cultural values concerns
- Religious values concerns
- National and regional security concerns

While there has been considerable research focusing on the various commercial and non-commercial aspects of using the Internet in the developed world (e.g., see Nath et al., 1998), there is a lack of research in the Arab region in general and Kuwait in particular. Moreover, the current press literature in the Middle East shows that the Middle East's use of the Internet has not kept up with the rapidly growing global averages. In the Arab region, Internet penetration rate is estimated at less than 0.5 percent, which is very low compared to that in the developed countries, where it exceeds 60% in the U.S. (Shaheen, 2002). Moreover, the literature reveals that online commerce in the Middle East is very low. According to the Arab Economic Unity Council, an intergovernmental organization, the total estimated sales value via e-commerce Arabic sites for the year 2002 was only \$150 million (The Wall Street Journal, 2002). Identifying and understanding the types and nature of the problems that present major concerns to the Arab world have not been investigated yet.

Kuwait was among the earliest adopters of the public Internet service in the world (Burkhart and Goodman, 1998). The Internet was introduced in Kuwait in 1993. However, Kuwait has scored a lower Web penetration rate in the GCC region. The number of Web penetration rate in the United Arab Emirates is 7.3 percent, which is the highest in the region (Shaheen, 2002).

This research project uses Kuwait as a case study to investigate the problematic issues resulting from using the Internet in our daily lives. More specifically, this study has three objectives:

- 1- To identify the motivating factors, frequency, and extent to which Kuwaitis use the Internet in their daily life.
- 2- To explore the nature of the emerging problematic issues surrounding the use of the Internet.
- 3- To examine associations between perceived Internet issues and the demographical dimensions presented in the study.

The results of this study are of value to policy makers, practitioners, as well as researchers. From a public policy perspective, the results provide some insights in the act of incorporating the Internet and promoting its use with a view to modernize our business and government working systems in an integrated manner. Furthermore,

the results of this study should have some degree of generalization applicable to other Gulf GCC countries owing to the shared cultural, political, and economic backgrounds common among these countries. The results will assist researchers in identifying Internet key research areas in Kuwait and other Arab Middle Eastern countries. Finally, the results of the study will be useful for commercial companies and "dot-coms" operating in the Arabic world.

This article falls into three sections. The first section discusses the sample and research methodology. The second section reports and discusses the results of the study. The last section provides a summary with some concluding remarks.

Methodology

Research Instrument

A research instrument was developed to achieve the study's three stated objectives. The instrument is divided into two major sections. The first section focuses on collecting different demographical data on participants in the study. The second section is designed to collect data on the perceived various Internet issues that could hamper the wider use of the Internet in Kuwait. Also, it describes the motivating factors, frequency, and extent to which Kuwaitis use the

Internet in their daily life. The instrument was thoroughly pre-tested prior to its administration. Trained data collectors were used to administer the questionnaire to the participating Kuwaiti Internet users.

Sample

The sample is a cross-sectional spanning of all Kuwaiti Internet user groups in the society. The randomly selected sample consists of a total of 145 Internet users. The detailed profile of the sample is presented in Table 1. The majority of participants in the

sample fall in the youth age groups of 18 to 35 years. In terms of gender, males represented a little more than half of the total respondents. Approximately half the number of respondents in the sample have a 4 year college degree or higher. Around two thirds of the participants have working careers, among which one third of this number have managerial duties. In terms of household income, the majority of the sample falls in the middle to upper-middle income ranges (i.e.; K.D500 to K.D1500 per month).

Table 1
The sample's demographical data

	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18 - 25	55	37.9
	26 - 35	49	33.8
	36 - 45	28	19.3
	46 and above	13	9.0
Gender	Male	82	56.6
	Female	62	42.8
Education	High school or below	36	24.8
	2 year college	40	27.6
	4 year college	53	36.6
	Graduate degree	16	11.0
Current job	Management	37	25.9
	Trained and administrative staff	39	27.2
	Researchers/educators	17	11.9
	Students	31	21.7
	Others	19	13.3
Household income per month in K.D.	500 or less	10	6.9
	501 - 1000	51	35.2
	1001 - 1500	47	32.4
	1501 - 2000	26	17.9

Analysis procedures

To address the objectives of this study, a number of statistical analysis procedures are used. First, descriptive analysis is applied to identify the motivating factors, frequency, and extent to which Kuwaitis use the Internet in their daily life. Second, factor analysis is performed on the emerging problematic issues surrounding the use of the Internet to help uncover a smaller number of dimensions that are easier to educate the different concerned parties in the society. Last, association testing is used to explore the relationship between Internet usage problematic issues and the demographical dimensions presented in this research. This analysis is done to explore the extent of the differing views on the problematic issues. The next section presents and discusses the results of the study.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Analysis Results

The first research objective of this study is to identify the motivating factors, frequency, and extent to which Kuwaitis use the Internet in their daily life. The questionnaire covered a range of questions that help shed light on type of usage dimensions (e.g., duration, weekly frequency of Internet usage, diversity skills of In-

ternet usage) and the motivations for Internet services usage from the user's point of view.

Tables 2 and 3 present summary results pertaining to the participants' duration and frequency of using the Internet. Table 2 shows that the majority of the respondents started using the Internet two years back or less. In addition, Table 3 shows that, on a weekly basis, around half of the respondents usually use the Internet only for 5 hours or less. These results could be interpreted in such a way suggesting that a sizable majority of Kuwaiti Internet users are new to the Internet world and do not use it more frequently as an important source of information.

Table 2
The starting time of using the Internet

	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 6 months	24	16.7
6 to less than 12 months	34	23.8
1 to less than 2 years	45	31.5
2 to 4 years	17	11.9
4 years or more	23	16.1

Table 3
Average weekly Internet usage

	Frequency	Percentage
5 hrs or less	75	52.8
6 hrs to 10 hrs	25	17.6
11 hrs to 15 hrs	17	12.1
16 hrs to 20 hrs	7	4.9
21 hrs to 30 hrs	9	6.3
More than 30 hrs	9	6.3

with each of following hindrance variables: censorship, speed/bandwidth, political danger, unauthorized access, connection cut-off, pornography, and finding things/navigating around. The demographic variable of the length of Internet use has 6 statistically significant associations with each of the following hindrance variables: unsolicited emails, commercialization/advertising of the net, equal access for all, security, pornography, and intellectual property/copyright.

In contrast, even though the sample is about equally split in gender representation, gender has indicated almost no difference in opinion-- only one relation in the list has a statistically significant p-value, i.e.; against the commercialization of the net.

Moreover, when looking at results from the hindering issues view, i.e.; the rows, we can find that the largest number of significant associations (or p-values) is found in the two rows of the hindering issues of: commercialization/advertising of the net and pornography. On the other hand, there is more than one hindrance variable (or row) that has no significant associations occurring in them. They are the variables of privacy, viruses, and paying for online services. This means that on such particular issues there are no different opinions on their relative importance.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

This field study is carried out to achieve three research objectives. First, to examine the nature of the emerging problematic issues surrounding the use of the Internet in Kuwait. Secondly, to identify the motivating factors that attracts the use of the Internet by Kuwaitis. Thirdly, to explore correlations between the study's demographical variables and the arrived at factors of problematic issues. The study is operationalised by using a questionnaire based research instrument.

The sample is a cross-sectional spanning of all Kuwaiti Internet user groups in the society. The majority of the participants in the sample fall in the youth age groups of 18 to 35 years with about equal representation of both gender groups. A sizable majority of Kuwaiti Internet users are new to the Internet world and do not use it more frequently as an important source of information. Hobbies and recreational activities were chosen as the main reason that motivates participants to use the Internet. Pornographic material on the Internet, viruses, and Internet crimes are ranked first, second, and third respectively as the most perceived problematic issues facing Internet users in Kuwait.

The factor analysis results show that the study's 18 Internet usage problematic issues can be grouped into four factor dimensions which are labeled: Harmful effect of Internet usage (from Internet providers' perspectives), Harmful effect of Internet usage (from clients' perspectives), Operational difficulties, and IT Ethics. Association Testing Results show that there are differences produced by the study's demographical variables, which can lead to some different opinions on the relative importance of various Internet usage problematic issues.

The findings of this study have direct implications in increasing our understanding of the prevailing Internet issues and challenges, which could

hinder the successful implementation of electronic commerce and electronic government plans in Kuwait in particular and the GCC region in general. Moreover, the findings should be of value in formulating governmental policies and programs on the Internet. To utilize the potentials of the Internet more fully, it is important that leading forces in the Arab society be aware of and effectively address problems and issues related to its use.

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الملخص

قضايا حول استعمال الإنترنت في الكويت ودوافعه

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تمخض التقدم التقني في شبكة الإنترنت عن ثورة معلوماتية ضخمة حول العالم، تغيرت معها الجوانب الحياتية للناس. فكما أن هذه التقنية أضافت إيجابيات كثيرة على المجتمعات المدنية، فكذا أوجدت معها كثيراً من المشكلات والقضايا (تقنية، سياسية، أخلاقية، اجتماعية، إلخ) بوصفها نتيجة حتمية لهذا الاستخدام. لذا فإن الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو تحديد مجموعة القضايا والمعوقات التي تحول دون الاستفادة من الإنترنت. وتظهر نتائج هذه الدراسة أن الغالبية من مستخدمي الشبكة ممن شملتهم الدراسة كانوا نسبياً حديثي العهد بالإنترنت، حيث يتميزون بقدرة متواضعة في مجال التعامل مع الشبكة. كما أنهم لا يعدون الشبكة مصدراً مهماً من مصادر المعرفة. كذلك توضح الدراسة أن الإباحية، والفيروسات، وجرائم الإنترنت هي المعوقات الرئيسة للمستخدمين، وهي التي تصدهم عن التوسع في استخدام الشبكة. وأخيراً، توصي الدراسة بأنه للوصول إلى تحقيق القدرات الكبيرة لهذه الشبكة، من الضروري جداً أن تعي مراكز القرار في الدول العربية حيثيات الإنترنت، ووضع هذه القضايا والمعوقات في حسابها.

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