E-Government Adoption in the State of Qatar

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This research provides insights into both the current potential of e-Government public adoption and future challenges and developments to encourage it. This study aimed to understand the level of e-Government adoption and the usability of online services among the people of Qatar. The purpose of this study was to tackle the public's adoption of e- Government through three main channels of communication; websites, mobile applications, and various social media tools. Based on the results provided in the study, relevant implications for policy and practice are offered.

Governments can benefit from using the internet to provide services, in terms of savings in their national expenditure, dissemination of public information, and provision of services in more efficient and effective ways than previously possible. Consequently, the concept of e-Government has become a global phenomenon. Governments are making significant investments to gain more efficient, open interactions between end-users and governmental bodies. However, the public's acceptance of e-Government services has lagged behind expectations in many parts of the world.

The e-Government initiative in Qatar started in 2000, with moderate adoption rates. In order to achieve a more transparent, effective, and accountable government, the Qatari e-Government portal began making information available for public use and embraced new communication tools using the latest social media platforms to engage with and reach out to the public.

This is the first study that addresses the public's perspective on the efficiency of the online services provided by the government bodies in Qatar, focusing on three main online channels, the website, mobile applications, and social media tools. Thus, this brief provides insight into the current potential of e-Government public adoption and future challenges for its development.

The importance of the project is both to assess the current level of e-Government adoption in Qatar whilst also contributing to achieving the overall goals outlined in the E-Government 2020 Strategy as well as the Qatar's National Vision [QNV] 2030 (QNV 2030).

A representative sample of 1,340 adults in Qatar aged 18 years and older were selected and interviewed using the Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing system (CATI) to explore the views of the general population in the State of Qatar (Qataris and Expats).

General Familiarity with information technology

Qatar National Vision 2030 seeks to transform the country into a knowledge-based economy (GSDP, 2008). To achieve this goal, the ictQatar strategy [1] was developed to support ICT infrastructure to position Qatar as a leading country in the knowledge economy. As a result of such efforts, several government organizations continued implementation of their digitization strategies as part of Qatar's E-Government 2020 objectives [2].

This section gauges the level of awareness and usage of governmental bodies' different online services. Most Qataris and Expats are aware of the availability of online services in

general in Qatar; however, only about three-quarters of them use such services (71% for Qataris and 73% for Expats).

Figure 1: Usage of Online Services
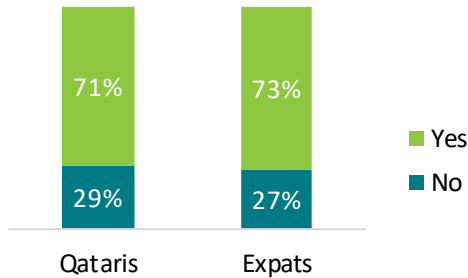
To clarify the reasons for not using online services, the respondents indicated two main reasons: a lack of awareness of the existence of online services and the fact that someone else uses such services on their behalf. The percentage of Qataris who are unaware of online services is higher than the percentage of expats (34% and 26%, respectively). Furthermore, a higher rate of expats (37%) compared to Qataris (23%) indicated that someone else uses government online services on their behalf. The remaining percentage comprises other reasons for not using online services, such as the fact that the respondents' mobile number is not registered under their name, they do not know how to use it, or they believe there is no need for online services (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Reasons for not using online services
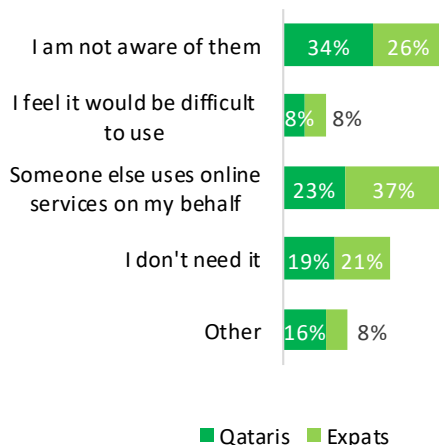
Awareness and usage of the government's website

This section looks at the level of awareness and usage of the different services offered on the government website by various governmental bodies. Regardless of the high awareness level of the existence and availability of Qatar's e-Government website (Hukoomi), only about 36% of Qataris and 41% of Expats barely use the website to interact with the government online. Both Qataris and expats (71% and 66%, respectively) agree that a lack of information and awareness campaigns makes it difficult for them to use the website.

Figure 3: The actual usage levels of Qatar's e-Government Website (Hukoomi) for interacting with the government
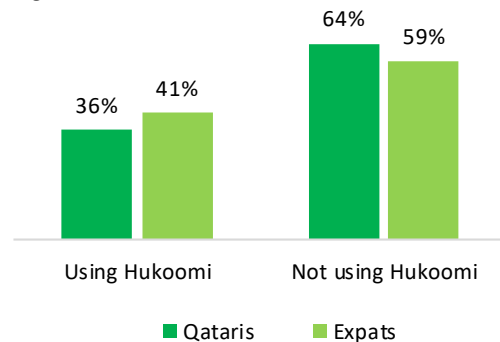
Awareness and usage of mobile government applications

This section assesses the level of awareness and use of the different services offered on mobile applications by various governmental bodies. There was a tremendous agreement between respondents (83% of Qataris and 82% of Expats) that mobile applications would make them engage more with the government.

Most users reported the ease of using mobile applications as the most appealing feature and the most influential factor in

embracing mobile applications (70% for Qataris and 68% for Expats).

Figure 4: What respondents liked the most about Government Mobile Applications

Figure 4: What respondents liked the most about Government Mobile Applications (bar chart)

General look: Qataris 2%, Expats 5%
Speed: Qataris 28%, Expats 27%
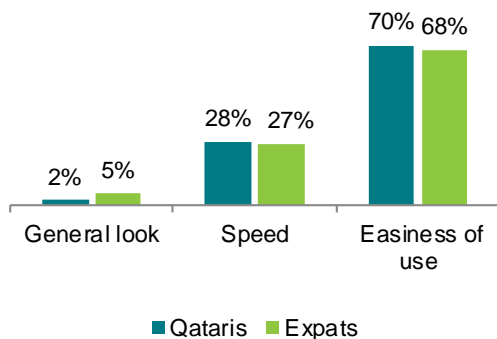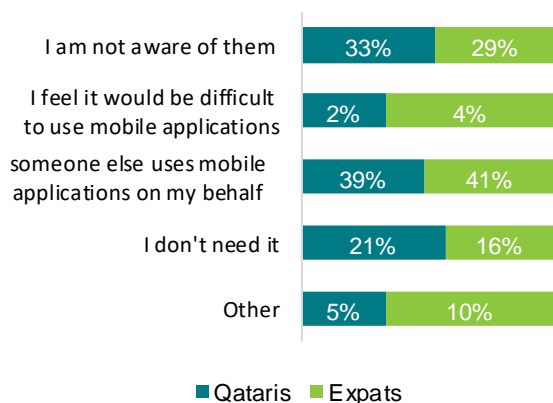Easiness of use: Qataris 70%, Expats 68%

■ Qataris ■ Expats

Figure 5 clarifies the reasons for not using mobile applications to interact with the government. First, 39% of Qataris stated that someone else uses mobile applications on [their] behalf, and 41% of expat respondents gave the same response. The second reason was a lack of awareness: about 33% of Qataris and 29% of expats were unaware of using mobile applications.

Figure 5: Reasons for not using mobile applications

I am not aware of them: Qataris 33%, Expats 29%
I feel it would be difficult to use mobile applications: Qataris 2%, Expats 4%
someone else uses mobile applications on my behalf: Qataris 39%, Expats 41%
I don't need it: Qataris 21%, Expats 16%
Other: Qataris 5%, Expats 10%
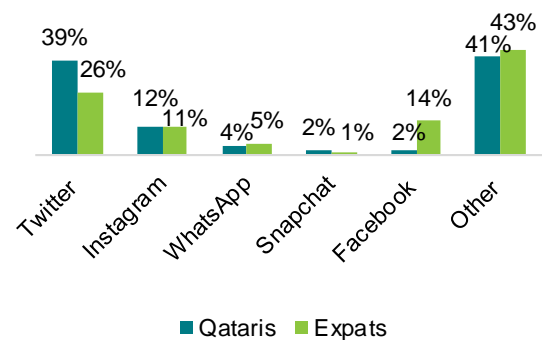
■ Qataris ■ Expats

Awareness and usage of government social media accounts

This section examines the level of awareness and usage of the different services offered on social media by Qatari governmental bodies. The respondents showed a high level of resistance toward using social media to interact with government bodies; a large portion of them (44% Qataris and 40% Expats) indicated that nothing could make them use social media for this purpose.

To understand the extent to which respondents in Qatar are willing to interact with government entities using their social media accounts. The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with a set of statements about the following: awareness of government social media accounts, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and intention toward using social media accounts.

Figure 6: Main social media accounts

Twitter: Qataris 39%, Expats 26%
Instagram: Qataris 12%, Expats 11%
WhatsApp: Qataris 4%, Expats 5%
Snapchat: Qataris 2%, Expats 1%
Facebook: Qataris 2%, Expats 14%
Other: Qataris 41%, Expats 43%

■ Qataris ■ Expats

Notably, in figure 6, although the question asked respondents to specifically name social media accounts to interact with the government body, around 41 percent of Qataris and 43 percent of Expats mentioned other sources they most often use to interact with the government body, such as Ashgal, different ministries, Metrash, traffic department, websites, HR emails …etc.

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Overall, 80% of Qataris are aware of the government's social media accounts, and 64% of them receive enough information. Similarly, 69% of expats are aware of the government's social media accounts, and 53% of them receive enough information.

The majority of respondents have a high tendency and willingness to engage with different government bodies using social media tools (89% in both Qataris & Expats) as their trustworthiness of the information received using social media tools is high. Thus, this represents a great opportunity and a challenge at the same time for all government bodies in the country to further extend their online activity.

In conclusion, whether it is through the regular website, using the latest mobile applications, or even the common global social media tools, three is considerable space for further progress in the government-client relationship in Qatar. Many mutual gains could be achieved using online techniques that might not be possible in typical offline scenarios. The current working-from-home experience (throughout the writing stage of this brief) and the online learning of Qatar University and all the schools in Qatar during COVID-19 are examples.

References

1. ictQatar (2014). Qatar E-Government 2020 Strategy. Ministry of Information and Communications Technology. Qatar.
2. Ahmed, F. B. J. (2018). Challenges of the knowledge society: Exploring the case of Qatar. *Global Economic Observer, 6*(1), 39-54. Retrieved from http://0-search.proquest.com.mylibrary.qu.edu.qa/docview/2085022382?accountid=13370

The study derived the following policy recommendations based on the overall usage and activity levels of all available ways of online-communication with the government online:

Policy Recommendations

1. There is a need to disseminate the availability of mobile applications for interacting with all government entities.

2. Government entities must capitalize on the ease of use of mobile applications to increase the use of these platforms for governmental services and interactions with the public.

3. The respondents stated that they trust governmental social media platforms as news sources; therefore, these platforms could be harnessed to make them effective in delivering updates on new rules and events.

4. Each E-Government platform should target end-users' preferences; therefore, social media platforms can focus on spreading news and updates, mobile applications can be used for governmental transactions, and websites can act as references for detailed information for those interested in learning more.