

2014 UAE SOCIAL MEDIA OUTLOOK: INCREASING CONNECTIVITY BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND CITIZEN



Foreword

As the UAE completes 43 eventful years as a federation, the country's wise leadership continues to work towards sustainable development across all sectors of the economy, and at all levels. Our leaders remain driven, with a clear strategy to make the UAE one of the best countries in the world and to ensure the happiness of its people.

The UAE government has implemented a well-defined methodology to achieve its long-term development goals. The methodology focuses on innovation and seeks to leverage technology to effectively communicate with all sectors of the public for the ultimate benefit of society. Thanks to its efforts, the country has achieved a paradigm shift in the sphere of government communication. Today, citizens and residents in the UAE are not just passive recipients of government services but are active partners in the development of these services. Much of this transformation has been brought about by the UAE's increased reliance on rapid technological advances.

The 'UAE Social Media Outlook 2014' highlights how the UAE government realized, early on, the importance of social media as an effective tool of communication. Offering insights into social media use in the UAE, the report analyzes the government's deployment of social media tools to directly interact with the public, understand their challenges, and ensure the design and delivery of innovative, need-based public services. The report also spotlights the remarkable national brainstorming session organized in 2013 that is the country's most significant achievement to date in the crowd-sourcing of ideas.

The report, which articulates the Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government's role as a knowledge partner to the Dubai government, offers valuable insights on capacity building and enhanced productivity.

I would like to conclude by reiterating the importance of social media in our world today. His Highness, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, led by example in embracing this medium of change.

In a message to his followers on Twitter, he said: "Social media changed concepts, opened doors and brought down barriers. It developed work and made the public a part of the development process...social media today has become an influential force and an open parliament."

Dr Ali Sebaa Al Marri,

Executive President, Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government

Foreword

With the rapid expansion of social networks in the Arab region, Social Media has played a significant role in the lives of people; yielding a powerful tool to implement government initiatives and bringing the government closer to the community, so as to respond efficiently to their needs. The UAE holds the pioneering position of utilizing social media to serve the best “interests of its people”, launching the first government brainstorming session via Twitter, to crowdsource citizens’ ideas in order to improve the healthcare and education sectors. Moreover, for four consecutive years, the UAE has retained a top ranking position amongst Middle Eastern countries, scoring the highest penetration rate of social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

As the second edition of the Emirati Media Forum convenes, the Dubai Press Club (DPC) continues its mission to monitor such prominent phenomena as social media networks, which have revolutionized the way news and information are conveyed. The DPC further continues to examine factors that have introduced a new wave of competition facing traditional media forms.

Adopting a scientific approach in pursuing its mission, Dubai Press Club has renewed its collaboration with the Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government (MBRSG), a reputed research institution that utilizes advanced research methods to meet high academic standards, to produce the “UAE Social Media Outlook 2014: Increasing Connectivity between Government and Citizen”. We are pleased to make such a reliable reference available to the public, hoping it will provide a useful reference tool for researchers and media specialists to further analyze social media networks and examine key dimensions affecting the media sector, in general and community trends, in particular.

Mona Ghanim Al Marri

Director General, Government of Dubai Media Office
Chairperson, Dubai Press Club

Foreword

The “UAE Social Media Outlook 2014: Increasing Connectivity between Government and Citizen” study complements the objectives of Dubai Press Club (DPC) to emerge as a platform for research and media studies. The study also falls in line with DPC’s strategy to keep pace with the changing phenomena that affect the media scene in addition to presenting credible research information to benefit local and regional media sectors as well as academics and media students. Through this study, the DPC seeks to utilize innovative channels to create unconventional networks for communication between the local and regional media and the community.

We are glad to launch this study, which is the fruit of collaboration between Dubai Press Club and the Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government (MBRSG). The study analyzes the social media scene in the United Arab Emirates and examines its features and characteristics. Using analytical data and statistics, the study surveys the opinion of citizens on the influence of social media on government services. It also explores the UAE’s unique experiment in utilizing social media to enhance government-citizens communication and increase public involvement through launching a brainstorming session to generate ideas aiming to improve the services quality in government departments.

The UAE holds a pioneering position in developing government sectors. This is apparent through the series of innovative initiatives launched and the employment of social media networks as interactive media platforms. As a main drive to develop the UAE media scene, Dubai Press Club aims to document such successful and distinguished experiments by the UAE through its partnership with renowned research institutions, a step that reflects the keenness of the UAE’s leadership to support and develop the media sector.

We hope the study proves to be a useful source of information and reference for universities, government institutions and individuals.

Muna Bu Samra

Director of Dubai Press Club

Introduction

As 2014 comes to a close, social media in the Arab world continues to grow exponentially, with over 85 million users in the region. This growth has been more than merely quantitative, as research conducted by the Governance and Innovation Program at the Mohammed bin Rashid School of Government over the past four years has shown. Social media usage in the region has evolved and transcended its once-traditional entertainment and social uses to play a pivotal role in civic engagement, youth and women's empowerment, entrepreneurship and societal change.

Social media has also changed information hierarchies and the power balance of knowledge exchange, creating two-way channels of discourse and engaging difficult-to-reach segments of society. It has the potential to empower marginalized voices to create, document and disseminate their version of current events.

Beyond being used by people in their individual and collective endeavors, social media is also being used by businesses and incorporated into government institutions to engage with citizens. In this regard, the UAE is at the forefront of Arab countries when it comes to the utilization of technologies such as social media in the provision of public services, whether for citizen engagement, innovation, or intergovernmental collaboration. An example of this is the recent 'UAE Brainstorming Session' via Twitter, initiated by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, to crowd source ideas from the public around healthcare and education issues in the UAE.

The UAE also tops the regional rankings across several social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, consistently having one of the highest user penetration users in the region over the past four years.

As such, this study will examine social media usage and trends in the UAE this past year, within the larger scope of social media usage in the region and its impact on Arab government, society and everyday life. It is a collaborative effort between the Dubai Press Club and the Governance and Innovation Program at the Mohammed bin Rashid School of Government and builds on the foundation of research conducted by the Program on the potential of social media to drive socio-economic growth and development in the Arab region.

The study will comprise three parts: the first presenting the latest social media usage statistics in the region, with a focus on the UAE's continued and exponential growth in the past few years; the second analyzing the results of a UAE-wide survey on the potential of social media to engage citizens in the design and delivery of public services; and the third documenting the success story that is the UAE Twitter 'brainstorming session' on public healthcare and education issues.

1. Social Media Landscape in the UAE and the Arab World

Social media usage continues to grow exponentially in the UAE and the Arab world, according to the latest research conducted as part of the Arab Social Media Report series¹. These findings, published here for the first time, highlight the latest social media usage and trends for Facebook and LinkedIn, specifically, in the region.

Facebook in the UAE and the Arab World:

Figure 1 illustrates the rankings of Arab countries according to their Facebook penetration. These have been divided into three categories:

High Penetration: These countries' Facebook user penetration rates indicate persistent growth and a pervasive use of Facebook in their societies. (Facebook penetration between 30% and above)

Emerging countries: These countries' Facebook user penetration ranges from 10%-30%, indicating

a medium penetration of Facebook users.

Developing users: These countries have low rates of Facebook user penetration, ranging from less than 1% to just under 10%, indicating room for growth

The number of countries in the High Penetration bracket continues to increase, now including nine countries in the Arab region. The UAE and Qatar top the rankings, with the UAE surpassing the 60% penetration mark for the first time. Kuwait and Lebanon have also surpassed the 50% penetration mark for the first time. Saudi Arabia and Oman, with penetration rates of 29%, are very close to reaching the required penetration rate to move up into the High Penetration bracket along with the rest of the GCC countries.

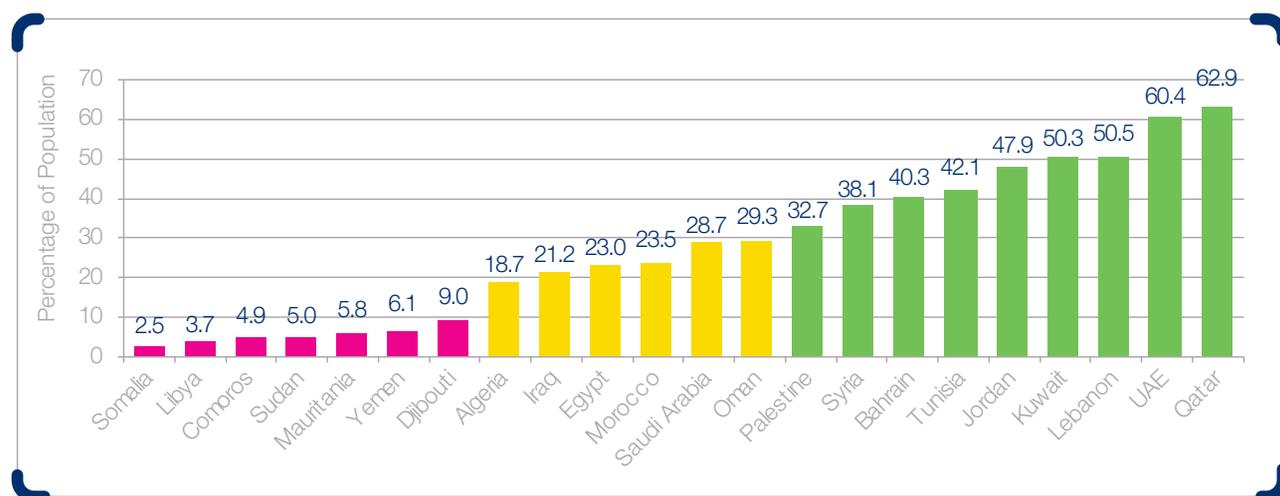


Figure 1. Facebook user penetration in the UAE and the Arab World
2014 populations from United Nations ILO Department of Statistics, <http://laborsta.ilo.org>. Additionally, Sudan population numbers do not reflect the change the country went through in 2011

Egypt persists in having the largest number of Facebook users in the world, with 20 million users, making up 23% of the Arab world's Facebook population. Saudi Arabia and Syria each make up 10% of the total Facebook users. The UAE, despite having a smaller population than most of the Arab countries that top the

rankings in terms of numbers of Facebook users, still makes up 6% of all Facebook users in the region, with a total of 5 million users (Figure 2). Within the GCC countries, the UAE has the second largest Facebook population, behind Saudi Arabia, making up 28% of all Facebook users in the GCC (Figure 3).

1. Arab Social Media Report series (2011-2014). Mohammed bin Rashid School of Government. Available for download from www.ArabSocialMediaReport.com

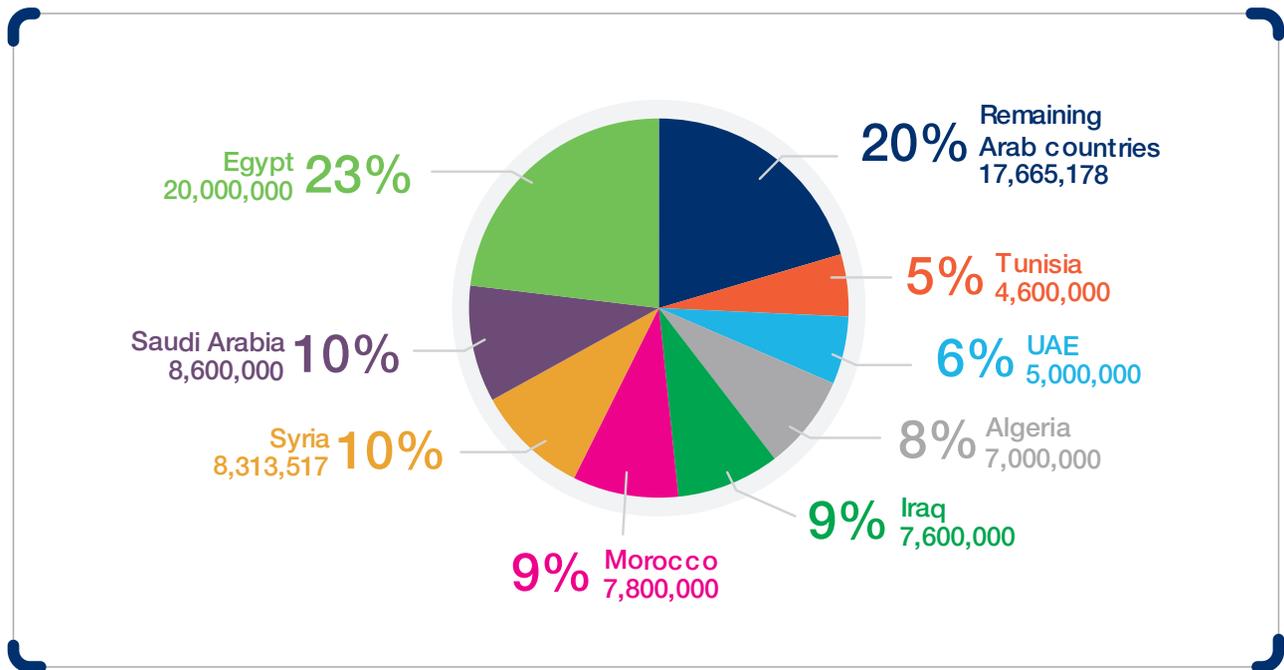


Figure 2. Number of Facebook Users and Percentage of Users in the Arab Region – October 2014

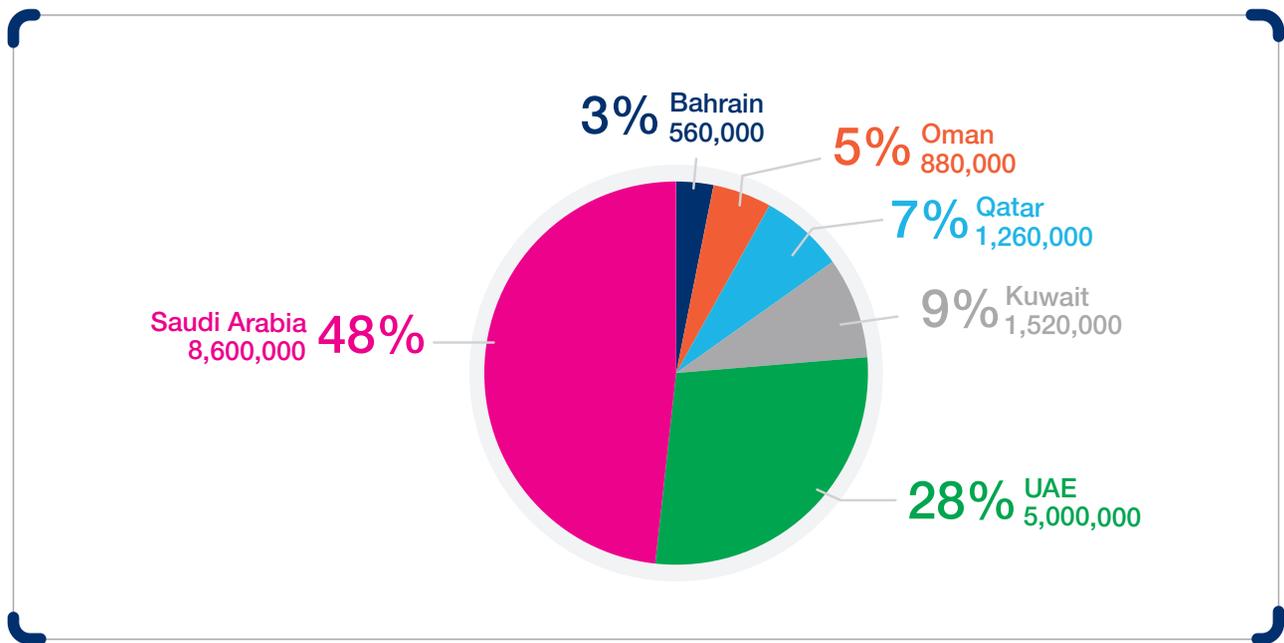


Figure 3. Number of Facebook Users and Percentage of Users in the GCC – October 2014

The UAE has consistently, since 2010 when Facebook data collection first started, been ranked first or second among all Arab countries in terms of Facebook penetration, and been one of the top 10 largest Facebook populations in the Arab world. This is a significant achievement for a country with a relatively small population, indicating an aptitude among UAE residents

for social media use, and the pervasiveness of Facebook in their everyday lives.

In these four years, the number of Facebook users in the UAE has tripled, from 1.6 million users in June 2010 to 5 million users in October 2014 – a growth of 200% - with 3.3 million people joining Facebook over that period (see Figure 4).

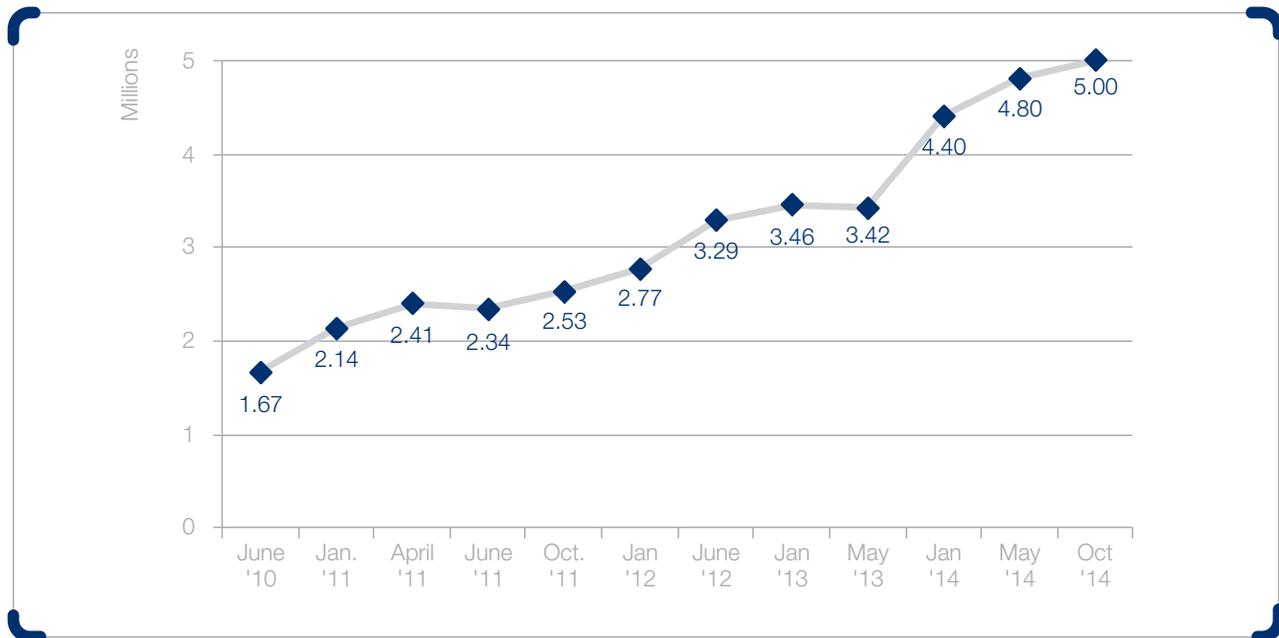


Figure 4. Number of Facebook users in the UAE between June 2010 and October 2014

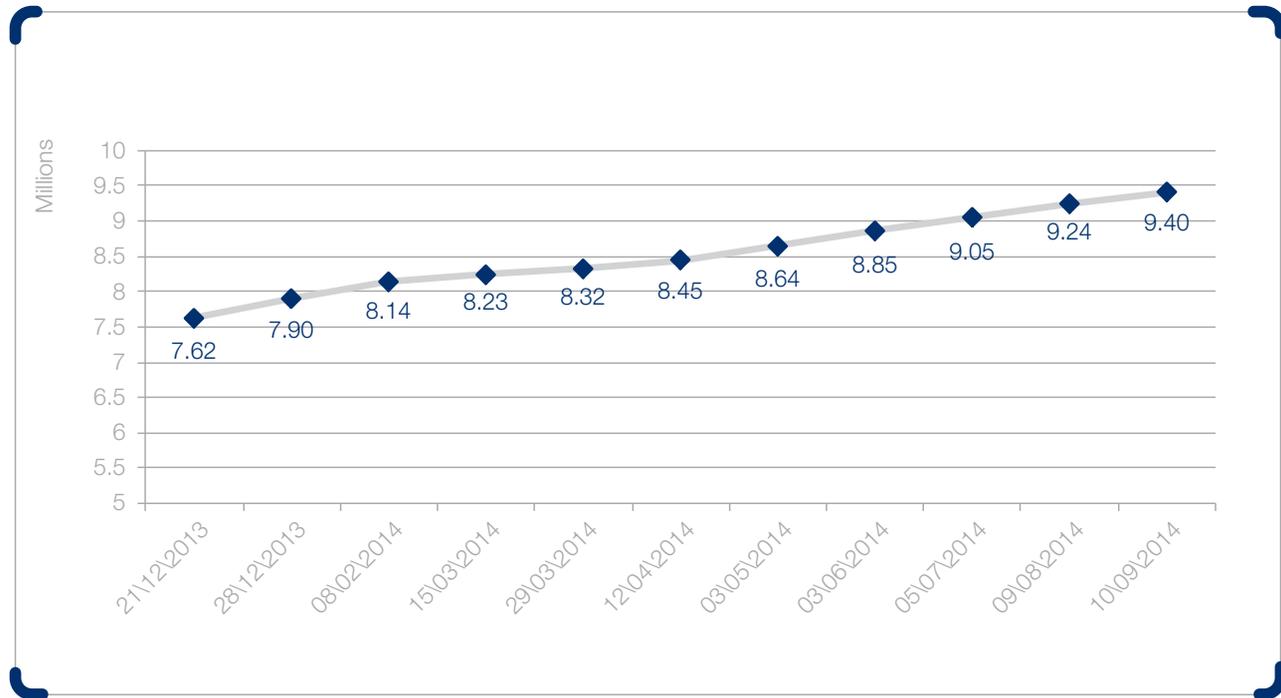
Facebook in the UAE: A Snapshot

- The total number of Facebook users in the UAE in October 2014 is 5 million, up from 4.4 million at the beginning of 2014.
- By October 2014 Facebook penetration in the UAE had exceeded 60%, up from 58% at the beginning of the 2014.
- The percentage of female users in the UAE in October 2014 is 28%, which has declined over the past two years from a percentage of 32%-33%. This latest percentage is also lower than the average percentage of female usage in the Arab region of 31.5%, indicating a larger gender gap in the UAE. It is also significantly lower than the global average of roughly 57%
- The percentage of young Facebook users (those under 30) has also decreased in the past two years from 52% to 48% in October 2014, with older Facebook users making up the slight majority. This is significantly lower than the average percentage of young Facebook users in the Arab region, which stands at 65%. Always the most balanced in terms of the age of its Facebook users, this increase in the number of older users indicates the maturity of Facebook usage and its prevalence across all age brackets.

LinkedIn in the UAE and the Arab World

LinkedIn has also shown significant growth in the Arab world since the beginning of 2014. As of October 2014 there are over 9.4 million LinkedIn

users in the Arab world up from 7.6 million users in January 2014. LinkedIn penetration has increased across the board, while it remains highest in the UAE (Figures 5 and 6).



Number of LinkedIn Users in Select Arab Countries²: (January - October 2014)

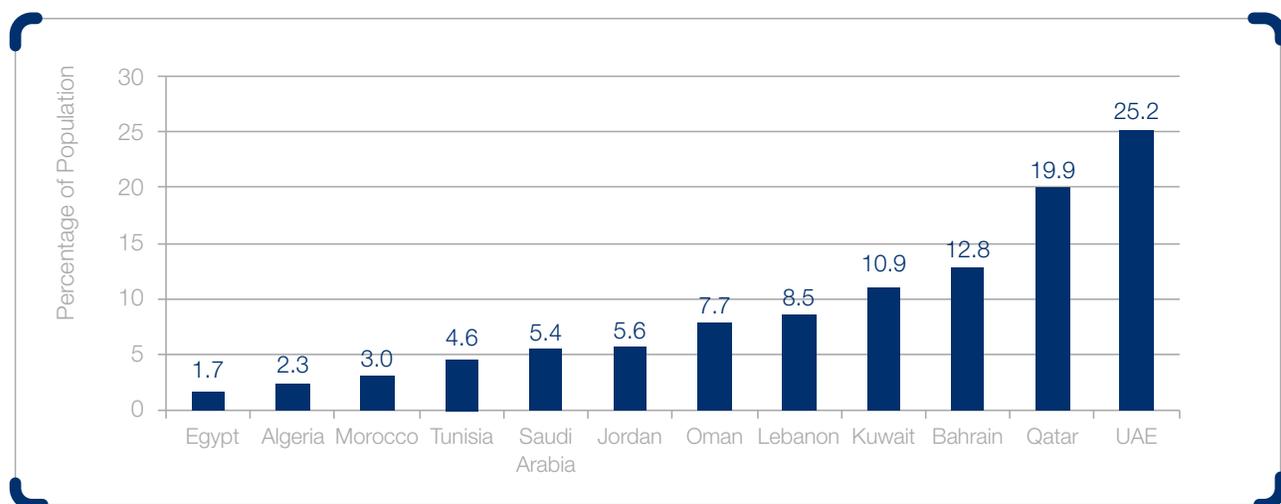


Figure 6. LinkedIn Penetration in Select Arab Countries (October 2014)

2. Combined Total for: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and UAE

The UAE has, since early 2012 when LinkedIn data collection first started, consistently been the country with the highest LinkedIn penetration in the Arab region. The number of users has

increased from over 860,000 in February 2012 to roughly 2.1 million in October 2014, of with a growth of 142%, or 1.2 million users during that period (Figure 7).

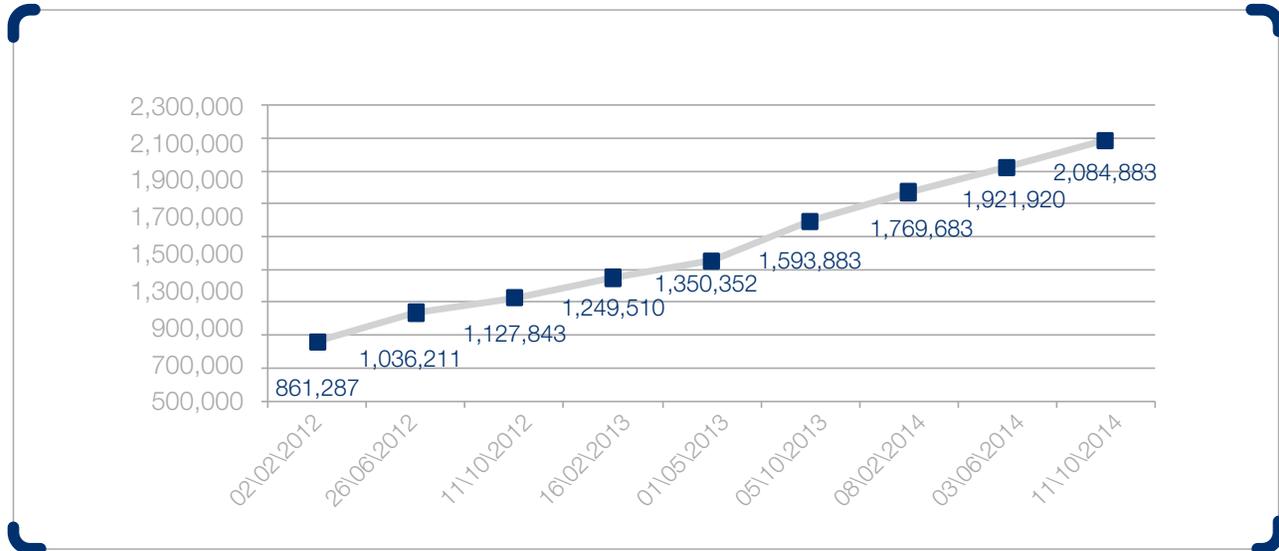


Figure 7. Number of LinkedIn Users in the UAE (Feb 2012 – October 2014)

LinkedIn in the UAE: A Snapshot

- The total number of LinkedIn users in the UAE in October 2014 is 2.1 million, up from 1.77 million at the beginning of 2014.
- By October 2014 LinkedIn penetration in the UAE had exceeded 25%, up from 21% at the beginning of the 2014.
- The percentage of female LinkedIn users in the UAE in October 2014 is 28%, which has been consistent over the past year and is close to the regional average of 29%. However, it is significantly lower than the global average of roughly 46%
- The percentage of young LinkedIn users (those under 35) has increased over the past year from 57% in February 2014 to 60% in October 2014. This is lower than the average percentage of young LinkedIn users in the Arab region, which stands at 68%. Being one of the more balanced countries in terms of the age of its LinkedIn users, this indicates the increasing maturity of LinkedIn usage and its prevalence across all age brackets, not just recent graduates and young professionals.

2. Social Media and Citizen Engagement in the UAE

Most people in the Arab world today exhibit a certain level of dissatisfaction with public services, whether in terms of their efficiency, effectiveness or accessibility. Although these levels vary, based on several factors³, there is a regional consensus that government services are below average and do not meet customer expectations. So it is not surprising that recent research has indicated that public services which incorporate customer input or feedback generate higher levels of satisfaction with these services.⁴ And while there are several ways of soliciting input and feedback, whether through traditional or online methods, information technology, in general, and social media, specifically, have a heightened potential to engage citizens and create a more public service design and delivery process that is customer-centric and inclusive.

And although the general public feeling about government services in the UAE is in contrast to the regional sentiment, with most public service sectors garnering an above average level of satisfaction, this does not mean that there are no issues or problems to contend with. This was acknowledged in the 'UAE Brainstorming Session' – to be further elaborated in part three of the report - which focused on ways to improve the public education and healthcare sectors. This pioneering initiative utilized the power of social media to crowd-source ideas from the public via Twitter, fittingly, given the UAE's tech-savvy population and leading government efforts in the adoption of information and communication technology (ICT),

Although government-citizen engagement is limited in much of the region and largely unilateral, there is an understanding among most Arab governments, and certainly in the UAE, of the need to have an inclusive process when it comes to provision of public services. Coupled with the continued upward trend in social media usage in the region for discussion and collaboration, this indicates the potential of social media to involve citizens and incorporate their input and feedback in to the enhancement of public services. Consequently, we conducted a regional survey on perceptions and experiences surrounding the use of social media by Arab governments to engage citizens in public services delivery. The responses from UAE residents were then extracted and the results analyzed to narrow in on the impact social media can have specifically for residents of the UAE.

Regional Survey on Social Media and Citizen Engagement

Survey respondents, among them UAE residents, were asked about their usage of social media to access information and give feedback on public services, as well as their reasons for visiting official social media pages. They were also asked about their perceptions of the benefits and risks of using social media to engage citizens in public service delivery, as well as suggested ways for governments to leverage social media use in citizen engagement.

Social media usage is almost universal among the UAE survey respondents, with 93% of them stating they had social media accounts. Perceptions of social media use in the context of public service delivery in the UAE were positive, with 57% of respondents stating that they strongly support the use of social media by government for the design and delivery of public services. Respondents believed that using social media to engage citizens in the enhancement of public services could result in significant short and long-term benefits. They also had an awareness of the risks involved, including security risks, information overload, and misuse of citizen information. They felt these could be addressed through several measures such as capacity-building, public awareness campaigns, a change in cultural mindset and a review of legal and regulatory frameworks surrounding the use of social media within the context of public service improvement.

Social Media, Information and Feedback on Government Services

When it comes to accessing information on public services, only 4% of respondents reported that social media was their first choice of medium, evenly split between those that used their personal social media accounts, and those that used official government social media sites. Another 2% listed government mobile apps as their first choice for accessing such information. Given that search engines are most people's default tool for finding information, it is not surprising that the favored method overall was using an online search engine, as reported by 37% of respondents. The second most common choice among respondents was visiting official government websites, as reported by 30% of respondents (Figure 8).

3. These include country income, personal income, and rural vs. urban dwelling, among others

4. The Arab Government Services Outlook 2014. The 2nd Government Summit. Dubai: The Governance and Innovation Program, Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government – Available on: www.ArabSocialMediaReport.com

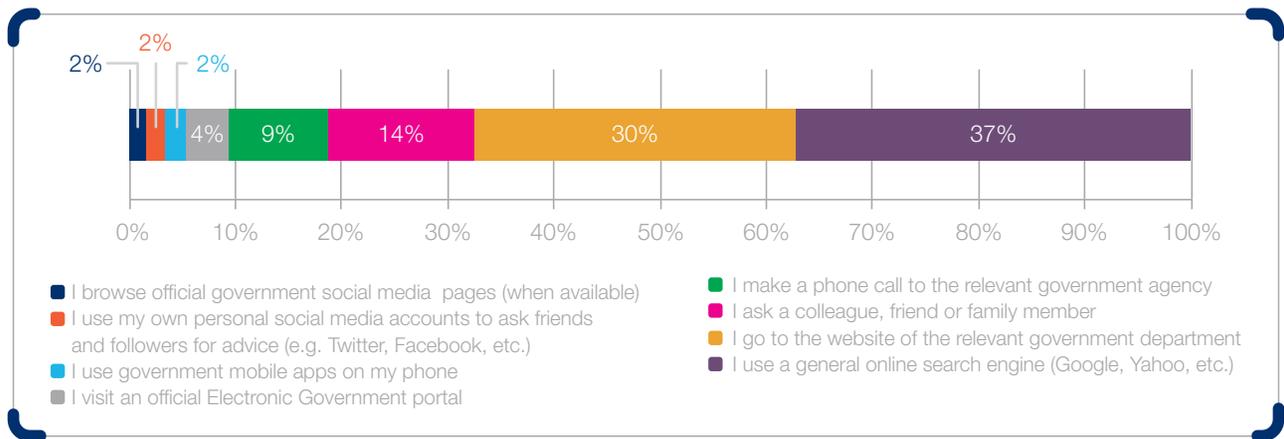


Figure 8. Primary access choice when seeking information about government services
 “When seeking information about government services, my first option usually is:”

In addition to providing access to information, social media can be a valuable tool for sharing feedback. When asked whether they had previously provided feedback to the government on the design and delivery of public services, over half of respondents said they had, with the largest

percentage (28%) reporting that they had done so through an electronic feedback form. Around 10% said they had commented on an official government social media account, with another 10% saying they had submitted their feedback via e-mail (Figure 9).

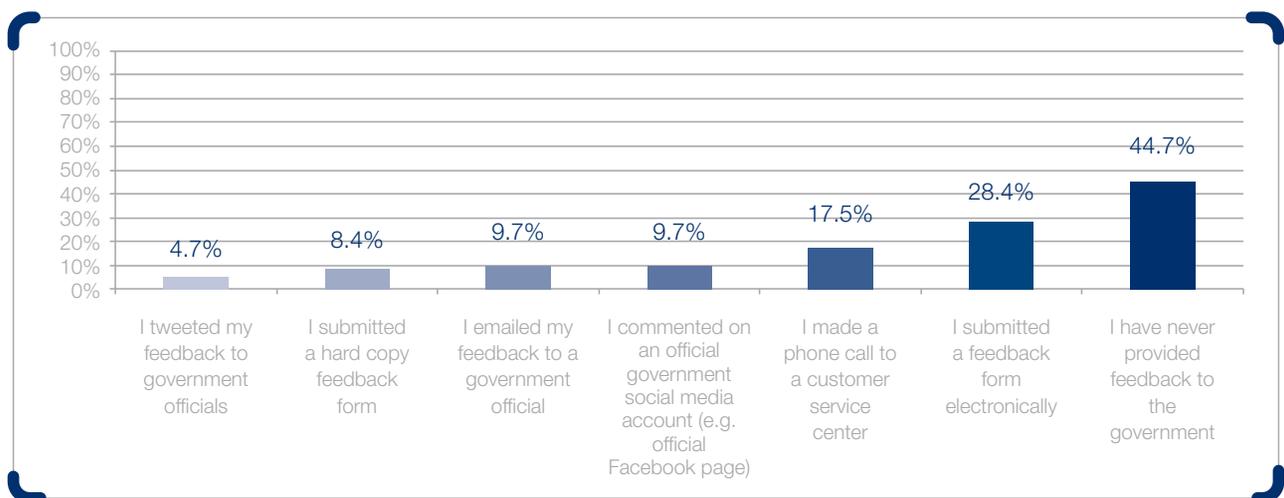


Figure 9: Feedback to the government on service delivery
 “Have you ever provided feedback to the government on service delivery?”

While electronic feedback forms were more popular than hard copies, 17% of respondents still preferred traditional methods such as customer call centers over social media and e-mail, implying a preference for personal interaction that is lacking in digital communications. Almost 5% of respondents claimed to have tweeted their feedback to government officials.

Usage Trends of Social Media for Public Services in the UAE

Frequency of Visits to Government Social Media Pages

59% of respondents stated that they visited official government social media pages regularly, with 20% of them visiting these pages at least once a week, 8% of them at least once a day, and 31% of them several times a day. Of the remaining 41%, 29% claimed that they rarely visited official government social media pages, while 12% said they never did. Given that an increasing number of government entities in the UAE are developing a social media presence and there is a push towards m-services, it’s not surprising to see that the majority of respondents frequent government social media pages (Figure 10).

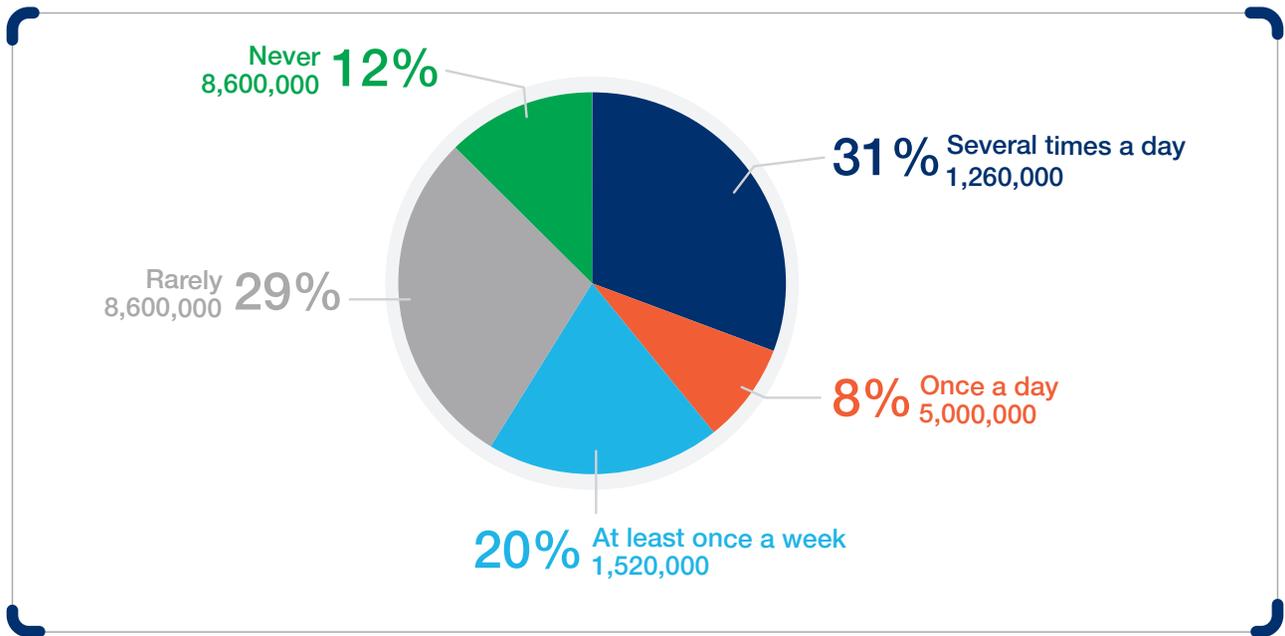


Figure 10: Frequency of accessing official government social media pages
 “How frequently do you access official government social media pages, when available?”

Utilization of Government Social Media Pages for Gathering Information and Giving Feedback on Services

Despite the fact that only 2% of respondents indicated that official government social media pages were their first choice when it came to accessing information (Figure 1), 78% of respondents who do frequent social media pages said that they use it for this very purpose. This corresponds to 43% of the entire survey sample, indicating that, for a large percentage of respondents, government social media pages are a relevant source of information (Figure 11). This also highlights the fact the social media is still primarily being used as a one-way tool to gather information, rather than being utilized as medium for discussion and engagement with government.

The second most common use of government social media pages was giving feedback on or evaluating services, at a much smaller percentage of 8%. Coupled with the fact that a similarly small percentage (10%) of all respondents reported having given feedback on government services through social media (Figure 2), this indicates a budding interest in using government social media pages for this purpose, one which should be nurtured and capitalized on by government entities in order to engage citizens. As with any new public communications channel, citizens’ trust needs to be gained over time in order to grow their usage. With social media especially, come expectations of responsiveness and accountability that need to be met. Any perceived lapse in these areas could be a deterrent to citizens’ use of social media.

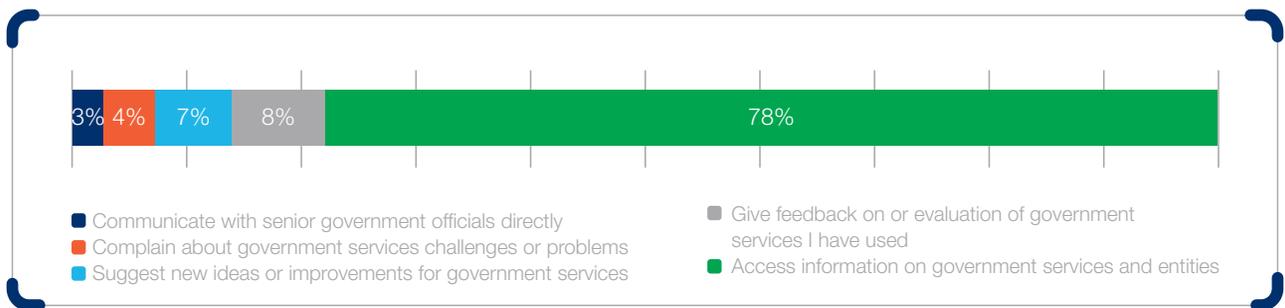


Figure 11: Primary use of government social media pages
 “My primary use of government social media pages is for the following purpose:”

Discussing Government Services on Social Media

Almost half of the respondents indicated that they use their personal social media accounts to discuss government services (Figure 12). The platform stated as most widely-used, by 23% of respondents, was Facebook, followed by professional social media networks such as LinkedIn and Bayt, used by 12% of respondents

and Twitter, used by just over 11%. These percentages mirror the popularity of the three platforms in the UAE, where the platforms with the highest penetration of users are ranked, in descending order, as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. They may also indicate that Facebook is the preferred social media platform for most official government social media pages.

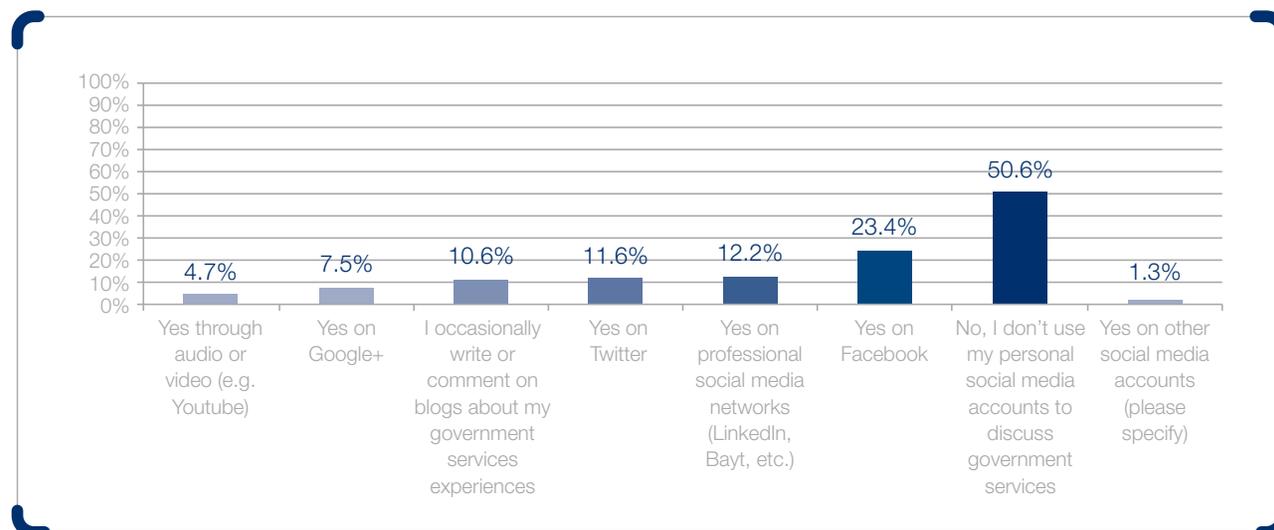


Figure 12: Using personal social media accounts to discuss government services
 “Do you use your personal social media accounts to discuss government services?”

Readiness for Utilizing Social Media in Public Service Design and Delivery in the UAE

What are the benefits

The majority of respondents agreed that using social media for public service design and delivery could be beneficial. In terms of short-term benefits, 85% said that by making communication between customers and government more efficient, social media could reduce the costs of creating and delivering these services, while 80% believed that social media’s capacity to enhance information exchange could increase service quality. Other largely-agreed upon benefits included better fitting services, broader inclusiveness of customers’ opinions and real-time responsive to customers’ queries and needs (Figure 13).

The highest ranking long-term benefits were improving government understanding of customer needs by analyzing data and feedback from social media resources, as reported by 80% of respondents, closely followed by increasing customers’ trust in government through direct

communication enabled by social media. Both of these benefits indicate that establishing trust and understanding between customers and government in the context of public service delivery are key priorities for respondents. Other benefits perceived as important included enabling innovation in services, creating online communities of interest around public services, and promoting inter-governmental collaboration (Figure 14).

These findings are in line with previous research indicating that people in the Arab region have overly positive perceptions of the benefits that social media can have on various aspects of their lives. These heightened expectations may also imply that citizens, given the pervasiveness of social media use in the UAE, are eager to engage with their government on social media.

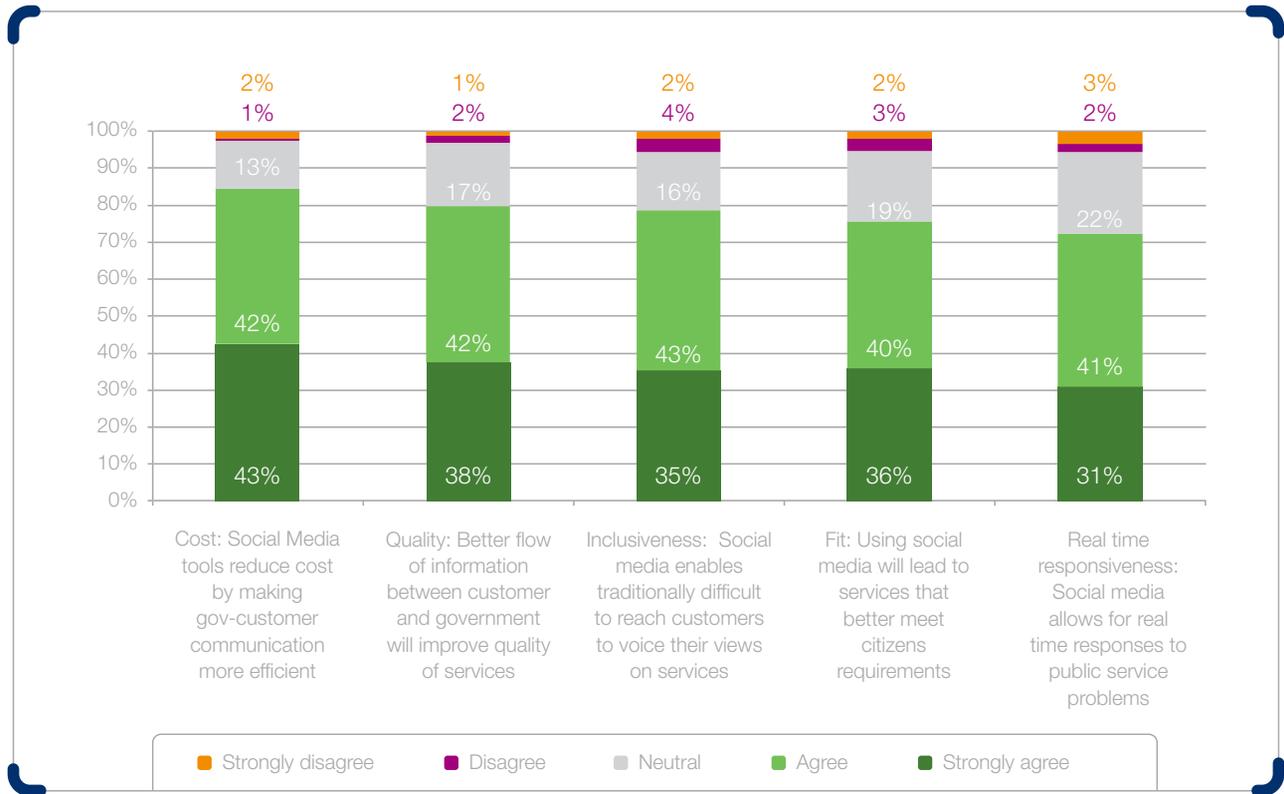


Figure 13: Direct or short-term benefits of using social media for services design and delivery

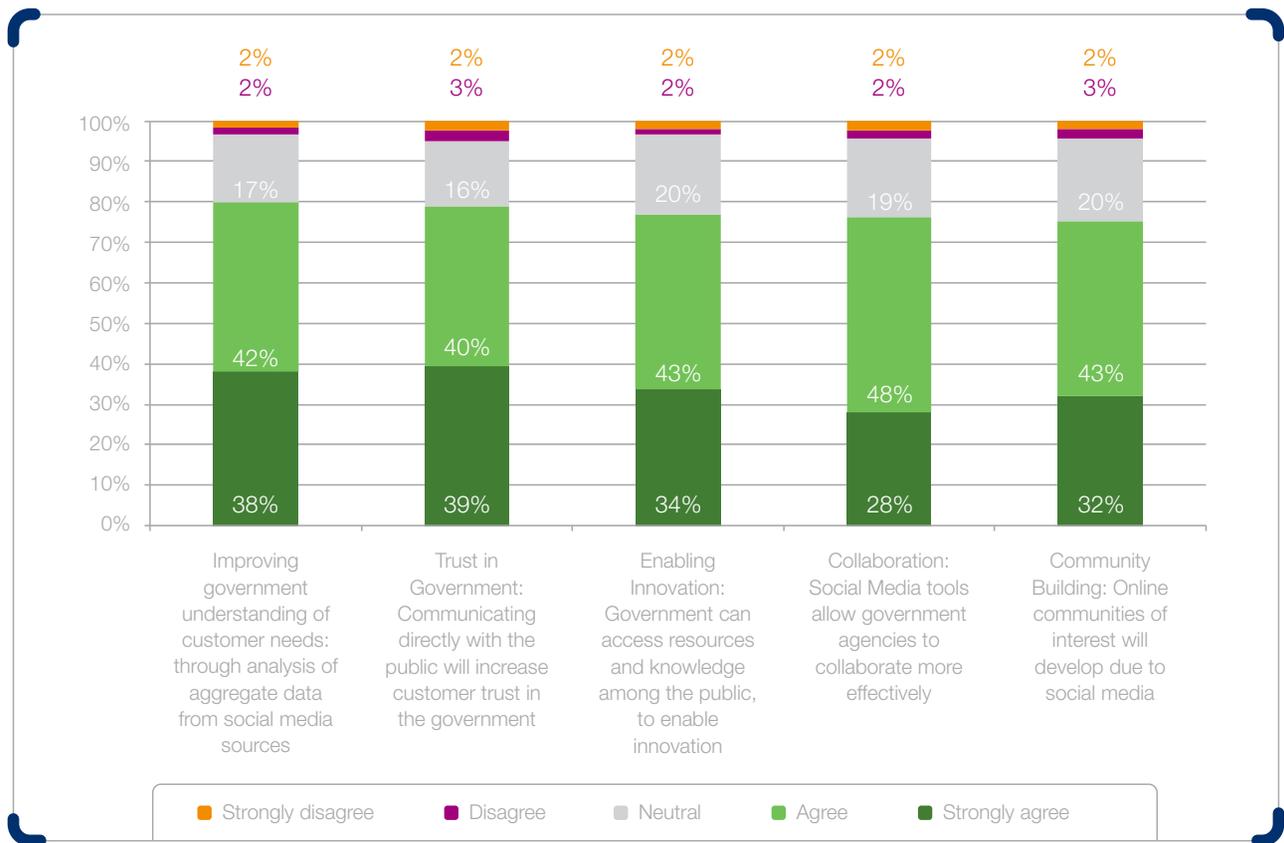


Figure 14: Indirect or long-term benefits of using social media for services design and delivery

What are the Risks?

Coupled with the high expectations among respondents of the usefulness of social media in public service delivery, there was an awareness of the inherent risks as well. The leading potential risk was that of questionable information validity, as reported by 78% of respondents, followed by

reputational damage, which was a concern for 66% of respondents. A majority of respondents also indicated that cyber security, negative citizen participation, information overload, and a fear of government's misuse of citizen information were all possible risks (Figure 15).

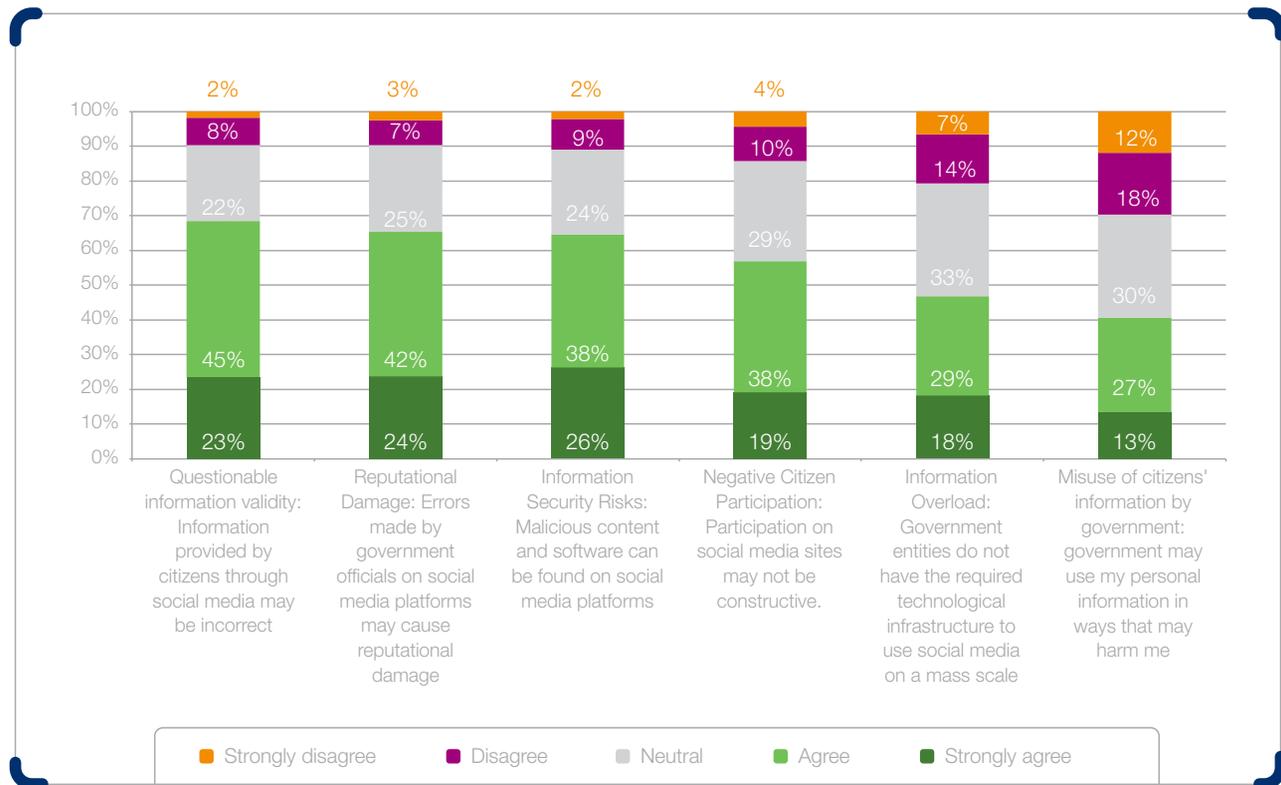


Figure 15: Risks of using social media tools by government entities for service design and delivery
 "Use of social media tools by government entities in my country of residence for service design and delivery may have the following risks, in my opinion:"

What Steps Could the UAE Government be Taking?

In order to build on respondents' positive perceptions of social media use in service design and delivery and capitalize on the opportunity that this presents for citizen engagement, governments need to make several changes. The most-needed of these changes are training and capacity building of government employees, as identified by 60% of respondents, followed by public awareness campaigns on social media use, as reported by 56% of respondents. Openness and transparency in the way data is collected was deemed important

by 45% of respondents. 42% felt that access to more social media channels for customers was needed, as well as internal policies on social media use for government agencies. Other changes that ranked lower were the need for a cultural shift towards social media in government, a change in the regulatory framework surrounding social media, and a change in government daily operations (Figure 16).

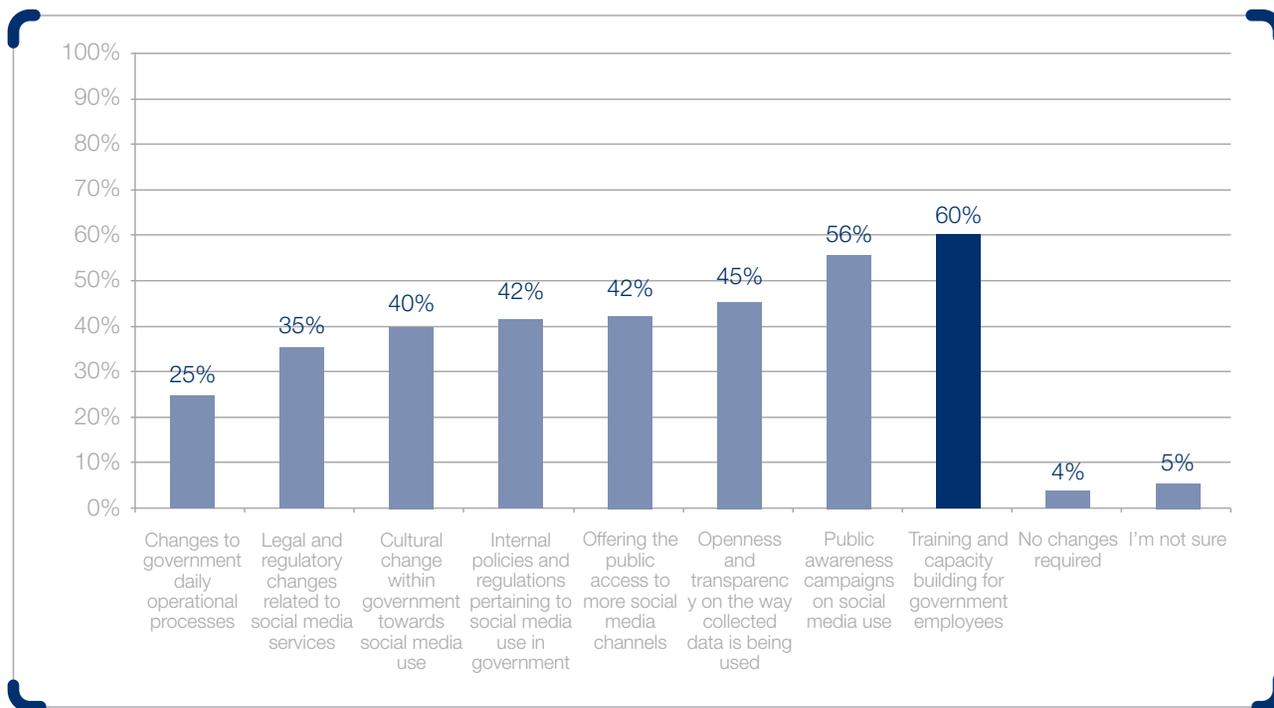


Figure 16: Changes governments need to make, to better leverage social media for citizen engagement and better services

“What changes does the government in your country need to make, to better leverage social media for citizen engagement and deployment of better services?”

Social Media, Citizen Engagement and Government Services: Key Findings

UAE residents have positive perceptions of the use of social media for public service design and delivery and its potential benefits: Customers in the UAE seem to be ready and willing to engage with the government via social media in the design and delivery of public services. This is expected, given the UAE government’s leading efforts in the region to integrate social media into government services, and the pervasiveness of social media use among UAE residents. Customers agreed that their engagement through social media for public service design and delivery could result in several benefits including better fit and quality of public services, reduced service costs, and enhanced inclusiveness.

UAE customers are primarily visiting government social media pages for the purpose of accessing information on public services, less so for giving feedback: The majority of the people in the UAE visit government social media pages at least once a week, and just under half of them use these pages as a point of access to information on government services. A smaller percentage uses these pages to give their feedback, indicating a burgeoning interest among UAE customers to engage in a two-way discussion with government on public services, coupled with a certain amount of skepticism regarding the government’s level

of responsiveness to customer feedback. These modes of usage also indicate that people in the UAE still prefer to utilize the informational rather than transactional side of social media, but that this could change with time as trust in government and its use of feedback acquired through social media is built.

Social media has the potential to enable engagement but UAE government has to rise to citizens’ expectations: UAE customers have high expectations of what social media can achieve in terms of engagement with government to improve public services. However, they also maintain that there are certain steps that need to be taken by government enhance the process of citizen engagement and meet customers’ needs and expectations. These include training government employees, developing awareness campaigns, implementing internal regulations and policies for social media use in government and promoting cultural shifts within governments towards the use of social media.

Understanding the risks of using social media for service delivery: Survey findings indicate that while UAE customers see the value and benefits of using social media for public service design and delivery, they also realize the risks involved. These possible risks include invalid information, reputational damage and misuse of citizens’ information.

3. The UAE National Brainstorming Session: A Case Study⁵

Introduction

Over the past decade, greater emphasis has been placed on acknowledging citizens of the UAE as individuals who actively contribute to sustainable community development rather than perceiving them as passive recipients of public services. Society in the UAE has steadily become more demanding of government services, requiring that they be more 'citizen centric'.

The government has attempted to capitalize on this demand, coupled with the UAE's high internet usage rates to develop a range of public services that employ technology in various ways to increase their overall efficiency. Examples of this include the development of a range of online services – often accessible via mobile platforms – and the introduction of 'e-gates' in airports to speed up immigration procedures in the UAE .

More recently, society in the UAE has become amenable to adopting social media for a variety of uses. So much so that presently, approximately 60% of the country's population are regular users of this medium. The UAE government has capitalized on these relatively prominent levels of social media usage within its society to communicate with members of the public and gauge how best to improve public services. This ultimately led to the conception of the 'UAE brainstorming session'.

Society and Trust in Technology

The UAE has generally been quick to adopt information communication technologies (ICTs) and employ them in various forms of public administration and government. This is evidenced by the World Economic Forum (WEF), which places the UAE at the top of its world rankings for acknowledging the "Importance of ICT to Government vision" and 2nd amongst 144 countries with regard to "Government Success in ICT Promotion". Similarly, the UAE is recognized by the UN as being one of the top twenty countries in the world in its "online service delivery" index. This adoption of ICTs has largely been well received by

society in the country, subsequently fostering an environment of public acceptance of ICTs by the government; a claim that is substantiated further by the UAE ranking 3rd amongst 148 countries with regard to "Public Trust in Politicians", in accordance with the WEF's Global Competitiveness report.

History of Public Participation in the UAE

Since the UAE's inception in 1971, the only formal participatory process that existed in the country was conducted through a body called the Federal National Council (FNC). Its role was limited to suggesting legislative amendments to the UAE cabinet. The FNC was however supplemented by an informal public participatory process, namely the "majlis": a habitual gathering that enabled citizens to communicate their ideas and concerns directly to their leaders within their community.

As encouraging as such an environment was, it was limited, both in its reach and in its ability to significantly affect public policy. Until recently, there remained no formal process in the UAE that enabled members of the public to systematically communicate directly with the government.

The Challenge

Despite admirable levels of government efficiency relative to other countries in the region, the UAE continues to face issues with two specific sectors: education and healthcare. Both of these services are critical to the development of the nation, yet despite their significance, they compare unfavorably to social, legal, economic and security services within the country. This is indicated by the UAE's relatively low global ranking of 49 for health and education services in the WEF's Global Competitiveness Report. This disparity is made further apparent by the results of a regional survey conducted by the Mohammed bin Rashid School of Government's (MBRSG) Governance and Innovation Program, where "education" and "healthcare" comprised the two lowest ranking sectors for public satisfaction of quality, efficiency and accessibility for government services in the UAE.

5. Based on the publication: Salem, F. (2014) 'From Majlis to Hashtag – The UAE National Brainstorming Session'. Mohammed bin Rashid School of Government

Radical improvements need to be made to the standards of both education and healthcare in the UAE, as they are the two most publicly accessed services in the country. The UAE's population is culturally, socially and economically diverse. This is reflected by the fact that education and healthcare services are not provided by one homogenous entity, but rather by a combination of federal and local government authorities as well as private institutions. As such, improving both health and education services would require engaging with the country's population on an unprecedented scale, both in terms of the quantity and the diversity of the feedback needed to impart meaningful change. Such an approach provides significant challenges, but is fundamental to the development of these two government sectors.

The Brainstorming Session

The UAE "cabinet retreat" is a gathering that occurs on a regular basis, whereby all members of the country's Cabinet of Ministers congregate to discuss the most pertinent matters that the nation faces. It's predominant objective is to encourage collaboration amongst various government ministries so as to find solutions to critical issues at hand. Improving the government's education and health sectors was the primary concern for the latest iteration of the cabinet retreat, which took place from the 8th to the 9th of December 2013.

A few days prior to this event, on the 3rd of December 2013, HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, issued a call for all members of the nation's population to take part in what was dubbed the 'largest ever national brainstorming session' in the country, appealing for ideas concerning how to tackle the issues faced by the education and healthcare sectors. This brainstorming session would be conducted over a range of traditional and online platforms, making it accessible to members of the public on an unprecedented scale. Further, it would provide members of the public with a systematic means of communicating with its government.

Participants were asked to submit their proposals either directly to the official website of the Prime Minister or via a dedicated email address that was provided. A short list of the most relevant proposals would then be discussed in further detail at the cabinet event.

The public response to the brainstorming event

exceeded expectations. By December 9th – the last day of the brainstorming session – participants had provided in excess of 82 thousand submissions. Each submission was systematically collected and sorted into five categories for each of the two sectors: health and education.

For education, these categories were:

1. Teacher Quality: How to enhance the efficiency and competency of teachers and add value to their teaching careers.
2. Teaching Methodology: Developing innovative teaching methods, integrating technology and applying international standards in this field.
3. 'Upskilling' Students: Enhancing students' skills to meet the standards of other developed countries.
4. Higher Education: Increasing the number of students who complete high school, university and postgraduate studies.
5. Aligning Educational Output: Integrating educational outputs with present and future requirements of the different sectors of the UAE economy.

For health, these categories were:

1. Quality of Services: Raising the quality of healthcare services for the public and private sector.
2. Competence of Healthcare Staff: Enhancing the efficiency and competence of healthcare staff, whilst also promoting careers in health care.
3. Specialized Health Services: Developing specialized medical services across the country.
4. Lifestyle Services: Transform lifestyle patterns to improve general health.
5. Prevention: Measures to limit the spread of diseases within society.

Outcomes, Achievement and Impact

The objectives originally set by the organizers of the brainstorming initiative were numerous. They included: actively engaging citizens by providing them with a means of directly influencing government strategies, and in doing so, facilitating

an environment that places citizens at the center of the decision making process within government. This in turn, would encourage collaboration and partnership between the government and the public through the use of ICTs, thus generating greater levels of transparency – and subsequently trust – regarding government practices.

The actual outcomes of the brainstorming session surpassed initial expectations: the government actively made use of crowdsourcing to allow the public to produce new solutions to solve problems with health and education services in the country. Additionally, new problems in existing public services were identified; this provided an invaluable insight into the unintended negative impact that certain decisions had had on existing government services. The process also produced a platform for the development of new government services, and a direct means of communication between the government and the public.

Solutions for Moving Forward

Several inferences can be drawn from the brainstorming session. They serve as a means of attempting to learn from the process as a whole:

1. Future endeavors of this nature need to be better planned and more proactive in nature. This process was reactive, which limited its overall effectiveness.
2. More resources need to be allocated towards handling the logistics of a process conducted on such a large scale. Few government entities allocate human resources for crowd sourcing, information collection and big data analysis; however, it would be a shame to not be able to fully capitalize on all of the feedback generated by the project.
3. Further to a lack of manpower, no advanced tools were used to collate and analyze the submissions generated in the brainstorming session. This made it difficult to systematically collate posts submitted through Twitter, despite the social media site providing a good platform for public participation. The use of big data analysis tools are fundamental, especially if this process was to be standardized across government entities.
4. Several government entities could have been more involved. This would have helped to generate greater collaboration amongst government sectors.

5. The number of substantial ideas generated by the brainstorming session has been overwhelming. In future, submissions may be analyzed more efficiently if the brainstorming session was more specific about how it targeted individuals, e.g. generating appropriate ideas and solutions for a specific technical problem may require targeting individuals with formal expertise within that field.
6. Some platforms in the UAE appear to be more popular with certain demographics than others: microblogging platforms like Twitter are more popular with UAE nationals, whilst platforms like Facebook are more popular with expatriates. It is important to fully capitalize on multiple social media platforms to reach out to as many individuals as possible.
7. Lastly, the effects of this event should not be seen in isolation, but rather as a step that contributes to a long term goal of greater levels of public engagement in the UAE.

Conclusion

This case study has aimed to evaluate the manner in which the government of the UAE has used technology, and in particular, social media, to improve public services, specifically within the health and education sectors.

The steps taken to utilize technology have affected the government in various ways. Most notably, it has helped to generate greater transparency regarding the approaches that the government adopts to improve public services. This, in turn, has further enhanced the level of trust shared between the nation's citizens and their government.

The UAE government has yet to fully construct a sustainable means of formally and systematically engaging its citizens that allows them to significantly influence the development of public services; however, the results generated by the brainstorming session are encouraging. It is important to build on these results in the hope that technology can be utilized as part of a long term solution to fortify ties between the nation's government and its citizens.

Annex 1

Facebook data

The number of Facebook users in all 22 Arab countries, was collected periodically between May 1, and October 15, 2014, with breakdowns for men and women, and in the following age brackets—youth (15-29), and adults (30 and over).

Raw data on for all Arab countries was collected and aggregated based on Facebook's official data (Group A), excluding Syria and Sudan (Group B), for which data was extracted from a source other than Facebook. Because of US imposed technology export sanctions, no data on the number of Facebook users in Syria and Sudan is available. The actual number of Facebook users in Syria (in November 2007) was located through online research; no such data for Sudan was found. For that reason, all Facebook data on Sudan in this report was estimated using the daily growth rate of Arab users (calculated from the Group A countries over different periods different periods for different reports - between January 5 and April 5, 2011; between January 3 and April 3, 2012; between January 7th and February 18th; and August 10 and November 9, 2013). This rate was used to calculate the number of users in group B, for consistency's sake, to ensure a smaller error margin than using the growth rates of similar countries for each individual country.

For Syria, specifically, after February 7, 2011, when social media sites were no longer blocked in the country, a different daily growth rate was used to reflect the ensuing surge in growth number of Facebook users. This rate was based on the average daily growth rate in Yemen, which has a similar ICT and socio-economic indicators as Syria. In addition, a one-off factor was added to the calculation of the Syria growth rate after lifting the ban on social media website on February 7, 2011. This was estimated based on the surge in number of Facebook users in Egypt after a similar Internet ban was lifted on 2nd February 2011.

In order to maintain accuracy, the average daily growth rate for Yemen was recalculated at several points in time and applied to generate the number of Syrian Facebook users.

It should be noted that for all charts in this paper, the numbers of Facebook users in Syria and Sudan are estimates, while the numbers for remaining countries were compiled based on official Facebook data.

LinkedIn data

The number of LinkedIn users in 12 Arab countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and the UAE, was collected periodically between May 1, and October 15, 2014, with breakdowns for men and women, and in the following age brackets: 18-24, 25-34, 35-54, 55 and above. Due to changes in the examined platform analyzed here, estimated numbers of users from several countries differ in previous report findings.

This could be due to changes, or corrections, in the criteria of geo-locating users by the platform itself. Attempts by the authors to examine the changes in the criteria with the platform where not successful, however, our analysis suggest that the current number in the Arab countries examined are more geographically representative.

Regional Survey on Social Media and Citizen Engagement

The regional online survey was administered in 22 Arab countries and ran from Feb – May 2014. Respondents numbered a total of 3654. UAE respondents numbered 320, which, given the population of the UAE, gives our findings a confidence level of 95% +/- 5.5% confidence interval.

Annex 2

About the Authors

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The views reflected in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the trustees and other staff at the Mohammed bin Rashid School of Government, the Dubai Press Club, or the Emirati Media Forum

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their appreciation, on behalf of the Mohammed bin Rashid School of Government, to the team at the Dubai Press Club, for their support on this collaborative effort

The authors wish to express their personal appreciation to **Maryam Minhas** and **Zargham Minhas** for their invaluable contribution to the research; and would like to acknowledge the efforts of the following individuals in providing essential contributions, input and assistance into the report and its related materials:

Fadi Salem, Sarah Shaer, Daniel Winterstein, Ghaith Yagan, Lama Ataya, Peggy Trabulsi, Roba Al-Assi, Heba Shaaban, Salha BuKattara

The Governance and Innovation Program

The Governance and Innovation Program at Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government (MBRSG) conducts research and programmatic activities focusing on policies for government innovation and development through information technologies in the Arab states. The objectives of the program are aligned with regional objectives towards nurturing a culture of innovation in society, promoting participatory, inclusive and transparent government models; and enabling more responsive and efficient governance through effective adoption of information technologies. The program works on three tracks:

- Policy and Scholarly Research: Conducting research focusing on government policies and societal transformation through technological innovation in the Arab region.
- Policy Advisory: The ultimate objective of the Program is to inform present and future Arab policy makers in assessing the impact of the ongoing transformations in their societies and governments; and to help develop locally fitting policies for future governance initiatives.
- Regional Development Activities: The Program brings together regional and international networks of practitioners and scholars working in related areas through programmatic and educational activities, in order to encourage proactive regional knowledge sharing and bridge the gap between policy and research.

The Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government

The Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government (MBRSG) is a research and teaching institution focusing on public policy in the Arab world. Established in 2005 under the patronage of HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Dubai, MBRSG aims to promote good governance through enhancing the region's capacity for effective public policy.

Toward this goal, the Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government also collaborates with regional and global institutions in delivering its research and training programs. In addition, the School organizes policy forums and international conferences to facilitate the exchange of ideas and promote critical debate on public policy in the Arab world.

The School is committed to the creation of knowledge, the dissemination of best practice and the training of policy makers in the Arab world. To achieve this mission, the School is developing strong capabilities to support research and teaching programs, including

- Applied research in public policy and management;
- Master's degrees in public policy and public administration;
- Executive education for senior officials and executives; and,
- Knowledge forums for scholars and policy makers.

Dubai Press Club

Established in 1999 under the patronage of Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Dubai Press Club (DPC) is a proactive platform for journalists and media professionals to debate and deliberate about various political, economic and social issues. Dubai Press Club plays a significant role in supporting and developing regional media industry by launching unique initiatives including the renowned Arab Media Forum (AMF), Arab Journalism Award (AJA) and the promising Emirates Media Forum (EMF).

Additionally, DPC's busy agenda offers a variety of activities targeting different segments of the media community. DPC hosts and organizes workshops and seminars on issues affecting regional and international socio-political scenarios, as well as strategic communication, business and economy, education, technology and culture. Also, the club periodically invites high-profile speakers and senior delegates to interact with local media and newsmakers. DPC is an active producer and sponsor of specialised media research and studies that keep pace with the rapid changes in the media industry.

On top of its efforts to promoting the culture of innovation and creativity in media and journalism regionally, DPC works to enhance professionalism by launching various initiatives and organizing educational and recreational events. As one of the world's most active press clubs, DPC provides its members with great opportunities and unlimited resources, in addition to access to global networks of journalists, experts and media organizations.



