

The adoption of social media in government agencies: Gulf Cooperation Council case study

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ABSTRACT

Social network systems are increasingly being used by governments to aid communication and improve services. Social network systems can be defined as ‘web-based services’ that allow individuals to construct a public or private profile within a bounded system, and to explore connections with others within the system. These networks play a vital role in many fields such as education, health and social marketing. The networks are useful for government agencies as they have many interactive and innovative features which aid communication and interaction between citizens.

The aim of this study is to explore the current status of government departments of GCC member states in regards to the usage of social media and to elicit the different ways in which SNS are being incorporated into the government departments of GCC member states. It consists of three main stages. Stage 1: It seeks to provide an outline of the current relevant literature regarding the categories, features and usage of social networking systems in order to provide real-life examples of governments that are embracing these technologies, and to discover what their experiences have been in doing so. Stage 2: is to investigate the adoption of social networking systems in government organizations, and their efforts in the race towards embracing them. That is to the extent government departments and ministries are championing the use of social networks across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, which networks they are using and who the key players are – for example, the social media champions. Stage 3: to enrich the study a comparative study to explore the extent that the developing countries (i.e., GCC countries) are catching up when compared with the developed countries (i.e. UK in this case).

The findings show that some GCC countries have taken tangible steps in adopting social media; for example, some of them have guidelines in place for adopting social media in government departments. Also, there are many champions who have started using social media to fulfil their ministry’s duties and communicate with their citizens. Some public figures in various governments are using social media to gauge public opinion on many different issues related to the running of the governments. However, most of the exerted efforts are individual rather than national strategy that is carefully planned and thought of.

Keywords: Social networking systems, social media, e-participation

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INTRODUCTION

The interactive version of the Web is called Web 2.0. This is an enhanced version of the Internet that enables dynamic user-interaction and user-ability to create and publish Web content without special programming. Because of these interactive capabilities of Web 2.0, terms such as Facebook, Google+, YouTube, Twitter, MySpace, LinkedIn, Wikis, podcasts, and blogs are becoming very popular in everyday language. Such applications are termed 'social networks' or 'social media'. This phenomenon has become a major part of our lives and many people try to share their day-to-day activities on social networks, and sharing photos and videos is also popular. The rapid rise of social networks has changed the way we interact online, how we connect to people, and, of course, how we market ourselves, our products, and our services. With these tools, people have a chance to share and upload information immediately, making data dissemination far more convenient and viral in nature.

Social networks are becoming a very popular tool for communication world-wide but in the Arab world it has its effect the most. The influence of social media in particular has been felt in the recent political changes in Tunisia and Egypt and the Arab spring that have swept through the Middle East. What happened during the "Arab Spring" is a good example of how social networks can be utilized to convey a message to a mass audience, that is, in terms of spreading the word or what is called 'citizen journalism'.

Many governments worldwide are reserving budgets to harness technology, and social media in particular, in order to transform government services through digital engagement between government agencies and their customers. Of course social media tools can be engaged for both external and internal communications, encouraging discussion and sharing knowledge and best practice between civil servants (Dumbacher, 2012).

Digital technology has revolutionized the way in which people communicate and share information at local, national and international levels. This paper argues that there is a lot to be gained by governments who make a real commitment to incorporate social networks into their day-to-day operations. But to what extent are governments adopting this new phenomenon? What is the state of readiness of the GCC for adopting social networking in their institutions and government ministries? What are the current national initiatives/plans in the different GCC countries regarding the social networking adoptions and their implementation? What are the perceived incentives or the advantages of adopting social media in government agencies? What might be the obstacles hindering them from incorporating new platforms? All these questions will be explored further in this paper.

The paper is organized in the following way: Section 2 outlines the research questions; Section 3 describes the research methodology and design; Section 4 provides a literature review on Web 2.0 and social networking, giving a historical perspective on the progressive development of the web and the main characteristics that were responsible for the paradigm shift of power from institutions to individuals and community participants helping each other, referred to by Li and Bernoff (2008) as "the groundswell". Section 5 presents a detailed overview of social networks and of the social media, including definitions, classifications and rate of growth. Section 6 provides data analysis and discussions and Section 7 presents the research conclusions and suggestions for future work.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the aims and objectives of this exploratory study, the researcher employed triangulation i.e. different research methods. Hence, a three-stage study was conducted:

Stage One:

Conduct a literature review to explore the following:

- a. What is Web 2.0, the 'big ideas' of Web 2.0, Forrester's Social Technographics Ladder?
- b. Definitions of social networking systems, differences (between media, networking, networks, network systems, and sites), categories of social networking systems
- c. Social media usage and adoption in government agencies worldwide
- d. Obstacles and enablers of social media adoption in the governments agencies

Stage Two:

The researcher conducted an online survey (netnography) to investigate the GCC readiness for adopting social networking systems in their institutions and government ministries. The aim is to investigate the usage/adoption of social networking sites in all the ministries in GCC countries. The researcher followed the procedure:

- a. A search engine was used to search the Internet for all government ministries/agencies in GCC countries and in particular the government portals.
- b. The home page for each ministry/agency was examined.
- c. All social networking sites that each ministry/agency is using were listed and assigned one of the following values:
 - i. *Working* - when a user clicks on an icon and it leads to a social networking site
 - ii. *Not working* - when a user clicks on an icon there is no action or it leads to an inactivated account
 - iii. *Active*: if there has been recent participation, within the last 1 - 2 days.
 - iv. *Not using social media*: if there is no social networking icon on the homepage of government agencies.

Stage Three:

The researcher conducted another online search using a search engine to find out about any national initiatives in each of the GCC countries:

- i. To check for any guidelines for using social networking systems in each country
- ii. To check for social media 'champions' using social networking systems for the purpose of conducting government duties.
- d. A comparative study between GCC and the UK usage of social networking in governmental agencies was also conducted. This process was carried out after similar study conducted on the UK governmental agencies.

SYNOPSIS OF WEB 2.0

The World Wide Web (W3) was created by Sir Tim Berners-Lee in 1989 when working at CERN (European Organization for Nuclear Research). He proposed the W3 project, initially to be used only as a means of transporting research-based ideas within the organization. The Internet and the World Wide Web are two different things. The Internet is a global system of interconnected computer networks that uses the TCP/IP (protocol) for serving users worldwide. W3 is a network of interlinked hypertext web pages accessed through the Internet. The Web is just one of the Internet's applications. The Web has experienced continuous improvement in its features and is still developing even now. The

main stages of this evolution are known as Web 1.0, Web 2.0, etc. These stages are outlined here.

Web 1.0 is a system of interlinked, hypertext documents accessed via the Internet, and, hence, was considered as the ‘read-only’ web. It only allowed for the searching of information. User interaction was very limited and content contribution by the users seemed to be negligible.

With the development of information and communication technology (ICT)-based tools, Web 1.0 has been upgraded to a ‘read-write’ web, which is also referred to as Web 2.0. These developments led to a considerable paradigmatic shift in the way people could interact with websites. Web 2.0 sites obtained much of their data from their users. Social networking applications became a vital part of Web 2.0, making the user experience more interactive and enriched (Shrivastava *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, Web 2.0 is the term given to describe a second generation of the World Wide Web that is focused on the ability of people to collaborate and share information online. Web 2.0 basically refers to the transition from static HTML Web pages to a more dynamic Web that is more organized and is based on serving Web applications to users. Other improved functionality of Web 2.0 includes open communication with an emphasis on Web-based communities of users, and more open sharing of information. Blogs, Wikis, Facebook, Twitter and web services are all seen as components of Web 2.0.

By carefully examining the characteristics of Web 2.0, one can deduce that its main feature is that it privileges users over institutions. Many researchers grouped these characteristics into six ideas that they believe are the reasons why Web 2.0 has had such a huge impact. These ideas are based on the concepts originally outlined by O’Reilly (2007). They include individual production and user-generated content (UGC), harnessing the power of the crowd, dealing with data on a large scale, architectural design of participation, network effects and open source movement (Anderson, 2007; Getting, 2007; Shrivastava *et al.*, 2011).

Similarly, Sharma (2009) lists the following as the core characteristics of Web 2.0, which also explain the characteristics mentioned above:

- User-centred design: created in a way that it fulfils every possible need of the end user and empowers them to perform certain customizations within the design.
- Crowd sourcing: using a small volume of content from multiple sources.
- Web as platform: advanced features available regardless of the software requirements of the system.
- Collaboration: a feature that enables many people to work together remotely.
- Power decentralization: all services of Web 2.0 are automatically available to all users instead of being provided by an administrator.
- Dynamic content: Web 2.0 services have to be highly dynamic and proactive.
- SaaS (Software as a Service): nowadays there are many software packages that are available as a web service with no platform dependency at all.
- Rich user experience: using XHTML, CSS 2.0, Ajax, flex and other similar rich media, have helped to make web services lighter, faster, less cluttered and more appealing to the end user.

The following section outlines the most prominent components of Web 2.0, which are ‘social networks’: their definition, categorization, rate of growth, and the benefits of and obstacles to their adoption by government agencies.

OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

Definition of Social Networks

In many cases the definitions of ‘social networks’, ‘social networking’, ‘social media’ and ‘social networking sites’ are overlapping. In this section we differentiate between these different terms. First, ‘social networks’ are traditionally defined as groups of people who, for example, share interests and/or activities. Social networking is the act of participating or interacting with one another within these social networks. Social networking sites are the websites where the interaction happens (Cohen, 2011; DigitalLikeness, 2008). Many websites could be classified as being “social networking sites”. Examples of the most popular and well-known social networking sites are Facebook, Twitter, Blogger, MySpace, Digg, Google+, and Stumbleupon, LinkedIn, Second life, YouTube, Flickr. Social networking sites deliver content through communication, collaboration/authority-building, multimedia, reviews and opinions, micro-blogging, publishing, photo sharing, entertainment and brand monitoring (Bard, 2010). They provide to users techniques and technologies such as aggregators, audio, video, live-casting, RSS, mobile, crowd sourcing, virtual worlds, gaming, search, conversation apps and Wikis (Wikipedia, 2013a; Wikipedia, 2013b; Wikipedia, 2013c). boyd (2007) gives another definition of social networking sites as: “*web-based services that allow individuals (1) to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) to articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) to view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.*”

On the other hand, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define ‘social media’ as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content”. Therefore, social media are just like other media, a means of communicating and exchanging information. Social media offer the opportunity to create or disseminate facts, opinions, arguments etc. in many forms (video, audio, image, text) i.e. social media are the platform and provide the tools for self expression in various forms. Groups of people with common interests are associated together on social media (SocialMediaToday, 2010).

Clearly the term “social networking sites” and “social media” are used interchangeably. Therefore, we will consider them as having the same meaning and, in this paper we will use the two terms in this manner.

Social Media Categories

The Web 2.0 technologies helped shape the Web that we are using today. There are numerous social networking sites. They have been classified or categorized or taxonomized in different ways. For example, Shrivastava et al. talk about the major Web 2.0 services and applications where they listed blogs, wikis, tagging and social bookmarking, multimedia sharing, audio blogging and podcasting, RSS and syndication and social networking (Shrivastava et al., 2011). Kietzmann et al. talk about social media functionality and they call it the honeycomb of social media (‘sharing’, ‘presence’, ‘relationships’, ‘reputation’, ‘groups’, ‘identity’, and ‘conversations’) (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Nicholas and Rowlands, in their 2011 study, highlighted the following categories: social networking, blogging, microblogging, collaborative authoring, social tagging and bookmarking, scheduling and meeting tools, conferencing and image or video sharing (Nicholas and Rowlands, 2011). Communities.gov.uk put forward the idea of categorizing social networks based on the categorization developed by Digizen (profile-based social networks; content-based social

networks; white-label social networks; multi-user virtual environments; mobile social networks; micro-blogging/presence updates; social search; local forums; thematic websites) (Communities.gov.uk, 2008). Many other researchers and practitioners (Kassel, 2011; Anderson, 2007; Safko, 2010; Culnan et al., 2010; digizen.org, 2011; etc.) also talked about different categorization of social media. Similarly, Wikipedia (Wikipedia, 2013a) lists more than 125 social networking sites, putting them into some categorization and indicates that even this list is “non-exhaustive” and “limited to some notable, well-known sites”. The researcher sifted through and reviewed these and other related online and printed material about social networks, aiming to come up with a more encompassing taxonomy of social media. After careful consideration, the study yielded a categorization that is based on the functionality of social networks. Obviously there are different categories of social networks and each category contains a large number of social networking sites that, in many cases, are increasing in number as well but perform similar or slightly different functions. Furthermore, each social networking site provides many services that address the different needs of both people and organizations, and the functionality of each social networking site can overlap with another. Indeed, over time I observed a kind of convergence in the proposed services. For example, the ‘gaming’ category has a number of social networking sites that might be considered as part of the ‘virtual world’ and vice versa. Similarly, Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn can be used to promote research, innovation and collaboration between researchers as well as business managers. Hence, different researchers might come up with slightly different categorization. Figure 1, below, illustrates this preliminary taxonomy or classification of the social networks that exist today.

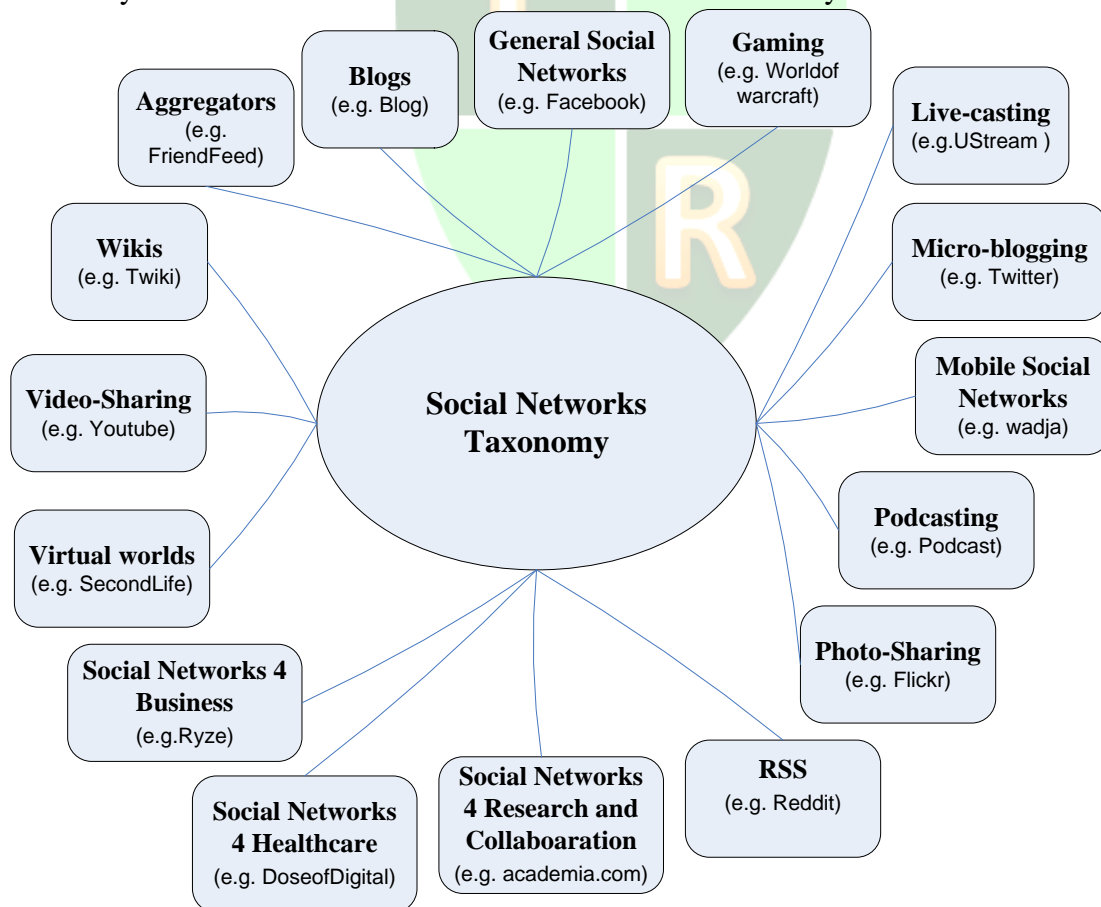


Figure 1: Preliminary Taxonomy of Social Networks

Some new social networking sites such as Google+ provide a large spectrum of services. Any new service proposed by a medium is immediately caught by other providers, only the features of the service being different. For example “Circles” in Google+ was immediately followed by “Groups” in LinkedIn, “Networks” on Ryze, and “Lists” in Facebook. However, since no one social networking site has all the desired features for everybody and every organization, people tend to register for different social networking sites. Hence, many social networking sites compete to include more features for their targeted audience.

New services generate new needs for users. For example, Facebook allows users (customers) to have one list of all contacts. This worked well at the beginning but later on another need was generated in which users/customers wanted to have different lists for different purposes such as Friends, Family, Acquaintances, Following, and Followers. Any person or organization can now create a group to meet its own needs and requirements.

Population and Growth Rate of Social Media

The social networks have grown rapidly and as a matter of fact there is exponential growth both in the number of social networking sites and in their functionalities. How do people choose between the large number of social networking sites, all with different features? Indeed, it is easy to find comparisons between products (e.g. when you want to buy a new car or TV) but such a comparative evaluation of social networking sites is still missing.

Table 2: Populations of Some Popular Social Networks

SNS Name	Year Created	Created by	Population (active Users) Million (in 2011)	Description/Focus	Ref.
Facebook	2004	Mark Zuckerberg	800	General social networking site	(Facebook, 2011)
Twitter	2006	Jack Dorsey	200	Mobile social networking site, Micro-blogging	(Twitter, 2011; Aevermann, 2010)
LinkedIn	2002	Reid Hoffman	135	Business and professional	(LinkedIn, 2011)
MySpace	2003	Chris DeWolfe and Tom Anderson	100+	General social networking site	(MySpace, 2011)
Google+	2011	Larry Page and Sergey Brin	50+	General social networking site	(Google+, 2011)
Plaxo	2002	Justin Miller	15	Aggregator, address book	(Plaxo, 2011)
Bebo	2005	Michael Birch and Xochi Birch	117	General social networking	(Bebo, 2011)
Baboo	2006	Andrey Andreev	86	General social networking site	(Baboo, 2011)
Flickr	2004	Ludicorp	32	Image/Video	(flickr.com, 2011)
delicious	2003	Joshua Schachter	8	Social Bookmarking	(delicious.com, 2011)
Orkut	2004	Orkut Büyükkökten	100	General social networking site	(Orkut.com, 2011)

The main goal during this study was to provide a guideline to social networks. The difficulty of such an analysis arises from the fact that (1) new social networking sites appear almost every day, (2) all social networking sites are continuously evolving (being modified or gaining new features), and (3) the population using social networking sites is increasing

exponentially (Wikipedia.com, 2013c). In Table 2 we provide a snapshot of the population (active users) of some well-known social networking sites (SNS) at the time of writing this paper (2011).

The popularity of each social networking site changes according to the features/services provided by that site in comparison with other sites. For example, eBizMBA Rank (2013) listed the fifteen most popular social networking sites as follows: Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Ning, Google+, Tagged, orkut, hi5, myyearbook, Meetup, Badoo, bebo, mylife, Friendster.

The study also highlighted the fact that some social networking sites experience more growth in the number of active users than others. Examples of this are Facebook (which, if it was a country, would come third in the world in terms of population), Google+ and LinkedIn, while some other sites such as Elluminate (www.illuminate.com) have disappeared, while DimDim (www.dimdim.com) has been acquired by Salesforce.com.

The fact that each social networking site has different features and functionalities, some of them regularly expand their features and functionalities, makes it difficult for individuals and groups to choose a specific social networking site and, as a consequence, people tend to register with and belong to several social networking sites to satisfy different needs (Flickr for photos, blogs for discussion, delicious for bookmarking and ResearchGate for communicating to a research community and so on).

Benefits of Using Social Media for Government Agencies

Good use of social media can help governments to better understand, respond to and attract the attention of target audiences. As its usage helps government to increase citizen engagement, facilitate information exchange and improve governance. It enables real two-way communication between people. Using social media (COI, 2011) is expected to lead to the following benefits:

1. An increase in government access to audiences leading to an improvement in government communication.
2. The ability to serve wider audiences (citizen and residence) with minimal financial effort.
3. Governments will be able to be more efficient and productive in their relationships with citizens, partners and stakeholders.
4. There will be greater scope to adjust or change communications quickly where necessary.
5. An improvement in the long-term cost effectiveness of communication.
6. An increase in the speed of public feedback and input.
7. The ability to reach specific audiences on specific issues.
8. A reduction in government dependence on traditional media channels and a counteraction to inaccurate press coverage.

Social Media Obstacles

By considering different literature resources and interviewing different IT professionals and end users, the researcher compiled a list of obstacles that some governments, especially in the Middle East, may face (NASCIO, 2013). These include:

- Lack of IT infrastructure.
- Lack of a national social media strategy or plan as part of the national IT plan.
- Lack of skills of governments' staff.
- Concerns regarding the legal terms and conditions of using social media.

- Government censorship (social networking systems are restricted in my workplace).
- Concerns over the integration of social networking systems with other IT solutions.
- Lack of resources to support (monitor/control and maintain, correct and update).
- Time consuming and tedious to use.
- Concerns about employee use/misuse.
- Not convinced about the value of social networking (ROI).
- Security concerns.
- Privacy concerns.
- Lack of accessibility.
- Challenges concerning fair and equal involvement for all citizens (digital divide).
- The perception that the social networking systems are only for games, friendship and entertainment, and therefore not relevant.

USAGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN GOVERNMENT AGENCIES WORLDWIDE

Many western countries such as the US and UK are very well advanced in this field; they have started seriously adopting social networking to communicate with citizens, partners and stakeholders. For example, in the UK the government has implemented Tweetminster, (2013), and the US government has similar Endeavour, Tweetcongress, (2013). However, only 30% of Asian governments take full use of social media technology to communicate and disseminate information to their citizens, leading to missed opportunities to better serve their people (Kuzma, 2010). The Arab Social Media Report (ASMR), which is produced quarterly by the Dubai School of Government's Governance and Innovation program (Mourtada and Salem, 2011) reported an increase in Arab countries using social media, especially in 2011.

THE GCC GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES/AGENCIES ADOPTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In an interview with John F Moore, Fadi Salem, the Director of the Governance and Innovation Programme in the DSG think tank, defined Government 2.0 as the utilization of participatory technologies or social networking in governance. He pointed out that e-participation has been identified as an integral part of e-government and the key to its evolution. He also highlighted that considering e-participation as an indicator of progress in Government 2.0, Bahrain leads the Arab countries in UNDESA's e-participation index rankings in 2010, coming in, at number 11, as the only Arab country in the top 20, with Tunisia a distant 2nd at 39. Talking about the factors that impact on the transformation of government towards Government 2.0 he outlined three main factors:

1. The technological aspects: The ICT infrastructure and Internet penetration vary across the Arab world, with the GCC generally being more advanced than the rest of the Arab world. For example, Internet penetration has grown by 450 percent on average over the past decade. Social media usage is on the rise across the region, according to Arab Social Media Report- ASMR (Mourtada and Salem, 2011), and there was a 78% increase in the number of Facebook users across the Arab world in 2010.
2. The demographic aspects: the youth between the ages of 15 and 29 constitute about 30% of the population. Hence, there is a large demographic of tech-savvy and eager adopters of technology and social media. (75% of Facebook users in the Arab world are in this demographic, according to ASMR).

3. The social aspects: Web 2.0 and social media are expected to allow more citizen participation and engagement with government. According to Mourtada and Salem (2011) the penetration of social networking and Web 2.0 technologies is soaring in the Arab region. It is argued that social networking tools have the potential to enhance citizen engagement in the region, as was clear in the protests and uprisings sweeping the Arab region.

Governments in the GCC are preparing for an increase in the use of social media to interact with citizens, spread government messages and gain feedback on policies (Ammari, 2012). On the regulatory side, some Arab countries have already developed, and others are developing, guidelines on the use of social media. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), for example, has recently established guidelines for social media usage by government entities. This document, which was developed by the General Information Authority and the Dubai School of Government, highlights best practices and addresses both the benefits and risks of using social networking tools, both in engaging with citizens and for inter-agency collaboration. Saudi Arabia has recently issued a document outlining the laws and rules governing the licensing and use of social networking tools and other forms of online publishing by citizens (John F Moore, 2011). Similarly Qatar has started to develop social media strategies and guidelines for government usage. Some others have started using social media and this is apparent by carrying out a brief survey of GCC governments' websites (Ammari, 2012).

To explore the adoption and use of social media by the ministries of GCC governments, a survey was conducted as outlined in the research methodology section. The survey showed that some of the GCC countries are early adopters, but these tend to be personal initiatives from individual ministers or even the CIO of that ministry or agency. The tables below show some of the findings of this exploratory study. The Dubai School of Government's Arab Social Media Report lays out the facts of social media usage in the region.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The data collected on the GCC countries have been analysed and then listed in the following tables, in descending order according to the usage of social media in each country.

Table - The usage of social media in UAE Ministries (n=18)

Social Media	Social Media Usage					
	No. of Ministries attempting to use SNs	% of Ministries attempting to use SNs	No. of not working (out of the attempting)	% of not working (out of the attempting)	No. of active ministries (out of total)	% active ministries (out of total)
Facebook	11/18	61%	2/11	18%	8/18	44%
Twitter	7/18	39%	1/7	-	5/18	28%
YouTube	8/18	44%	-	-	2/18	11%
Rss	8/18	44%	1/8	13%	5/18	25%
Flickr	1/18	6%	1/1	100%	-	-
Blog	1/18	6%	-	-	-	-

Ministries using social media = 12 /18 (67 %)

Ministries not using social media = 6 /18 (33 %)

In the UAE, a total of 18 ministries were surveyed and 67% are using some sort of social media and the rest are not using any. It was noted that 44% are active users of Facebook, 28% active users of Twitter, 11% use YouTube and 25% are active users of RSS feeds. Hence, it can be said that most ministries who are engaging with social media are using Facebook, Twitter and RSS.

Table - The usage of social media in **KSA** Ministries (n=22)

Social Media	Social Media Usage					
	No. of Ministries attempting to use SNs	% of Ministries attempting to use SNs	No. of not working (out of the attempting)	% of not working (out of the attempting)	No. of active ministries (out of total)	% active ministries (out of total)
Facebook	10 / 22	45%	4 / 10	40%	3/22	13%
Twitter	9 / 22	40%	3 / 9	33%	3/22	14%
YouTube	6 / 22	27%	1 / 6	17%	1/22	5%
Rss	7 / 22	32%	2 / 7	29%	3/22	14%
flickr	2 / 22	9%	2 / 2	100%	-	-

Ministries using social media = 12 / 22 (55 %)

Ministries not using social media = 10 / 22 (45 %)

In KSA, 22 ministries were surveyed, of which 55 % are using some sort of social media and the rest are not using any. It was also found that 13% are active users of Facebook, 14% active users of Twitter, 5% active users of YouTube and 14% active users of Rss. Hence, it can be said that most ministries who are attempting to use social media are using Twitter and RSS.

Table - The usage of social media in **Bahrain** Ministries (n=16)

Social Media	Social Media Usage					
	No. of Ministries attempting to use SNs	% of Ministries attempting to use SNs	No. of not working (out of the attempting)	% of not working (out of the attempting)	No. of active ministries (out of total)	% active ministries (out of total)
FaceBook	8/16	50%	-	-	6/16	38%
Twitter	8/16	50%	-	-	7/16	44%
Youtube	7/16	43%	-	-	-	-
flickr	3/16	19%	-	-	2/16	13%
RSS	4/16	25%	-	-	3/16	19%
Blog	2/16	13%	-	-	-	-

Ministries using social media = 8/16 (50%)

Ministries not using social media = 8 /16(50%)

In Bahrain 16 ministries were surveyed, of which 50 % are using some sort of social media. It was also noticed that 38% are active users of Facebook, 44% active users of Twitter, 13% active users of Flickr, and 19% are using RSS. Hence, it can be said that most ministries who are attempting to use social media are using Twitter and Facebook.

Table - The usage of social media in **Oman** Ministries (n=22)

Social Media	Social Media Usage					
	No. of Ministries attempting to use SNS	% of Ministries attempting to use SNS	No. of not working (out of the attempting)	% of not working (out of the attempting)	No. of active ministries (out of total)	% active ministries (out of total)
Facebook	9/22	41%	2/9	33%	4/22	18%
Twitter	7/22	32%	2/7	29%	2/22	9%
YouTube	5/22	23%	1/5	20%	-	-
RSS	8/22	36%	2/8	25%	3/22	14%
Flickr	1/22	5%	-	-	-	-
Panoramio	1/22	5%	-	-	-	-
Vimeo	1/22	5%	-	-	-	-
Google+	1/22	5%	-	-	-	-

Ministries using some Social Media = 10/22 (46%)

Ministries not using any Social Media = 12/22 (54%)

In Oman, 22 ministries were surveyed, of which 46 % are using some sort of social media and the rest are not using any. It was also noticed that 18% are active users of Facebook, 9% active users of Twitter, and 14% active users of RSS. Hence, it can be said that most ministries who are attempting to use social media are using Facebook and RSS.

Table - The usage of Social media in **Qatar** Ministries (14)

Social Media	Social Media Usage					
	No. of ministries with SNS logo on homepage	% of ministries with SNS logo on homepage	No. of SNS not working on homepage	% of SNS not working on homepage	No. of active ministries (per total)	% active ministries (per total)
FaceBook	8 /14	57%	1/14	7%	3/14	21%
Twitter	6 /14	43%	1/14	7%	4/14	28%
Youtube	6/14	43%	-	-	1/14	7%
RSS	3/14	14%	-	-	3/14	21%
LinkdedIn	1/14	7%	-	-	-	-

Ministries using social media = 6 /14 (43%)

Ministries not using social media = 8 /14 (57%)

In Qatar, the surveyed ministries were 14, of which 43 % are using some sort of social media and the rest are not using any. It was also noticed that 21% are active users of Facebook, 28% active users of Twitter, 7% using YouTube and 21% active users of RSS. Hence, it can be said that most ministries who are attempting to use social media are using Twitter, followed by Facebook and RSS equally.

Table - The usage of Social media in **Kuwait** Ministries (18)

Social Media	Social Media Usage					
	No. of ministries with SNs logo on homepage	% of ministries with SNs logo on homepage	No. of SNs not working on homepage	% of SNs not working on homepage	No. of active ministries (per total)	% active ministries (per total)
Facebook	5/18	27%	1/5	20%	4/18	22%
Twitter	4/18	22%	-	-	5/18	28%
YouTube	1/18	5.6%	1/1	100%	-	-
RSS	4/18	22%	1/4	25%	3/18	17%

Ministries using social media = 7/18 (39 %)

Ministries not using social media = 11/18 (61%)

In Kuwait, 18 ministries were surveyed, of which 39 % are using some sort of social media and the rest are not using any. It was also noticed that 22% are active users of Facebook, 28% active users of Twitter, and 17% are using RSS. Hence, it can be said that most ministries who are attempting to use social media are using Twitter and Facebook.

The data collected on the UK have been analysed and then listed in the following table.

Table - The usage of social media in **United Kingdom** Ministries/departments (n=14)

Social Media	Social Media Usage					
	No. of ministries attempting to use SNs	% of ministries attempting to use SNs	No. of not working (out of the attempting)	% of not working (out of the attempting)	No. of active ministries (out of total)	% active ministries (out of total)
facebook	7/14	50%	-	-	4/14	29%
twitter	12/14	89%	-	-	9/14	64%
youtube	13/14	93%	-	-	6/14	43%
flickr	11/14	79%	-	-	4/14	29%
Google+	1/14	7%	-	-	1/14	7%
foursquare	1/14	7%	-	-	-	-
podcasts	1/14	7%	-	-	-	-
Linked in	1/14	7%	-	-	1/14	7%
Storify	1/14	7%	-	-	-	-
Rss	7/14	50%	-	-	3/14	21%
blog	1/14	7%	-	-	1/14	7%

Ministries using social media = 13/14 (93%)

Ministries not using social media = 1/14 (7%)

Full details of the findings regarding the usage of social media by GCC governments and UK can be obtained from the authors.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

General overview of (GCC vs. UK) usage of SNs

The rise usage of Web 2.0 social networks sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube has brought substantial changes and opportunities for both online consumers and governments. These tools have changed the ways Internet users communicate with each other and their governments, and allow for greater social participation. The number of worldwide users is growing significantly and their expectations for more services are rising. According to Figure 1, which shows the percentages of general usage of social networks in government agencies (GCC vs. UK), countries are varying in their efforts to adopt social networks. As mention above, this research investigates the usage level of social networks in government agencies (GCC vs. UK). The results show that a majority of UK ministries (approximately 93%) are using Web 2.0 tools for communication and information dissemination. In addition; UK is the highest in terms of the use of social networks, compared to GCC. On the other hand, a minority of Qatar ministries (approximately 43%) are adopting Web 2.0 tools in their ministries as well as for Oman and Kuwait. Also, the usage level in both the UAE and Bahrain is nearly the same according to the number of their ministries. Furthermore, based on data collected recently and before approximately three months the utilization rate of usage of social networks (SNs) in government agencies (GCC vs. UK) has not changed significantly.

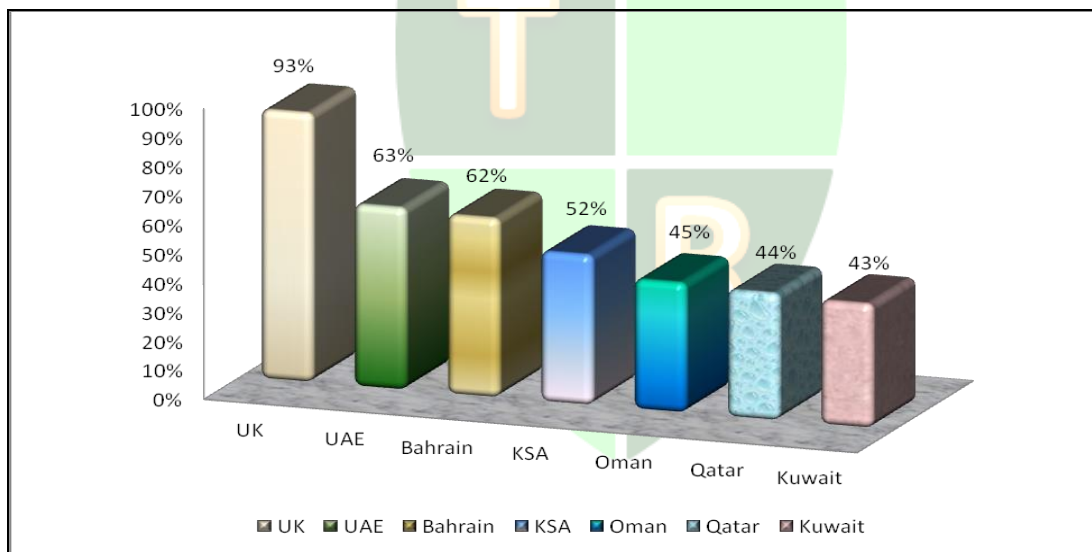


Figure 1 : The general usage of social networks (SNs) in government agencies (GCC vs. UK)

Efforts to use SNs (GCC vs. UK)

Freeman, Loo (2009) indicates there three classes of benefits that governments can achieve from using Web 2.0 technologies: efficiency, user comfort and citizen participation. So, in this study as shown in Table 2, the main consequence of the findings would imply that the UK government is advanced in adopting SNs in almost all of their ministries/departments to achieve these benefits.

On the other hand, GCC countries are varying in their adoption therefore; GCC Governments should consider an organized approach to utilizing these sites to reach the UK level. Moreover, Freeman, Loo (2009) allegation that these techniques can be leveraged to change the way governments provide services and information online, as well as interaction with the constituents and stakeholders.

Moreover, the study found that the functions of ministries in each of these countries play an important role in the selection of the type of social networks which will be adopted. For instance, foreign office in the UK adopts a large amount of SNs in its website as compared with other UK ministries/departments and GCC ministries.

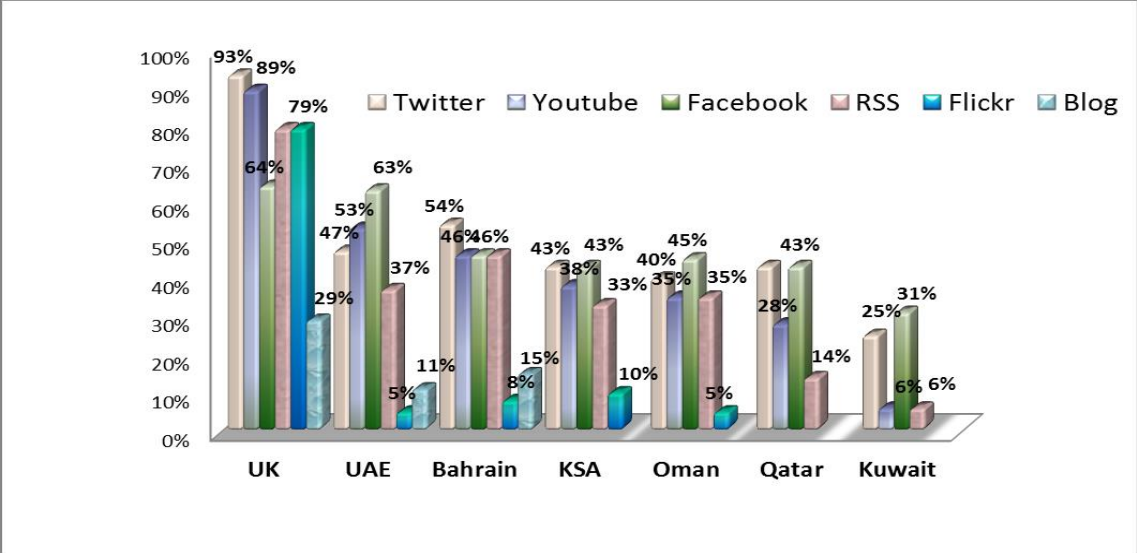


Figure 2: The usage of social networks (SNs) in government agencies (GCC vs. UK) across countries

In addition, the Figure 2 illustrates that the overall usage of some SNs sites in the UK ministries/departments such as Twitter, YouTube, RSS and Flickr is high as compared with GCC countries. Moreover, the GCC countries are differ in their usage of SNs since some of them use some one kind in varying percentages for example the use of usage of Facebook in UAE 63% while in Kuwait 31% and in KSA, Qatar and Oman 43%, 43%, 45% respectively and UK 64%. Hence, it can be said that Kuwait has the least percentage of usage of Facebook and the UK has the highest. Full details of the findings regarding the usage of social media by GCC and the UK governmental agencies are available on request from authors.

According to Danis et al. (2009), the governments can use social networks (SNs) sites to obtain and position resources and local knowledge, observe and resolution problems and involve their citizen in an atmosphere of cooperation.

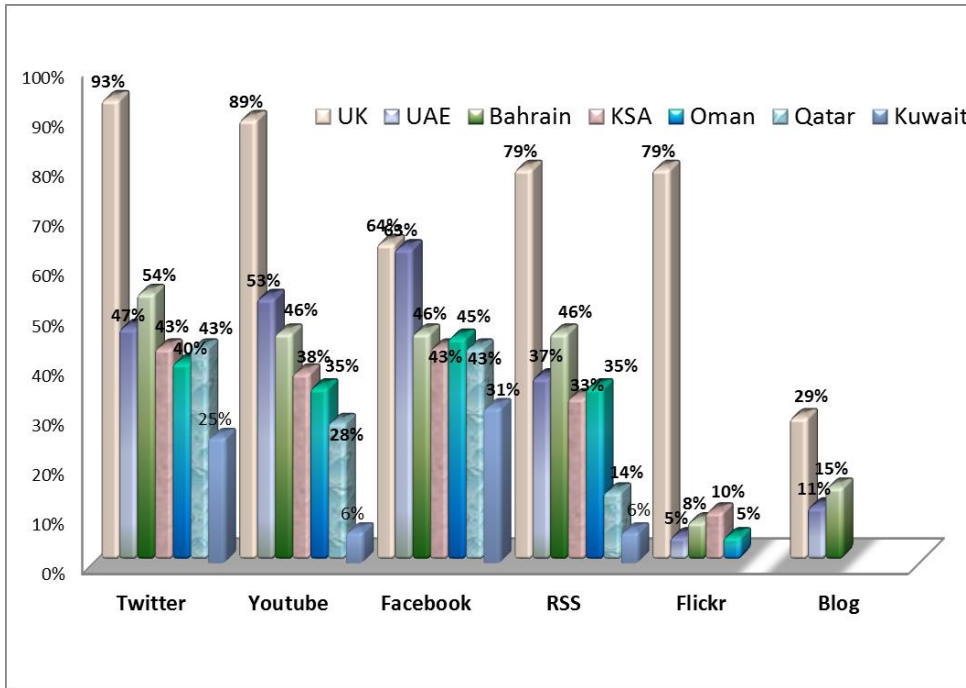


Figure 3 : The usage of social networks (SNs) in government agencies (GCC vs. UK) per SNs

Figure (3) indicates that in general Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and RSS are the most common social networks (SNS) sites used, in particular, Twitter has the highest percentage of usage. Also, the United Kingdom leads all GCC countries in the use of Twitter, RSS and YouTube followed by the Bahrain. On the other hand, the study found that Kuwait is the least commonly used for Twitter and RSS in comparison to other GCC countries.

Active usage of SNs in government agencies (GCC vs. UK)

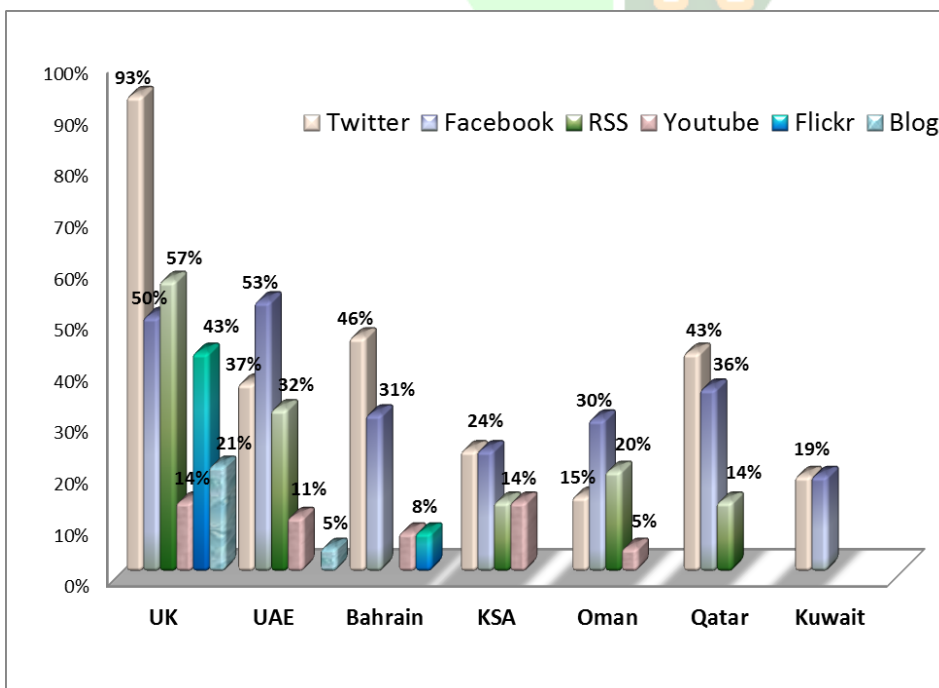


Figure 4 : The actual use of social networks (SNs) in government agencies (GCC vs. UK) across countries

Cole (2009) suggests that social networks (SNS) can be powerful tools governments can use to help spread the awareness of civic participation. This seems clear from the high proportion of the actual use of social network in the UK in general and Twitter in particular. Figure 5 demonstrates that, although UAE has the highest level in the actual usage for Facebook, the UK has the highest rates in all other tools.

Also, the figure points out that, the actual use in Kuwait and KSA for Facebook and Twitter is almost the same. Hence, it can be said that in these countries most ministries who are engaging with social networks are using Facebook, Twitter.

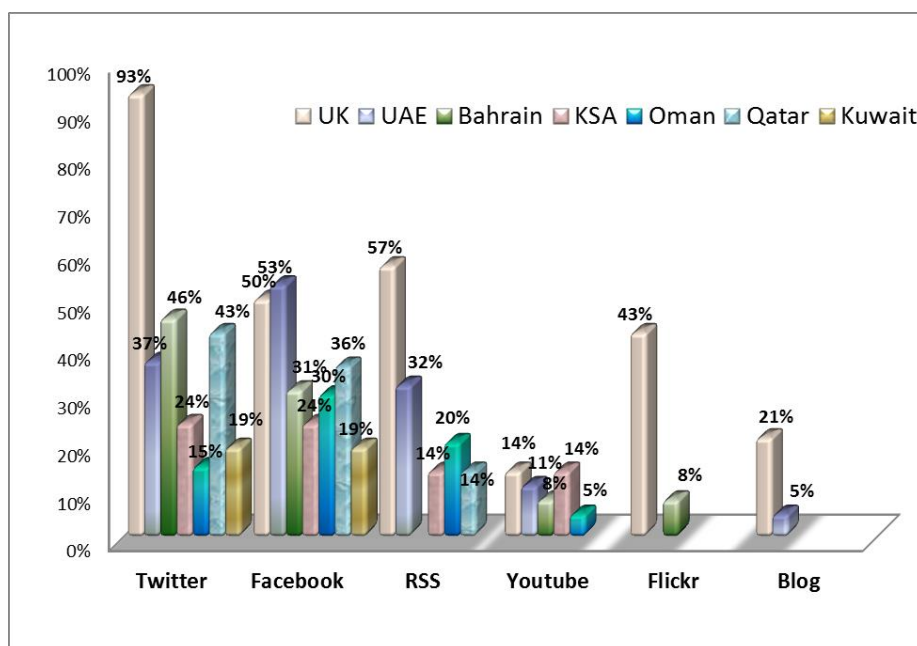


Figure 5 : The actual use of social networks (SNS) in government agencies (GCC vs. UK) per SNS

Moreover, this study found that the usage of SNS is limited to specific types of SNS as Facebook, Twitter, RSS, Youtube, Blog and Flickr. Also, there are varying levels of usage which may be associated with varying types of activates and functions for example YouTube has the lowest level in comparison with other SNS in contrast to Twitter.

Moreover, the Figure 5 illustrates that overall actual usage of SNS sites in the UK ministries/departments is still the highest regarding the use of Twitter, YouTube, RSS and Flickr in comparison with other GCC countries.

Furthermore, the GCC countries are differ in their actual usage of SNS since some of them use some kind in high percentage such as the usage of Facebook in UAE (53%), in the UK (50%), Qatar (36%), Bahrain (31%), Oman (30%), KSA (24%) and Kuwait is (19%). Hence, it can be said that Kuwait still has the least percentage of usage of Facebook. While the actual usage of other tools is declined and in some cases is faded for instance the usage of Blog and Flickr. Figure (5) indicates that; in general Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and RSS are continue to be the most common social networks (SNS) sites used in the surveyed ministries/departments of these countries.

SOCIAL NETWORKING INITIATIVES

Social Networking Initiatives/Champions in GCC countries

Since last year the outreach of social media in the GCC countries has not only been noticed and exploited by marketing firms but also by regional governments and officials. For example, an innovative use of social media in the Gulf is that of Kuwaiti citizens interacting with their elected MPs. One Gulf government that has embraced social media is Bahrain, where a number of cabinet ministers, including those responsible for the foreign, interior and information portfolios, maintain active Twitter profiles. Another noticeable presence on Twitter is that of Abdul Aziz Khoja, the Saudi Minister of Information and Culture. The 69-year-old former diplomat personally updates his Twitter profile and interacts with Saudi as well as non-Saudi users (Al-Qassemi, 2012). Many other princes, ministers and others use social networking, especially Twitter, to deliver their opinions and ideas. The most popular of these characters are:

- Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid - Vice President of United Arab Emirates
- Sheikh Khalid Al Khalifa, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bahrain
- Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, UAE Foreign Minister
- Ahmad Almelaifi, Minister of Education of Kuwait
- Waleed Altabtabie, Member of the National Assembly of Kuwait
- Shuaib AlMuwaizri, Minister of Housing and member of the National Assembly of Kuwait
- Abdulaziz Khunain, Spokesman of the Ministry of Civil Service-KSA
- Tawfiq al-Rabiah, Minister of Commerce and Industry-KSA
- Nawaf bin Faisal, General President of Youth Welfare-KSA
- Khalfan Alesry, member of Shoura Council, Oman

However, the strongest advocate of this technology is Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum who has used all the means provided by Facebook and Twitter and even has a special channel on YouTube. He has all the media in the UAE at his fingertips, but prefers to use social networking to connect to the youth who constitute the majority of the people. Furthermore, there are many initiatives in the region such as United Arab Emirates issuing "Guidelines for Social Media Usage in United Arab Emirates Government Entities". The table below shows some more of these initiatives and the social media champions that are contributing to the widespread use of social media in the Gulf.

Table - Social Media Initiatives, Champions in GCC countries

State/ Country	Initiatives	Champion		
		Name	Position	URL
KSA	=Working on Social Media Guidelines =Price Alwaleed Bin Talal, bought 50% of Twitter	Abdlaziz khoja	Minister of Culture and Information	Twitter: http://twitter.com#!/abdazizkhoja
		Abdulaziz Khunain	Spokesman of the Ministry of Civil Service	Twitter: http://twitter.com#!/a_khoneen
		Tawfiq al-Rabiah	Minister of Commerce and Industry	Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/people/Tawfig-Alrabiah/598668768 Twitter: http://twitter.com#!/tfrabiah/status/169005598887772160

		Nawaf bin Faisal	General President of Youth Welfare	http://twitter.com#!/nawafbinfaisal
UAE	=UAE Government Social Media Guidelines	Mohammed Bin Rashid	Vice-President & Prime Minister	Twitter: http://twitter.com#!/HSHKMOHD Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/HHSheikhMohammed Youtube: http://www.youtube.com/user/HHSMohammedBinRashid
		Abdullah Bin Zayed	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Twitter: https://twitter.com#!/ABZayed
		Mohammed Bin Zayed	Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces and Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council	Twitter: https://twitter.com#!/MBZNews
Oman	Working on Social Media Guidelines	Hamid Al Barashdi	Oman Metrology	@7albrashdi
		AlShaima AlRaisi	Member of Shoura Council	@AlShaimaAlRaisi
		Khalid Al Busaidi	President of Oman Football Association (OFA)	@SayyidKhalid
		Khalfan Alesry	Member of Shoura Council	@KhalfanAlesry
Qatar	ictQATAR: Creating a Strategic Presence in Social Media	H.H Amir Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani	Amir of Qatar	https://www.facebook.com/pages/HH-Amir-Hamad-Bin-Khalifa-Al-Thani/10026731961
		Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al Thani	former prime minister of Qatar	http://www.facebook.com/pages/Hamad-bin-Jassim-bin-Jaber-Al-Thani/108070812547820?nr
Kuwait		Ahmad Almelaifi	Minister of Education	Twitter: http://twitter.com#!/almelaifi
		Waleed Altabtabie	Member of the National Assembly of Kuwait	Twitter: http://twitter.com#!/Altabtabie
		The Civil Service Commission	-	http://twitter.com#!/csc_kw
		Shuaib AlMuwaizri	Minister of Housing and member of the National Assembly of Kuwait	http://twitter.com#!/shuaibMuwaizri
Bahrain		Khalid Alkhalifa	Diplomat, Ambassador, Foreign Minister of Bahrain, Reader, World traveller	Twitter: http://twitter.com#!/khalidalkhalifa

Another element which has proved to be an influencing factor in the take-up of social media is the Arab uprising which has shone a spotlight on social media platforms. Facebook and Twitter have played a role in the dissemination of information to the outside world as regimes tightened the noose on the flow of information by other means (Al-Lawati, 2011). In this regard, many people argued that social media would influence freedom of expression

because people could express their opinions to their followers and friends without the government intervention and control that they had been used to before. Similarly, human rights would be enhanced because governments would be exposed by the new media through what is called ‘citizens journalists’. All this is expected to reflect positively on the performance of world governments by forcing them to be more transparent, leading to good governance and a better life for all. All-in-all there is some reform going on, especially in the Middle East. Some attribute it to social media and new satellite channels, and some to change that is already over due in the area.

Social networking Initiatives and Champions in the UK

Citizen engagement in government is one of the measures of a healthy society. Therefore, from all the above graphs, it’s clearly that the UK government engaged heavily in using and adopting social networking, and they taking all safety measures required by constructing the guidelines that need to advice people on how to use it. In the UK in contrast to GCC countries we noticed the initiatives came from the government bodies rather than from the individual people. Moreover, the UK Government is undertaking some of its most open and purposeful innovation. The fruits of these activities are up there with the very best from the consumer, educational and Networks sectors. Some examples of such initiatives are:

- *Gov.uk*: In November 2010, the Digital Champion Martha Lane Fox published the Directgov 2010 and Beyond: Revolution not Evolution report. This called for government services to be shifted online and focus more on the needs of the user. In 2013 Directgov was replace by Gov.uk (Gov.uk, 2013).
- *UK Trade & Investment – LinkedIn Group*: UK Trade & Investment is the government organization that helps UK-based companies succeed in the global economy and assists overseas companies to bring their high quality investment to the UK. UKTI is a good example of intelligent use of LinkedIn to involve stakeholders. The UKTI LinkedIn group brings together trade and investment experts and businesses. It offers knowledge, insight, support and facilitates connections. The group is open to worldwide businesses of any size, sector, or level of international trade (UKTI, 2013).
- *DirectGov – Innovate*: An excellent platform to enable collaboration with developer communities at which developers of all ages are encouraged to submit apps developed using government data, crowd-sourcing, or new digital technologies (DirectGov, 2013).
- *Defence Social Media Hub*: Defense Headquarters' already has an impressive track record in use of social network. Blogs, Youtube and Twitter are being used by a range of staff from press officers to squaddies. MoD has recently developed excellent guidance to help staff navigate between their personal, sponsored and official online profiles (MoD, 2013).
- *Social Networks Guidance*: How to use social networking for civil servants. It is published as part of the government's ICT strategy.

Table - UK Social Media Initiatives

Initiatives	URL
Launched E-envoy in 1999 (for E-gov.)	-
Engaging through social media	http://coi.gov.uk/guidance.php?page=264
Government public services' Gateway	Direct.gov.uk
Brighton and Hove city council	http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/
Social Media Guidance for UK Armed Forces and MOD personnel	http://www.blogs.mod.uk/social-media-guidelines.html
Social media guidelines - Web support - University of Exeter	http://www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/web/socialmedia/
Social Networking, Microblogs and other Third Party Websites: BBC Use	http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/page/guidance-blogs-bbc-full

EDINA Social Media Guidelines	http://edina.ac.uk/about/social_media/social_media_guidelines.html
The Methodist Church in Britain Social Media Guidelines	http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=churchlife.content&cmid=3140
Tweetminster	http://tweetminster.co.uk/
http://www.parliament.uk	http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/other-committees/speakers-conference-on-parliamentary-representation/social-media/
Policy on Use of Parliament-Sponsored Social Media	http://www.parliament.uk/documents/foi/FOI-2011-parliament-social-media-policy-F11-284.pdf

Clearly, the UK government engaged heavily in using and adopting social media, and they taking all safety measures required by constructing the guidelines that need to advice people on how to use it. In the UK in contrast to GCC countries we noticed the initiatives came from the government bodies rather than from the individual people.

The Social Media Revolution and Virtual Freedom

One need to consider the features of the Internet revolution that has been brought about by social networking sites and to attempt to explore the future that the repercussions of the revolution is still casting a shadow over, and put great pressure on the traditional media to develop their tools. The legislators need to lay out legislation that strikes a balance between the controversial issues of freedom and power.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Heritage, Hamad bin Abdulaziz Al Kuwari, said that his country (Qatar) anticipated early transformations in the new media. He proclaimed the determination of his government to pass a law on information activities soon, indicating its response to the freedom of expression on the Internet by saying that it would be the first pillar of the law to be passed.

If the Internet revolution is presenting a challenge to oppressive authority, it is equally challenging the media as a whole. The high importance of digital and virtual space cannot be ignored in the life of our modern societies. It was not only the politicians and authoritarian elites in the Arab world who were caught by surprise when the new media tools of social networking, such as Facebook and Twitter, led the Arab masses onto the streets. There were also many intellectuals who felt this effect of the Internet revolution, and realized the inability of their traditional tools to influence people on the street. Many of them then became aware of the impact on the Arab Spring of this modern means of communication, so that they exerted some effort to catch up with the social communication by creating their own online pages in an attempt to narrow the gap with people on the street.

It can be said that the media in its new transformation has made the whole world a newsroom in which an ordinary citizen can broadcast pictures and interviews and assume the role of a journalist, and the digital camera has become a cheap and effective tool in the hands of the ordinary citizen.

Many governments, especially in developing countries, played a monitoring role in the movement and flow of information across borders that were brought about by the technical advancements in the field of telecommunications, whether through the Internet, mobile phones or satellite TV. These governments think that the monitoring process will enable them to control the citizens' cultural and social orientations, which leads to the possibility of controlling their political orientation, especially if we consider that the explosion in the dissemination of information could work against these oppressive governments. Hence, it can be said that true information dissemination cannot be achieved in

societies that are not democratic- closed societies. The likelihood of achieving such freedom depends on the flexibility of these governments and the margin of freedom they are willing to allow.

CONCLUSION

It seems that many countries have either started using social networking or are in the process of preparing to do so. However, many ministries are facing challenges in adopting this technology, so progress is variable.

The findings show that some of the GCC countries started building strategies in adopting such media; for example, some of them had guidelines in place for adopting social media in government departments. Also, there are many pioneers/champions/heroes who started using social media to fulfil their ministry duties and communicate with the citizens. Some public figures in the governments are using social media to gauge public opinion regarding many different issues related to the running of the government.

Future work

More research needs to be conducted to survey the governments' adoption of social networking systems. For this purpose different case studies (a questionnaire or interview) with the ministries and agencies of these governments may be employed for data collection to investigate the actual use, implementation, policies, strategies, obstacles/constraints and future plans. It would be useful if the survey was conducted in different parts of the world to examine the digital divide between these different countries.

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