

Chapter XXIV

Factors Affecting Attitudes Toward Broadband Adoption in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

Utilizing a survey approach, this research set out to explore the reasons for the slow progress in broadband adoption and investigates the factors that may be affecting the adoption of broadband by KSA consumers. Particular emphasis was placed on individual-level factors such as social and cultural influences. The key findings were that the factors with the main influence on attitude towards adoption of broadband were: (1) usefulness, (2) service quality, (3) age, (4) usage, (5) type of connection, and (6) type of accommodation. Contrary to prediction, although socio-cultural factors such as regulation through filtration of broadband were found to have no significant influence on the adoption of broadband, consumers were aware and largely did not like the regulation. The chapter also provides a discussion on research implications, limitations, and future directions.

INTRODUCTION

Broadband is commonly used to refer to high-speed Internet access via cable modems or digital subscriber line (DSL), which is faster than dial-up (or narrowband). Broadband is considered vital for the growth and diffusion of emerging e-services including e-learning and e-government services (Bose, 2004; Choudrie & Ghinea, 2005; Choudrie & Dwivedi, 2005a, 2006a). This is because broadband users are more likely to be aware of new e-government services (Dwivedi, Choudrie, & Brinkman, 2006b). However, the Internet in general

has not been adapted globally at the same time or the same rate. Some countries are the leaders and others simply follow them. The adoption and diffusion literature suggests many factors are likely to influence the process of adopting the Internet. Such factors include cultural, social, economical, skills, service quality, resources, and technological factors (Choudrie & Dwivedi, 2005a, 2006a, 2006b; Oh, Ahn, & Kim, 2003).

This chapter is concerned with the adoption of broadband in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), therefore there is a need to have some background information about the KSA. The following offers a

brief description and discussion on the development of information and communication technology (ICT) in general in the KSA, with specific focus on broadband technology. The Internet is a relatively new technology in the region. King Abdulaziz city for Science & Technology is responsible for starting the Internet service in 1997. It has put in place the policies and procedures for using the Internet in arrangement with other related government and private sector organizations. The city also trained its staff and put the layout and design of the new network that become the main vessel that transfers information all over the kingdom. Currently, there are three main types of Internet access available in the KSA: (1) dial-up, which is the most common one; (2) DSL broadband, which is the focus of this research; and (3) satellite, which is comparatively expensive but not as popular.

The Internet Services Unit (ISU) in King Abdulaziz city for Science & Technology has many roles to play, such as connecting the service provider with the Internet so to provide it to the customer, connecting all the Saudi colleges and universities to the Internet, and the most important role is the filtration of Web sites. In 2001, the Council of Ministers Resolution prohibited users within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from publishing or accessing certain content on the Internet. The ISU operates the high-speed data links that connect the country to the international Internet. While Saudi Internet users may subscribe to any of a number of local Internet service providers, all Web traffic is forwarded through a central array of proxy servers at the ISU, which implements Internet content filtering roughly in line with parts of the resolution. The ISU blocks any Web site that contains sexually explicit content and sites that are related to drugs, bombs, alcohol, gambling, and pages insulting the Islamic religion or Saudi laws and regulations.

In the KSA the Internet has taken a while to diffuse and is therefore seen as a relatively new technology. The KSA first started with dial-up connections and then moved on to adopt broadband and satellite connections to provide better data communication services to its citizens. However, even with broadband technology, the number of Internet connections is considered to be relatively

poor in comparison to other developed countries such as the UK, as well as newly industrialized leading broadband users such as South Korea (Oh et al., 2003). This poor connectivity is often claimed to be caused by Web site filtration in the region. Consequently, broadband adoption has been slower than expected in the region. Furthermore, research that examines broadband adoption from the individual perspective has not yet been undertaken in the KSA and other developing countries in the region. Therefore, this research aims to explore the reasons for the slow adoption by examining the individual-level factors affecting the adoption of broadband in the KSA. The research will thereby seek to identify individual-level factors, and attempt to examine why and how the identified factors affect consumers' attitudes towards the adoption of broadband in the region. The chapter then provides some implications and recommendations to the government and ISPs for encouraging broadband adoption within the KSA.

Having introduced the topic of interest, this chapter now provides a brief discussion on the background literature in the next section. That is followed by a brief discussion on the theoretical basis for this research and a brief discussion of the utilized research methods. The findings are then presented, followed by discussion, and finally, a conclusion including the contributions and limitations to the research are provided.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the factors that affect the adoption of broadband by consumers of the KSA. There are relatively few studies that have examined broadband adoption from the micro perspective (i.e., individual level) in general, and as per our understanding, no such undertaking has occurred in the KSA. This section briefly discusses the available literature in the area and outlines the theoretical basis of this study.

The adoption literature discussed henceforth provides discussions of both macro and micro factors that drive the success or slow uptake of broadband deployment in the context of leading

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