Case Study: Mobile Mania in Qumran

Description

Qumran, a developing country in the Middle East, that was historically part of the British Empire, and was a British protectorate until the late 1970s. As a consequence of these historical ties, most of the population have some proficiency in the English language. Qumran has seen an explosion in the use of smartphones in the past seven years. The country hasn't got a significant landline infrastructure, but with the advent of affordable Wifi and smartphones, internet usage is growing rapidly.

A national survey was recently undertaken, and it found that Internet usage is currently at 57% of the population. There is a sharp divide in terms of age profile of users, with almost 90% of educated, younger adults (18- to 34-year olds) using these services; in contrast, amongst older adults (older than 34 years old) having a rate of 29% usage.

The first section of the survey asked respondents what services they access using the internet, and there was almost unanimous agreement that it serves as a very easy way to keep in touch with family members and friends who are geographically dispersed. A typical survey response stated that "*I can keep up with friends and family who are in other parts of the county, and I can see what they are up to. I also get to hear all the gossip from everyone as well*".

The younger adults who participated in the survey also highlighted the significant educational benefits of Internet usage, commenting on the access to an enormous repository of resources, including online courses, MOOCs, textbooks, newspapers (from around the world), and magazines. They also noted that since the majority of Internet content is in English, they are ideally situated to get the most out of this content (as many of this age group are highly proficient English speakers). This demographic also use these services for online shopping, to access government services, and social media.

The older adults are cognizant of the benefits of Internet usage, but amongst this demographic there is a growing concern evidenced in the second section of the survey (as well as in the national media, and by some politicians) that there may be notable drawbacks to Internet usage. Of particular concern is their perception that the Internet is responsible for the erosion of the Qumrani culture, where younger people are eschewing traditional dress, customs and values; and seem more concerned about the latest gossip concerning American celebrities than they are about local and national issues. According to the survey, the most egregious aspect of this concern is the upsurge in the use of the English language which had been in the decline after the Qumrani Secessionist Revolt of 1978, and subsequent withdrawal from British protectorate status, but is now popular again because of prevalence of English language on the Internet.

Also in the second section of the survey 64% of the older adults expressed significant concern about the nature of the personal data they are required to share to access these services, including their date of birth, sometimes photographs, and sometimes credit card details for services that claim to be free. They also identified the issue of how their data is being used by these technology companies, how it is being collated with other people's data, and how it is being shared with third-party organizations. In contrast only 25% of younger adults

expressed similar concerns, and in fact many younger adults expressed the opposite opinion, many commented that their "*personal data is a fair exchange for access to these important services*".

In spite of these disagreements, there was general agreement on the negative impact of the Internet on morality in the third section of the survey. Even some of the most ardent advocates in the younger adult demographic rate the influence of the Internet on morality as being "*Neutral or Slightly Negative*", whereas 73% of older adults rate its influence as "*Somewhat or Significantly Negative*". Older adults highlighted specific concerns about the impact of the Internet on children, including the amount of time they spend using it, the lack of censorship of adult materials that they may inadvertently access, and the perceived increase in narcissism and perceived decline in empathy in children. They also expressed the view that since the Internet can be accessed anonymously, it can lead to immoral behaviour such as cyberbullying, digital piracy, and identity theft.

Another area of significant agreement was in the final section of the survey on the importance of Internet access for commercial activities, and the majority believe that the Internet will be crucial for the future growth of the Qumrani economy. Some of the key benefits that the survey participants mentioned include: the possibility of remote working, improved productivity, online accounting systems, eMarketing, and new business opportunities. As such, the government have decided to develop a comprehensive Computer Growth Policy, which includes the development of online government services, as well as giving instructions to all of the colleges and universities to allocate more places for students doing computer science courses, and finally they have decided to reduce their Corporation tax to attract large multinational technology companies to house their offices and Data Centres in Qumran.

1. Do the older adults in the survey have a reason to be concerned about the use of Internet access by younger adults who seem to be rejecting traditional Qumrani culture (particularly given the historical context)? Why?
2. Do the older adults in the survey have a reason to be concerned about the use of Internet access by children who have access to such a wide range of uncensored content? Why?
3. Do you agree with the statement "*personal data is a fair exchange for access to these important services*"? Why or why not?
4. Do you think that children who undertake illicit activities online such as digital piracy end up undertaking illicit or immoral activities in the real world? Why?
5. Do you think the Qumrani government is making the right choice by attempting to attract multinational technology companies? Why?