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## Middle East Youth Partnership with Mobile Phones

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**Abstract:** The Middle East is the world's second-fastest growing mobile market, with 60 percent youth population under the age of 29. For instance, in Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), smartphone penetration has risen 11 percent in recent years. The "winner" is the emergence of youth partnership with mobile phones, a voice manifested in Egypt and Tunisia during spring 2011 uprising. Despite residual conservatism, virtual words and Internet access have broken societal cultural barriers. As a result, mobile phones have become gadgets for companionship and social interaction, while communicating text messages and/or pictures is being circumvented. Although purchasing is driven by passion or prestige, youth are generally drawn to the latest mobiles that are loaded with technology-driven features. Current favorites include Lumia 640 XL, Samsung Galaxy S6, Samsung Galaxy Note Edge, iPhone 6 (S), Nokia 925, HTC One M8, Motorola Droid Turbo, Sony Xperia Z3, and Blackberry Passport SQW 100.

**Key words:** mobile phone; technology; youth; partnership; internet

**JEL code:** F60

### 1. Introduction

Reviewing youth transformational power, Rosen (2014) writes an article published on August 14, under the title, "The New Arabs: How the Millennial Generation Is Changing the Middle East". Rosen argues that youth and their mobile phones have "forever changed their societies", or indeed, "forever changed the world". The writer argues that youth, sometimes called "the millennials", gained prominence during the Arab 2011 spring uprising as their mobile phones played a major role in capturing images and transmitting them on social media.

In Tunisia, online youth users catapulted to 1.7 million between 2006 and 2008, and doubled again within a year when 90 percent of the population had mobile phones. In Egypt, 46 percent of urbanites were online by 2012; 40 percent accessed the Internet by mobile phones. In 2006 and 2008, eight million Egyptians applied (half of youth population) for US immigration lottery thanks to lessons learned from information generated by mobile phone technology during the peak period of the Arab uprising. Revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia are said to have been galvanized by "twenty somethings" enameled with maximizing the technological features of their mobile phones.

Libya, where the youth population was less connected, saw youth communicating pictures of police assaults and witnesses' statements. Libyan youth also used their mobiles to post venues for marches and in relaying lyrics of protest songs, which enabled demonstrators to overcome the fear of venturing into the street. Sweis (2014)

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reports for International Journalist's Network (ijnet). The writer, in an article captioned, "Digital media empower Middle East Youth", admits Middle East revolutions were "powered" by young people using mobile technology. "Young people, who make up 30 percent of the region's population, have played a dominant role in the protests — documenting events with mobile phones . . . ."

Youth partnership with mobile phones is not entirely new. Recalling history in order to appreciate up-to-date development, Ahmed (2004) recalls the old days when it took years to get a new telephone line. Now, there is less demand and pressure for landlines because mobile technology has out-numbered landline subscribers. Ahmed believes the mobile phone revolution is simply supreme. Worthy of notice, too, is the exponential growth of youth mobile technology market.

In retrospect, Ahmed (2004) admits the picture was quite different in 1994 when mobile phones were introduced. It was a heavily regulated sector with prohibitive license fees, high call charges of 30 cents per minute, and expensive handsets. Then, only the privileged could afford or use them. To the contrary, [www.go-gulf.ae](http://www.go-gulf.ae) puts today's smartphone penetration in the following countries as follows: Qatar, 75 percent; United Arab Emirates, 73 percent; Saudi Arabia, 60 percent; Jordan, 50 percent; Egypt, 26 percent; Morocco, 16 percent. In addition, 72 percent of smartphone owners are less than 34 years old. Importantly, smartphone penetration in the Middle East is projected to reach 39 percent in 2016.

Youth partnership with mobile phones is no longer debatable. Hashem (2009) says the Middle East is well known as a region for some of the most autocratic and least democratic political systems in the world. In the present environment, Hashem explains, youth in the region have had to find creative ways to deal with parental restrictions and governmental control over conventional media. This author believes parents usually acquiesce in providing for their children that which is deemed appropriate; parental good will further extends to providing "desired" mobile phones. For many parents, the purchase is considered an imperative in that it establishes two-way communication with their children.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Glimpse of Middle East Youth and Mobiles**

The popular television show, "Arab Idol", is the Middle East counterpart of "American Idol" and is popular among Middle East youth. During the show, the entire region comes to a grinding halt as millions watch or listen to the broadcast, and then vote for their favorite artist using their mobile phones. In conservative countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, Akl (2010) reports that there is no dating. Hence, youth use mobile phones to connect with the world and people around them. To circumvent traditional or cultural restrictions, youth go to restaurants and cafés "armed" with their mobile phones. Bluetooth open, youth engage their mobile phones in conversation, arrange meetings, and exchange phone numbers and "flowery" pictures.

Khalil (2011) describes Middle East youth partnership with mobile phones as a "youth quake", with the youth situated squarely at the center. Khalil believes the young generation, much like the West protest generation of the 1960s, is changing the political and cultural outlook of the region. Meanwhile, Sika (2012) writes under the headline, "Youth Political Engagement in Egypt: From Abstention to Uprising". Sika discusses youth interest in changing the outcome of elections, the prevalence of restrictive social conditions, as well as absence of political participation by youth. The author points out that although youth espouse democratic values, they are frustrated the system does now allow them to participate.

Still on politics, professor Djavad Salehi-Isfahani ([www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu)) of Virginia Tech University (United States), and resident fellow at Brookings Institution, is a Middle East expert. Salehi-Isfahani says youth in the region are not optimistic about political change, nor do they want to fight radicalism. Youth concerns, Djavad points out, are jobs, education, and marriage, all of which have eluded Middle East youth for decades. In fact, youth unemployment in Egypt is 30 percent. In Algeria, 46 percent of young people are unemployed. Youth in other Middle East countries do not fare any better when it comes to unemployment.

The youngest region in the world, the Middle East has a population of 380 million. Of this number, 60 percent are under the age of 29. The region's median age is 22. Yemen's median age is 18; in Iraq it is 20. That of Egypt is 24. Almost two-thirds of the Middle East is under the age of 26, estimated to double by 2050. The youth are united in their rejection of the status quo. They want a new order accountable and responsive to youth needs.

BBC News (2011) credits Wael Ghonim, Google employee and Egyptian youth leader. Under the headline, "Profile: Egypt's Wael Ghonim", the international network reports on Ghonim's efforts to rally youth to use mobile phones in communicating their concerns. Consequently, youth took to YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. They have since posted and transmitted pictures and text messages using mobile phones.

The youth have championed the cause for open and representative society on the Internet using mobile phones. Mobile phone technology is a tool that has provided youth the capability to interact freely. Thus, the youth have built a virtual society that has spilled into the streets. The adorned experience, using connectivity and solidarity to bring about change, has fueled the proliferation of youth mobile phone use. A priority of youth has been a new civic order with three seemingly contradictory characteristics: individualism, pluralism, and anonymity. This trio is explained in the accounts of Mohamed Bouazizi of Tunisia and Khaled Said of Egypt.

Bouazizi of Tunisia came from a family of six brothers and sisters. They lived modestly in the backwater of Sidi Bouzid where job opportunities were scarce. He got a job as a fruit vendor at the local market. But he did not have a license. In the meantime, his meager earnings paid for his sister's school fees. He had also started to save for a work-van.

As he was setting up one morning, a female inspector walked up and gave him a ticket for not having a license as a fruit vendor. Since the ticket involved a monetary fine, Bouazizi protested. But his protest met with a slap on his face by the inspector. He was humiliated in front of the entire market. He lodged a complaint with the authorities about the incident, but his complaint fell on deaf ears. No officer would sit down and listen to him.

Desperate and incensed, the youth doused himself with petrol, and set himself on fire in front of the municipal building. Bouazizi died 18 days later. At his funeral, his supporters cried out, "Farewell, Mohamed, we will avenge you." They did. After a few weeks, the Tunisian government fell. Government-controlled media did not cover the event. But mobile phone phones did. Camera phones uploaded videos to YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter.

Said from Egypt was in his regular spot in Sidi Gaber when two policemen walked in. They asked everyone to show identification (ID). Said did not comply because he had a small bag of marijuana. As a consequence, he was dragged out of the café and beaten. He was then thrown into the police vehicle and taken to the station where the police continued to torture him. Said died later of wounds inflicted on him at the hands of police.

As if being dead was not enough, the police threw his corpse in the street. They claimed that strangers had attacked him. The police further alleged that he had choked on the bag of marijuana he was trying to hide. "Each one of us can be Khaled," said a sentiment expressed over, and over, by people who learned of Said's fate. What happened to Said galvanized the youth who harbored deep resentment against police mistreatment. They used

their mobile phones to right a wrong. Pictures of police brutality against Said were taken and posted on YouTube. Facebook and Twitter added comments and analysis.

Bouazizi and Said were two ordinary young citizens. The two young men were innocuous members of the masses. Although their lives did not score points in the echelons of fame or notoriety, their deaths carried a potent symbolism. They came to symbolize the persistent struggles of their generation against authoritarian rule. The virtual nature of mobile phone technology, in concert with social media and the Internet, gave youth a voice that began the march toward social change in the Middle East. The youth have taken advantage of the anonymity embedded in mobile phone communication to express themselves.

## **2.2 Virtual Words of the Youth**

BBC, otherwise known as British Broadcasting Corporation (2005), invited comments by Middle East youth. In the exercise, BBC acknowledged the chatter on mobile phones and the “complex path between traditional culture, religious values . . . and social expectations as they establish identities, choose careers and find marriage partners.” The network asked the following questions (in one paragraph): Do you live in the Middle East? What is life like for young people in your country? What role do they play? How do you see them? Are they tomorrow’s leaders, a lost generation or something else? The following is a sample of comments sent to BBC by Middle East youth:

*Sami, Damascus, Syria:*

“I’m a young man from Syria. Syria is the worst country ever for the youth for a number of reasons. We don’t have any freedom in Syria for youth. Secondly, there are no job opportunities and incomes are very low, with high inflation. And thirdly, the government is for the president’s loyal workers only. On top of that, we have to do military service for two years, unpaid, and under all kinds of torture.”

*Jerome, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia:*

“I think you could write a book about the internal conflicts in the young of the Middle East. I have lived in Saudi Arabia for years and have known many young Saudi men. I’ve found that they live in an austere desert nomad culture where tribe, family, religion and modesty are strong values. They also partake in phone sex, instant messaging, alcohol, and Gulf area prostitutes. Living this dual life must cause internal conflict in these men [youth], and I wonder how this will ultimately affect the Middle East.”

*Leen, Amman, Jordan:*

“I was born in Jordan, but attended university in the US. Returning to my country for a summer vacation, I find youth parked on the sides of roads for hours without anything to do. It would be easy to blame the youth, but it is important not to overlook the role the government can play in encouraging youth productivity, community involvement, and activities. The onus is on the government to motivate youth and help them become active and productive citizens of their countries.”

*Anais, Texas, USA:*

“I believe it is time for the youth in the Middle East to take courage and stand up, so they may have the freedom to explore other mindsets, change their paradigms, and make decisions based on the truth and what is right. Although past generations oppose most Western concepts, they are not all evil. Therefore, today, more than ever, it is in the youth’s best interest to sort them out and adopt those-which are good.”

## **3. Methodology**

For purposes of the present research, secondary sources were used. These sources included books in library holdings on the topic under investigation. Written and published newspaper and magazine articles, as well as journals, were also consulted. Generally, these sources were used for purposes of analysis and interpretation. Primary sources consisted mainly of interviews conducted with youth mobile users in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The limited scope of the paper makes it impractical to investigate all 21 countries in the region. Thus, only 13 countries were included in the investigation. They are Bahrain, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Palestine (West bank and Gaza), Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, UAE, and Yemen.

50 interviews were conducted. Phone interviews were conducted with student participants in Bahrain in November 2013, and 15 student participants in Qatar in December 2013. In addition, 10 others interviews were conducted between January 2014, and February 2014, with professors at the United Arab Emirates University, and 10 professors at Gulf University for Science & Technology (Kuwait). The professors represented 11 countries.

Five topics drove the research effort. The first topic attempted to determine the extent to which mobile technology has penetrated the Middle East. The second topic explored the types of mobile technology used by youth. The third topic traced social and cultural environments prior to the advent of mobile phones. The fourth topic addressed the mobile phone market in the Middle East. And the fifth topic gauged the future of mobile phone technology with youth as target users.

The theory of uses and gratifications provided a theoretical framework. According to Shao (2009), users interact by establishing a social connection within virtual environments. In addition, the theory of social responsibility was considered. And as articulated by Pitner (2009), the theory analyzes the significance of information sharing in conforming to societal norms and ethics.

## **4. Findings**

### **4.1 Youth Mobile Phone Market**

Burson-Marsteller (2009) conducted an “Arab Youth Survey” using a representative sample of 1,800 young men and women. The age selected for the study ranged from 18 to 24 year-olds in the following countries: UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Jordan, and Egypt. The survey revealed that, Middle East youth depend on their mobile phones as companion, for school and personal reminders, for access to the Internet, and social interactive communication. Indeed, they get satisfaction in acquiring fashion and exhibit fascination with consumer brands accessed through the Internet.

The company reports that, of the 1.8 billion youth mobile phone accounts around the world, the youth mobile phone market is worth 360 billion annually. Research further shows that the trend is moving at full speed, estimated to grow by 50 percent in 2016. Data shows mobile devices must be attractive enough and loaded with highly competitive technology-inclined features to form “love” relationship (partnership) with youth.

Al Khaleej Times (2010) staff report, “Micromax makes foray into UAE,” says Miramax Informatics has launched operations in the UAE, Oman, Kuwait, and Qatar. Micromax mobile phones are targeted toward youth below 30 years of age. Mobile phones sold in these countries feature modern gaming and social features designed to attract the purchasing will of youth. Micromax has signed a distribution contract with mobile UAE LLC into 2020. In Oman, distribution is through molecular Group of Companies. Jumbo Electrics distributes in Qatar and Kuwait.

In an interview with Vikas Jain, the Micromax business director boasts that his company is privileged to have consumer confidence and is excited about the market opportunity in Dubai (UAE). Vikas believes the dual Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) handsets, with two numbers in one mobile phone, are a boon among youth.

An article published by Mubasher (2012), entitled, “Zain unveils ‘Zain Campus’ targeting students”, depicts innovative ways that mobile phone operators are using to attract subscribers. Zain (Kuwait) announced a strategy

aimed at youth population. Hence, “Zain Campus” enables students to communicate and exchange information with peers. The service permits students to make calls and send messages free of charge. Mobile phone companies have an eye on the future. They stock the latest mobile phones, especially in the smart phone category.

#### **4.2 Youth and Their Smartphones**

Gitex Technology Week organizer and Nokia general manager, Tom Farrell (2014), admits Nokia recognizes the need to adopt new technologies to serve the ever-expanding needs of the technologically minded Middle East youth. This recognition is manifested in the Nokia-Etisalat partnership intended to offer direct billing integration that allows Ovi Store customers to pay for “apps” instantly. Jackson (2009) is not surprised that Samsung has taken on the Middle East mobile phone market with Samsung Galaxy. And the launching of Galaxy S6 in 2014 places Samsung as leader in the Android operating system. Dazzling features include dual Shot, Simultaneous hard drive, video and image recording, geo-tagging, touch focus, face and smile detection, image stabilization, 62-hour music play, and 13-megapixel camera.

Prominent mobile phone manufacturers targeting Middle East youth are Apple, Samsung, Blackberry, and Nokia. The iPhone 6(S) retains the “trendiness” associated with Apple. “Everyone wanted a BlackBerry, and everyone wanted an iPhone. Now, many people have both,” says Aisha Hadan, a student at Qatar University. Contemporary mobile phones that tantalize youth are Samsung Galaxy S6, iPhone 6(S), Nokia 925, and Blackberry Passport SQW 100. These devices are “loaded” with features and applications (apps) touting modern technology. They are intended to lure youth to contract long-term partnership with mobile phones.

#### **4.3 Why Are Youth Drawn to Mobiles?**

Youth in this part of the world widely use social media; their partnership with mobile phones links them with social media. Elyazgi (2011) found that youth between the ages of 15 and 29 account for 70 percent of Arab Facebook users. In the same year, the number of active Twitter users was over one million. Combined, youth generated more than 22.7 million tweets. The UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Lebanon led the Middle East in the growth of youth mobile phone use and social media interaction during the social unrest.

Interviewee Mohammed (2013) believes mobile phone purchasing is driven by passion or prestige. The 24-year-old is a smartphone enthusiast who likes to buy the newest gadgets because he wants to stay up-to-date. As Mohammed speaks, the iPhone is comfortably propped atop the BlackBerry. He confesses he is addicted to that which is new, saying, “If a trend has taken off elsewhere and if you get your hands on it quickly, you’ll be one of the few trendsetters.”

Turkey is capitalizing on trendsetting in the Middle East. In a November 10 (2011) blog, “Turkey is leading the mobile revolution in the Middle East,” Fatih Isbecer says the markets are ever gaining speed and that the Middle East youth population is rising. According to VentureBeat (2011), the country’s telecommunications companies are acquiring technology from the West to manufacture smartphones with youth as target users. According to the World Bank, more and more investors are attracted to the Turkish market due to a diversified economy, proximity to Europe, and integration with European markets ([www.beat.com](http://www.beat.com)). Turkey provides two types of mobile banking services popular among youth.

In the meantime, [www.emarketer.com](http://www.emarketer.com) (2014) observes in “Smartphone Usage Soars across the Middle East and Africa,” stressing that the region witnessed a jump in smartphone use between 2013 and 2015. For instance, in Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and UAE, smart phone penetration rose by at least 11 percent. eMarketer records the most pervasive growth in Lebanon, which saw the number of users jump by 75 percent within one year. Penetration was highest in Saudi Arabia at 79 percent, followed by UAE at 72 percent. Conversely, penetration

was least in Egypt, which was up just one percent. eMarketer anticipated the number of smartphone users in the region to jump from 33.2 million to 156.4 million in 2016. [www.analysismason.com](http://www.analysismason.com) states that, Mobile Data Growth Will Drive Middle East and North Africa Telecoms Revenue to USD 96 Billion by 2018.

InMobi (2012) is referred to as the world's largest independent mobile advertising network. Company vice-president of research and marketing, James Lamberti, maintains that Middle East mobile advertising growth keeps pace with trends in the region. If the current trend continues, states Lamberti, the region stands to retain youth mobile phone loyalty. And when young people use mobile phones, youth impact is inevitable.

#### **4.4 The Societal/Social Impact of Mobile Phone Use**

Political leaders are aware of the impact of information, communication, and technology (ICT). In 2008, 21 information ministers of the Arab League met to discuss the impact of mobile phone technology on their populations. The ministers issued a statement emphasizing mobile phones should not be used to "offend" leaders in the Arab World, a code word for destabilizing. The statement further expressed the need to protect Arab identity (against threat by mobile phone-generated information). Although Qatar is the only country that has not signed the Middle East Outreach Council (MEOC) declaration, smartphone text and photo features have, nonetheless, provided youth a unique avenue to voice opinions.

The will to participate is reflected in the revolutions that sprung in 2011. Irrefutably, youth partnership with mobile phones gave rise to collective message conceptualization and dissemination by and for a deprived segment of the population. And when the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt fell, the world watched with awe youth fortitude as their capitalized use of mobile phones. Yemen followed suit in 2012. This explains why Tufte and Mefalopoulos (2009) define participation as "the involvement of ordinary people in a development process leading to change." There has been an impact on social life as well. Prior to the advent of mobile phones, young men and women had to take a risk to exchange phone numbers or to make personal contact. This is customary in the Middle East where dating is "haram" [not allowed]. To get around the restriction, a young man might toss a cassette tape through a girl's car window; wait for her outside a shop; or drop a piece of paper with his phone number on a known-street for her to pick up. Today, young men and women exchange phone numbers via text messages and pictures using such features as Bluetooth or Instagram.

When BlackBerry suffered widespread service disruption in September 2011, the impact was dramatic. In the UAE, there were 20 percent fewer accidents in Dubai and 40 percent fewer accidents in Abu Dhabi within the three-day service interruption. The reason is simple. Youth drivers (who often make or receive calls, text, send pictures or use the Internet while driving) could not use their mobile phones. Consequently, there were no phone calls made or received; there were no text messages sent or received; there were no pictures taken or sent or received; there was no Internet access for mobile phone use; and there were no e-mails to be sent or received via mobile phones. There was only one "service" available, namely, behind the wheel paying full attention to driving!

Taking a page from driving, a BBC News article, "Phone technology aids UAE dating," Sharp (2005) reflects on what happens in UAE malls, cinemas, and cafés in Dubai's notorious traffic jams where youth go there and use mobile phones to communicate. In the article, Sharp writes about Zara Abdul. The latter says she cannot check out the latest fashions in the store or sip a smoothie in a café without being bombarded with phone numbers of admirers. Traditionally, a young man's first amorous approach to a woman is a marriage proposal made by his parents. While this cultural trait will survive the mobile technological tide, the youth will likely communicate about marriage before their parents do.

A study by professor Abdullah Al-Rasheed ([www.news.bbc.co.uk](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk)) focused on Saudi teenage boys' mobile



phones detained by religious police officers for harassing girls. The researcher found that, 88 percent of girls said they had been harassed while using Bluetooth. The report showed 69.7 percent of files saved in mobile phones contained pornographic content; 8.6 percent were of violent nature. To protect cultural values, Saudi Arabia has instituted severe penalties for youth misuse of mobile phones.

Sweis (2011) writes that the power of mobile technology extends not only to political issues and revolutions, but also fundamental social issues that include education and health. For example, a YouTube video, showing a Jordanian student verbally abused by his teacher, met with public outrage. The minister of education apologized to the student and the teacher was penalized.

Tunisia is making giant steps in youth employment using mobile phones. Ooredoo (2013) acknowledges that Najja7ni Employment Mobile Service has enhanced employability and financial awareness for youth since its inception in early April 2013. By April 30 that year, 300,000 customers had signed up for the service. The goal of the program is to enable youth to achieve their ambitions. Najja7ni Employment is available on any mobile device to reach the widest possible youth audience. Najja7ni Employment is currently available in French; it will soon be available in Arabic and English. Ooredoo chief executive officer, Nasser Marafih, admits youth unemployment is a major issue with impact on individuals, families, and communities. Marafih believes Ooredoo can make an impact on youth employment using mobile technology. "We are studying the success of 'Najja7ni'," he reiterates. Despite the good intentions, mobile phones come with certain dysfunctions.

#### **4.5 Mobile Phone Adverse Impact on Youth**

Recognizing mobile phones' unintended consequences, Sweis (2011) advocates progressive mobile phone use. Sweis makes reference to Shahida Azfar, director of Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The latter speaks on youth violence, "They have also been among its first victims." Sayed Ahmad Sayed, 14-year-old boy in Bahrain, was shot dead during a youth protest. Shortly after, youth posted photos of his bludgeoned head on YouTube. And BBC (2013) broadcast the sentencing of six youth activists to one year in jail for insulting the king using mobile phone-generated messages posted on Twitter.

In a report published by TR-Question More (2013), Kuwaiti youth, Mohammad Eid al-Ajmi, received a five-year jail term for insulting the Emir on Twitter. It is the third such conviction since January 2013. A few months later, the same court sentenced Ayyad Al Harbi and Rashed Al-Enezi to two years in jail each. Enezi did not mention the Emir by name, but the court said it was clear for whom the insult was intended. In the West Bank (Palestine), TR-Question writes about a six-month jail sentence for 29-year-old Anas Ismail for "libel and slander against communications minister." BBC (2013) reports a UAE judge's 10-month jail verdict against Abdullah al-Hadidi for tweeting. Abdullah's father (94) was on trial for plotting to overthrow the government. Abdullah was arrested on March 22 (2013) after tweeting details of the hearing at the federal courthouse in Abu Dhabi.

#### **4.6 Outlook of Youth Mobile Phone Use**

The 4th World Summit on Media for Children and Adolescents was held in April 2004 in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) with a focus on youth and mobile devices. The summit agreed the world media landscape for youth presents two opposing themes: opportunities and risks. For example, globalization of media broadens youth outlook and provides access to information. Conversely, it threatens cultural identity and values. It is true that technological advances bring new skills and greater youth participation. However, it increases the risk of youth exploitation. Although the summit took place one decade ago, the values expressed then are still valid and applicable in today.

UAE Al Khaleej Times (2011) recognizes smart phone penetration. The paper writes in the July 23 article

that the region is moving towards “mobile only” content given that mobile applications are overtaking traditional features. These technological advancements, the papers states, account for the country’s 232 percent mobile phone penetration rate. Lina Alsaafin (2013) critiques a report on social media in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Palestine), which found 40 percent of Palestinians actively using social media, especially Facebook. This places the Palestinian Territories as the most populous users in the Middle East with 232 percent increase in Twitter users. Prominent among the reasons for Palestinian youth mobile phone use is access to social media to fight the Israeli occupation.

Middle East youth will not part company with their mobile phones in the foreseeable future. Ali Al-Saban is a 24-year-old Kuwaiti enthralled by smart phone gadgetry. This author met Ali in the waiting lounge of a car repair shop. Ali was sitting in the customer lounge as his brand new 2012 Toyota Avalon was going through scheduled maintenance. The service took three hours, but the long wait is no big deal to Ali. Ali was busy with two mobile phones, Samsung Note III and iPhone 4S. “Samsung Note III has 30 ring tones and I can customize them,” he said proudly with a broad smile and sense of confidence. “iPhone has applications like Viber and Tango. But it’s got small screen, so I go back and forth between the two phones.” New phones and improved features will only get youth hooked to mobile phones and keep afloat the already strong partnership.

The European Travel Commission Digital Portal ([www.etc-digital.com](http://www.etc-digital.com)) puts Middle East mobile phone youth market as important, having gained prominence during the 2011 spring uprising. In this regard, Middle East youth mobile phone users are digitally engaged and open to discovering latest technologies. According to the European Travel Commission, 83 percent of youth are using the Internet on daily basis, while 99 percent spend about 30 minutes online.

## **5. Conclusion**

Middle East youth come from societies where culture, and sometimes, conservatism, place barriers to youth opportunities or problems that need to be addressed. Given that youth makeup about 60 percent of the population under the age of 29, and that unemployment hovers around 30 percent, youth have exhausted ways and means of communicating their problems to the government or authorities. And mindful of the limitations placed on conventional media, youth have found “comfort” and “companionship” in the virtual sphere, namely, mobile phones. This explains why Khalil (2011) describes Middle East youth partnership with mobile phones as a “youth quake.”

BBC (2011) credits Google employee and Egyptian leader, Wael Ghonim, with rallying youth to voice their concerns during the spring 2011 uprising. While youth are aware they cannot always fight and win against tradition or radicalism, they consider jobs, education, and marriage as cardinal imperatives important to them. To this end, youth are united in their rejection of the status quo and committed to harnessing mobile phones to social media in order to disseminate themes or information to their cause.

Thus, the Internet is a prime youth resource for sending messages, lyrics, and pictures to online users. Socially, youth have done away with traditional protocols, stimulated “acultural” male-female communication, let alone masquerading with dating. Today, and thanks to mobile phones, youth exchange communication in public places such as restaurants, cafés, and showrooms. Mobile phone favorites, such as Lumia 640 XL, Samsung Galaxy S6, Samsung Galaxy Note Edge, iPhone 6 (S), Nokia 925, HTC One M8, Motorola Droid Turbo, Sony Xperia Z3, and Blackberry Q30 only breed youth fidelity. In fact, Mubasher (2012) believes operators employ

innovative ways to lure youth. In Kuwait, “Zain Campus” is one mobile operator’s approach to make it possible for students to communicate and exchange information.

Looking forward, Burson-Marsteller’s survey showed that, of the 1.8 billion youth phones projected for 2016 around the world, youth mobile market will hit 360 billion. According to the data, highly attractive devices loaded with competitive technology-driven features will attract and retain youth loyalty. [www.emarketer.com](http://www.emarketer.com) (2014) reports that, the Middle East witnessed an increase in smartphone use between 2013 and 2014. In Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and UAE, smart phone penetration rose by at least 11 percent, while Lebanon recorded an increase of 75 percent. Penetration was highest in Saudi Arabia at 79 percent and UAE at 72 percent. eMarketers predicts Middle East smart phone users in the region will skyrocket from 33 million to 156 million.

The partnership between youth and mobile phones has its drawbacks. Youth have been shot during protests, which have been galvanized by mobile phone communication. Other youth have served or are serving jail term for their actions using mobile phones. Postings on YouTube, Facebook, or Twitter have infuriated conservative authorities who have resorted to recrimination against youth. In reality, despondency will linger into the future and frustration will revisit youth environments. The “golden” opportune difference is that, youth partnership with mobiles is now ever ready to portray youth voices. Rosen (2014) could not have put it any better, saying, “The youth (“the millennials”) and their mobiles have “forever changed their societies, or have indeed, forever changed the world.”

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