

# Chapter XI

## Technology Acceptance of Free Wireless Internet Park Initiatives

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter examines the adoption of free wireless internet parks (iPark) by Qatari citizens as means of accessing electronic services from public parks. The Qatari government has launched free wireless internet parks concept under their national electronic government (e-government) initiative with a view of providing free internet access for all citizens while enjoying the outdoors. By offering free wireless internet access, the Qatari government hopes to increase accessibility of e-government services and encourage their citizens to actively participate in the global information society with a view of bridging the digital divide. The adoption and diffusion of iPark services will depend on user acceptance and availability of wireless technology. This chapter examines an extended technology acceptance model (TAM) that proposes individual differences and technology complexity to determine perceived usefulness and perceived ease of the iPark initiative by using a survey based study. The chapter provides a discussion on the key findings, research implications, limitations, and future directions for the iPark initiative in Qatar.*

### INTRODUCTION

The Qatari free-wireless-internet-park (iPark) concept was launched in 2007 under the banner of e-government to make public services more

accessible to citizens. The iPark initiative is implemented in a number of public parks and provides free connection to the citizens' Internet ready devices such as, laptop and PDA's any time of day. The first such initiative was launched in

the city of Doha in Qatar and it is the first of its kind in the Western Asia region. The primary goal of the initiative is to increase internet usage by establishing “hot spots” in public parks (IctQATAR, 2007). There are currently three designated wireless internet hotspots throughout selected public parks in the city (ibid). This chapter explores citizens’ acceptance of the iPark concept as part of the e-government initiative in Qatar.

The Qatari e-government initiative was launched in 2000. In global terms the UN E-government readiness report (2008) ranked Qatar’s e-government project as number 53 worldwide. As in many countries, the national e-government focus in Qatar is to achieve the highest performance in executing governmental transactions electronically, through streamlined business processes and integrated information technology solutions (IctQATAR, 2007). Moreover, the Qatari government hopes that free internet access offered through the iPark concept will encourage more citizens to use e-government services and help bridge the digital divide.

The Internet while being the primary mode of access to e-government services has not been adapted globally at the same time or rate; some countries are considered as leaders (such as the US, UK and Singapore) and others simply follow (i.e. the Arabian Gulf region) (Gupta and Gupta, 2005). More recently, wireless technologies have become a useful means of internet connectivity and access to electronic services (e-services). Wi-Fi for ‘Wireless Fidelity’ is a set of standards for wireless local area networks (WLAN) and provides wireless access to the Internet (Lehr and McKnight, 2003). Hotspots providing such access include Wi-Fi-cafes where services may be free to customers. In fact, a hotspot need not be limited to a confined location; as illustrated in this chapter, public parks can be used to offer free wireless internet access to citizens.

In particular, Wi-Fi has opened up new opportunities for electronic commerce (e-commerce)

and e-government by allowing citizens to build connectivity 24/7. Moreover, it helps to increase accessibility of services and to expand social, government and business networks. The European Commission estimated Wi-Fi users to be around 125 million worldwide in the year 2006, and that there will be more than 500 million Wi-Fi users worldwide by 2009 (JiWire, 2006). However, wireless security remains mostly important factor that challenges wireless internet hot spots. As Wi-Fi grows the security threat also increases rapidly and therefore the need to protect information becomes imperative (Peikari and Fogie, 2003). The security risk remains largely from hackers, who are individuals, that access into the system without any authorization and for personal gain.

Given the above context, the rationale for this research is to gain a better understanding about the free wireless internet park “iPark” initiative in Qatar. Using a pilot survey questionnaire, this study aims to explore the intention of citizens to use iPark services in Qatar. This is achieved by examining their perceptions of ‘ease of use’ and ‘usefulness’ in relation to internet access in the iPark. To pursue this line of inquiry, this research uses the technology acceptance model (TAM). TAM theorizes that an individual’s behavioral intention to use a technology is determined by two factors: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Gardner and Amoroso, 2004).

The chapter is structured as followed. In the next section the national Qatari e-government background is presented then a literature perspective of e-government is offered followed by an outline of the theoretical model used for the research. Then the empirical background to the research is presented. This is followed by the methodology used for the research and a presentation of the empirical results. Finally the chapter concludes by analysing the empirical results, discussing the research implications and identifying areas for future research.

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