Culturally-Aware Motivation for Smart Services: An Exploratory Study of the UAE

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Abstract

The adoption of smart services could be challenging despite the benefits they can offer in terms of ubiquity and intelligence. The main reason for that is the relatively difficult administration of the services on smart phones and the availability of other options including the in-person and desktop services. However, the design of smart services could be more proactive and attract users' adoption through the use of persuasive and motivational techniques. These techniques should be culturally-sensitive. This paper reviews the use of Cialdini six principles of influence in the cultural context of UAE, and it assesses how they should be used to increase the adoption of smart services. As a method, we conducted in-depth interviews with ten experts in various domains; including marketing and customer services; in the UAE. We report on the potential and the adverse effects and identify context specific factors of the use of these principles in the context of the UAE aiming to give the management of software-based motivation a starting point for their design and evaluation.

Keywords: Persuasion Quality, Culture-sensitive Design, Smart Services Adoption, Empirical Study.

1.0 Introduction

Motivation in personnel and users is a basic need to perform tasks and achieve the enterprise system goals and requirements. Motivation has been often seen within the boundary of the management of an organisation, e.g. the human resources development, customer services, outreach programmes, etc. With the advance of computing and communication technology and the proliferation of Web 2.0 techniques, motivation has become a social requirement to be facilitated through the technical part of a socio-technical system [1]. That is, unlike the business requirements typically associated with economic value, motivation is seen as a

supplementary requirement that aids the quality achievement of other requirements.

Software-based motivation, known as gamification [2] and persuasive technology [3], has seen a wide adoption as a novel mechanism to change people's behaviour and attitude in a business context through the use of game elements. The ad-hoc application of software-based motivation may lead to adverse effects such as reducing quality, distraction, creating unnecessary competition, trivialising the serious task and tension [4, 5]. The socio-cultural framework is one of the main dimensions to consider when using software-based motivation.

The development of smart services as an incarnation of an electronic government and e-commerce paradigms is emerging various areas of the world. Despites their benefits of being ubiquitous and context-aware, their adoption as a new technology require motivating the users and also staff in the back-end. For example, the availability of in-person and agencies alternatives and the lack of human-to-human interaction that could be perceived as an obstacle. Therefore, it would be recommended that smart services are augmented with a motivational layer to increase their adoption and to support users' retention.

This paper explores the peculiarities to take into account when designing software-based motivation for the socio-cultural framework of the UAE where smart services paradigm is intended to grow. To this end, ten experts interview have been conducted. The questions and the findings were centred around Cialdini's six principles of influence [6] and driven by two main research questions which will be further investigated in follow up studies.

- **Research Question 1:** How would UAE nationals react to and perceive motivational elements to increase the use of an offered service?
- **Research Question 2:** What are the contextual factors that affect the acceptability of those elements?

This paper reports on an exploratory study investigating the characteristics of customer motivational factor which will feed into the development of *fit for purpose* smart services.

2.0 Method

The aim of the exploratory investigation presented in this paper is to gauge the suitability and efficiency of motivational techniques targeting citizens of the UAE. This can then be used in future to employ models utilising these techniques to design attractive and culturally relevant smart devices. The investigation presented in this paper is part of a two-phase approach. The first phase consisted of a series of interviews of ten experts of different customer driven domains in the UAE. The second phase will be a quantitative study involving a survey of UAE service users.

The investigation presented in this paper is therefore a qualitative study involving interviews of ten experts working in customer driven domains, namely Banking, Telecommunication, Tourism and Marketing, Customer Services, and Government.

The ten experts headed or participated in public campaigns promoting various services to UAE citizens. The process of choosing the experts was convenience sampling based.

2.1 Interview Setup

The interview process was split into two phases; the initial interview and an optional post interview contact in case further clarification regarding some of the responses was required. All interviewees received information sheets with all the interview questions before the date of the interview to allow each interviewee to understand the scope and the purpose of the interview. The interviews lasted on average 45 minutes, where the shortest last 31 minutes and the longest 50 minutes. The interviews were conducted either with the help of video conferencing or in person.

2.2 Interviewees

As mentioned earlier, the interviewees are experts working in five customer driven service domains. Table 1 shows the different experts mapped to the domains and the number of years they have been working in these domains. It can be seen that the experts have have a large amount of expertise dealing with planning projects for customers in the UAE. Expert 10 is the expert with the least experience. However, Expert 10's role involves daily interaction and problem solving with and for customers.

	Exp. 1	Exp. 2	Exp. 3	Exp. 4	Exp. 5	Exp. 6	Exp. 7	Exp. 8	Exp. 9	Exp. 10
Banking	X		X				X			
Customer Service	X	X					X		X	X
Marketing and Tourism			X			X		X		
Gov.				X	X			X		
Teleco.		X							X	X
Years of Experience	13	30	9 ½	7	15	5	18	13	20	<5

Table 1: Experts' domains and experience

All domains are driven to provide services to customers, and the experts have insight about the motivational factors of customers in the UAE.

After conducting the interviews, the responses were used to explore Cialdini's [6] six elements his of motivation and and persuasion model in the context of the customers in the UAE. Cialdini's model has been accepted by numerous researchers [7, 8, 9, 10], and the findings contrasted to this model will provide sufficient insight to conduct future surveys into motivational factors impacting on customers' adoption of offered services. The six elements are Reciprocity, Scarcity, Authority, Commitment and Consistency, Social Proof, and Likability.

3.0 Results and Discussion

The analysis of the interview transcripts resulted in the identification of factors linked to elements of Cialdini's model specific for the context of the UAE.

3.1 Reciprocity

Reciprocity relates to a positive good, which is the expected behaviour when receiving something for the first time from a provider. In other words, the motivation is caused by a return of an action or a behavioural change, as a reaction to a previous behaviour. The analysis of the interviews with the ten experts highlighted 12 factors customers in the UAE may be influenced by in relation to reciprocity; these are suspicion, manner, familiarity, quality, transparency, offer, trust, escalation, managed scale, experience, and market and overload.

Suspicion: The experts indicated that customers in the UAE may be suspicious towards available offers. Customers may not trust the underlying value of the offered good or service. This would mean that service providers need to consider this suspicion when communicating offers to a customer.

Manner: Offering a service if the customer fulfils conditions may be perceived by a customer as a sign of the provider's lacking manners. That means that, according to the experts, UAE citizens seem to dislike bargaining for a good or receiving an offer as a result of negotiation efforts.

Familiarity: The experts indicated that customers in the UAE may prefer clear and familiar offers. Complex and complicated offers may induce insecurity and uncertainty in the customers' perception of the offer.

Quality: Customers appear to want to be sure of the quality of a service or good before even considering an offer. Offers may be ignored entirely if the quality of the underlying product, the service or the good, is perceived as bad.

Transparency: Offers where the cost benefit is not completely transparent are not very popular in the UAE. The *unknown* of the offer as a result of the lack of

transparency will likely have a negative effect on the motivation to accept an offer. This appears to confirm Colesca's [11] findings, who stated that transparency in the provision of e-government services increases the trust between citizens and government. That means that the experts confirm that providers in the UAE, in Colesca's case governments in general, will gain trust through transparency, and offers will be accepted more willingly by customers.

Offer: This factor is linked the the perceived quality of the good or service as discussed earlier. However, it refers to the relationship that the customer establishes with a provider if an offer is perceived as qualitatively good. The customer will more likely consider new offers if the quality of previous offers were perceived as good.

Trust: Related to the previous point is the trust relationship the customer has with a provider. If this trust relationship is disturbed, the customer will be less likely to accept offers. This attitude may result from the UAE's thriving economy and the subsequent high average income which has been persisted for more than 30 years [12]. According to the experts the trust relationship may result in long term relationships which do not change unless significant quality issues become apparent.

Escalation: This factor relates to the escalation of offers. UAE customers appear to expect offers to develop in their favour over time. This factor would need to be considered when providers develop offers since not only rewarding offers would have to be considered, but also customers' expectations.

Managed Scale: Since customers may expect scaling of offers, this scaling needs to be managed carefully. The experts indicated that customers may as mentioned previously be suspicious towards an offer. If an offer escalates too quickly it may have a negative effect on the motivation of the customer. This again relates to the the customers' expectations.

Experience: It appears that UAE customers would not necessarily consider an offer purely based on monetary rewards. This is especially so if the monetary rewards is small. However, offering experiences and excitement as part of the offer may be enticing to customers. This would confirm Antikainen and Vaataja's [13] findings for the UAE context; motivation might take different formats, as it could be monetary, and non-monetary approaches for some segments.

Market and Overload: Market relates to providing services to a big market segment without alienating the customers. UAE customers appear to expect that offers are tailored to them. If that is not the case, these offers may not even be considered. Another issue related to large markets is overload due to the number of offers provided by different competitors. This overload may have a negative effect on the motivation to accept an offer, but it may be mitigated by customisation.

3.2 Scarcity

Scarcity related to motivation through the limitation of specific offers. This limitation may be time-bound, but it could also be related to a customer's performance in completing a challenge or a lottery draw. Additionally, the scarcity concept and its degree of influence could vary from customer to another, depending the perceived value of the offer which could be monetary or quality values [14].

The experts highlighted several challenges which were categorised into six factors influencing the element of scarcity in the context of UAE customer motivation. These factors are competition, social recognition, uniqueness, secondary nature, exclusivity, and negativity.

Competition: Scarcity may result in an adverse effect. For instance, if a customer never gets the chance to get an offer, it may actually result in rejecting a product or service altogether. In fact, scarcity may result in customers feeling insulted by being omitted from offers.

Social Recognition: The social impact of limited offers may be motivational in the context of the UAE. Customers may receive offers if they recruit more customers. That would result in limiting the offer to those who recruit, but it may result higher adoption of a good or service.

Uniqueness: The uniqueness of a good or service may motivate customer in the UAE to adopt a good or service. Uniqueness may therefore increase the perceived value of a good or service even if the actual economic value may be low.

Secondary Nature: Scarcity according to the experts may have a secondary nature to motivation. The experts indicated that scarcity may not be the most influential element, and it may only be a secondary aspect in the motivation process.

Exclusivity: The experts recognised exclusivity as a potentially driving factor. Providing a limited offer linked to exclusive rights may be enticing to UAE customers.

Negativity: Scarcity may be perceived as negative. Customers may perceive the good or service on offer as a leftover.

3.3 Authority

The *authority* element of Cialdini's [6] motivation and persuasion model relates to the influence celebrities and public figures may have on motivation customer behaviour. Positive endorsement by such an influential figure can be a critical part in customer motivation. However, the experts again identified factors related to the element of authority especially relevant to the UAE context. These factors are

effectiveness, profile, lifespan, secondary nature, age, lifetime, personalisation, vision, patriotism, and objectivity.

Effectiveness: All experts agreed that this technique is one of the most influential in the UAE. The society and culture recognises individuals who contributed to the growth of the country. According to the experts these respected individuals with *authority*, it will help a marketing campaign.

Profile: According to the experts the background of the individual with authority does not have to match what they promote for the motivation to be effective.

Lifespan: The experts stated that in their experience the authority of individuals promoting a good or service will be longer effective than they would be in other markets.

Secondary Nature: If a good or service has been accepted by potential customers, an authority may only have a secondary influential effect on the motivation to accept an offer. That would mean that providers need to be aware of this secondary limited nature if the authority element.

Age: The age of the customers to be targeted will influence which individual would be effective to motivate and persuade.

Lifetime: It may be advantageous if an individual accepted as authority is not too tightly coupled with a good or service since the lifetime of the individual may not be too long. Lifetime may not necessarily be the biological lifetime; it could also refer to the time an individual is active in their field of expertise.

Personalisation: This relates to the providers' recognition of the customer as an individual of authority. UAE customers appear to prefer if marketing campaigns are targeted to them; thus recognising the customers' authority.

Vision: The experts indicated that the authorities might not need to advertise each good or service individually. Authorities could be very effective endorsing a vision of a company, which may entail the usage of a good or service.

Patriotism: The feeling of community is prevalent in the UAE. That means that authorities linked to a community may be affective promoting a good or service.

Objectivity: If a good or service endorsed by an authority does not meet the expectations of the customers, any other products endorsed may actually be rejected too.

3.4 Commitment and Consistency

Customers can be committed to a specific provider, and as long as the service they receive matches their expectations and quality definition, then it is likely that the customers will keep using the service. That means that the customers will be self-motivating themselves to stay with a provider. In other words, this element relates to the consistency for the provided service and the expected commitment from customers once the provider triggered their needs. The experts argued that this element could work efficiently in the UAE due to UAE citizens' cultural values. However, they highlighted seven factors which may have to be considered in the context of the UAE. These factors are lifespan, duality, personal nature, management of change, negative impact, moral values, and escalation.

Lifespan: The experts stated that UAE customers stay committed to a service or good as long as the quality is consistent and the customer expectations are met.

Duality: The customers appear to expect high quality in return for their commitment. That means that customers' expectations can escalate as mentioned earlier, and these expectations will have to be met by the providers to maintain the customers' commitment.

Personal Nature: If customers experienced long lasting personal interactions with a provider's representative, the customer may actually overlook temporary shortcomings of a good or service.

Management of Change: The success of any IT based service is relatively linked to the commitment of the present and potential users (customers), and respectively the commitment is linked to how the service design to be consistent [15]. The service design may evolve eventually; the service might be merged with other services, or it could expand to the point where it could be renamed or endorsed differently. This might affect commitment and consistency since customers may not be able to understand the new change and disassociate the changed service from the original service design.

Negative Impact: As indicated earlier UAE citizens due to their strong sense of loyalty expect consistency for their loyalty. However, providing this consistency is not always easy to provide, especially when in-person services transform into IT based services.

Moral Values: Moral and religious values are of important consideration in the UAE which need to be recognised by the service providers.

Escalation: Customer in the UAE may expect services to be changing in their favour in return for their commitment. This may not always be possible especially for general-purpose services. Transparency about the services may help to mitigate this expectation.

3.5 Social Proof

The element of social proof relates to the confirmation of impressions and perceived correct behaviour based on the observed reactions of peers. The experts identified proactivity, provability, openness and frankness, similarity, age, duality, disappointment and uniqueness as factors that need to be considered in the context of the UAE.

Proactivity: The experts stated that proactivity in providing information to potential customers may be beneficial since customers may have limitations gathering this information by themselves. However, this factor needs to be considered with the related factor of openness and frankness.

Provability: Due to the availability of customer reviews and opinions on social media providers may have to proof that their goods and services are what they state they are. Customers may actively investigate if providers' claims are true.

Openness and Frankness: As indicated earlier UAE citizens appear to appreciate openness and clarity about shortcomings of goods and services. When social proof contradicts the information given by the providers, this may be detrimental to the motivation and persuasion of customers to accept an offer.

Similarity: It appears that citizens in the UAE do seek social proof from individuals from similar social groups. That means providers' messages can be tailored to these groups. However, this can fact can have a negative impact if the targeted social groups do not match potential customers.

Age: It appears that younger customers are willing to search for social proof on social media or online resources. Older generations appear to be content with being served simple direct communication.

Duality: Social proof can impact on offered goods and services positively and negatively. Trust relationships can be extended or diminished by social proof.

Disappointment: While social proof may entice potential customers to use a good or service, it may also lead to disappointment when expectations are not met.

Uniqueness: Since customers in the UAE appear to prefer tailored goods and services, the fact that a large number of other customers use these goods and services may negate the impact of social proof. That means communicating social proof needs to be considered carefully.

3.6 Likability

This element of the motivational and persuasion model refers to being motivated by individuals who target customers know or like. The experts influence, respect,

language, moral values, look, lifestyle, success, and geographical similarity as factors to be considered in the context of the UAE.

Influence: Likability appears to be very influential in the context of UAE. It appears that customers appreciate if providers understand their customs. This influence of cultural context was also recognised by Munro et al. [16] in a wider context.

Respect: The consideration of likability by providers in the UAE appears to be a sign of respect. Providers ignoring the UAE cultural context may be perceived as inconsiderate.

Language: The experts also highlighted that likability will even be represented in language patterns, and providers ought to consider these.

Moral Values: The experts stated that likability would also ensure that moral values are to be considered by providers.

Look: In many industries the employment of perceived attractive individuals to promote a good or service is seen as a motivational factor. However, it appears that in the context of the UAE the experts state that this may not be the case.

Lifestyle: The experts indicated that the likability of a lifestyle of a promoting individual is important in the context of the UAE.

Success: The success achieved by an individual promoting a good or service may motivate potential customers to adopt the promoted good or service in order to achieve a similar success.

Geographical Similarity: Customers in the UAE appear to prefer if goods and services are provided in offices and branches local to them. However, this may be difficult to achieve for online services.

4.0 Conclusions and Future Work

The exploratory study presented in this paper investigate what ten experts working in customer driven domains in the UAE consider as influential factor in relation to Cialdini's [6] six elements of his motivation and persuasion model.

The experts highlighted several factors which appear to be specific to the context of the UAE. However, this needs to be confirmed by studying smart service customers' attitudes in more detail. This should also be contrasted to preconceptions service providers not familiar with the context of the UAE may have.

A survey of customer attitudes towards smart services will be undertaken to see if the factors highlighted by the experts are relevant. The findings of the analysis of this survey will then be contrasted with an investigation into potential preconceptions about UAE customers as exhibited by smart service providers not familiar with the market in the UAE.

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