

Using mobile technologies to promote youth employment a partnership approach

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ABSTRACT

Information and communications technologies (ICTs), including mobile technologies, are having a dramatic impact upon societies in the Arab region. With the rapid upsurge in use of mobile technologies throughout the region, patterns of usage have shifted from making phone calls and surfing the Internet to using social media tools for societal change. The Najjahni mobile platform in Tunisia represents a multi-level partnership to develop mobile educational applications that has now reached over half a million young Tunisians. This paper provides an overview of the success of Najjahni, and the critical partnerships that have made such a project possible.

Author Keywords

Employment, Entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, mEducation, mEnglish, mLearning, NGO, partnership approach, social initiative, telecom, youth,

INTRODUCTION

It has been increasingly recognized that in developing countries ICTs are inducing dynamic changes in society. They are influencing all aspects of life. ICTs greatly facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, offering opportunities that improve the delivery of basic services and increase business productivity and competitiveness. The Arab region, in particular, is seeing a spectacular upsurge in the use of Internet and mobile technology. A recent study conducted by Gallup¹, concluded that 87 percent of young Arabs aged 15 to 29 had, in 2010, access to mobile phones. The use of mobile phones and Internet in Arab countries is no longer about only making calls or gathering information on web sites but rather about utilizing mobile phone applications and social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter for positive societal changes. For instance, mobile phones and social media were used by many Tunisian youth as a mean to express their right for social justice and access to development and employment.

Since 2003, PRO-INVEST, a leader in developing employment and vocational training policies, has actively been working on the use of Information Technology in the field of education, youth employment and vocational training. This paper will showcase the MobiWorks experience, an employment mobile platform jointly developed with SILATECH and Tunisiana, the main private telecommunication operator in Tunisia. Currently, MobiWorks has reached 300000 young Tunisians. The success of such a platform could not have been achieved without the set-up of a partnership approach involving private and public institutions, as well as civil society.

The Najja7ni project

One of the major mLearning initiatives that has been developed as part of the public, private and civil institutional collaborative approach in Tunisia is the *Najja7ni* project (Ooredoo, 2013). *Najjahni* is a set of 3 main mobile learning services, made possible thanks to a partnership between Edupartage, an Education community based network (created and founded by PRO-INVEST), Tunisiana, and Silatech, a social initiative that promotes youth social and economic inclusion throughout the Arab world. *Najja7ni* is affordable, playful, and accessible. It uses USSD which works on any GSM phone, even if the phone has no credit.

The first service, *Najja7ni Education*, was launched in 2010 (Ooredoo, 2013; Edupartage, 2008). It has been a real success among pupils from primary and secondary schools with over 500,000 registered subscribers since launch. *Najjahni Education* covers a total of 2500 questions prepared by Tunisian teachers and 100% compliant with the official education programs. Thanks to this service kids from remote areas are able to learn mathematics, sciences, Arabic, French and English.

The second service is *Najja7ni m-English* (Embassy of the United States – Tunisia, 2011; Ooredoo, 2013; Edupartage, 2011) Launched in 2011, this service has captured the attention of young job seekers who are highly interested in

¹ <http://www.gallup.com/poll/147035/young-arabs-connected-2010.aspx>

acquiring new language skills to help them better integrate into the labor market. Thanks to this service Tunisian youth have the opportunity to access to English courses including 50 daily conversation scenarios and 500 interactive quizzes.

The latest service was launched in 2013. *Najja7ni Employment "MobiWorks"* aims at bridging the gap between youth and labor market (Ooredoo, 2013; Silatech, 2013; Edupartage, 2013). The service currently offers mLearning for entrepreneurship, career guidance, labour market and financial literacy, and will soon add job matching, mobile marketplace and youth savings services.

The employment service has been used by over 300,000 subscribers in less than a month since launch.

Najja7ni usage statistics show that:

- 68% subscribers use the service several times a week,
- More than 80% of them are satisfied with the quality of the learning content. The service is considered to be very helpful and, overall, excellent
- 96% found it user friendly and intuitive,
- 96 % found it accessible from everywhere and from any kind of mobile phone.

POTENTIAL PERSPECTIVES AND SUMMARY

Najja7ni will be soon available in other emerging countries and offering new services for women empowerment and financial inclusion of disadvantaged populations. Partnerships such as those that have resulting in the *MobiWorks* and *Najja7ni* projects are critical if mobile technologies are going to be effectively leveraged to realize social change in developing countries. Part of that social change is being generated by informal usage patterns, such as the use of social media to express viewpoints and rally like-minded individuals behind societal causes. However, the collaborative efforts of private, public and civil institutions can lead to the development of more formal tools for social change. These tools can expand formal and informal learning opportunities and, as seen in the case of *Najja7ni* employment, have a positive impact on access to and the demographics of the labor market.

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