

# INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY FOR ENHANCING NGOS' PERFORMANCE IN THE KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

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## ABSTRACT

The current research aims to investigate the situation of the NGOs in the Kingdom of Bahrain from many aspects: types of IT adopted, reasons behind adopting IT, obstacles to adopting IT, perception of the impact of adopting IT to enhance organizational performance, and perception of the importance of using the Internet and web-based technology in enhancing NGOs' organization services. Based on the investigation, a framework for adopting IT by NGOs in the Kingdom of Bahrain was developed. The findings of this research are particularly applicable to the NGOs' executives and administrators to enhance their awareness of the importance of IT in handling various NGOs' tasks such as managing organization information, enhancing communication with staff and volunteers, performing effective administrative work, and more, which should reflect on their decisions about when to adopt IT in their organizations.

**Keywords:** NGOs, Kingdom of Bahrain, Organizational Performance, Information Technology

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Due to governmental reform, the role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) has become more crucial in accelerating the economic and social development in any country. Therefore, a number of NGOs have participated in social welfare, community construction, and other public service activities as an effort to form a new cooperative

relationship with the government<sup>1</sup>. Compared to the governmental organizations, NGOs are less bureaucratic. They are very much concerned about the daily lives of people and communities, and this makes them highly prepared to “speak and act on behalf of the chosen causes”<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, due to the continuous changes in technologies innovation, Information Technology (IT) strategies, and IT security and regularity issues, NGOs—like other organizations—are operating in a dynamic environment<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, within NGOs, the need to use IT to manage information, communicate with staff and volunteers, perform accounting, and handle various other tasks continues to grow<sup>4</sup>.

The current research aims to investigate the current situation regarding the adoption and use of IT by the NGOs in the Kingdom of Bahrain from the following aspects: 1) types of IT adopted and reasons and obstacles for adopting IT, 2) perception of the impact of using IT to enhance the organizational performance, and 3) the importance of using the Internet and web-based technology in enhancing NGOs’ services. Based on the investigation, a framework for adopting IT by NGOs in the Kingdom of Bahrain will be developed.

## **2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 IT and NGOs**

IT could serve NGOs in different ways; it could improve productivity, increase the overall effectiveness through better collaboration, and extend services to new communities in need<sup>5, 6</sup>. Moreover, IT can be a powerful force that opens exciting opportunities for NGOs to achieve their missions and goals in an effective way. Therefore, leaders in NGOs must obtain an overall appreciation of the potential of IT and link the acquisition and utilization of IT to the organizational mission<sup>6</sup>. The impact of IT on NGOs’ services and performance has been examined by many studies<sup>7, 8</sup>. Although most of these studies have suggested that IT plays a vital role in improving the quality and quantity of information, its potential for adoption and innovation is often uncertain<sup>9</sup>.

Historically, NGOs have been behind their corporate counterparts in adopting IT<sup>4</sup> and have been relatively slow to take advantage of emerging IT<sup>10</sup>. Most of the NGOs adopt the traditional (manual) methods by using computers for word processing, spreadsheet and accounting applications<sup>11</sup>, and managing a patchwork of old and new elements that often do not work well together<sup>4</sup>. NGOs, unlike their corporate counterparts, face some constraints that inhibit them from adopting IT. These inhibitors include a lack of budget to invest in the latest and greatest systems and IT tools, a lack

of sustainable capital for IT investment, an inability to pay competitive salaries to technical personnel, and an inability to build the needed technical skills<sup>11</sup>. Some source of financial support for NGOs may be individual donations, governmental grants, fundraising efforts, grants via funding agencies, or direct contributions from other NGOs. However, NGO funds are mostly dedicated to achieve the organization's mission, goals, and planned activities<sup>4,6</sup>, while a comparatively low proportion of the budget is directed to general IT support or staff's professional development<sup>4,6</sup>. Lack of such IT budgetary planning or IT strategic planning impacts the organization's ability to take advantage of the strategic and innovative opportunities provided by IT<sup>10</sup>.

## 2.2 NGOs in the Arab Region and Kingdom of Bahrain

In the Kingdom of Bahrain, the history of NGOs began in the late 1950s with the formation of the Law of Clubs and Societies, a law for organized voluntary social activities. Late in the 1980s, another law was formed under the name "Law of Social and Cultural Societies and Clubs associations." This law attracted the formation of NGOs in the Kingdom of Bahrain, especially the charity societies, which reached around 80 societies in the year 2006<sup>12</sup>. The Kingdom of Bahrain through the Ministry of Social Development believes in the importance of the civil societies and NGOs in developing and enhancing society as a whole entity<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, in addition to its regulatory duties, the Ministry of Social Development continues supporting the NGOs to recognize their stated goals. Despite this governmental support, the sustainability of the NGOs is still influenced by many other forces and factors; those organizations are monitored and evaluated for their effectiveness in society as well as their efficiency at achieving their goals. Undoubtedly, IT is one of the important tools that can highly support the NGOs in facilitating their jobs. It can provide an exceptional opportunity to improve the diffusion of information, networking, and exchange of experiences and technologies, as was mentioned in section 2.1.

## 3. RESEARCH METHOD AND DATA COLLECTION

The study sample is composed of people from different types of NGOs. Two hundred questionnaires were distributed to different people belonging to different types of NGOs in an attempt to solicit their different views. From the 200 questionnaires distributed, only 150 were completed. The survey instrument provided a response rate of 75%.

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### 4.1 IT Strategies Used by the NGOs, Reasons for Using Them, and Obstacles to Adopting IT

The analysis began by investigating the current IT strategies adopted and used by the NGOs and the reasons behind using and adopting them. The results are shown in Table 1. The results show that most of the NGOs that participated in the current study possess standalone computers (74.7%), while just 13.3% of them have an Intranet service.

**Table 1.** Types of IT used by the NGOs

IT adopted	%	Reason for adopting IT	%	Obstacles to adopting IT	%
Standalone computers	74.6	Easy access to information	78.6	IT considered not important	5.0
Networked computers	25.4	Improve the decision making and the strategic plans	55.5	IT is not effective for the NGO services and administrative works	86.0
Internet service	50.8	Manage the NGO resources and maintain financial records	76.1	Adopting IT is very expensive	93.1
Intranet service	13.1	Provide better customer service	59.6	Lack of technically qualified people willing to work in NGOs	75.4
E-mail service	49.2	Enhance customer relationships	59.0	Difficulty facing personnel when using IT tools	89.3
Website and web-based community	59.5	Automating the administrative work	85.5	Lack of knowledgeable full-time staff, relies on part-time staff and volunteers	89.2
Online social network	70.0	Secure confidential information	72.3	Need continuous management and control	67.0

The reasons behind adopting IT in NGOs are varied. The results demonstrate that the majority of respondents adopt IT merely to obtain functional efficiency. For example, 85.3% of them use IT to automate their administrative work. However, the results show that IT can be used to achieve an effective and strategic functionality, as using IT to enhance the privacy and protection of information was the concern of 72.0% of the participating NGOs. In addition, Table 1 illustrates the obstacles facing the NGOs to adopt and use IT. The results revealed that the cost and the expenditures of adopting IT are the main barrier for most NGOs (93.3%), followed by the difficulty facing personnel to use IT tools, the lack of

knowledgeable full-time staff, and reliance upon part-time staff and volunteers (89.3% and 89.3%, respectively).

#### 4.2 Perception of the Impact of Adopting IT on the Performance of the Organization and the Importance of Using the Internet and Web-Based Technology in Enhancing NGOs’ Services

The results illustrated by Table 2 reveal that most NGOs believe that IT is very important for improving internal and external communication (89.3%) and that monitoring activities leads to greater efficiency and productivity (87.3%).

**Table 2.** Perception of the impact of adopting IT on the performance of the organization and the importance of using the Internet and web-based technologies in enhancing NGOs’ services

Impact of IT	%	Impact of online technologies	%
Improve internal and external communication (enhancing communication with volunteers, other organizations and ministries, needy people, etc.)	89.2	Highlight the services provided by the NGOs	70.8
		Provide online services and activities	56.9
Enhance the effectiveness of the services provided	18.5	Enhance the NGOs’ global services	65.4
Improve NGOs’ performance and productivity	63.8	Increase the communication between NGOs	84.6
Speed up administrative works	56.2	Reinforce NGOs to cooperate and exchange experiences	67.7
Ease of access to information (find right information in the right time for the right person)	60.8	Enhance the NGOs’ performance	57.3
		Enhance the relationship between NGOs and their partners: banks, hospitals, etc.	49.3
Monitor activities that lead to greater efficiency and productivity	87.3	Provide new initiatives supporting the NGO services and activities	50.0
Enable a more-secure, private channel for communication with stakeholders	76	Provide an avenue for safe and secure online financial donations and contributions	83.3
Provide transparency of operations that enables donors and government agencies to monitor expenditures	81	Allow stakeholders (donors, volunteers, and clients) to interact online in a secure, private, one-to-one web-based environment (forums, Facebook...)	46.0

Results on the perception of the importance of using the Internet and web-based technology in enhancing NGOs’ services are also shown in

Table 2. The results illustrate that most of the participants believe that using internet and web-based technology for NGOs would increase communication between NGOs (84.7%) and allows stakeholders (donors, volunteers, and clients) to interact online in a secure, private, one-to-one web-based environment (83.3%).

## **5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The current research was conducted to investigate the situation regarding the adoption of IT by NGOs in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The research findings revealed that NGOs in the Kingdom of Bahrain possess a limited understanding and awareness about the potential of IT, and they are still ignorant of effective and strategic roles for IT in the NGOs. Some NGOs are isolated from the world of technology and thus face a challenge in deciding which technologies are more suitable for their organization. The findings, moreover, indicated that most of the NGOs own very basic IT equipment and limited hardware/software essential to perform efficient tasks. On the other hand, while some NGOs' senior managers and board members adopted more-advanced IT, they are still not comfortable with their investment in the IT, as the connections between the adopted IT and the organizations' missions and objectives are still not clear. Based on the literature, the use of IT should be aligned with the goal and mission of each organization in order to add value to the organization's activities and gain a competitive advantage<sup>13</sup>. NGO managers need to familiarize themselves with the IT so that their organizations can use it to achieve their mission; IT is no longer adopted just for the "back office," administrative works, and word processing tasks<sup>10</sup>.

Lack of financial and technological resources, on the other hand, were identified by the research to be one of the major problems facing NGOs in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The significant constraint in technological resources is the lack of IT capacity, both human and infrastructure. In fact, building IT capacity to create strategic information and competitive knowledge is one of the biggest challenges facing NGOs. Therefore, NGOs in the Kingdom of Bahrain need to enhance their IT capacity first, especially related to the budgeting, training and staffing, and senior management involvement in order to boost the strategic utilization of IT<sup>5, 14</sup>. On the positive side, the study revealed that more than half of the participating NGOs own a website and web-based and online technologies, and they are continuing to devote greater resources to exploiting them in many of their activities. NGOs realize that using online technology will enable new forms of information collection, processing, and broadcasting that were never before possible. For example, by using such technologies, NGOs can employ a forum for obtaining feedback from their donors, announcing their

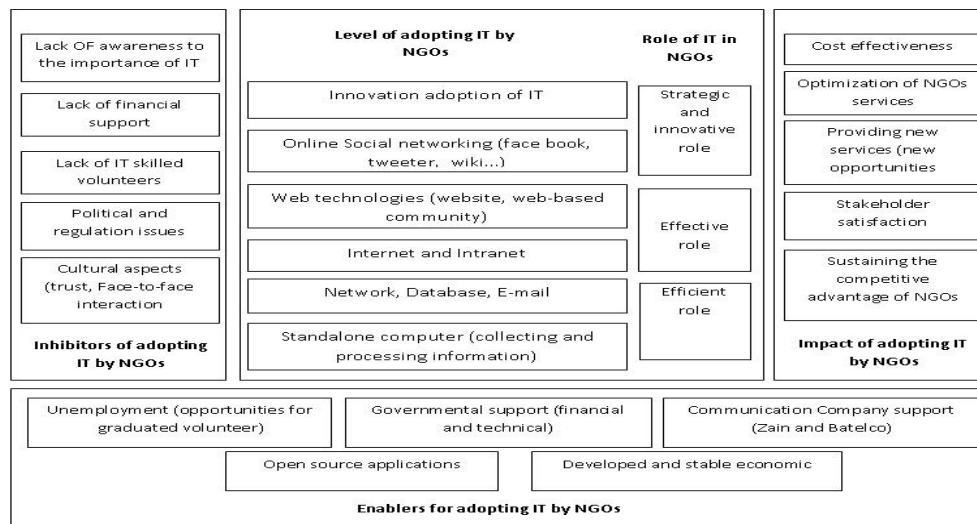
events and activities, and providing an up-to-date report on their services, achievements, and next plans. However, NGOs need also to enhance their external communication capabilities, especially in regard to providing information about their organization, networking with other NGOs, and transferring information to other NGOs<sup>5</sup>.

Based on the findings of the research, a framework for IT adoption by NGOs in the Kingdom of Bahrain was developed. The framework depicted in Figure 1 demonstrates five main steps to adopt IT for NGOs: inhibitors, enablers, levels of adopting IT, role of IT in NGOs, and impact of adopting IT. Figure 1 shows four levels for adopting IT, starting with adopting IT for an efficient purpose and reaching the innovative adoption of IT. Consequently, IT will play different roles: efficient, effective, strategic, and innovative. NGOs in the Kingdom of Bahrain started with the basic administrative tasks such as creating a database for the donors, needy people, visits made by employees, investigation records, and so on. Some NGOs reached some advanced levels of IT adoption by implementing IT for better communication with stakeholders and to enhance the effectiveness of their activities and services. However, only a small number of NGOs in the Kingdom of Bahrain have reached a mature level of adoption. At this level, NGOs have adopted technology to add new innovative activities that can help NGOs achieve their missions and enhance their competitive strategies<sup>7</sup>.

The framework illustrates five inhibitors for the adoption of IT by NGOs: lack of financial support, lack of awareness, culture, policies and regulation issues, and lack of IT-skilled volunteers. Cultural inhibitors include the resistance to acceptance and use of emergent technology, perceived importance of face-to-face interaction, and the existence of mutual trust among NGO partners. The research findings identified cost to be one of the major obstacles to adopting IT by NGOs in the Kingdom of Bahrain; however, cost can be considered one of the major impacts of adopting IT. For example, through using e-mail service to communicate with their customers, NGOs can cut down costs compared to using faxes or even the regular mail. In addition, using the internet for conducting online workshops and advertisements could minimize the cost used for paper, storage, and publication. In addition, five enablers were identified for the adoption of IT. The main enabler is governmental support. In addition to the financial support, the government offers training opportunities in computer and internet use at a local public access center. Furthermore, the telecommunication companies and ICT providers in the Kingdom of Bahrain can be considered important enablers for adopting IT. Zain and Batelco, for instance, offer many special services for NGOs such as using SMS services and Internet with trivial tariffs. Moreover, these main telecommunication companies frequently provide NGOs with free domains

and hardware like personal computers, laptops, and many other offers to support them in enhancing their IT capacity.

The findings of this study offer significant implications for the importance of adopting IT. The findings are particularly applicable to NGOs' executives and administrators, as they expose ways to benefit from the IT to handle various NGO tasks such as managing information, communicating with staff and volunteers, performing accounting jobs, and more. The results will enhance the NGOs' administrators and executives' awareness of the importance of IT, which should reflect on their decisions when planning to adopt IT for their organizations. The application of basic technology played a major role in assisting NGOs to achieve fundamental goals and objectives, making them better communicators, helping them become more-efficient organizers, and strengthening their connections to people. In this way, adopting a more-comprehensive application of new technology tools in the NGOs will continue to enhance organizational performance, encourage citizens to participate in the development of their communities, and change the way that NGOs do business<sup>6</sup>.



**Figure 1.** Framework for adopting IT in NGOs in the Kingdom of Bahrain

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