

The inner strength: a perspective on the consequences of COVID-19 on Oman's actions

Abstract

Once the World Health Organization (WHO) alerted the world on the Coronavirus disease in 2019, (COVID-19) countries around the world reacted to confine the spread of COVID-19 and to adapt to the new lifestyle. Due to that, a huge focus on electronic service was obvious in various countries around the world. The electronic services became increasingly important as continuous development in various applications observed across different sectors such as in business, government, education and health. The aim of this study is to review the impact of COVID-19 on Oman's response and measures in containing COVID-19. This study is also exploring the onset of various electronic services in Oman and its benefit to the users and the society. This study documented that various technological initiatives such as E-shopping and E-services were proposed and adapted as a measure in encompassing COVID-19 to improve the services of everyday life. These developments considered as the seed to further enhancing the growth and enhancement of technological infrastructure in Oman.

Keywords: Oman, COVID-19, electronic services, technology

Volume 11 Issue 2 - 2023

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Received: December 07, 2022 | **Published:** June 14, 2023

Introduction

Oman 2040 vision aimed at the development and the investment in the field technology of an information system. The vision is tailored to initiatives the integration and adaptation of electronic services for government and the society.¹ Even though COVID-19 was a national crisis, it helped in accelerating Oman's movement toward adaptation and integration of technologies across its various sectors such as education, health, housing and many others. Oman, like the rest of the other countries, did not know what to expect from COVID-19 and did not imagine how the virus is progressing, to what extent and what to expect from it. Oman is a country with a higher percentage of youth 64% than elderly are, but still COVID-19 has created an alarm for Oman's government. Due to that, on March 15, 2020 Oman decided to move forward with strict measures in containing COVID-19. For example, all schools, day care, shopping center, mosques and public spaces closed. This was a new experience for every single person in the country from our toddlers to our elderly. It was not just a new experience, but also it was the opposite of our culture, which based on gathering, collaboration and handshaking. All of these have been stop suddenly.

In 2007, Oman witnessed with a major cyclone that cost the country billions in damage and human loss. Since then the country has become well prepared logistically in how to handle these types of natural hazards events. The country became an expert in how to handle these events and was able to plan ahead of time and to track these events as they progressed. The country was able to react, plan and take action in that regard, we learned our lesson, and however, COVID-19 was a national crisis at a different magnitude. In my experience, COVID-19 was the first national public health crisis I have witnessed and it presented different challenges to society and government alike. As the world is moving fast in artificial intelligence and 4th generation industrial revolution, the world is becoming a small society intermingled with technology that prompted services based on technology to meet its increasing demands toward smart cities and e-services.² That said, one of the challenges that faced Oman society and government was the lack of established technological and

infrastructure systems. These challenges were noticeable during the national crisis such as natural disasters,³ and during the public health crisis during COVID-19. There were various challenges that had been document by researcher is discussing the lack of infrastructure and technologies in Arab countries.⁴ Other studies conducted by Alraja et al.⁵ showed that Oman's users had concerns toward security, privacy and familiarity of Internet of Things (IoT) usage in the healthcare system. However, COVID-19 has triggered the practices in integrating the Internet of Things (IoT) and various advanced technologies in optimizing health care and services. As the magnitude of COVID-19 increased the Omani government had acted beyond their concern and developed a "wrist-wearable device" that was capable of tracking COVID-19 patients to ensure they are following the needed measure.⁶ In addition, there are various studies demonstrating the influence of IoT in improving the health care efficiency by lowering the costs, and reducing the waiting times.⁷ As technology integration increased in Oman, further technological integration and adaptation for IoT and Artificial Intelligence became obvious as the case of Oman Airports, which provided an example about the benefits incorporating IoT and Artificial Intelligence in improving the airport services, and traveler experiences.⁸ The technological transformation leads to the development of digital transformation that optimizes the performance of Oman services.

Furthermore, a study conducted by AL Hawari et al⁹ showed during COVID-19 pandemic many of Oman's consumers have shifted their shopping behavior from physical shopping to online shopping habits. As a result, various startup- companies have been develop offering online shopping and food delivery such as Geeb application; Ayshay application, and TM-Done application. Otaxi is another example that showed a shift in consumer behavior and highlighted the advantage of integrating technologies in easing people's everyday life by providing huge services and convenience, for people during COVID-19.¹⁰ Moreover, E-wallet has emerged as a new method of payment system in Oman that provided a quick and more inclusive way to handle money and financial transactions such as e-floods, bmw-wallet, NBO wallet, Oman pay, and alizzwallet.¹¹ This electronic payment was not use widely in Oman pre COVID-19, but the pandemic has

triggered it and has assisted people in connecting with each other to conduct digital commercial activities across the country. However, the future and the suitability of electronic shopping and logistics are still growing and more time is needed to measure its success and adaptation by the Omani citizens.

Conclusion

COVID-19 provided a new experience for all of us not only by its nature, but also by being a new type of national emergency at the public health level. Having not been exposed to something like this before COVID-19, it may explain why we could not make a decision by March 15, 2020. However, surprising actions have been witnessed and that enabled us to explore Oman's inner strength. Strength came from everybody's collaboration and unity to defy the national emergency crisis. We found that we as a country responded in a very short time to overcome various challenges starting from shutting down our school, and limiting our movement to the development of various software and apps in helping manage the pandemic. We discovered we are resilient, and we were able to bounce back. The country's actions from converting the education system to an online one in a very short time showed the country's resilience and quick adaptation measures to cope with COVID-19. Our youth showed us their intellectual's creativity by manufacturing our own masks, hand sanitizers and even ventilators to meet the country's demands. These inventions, industries were never planned or anticipated by establishing and making in Oman before COVID-19.

Our youth showed us that we could depend on them; they can take our hands to go forward in fighting COVID-19 and any future disaster. Our youth showed us, yes, we are able to produce and create to be less dependant on outside inventions. Not only that, but our youth has also explored, developed, and implemented E-shopping and E-services in a very short time. Many applications were developed either for monitoring patients or to provide a digital platform for shopping and serving people.

COVID-19 is a national emergency, but it is also an event that helps us to explore and to know our youth better. COVID-19 showed us our inner strength, showed us how to be creative and helped us to make choices and influence life's trajectory in a perceived meaningful direction. COVID-19 proved Oman is moving toward being resilient in facing a natural disaster or a public health emergency. We are ready to face and fight back, because we are the youth, the hands, and the mind of our beloved country. Thank you COVID-19 for helping us to visualize our treasure and value in our youth. The Omani youth made Oman proud. Thank you, COVID-19 for helping us to explore ourselves.

Acknowledgements

None.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare there is no conflict of interest.

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