

We are all consumers now

Our increasingly digitised world has revolutionised our relationships with people, companies and governments. The explosion of information and the ability to access the internet by a growing proportion of the world's population have changed society's expectations about the role of government giving rise to the consumer citizen. Governments now have to be sophisticated data-led marketers in addition to leaders.

Citizens of nation states around the world no longer see their relationship with their government as a bilateral, one-way engagement. They are now empowered through networks of relationships enabled by social media which demonstrate the often anachronistic structures of government. Nineteenth century institutions of government are grappling with how to stay relevant in today's digital world. Twentieth Century citizens, brought up in a world of consumerism, demand exceptional service delivery. Service levels are also expected to continually improve. Our consumerist attitudes and expectations apply now just as much to government services such as healthcare and education.

*Jon Earl, Managing Director
and Head of Middle East
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tells us why 'we are all
consumers now.'*

How are governments responding to this challenge? As with any organisation, governments face the resource restraints of time, money and people. Firstly, government institutions have to embrace the need to change. Commentators talk of a potential third age of government, where the limitations of old bureaucracies make way for decentralised, digital delivery of services based on data sharing.

Secondly, accepting the model of a decentralised, digital delivery model, governments need to increasingly take a strategic view on how best to harness the power of new technologies. Creating an app or a hashtag to report graffiti or potholes is only a first step. By creating the means for citizens to report issues directly, the historic rules of engagement are being changed. Gone is the old

command and control structure; citizens are invited into the management of service delivery. States such as Dubai are at the forefront of this change, having implemented a range of initiatives that embed digital engagement with its citizens at the heart of policy research, development and delivery. Since 2013, citizens have been able to vote on government services through the Hamdan bin Mohammed Smart Government Award. Last year's "UAE Brainstorming Session" was the first nationwide technology-led citizen engagement initiative that actively sought citizen co-design and co-production of public services through social media interaction.



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Thirdly, governments will need to demonstrate their relevance and value to an empowered and vocal citizen base. Interpreting data to identify issues and potential new policy initiatives will enhance government's ability to meet the expectations of citizens and to play an appropriate role in the development of its society.

Just as corporations around the world have had to adjust to how best to harness social media and new technologies to engage with stakeholders, governments around the world face similar challenges. What is clear is that the rules of engagement have changed. To ignore the change in relationships and expectations generated by easy access to information and digital networks will come at a cost. Those companies who understood how their relationships were changing remodelled their businesses, created new capabilities and policies to actively engage with customers, often creating enhanced levels of service delivery, brand loyalty and growth.

The path to creating a new model of government service delivery defined by the citizen consumer will not be linear. Culturally and organisationally, governments will have to accept significant change, as they adapt their interactions and structures to meet the expectations of their citizens. Equally, citizens will need to take responsibility for their involvement in policy development and implementation.

The consumer citizen empowered by new technologies is changing how governments deliver services around the world. Those governments that adapt best to a digital world will continue to remain relevant and deliver services that not only support, but help to redefine what a government offers its citizens in terms of value.

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