

Gulfnet: The Advent of Computer Networking in Saudi Arabia and Its Social Impact

Authors : Abdullah Almowanes

Abstract : The speed of adoption of new information and communication technologies is often seen as an indicator of the growth of knowledge- and technological innovation-based regional economies. Indeed, technological progress and scientific inquiry in any society have undergone a particularly profound transformation with the introduction of computer networks. In the spring of 1981, the Bitnet network was launched to link thousands of nodes all over the world. In 1985 and as one of the first adopters of Bitnet, Saudi Arabia launched a Bitnet-based network named Gulfnet that linked computer centers, universities, and libraries of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries through high speed communication lines. In this paper, the origins and the deployment of Gulfnet are discussed as well as social, economical, political, and cultural ramifications of the new information reality created by the network. Despite its significance, the social and cultural aspects of Gulfnet have not been investigated in history of science and technology literature to a satisfactory degree before. The presented research is based on an extensive archival research aimed at seeking out and analyzing of primary evidence from archival sources and records. During its decade and a half-long existence, Gulfnet demonstrated that the scope and functionality of public computer networks in Saudi Arabia have to be fine-tuned for compliance with Islamic culture and political system of the country. It also helped lay the groundwork for the subsequent introduction of the Internet. Since 1980s, in just few decades, the proliferation of computer networks has transformed communications world-wide.

Keywords : Bitnet, computer networks, computing and culture, Gulfnet, Saudi Arabia

Conference Title : ICSRD 2020 : International Conference on Scientific Research and Development

Conference Location : Chicago, United States

Conference Dates : December 12-13, 2020