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Fueling the GCC's Digital Potential:

A Strategic Playbook
for Super App Success

INTRODUCTION

The Rise of Super Apps in a Hyperconnected Region

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is rapidly emerging as a fertile ground for digital innovation. With smartphone penetration surpassing 90% in several markets and internet usage nearing ubiquity, the region's consumers are not just digitally connected—they are digitally driven. This behaviour is fuelling a seismic shift in expectations: customers now demand frictionless, hyper-personalised, and integrated digital experiences—delivered at speed.

Inspired by the success of Southeast Asian super apps like Grab and Gojek, which have transformed digital economies by integrating services such as ride-hailing, food delivery, and digital payments into single platforms, the GCC's digital landscape is undergoing a similar evolution.

Why the GCC is Ready for Super Apps

90%+ smartphone penetration

Digital transformation visions
(Kuwait Vision 2035, KSA Vision 2030)

Fintech & telco partnerships accelerating

Consumers demanding seamless, personalized services

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Regional innovators like Careem have already demonstrated the potential of super apps, rapidly expanding from ride-hailing to offer services such as deliveries and payments. Inspired by such success stories, Kuwait is now embracing digital transformation at a much faster pace. According to DataReportal's "**Digital 2024: Kuwait**", at the start of 2024, 99.0% of the total population in the country were internet users. Central to this momentum is the Kuwait Vision 2035, a national strategy aimed at diversifying the economy and positioning the country as a regional leader in innovation—including the financial services sector. Another fast moving initiative is KSA's digital transformation vision for 2030, that is digitizing services and promoting an inclusive ecosystem prioritizing on financial security, innovation, making it a leading digital nation.

99% of the total population in the country **were internet users**

These nations are backed by strong state support for digital infrastructure and innovation-led growth, ready to become a hub for next-generation financial ecosystems. Several non-financial institutions are getting inspired by tech-savvy population demands and are partnering with fintechs and banks for seamless and personalized digital banking experiences. This is pushing financial institutions to invest in user-friendly mobile apps, online platforms, and personalized services within the state. Traditional banks are increasingly collaborating with fintechs to leverage their agility and technological expertise, with Central Banks playing a crucial role in fostering a conducive environment for digital transformation.

Their playbook?
Becoming Super Apps—digital platforms that unify lifestyle and financial services under a single, seamless user experience.

However, delivering this vision requires more than just bundling features. It necessitates a strategic roadmap, deep integration capabilities, and, most critically, the right technological infrastructure. This article explores why the GCC is primed for super app growth, and what makes several non-financial institutions like telcos and ride-hailing firms ideally positioned to lead this transformation.

What's in it for Non-Financial Institutions?

For many reasons, these institutions can greatly benefit from eventually building a superapp, as this would mean they have access to greater consumer connectivity, increased financial inclusion for many underbanked segments, and provide a comprehensive set of digital solutions, contributing to the digital economy.

SUPER APP

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Super apps create an all-in-one ecosystem where users can perform daily tasks—from paying for metro rides, to utility bills and groceries—without ever leaving the platform. As telcos and other tech giants decide to move away from traditional digital services through added services with super apps, embedded finance and open banking become pivotal and the right infrastructure to support them is key.

With open banking regulations gaining traction in the GCC, super apps have a unique opportunity to aggregate financial data across multiple user accounts, giving users a single, unified financial experience within their app. By integrating banking services, they can position themselves as the primary financial hub for consumers.

The journey from offering telecommunications or ride-hailing services to becoming a full-fledged super app is a strategic progression—one that requires a strategic roadmap, the right infrastructure, and the right ecosystem partners.
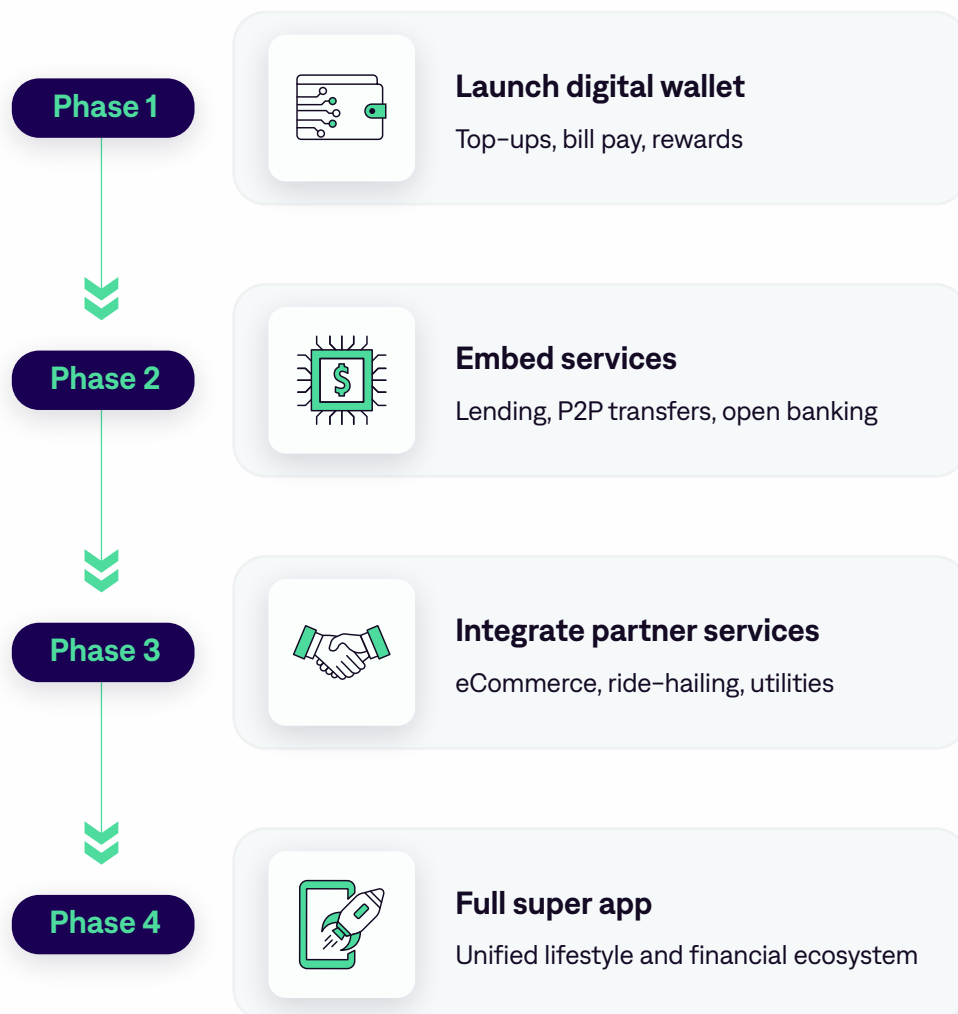
Embedded finance and open banking are pivotal to super app success in the GCC.

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The Ideal Roadmap
for Super Apps in GCC

Building a successful super app is a strategic progression, not an overnight transformation. Each phase should be carefully planned to establish a strong financial foundation, expand service offerings, and ultimately create an interconnected ecosystem.

The Strategic Roadmap for Super App Growth

Phase 1

Launch digital wallet

Top-ups, bill pay, rewards

Phase 2

Embed services

Lending, P2P transfers, open banking

Phase 3

Integrate partner services

eCommerce, ride-hailing, utilities

Phase 4

Full super app

Unified lifestyle and financial ecosystem

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As a fundamental step, NFIs may leverage a digital wallet to facilitate seamless transactions and pivot into customer engagement, with functionalities such as mobile top-ups, bill payments and reward programs. Furthermore, building a closed-loop ecosystem with key merchants and service providers is essential for creating a self-sustaining and engaging transactional environment. Here, the right back-end infrastructure from the initial journey needs to be modular and microservices based, which is crucial for these institutions to be able to introduce digital products within their wallet offerings.

As next steps, there is a need to expand current offerings through embedded finance to drive engagement and unlock new opportunities. Through an API-first modern infrastructure, adding new digital products including lending, P2P transfers, and open banking for seamless bank transfers along with multi-account management can drive greater engagement, resulting in rapid deployment of services and an addition to the existing data pool that these tech giants can already leverage. This approach would enable seamless integration with other services and applications. Through embedded finance, digital wallets can integrate a wide array of financial services directly into their applications and enhance features around account management, payments, lending and credit offerings and processing.

By following this high-level roadmap, digital wallets can evolve from single-service platforms into holistic financial and lifestyle ecosystems, positioning themselves as the primary digital destination for users across the GCC.

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CONCLUSION

The Infrastructure Behind Super Apps

Super apps are transforming the way consumers and businesses engage with digital services, but their success hinges on having the right technological infrastructure. The transition from wallets to super apps means there is a need for capabilities that not only provide the technology, but also align with a businesses' strategic vision to orchestrate financial services seamlessly in a thriving economy like the GCC.
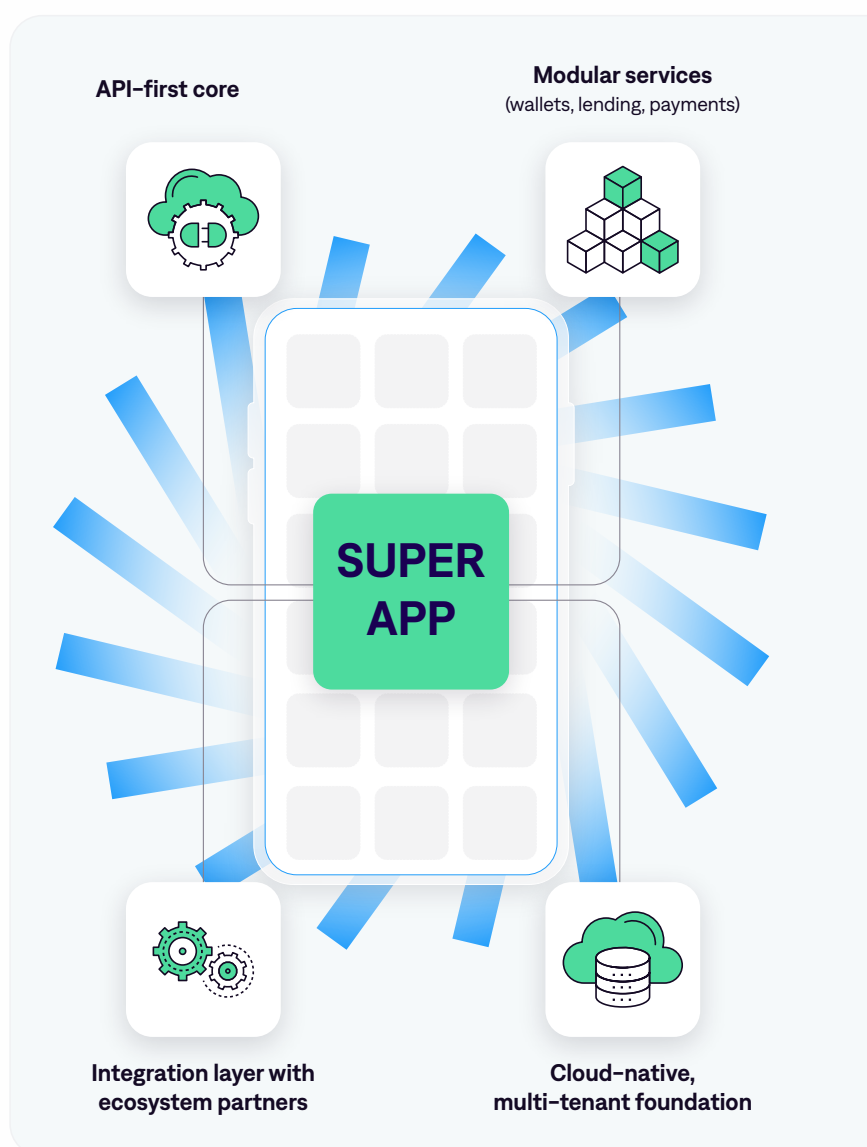
A rich back-end infrastructure can help create a more enhanced ecosystem for super apps through interactive channels which can be accessible at any given time, where telcos and other businesses get the opportunity to operate like tech companies through easy integrations and more control; which means no complex code and numerous months needed to configure.

This recent report on **Digital Wallets and Core Technologies** also talks about the importance of having a cloud-native and multi-tenant solution, which would play a major role in cost savings and efficiency through 'elasticity', scaling up and down with no downtime.

The right partner will also bring the right set of ecosystem partners who plug-in services when required, letting these everyday forces of life like retailers and e-commerce businesses choose and add products based on their strategic roadmap.

In essence, there is a need to find the right partners who rapidly deploy and customize offerings through APIs in each phase of this transition, and enable seamless expansion; all by providing speed to market.

Super apps are redefining digital engagement across the GCC, and those that invest in the right infrastructure will lead the next wave of financial innovation. They will act as building blocks for creating robust and scalable digital wallets and super apps.

API-first core

Modular services
(wallets, lending, payments)

SUPER APP

Integration layer with ecosystem partners

Cloud-native, multi-tenant foundation

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Are you ready to power the future of finance?

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Have questions about how Tuum can transform your digital offerings?

Get in touch with our team to explore how Tuum's solutions can help your institution unlock new opportunities and stay ahead in the rapidly evolving financial landscape

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