

# **SOCIAL MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON FILM MAKING FOR STUDENTS OF DIGITAL MEDIA SPECIALIZATION IN COLLEGE OF APPLIED SCIENCES, NIZWA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Social media and filmmaking accomplish the same purpose, which is to connect people. With the advent of the digital age, the social networking sites have had an impact in all aspects of filmmaking as well as education. The purpose of this study is to explore new media platforms and ways to utilize them by inquiring how the social networking sites influence various aspects of filmmaking and learning of filmmaking of the digital media specialization students in the College of Applied Sciences (CAS), Nizwa, under the Ministry of Higher Education, Sultanate of Oman. The study showcases how Social Networking Sites (SNS) have over the years, made information easily available and experts in fields more accessible, thereby, supporting the process of pre-production, screen writing, planning, organizing and executing the script, as well as casting and funding. The study makes a case for a renewed approach in investing more resources in the sector, for students specializing in digital media courses in universities, which apart from enhancing learning from peer review and cross skilling, also provides an opportunity for monetizing the work of the students through virtual education, advertisements and distributing and marketing of their work. The study also takes into account a perspective through the gender lens, considering that women outnumber men in digital media specialization course in College of Applied Sciences, Nizwa.*

**Keywords:** *Social Networking Sites, E-learning, Communication, Digital Media, Filmmaking, Oman*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Although a number of Hollywood films had been shot partly in Oman, until recently, Omani films and film makers had not expressed their voice internationally. The media industry and entertainment industry of Oman has been undergoing a rapid transformation. With the Sultanate of Oman entering into formal agreements with film organizations of the Arab world, the film industry has seen an increasing momentum to what can be termed the local cinema movement. There are no dedicated schools /institutions of Film making in Oman, but there are a number of the universities offering courses in digital media. These have become important learning centers for young aspiring film makers. As the media industry, in general, is predisposed to be influenced by the consumption pattern of the

audience, the Social Networking Sites (SNS), which are misty reflections of the collective public mind, play an important role in shaping the content as well as the techniques in film making. Social networking sites are computer-mediated technologies that allow individuals and organizations to view, create and share information and ideas via virtual communities and networks.

The web based and mobile technologies create highly interactive platforms through which professionals, students, communities and organizations can share, co-create and discuss user-generated content. They introduce substantial changes to communication between businesses, organizations, communities and individuals. Against this backdrop, the research aims to study the influence of SNS in enhancing and sharpening the techniques in film making of digital media specialization students of the CAS Nizwa. The results of this study can be used by the students and faculty to articulate the need for greater investment, through the institution of a dedicated channel on social media for digital media specialization students, as part of their pedagogy, to enable wide dissemination of their work for peer and expert reviews. Towards this, 35 digital media specialization students of Mass Communication (Bachelor degree) Program at CAS, Nizwa, were surveyed. The research assumes the students to play an active role in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives rather than passive observers. Hence, it uses the *Uses and Gratification theory* propounded by Blumler and Katz (1974) holding the students responsible for choosing media to meet their needs.

This theory would therefore imply that the media compete against other information sources for viewers' gratification, thereby drawing from deductive reasoning (Taranovych, 2013). Whilst a gender lens was not particularly applied to the study design, the nature of universe and findings made the analysis of findings from a gender perspective inevitable. The survey, apart from revealing the diversity of choices that social media offered digital specialization students, also confirmed the need to promote dedicated channels among students to share their work with peers and faculty and receive feedback that will help them with professional film making after studying digital media. The peers may include other Colleges/Universities running Mass Communication courses at the graduation and post-graduation levels in Oman. This will also bring in the scholars and students, experts and the inexperienced together by creating common talent pool for the media and entertainment industry where important works of art are showcased and disseminated.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Social Networking Sites and Film production**

Social Networking Sites (SNS), as defined by Kaplan, are applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have

access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other. These personal profiles can include any type of information, including photos, video, audio files, and blogs (Andreas M. Kaplan, 2010). Many of the new distribution vehicles, the SNS provide viral and other opportunities for significant Digital programs with limited or no media cost (Burton, 2009). YouTube enabled the posting of multiple trailers to show different scenes of a movie, and Facebook, made available the option of imbedding these uploaded video or audio for larger integrated dissemination, thereby making possible the multiple platform screening of movie clips to the users. Twitter, an online website and mobile application, too gives the option of following people, organizations and campaigns online; expressing ideas, sharing pictures and tweeting back, all within 140 characters (Tejada, 2015). As a popular platform it carries contents to a large group allowing the stuff to spread like a virus (Charlesworth, 2015).

In addition to uploading and disseminating the videos, Facebook allowed users to stay connected, and share their reaction to the posted content with likes and dislikes through regular updates and profiles via notifications. YouTube too allowed the space for feedback to uploaded content by the *comments* option inbuilt into it. All these possibilities together made the production studios to run their promotions on SNS, which were far more effective and expansive in their coverage. Many movie studios tweet updates and articles and receive reactions and followers from the public, thereby allowing conversation between the two profiles. (Tejada, 2015). This enabled the production studios to gauge what kind of audience most interested in the movie, and regions where these clips are viewed, through another in-built feature of Analytics, hit count and impressions, in YouTube and Facebook. Internet and electronic technology have enabled the film studios, producers and makers to not just campaign for their movies online, but do so by reaching out to the vast market, transcending geographies, and connecting with masses who are and could be their potential audience members. According to research conducted by Chong Oh, “the more a movie studio is willing to engage with its followers via social media the more likely it is to have a higher WOM [Word-Of-Mouth] volume (Tejada, 2015).

As noted by Morrell (2013), in this age of YouTube, the average person can shoot, edit, and distribute digital film o an international audience. Even if these clips are not finished outputs, they are representative of a revolution in digital filmmaking that has aesthetic value and social impact. Youth are developing and demonstrating myriad literacy skills via their participation in digital filmmaking. Young people are earning the skills of shooting and editing movies as they are now able to transfer raw footage from their cell phones, flip-cams and more sophisticated high definition (HD) cameras to computer programs such as iMovie, Final Cut Pro, or Adobe Premiere, where they can edit these clips into montages or short cuts with seamless transitions, adding graphics, music and credits. An analysis of

the raw footage content on YouTube produced by young reveals that they are developing more sophisticated film skills. Young people are also learning about various formats of saving and sharing the large files that digital files are needed to create and distribute films. They understand that digital files have to be compressed into QuickTime or other readable formats before they can be uploaded to sites such as Facebook, Google+, and YouTube. Once posted, they know how to embed videos into their posts on SNS, blogs and webpages (Morrell, Duenas, Garcia, & Lopez, 2013).

### **The Digitalized Oman**

Ever since the development of television we experienced the emergence of an unprecedented number of information and communication technologies that have excited the imagination of individuals seeking to use them to establish new media system (DeFleur & Rokeach, 1989). Now a day's media corporations are transnational and becoming global (Potter, 2012). Digital, networked media have been embraced by countries around the globe, and Asia is at the very forefront of this trend. As per the Internet World Statistics, 2015a, Asia's internet users constitute just under half of the world's internet population at 45.6percent. The region's rapid economic growth and youthful and increasingly well-educated populace have catalyzed the adoption, consumption, appropriation, and production of digital media content and new technology (Sun Sun Lim, 2016). It is this revolutionary transition from traditional advertising to media services that the Oman in general, and its entertainment industry is driving towards. In the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, one-third to half of the population is under 25 years while in Oman, half of the population is under the age of 25.

A consistent strong growth in social media usage across the Arab region is being witnessed. And, whilst the social media penetration in Oman is still behind the other GCC countries, the percentage of internet users in Oman has increased exponentially in the last fifteen years from 3.5percent in 2000 to 70.2percent of the total population in 2014, largely due to devices like smart phones, tablets, and laptops that are mobile and internet enabled (Sarprasatha, 2016). The steps being taken by the Sultanate of Oman are also significant in this regard. In 2003, the Digital Oman Strategy to guide the development of ICT across society was launched. In response to academic and training needs, to match up with the technological innovations in education, the Omani Society of Educational Technology (OSET) was launched in 2006. As an ICT education expert group, the OSET also intends to disseminate their applications within the Omani society; and link with similar associations in the Gulf and other parts of the world (Musawi, 2010). The biennial Muscat International Film Festival, last held in March 2016, under the auspices of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture saw a growing number of youngsters from Oman making their way into international film festivals and circuits. Such multi-national events provide a good

platform for upcoming filmmakers to showcase their works, and watch movies made by their peers, besides, giving them an opportunity to interact and share their thoughts with others, but leave much to be desired too.

### **The PROBLEM Statement**

The existing review of literature has established that the universal presence and access to a range of social networking sites via internet facility, has empowered young people in sharpening their film making skills, by making information easily available. However, focused research on the impact and influence of SNS on film making is still highly inadequate, and negligible in the context of Oman. This research aims to analyze this very aspect by interviewing students of Digital media specialization at CAS, Nizwa, Oman. The results could be used for advocating for higher investments and attention to digital media courses that educate students in filmmaking at the university level to keep in with the necessity of building a professionally robust media industry in Oman.

### **The Objectives**

- Determine the effectiveness of SNS in film making by the students of digital media specialization.
- Establish the need for instituting a dedicated social media channel for the students in the university.

### **The Research Question**

How effective are SNS for filmmaking for CAS Nizwa Students.

### **The Hypotheses**

Against this background, the hypothesis proposed below is to analyze the mutually reinforcing correlation between the social networking sites (SNS) and film making by students. Therefore:

*H:* Social Networking Sites enhancing film making skills in students of digital media specialization at the University of CAS, Nizwa, and requires a dedicated channel on social media for students to showcase, discuss and share their work for review and feedback from experts and peers.

## **THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study targeted 35 digital media specialization students of Mass Communication Program (Bachelor degree), at the CAS, Nizwa in Oman. The sample was chosen through Purposive Sampling Technique, wherein “Particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten

as well from other choices'' (Maxwell, 1997). The dependent *variable* in the study is the student group while the Social Networking Sites are the independent variable frozen for the study of the effect it has on dependent variable. The demographic variables (age and gender) were recorded and applied to the analysis of the responses. About 80percent students in digital media specialization course were females, while the age group of respondents was 21-24 years. The influence or impact of independent variable will be measured in terms of the responses received to questions administered to find out what aspects of filmmaking get influenced among the digital media specialization students.

Structured questionnaires were administered electronically to these students, and responses were received via email from 25th to 27th June 2016. The questionnaire contained both dichotomous, two-point questions (e.g. Yes or No) and multiple choice questions (e.g. A, B, C or D). The responses were collated in an excel sheet and calculations were converted into percentage for analysis, and supported with secondary information. This method helped in analyzing empirically derived information appropriate for this study. The sample to a great extent being homogenous in nature (digital media specialization course and gender composition), findings will be extrapolated to establish the need for dedicated social media channel at universities in Oman.

## **THE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Relationship between the SNS and Students' pedagogical needs**

Oman's entertainment industry is slowly emerging and opening up to film making as a profession. Social networking sites can become spaces of action where students can share their films or guide other students to critical discovery through various links (Morrell, Duenas, Garcia, & Lopez, 2013). The survey has revealed that while YouTube remained the most viewed SNS for 89 percent of respondents at Nizwa for online viewing of films across genres, 69 percent of them were careful to acquaint themselves with the ratings and view count of the content they viewed online. This helped them to zero in on the most appropriate content. This indicates that the students looked up for some level of validation by viewers before settling to watch the uploaded content on the website.

The contents mostly watched on YouTube comprised short films for 63 percent of respondents, followed by fiction and documentaries. A relatively high usage of YouTube in Oman could be an indication of this access to bandwidth (Sarprasatha, 2016). It is important to note that even though a majority of respondents watched short films, 40 percent of them watched them to gather information on filming. The remaining percentage watched short movies for pure entertainment purpose. 94 percent of respondents admitted that the films they watched on SNS influenced their style of filmmaking projects through

idea generation and refinement, across direction (37 percent), cinematography (26 percent), editing (26 percent), scripting (9 percent) and audio (3 percent). So, whether entertainment or infotainment, the content the students viewed help them improve their educational learnings in digital film making. Additionally, the students were encouraged by their teachers to watch short films on social media.

Of the 54 percent of respondents who had shared their work on SNS, 34 percent had uploaded their projects on YouTube followed with 6 percent on Instagram, and 9 percent on both YouTube and Instagram. This finding corroborates with the statistics put forth by the Arab Social Media report 2015. The report states that about 40 percent of social media users in Oman are users of YouTube among whom 57 percent access YouTube on a daily basis. In Oman, 40 percent of social media users are users of Instagram. The report further states that the daily access to Instagram was seen in 86percent of these users; of which 37 percent access it via the smartphone app. However, the daily access to YouTube at 57 percent is the second lowest only to Lebanon with 56 percent access as compared to other Arab nations (Arab Social Media Report, 2015).

The findings that 46 percent of respondents had never uploaded and shared their own work on any of the SNS despite having the facility, also correlates to the finding that only 4percent had preference for YouTube in Oman according to the Arab Social Media Report 2015. But, while this report surveyed (i) individuals aged 15+ years who used at least one social media channel on regular basis, and (ii) experts in the fields of communications, media, the reasons for why this 46percent of respondents, who are the students of digital media specialization had not uploaded their works on YouTube emerged as an area of inquiry at the university level.

### **Economics of the Social Networking Sites & Film Making**

Ninety seven percent respondents expressed that social media was the appropriate platform for promoting a film, and 74 percent respondents opined that social media was used by the filmmakers for generating revenue. To the question of the need for instituting a dedicated channel on social media to showcase and share their works, 94 percent respondents answered in the affirmative. This suggests that respondents who are studying digital media are aware of the prospects that would eventually open up in film making industry in Oman if required platform is provisioned to them. The literature examined has also sufficiently indicated the lower cost implications when movies are promoted on SNS, thereby reaching out to the diverse and vast market and audience beyond nations and regions.

### **A Gender perspective to the Findings**

Over the past twenty-five years, analytical critique of the interconnection between women, media institutions and media content has come to occupy an ever more central place on the

international agenda. This has occurred against a background of dramatic transformation brought about by changes in the global media system. During the early years of the international women's movement, media issues were generally regarded as secondary to cardinal problems such as of poverty, health and education for women. By the early 1990s in most regions of the world the media could no longer be dismissed as an élite irrelevance. The exponential rate of technological change that has transformed media and communication structures globally is reflected in the degree of attention paid to the women media- communication nexus by the international community (Gallagher, 2002).

8percent respondents of digital media specialization at CAS, Nizwa, were females, which is a positive and welcome trend in the journey of filmmakers and filmmaking industry in Oman. Of the 63 percent respondents that subscribed to *Drama* as the mostly viewed genre, 68 percent were females. Interestingly, a small percentage of female students of about 7 percent watched *Horror* and 18 percent watched *Action* movies. It is to be underscored that while miniscule, female respondents have also gone beyond the stereotype and articulated their interest in other genres, such as action, that is normally associated with masculinity and male preference only. At a recently held seminar on women empowerment, Omani filmmaker Laila Habib al Hamdoon pointed out how culture has a positive as well as a negative effect on filmmaking in general, and the role of women in particular. Patriarchy and culture impose limitations on the issues that can and cannot be articulated through film making. It is this stereotype that aspiring women filmmakers wish to bring out through their films in Oman. And this finding hints at a positive leap towards addressing this need through media (Goveas, 2011).

### **THE CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION**

To conclude, the findings suggest that there is a need to promote the use of social media and complement the filmmaking course with practical visibility platforms, whereby their work can be viewed and reviewed by professionals from within and outside the country, and their peers in universities. The study establishes the overall need for resourcing the filmmaking/digital media sector, through Government aided programs or possibly through public private model. Creating regional, national and international film festivals where local, artistic and independent works are screened and reviewed are required. A dedicated channel on social media to enable students to showcase their work without risks and limitations within the university would be one of the initial steps to address the need for judicious exploitation of social media for educational purpose.

This, apart from enhancing learning from peer review and cross skilling, also provides an opportunity for monetizing the work of the students through virtual education, advertisements and distributing and marketing of their work. Majority of the students in

digital media specialization being women is a very encouraging trend which strongly challenges the socio-cultural restrictions, in line with the Omani Government's boost to women's participation in work force and all field of work and knowledge. However, this requires affirmative attention and measures to encourage the students to engage in professional film making projects supported by the Government aid, to sustain and retain the skills developed with digital media course.

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