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## The Role of Visual and Audio Content in Promoting Social Accountability Among Omani Youth

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### Abstract

This study examines how visual and audio content influences social accountability among Omani youth on social media platforms. As digital media increasingly shapes public opinion and civic engagement, understanding the role of content such as images and videos is critical. Through focus group discussions involving three groups of Omani youth, each with five participants aged 18–29, this research explores their preferences, perceptions, and strategies for engaging with social accountability topics. The findings highlight the effectiveness of visual and audio content in raising awareness, inspiring critical thinking, and encouraging civic participation. Participants identified these formats as impactful, with their immediacy and emotional resonance fostering greater engagement. User-generated content and interactive tools, such as hashtags and live updates, were also seen as key in spreading awareness and mobilizing collective action. However, challenges such as privacy concerns, misinformation, and cultural sensitivities emerged as barriers to effective participation. This study provides practical recommendations for leveraging media to enhance social accountability efforts. Suggestions include improving media literacy programs to help youth critically evaluate online content, ensuring platform transparency and safety to build trust, and incorporating culturally relevant and interactive features to increase engagement. Collaborating with influencers who align with social accountability values was also identified as a way to amplify campaigns and reach youth effectively. By addressing these challenges and adopting strategic approaches, visual and audio content can play a significant role in empowering Omani youth to participate in social accountability efforts, fostering a more informed and active citizenry in Oman.

**Keywords:** Social accountability, Omani youth, visual content, audio content, social media.

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### 1. Introduction

Social media platforms have become vital tools for shaping public discourse and fostering civic engagement, offering dynamic spaces for individuals to participate in social accountability initiatives. In Oman, where youth represent a significant portion of the population actively engaging with digital platforms, visual and audio content such as videos and images are emerging as powerful tools for driving awareness and action on social issues. These formats are highly effective in capturing attention, inspiring critical thinking, and encouraging meaningful participation, making them crucial in the push for a more informed and active citizenry.

While global research underscores the transformative potential of digital media in amplifying marginalized voices and driving collective action, limited attention has been given to the specific role of visual and audio content in promoting social accountability among Omani youth. Existing studies often focus on Western contexts or broad demographics, neglecting the unique cultural and social dynamics in Oman. Furthermore, challenges such as privacy concerns, misinformation, and the influence of societal norms in politically sensitive contexts remain underexplored. Addressing these gaps is essential to understanding how Omani youth navigate and engage with social accountability issues in digital spaces. (Hurley,2021)

To address these gaps, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What types of visual and audio content (e.g., images, videos) are most preferred by Omani youth for engaging with social accountability topics on social media?
2. How do different forms of visual and audio content influence Omani youth's awareness and actions regarding social issues?
3. To what extent do visual and audio media foster civic engagement and promote social accountability among Omani youth?
4. How can visual and audio content be strategically utilized to amplify youth voices and drive social change in Oman?
5. How do cultural and social factors in Oman shape the effectiveness of visual and audio content in promoting social accountability?

By focusing on these questions, this research aims to uncover the specific ways in which visual and audio content contributes to civic participation while navigating the sociocultural and political challenges unique to Oman. Through focus group discussions with Omani youth aged 18–29, the study captures their lived experiences, preferences, and perceptions, providing valuable insights into their engagement strategies and the barriers they face.

The findings aim to provide a framework for leveraging visual and audio content to enhance social accountability efforts, offering practical implications for policymakers, content creators, and civic organizations in Oman. This research not only contributes to the global discourse on digital media and civic engagement but also sheds light on the unique sociocultural landscape of Oman, where youth hold the potential to drive transformative change through innovative use of digital tools. By addressing this demographic and context, this study advances a more inclusive understanding of the role of media in empowering civic participation and accountability.

## **2. Literature Review**

Visual and audio content have emerged as powerful tools for promoting social accountability, particularly among youth. These media forms enable effective communication, foster engagement, and influence behaviors in various contexts. Social media platforms, with their ability to disseminate information widely and rapidly, serve as vital spaces for civic engagement and behavior change, particularly in societies like Oman, where youth are increasingly active in digital spaces (Habes, 2023). This review examines relevant studies that highlight the role of visual and audio content in fostering civic competence, behavior change, and engagement, with a focus on their implications for promoting social accountability among Omani youth.

Building on these broader observations, Ostapenko (2020) conducted an empirical study exploring the potential of social media in enhancing civic competence among student youth. The study identified structural components of civic competence—such as awareness, participation, and critical thinking—that are significantly influenced by interactions on social media platforms. Through the integration of visual and audio elements, these platforms create engaging and interactive environments that stimulate youth to explore and act on social issues. This underscores the importance of using digital media to empower youth, equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary to participate meaningfully in social accountability initiatives.

Similarly, Fantini et al. (2021) further emphasized the value of social media content in capturing audience attention and fostering engagement. Their study focused on the commodification of visual and audio content for product promotion, noting that the same principles apply to social issues. The findings indicate that well-crafted visual and audio content can resonate deeply with audiences, leveraging emotional and cognitive responses to drive engagement. For Omani youth, the strategic use of these media formats can help bridge the gap between awareness and action in social accountability efforts.

Beyond traditional social media, the integration of innovative technologies has demonstrated the transformative potential of visual and audio content. Prabha et al. (2022) presented a minimalist social robot platform designed to promote positive behavior change among children. By leveraging audio-visual perception and artificial intelligence, this approach highlights how interactive and engaging media can influence attitudes and behaviors. While the study focuses on children, the implications for youth are clear: the use of advanced technologies to deliver impactful content can play a critical role in fostering civic responsibility and promoting accountability.

Adding to this discourse, Gao et al. (2022) explored the effectiveness of social video platforms, such as the Chinese platform Bilibili, in promoting COVID-19 vaccination among youth. The study demonstrated how creators' unique interpretations of audio-visual content significantly shaped youth attitudes toward vaccines. This highlights the role of influencers and content creators in crafting persuasive and relatable messages, suggesting that Omani youth could similarly benefit from tailored visual and audio campaigns to encourage participation in social accountability activities.

In addition to direct engagement through social media and technology, formal policies also underscore the importance of effective communication strategies. Mackie et al. (2022) examined the role of formal policy in promoting informed consent for psychotropic medications among youth in child welfare custody. Although this study focuses on procedural elements, its emphasis on clear, engaging communication aligns with the broader role of visual and audio content in fostering understanding and trust. This reinforces the idea that well-designed media, supported by clear policies, can enhance accountability and ensure youth feel empowered to participate in civic discussions.

The influence of visual representation on youth engagement was further explored by Greene et al. (2022). Their study examined how vape influencers utilized gendered promotional tactics on Instagram, highlighting the importance of visual presentation in influencing audience perceptions. These findings demonstrate that strategic use of imagery and narrative can shape

attitudes and behaviors, suggesting that social accountability campaigns in Oman should consider similar approaches to resonate with their target audiences effectively.

Taken together, the reviewed literature collectively emphasizes the significant impact of visual and audio content in engaging youth and promoting social accountability. From fostering civic competence to influencing behavior through technology and strategic promotion, these media forms offer a versatile and powerful means of communication. For Omani youth, who increasingly turn to digital platforms for information and engagement, leveraging these insights can help amplify their voices and foster a more informed and active citizenry. Tailored campaigns using culturally relevant visual and audio content can enhance awareness, inspire participation, and drive social change, creating a robust framework for accountability in Oman.

### **3. Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the role of visual and audio content in promoting social accountability among Omani youth. Qualitative research is particularly suited for this study as it allows for in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes, providing rich insights into the nuances of their engagement with visual and audio media. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative approaches are ideal for examining complex social phenomena in specific contexts, making it an appropriate choice for investigating youth engagement in Oman.

#### **Participant Selection and Sampling**

Participants for this study were Omani youth aged between 18 and 29, a demographic category defined by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI, 2020). This age group represents a critical segment of the population actively engaging with social media platforms, making them an ideal sample for examining the research questions. A purposive sampling method was utilized to ensure the inclusion of participants who could provide relevant and diverse perspectives on the topic. Purposive sampling, as outlined by Patton (2015), is a non-probability sampling technique that enables researchers to target individuals most likely to offer meaningful insights based on the study's objectives.

To recruit participants, a public call for volunteers was issued through online platforms and email invitations. The call targeted individuals who had previously participated in an online survey conducted to investigate similar themes of social media and social accountability. This approach allowed the study to build on existing data while ensuring participants' familiarity with the subject matter. Efforts were made to include individuals from diverse backgrounds, encompassing varying levels of education, professional experiences, and regional representation across Oman. This diversity aimed to provide a holistic understanding of the research topic by capturing a wide range of perspectives and experiences.

#### **Focus Group Discussions**

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were chosen as the primary data collection method for this study. FGDs are widely recognized in qualitative research for their ability to facilitate interactive discussions, allowing participants to build on each other's ideas and provide richer data than individual interviews (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Three focus groups, each consisting of five participants, were conducted to ensure manageable group sizes that encourage participation while maintaining diverse viewpoints. This group size aligns with the

recommendations of Kitzinger (1995), who suggests that small groups of 4-6 participants allow for both in-depth discussion and diverse interaction.

The discussions were conducted via Google Meet, a practical choice given its accessibility and familiarity among the target demographic. Online focus groups have gained prominence as a viable method for qualitative data collection, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as they provide flexibility and eliminate geographical barriers (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017). The use of Google Meet ensured that participants from different regions of Oman could participate without logistical constraints, enhancing the diversity of the sample.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Each focus group session lasted approximately 60-90 minutes and was moderated by the researcher. The discussions were guided by a semi-structured interview protocol designed to elicit participants' views on the role of visual and audio content in promoting social accountability. The protocol included open-ended questions that encouraged participants to share their experiences with different forms of media, discuss their preferences, and reflect on how such content influences their engagement with social accountability issues.

Key topics explored during the discussions included:

- Preferences for visual and audio content formats (e.g., videos, images).
- The perceived effectiveness of these formats in raising awareness and driving civic action.
- Cultural and social factors influencing their engagement with such content.

All sessions were recorded with participants' consent to ensure accurate data capture. The recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. As recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), transcription ensures that all nuances of the discussion are preserved, facilitating a thorough manual thematic analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Manual thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data collected from the focus group discussions. Thematic analysis is a flexible and widely used method in qualitative research that enables researchers to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis followed a six-phase process:

1. Familiarization with the data through repeated readings of the transcripts.
2. Generating initial codes to identify meaningful segments of the text.
3. Searching for themes by clustering related codes.
4. Reviewing themes to ensure they align with the research questions and data.
5. Defining and naming themes to encapsulate their essence.
6. Producing the final report to present the findings in a coherent narrative.

The manual approach allowed the researcher to engage deeply with the data, ensuring that nuances and contextual subtleties were not overlooked. This hands-on method aligns with recommendations by Nowell et al. (2017) for achieving rigor and trustworthiness in qualitative analysis.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical standards were strictly upheld throughout the research process to ensure the protection and privacy of all participants. Prior to participation, individuals were fully informed about the aims and scope of the study, and their involvement was entirely voluntary. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant, with clear explanations provided regarding their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty.

To further safeguard participant privacy, all data collected during the focus group discussions were anonymized. Personal identifiers were removed from transcripts and records to ensure confidentiality. The recorded sessions were securely stored and accessed only by the research team. These measures ensured that participants' perspectives could be shared candidly while minimizing any potential risks associated with their involvement in discussions of social accountability, a topic that may carry cultural and social sensitivities in the Omani context.

By adhering to these ethical guidelines, the study promoted a respectful and secure research environment, encouraging honest and open contributions while protecting participant rights and data integrity.

### **Findings**

The findings of this study provide an in-depth exploration of how visual and audio content influences social accountability among Omani youth, shedding light on their preferences, perceptions, and engagement strategies. The focus group discussions revealed that visual and audio media play a crucial role in fostering civic engagement, raising awareness, and addressing culturally significant issues. These media formats emerged as particularly effective tools for capturing attention, enhancing credibility, and disseminating information efficiently. Informant A (1) highlighted this by stating, "Any content that includes audio or images is very influential for social accountability. It's direct and easy to perceive by people." Similarly, Informant A (3) emphasized, "Visual content is so influential because it's attractive and provides more information." This demonstrates that the inherent appeal of visual and audio content resonates deeply with youth, aligning with Ostapenko's (2020) findings that such media formats foster civic competence by engaging audiences and stimulating critical thinking. Fantini et al. (2021) also underscored the ability of well-crafted visual and audio content to leverage emotional and cognitive responses, further driving engagement and awareness. These preferences reflect the importance of utilizing media formats that align with youth consumption habits to encourage participation in social accountability efforts.

The effectiveness of visual and audio content in raising awareness and prompting action was another recurring theme. User-generated content and interactive features such as hashtags and comments were identified as particularly impactful in spreading awareness about social issues. Informant B (1) shared, "User-generated content has a significant influence. Influencers presenting social issues in a sarcastic manner often provoke viral reactions on social media, prompting government intervention and solutions." This sentiment was echoed by Informant A (5), who noted that visual and audio content is "more credible and believable," thus effectively engaging diverse audiences. These observations align with Greene et al. (2022), who highlighted the strategic use of visual representation in shaping audience perceptions and influencing behaviors. Similarly, Gao et al. (2022) found that tailored audiovisual content significantly shaped youth attitudes toward public health campaigns, such as those addressing COVID-19. These insights underscore the potential of user-generated and interactive content to amplify the reach and impact of social accountability initiatives among Omani youth.

Social media platforms were also identified as powerful tools for mobilizing youth and fostering collective solutions to social issues. Participants cited examples of successful campaigns that led to tangible outcomes, such as heightened social accountability during the Gaza crisis and various boycott movements. Informant B (2) reflected, “The Gaza crisis and boycott campaigns led to increased social accountability,” illustrating the capacity of social media to inspire civic participation and hold institutions accountable. However, some participants noted challenges in achieving sustained engagement and tangible outcomes in certain cases. These observations are consistent with Ostapenko’s (2020) findings that, while social media enhances civic competence, its effectiveness in achieving long-term change depends on sustained engagement and strategic communication. This underscores the need for coordinated efforts to ensure that social media continues to serve as an effective platform for civic engagement in Oman.

The role of cultural and social contexts emerged as a significant factor shaping youth engagement with visual and audio content. Participants expressed a strong sense of pride and responsibility in preserving Omani traditions and countering negative portrayals on social media. Informant B (3) stated, “I am driven to participate when influencers portray our traditions and customs negatively just to gain social media attention,” highlighting how cultural pride motivates youth to engage with social accountability topics. This aligns with Greene et al. (2022), who demonstrated the importance of cultural representation in shaping audience perceptions and engagement. Tailoring content to reflect the cultural and social identity of Omani youth is essential for fostering meaningful participation and amplifying their voices in public discourse.

Overall, the findings illustrate the multifaceted relationship between media formats, user engagement, and cultural dynamics in promoting social accountability among Omani youth. While visual and audio content presents unique opportunities for fostering civic participation, challenges such as misinformation, privacy concerns, and cultural sensitivities must be addressed to maximize its effectiveness. By integrating culturally relevant narratives, enhancing media literacy, and leveraging interactive features, social accountability campaigns can better resonate with Omani youth, encouraging greater participation and collective action. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the intersection between digital media and civic engagement, emphasizing the potential of strategic media use to drive meaningful social change in Oman.

#### **4. Discussion**

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of how visual and audio content influences social accountability among Omani youth, highlighting key opportunities and challenges. By analyzing the preferences, perceptions, and engagement strategies of Omani youth, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the role that these media formats play in fostering civic engagement and addressing social issues. The discussion integrates insights from the findings, literature review, and analysis to present the study's contributions, challenges, limitations, recommendations, and avenues for future research.

The findings offer direct insights into each of the research questions:

- RQ1: Youth prefer short, emotionally resonant formats like TikTok videos and infographics. These match their consumption habits and cognitive styles.

- RQ2: Visual and audio content builds awareness by being accessible, shareable, and emotionally charged. It prompts actions when it connects personally, such as through satire or authenticity.
- RQ3: Media does promote civic engagement, especially when paired with interactive tools like hashtags and when users feel safe to share.
- RQ4: Strategic use—like aligning content with influencers, leveraging satire, or using familiar visuals—increases reach and impact. Real-time engagement tools amplify collective action.
- RQ5: Cultural values drive content effectiveness. Youth engage more with messages that reflect pride, heritage, or local concerns. Content that challenges norms without sensitivity risks backlash or disengagement.

These alignments show how visual and audio formats are not just communication tools but cultural vehicles. They mediate how Omani youth understand and act on civic issues. They also show that effectiveness depends on credibility, relatability, and cultural framing. Without these, even well-designed content fails to resonate.

Also, the findings reveal several challenges that hinder the effectiveness of visual and audio content in promoting social accountability among Omani youth. Privacy concerns and the fear of government surveillance emerged as significant barriers, discouraging youth from engaging openly in civic discussions. Additionally, participants expressed frustration with the spread of misinformation and the lack of reliable sources on social media platforms, which undermines the credibility of social accountability efforts.

Cultural and societal expectations also pose challenges. Many participants noted that discussing sensitive issues online could lead to social judgment or backlash, particularly in a close-knit society like Oman. These challenges align with global research, such as Greene et al. (2022), which highlights the influence of cultural norms on youth engagement in civic activities. Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions that foster a safer and more inclusive digital environment for youth.

While this research offers valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study relies on a qualitative design with a purposive sampling method, which limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of Omani youth. Although focus group discussions provided rich, in-depth data, the relatively small sample size of 15 participants may not fully capture the diversity of experiences and perspectives within this demographic. As a result, individual or group-specific views may disproportionately influence the themes that emerged. Future research should consider employing larger and more diverse samples, potentially incorporating quantitative methods, to enhance the representativeness and allow for more robust, generalizable conclusions.

Second, the exclusive focus on Omani youth aged 18–29, as defined by the NCSI (2020), also narrows the scope of the study. While this age group is a critical segment of social media users and civic participants, excluding younger and older populations limits the ability to understand the full spectrum of how visual and audio content impacts civic engagement across the wider population. Expanding the research to include a broader age range would provide a more comprehensive view and could reveal different patterns of engagement and perception across life stages.



Finally, the reliance on self-reported data through focus group discussions introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, where participants may have shaped their responses to conform to socially acceptable norms or to meet perceived expectations of the researcher. This may affect the authenticity and accuracy of the insights obtained. Future studies could address this limitation by incorporating mixed-method approaches—such as anonymous surveys, longitudinal designs, or observational techniques—to validate and expand upon qualitative findings and mitigate bias.

The findings of this study indicate several practical strategies to enhance the effectiveness of visual and audio content in promoting social accountability among Omani youth. Strengthening media literacy programs emerged as a key priority, as educating youth on how to critically evaluate online content, identify credible sources, and navigate misinformation is essential for fostering responsible digital engagement. Tailored digital literacy workshops and campaigns can empower young people to participate more effectively in social accountability discussions, equipping them with the skills necessary to discern credible information from misinformation in an increasingly complex digital landscape.

Improving platform transparency and safety also stands out as a vital strategy. Social media platforms must prioritize user privacy and implement clear and robust content moderation policies. Features such as accessible complaint systems, regular transparency reports, and reliable reporting mechanisms can foster trust among users and create a safer environment for civic engagement. These measures address privacy concerns that often discourage youth from engaging openly in social accountability efforts and provide a framework for secure and inclusive participation.

Leveraging culturally relevant content is another essential approach. Social accountability campaigns that reflect the cultural identity and values of Omani youth are likely to resonate more deeply and achieve greater impact. Using culturally appropriate visuals, narratives, and themes can enhance the effectiveness of these campaigns by fostering emotional connections and a sense of relevance among the target audience.

Delving deeper into the cultural underpinnings of Omani youth engagement, the findings reveal that certain cultural norms and values significantly inform digital behaviors. There is a pronounced respect for tradition and national heritage among participants, with many expressing increased motivation to participate when media content either upholds or threatens these elements. As one participant explained, “I am driven to participate when influencers portray our traditions and customs negatively just to gain social media attention,” highlighting how cultural pride and the desire to protect national identity can mobilize engagement. Visual and audio content that leverages Omani language and symbolism was viewed as highly credible and resonant, with another youth stating, “Visual content that uses our language and cultural symbols makes the message stronger and more believable”. Furthermore, the weight of collective identity and family reputation shapes the ways in which youth interact with, share, or refrain from engaging with sensitive topics online. “We avoid commenting on certain topics because people might judge us or our families,” observed a participant, illustrating that concerns around social judgment and communal perception influence not just the willingness to engage, but also how deliberately content is crafted and circulated in the Omani context.

Encouraging interactive features, such as hashtags, live updates, and user-generated content, can significantly amplify the reach and engagement of social accountability initiatives. These

tools foster a sense of community and collective action, enabling youth to participate actively and collaboratively in discussions and campaigns. By integrating these interactive elements, campaigns can stimulate meaningful dialogue and promote sustained civic engagement.

Lastly, collaboration with influencers presents a powerful strategy for promoting social accountability efforts. Trusted influencers who align with the values of these campaigns can act as intermediaries, effectively bridging institutional messages with youth audiences in relatable and engaging ways. Influencers, as role models, can inspire participation by demonstrating the importance of civic engagement and encouraging youth to take an active role in social accountability initiatives.

By implementing these strategies, stakeholders can maximize the potential of visual and audio content to drive social accountability among Omani youth, ensuring that campaigns are impactful, inclusive, and culturally resonant. These approaches address the challenges identified in the study while capitalizing on the unique opportunities offered by digital media to foster meaningful civic participation.

This study opens several avenues for future research. First, quantitative studies could complement the qualitative findings by examining the impact of visual and audio content on social accountability across a larger and more diverse sample of Omani youth. Surveys and experiments could provide statistical evidence to validate the themes identified in this study.

Second, comparative studies exploring the experiences of youth in other Middle Eastern countries could offer valuable cross-cultural insights. Understanding how regional similarities and differences shape youth engagement with social accountability could inform more tailored and effective interventions.

Third, future research could investigate the long-term impact of visual and audio content on behavior change. Longitudinal studies tracking the outcomes of specific campaigns or interventions could provide deeper insights into the sustainability of youth engagement in civic activities.

Finally, exploring the role of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality, in enhancing the effectiveness of visual and audio content could offer innovative solutions for promoting social accountability. These technologies have the potential to create immersive and engaging experiences that inspire greater participation.

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