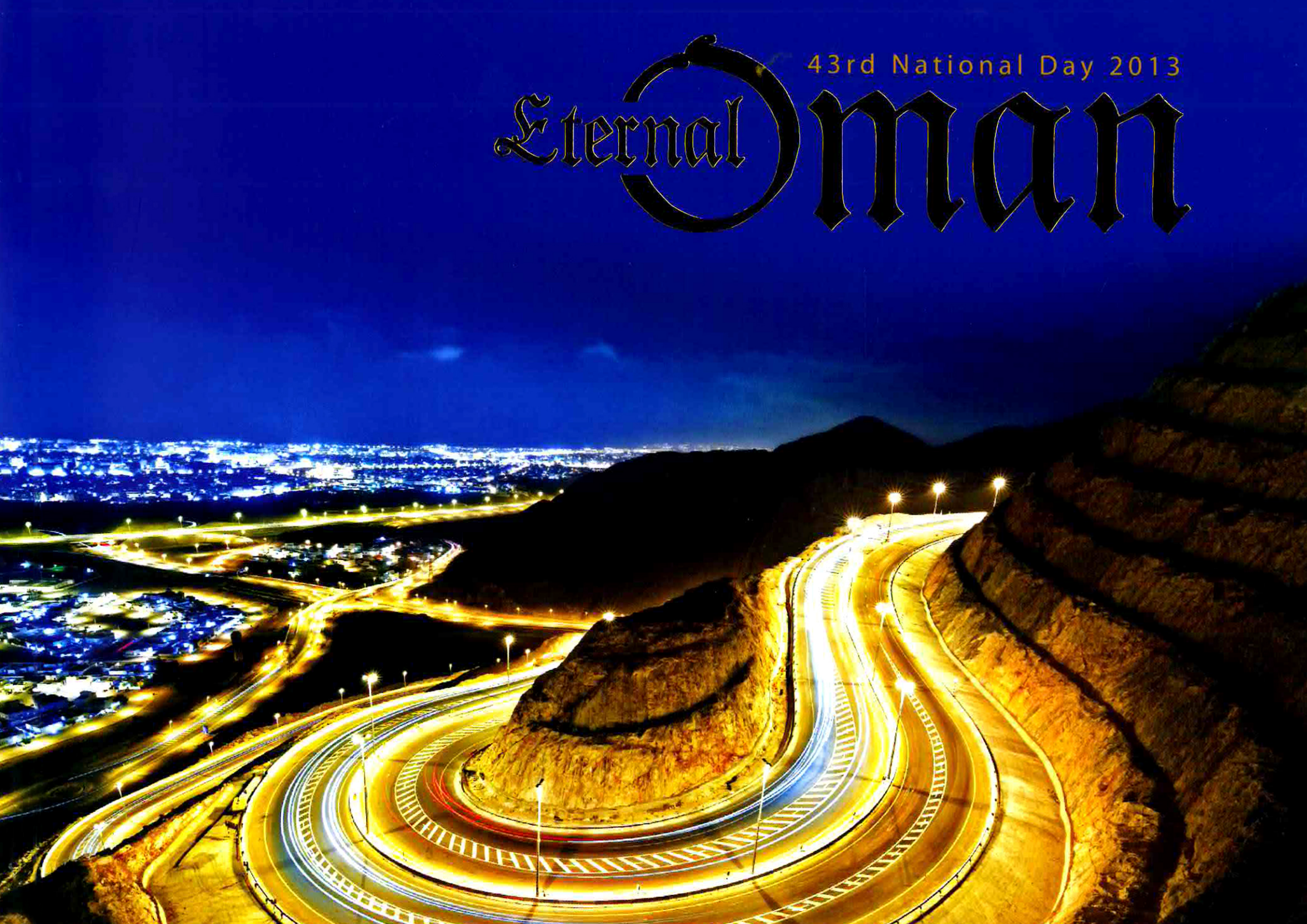


43rd National Day 2013

Eternal Oman

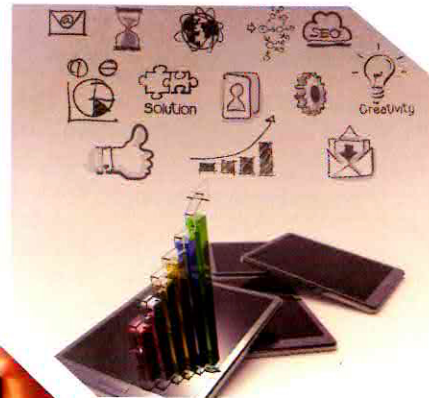


Chapter 2:

Social media - the potential for development in Oman



Baby Sam Samuel



With the penetration of Internet-enabled devices like smartphones, tablets, and laptops, the number of Internet users in Oman has risen in the last decade from almost 4 percent to nearly 70 percent of the total population and these users

are now slowly and steadily getting hooked to various social media services

Social media, a term that is as ubiquitous as the various social media itself, has become a major game changer of the Internet era. It encompasses a wide array of web and mobile based technologies that foster interaction, allowing people to build relationships and create, share and exchange ideas and information in virtual communities and networks, says Baby Sam Samuel, an entrepreneurial executive with core expertise in building brand recognition and sales momentum.

Currently involved in diverse entrepreneurial activities and as the brand strategist for Knowledge Oman, the volunteer based organisation, he presents here his perspective on the growth of the social media in the country, listing out various online services to reflect on the present social media scene in the country.



Knowledge Oman Team at a social media seminar at the US Embassy

The umpteen number of online services falling under social media range from social networks to gaming sites, podcasts, photo and video sharing sites, bookmarking sites, forums, blogs, and micro-blogging platforms; the networking site Facebook is, of course, the most popular of these globally. In fact, if it were a country, with its billion plus users, it would be the third largest country in the world.

Even as the definition of social media continues to evolve, some of the major characteristics of the services remain the same. They include:

Participation: Encourages contributions and feedback from everyone who is interested, with a high level of user interaction.

Openness: Encourages openness through voting, comments and sharing of information.



“ Be it self-promotion or advertisement of products, services or a business at large, social media marketing has become not only a viable, but also an essential tactic in creating and retaining the attention of an ever online public ”

User generated content: Thrives on content that is user generated.

Conversation: Acts as a multi-way dialogue as compared to traditional broadcast media.

Community: Allows quick formation of communities, with effective communication.

Connectedness: Links to sites, people, networks, content and other resources.

Social Media Scene in Oman

With the penetration of Internet-enabled devices like smartphones, tablets, and laptops, the number of Internet users in Oman has risen in the last decade from almost 4 percent to nearly 70 percent of the total population and these users are now slowly and steadily getting hooked to various social media services like Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp and LinkedIn; Arabic language, as per recent research, continues to be the fastest growing language across these platforms.

Today's youth, dubbed the iGeneration, are forever online; their dependency on these media is evident from their inability to remain unplugged even when asleep. The negative effects of social media on the behaviour and attitude of children and youth have been much talked about in recent times. However, the same media also provides ample opportunities for the enterprising youth in Oman.

Self-Education & Training

Social media and networking has many implications in the field of education, particularly, self-education. They enable students to access online a multitude of free and paid resources in education and training in terms of videos, tutorials, e-books etc., offered by individual educators, organisations and even world-renowned universities and colleges. These services also make available a wealth of previously unavailable resources, including academic and research materials. As a means of mass communication, they also ensure that news and information is spread and accessed in real time, faster than any other medium. In a recent trend, more and more colleges across Oman are using social media to recruit, engage and retain students.

Global Networks

Social media opens up myriad ways for today's youth to connect with people across the world without the bounds of the physical abilities, appearance or geographic location, enabling cross cultural dialogues that can lessen cultural shock, create culturally sensitive youth, and bring the world closer together. Additionally, the plethora of web based social tools and services let users display skills and talents to a global audience - budding musicians, photographers, artists and writers can all find their voice and audience online.

Marketing

Be it self-promotion or advertisement of products, services or a business at large, social media marketing has become not only a viable but also an essential tactic in creating and retaining the attention of an ever online public. Consequently, businesses in Oman are awakening to the new possibilities offered by social media to engage and interact with their customers. Facebook's sponsored stories; promoted tweets on Twitter; and YouTube's promoted videos, etc. are ways for enhancing the reach of content through paid services.

Additionally, since everything from what one had for breakfast to one's every good and bad experience is being shared online and gets permanently imprinted in the Internet universe, it becomes all the more pertinent for businesses to monitor what is being said online about them. Reputation management therefore has become another side of the coin of social media marketing.

Entrepreneurship

Social Media has relevance not only for the average Internet user but for businesses as well, due to the integration it provides between individuals, community and organisations. These platforms act as a forum for mutual interaction between businesses and their end users, providing a hitherto unseen transparency.

It can empower entrepreneurs, start-ups and small businesses and help them make use of this relatively less expensive marketing tool to fit their many needs and many functions, and create a compelling web presence and an online identity. Effective use of social media services can aid them in research on social behaviour and other characteristics of target market; brand awareness; promotion; consumer engagement; lead generation; referral traffic; and revenue creation.

E-Commerce

A great way to feed the entrepreneurial spirit is by creating businesses online. As these Internet based business models thrive on e-commerce platforms that are linked to social media, the economic impact of these media is enormous. Social commerce and social shopping are concepts that revolve



