FRAMING THE FUTURE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LANDSCAPE AND PORTRAIT MODES IN VIDEO RECORDING AND AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT IN BAYAN COLLEGE, OMAN

Geleceği Çerçevelemek: Umman'daki Bayan Koleji'nde Video Kaydı ve İzleyici Katılımında Manzara ve Portre Modlarının Karşılaştırmalı Bir Çalışması

Hariharan ANBAZHAGAN[1]

[1]Bayan College Affiliation With Purdue University, Northwest USA, e-mail: hariharan@bayancollege.edu.om

ORCID ID: HA: 0009-0007-3387-917X

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the influence of video aspect ratios on audience engagement among students of Bayan College, Oman. With the growing consumption of mobile-first content and the surge in short-form videos, the study investigates how landscape (16:9) and portrait (9:16) formats perform regarding viewer retention, interaction, and preference. The findings offer actionable insights for content creators and media professionals in Oman by combining quantitative survey responses and Instagram engagement metrics. This study significantly shows that portrait (9:16) videos outperform landscape (16:9) videos in terms of audience engagement, especially for short-form content on mobile platforms.

INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced digital world, how people watch videos has changed as much as what they watch. Across Oman, especially among younger audiences, the rise of smartphones and social media platforms has made short, vertical videos the new norm. However, traditional landscape videos in the 16:9 format continue to dominate professional settings and longer content.

Back in the early days of television, the 4:3 aspect ratio was the default format. It was square in shape and fit well with the bulky TV screens of the mid-20th century. This format became the global standard for analog broadcasting. For many, the 4:3 frame brings back memories of classic TV shows and early cinema experiences.

As technology advanced in the late 1990s and early 2000s, a new aspect ratio began to take over 16:9. With the rise of HD formats and widescreen displays, this format offered a more cinematic feel and a wider field of view. It became especially popular in film, television production, and even classrooms, where wider screens allowed for better visual storytelling. Today, 16:9 is still widely used in professional settings and YouTube videos, offering a familiar and polished viewing experience.

With the explosion of smartphones and mobile apps like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts, video content started flipping on its side literally. The 9:16 vertical format, which fills the entire phone screen, has become the friendly for mobile users. Especially among younger audiences, vertical video is now seen as the default. This shift has influenced how creators shoot and edit content, with many prioritizing mobile audiences over traditional screen formats.

Aspect ratios are more than just numbers; they shape how stories are told and how viewers connect with them. Whether it's the boxy 4:3 of early television, the immersive widescreen of 16:9, or the intimate, scroll-friendly 9:16, each format brings a unique style and purpose. In today's media environment, where content is often short, mobile, and highly personalized, understanding how these ratios influence engagement can help educators, creators, and marketers communicate more effectively across platforms.

This research examines the continuing evolution of these formats and their influence on audience engagement today. By merging survey data from Bayan College students with Instagram engagement metrics from the college's official account, the study seeks to evaluate whether portrait or landscape formats are more effective in engaging audiences and, more importantly, why. Ultimately, this paper poses a straightforward yet relevant question: in a world where content is brief, mobile, and social, which format conveys the story most effectively?

Literature Review

In the study recognizing video content in portrait mode by Han et al. (2024), they demonstrated that the portrait mode video used in mobile platforms requires unique recognition algorithms due to the constrained frame and composition style compared to landscape videos. Their results highlight how crucial it is to create recognition algorithms that take into account the unique difficulties and user interaction styles present in vertical formats. This study closely aligns with the current study, which explores not only the technological and aesthetic differences between portrait and landscape videos but also the frames' influence and user engagement.

Clayton (2019) discusses how smartphones have changed the way people watch videos, making vertical video (9:16 aspect ratio) very

popular, especially on social media like Instagram and Snapchat. This challenges the traditional horizontal format that the film industry has used for over 100 years. Historically, vertical video was rare, and filmmakers mostly used horizontal frames. Clayton explains that the horizontal frame often cuts out important parts of tall subjects like people or buildings. Vertical video allows showing a full person from head to toe and better fits tall objects, making it useful for close-ups and storytelling on mobile devices. Clayton points out there is very little research or teaching about how to create good vertical videos. He encourages filmmakers and teachers to develop new skills and ideas specifically for vertical video, which is becoming a permanent and important format. His work helps explain why vertical video is different and important, supporting studies about how people watch and engage with videos on their phones.

El-Sayed (2023) studied mobile video advertising in Egypt. He found that 32% of respondents liked vertical videos. Vertical videos were the second most popular format. The most popular format was virtual and augmented reality, preferred by 64% of respondents. These findings show that video ads should match mobile viewing habits to increase engagement.

Quinn, Eddings, and Stewart (2013) studied how people use portrait and landscape modes on their mobile phones for different tasks. They found that most users preferred portrait mode for tasks like dialing, texting, and using Facebook, while landscape mode was mainly used for watching videos.

Research Objectives

•To examine how Omani audiences engage with landscape (16:9) and portrait (9:16) video formats on social media platforms.

•To analyze viewer retention and interaction metrics (likes, shares, comments) to determine which format performs better across short-form and long-form content.

•To provide platform-specific recommendations for content creators and marketers based on the preferences and behaviors of local audiences.

Methodology

This study adopted a triangulation approach to data collection. First, a structured survey was administered to students at Bayan College. In addition, audience engagement metrics were gathered from six videos posted on Bayan College's official Instagram account three in portrait format and three in landscape format.

Results and Data Analysis

Survey Findings

Demographics

The survey primarily captured the perspectives of young Omani audiences, with a significant majority (74.6%) falling within the 18–25 age range. The gender distribution was notably skewed, with 79.6% of respondents identifying as female and only 16.8% as male. Most participants (84.3%) were students, highlighting a youthful, digitally engaged demographic.

Video Consumption Behavior

When it comes to online video consumption, 53.5% of respondents reported watching videos regularly. Instagram Reels emerged as the most popular platform, preferred by 63.2% of participants, followed by YouTube (40.4%) and TikTok (29.8%). In terms of content types, entertainment videos were the most consumed (60.5%), followed by lifestyle and vlogs (41.2%), and educational content (28.9%).

Format Preferences

A majority (64.3%) of participants reported using both portrait and landscape phone orien-

tations, depending on the nature of the content. When asked about their overall preference, 35.7% favored landscape mode, 24.1% preferred portrait, while 40.2% had no specific preference.

Engagement levels varied by format. Nearly half (46.5%) agreed that vertical videos (portrait mode) are more engaging, though a significant portion (44.6%) remained neutral on the issue. Format preferences also differed by video length: 42.5% preferred portrait orientation for short videos, whereas 53.5% favored landscape orientation for longer videos.

Interaction & Perception

A strong majority (69.6%) expressed a desire for more content optimized for mobile viewing. Additionally, 51.3% found the presence of black bars in landscape videos on vertical screens to be distracting or annoying. Perceptions of interactivity were divided: 34.5% found landscape videos more interactive, while 33.6% believed portrait videos offered a more engaging experience.

Instagram Engagement Data

Metric	Portrait Videos (9:16)	Landscape Videos (16:9)
Average Views	16,289	7,351
Average Watch Time	15.6 seconds	12 seconds
Average Interactions	622	295
Engagement Reach	High non-follower (63.3%)	High follower (72.6%)

The examination of Instagram engagement metrics indicates a strong user preference for portrait (9:16) video formats over landscape (16:9). On average, portrait videos received notably more views, with 16,289 views compared to just 7,351 for landscape videos. The highest viewed portrait video reached an impressive

26,695 views, significantly outperforming the leading landscape video, which had only 8,864 views.

Portrait videos also retained viewers' attention longer, boasting an average watch time of 15.6 seconds, whereas landscape videos averaged only 12 seconds. In terms of viewer retention, portrait content secured up to 19 seconds per viewer, compared to just 13 seconds for landscape, highlighting greater viewer engagement.

Interaction rates mirrored this trend. Portrait videos produced an average of 622 interactions (likes, shares, comments, saves), nearly double that of landscape videos, which garnered an average of 295 interactions. This indicates that vertical content is more likely to enhance user engagement and stimulate sharing.

Notably, the reach of the two formats varied in terms of audience demographics. Landscape videos primarily engaged existing followers, with 72.6% of interactions originating from users who already followed the account. Conversely, portrait videos demonstrated a wider appeal, sourcing 63.3% of their engagement from non-followers, showcasing a greater potential for virality and brand exposure.

Discussion

The findings from both the student survey and Instagram engagement data reveal a noticeable trend: portrait (9:16) videos significantly outperform landscape (16:9) videos in terms of audience engagement, especially for short-form content on mobile platforms. This aligns with the broader global shift toward mobile-first content consumption and reflects similar behavioral patterns among young Omani audiences, particularly students at Bayan College.

Preference for Vertical Formats in Mobile Environments

Students demonstrated a clear preference for vertical videos when consuming short content on platforms like Instagram Reels and TikTok. These platforms are inherently designed for portrait orientation, and the ease of viewing without rotating the device contributes to higher engagement. The portrait videos posted on Bayan College's Instagram account recorded nearly double the views and interactions compared to their landscape counterparts. Importantly, they also reached a broader audience, including a higher percentage of non-followers, indicating greater potential for viral reach and discoverability.

Format and Content Type Are Closely Linked

Despite the strong performance of vertical videos, the data also emphasizes the continued relevance of landscape formats. Survey responses indicate that students still prefer landscape orientation for longer videos, particularly for educational or documentary-style content, often consumed on YouTube or desktop screens. This suggests that viewer preference is influenced not only by screen orientation but also by content type and duration.

Demographics and Usage Patterns Matter

The demographic composition of the respondents primarily female students aged 18 to 25—also played a role in shaping content preferences. Most reported watching videos frequently, with Instagram being the most used platform, followed by YouTube and TikTok. A large proportion (64.3%) reported switching orientations depending on the content, revealing a flexible approach to media consumption. However, 46.5% agreed that vertical videos are more engaging, and over half expressed frustration with black bars in landscape videos viewed on mobile screens, reinforcing the importance of format optimization.

Algorithmic Advantage of Vertical Content

One of the key reasons behind the strong performance of portrait videos is the way social media algorithms function. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok prioritize vertical content, allowing it to reach wider audiences more organically. The engagement pattern observed in this study confirms that vertical videos are more likely to be promoted beyond an account's existing follower base. In contrast, landscape videos showed stronger engagement only among existing followers, indicating a more limited reach.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the engagement differences between portrait and landscape video formats, there are some limitations worth noting. One key challenge is the difficulty of repurposing content across different aspect ratios. Simply cropping a landscape video into a vertical frame often results in loss of important visual information or awkward compositions, which can negatively affect viewer experience. This practical issue underlines the need for careful planning during pre-production to select the most appropriate format for the intended platform and audience.

Future research could explore creative solutions to this challenge, such as adaptive framing techniques or dynamic editing workflows that maintain the integrity of visual storytelling across multiple formats. Additionally, expanding the study to include a broader range of demographics and platforms beyond Instagram would help generalize findings and offer deeper insights into evolving viewer preferences in Oman and similar contexts. Finally, as vertical video continues to grow alongside emerging technologies like augmented reality, future in-

vestigations might also consider how these formats interact to shape audience engagement in increasingly immersive environments.

CONCLUSION

This research emphasizes the growing influence of aspect ratios on how audiences interact with video content. With the increasing use of mobile devices and the dominance of social media platforms in Oman, vertically oriented videos are becoming increasingly prevalent. For content producers to maintain relevance and effectively engage viewers, it is important to adopt adaptable production methods that align with evolving consumption patterns. Recognizing viewer behavior and the unique demands of each platform is vital for enhancing content visibility and audience interaction.

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