

Chapter 10

TV Commercial Space in the UAE: A Regional Hub for Advertisement Production

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ABSTRACT

A thriving media ecosystem today requires a vibrant content production ecosystem. The MENA region today boasts several established and emerging media ecosystems. Key criteria essential for establishing a healthy media production workflow are location, production, infrastructure and support, incentives and investment returns, city infrastructure and safety, as well as access to talent. This chapter aims to establish UAE as a hotspot for film and TV production, making it a regional hub for television advertising production. The study includes the new framework of UAE media strategy, looking close into the media regulations which have revolutionized the media-free zones in all the emirates of the UAE. The research approach is of an exploratory and descriptive nature involving a problem-centered interview (PCI) that offers a structured interview procedure investigating individual perspectives on the UAE film and TV advertising industry.

INTRODUCTION

The growth of the media ecosystem worldwide since the birth of film and television is unprecedented. Content production is at the core of this growth story. It can take any shape, but what remains at the center of this progress story is a thriving global media ecosystem. The MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region has several established media ecosystems, many competing to be the best in the region.

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UAE has claimed among the top spots, establishing itself as a regional center for film, television, and social media. The success can be attributed to UAE's world-class infrastructure and its ideal geographical location. It offers excellent incentives to producers seeking to produce films and other content in the country.

Dubai shot into prominence with the launch of Dubai Media City in 2001. The city has, over time, become a growth story, and so has the media city, attracting talents from all over the world with its foray into filmmaking, advertising, and television broadcasting. Abu Dhabi too joined media production with the creation of TwoFour54 in the year 2008. Since then, it has grown manifold by offering some attractive ownership possibilities and ease in registration and licensing. The facility houses a campus-like collaborative space, including a studio of 300,000 sq km. The area also has an advanced post-production facility. Within a decade of its setup, Abu Dhabi announced a new offer of waiving license and registration for new companies and freelancers for two years. Some of the major blockbusters shot in the UAE recently are Star Wars: The Force Awakens, 6 Underground, and Mission Impossible - Ghost Protocol. More than 90 productions from the Hollywood and Indian film industry have been shot in the UAE.

Suppose we investigate the essential requirements for creating a healthy media production ecosystem. The following areas can be identified as key to its success: location, production support with the proper infrastructure, incentives and return to investment, city infrastructure, safety, and access to talent.

The most effective way to create awareness of a brand is through TV Advertising. But that's changing as TV AD spending moves towards the digital realm as the TV advertising business model is seeing a dramatic shift. This chapter focuses on the TV commercial space in the UAE, which has become a regional hub for Television Advertising production. The region's challenging economic state, mainly due to the Covid 19 pandemic, has disrupted the economy, but the shift was already underway. Even though ad spending has declined since 2015, UAE is still among the region's leading advertising markets.

The over-the-top (OTT) media services are forecasted to drive the growth of the reinvented TV advertising business model. The reason for such a reach and retention offered by OTT services is due to its 100% video advertising viewable and non-skippable features. These are included in all the leading OTT platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and the newly commissioned Disney Plus. These types of advertisements are called Subscription Supported Video-on-Demand Services. As the audience views such ads, it reinforces the brand's image. As per Magna Global (2021), OTT video ad spending is expected to reach \$5 billion globally in a year. UAE's own homegrown OTT streaming service, such as Starzplay, has added anime content, a Turkish TV channel, and an exclusive sports partnership over the last year. The service has seen a sharp growth in its subscription base through sign-ups, conversions, and consumption in the TV streaming industry.

Meanwhile, Digital advertising has been appealing to a growing number of advertisers since it creates opportunities for smaller budgets, often on a fully automatized ecosystem, for all sorts of ad formats. Ad expenditures in the digital environment already surpassed the amounts spent on traditional TV screens in the UAE. TV advertising remains by far the most efficient medium in terms of brand image safety and viewers' conversion into actual consumers, the industry seems to have reached a turning point with last year's crisis. However, with new capabilities brought onto TV screens by the deployment of IP based receptions and digital OTT services, the growing proportion of households equipped with connected screens, and the integration of advanced features in traditional linear broadcast streams, new opportunities are flourishing for advanced advertising products bridging the gap between TV and digital. This study will closely follow the transition and provide an outlook for the future.

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