

Amjad Ahmad: You're listening to a leading voice shaping Middle East business and economy. I'm Amjad Ahmad and this is EmpowerMe Conversations. Let's jump in. Hi, everyone and thanks for joining us.

Today is EmpowerMe Conversation is with the founder behind the Saudi Creative Media Studio Telfaz 11. From YouTube to Netflix to the big screen, Alaa Fadan and his team are bringing Saudi culture, humor and art to the masses. Welcome Alaa.

Alaa Fadan: Hi, how are you? Thank you for having me.

Amjad Ahmad: Oh, we're glad to have you. I'm really excited about this episode. We're watching the stuff you guys do for quite some time and it's really fun and exciting. I wanted to ask you, you started the company in 2011; way before entrepreneurship was fashionable. So tell us about that leap to the unknown. What was it like? Why did you do it and what was the opportunity that you saw in creating Telfaz?

Alaa Fadan: Yeah, kind of dating myself here, but yeah, it's been ten years now and I think we kind of jumped into it and we didn't really think about being entrepreneurs as much as we wanted to create some kind of change. We wanted to work in an industry that was kind of cultivating and nurturing for creatives. But what we had noticed me and my co-founders back then, 2010 that in Saudi Arabia wasn't very nurturing for creative. So we weren't really known for creativity in Saudi Arabia. But we've noticed that there were a lot of creatives actually underground there. They were working and they were doing these side hustles. They were doing it as a hobby, but they were just fantastic.

And us being in that kind of community, we were always fascinated by the people that we met and we always asked them, "What do you do?" And it was always something like, "Oh, I work in a government job that I hate." Or some kind of thing that it was totally far from what they really excelled at.

Amjad Ahmad: So it was more something they just did on the side?

Alaa Fadan: Yeah. But for us, we were really amazed that they didn't do this for a living and you're like, "Man, you should do this for a living. You guys, you're really good at this and more people should know about you." So for us, we kind of wanted to be in that industry. We were really interested in content creation and filmmaking. And to us, we knew right away that, okay, so that the issue isn't really the people or talent or lack of talent, but it's really that kind of a culture around accepting this kind of a talent and especially like when it comes to media and content creation and creativity, because, our parents come from a different generation. They were all about security, job security. You need to go to university, get high grades. I don't know if you're from the same background, but over here, you need to have a really good GPA so you can go into medical school and if you don't have a good enough GPA, then they go, "Okay then you can go into engineering and it's not engineering then business." It's like a class system where like we were and it was fascinating to me because...

Amjad Ahmad: I very much come from that same background. I used to draw so much and I wanted to be an artist and my parents completely ignored it and said, "You need to go into something to make some money."

Alaa Fadan: Right, but for us, we're like, okay, it kind of pressures kids and people into becoming things that they not necessarily love or not necessarily great at. It's just societal pressure, and then we're like, okay, we need to focus on these people that really love this thing because when you actually do things out of passion, when you focus on your strengths, that's one of the main things that we advocated. You need to focus on your strengths. What are you good at? Go there, put yourself out there, because when you focus on your strengths, you're going to excel in it and you're going to be on par with all the excellent people in the world. But if you're working in something that you don't really love, the best you can be is mediocre. So that's why we were like, okay let's help these people who are good at this; the creatives to kind of showcase them, to shed the light on them.

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Just so the people and the world, we can change the perception of these local creatives. So for us, we started we were like, okay, the first thing we thought about was maybe if we start making documentaries and following these really inspirational people around and put them online, people will start understanding that there are really talented people and inspire people to do the same thing. And we actually started to do that, we followed animators, we followed directors, we followed different people in the creative scene artists and we started creating these documentaries.

But somewhere down the line, at the same time, there's this whole social media revolution going on. People are starting to get on Twitter. They're starting to speak out, they're starting open up to the world and we are like, okay, so there's this whole Twitter thing, this whole social media thing that people get on, let's see how we can utilize that and how we...

Amjad Ahmad: And just to remind the audience that at that time in Saudi, you had tremendous Twitter growth and YouTube growth.

Alaa Fadan: Absolutely! Tremendous growth, tremendous YouTube growth, so we were like, okay, this is a really good opportunity for us and now we can start reaching a wider audience, and when we were thinking about audience and how to kind of influence change or influence this positive mentality about local creativity, we felt that maybe doing it through comedy would be much better because comedy travels much further on social media. People would love and they share comedy much better. And at that time, there was this movement also going on in Saudi Arabia, it was still an underground movement. It was like a stand-up comedy movement that's going on. They used to have it in compounds and behind closed doors. It wasn't like really that popular thing.

Amjad Ahmad: This was a time before entertainment in Saudi?

Alaa Fadan: Yeah, before entertainment. Entertainment was kind of behind closed doors. It was very private and we were kind of in that scene. So we had access to a lot of talented people stand-up comedians because we did also follow around some stand-up comedians. We did kind of document some of these events with these international stand-up comedians come in and perform in. And during this documentation and these times, we met a few pioneers in the Saudi stand-up comedy comedians and we decided to kind of join forces and create a Saudi YouTube show, like a satirical YouTube show. And for us, we're like, okay, there's something there very interesting. We can create content. We can showcase Saudi talent, we can entertain people and we can reach them so easily because of the democratization of media that YouTube did. And we were able to access and reach

millions and millions of people right there and with virtually no cost. It's just the cost of electricity and my dad's attic that we used.

Amjad Ahmad: That's a very powerful point because I think that distribution side was new and something that you sort of lead in the region and I think you did it very well. But like you said, it democratizes access to a huge audience, right?

Alaa Fadan: Yeah, absolutely and that's the thing that enabled us to continue and that's how we really started and the space and now we're a media company and we started digital and we're digital first and we started with video as well. And today, we have over 13 billion minutes watched, 28 million subscribers across social media platforms, over 100 hours of content produced. And all that, I feel like from the start it was kind of the catalyst of getting this content creation movement in Saudi. So we became in Saudi Arabia and which is something that we set out to do from the beginning is to be creative culture catalysts.

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We became just from consumers where Saudi Arabia was per capita number one and YouTube consumption. Now, we became as Saudis, we're one of the top content creators and people who produce content. And in the past that was kind of dominated by Egypt and maybe the Levant area. Now, Saudi Arabia is one of the top content creators, which to us it's very satisfying because that's what we wanted to do. And in the beginning, we actually like I said, we never thought of ourselves as wanting to be entrepreneurs as much as we wanted to create this creative economy so we can work in it instead of working our day jobs. So that was the main goal.

Amjad Ahmad: You mentioned something and I want to head on for a second. You mentioned that you have basically created an outlet for Saudi creatives and a Saudi voice. And as I watched your growth, I think that had a lot to do with it. Why do you think your content resonated so much versus others?

Alaa Fadan: Simply just because we focused on what we know; authenticity, so in the past, the model or the satellite TV model, they were what worked in order for it to work for them economically, they need to be planner, they need to create content to be consumed by the Saudis, the Lebanese, they nomads, all across the board.

Amjad Ahmad: People forget we're all different.

Alaa Fadan: Right, we're all Arabs, we speak Arabic. But I think that's basically where it stops and the similarities we are very different in terms of our sense of humor, our mannerisms, how we speak, how we move. But, yeah, people forget that. So when we started creating content, we focused on a very focused level, even in like different places in Saudi, whether it's in the Hejaz or in Riyadh or the South, we really focused, we spoke that language because that's how Telfaz 11 team were focused. There are people who represent the West. There are people who represent the south, North and East and we came together and we created this content and we knew exactly how to kind of cater to every single region in Saudi.

So, like very specific things too like a specific dance in the West, you see that in their content, music that you only hear from the South or like even kind of dialects or just swearwords, there are specific for a certain area or for the youth specifically. So when you

started looking at and watching this content, they kind of really relate it to it. And it came at a really good time when they couldn't relate to anything on TV because it wasn't really speaking to them or on satellite TV. It wasn't really specifically speaking to them. They were trying to speak to everybody. But Telfaz11's content when they watch that, they're like, "That's me, that's me on the screen. That's how I talk to my friend, that's how I mess around. That's my sense of humor." For us, that was mainly our strengths and that's what we focused on.

Amjad Ahmad: I saw that you signed this great Netflix deal and I think the real interesting thing about Netflix now is that gives you sort of global exposure with your shows. How do you see that going forward? You're going to stay authentic. But how do you see this sort of globalization of your content?

Alaa Fadan: Yeah, with Netflix, that's why it's actually succeeding, and when you talk about authenticity and going global, it's fascinating because in Saudi right now, for example, one of the top shows that people watch, they're not even in English; they're Spanish shows, they're French shows and that's what platforms like Netflix enabled different producers to do is to export their culture or export their productions to other regions and still be relatable.

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And that's what we're looking to do with Netflix now. We're still going to be authentic and we're still going to be telling our own stories and I think that's actually what people are looking for. The good thing about what we do and that's kind of an advantage of Saudi stories in general is and for the longest time, Saudi has been a black box in terms of like stories from the people. And what people know about Saudi is really what's in the news or...

Amjad Ahmad: It's very limited.

Alaa Fadan: Yeah, it's very limited and it's what's perpetuated by Hollywood or by the news. But in reality, Saudis are very rich culture and the Saudi has amazing stories. There are amazing human stories here that haven't been told yet. But at the same time, they're very human stories. They're very universal stories. But at the same time, there are flavors; there are nuances to the Saudi culture that the world hasn't seen yet.

Amjad Ahmad: That's the common link as human beings and some of these stories have a common link?

Alaa Fadan: Yes, absolutely. And that's what we were excited about, is to tell these stories to the world. And I think the world would be excited to hear these stories and deals like Netflix will enable us to tell these stories and tell really new stories that are new to the world. But it's like some stuff that we live every day. But it's an opportunity for the world to see the real authentic Saudi stories, but at the same time very relatable to the world.

Amjad Ahmad: I think that's going to be very interesting to see how people respond, because, as you said, I think Saudi has been a black box and you don't really hear too much about authentic Saudi stories so it's exciting to see that. As you take a step back and look at the wider media industry lens in Saudi, when you look at movie theaters and people going to the movies versus streaming, versus social media, do you see the same tensions that you see abroad? Do you think that the movie industry in terms of movie theaters will survive?

What's interesting is Saudi was sort of excited about opening movie theaters at a time where others are retreating from it. So how do you view the industry going forward?

Alaa Fadan: Well, I'm kind of biased here because we just closed a deal with the first Saudi brand or theater brand movie. So for me, I'm very bullish on the market. But at the same time, Saudi is very supportive of the market. It is true that whole world, they're kind of retreating the movie industry is this kind of struggling right now. But for Saudi is such a special case that it seems like it's almost the opposite that's happening here in terms of the support that's happening, in terms of the interest from the people, there's huge expansions going on in terms of theaters. So that's for it's still in its infancy and we see a huge opportunity there possibly from the box office. We're kind of predicting that Saudi market will hit a billion dollar market. It will be a billion dollar market by 2030. So that's very lucrative for people who want to be in the business for.

And then there's also all the support that's happening from the government to focus with the vision helping the economy being a thriving economy through different nine oil based economies and industry. So there's a huge focus on entertainment and I think that's very important from everywhere, from the private sector, from the government sector, from even the people, they're ready to like, okay, so we're ready to be entertained and have fun and have different outlets to go to entertain ourselves. So a big part of that is the movies and it's funny, we haven't had movies for the longest time, but Saudis are very in tune with all the movies, all the actors, all the directors, all the genres. They'll talk to you about like art-house movies and you're like;

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“What? You guys don't even have movie theaters and you're talking to me about art-house movies.”

Amjad Ahmad: I can definitely attest to that from my Saudi friends. They're the biggest movie buffs I know.

Alaa Fadan: Absolutely!

Amjad Ahmad: So you mentioned this change. I've noticed it as well of course. And you started so early. What are some of the big changes that you've seen in terms of specifically the ecosystem? You built a company at a time where it wasn't, again, the thing to do. What are some of the big changes that you see from then till today?

Alaa Fadan: In the ecosystem I think it's something that we set out to do. In the beginning, we wanted to like I said, we wanted to showcase local talent. We wanted to make sure that Saudi creatives do serve us after. In the past like I said, Saudis weren't really known for their creativity. So when companies are looking for creatives, they don't look for people in Saudi. They're usually get them from neighboring countries or from countries abroad. Just like if I'm talking about the creative industry, maybe the advertising or anything that has to do with creative or media it was never Saudi. But I think there has been a shift and I'd like to believe that Telfaz 11 had a big role in changing that and making sure that to kind of tap into local creativity and local creatives and make sure that to kind of leverage and to benefit from the people who are really good, who can do it really well.

So now the trend is or you're seeing a lot of companies going to local creatives or Saudi creatives instead of foreign. So you're starting to see a lot of local agencies and local creative, boutique agencies are starting to pop up and they're doing really great work for these brands that you're seeing more and more international brands going to them instead of the international creative agencies. Just because of the unfair advantage that we have is that local insight.

Amjad Ahmad: Do you feel like the talent pipeline has become more robust now that there's a professional outlet for creativity is that what's happening?

Alaa Fadan: I think it's on its way there still. There is a lot of are tapping into a lot of talents and these companies are tapping into a lot of local creative talents. But I think there's still a little way to go for us to say this and for us to kind of claim that there's professional robustness. I think...

Amjad Ahmad: What needs to happen, in your opinion, for that pipeline to improve?

Alaa Fadan: I think it's time more trust; hiring more and more of these creative agencies, relying more on local companies and local creatives on doing big business.

Amjad Ahmad: Is there an educational angle to this?

Alaa Fadan: Absolutely, and that's what I was about to say, is kind of working on making sure that transfer of knowledge from the experts around the world, facilitating that colleges and universities and degrees and in these areas, all kinds of workshops that kind of help that. But I think mostly it's actually getting to work with these companies and giving them a chance, because that's really what happened with Telfaz 11. We kind of proved ourselves just because we were able to build an audience and become tastemakers in terms of content. So we attracted the clients and the brands to work with us because we did have a case of building audience and being tastemakers. But I think local companies; not all of them had the privilege of what we had and building an audience. They are in different businesses. So I think they need to be given a chance whether start with them with smaller projects or actually bigger companies, just focusing on just working with local companies and I think that will kind of accelerate things.

Amjad Ahmad: Well, what do you think can be done to sort of motivate companies, government to work more with local talent? Is there something that can be done to sort of incentivize that kind of approach?

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Alaa Fadan: Well I think from locally or from my angle, for example, for us, if we're filmmakers or if we're content producers, there should be an incentive, for example, exhibitors to kind of showcase more and more local films. So whether it's in tax breaks there's a mandate on them that you need to have a certain percentage of your output or your viewing as local. And that type of stuff will help the local industry and maybe stuff like that could extend to other industries as well.

Amjad Ahmad: Do you feel that today, the mindset and maybe specifically here, the government mindset in terms of the creative and arts, let's say industry; do you feel like

from an educational side that they're investing behind that to create sort of vertical and creative arts? Is that something that they're paying attention to?

Alaa Fadan: Oh, absolutely. I think so and I'm starting to see a lot of kids coming back from scholarships in this industry and filmmaking. So in the past when I went to school, it wasn't; it was kind of almost impossible to get these kinds of degrees. But now I'm starting to see...

Amjad Ahmad: Well, correct me if I'm wrong, but a lot of the governments actually would not support arts degrees outside in many cases.

Alaa Fadan: Absolutely, and now I have people on the team that actually went on scholarships for filmmaking or producing and that's fantastic. That's the stuff that we need. Again, getting that expertise and bringing it here and we're starting to apply it.

Amjad Ahmad: What do you see in terms of the talent on the women's side? Do you see a lot of women starting to engage more in the arts and creative? There are a lot of initiatives today in Saudi that have been very positive in terms of advancing women's participation in the economy. What is Telfaz seeing? Are you seeing this in real time?

Alaa Fadan: Absolutely. We've definitely seen it last real time and we've come a long way since we started. That was one of the major pain points in Telfaz and in all honesty, that pain point is reflected in our content. So if you look at our older content, you would hardly see any female representation that even though they are 50% of the population and they also watch our content. But it was really hard for us to get female talent to in media and I think that's not just Saudi, but I think in Saudi especially it was. Especially like in the past, media was kind of taboo and it was a big part of what we were trying to normalize that media isn't taboo. You can still work in media and do a great job and kind of activate this local creative economy and have people working it as full time jobs. And throughout the years, we're starting to see more and more females coming into the industry and for us it was always important for us today at Telfaz maybe 50% of our leadership is female. So that's something we're very proud of. We have female producers, which is great and it's really a product of us really realizing that our content was very masculine and that needed to change. But it was not going to be just because we didn't have any other choice. It was very difficult for us.

Amjad Ahmad: And as you said, 50% of the populations are women, it made business sense; female content and women producers and so on and so forth.

Alaa Fadan: Absolutely, I do see it. I do see it in real time, like in Telfaz outside for sure.

Amjad Ahmad: And as you look at sort of just focusing more on, you went through a process of raising money and going to the venture capital industry and so on and so forth, what do you see from that side? Have things improved from when you started? STV is a big investor and we just had them on to one of our panels.

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How do you see that financing space? We hear a lot about initiatives coming out to support entrepreneurship, but what are you seeing on the ground?

Alaa Fadan: Yeah, what we did with Telfaz, we were one of the first companies to kind of take that route and we also take pride in that and one of the first very visible in public companies that public not publicly traded, but publicly people like follow and are very interested in their news to go that route and fundraising with STV. I think we were the first kind of deal with STV, which was a big news. So I think we kind of bootstrapped for seven, eight years before we even thought about raising around and then on and then in 2018, we decided, okay, it's time for us to put some rocket fuel into the ship so we can start and finding strategic partners and all that. So STV was one of them. VSQ played a really big part in that as well, VentureSouq. Ever since then, I think in terms of capital, I don't think there's has been capital itself hasn't been an issue. There's a lot of money, thank God in the region. But I think we still have some ways to go in terms of the VC kind of ecosystem and kind of supporting the entrepreneurs and the companies. I think we're not as mature as I guess other markets yet. But at the same time, I think there's a lot of interest and thankfully, I think there's a lot of capital. There's a lot of money in the region.

Amjad Ahmad: Do you see entrepreneurship and more Saudis starting companies today, is that sort of becoming a viable career alternative?

Alaa Fadan: Absolutely, like I said, when we started that was kind of to us it was amazing to me how many entrepreneurs came to me, who came to us in general and they said, I've been watching you for seven years. And when that happened, it really inspired me that, okay, this could happen and it inspired me to start my business, inspired me to think of my business like that. And in the past, I think most of the businesses and the people who are business owners in Saudi didn't think of startups this way. They were thinking more about real estate, that type of stuff, opening shops or restaurants.

But now they're starting to think about entrepreneurship differently and that they can really think about it as, okay, I can start a business, I can create value, and then I can have investors back me up. And when Telfaz happened, we did have a lot of people come to us and they said, "You guys, you inspired us to continue and we didn't even know we can take that route." So there was a lot of awareness that happened. I'd like to say it was intentional, but it was something that thankfully, just because Telfaz 11 and STV were so visible that the news kind of traveled.

And so as we continued to do stuff like that, raising money and make a deal after deal like the Netflix deal or the movie deal, that stuff has become more visible, especially with our penetration social media and people are being very, very active in social media and having access to news. I think it did kind of inspire people to kind of pursue entrepreneurship.

Amjad Ahmad: I don't think this point should be underestimated. I mean, one of the things that we focus heavily on empower Middle East at the Atlantic Council is this, is showing role models. I think our youth need to see these successful role models because they think I can do it. So I think the more success stories we have like Telfaz, the more you'll see entrepreneurs sprouting up and coming up and trying to do things. So I think it's very powerful to have role models and we need that across the region.

Alaa Fadan: Yeah. And I don't want to say that we're role models, but we're trying, we're lucky enough to have created something that does generate interest. And we have a great team, that are very forward looking, very creative.

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And we get to meet a lot of people in the industry, we're lucky about that. We have a lot of interest and work with a lot of forward thinking people that kind of help us with navigating the ecosystem and this whole environment of building a company and kind of maneuvering in this region and building a company in this region. So we're very thankful for that. And we say that we got to represent, we have to represent, we have to represent Saudi entrepreneurs, Saudi content, and the Saudi people, and especially when we're talking about content and what people see in Saudi creativity and kind of go back to really what we're trying to do is be creative culture, catalysts and kind of tap and build this whole industry that was kind of nonexistent 10 years ago this local creative economy and kind of build it and kind of trailblazer and lead the way.

Amjad Ahmad: If you hit on one or two big observations that you're noticing about the culture change in Saudi these past few years, what would that be?

Alaa Fadan: Are you talking business or just culture?

Amjad Ahmad: No, I'm talking more culture. You feel there's something brewing, there's a change. What are those big observations that you've seen? I mean, you're sort of the eyes to this culture. We're peering through you and a lot of your content about the culture.

Alaa Fadan: Yeah, I'm seeing a lot of excitement in people out there in terms of business. They're out there. They're creating businesses. They're socializing. They're meeting up. They're going out there. They're going out to new restaurants. They're finding new entertainment venues. I see a lot more socializing between people which is great. Honestly, I see a lot more female representation in businesses. I see that a lot more now, which is great in the workforce.

I was just talking about this like about an hour ago with a couple of guys, you can tap into like Clubhouse. I'm sure you've heard of it. It kind of really gauge where the Saudi people are at from what they're talking about. And they have a lot to talk about. And there's so much excitement in there. There's a lot of VC talk. There's a lot of entertainment talk. There's a lot of just messing around and comedy and just having fun together. There's a lot of topics.

I see there's a lot of content personally. There's a lot of content that can still come out from Saudi. And that's what I'm really excited about. The stories that will come out from here that are really special from the area and especially from Saudi.

Amjad Ahmad: I think we have to mention the pandemic and we've seen an acceleration of digital all over the world, and I'm sure you've experienced the same. What has it done, particularly for Telfaz, in your opinion? What change have you seen or what acceleration have you seen due to this pandemic?

Alaa Fadan: Well, the silver lining that came out of the pandemic, it kind of accelerated the move from traditional media to more digital media.

Amjad Ahmad: Yes, I think we should note that in the region particularly was very sticky, the traditional media, people are still spending a lot of money on newspapers and TV.

Alaa Fadan: And when we first started 10 years ago, we thought it would be faster, but it was very sticky. They really stuck around. But the pandemic came and I think it kind of

accelerated that whole process, that inevitable process that everybody knew it will come one day, but it made it much faster. But at the same time, that the silver lining for us, it's a really good time for us.

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It's a really good time to be in content in general. And content is very sought after and that's how everybody's looking for content. So when the pandemic hit, platforms like Netflix, they just skyrocketed and the kind of demand and they did really well. So they're starting to look for more and more content to kind of cater to all the demand that they had. So they started to coming to Saudi. They started to come into regions like Saudi. And it was good news for us when you have, like, big demand like that for content from different platforms. And I'm not just talking about Netflix, I'm talking about even local platforms, local venues.

Amjad Ahmad: Do you see more international players sort of approaching you these days about Saudi specific content.

Alaa Fadan: 100%. I see them coming because, it's just like Netflix, for them to sustain, they can't just stay in the states anymore. And I think that's the case with all the other platforms. If you're talking, Amazon, HBO, Disney, all of the above, it's not just about the states anymore. We live in a world and they realized that. And for them to sustain, they need to go and kind of go after these different regions. And I think Netflix was very fast and they realized that really quickly and they realized, okay, for us to really sustain and kind of continue to dominate, we need to go into these different regions. And that's one of the main reasons they came to Saudi and talked to us. And they're like, okay, Saudi is an important region for us or is important market for us and we need to start investing here. And I see the same thing happening with all other international platforms.

Amjad Ahmad: I mean, we know Disney is expanding, we know Amazon is expanding as well as others. So, I think you're very well placed to sort of capture a lot of that growth that's going to come in.

Alaa Fadan: Absolutely. And I think, it becomes who can come here and kind of capture this market. Netflix has an early mover advantage. They know they're here and they're starting to invest in the region, but the market is still really big for Netflix and for Amazon and for everybody else to come in. And, yeah, I'm really excited. I'm really excited about this space.

Amjad Ahmad: Where do you see this going? Where do you see Telfaz in five years given all of this acceleration, streaming, movies, you're doing other things, where do you see Telfaz?

Alaa Fadan: Yeah, for us and like I said, I'm really excited about the space. And I see Telfaz being the definitive modern content creator in our media company in the region and hopefully in the world. And I think one of the opportunities that we need to get into and we need to focus on now that we know that we can get into feature films and long form content with Netflix and with movies. And that's something that's very exciting for Saudis specifically, maybe not the whole world, but Saudi. But also because we started in digital, we're sitting on millions and millions of data points.

All the interactions with all our fans and the engagement. So there's a lot of information there or data there that we can utilize to kind of take our content creation to the next level

and going into more data driven decisions and data driven content creation. So I think that's where we could head in the future, along with all the big opportunities are coming from the big platforms.

Amjad Ahmad: And do you see your audience expanding regionally and even global?

Alaa Fadan: Absolutely. I mean, like I said, today we're in Saudi and we're watching Korean films and Spanish and French series. Why not? I think they're amazing and interesting stories that are come out from Saudi. And I really do believe that we can create content that travels outside of Saudi.

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Saudi hasn't been really known for making content that travels. But today, I think we have if it's if we're enabled and if we have the resources, we can we can create amazing, amazing content that's consumed regionally and hopefully further.

Amjad Ahmad: Well, I can't wait to see you in the Oscars one day.

Alaa Fadan: From your mouth to God's ears a lot.

Amjad Ahmad: Alaa, thank you so much. This has been fantastic. And I know you said you don't want to be a role model, but you are. And you're really giving a lot of inspiration to younger as well as older people who are very creative. So thanks again. And please keep us posted on your rise.

Alaa Fadan: I appreciate it Amjad. Will do.

Amjad Ahmad: Thanks for listening. If you like what you heard, please subscribe to EmpowerMe Conversations on your favorite podcast platform and please tell your friends about it. For updates on our work, follow Atlantic Council's Rafik Hariri Center and Middle East Initiative on LinkedIn and @ACMideast on Twitter. You can also visit www.AtlanticCouncil.org and click sign up to receive email alerts about the work of the EmpowerMe Initiative. See you next episode.