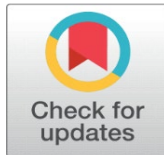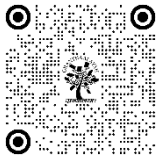# THE DICHOTOMY OF DOORS: AN ANALYSIS OF "C U SOON"

A.K. Gopika [1] ✉ iD, Devi K. [2] ✉ iD

[1] P. G. Student, M. A. English Literature, Department of English Language and Literature, Amrita School of Arts, Humanities and Commerce, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Kochi Campus, India
[2] Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Amrita School of Arts, Humanities and Commerce, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Kochi Campus, India

ABSTRACT

Media and Entertainment Industry (M&E) has numerous slices that combine into one whole. The M&E industry consists of movies, radio, music, advertising, artificial intelligence, internet, gaming etc.... It is one of the fastest-growing industries in India and the World in general. It is an industry shaped according to the needs and demands of the viewers or consumers. A contemporary consumer not only checks on their demand fulfilment but also keenly looks upon the layout in which the media presents itself to suit their tastes and preferences. This industry is also heavily weighed upon for its quality, culture, markets, and emotional and cognitive approaches.

The COVID-19 Pandemic impacted the media and entertainment industry in multiple ways. The pandemic led to the temporary shutdown of movie theatres and production houses that in turn affected their box office collection. The pandemic led to the emergence of video entertainment platforms such as Amazon Prime, Netflix, Hulu etc...

The paper highlights how the pandemic opened doors for experimentation in film production and making in Kerala. It analyses the Malayalam Film Industry"s first computer screen film "C U SOON" directed by editor-turned-director Mahesh Narayanan.

Keywords: Screen-Life, Chamber Films, Computer-Screen Film, GoPro Cinematography

1. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Anna Vetticaud, in her journal post in "Indian Express" states that "C U Soon" was filmed following all COVID-related safety standards in effect in Kerala during the lockdown, according to notes on screen at the beginning of the movie. Intelligent filmmakers around the world have to figure out a method to develop full-length features while the Coronavirus pandemic kept most of us confined to our homes. It is assumed that this Indian filmmaker comes from Mollywood given that Malayalam cinema has recently experienced a golden age of experimentation. Since the start of

the Internet era, a few select filmmakers have been experimenting with the desktop genre, sometimes known as the computer screen genre. C U Soon is unique because it was inspired by the current real-life health issue. It takes great talent to match a topic to a framework that is in harmony with the current restrictions on actor mobility. Team C U Soon is deserving of praise just for this. But the movie is much more than just an original concept—it is simply excellent storytelling. Cibil (2020)

Sanjith Sidhardhan, in his "E-Times entertainment news portal posts "C U SOON Review: This Gripping Film Will Keep You Glued to Screens" points out that Mahesh's mastery at storytelling is evident from how he keeps the audience guessing throughout the film, which is an intensive experiment tackling an intense subject. The filmmaker, who is also credited as the virtual choreographer, doesn't get too caught up with using all aspects of technology that he could have and instead keeps it minimal while focusing on letting the story unfold screen by screen. Despite being a screen-based film that is shot mostly indoors, the actors and the way the scenes are filmed add to the tension-filled atmosphere that keep the viewer's attention from wavering. The central narrative digresses only when Mahesh plugs small details about his characters – such as Jimmy already being in trouble with the law, the reasons for Kevin being abrasive or Anu's look of disbelief and shock in certain scenes. The denouement especially works for all these reasons as each character goes through a full circle of emotions or in some situations, Anu's expression of shock and amazement. For each of these causes, the denouement—where each character experiences a whole range of emotions—works particularly well. Sidhardhan (2020)

The literature review of my paper focusses on how various technicalities were closely employed in the making of the film. Mahesh Narayanan took on the burdensome work of authoring the narrative, editing, and virtual cinematography for the film, which was totally shot during the lockdown with a small 32-person crew. Mahesh also required a camera that he could use efficiently; the video was partially shot on an iPhone. He selected a 4K resolution camera and a selection of other tools for the job. Six rental apartments in Fahad's building served as the film's backdrops. As soon as the shoot began, the entire team moved in and stayed there for 22 days. In terms of lighting, the video call screen's natural light provides 50% of the work, and the remaining 50% is provided by the amount of grain in the video. Through virtual tools, all of the characters could communicate. Litty (2020)

My paper delves deeply as to how much technicalities have been of crucial use in the making of the film that created a landmark in the history of Malayalam cinema.

2. OVERVIEW OF "C U SOON"

An experimental film of editor-turned-director Mahesh Narayanan, the movie talks about the life of Jimmy (played by Roshan Mathew) who works as a client executive in A UAE-based bank. He falls in love with Anu (played by Darshana Rajendran) via a dating app. Their relationship quickly expands, and they start video calling regularly through Hangouts and Google Duo. Though have "t never met once, Jimmy takes a step forward by introducing Anu to his mother. Her mother seeks the help of Jimmy"s cousin and tech wizard Kevin (played by Fahad Fazil) to find out more about Anu and her family background. Kevin who is not interested in doing it finds Anu"s details by tracking her IP address. Suspicious of Kevin"s new interest in another girl, his lover Sanjana plants a bug in Anu"s Facebook account to get her details which later helps Kevin to find the real truth about Anu. Migrator (2021)

Things take a new turn when Jimmy calls Kevin to inform him that Anu was beaten up by her father when he came to know about their affair. Jimmy takes Anu to his flat to get her treated as the latter sustained injuries. Later Jimmy meets Anu's father who apologizes for his behaviour and asks for Anu's phone number. The next day Jimmy finds Anu's suicide note mentioning that she has left Jimmy for good.

It is when Jimmy gets arrested that Kevin takes on the hunt behind Anu's true identity. Kevin hacks Anu's Facebook profile and understands that she came to Dubai on the pretext of a housemaid's job. On reaching Dubai, she realizes that she has been cheated and is forced into prostitution. The father that Anu used to talk about is a pimp who hires girls from India for the job of housemaids only to lure them later into prostitution. Kevin tells about this to Jimmy who already got to know that Anu was a call girl and is angry with him for not informing about this to him earlier. As the last resort to help Jimmy, Kevin tracks down Anu's whereabouts and understands that her last location was the Indian Consulate General in Dubai. Kevin finds news live where he sees Anu reporting about the sex racket in Dubai and those who were involved in it. The traitors get caught and Anu is sent home safely. Jimmy's mother, who is sad and angry with what has happened to her son, calls him to US. Kevin gives Anu's number to Jimmy who says he still loves her. The movie ends on a happy note with the last words of Jimmy to Kevin "C U SOON". Gupta (2020)

3. MOTIVE BEHIND "C U SOON"

The movie was inspired by a morbid video sent by a trafficked girl to her parents from the Middle East. The director Mahesh Narayanan gets this video shared by a journalist friend of his who later shows it to Fahad Fazil.

When the Covid -19 pandemic took over all walks of industries, the film industry was no less. It is when Mollywood came to a standstill that Fahad got reminded of that video. He approached Mahesh if he could change that video to a movie line. When Narayanan first prepared the draft, it was just an hour-long movie. Soon he did a screen test shoot with Darshana and Roshan and later he asked his crew members for suggestions. It was after having their suggestions and with Fahad's decision to bankroll the movie that Mahesh completed the final draft of the film, and it came into existence later.

4. WHAT IS A COMPUTER SCREEN FILM?

Popularly known as "Screen life" or "Visual-Storytelling", it is a film format where all the events of the movie take place on a smartphone or a computer screen. This genre of filmmaking became famous during the 2010s which took place due to the booming impact of the internet.

Russian director and producer, Timur Bekmambetov was the first person to feature a computer screen film "Unfriended" in the year 2014." A computer screen film should take place on a particular screen with its events never going out of the screen space" screen life (2023). The camera work should look similar to a device camera. The actions should take place in reality without any visible changes and along with it; the sounds should also emerge from the computer itself.

In this form, a film will be set up in the backdrop of a computer screen where the files and folders that are displayed on the screen will serve as decorations. The cursor movement is what catches the viewer's attention. Vetticad (2020)

The peculiar difference between "normal films" and "screen life films" is its post-production i.e., the time required for its editing. Screen life editing takes six to nine months and is compensated by the shorter production time it takes.

There is software named "Screencast", that is also employed in making a screen life film. It refers to the digital recording of a screen output of a computer Screencast. (2023). Screencast is also known as "Screen Recording" which also performs narration and captions.

This software enhances "screen decoration". A GoPro camera is usually used by cinematographers to shoot a screen life as it is a cameraman who brings life to the film.

Though it was Timur Bekhmambetov who first took a full-length screen life film, even before him, there were a bunch of cinematographers who employed this genre in pseudo-documentary of found footage formats and mockumentary.

Bekmambetov can be rightly said as the "Father of Screen Life films". Other than the movie, "Unfriended", he produced the first TV series in 2019 named "Dead of Night" which dealt with the Zombie Apocalypse. The peculiarity of this series was that it could be viewed through Snapchat applications on Smartphones.

In 2018, Bekmambetov co-produced the first „screen life documentary" named "1968, Digital". Released in Russia, this vertical web series told the story of a 1968 real hero through a smartphone screen.

It was by the end of the 2020s that countries like India decided to step into screen life formats. Bekmambetov signed an agreement with Sharad Devarajan, co-founder of Graphic India Film company and with Reliance Entertainments to produce Indian-film in computer screen life format.

5. KEY TECHNIQUES USED IN VARIOUS COMPUTER SCREEN FILMS

1) "MEGAN IS MISSING"

Considered to be is one of the first computer screen films produced in the recent era. It is a 2011 American found-footage psychological horror film. Directed and edited by Michael Goi, this film was done at a low budget of 30-35,000 USD. The key highlight of this screen film was that the film never used any "motion picture or grip lighting equipment". The film intended to give a "raw" experience to the audience where even "sound equipments" were deliberately avoided. Megan is Missing. (2023)

2) "FACE 2 FACE"

Yet another milestone in the genre of computer screen films. A stand-alone teen drama film directed by Matt Toronto, the film discusses the lives of two childhood friends; Terrence Johnson and Madison Daniels who renew their friendship by talking about their respective lives just to escape from their teenage issues and also to get along with and understand the topics of "sexual identity and parent-adolescent incestuous abuse". The highlight of this film is that it was shot primarily on "GoPro" with the narrative taking place via video chat screencast using webcam and smartphone cameras. "GoPro Hero 4" was successfully employed to imitate the look of „Face-Time" chat, a typical feature of Apple iPhones and iPads. Toronto was against the idea of using movie cameras as the shots would get a smooth outlook. He reached out for a GoPro as it provided the film with a naturalist look. GoPro also oversaw manual settings, colour profiles and connectivity. "Weight" was an

important aspect that made Toronto go for this mode as it affected the gestures that the actors held on. Anderson (2018)

Kristoffer Carillo, Director of Photography stated that he made camera rigs from materials like "foam core and Velcro" that allowed him to get the camera in the correct place. He also lighted up every scene at a 360-degree angle as this angle did not require any sort of lighting throughout the journey of each scene. The actors were made to talk over a „real face time connection" placing them in different rooms while the GoPros obtained the shots. Toronto used the shortcomings of modern video calling for his purpose. He has put in „freeze frames" to give an impact of slow or reducing connectivity to the viewers.

3) "THOMAS IN LOVE"

A French Dramedy and one of the first feature films to take place on a computer screen space. The titular character, Thomas is an agoraphobic who doesn"t step out of his apartment for eight long years. His entire social life is presented to the audience through a computer screen. The film tries to assert the idea that computer technology is not entirely futuristic, it is just a continuation of the present-day chat rooms and vide streaming platforms. The greatest discovery unveiled through this film is a virtual "sex suit"; a cross between an "EKG Hook up and vibrator" which allows two people to have control of each other's bodies through the internet. Thomas wields this suit on his love interest, Melodie, a poet with whom he gets acquainted through a dating site. The movie gives dire ideas about the black world of online life and confusing situations in that Thomas gets trapped himself and how eagerly wants to escape it as well.

6. "C U SOON" AS A CHAMBER FILM

The definition states that it is a film that "involves small number of characters in a single or a couple of locations interacting for a short period of time" Babu (2020). To state some world classics; Ingmar Bergman"s "Glass Darkly". "Winter Light" and Roman Polanski"s "Carnage" fall under the category of "Chamber films". Notable film-maker Bergman derives his inspiration from Chamber Dramas which have their roots in classical chamber music.

"Chamber Music" can be rightly considered the origin of the present-day "Chamber Films". A small group of musicians conducted live performances in a palace chamber that later provided impetus for "Chamber Dramas" which took its shape in theatre plays that worked on a nominal plot where an entire play consisted of three acts with no changes taking place in the stage set-up. Similarly, Chamber films also employ less use of outdoor locations where the story takes its shape with minimum settings in a closed circle of space.

Iranian films have found a prestigious place across various film festivals for their making of extraordinary chamber films. Iranian filmmaker Ashghar Farhadi's family drama titled "A Separation" (2011) won the Academy Award under the category of best foreign language film. Farhadi's films are highly dramatic considering his evolution from theatre and then later to films. Kiarostami's "Ten" (2002) and Panah"s "Taxi" (2015) are some classic examples of this genre of films that have relied on movie cameras to encapsulate action that takes place inside a car and how different characters enter, get out and converse with each other in limited space of the car.

Shifting to the Indian context, R. Pathiban's National award-winning Tamil film "Otha Seruppu", Joy Mathew's Malayalam satire-thriller film "Shutter" and the Hindi

survival drama film titled "Trapped" by Vikramaditya Motwane are some noted films in this category.

The storyline of "C U Soon" is compressed under three locations: Jimmy's home, Kevin's bedroom, and Anu's bedroom. There are no significant changes made to the backdrop. The noises and atmosphere used are nominal. The main concentration is given to the conversations that take place through various chat and video-

calling apps. The viewer constantly gets to read the private chats of the main characters. Even phone conversations are also clearly listenable.

"Chamber films" and "Screen-based films" can be taken to be "two sides of the same coin" with peculiarity visible in the type of cinematography and editing techniques put to use by the latter.

7. "C U SOON" AS A COMPUTER SCREEN FILM

Inspired by the 2018 Hollywood film "Searching" directed by Aneesh Changanty where a father is trying to find his missing daughter, the only basic difference is that "Searching" is a predecessor of Screenlife i.e., it is found footage movie whereas "C U SOON" is the replica of a screen life format.

Shot entirely in the lockdown with a minimal 32-member crew, Mahesh Narayanan took the heavy task of writing the screenplay and editing and virtual cinematography. Shot partly on iPhone, Mahesh also needed a camera that he could put to use effectively. He chose a 4K resolution camera and a set of others to serve the purpose. The locations of the film were six rented flats in Fahad's building. The whole team moved in and lived there for 22 days till the shoot got over.

Talking about the lighting, half of the work is done by natural lighting from the video call screen; the rest was done by the amount of grain in the footage. All the characters communicated through virtual gadgets.

The movie intended to ensure that the audience did not get lost in the style of the movie. He wanted the viewers to get immersed in the story. According to directors, "Films must be entertaining and entertainment means engagement". So, to keep the viewers engaged, he broke the first phase into ten minutes, the second phase into the next ten minutes and so on. His idea was to make every phase absorbing and transport the audience smoothly to the next.

The most challenging job was "writing for the edit". The 65 pages final draft was developed from a thin line initially written to 40 pages. As a writer, Mahesh felt it was very tricky to narrate and fill the audience with backstories. There was a two-camera set-up which did not have any close-up shots. Mahesh

first had to recompose, reframe and the entire editing. That's where virtual cinematography played its role. He assembled all his actors in various apartments in a specific building. He did test shoots so that when one actor was doing his part, the person opposite could converse even though he was not part of the frame. Mahesh employed this technique as he could portray the escalated emotions of his characters.

As said earlier, since C U Soon was shot as an experimental one, the director did not intend to release the film in theatres. It was released through the OTT platform of Amazon Prime during the lockdown months of Covid 19 so that viewers could watch and enjoy the movie under safe conditions.

The ultimate aim of the movie was to knock on the basic human fears about technology and how much people's lives are made online and how it is impossible to locate what is real and what is fake.

8. CONCLUSION

"C U SOON" is a fascinating movie that studies how different people are in this era of social media. How well can we understand a person that we have met online and how different is a person online than how he is different in real life? The film puts forward all these queries and like all other typical media-related films ends on a note that "all social media is evil". In short, Mahesh Narayanan's "C U Soon" is a red light on the evil and ruthless world of social media.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

Anderson, T. (2018, March 14). Face 2 Face : The Award Winning Movie Shot on a GoPro. Retrieved February 28, 2023, From Tech Radar.

Babu, S. (2020, September 5th). C U Soon Indicates that Ideal Time to Explore Chamber Dramas and Screen-Based Drama. Retrieved February 28, 2023, From on Manorama.

Cibil, S. (2020, November 11). "C U Soon" New Ways of Digital Cinema.

Gupta, S. (2020, September 1). C U soon Review : A Satisfying, Moving Thriller. The Indian Express.

Litty, S. (2020, September 1). C U Soon Movie Review : A Reminder to Log in to the Real World. On Manorama.

Megan is Missing. (2023, February 11). Retrieved February 28, 2023, From Wikipedia.

Migrator. (2021, January 13). C U soon, My Favourite Malayalam Movie. Filmcompanion.

Screencast. (2023, February 16). Retrieved February 28, 2023, From Wikipedia.

Sidhardhan, S. (2020, August 31). C U Soon Review : This Gripping Film Will Keep You Glued to the Screens.

Vetticad, A. V M. (2020, September 1). C U Soon Movie Review : Fahadh Faasil & Friends Snatch Innovation from the Jaws of the Lockdown for a Clever Thriller-Entertainment News, Firstpost. Firstpost.