

# THE UNESCO Courier

April-June 2021



## THE 20s: REALLY THE BEST AGE TO BE?

**India's youth:** Hit hard by the pandemic  
**Influencers** make an impact on **young Africans**  
**The many lives of China's slash generation**  
**K-pop:** A cure for the pandemic blues

### IDEAS

**Conspiracy thinking:**  
The forces driving  
a global phenomenon



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## Editorial

Being young can be exciting and fun, but it is always challenging. Completing your studies, finding a job, finding somewhere to live – in short, taking the first steps of the rest of your life. If it was not easy before the Covid-19 pandemic, it is all the more difficult during this time. Besides all the uncertainty, the health crisis has affected young people's social lives and prevented them from developing a network of friends and support that are vital to their well-being.

The impact has been experienced at many levels. One is the disruption in their learning pathways. Nearly three-quarters of 8- to 19-year-olds who were studying before the pandemic, experienced school closures – with thirteen per cent left without any access to courses, teachers or learning at all, because of gaps in online and distance learning. We have seen reductions in the funding of education, and the gaps will remain for years to come.

Besides education, employment has suffered too, with 8.7 per cent of young workers dropping out of the labour market.

All this has had a deep impact on young people's mental health as well. Figures for the United States show that almost two-thirds of young adults have symptoms of psychological problems – with twenty-five per cent reporting increased substance use to deal with the stress of the pandemic, and twenty-five per cent saying they'd considered suicide.

In spite of the grim picture, I am hopeful that young people have the resilience and the vision to come out stronger from the crisis. Today, as in the past, young people are willing to fight to change things. They do not accept the increased inequalities of income and opportunities. They are at the vanguard of environmental campaigns. They promote solidarity and support for the most vulnerable. They are willing to risk their all to defend democracy. They are the driving force behind many social movements.

I observe it first-hand every day here at UNESCO, where young people's enthusiasm and intelligence are helping to find solutions – not just for themselves, but, as in other campaigns, for all of us.

As we start to repair the damage of the pandemic and the policies that made it worse, let's engage with youth, and for youth, to build a better world for us all in the years to come.

**Gabriela Ramos**

Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences, UNESCO

WIDE ANGLE

# The 20s: Really the best age to be?



## Agnès Bardón

UNESCO

**“I was 20. I won’t let anyone say those are the best years of your life.”** This phrase of French writer Paul Nizan (1905-1940) has a striking resonance today, one year after the Covid-19 pandemic – and the unprecedented constraints on freedom that came with it – started.

What does it mean to be 20 years old in a world where travel is restricted, learning is at a distance, relationships and friendships are blocked, and professional horizons are blurred? At the age when connections with the world and with others are being forged, the under-25s – who represent nearly forty per cent of the world’s population – are seeing their dreams being seriously dented by the health crisis.

As early as April 2020, a report from the International Labour Organization (ILO), *Youth & COVID-19: Impacts on jobs, education, rights and mental well-being*, found “the impact of the pandemic on young people to be systematic, deep and disproportionate. It has been particularly hard on young women, younger youth and youth in lower-income countries.” Not surprisingly, the report – which surveyed 12,000 young people from 112 countries – also highlights their concerns about their future and their place in society.

It is true that employment prospects have become much gloomier as the crisis has dragged on. While the pandemic has affected all employees worldwide, 18- to 25-year-olds have been harder hit economically than their elders. According to figures published by the ILO in January 2021, global job losses for adults caused by the pandemic are 3.7 per cent – but 8.7 per cent, almost triple that number, for young people.

This anxiety-provoking situation, combined with feelings of isolation, insecurity, and the lack of short-term prospects, has put a strain on the mental health of under-25s.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, a recent poll of young people revealed that over a quarter of them felt anxious, while fifteen per cent said they were depressed (UNICEF U-Report).

**S**o, will the pre-crisis Generation Z become the sacrificed generation? It’s not clear. Although it is too early to predict the effects of the pandemic on the lives of the very young, it is already apparent that – in spite of the constraints imposed by life under the crisis – they are showing real resilience. Everywhere, they have started initiatives aimed at providing responses to the crisis – dealing with the emergency, fighting misinformation, and joining together in solidarity – as reflected in the UNESCO campaign *My Covid-19 Story* #YouthOfUNESCO, launched in April 2020.

During this ordeal, social networks and the internet – the indisputable markers of this hyper-connected generation – have enabled these “digital children” to create links, make their voices heard, and to serve as sounding boards for their anger and frustrations. But it has also fuelled their creativity and commitment – in particular, for the protection of the environment and the fight against climate warming, which top their list of concerns, along with the fight against racial and sexist discrimination.

It is certainly too early to distinguish between changes brought about by the crisis, and the trends that were already underway. But by demanding a fairer and more environmentally respectful world, today’s youth already have one foot firmly planted in the world after the pandemic. ■

## Young researchers analyse the pandemic

Young people are in the best position to understand and analyse what they have been going through since the health crisis started. This was the idea behind UNESCO’s Youth As Researchers (YAR) global initiative to explore the impact of Covid-19 on young people. Conceived by UNESCO, the National University of Ireland, Galway, and the Pennsylvania State University in the United States, the youth-led research initiative was officially launched on 4 December 2020.

The programme, which brings together some 270 volunteers between 18 and 35, invites young researchers to engage with the United Nations, universities and civil society. Together, they will help generate knowledge about how Covid-19 has affected the lives of young people – in the areas of well-being, learning, youth-led action, human rights, and the use of technology.

The aim is to collect and analyse data to find solutions to combat the effects of Covid-19 on young people. The YAR initiative includes training opportunities for participants, and advice and mentoring during the research process.

The data collected will be used to contribute to the implementation of measures to alleviate the problems caused by the pandemic, and to promote the adaptation of public policies in favour of youth at national and local levels. Forty teams are currently working on the programme, the results of which will be made public at the end of June 2021.

# India's youth: Hit hard by the pandemic

Soaring unemployment, distance learning in conditions that are often difficult, feelings of isolation, a return to domestic work for girls from disadvantaged backgrounds. In a country where almost half the population is under 25, young people are paying a disproportionately heavy price during the health crisis.

## Sébastien Farcis

Correspondent for India and South Asia, *Radio France Internationale*, based in New Delhi.

**T**he year 2020 had started well for Gaurav – in February, he was hired as a salesman in a sports shop in the Pul Bangash area of Old Delhi. It was the first job for this 20-year-old amateur boxer who had left school early.

But the coronavirus epidemic brought all this to a brutal end. “Public transport became less frequent, and then stopped completely,” Gaurav recalls. “I couldn’t afford to take a taxi to work every day, so I had to quit.” In any case, he would not have been able to keep his job because of the strict lockdown imposed from 25 March that year. This paralysed the Indian economy for over six months, and shattered the dreams of many young people.

India has one of the youngest populations in the world. Over 600 million people, or almost one Indian in two, are under 25. And, like Gaurav, many are now finding it hard to enter the labour market. According to projections based on the latest census in 2011, 11.5 per cent of the Indian population, or 157.7 million people, are between 18 and 23. This inexperienced

workforce is most at risk in the event of an economic downturn.

### Urban youth on the front line

The crisis caused by the pandemic is the most serious ever recorded since the country’s independence in 1947. India’s gross domestic product (GDP) fell by 8.5 per cent in the 2020-2021 fiscal year. According to a three-year survey of 170,000 households by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, 41.2 per cent of those surveyed had lost their jobs between December 2019 and April 2020.

This figure rises to 58.5 per cent for young people aged 15 to 24. “Urban youth have been much more affected than rural youth,” says Paaritosh Nath, a research fellow

at the Centre for Sustainable Employment, Azim Premji University, in Bangalore. “The agricultural sector has continued to function, and the guaranteed public employment programme in rural areas has made it possible to offer work to more people there. But such a programme does not exist in the cities, except in a few states.”

The lockdown has also delayed the path to economic independence for young Indian women, like Shabri, a high-school graduate from a New Delhi slum. In December 2019, she began vocational training with the Life Project 4 Youth Alliance (LP4Y). She had a difficult time returning to her family during the lockdown. “We went to my grandparents’ house in rural Bihar [a state in the country’s east], where I had to do all the household chores,” says the 24-year-old, squinting over a face mask. But the ordeal has only increased her motivation. While her father was slowly resuming his business as a tea vendor, Shabri returned to her studies.

The LP4Y NGO has become a lifeline for 17- to 24-year-olds affected by the pandemic. But before it could resume its activities after the lockdown, its volunteer staff had to restore their premises, which had been devastated by the monsoon. “In September, when we were allowed to reopen, all the balconies outside our offices were covered

“  
**The pandemic has  
caused millions  
of students  
to interrupt  
their studies**



▼ *Shabri (seated, with a mask), finishes her training at the Life Project 4 Youth Alliance centre in New Delhi, after an interruption of more than nine months due to the lockdown.*

in mud,” says Romain Butticker, manager of the Paharganj centre, which is spread over three cramped floors of a building in this working-class district of Old Delhi.

After considerable efforts to contact the participants, around thirty trainees found their way back to the centre in December. “The epidemic has been a disaster for these young people. They come from the slums, where six or seven people sometimes share a single room,” Butticker says. “Before the lockdown, they were studying, and had a future to look forward to. And then, all of a sudden, everything stopped.” They came back worn-out, but also very eager to make it through.

## Courses by phone

Students have also borne the full force of this crisis. For the quarter of young Indians who attend university, classes became virtual during lockdown. While the transition to distance learning has gone fairly smoothly for students at private colleges, it has been more difficult for those attending public universities, and for students who are less fortunate or live outside major urban centres. “All our courses were delivered by voicemail on WhatsApp,” says Munazza, who was completing a master’s degree in English at the Jamia Millia Islamia Public

University in New Delhi, at the time. “It was the only way that students like me who had returned to our homes in Kashmir [a northern Indian state] could continue their studies.”

The pandemic has also increased social inequalities, and caused millions of students to interrupt their studies. In the Mysore region in the country’s south, for example, forty-three per cent of students in public

universities were no longer following their bachelor’s degree courses in December 2020. The drop-out rate for girls has been as high as sixty-five per cent. “Hit by the crisis, many parents have preferred to marry off their daughters,” explains sociologist and feminist writer and activist Manjima Bhattacharjya.

Students who have managed to continue their studies often suffer from a sense of isolation. When Munazza’s roommates left during lockdown, the 24-year-old found herself alone in New Delhi. “After they left, I found it hard to keep studying. Even cooking was an effort,” she recalls. Her hopes of finding a skilled and well-paid job have also receded. “I was offered three hours of work a day for less than what a taxi driver earns,” she complained. “Why study for an extra five years if that is the case?”

Munazza managed to bounce back, by joining the students who helped feed the thousands of migrant workers from rural areas who had lost their jobs in the city, and could not return to the countryside because of a lack of transport.

Finally graduating in June 2020, Munazza now plans to enrol her thesis for further studies. But universities that are still in lockdown, or have inadequate staff, could take months to release the registration forms. The year of crisis has not just been negative for her. It has helped her become more mature and get to know herself better, she admits. “I’m a person who worries by nature. I now realize that if I stay calm, everything will be okay.” ■

## UNESCO warns of a generational catastrophe

In the year since the pandemic started, schooling was disrupted for an average of twenty-five weeks, due to complete or partial school closures. As a result, over 100 million more children will not be able to read or write properly. In fact, 584 million children do not have basic reading skills, an increase of over twenty per cent in a year.

These are the findings of a UNESCO Institute for Statistics report published in March 2021. It points out that the highest learning losses are in the Latin America and Caribbean region, and Central and Southern Asia. Even more concerning is the fact that it could take a decade to return to the situation before the pandemic, the study notes. But there could be a recovery by 2024 if exceptional efforts are made to provide remedial classes and catch-up strategies.

These concerns were the focus of a ministerial meeting convened by UNESCO on 29 March 2021. Called *One Year into COVID: Prioritizing education recovery to avoid a generational catastrophe*, the meeting reiterated how crucial it is to support continuity of learning in a context where sixty-five per cent of governments in low-income countries have already cut funding for education. While fiscal measures could inject more resources into education, UNESCO calculates that only two per cent is earmarked for education in fiscal stimulation packages.

# Anne Muxel: “The pandemic is an opportunity for young people to search for meaning”

Is Generation Z inward-looking and not interested in politics?

This is a common misconception, says French sociologist and political scientist Anne Muxel. The Director of Research at CNRS, the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CEVIPOF-Sciences Po) – who specializes in the relationship between young people and politics – describes a generation that is committed and resilient, as it lives through the pandemic.

Interview by **Laetitia Kaci**

UNESCO

● **How do we define the concept of generations?**

From a demographic point of view, a generation is a group of individuals born in the same period, marked by the same social and historical context. This is an objective fact. However, the feeling of belonging to a generation, of shared experience, of common identity, is a more complex reality. Depending on the status of individuals in society, their culture, their experience and their living conditions, this notion of belonging can indeed be questioned.

It is generally an event, or a set of circumstances, that make it possible to identify a common reference point for individuals from different social backgrounds. This presumes the existence of historical and socio-cultural markers in which this age group fits. In this respect, we talk about the May 1968 generation in France, or the generation of the Algerian war [1954-1962].

● **In your opinion, what are the markers that characterize the generation of under-25s known as Generation Z?**

It's not easy to define them. The concept of generation must be handled with care, as it covers a variety of individual experiences and different ways of being part of society.

Youth is a pivotal time in life, when experiences that influence the future, and the subsequent course of an individual, are fixed. In this respect, the experiences gained during this period are foundational. We can therefore legitimately believe that the socio-economic crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic will have a lasting impact on Generation Z – which some people are already calling

the Covid generation. Although all age groups are exposed to these events, this generation will be more affected, because they occurred at the time of their entry into adulthood.

● **Some say that Gen Z is not politicized. Yet, following the lead of personalities like Greta Thunberg in Sweden, Iris Duquesne in France, or Leah Namugerwa in Uganda, tens of thousands of young people around the world are mobilizing to defend the planet. How do you explain this paradox?**

From my point of view, young people are politicized. I would even say they tend to be more mobilized than their elders. They are more interested in social issues such as environmental protection, social justice and human rights.

But their mobilization does not necessarily go through the traditional political channels – whether through elections or the membership of a political party or union. Today, young people prefer other forms of citizen participation, such as demonstrations, petitions, boycotts or collective mobilizations on social networks.

“

**The idea that young people are huddled together and indifferent is not correct**



© Portia Crowe

▼ Leah Namugerwa, the Ugandan climate activist who is now 16, marches through Ggaba Beach in Kampala, to mark a global climate strike in November 2019.

Numerous studies show that their involvement in volunteering has actually increased in recent years, and that their interest in politics has not waned. Therefore the idea that young people are huddled together and indifferent to the general interest is not correct.

Greta Thunberg is a good example. From an individual commitment – which took the form of a school strike – this young girl was able to raise the awareness of young people all over the world, and mobilize them through the climate marches.

● **Citizens' movements have always existed. How are they different today?**

Many social transformation movements have involved demonstrations and petitions. These are indeed means of expression and democratic practices that have existed for a long time. But this culture of protest, which has spread widely, has gained legitimacy – particularly among young people, who have taken it up in large numbers. Previously, these actions were perceived as protests. Today, they are considered the living heart of democracies, and have spread to other segments of society.

● **What role does digital media play in mobilizing youth today?**

Young people are entering the workforce with these new communication tools that have changed their relationship to civic and political life. In terms of mobilization, these tools have a multiplier effect, and offer young people a wider possibility to express themselves – whether in their personal, professional, cultural, or political life.

Social networks have become conduits for politicization that allow young people to join and defend a cause. These channels can no longer be ignored. In fact, today we see more and more political leaders addressing young people via these networks.

● **Is it fair to call young people today the sacrificed generation?**

This is indeed the image that society gives them. But in the face of the ordeals they are confronted with, they are developing a real capacity for resilience and adaptation.

This young generation is characterized by having grown up in an era marked by multiple crises – whether health, economic or environmental. Moreover, the pandemic has imposed restrictions on young people's freedoms that they were not accustomed to. It has also confronted them brutally with questions of our vulnerability and our finiteness, which can generate anxiety.

But the current health crisis is also an opportunity for them to become more aware, and to search for meaning. This is a generation that will have to find a balance between their personal life, ecological and technological challenges, and scientific progress. It is also a generation that is confident in its ability to overcome these crises. Indeed, the experience that young people are living today could lead to new and promising democratic expectations. ■

# Generation Greta

For the new generation, changing the world means saving the planet, above all. They are proclaiming this loud and clear – on social networks, in the streets or through civic disobedience movements, such as school strikes. The scale of the worldwide mobilization of under-25s is commensurate with the urgency of the environmental challenges we face.

## Anna Turns

An environmental journalist based in Devon, United Kingdom, she teaches journalism at Plymouth Marjon University.

Since she first sat down in front of the Swedish parliament in August 2018 and went on strike from school to raise awareness about the climate crisis, Greta Thunberg, 18, has galvanized millions of followers around the globe. Today, the youth climate movement is considered by many to be a loud and unified voice – which has found a tremendous resonance around the world among Generation Z, born after 1995.

Fifteen-year-old Holly Gillibrand has been striking from her school in Fort William, Scotland, every Friday since January 2019. “It’s all about rebellion – this sort of civil disobedience will change everything. We need more people, adults and children, demanding change and rebelling against the system that’s caused this crisis,” explains Gillibrand, who volunteers for the global climate movement Fridays for Future, started by Thunberg.

“We’re all working together for a common goal, to create a different future, and that brings me hope, but it’s frustrating

“

**We need more people demanding change**

when adults tell me what I’m doing is great – then don’t actually do anything about it themselves.”

While youth activists play a key role in amplifying the call for a step change, Gillibrand knows there isn’t time to wait for the youth of today to become the leaders of tomorrow. “It’s important that young people understand they can change something right now – we can be a powerful influence on parents who vote, or connect with other people concerned about the same things,” she insists.

## A collective experience

For Gillibrand and many others, the fight against climate change is a collective experience. Global strikes give individuals a sense of agency, and a feeling that they’re part of something much bigger than themselves. This leads to connection, and ultimately more potential for change, according to professional climate coach Charly Cox.

Based in Oxford, she helps people to transition into greener careers. “Isolation is a massive threat to any activism, and young people tend to congregate en masse at school or university, so they can share their vulnerabilities and work together,” says Cox, who feels that the

whole system is moving towards a new paradigm, and that there’s a sense of readiness for change. “As parents and young people, we have a very defined stake in the future, and the pandemic has given us a massive imaginative capacity that we didn’t have previously, to consider new possibilities. Now, I think the activist voices are chiming with the shift in beliefs in the general system.”

So many solutions start with a fundamental need for better understanding of the crisis – something that is lacking in many schools around the world. In the United Kingdom, the student-led Teach the Future campaign is calling for an urgent overhaul of the education system to better reflect the climate emergency and ecological crisis – from improved and climate-relevant teacher training, to more energy-efficient school buildings, and a curriculum that covers the crisis and vocational courses that offer training in green skills.

## Sowing a sense of confidence

While writing his book, Eddie Reynolds, co-author of *Climate Crisis for Beginners* (Usborne, 2021), made a conscious effort to provide children – and their adults –





→ with the tools they need without telling them they have to do anything. “People underestimate kids’ ability to understand the concepts and deal with it emotionally. We just tried to make every aspect of climate more tangible – from economics to politics – by explaining that they are the result of lots of different people’s individual choices. Everyone’s small actions are really significant,” says Reynolds, who hopes books like his will spark new conversations about climate.

## “ The mobilization of Gen Z has far from peaked

Sarah Goody, a 16-year-old student who lives in San Francisco, United States, says she “found her purpose” after learning briefly about the climate emergency in school. She started striking and researched the subject in more depth, then went on to found Climate NOW, an organization that aims to educate and empower young people. She has presented talks to classes in over seventy schools so far.

“We provide schoolchildren with tools and resources but it’s also about sowing a sense of confidence, so that young people feel like their voices do matter – because my generation is the one that will face the worst effects of climate change,” she explains.

Now, Goody is optimistic that she and her peers will succeed as change-makers. “Gen Z is the compassionate generation, looking to change the world,” she says. “The future is exciting – we can restructure our society to reflect the ideals we have for a better planet. So many innovations can come out of this movement.”

At the international level, Climate Cardinals is a youth-led non-profit platform that makes environmental information more accessible to everyone through translation. “The climate-crisis clock is ticking, but any motivated bilingual student can start making critical information accessible during this crisis,” says volunteer Cristina C. Leon, 17, a student based in Lima, Peru, who speaks Spanish, English, and German. She understands that language



▼ Cristina Leon, 17, from Lima, Peru, volunteers for the Climate Cardinals platform, which translates environmental information into different languages to make it more accessible.

is a huge barrier to the global transfer of scientific knowledge.

Since launching in spring 2020, more than 8,000 young volunteers like Leon have translated climate information into over 100 languages, from Hebrew to Urdu. “Our translations directly empower the most vulnerable communities to prioritize the climate agenda. It’s a matter of leaving no one behind, regardless of their language or education,” she adds.

### Being bold and creative

It’s not all about the science either. Climate will increasingly become a huge part of our culture – allowing communities to create a safe space to explore and deal with the raw emotions associated with the crisis. Serayna Solanki, a 25-year-old climate justice advocate based in the UK, is curating a creative intergenerational programme called Grandmothers’ Garden for ethnic minorities – focusing on climate change, nature, and environmental loss.

“Art is a powerful tool for stories, and takes many shapes in different global

communities. From traditional songs and tapestries, to creative writing and design, it’s a vehicle for emotions, guiding wisdom and complexity,” describes Solanki.

“Youth activism is so powerful because there is no verbal camouflage or vagueness when speaking to systems of power. Stop ecocide. We say it how it is because we understand what’s at stake. Climate change is a result of colonial capitalism,” Solanki states.

In her opinion, the mobilization of Gen Z has far from peaked. “While youth activists have been raising awareness of climate change, I believe that the next push will be raising awareness of false and unsustainable solutions. With the confidence to be bold and creative, there’s still a lot of energy to come.” ■

# Zoomers, in their own words

## ● Nazigul Jusupova

24, Kyrgyzstan

**A data journalist, she is also a student at the Higher School of Economics, Moscow.**

After five years of working for AKIpress, the first independent news agency in my country, I now work in data journalism – which uses graphics and statistics to tell a story in the best possible way.



Data journalism is hard work, but it has allowed me to explore subjects including mental health, cardiovascular diseases, and the problems of youth and poverty. Like all quality journalism, it also plays a vital role in fighting fake news. I am very proud to be surrounded by young people who are busy implementing their ideas – working on social projects, caring about public welfare, and promoting conscious consumption. They are not afraid to express their thoughts and emotions, demand the observance of laws, and defend human rights – in spite of their young age and lack of experience. I feel the courage of the generation I am a part of – its freedom from stereotypes, and its readiness for global change. It is the young who bring uniqueness to the established way of life, become the authors of changes, and contribute to the development of society. Young people are not just about the future, they are also our present.



**I am proud to be surrounded by young people who are busy implementing their ideas 😊**



## ● Francisco Javier Vera Manzanares

11, Colombia

**Activist for the protection of life.**

My greatest concern is to see a lack of empathy and solidarity for those around us – that we don't think about other people, either from an environmental or a health point of view. When we don't wear a face mask, we are not taking care of our own lives, or those of others. It's the same for the climate crisis – we don't take care of the planet.

I act by raising the awareness of people who are not sensitive to these issues, by encouraging them to look after themselves, animals, and ecosystems.

I belong to a generation that has become aware of the importance of life. Like me, many children are taking action to protect it. We are the generation that has the chance to make a difference – by putting our citizenship at the service of life, but also by asking our public authorities to take urgent and ambitious action.



**I belong to a generation that has become aware of the importance of life 🙌**





## ● Sahar Chakroun

27, Tunisia



**Resident doctor/social entrepreneur in Sfax.**

I belong to a generation that resists – a generation that is desperate but optimistic, frustrated but passionate. In spite of the instability that reigns today, in spite of the economic, political and social crises, we cannot forget the euphoria of the first elections, nor the solidarity of the nights of the Tunisian Revolution that took place ten years ago. Many young people are involved in associations, local authorities, or political life. Every day, they take the risk of embarking on new adventures to help move the country forward.

It is thanks to this generation that the ECOZONE Coworking Space was born. It is a space where young people from Tunisia's Sfax region can recharge their batteries, renew themselves, get inspired, and innovate. It is a space where they can meet up, help each other, and work towards a Tunisia that reflects their vision.

The real concern of young Tunisians today is not just to survive, or to secure their own future, but also to ensure the success of their country. I belong to this generation of resistance, but above all, of resilience.

## ● Jessica Martínez

21, Paraguay

**Forward at Real Madrid football club, Spain.**

The pandemic has affected us all greatly. People around us have suffered the loss of a loved one, jobs, or freedoms that we took for granted, like being able to go out into the street. Each individual must make a small contribution to cope with this reality, so that together, we overcome this complicated and tragic situation.



My contribution is to be responsible, by taking precautions, while at the same time I feel privileged to be able to continue doing what I love: playing football. My club tests us regularly [for Covid-19] so that we follow the procedures required by the competition. And then, when I'm with my family or friends, I make *tereré*, a traditional Guaraní drink. It's like an unconditional friend that we take everywhere with us – with our thermos and our *guampa* [a cup to drink *tereré* from], that accompanies us through good times and bad.

If football is what you are most passionate

about, you have to work hard every day to try to go as far as possible. Even if nobody can guarantee you success, you will not have to blame yourself afterwards – because you will have tried, and given it your all.



**If you're passionate about something, you must give it your all 🙌**



**The real concern of young people is to ensure the success of their country 🇹🇳**





The pandemic gave me an opportunity to help my community 🙏

### ● Jason Krause Jr.

17, United States

**Student at North Broward Preparatory School, Florida.**

I have always wanted to help my community – the health crisis gave me an opportunity to do that. In February 2020, I noticed how uncomfortable it was to wear a mask for prolonged periods of time.

To solve this problem, I designed a prototype – a rectangle with multiple slots that goes behind the head, to hold a mask below or above the ears. This prevents irritation.

After 3D-printing a few batches, I went to local hospitals to ask if they would like to try my invention. I applied for a patent on the design – which we later named Earstrap – and asked some of my closest friends to help in the manufacturing process with their 3D printers.

Through a crowdfunding platform, we raised over \$10,000 in a few months. This allowed us to buy some printers and a huge amount of filament. At one point, we were cranking out 2,000 Earstraps a week.



We have donated over 11,000 Earstraps to hospitals and medical facilities in 99 locations around the world. This project allowed us to do something that we loved, and to help so many frontline health-care workers in the process.



### ● Abiona Mataranyika

22, Zimbabwe

**Student at the University of Zimbabwe, Harare.**



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My fight is to reverse the discrimination against women political activists. Cyber-bullying and sexual harassment are a daily occurrence for them. Men, and even women, use social media to silence the political discourse of women.



**I am part of a generation that is fighting for gender equality 🙏**

I refuse to be part of the 'silent gender' norm. As president of the Student Representative Council, I work to empower ambitious young women to fight against gender discrimination. To express this, I used the slogan 'Rise woman rise' during my campaign. I challenged the university authorities to include us, as representatives, in policy-making. I fought against the abuse of female activists, and ensured that the perpetrators were held accountable. This was possible because I am privileged to be part of the disciplinary committee. During the lockdown, we held webinars and sessions on women's mental health.

I really feel that I am part of a generation that is fighting for gender equality. Our goal is to create an environment where young women in politics are heard, and can speak out without fear.

*A luta continua!*



# Are all young people digital whiz-kids?

It is easy to believe that young people, born in the digital age, would naturally be better equipped with the necessary skills to use new technologies. Beyond the cliché, however, the reality is much more complex. The ability of the younger generation to master new digital tools depends very much on their socio-economic backgrounds and family environment.

## Sue Bennett

Head of School, Faculty of the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, and at the School of Education, University of Wollongong, Australia, with an expertise in information and communication technologies in education.

**T**he idea of young people being ‘digital natives’ – a term coined by education consultant and author Marc Prensky – first became popular twenty years ago. They have also been referred to as the ‘net generation’ and ‘smartphone generation’, seeking to capture the same central idea that younger generations are fundamentally different because of their exposure to technology.

It was claimed that young people could multitask more easily, had shorter attention spans, preferred visuals and interactivity, and liked using technology more. As a consequence, a radical change would be needed to ensure that old-fashioned ideas and institutions did not limit the capacities of these young generations.

The problem was that much of this early commentary was based on observations and anecdotes, with little hard evidence to back up these claims. But the idea soon began to attract the attention of researchers who were keen to investigate whether the claims stacked up. From the mid-2000s, studies were done around the world to look

at how young people used technology for their education and in their everyday lives.

Researchers conducted large-scale surveys asking about what devices young people had access to, what apps and platforms they used, and how often. Detailed, smaller-scale studies to observe technology use were also carried out in school and higher-education classrooms, homes and community settings.

### Digital divides

The results from this extensive and careful work have repeatedly pointed to the same conclusion – that young people are not as easily categorized as the ‘digital native’ label suggests. They are, in fact, very diverse in the ways they use and think about digital technology. Also, comparisons between generations have not provided evidence that younger people have an inherent advantage. Older people can and do become skilled and confident using the same technologies.

Even more importantly, within the younger generation, socio-economic

factors were found to play a major role in the opportunities young people have to develop technology skills and knowledge. These affect their opportunities for education, work, and social connection.

“  
**Young people are not as easily categorized as the ‘digital native’ label suggests**

A 2007 study in the United Kingdom of 1,500 9- to 19-year-olds, for example, found that higher-income households had better quality of access, allowing more frequent use – which allowed them to develop greater confidence and proficiency with technology. And a 2008 study in the United States of 18- to 26-year-olds found that those with higher levels of education undertook online activities that were more self-enhancing.



The continuation of these patterns was captured in the 2015 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report, *Students, Computers and Learning: Making the Connection*. It suggests that while material access to technology has increased, young people from more advantaged backgrounds spend their time online doing activities that develop more comprehensive and beneficial skills. This reveals ongoing 'digital divides' between those who have been able to develop the capabilities to use the technology effectively to achieve their desired outcomes, and those who have not.

### Breaking away from stereotypes

We must resist making generalizations and assumptions about young people and technology. There is an undeniable attraction to generational traits, and there is no denying that we are all shaped by the times we are born into. But that overlooks much more important contextual differences that influence our development and shape our life chances. Ascribing characteristics according to age is misleading, and may actually be harmful because it causes us to overlook barriers and inequities.

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### Socio-economic factors play a major role in shaping our life chances

Taking a more nuanced view would allow us to delve deeper into how socio-economic circumstances play a role in technology use – and the opportunities that being skilled and confident with technology provide us.

Appreciating that technology access is variable is a next critical step. As the cost of purchasing technology has come down, more young people have access to devices, and often devices of their own. But there are distinct differences between what can be accomplished on a mobile phone compared to a laptop, and between the quality of limited mobile data access and high-speed broadband. Well-equipped homes made the transition to learning and working from home fairly easily. It was much more challenging for households with limited devices and connectivity. And as the pandemic restricted movement and capacity, many young people lost access to free public Wi-Fi, or fast access at school, college, university or workplaces.

### Omnipresent screens

We must also recognize that social contexts shape technology use. This includes how families, educators, friends and communities use technology for learning, work, and play. These social contacts shape how young people see the possibilities for technologies in their lives. With the Covid-19 pandemic keeping us physically apart, we have become more dependent on technology than ever. As a result, better access and richer social networks are distinct advantages.

Even before the pandemic, technology had become increasingly essential to educational attainment, working life, social engagement and leisure. The rapid shift to emergency remote teaching, working from home, and socializing online, has only accelerated the trend.

Ultimately, 'digital as default' has brought the digital inequalities that have long existed into sharp relief. This should provoke us to further scrutinize those differences, and to act to create a more digitally inclusive society for people of all ages. ■



Illustration © Selçuk Demirel for The UNESCO Courier

# Africa's youth: Influencers make a big impact

Unheard of until recently, the profession of influencer is enjoying growing success on the continent. Eager to acquire a young and connected clientele, companies are now eyeing the most popular of these new social media celebrities.

## Kesia Ebale

Journalist based in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

**A** year ago, Elsa Majimbo led an anonymous and quiet life as a journalism student in Nairobi, Kenya. Caught off guard like much of the world by the Covid-19 pandemic, she started posting comedy sketches on her Instagram account, to counter the monotony of the lockdown. With her poorly-framed videos – punctuated by bursts of laughter and handfuls of potato chips consumed between gags – the 18-year-old saw the number of her followers soar.

## “ Fashion, lifestyle, music, humour, cooking, and beauty are the most popular topics

Shared tens of thousands of times, her messages caught the attention of Rihanna, the megastar singer, actress, and businesswoman. That was quite a coup for Majimbo, who now boasts 2.2 million followers, and recently went into partnership with Italian fashion designer Valentino to promote her brand.

In just a few months, Majimbo has become one of East Africa's influencers – someone who has the power to affect the buying habits or quantifiable actions of others, using social media. She has joined the exalted ranks of “content creators” who monetize the fame they have acquired on Instagram, YouTube or Twitter.

Fashion, lifestyle, music, humour, cooking, and beauty are the most popular – and therefore the most profitable – topics for influencers. In Africa – the world's youngest continent, where the smartphone market has exploded in recent years – this new career is attracting a growing number of young people enticed by the digital spotlight and the promise of significant wealth for some. The mega

influencers – those who have more than a million followers – remain a miniscule minority.

## A phenomenon that has evolved

The influencer phenomenon, which started about a decade ago, has evolved since. While many of the social media stars started out as activists for change, they now target local or multinational companies, such as telecommunications providers, hotel chains, airlines, etc. “Influencers born on Twitter in the 2010s began by demanding an internet for all, and denouncing the digital divide,” explains Kahi Lumumba, founder and CEO of Totem Experience, a digital marketing agency in Abidjan.

“In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, [content creator, web activist, blogger and brand influencer] Edith Brou, one of the most followed personalities in the country today, began by relaying information on the 2010 political crisis,” he adds.

The practice of using digital platforms to advocate a cause has not stopped. In fact, it is encouraged by some private companies involved in the fight against inequality, discrimination or global warming. “Every year, the Ivorian Electricity Company gives awards to the country's best students. Influencers are recruited to advertise the initiative. We have also worked with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to make young people more aware of issues related to illegal migration,” continues Lumumba.

## “ Digital platforms also serve to fight against inequality, discrimination or global warming

But today's social media stars are mainly sought-after by companies wanting to attract a young and connected urban audience. Totem Experience connects

brands – keen to promote their new services – with influencers followed by a loyal community. For instance, about fifteen influencers recently posted videos on their personal accounts, featuring delivery men to promote a home delivery app created in Abidjan. “For companies, it's a way to increase sales and get closer to their customers,” says Lumumba, whose agency will soon expand from thirty to fifty employees.

## Clickbait

These stars of the web are usually paid for promoting and advertising photos or videos. Depending on the number of clicks they attract, a bonus is often added to their fee. Influencers who work in fashion, travel or tourism also receive benefits in kind – such as clothing or free stays in luxury hotels, which, of course, they must in turn promote among their followers.

It is difficult to estimate how many influencers make a living by relying solely on the profession in Africa. Most of them have another job or side business to fall back on. The very limited circle of mega influencers are more likely to be A-list celebrities known for talent in their own right, like singers, actors, sports stars or fashion icons, rather than those who have gained fame only through the internet.

The StarNgage influencer marketing platform features a Top Instagram Influencers Ranking listing the top 1,000 stars worldwide, by country. In Nigeria, the continent's most populous country, Afropop singer, songwriter and activist Yemi Alade leads the way, with 12.3 million followers.

In French-speaking West Africa, “Dudu fait des vidéos” is a popular web influencer. Known for his depictions of daily life in Dakar, Senegal, Dudu – whose real name is Mouhamadou Ndiaye – has struck a deal with a mobile phone company with a strong presence in Africa to promote his videos.

On the other side of the continent, South Africa's Kefilwe Mabote – who has 1.1 million followers on Instagram – has built a solid reputation in the fashion and luxury market. A formidable businesswoman, she has forged partnerships with prestigious international brands. In April 2020, she published a book, *Kefilwe Mabote: Influencer De Luxe: From Soweto to Milan*, which recounts her success story.



## → A diverse continent

While many of the same trends can be observed throughout the continent – particularly regarding the popularity of the topics covered – significant disparities still exist from one country to another, and from one African region to another. Not all countries have the same level of digital infrastructure and network quality. The influencer business reminds us of a truth that is often ignored by marketers – that there is not just one Africa, but many.

Thus, English-speaking Africa, driven by heavyweights Nigeria and South Africa, currently outpaces French-speaking Africa. West Africa, where thirty-six per cent of the population has access to the internet, has a head start over Central Africa, where only twenty-two per cent of the population is connected.

Experts believe that the situation will become more equitable in the coming years. “Once Central Africa has the infrastructure it currently lacks, there will be a tidal wave. In the creative world in general, the Democratic Republic of the Congo [DRC] makes a difference,” predicts Lumumba. The grandson of Congolese independence leader Patrice Lumumba, he is banking on Kinshasa – the largest city in French-speaking Africa – to become a hub for digital creativity.

The young entrepreneur hopes that the Congolese singers Inness’B, Gaz Mawete, and Moise Mbiye – whose Instagram accounts are currently the most popular in the DRC – will soon share the spotlight with new network stars, boosting the promising market of influencers in this country of over 80 million people. ■

# China:

## The many lives of the slash generation

Juggling jobs comes naturally to these city dwellers, who are educated, well-travelled, and at ease with digital technologies. Slashers, unlike earlier generations, do not hesitate to try their hand at different professions and careers – all at the same time. Following their dreams, these young people are quick to acquire new skills – whether it is painting murals or playing ancient instruments, hip-hop dancing or creating fashion – and share them via social media.

### Zhang Yiwu

Professor of Chinese Literature at Peking University, literary critic and author, his most recent book is *Strict and Honest Spirit: The Profound Force of Chinese Spirit*, 2016.

Jiajia, a 26-year-old fashion design graduate from China’s Anhui province, has tried her hand at many things. She has been a cosmetics model, donned a mascot suit to hand out flyers, worked as a reception greeter, and as an English typist. This young artist is now an art influencer with 6 million followers on Douyin – the Chinese version of TikTok, the short-form video platform – where she now documents her skills as a muralist.

When Jiajia first started sharing videos on the platform, the idea was merely to document how she painted murals. But that changed with her increasing popularity – the artist, whose real name is Zhang Lijia, now goes by Muralist Jiajia. Live-streaming her work and interacting with her fans is now a full-time job.

Jiajia represents the best of China’s Generation Z. Born between 1996 and 2010, Zoomers – as Gen Zs are sometimes called – are digital natives who grew up with the internet. In many ways, their lives echo China’s internet boom in the past two decades.

For this generation, social media is the main form of communication, entertainment, and news. It can also lead to very lucrative careers. The total views of art-related videos on Douyin hit 2.1 trillion as of December 2020 – approximately 300,000 times the visits to New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2019.

### Rock, hip-hop, and ceramics

Hip-hop dancing, musicals, rock music, ceramics – to name a few – bring young enthusiasts together on social media platforms including Douyin, Bilibili, Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) and WeChat.

▼ An artwork by Mo Guiling, inspired by the animated television series *SpongeBob SquarePants*.



Like Jiajia in the early years of her career, when she tried different jobs, more and more young Chinese are choosing to adopt a freelance lifestyle that enables them to have more than one job or identity. Known as China's slash generation [the term "slash career" was originally coined by *The New York Times* columnist Marci Alboher in 2007, and popularized in China by writer/dancer/entrepreneur Susan Kuang and her 2016 book, *Slasher Generation*], the term refers to people who enjoy having multiple work identities and the "/" symbol in their job description.

## “ Creativity and entrepreneurship are more attractive than a conventional career path

Growing up at the height of China's economic growth, Gen Z represents a cultural shift from previous generations. For the slash generation, individuality, flexible working hours, creativity and entrepreneurship are more attractive than the conventional career path – that ideally included a state office job, with a long

tenure, social benefits and stability – their predecessors valued.

According to a 2019 report from the state-owned Xinhua News Agency, China's slashers have exceeded 80 million – a number which is expected to grow. The majority of these youth are well-educated urban dwellers with a global perspective, more choices in life, and instinctively familiar with technology. The slash lifestyle gained such popularity as a cultural phenomenon that a Slasher Festival was organized at a luxury shopping mall in Xi'an in 2019.

## The rise of *Guochao*

Mo Guiling, a visual communications graduate and freelance photographer, is a typical example of the slash generation. He spends part of his time enacting his unusual ideas at home – such as imitating *Mr. Bean* (a British TV series from the 1990s, starring Rowan Atkinson), or covering the walls of his room entirely with newspaper – before recording them on video.

Mo's first video went viral on Douyin, with 2.2 million likes. This encouraged him to produce more visual stories – depicting not only his personal life, but also popular culture, such as Japanese anime and American

movies. His imaginative photos and videos are hilarious and thought-provoking.

Others like Mo are working to revive their traditional cultural heritage. One of the major influences shaping China's consumer culture is the rise of *Guochao* (literally, Chinese style) – with fashionable retro homegrown Chinese brands of clothing. Contributing to the rise of domestic brands, *Guochao* has also provided a boost to the country's fashion industry.

## A 2,000-year-old zither

Fascinated by the richness of their cultural heritage, China's young zoomers and influencers are keen to promote it. Peng Jingxuan, a 25-year-old from Wuhan who has been in France since 2017 – studying for a master's in musicology at the Bordeaux Montaigne University – is one of them.

Realizing that people outside China knew very little about traditional Chinese musical instruments, she decided to introduce them to the sounds of the *guzheng* – a Chinese zither, a plucked string instrument dating back to the Qin dynasty, over 2,000 years ago.

Dressed in a traditional Han Chinese gown, Peng started performing on her beautiful *guzheng* in front of the Grand-Théâtre, Bordeaux's opera house. She has recorded her music and travels across Europe, where she has performed on her *guzheng* at many places – including the foot of the Eiffel Tower, the banks of Lake Geneva, or at a wedding in a French chateau.

Peng has over 7.7 million fans on Douyin. "When I hear people clapping at the end of the show, I am always filled with national pride," she told the *China Daily* in April 2020.

With opportunities to connect with the rest of the world through the internet, China's Gen Z is more open and approachable. They are often well-travelled. Like their peers in other parts of the world, they have a strong interest in issues like the environment and climate change, are concerned about vulnerable populations and animal welfare, and actively seek social change.

China's youth are involved in community affairs, and often volunteer, as a result. The recent renaissance of traditional culture and lifestyle changes demonstrates that their voices are actually being heard. We have every reason to believe that their vision for a more diverse society will prevail in the future. ■

# Finding new ways to keep informed

In the space of two decades, young people have moved away from traditional media – television, radio, print – to digital media. But beyond the change of format, it is their whole relationship to information that has changed. Latin America is a good example of this move towards a more social, interactive and responsive web.

## Mariana Souquett

Journalist based in Caracas, Venezuela.

**E**lias Haig, 15, dreams of being a science popularizer. To learn about the subjects that interest him, this teenager from Los Teques on the outskirts of Caracas, began by consulting the platforms he found on the internet. He also regularly consults Twitter. “It allows me to have a more comprehensive view of what’s going on,” he explains.

In 2018, at the age of 12, Haig created a blog, *La Noción de la procrastinación* (The concept of procrastination), where he talks about video games, science, social networks, films, and even fake news. He has now decided to focus on his blog and his Twitter account, another social network where he already has over 4,400 followers. To establish more direct contact with his audience, he has also started creating a podcast on YouTube.

In his quest for information, Haig is fairly representative of his generation – hyper-connected, favouring social networks to the detriment of traditional media, and a transmitter of information on his favourite topics.

Young people have gradually appropriated media to the point of converting them into laboratories for the construction of identities and the social world, according to Jorge Alberto Hidalgo Toledo, president of AMIC, Asociación Mexicana de Investigadores de la Comunicación (Mexican Association of

Communication Researchers). They are now both consumers and producers of content, he explains.

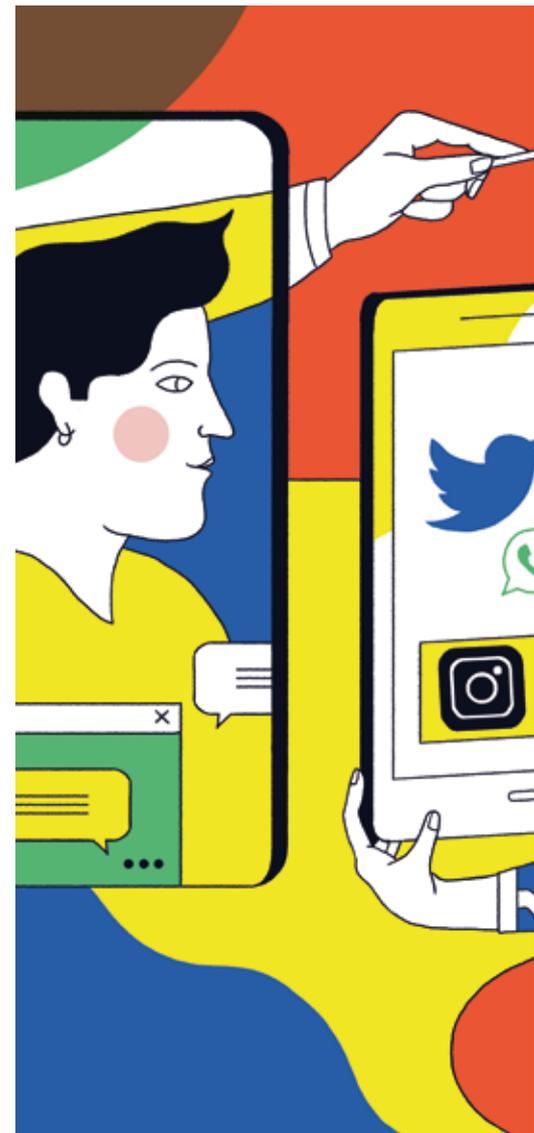
## Sports and entertainment

Although young people continue to consume political, social and economic issues in the media, they generally use this information as a mechanism to answer the existential questions that concern them, adds Hidalgo Toledo, who is also academic co-ordinator of the School of Communication at the Anáhuac University in Mexico.

“There are many, many ways of being young,” he continues. “We generally imagine youth as a unitary, uniform group, a mass. But some of them have a strong political awareness, which comes mainly from the fact that they are concerned about a fundamental issue: the future. And they can visualize this future from a political, economic, family or work perspective.”

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**Young people are both consumers and producers of content**



Will my family be okay? What will the world be like when I finish my studies? These are some of the questions that young people ask themselves in socio-digital spaces, according to the expert.

But this interest in political or economic issues in young people comes much after their interest in sports and entertainment – as shown in a 2020 study by the Instituto de Investigaciones de la Comunicación (Institute for Research in Communication) of the Central University of Venezuela (ININCO-UCV).

Another study by ININCO indicates that young people focus on information concerning their daily lives – such as urban public transport services, or the exchange rate of the dollar. “Information is increasingly about content of practical interest. For young people, this paradigm shift has led to a diversification of sources,

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## What will the world be like when I finish my studies?

or a replacement of traditional media in favour of emerging media – where even a meme can now serve as a source of information – such as a Twitter feed or a podcast,” explains Morella Alvarado, a faculty member at ININCO-UCV.

### Attracting new audiences

Faced with these changes in the habits of the new generations, traditional media are trying to adapt. Some journalists are making an effort to produce content aimed at people under 30. In Brazil, Evandro

Almeida, 23, a member of the Latin American Network of Young Journalists, favours formats that appeal to his peers. He recently produced a series of long-form videos for Instagram TV (IGTV) and YouTube, about Latin Americans living in zones of war and armed conflict.

“I created this specifically for social media, to inform young audiences in the region about what’s happening in other countries,” Almeida says. “Since 2019, all my reports have a social media focus, to attract new young audiences.”

A similar story is that of Noelia Esquivel, 25, a reporter for *The Voice of Guanacaste*, an independent media outlet in Costa Rica. She has increasingly abandoned traditional media sources in favour of digital media. Her preference is for news bulletins received by email.

While she believes that young people in her country are turning to social networks to find information, Esquivel recognizes that more needs to be done to capture young audiences with more engaging formats. “They spend a lot of time on social networks,” she notes. “That’s where they find out how their friends are doing, but also what’s happening in their country, their region, and the world.”

The switch to digital media appears to be justified, considering that fifty-one per cent of internet users surveyed in Latin America say the main reason they use social networks is to keep up with the news, according to a 2020 GlobalWebIndex report. All the more reason to strengthen internet access in the region – to reduce the gap between those who have easy access to news content and the “information-poor”. ■



Illustration © Sophie Della Corte for *The UNESCO Courier*

# Growing up in the age of fake news

Hopping from one social network to another, young people in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region now get their information from YouTube, Instagram and Facebook. To be able to distinguish between reliable information and fake news while navigating this flood of information, it is urgent to develop critical thinking.

## Hadil Abuhmaid

A doctoral candidate at the School of Journalism and Communication, University of Oregon, United States, she is co-author of *How The Middle East Used Social Media in 2020*, an annual review.

Some days ago, my nephew asked me who my favourite YouTuber was. Without hesitation, I said “no one”, because I rarely watch YouTube. He gasped and asked, “Then what do you do on your laptop all day?”

Well, I am a 34-year-old Ph.D. student, not an 11-year-old. But his reaction reflects the power and influence that platforms like YouTube have on many young people around the world – including the Middle East, the region where I am from and which I continue to study.

In one of the most youthful regions in the world – where over twenty-eight per cent of the population is between 15 and 29 – it should come as no surprise that nine out ten young adults use at least one social media platform to converse, access information, and share content, according to the 2019 *Arab Youth Survey*.

### Juggling between multiple platforms

“I check my Facebook and Instagram about fifty times a day,” Tabarek Raad, 28,

a translator from Basra, Iraq, said. “I use these two social media accounts to connect with friends and keep myself in the loop of what’s going on in the world,” she added.

Using social media platforms to check the latest news, watch and interact with friends’ stories, share something, or just passively browse through the newsfeed, is universal among youth everywhere today. But what is interesting about internet users in the Middle East is that they have an average of 8.4 social media accounts, according to GlobalWebIndex, the market research firm.

Mohammed Haraba, 28, who works for a large oil company in Al-Ahsa, Saudi Arabia, has nine social media accounts – including

WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook. “I check WhatsApp every hour, unless I am too busy. It is the only platform on which family and friends gather. I don’t know anyone who doesn’t have an account,” he said.

Facebook, which used to be Haraba’s main platform for socializing four years ago, now ranks low on his list. With over seven out of ten Arabs using Facebook and WhatsApp, the platform still has a big presence in the region, with 45 million Facebook users only in Egypt, Statista reports.

Social media platforms are now the dominant source of news for young Arabs. Statistics from the *Arab Youth Survey* show that in 2020, seventy-nine per cent of young Arabs receive their news from social media, compared to only twenty-five per cent in 2015. “Facebook is one of my main sources of news and communication with friends. I check it more than ten times a day,” Pamela Hadawar, 24, from Palestine said. “And depending where the news comes from, I check with other news agencies and sources to make sure it is accurate.”

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**I check my Facebook and Instagram about fifty times a day**

This trend has resulted in a decline in news consumption through newspapers and television. Saudi Arabian youth, for example, reported an almost thirty per cent decline in TV news watching in the past four years.

### An infodemic

The widespread use of social media in the region is both fascinating and scary – with information bombarding us constantly, it has become harder to filter the content. Fake news and misinformation have become especially prevalent during the pandemic. False and inaccurate news has spread even more rapidly on social media, resulting in an infodemic.

The deluge of information has been overwhelming for some. “I used to get most of my news from Twitter, but I deactivated my account when the pandemic started,” says Tala Zabalawi, 31, a digital marketing specialist in Amman, Jordan. “It was so stressful to read about the pandemic, that I decided to focus on happy thoughts instead.”

The growth of media consumption and the increasing affordability of new technologies point to an even further expansion in the use of social media in the MENA region. Big tech companies have been quick to take advantage of this emerging market. This has initiated an important discussion around media literacy.

## “ Social media platforms are the dominant news source for young Arabs

Realizing the value of media education for young adults, several organizations in the region have been offering training and workshops to increase awareness. Other initiatives – like Jordan’s Fatabayyano platform in Arabic – offer fact-checking services.

This is a start. In order to develop critical thinking that allows us to distinguish between truth and lies, between facts and opinions, we need the widespread introduction of media education, particularly in schools. ■

### UNESCO combats the disinfectomic

Distinguishing between facts and rumours, learning to search for, and evaluate, online content, identifying sources – the need to take a critical look at information has never been more crucial in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and its trail of false news about the disease.

For years, UNESCO has been promoting media and information literacy, especially among teachers. Online courses that are free and open to everyone are available for self-learning. Since 2012, the Global Media and Information Literacy Week has been an opportunity to promote this critical learning, and the diversity and pluralism of content.

Organized by the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Alliance, it brings together over 600 organizations in more than eighty countries. The theme of the 2020 edition, held in October, was “Resisting the disinfectomic”.



© Juana Medina/Cartoon Movement

# K-pop: A cure for the pandemic blues

While large parts of the cultural sector have come to a grinding halt due to the pandemic, K-pop – the South Korean music genre that’s become a global phenomenon – has continued to flourish.

**Yu Young Jin**

Freelance journalist based in Seoul, Republic of Korea.

‘Dynamite’, the first song from K-pop band BTS to be sung entirely in English, was such a big hit when it was released in August 2020, that it was estimated to have contributed over \$1.4 billion to the economy of the Republic of Korea, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism estimated.

The feel-good music video from the hugely popular boy band smashed all previous YouTube records – with a total of 101.1 million views in a single day, twenty-four hours after its release.

## “ Snack videos cater to the short attention spans of youth

K-pop, arguably the country’s most successful cultural export, has not suffered due to the pandemic. Quite the contrary. The genre’s influence, which can be measured by the popularity of its online concerts, has grown steadily in recent months. For instance, KCON:TACT 2020, a week-long online concert in June 2020, attracted over 4 million viewers.

Nearly forty per cent of those who attended these virtual events said they would purchase tickets again, the Korea Creative Content Agency found. Seeing the potential of the economic contribution of online K-pop concerts, the government announced that they would allocate 29 billion South Korean won to build a studio – to encourage entertainment companies to organize more of these events.

## Hyper-connected youth

Deprived of outings and activities, the country’s young people are over-invested in their screens, which have now become the only way to access culture and information.

In a survey by consulting agency 20s Lab on the media consumption of Generation Z, 88.4 per cent of respondents indicated that their media usage had increased during the pandemic. YouTube, streamers, and television programmes were among the most common types of content that these young South Koreans watched.

In one of the world’s most-connected countries – with an internet penetration rate of over ninety-five per cent in 2018 – it is no surprise that nearly eighty-seven per cent of young people

between 20 and 29 are hyper-connected and addicted to social media, according to a 2019 study by Statista, a global business data platform.

Nearly a quarter of young people surveyed in a 20s Lab study in October 2020 were categorized as “heavy users” – they were on social media for over three hours a day. The study also revealed that each platform was used for a different purpose: Instagram, for updates from friends and expanding personal interests; Facebook, for finding useful information or sharing interesting content, and Twitter, for expressing feelings or thoughts throughout the day.

Minjeong Kang, a professor at the College of Fine Arts, Hongik University, Seoul, says Gen Z “want to be connected all the time, and express their convictions” on social media.

Another distinctive feature is that today’s younger viewers prefer short videos that focus on reality – as opposed to older generations who enjoy longer, mainly fictional, content. In her research, Kang found that over eighty per cent of the country’s Gen Z population used YouTube as their main source of information.



▼ The K-Pop Korean finger heart Saranghae symbol, which says “I love you”.



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**Deprived of outings and activities, young people are over-invested in their screens**

▼ *Red Velvet, the South Korean K-pop girl group.*

## Coping with the Coronavirus blues

K-pop has even had a beneficial effect on the psychological state of young people. Many say that these frothy videos have helped them cope with the Coronavirus blues – a term that describes the anxiety caused by the pandemic.

In response to the popularity of music programmes and short formats, the industry has adapted. Content related to K-pop has helped channels such as Dingo Music on YouTube to amass over 2.7 million subscribers. Launched in 2015, the channel targets the 18 to 24 generation, and features the country’s most trending idols and artists – including singer-songwriters Hyuna, Taemin, and Chung Ha.

Before using YouTube as its main platform, the company started on Facebook, and specialized in one-minute “snack videos” – bite-sized pieces of content with fast-paced editing. This format catered to the short attention spans of young people, explains Jay Yeon, a former producer for Dingo Music. He attributes part of the company’s success to its fast adaptation to trending social media platforms.

K-pop has also given a boost to paid music streaming sites such as Melon, the country’s most popular music streaming app among youth, followed by YouTube Premium, according to Statista. People in this age group streamed an average of 137 minutes of music a day, 20s Lab noted.

Capitalizing on the popularity of this music among the younger generation,

new social networks have emerged – such as Clubhouse, an invite-only social network based on audio-chat – where members from all over the world can talk in real time.

Driven by the huge success of K-pop groups, these new trends in cultural consumption did not originate during the health crisis, but the pandemic has amplified and accentuated them. And we can only imagine that they are here to stay. ■

# The last picture show

Photos: **Stephan Zaubitzer**

Text: **Katerina Markelova**

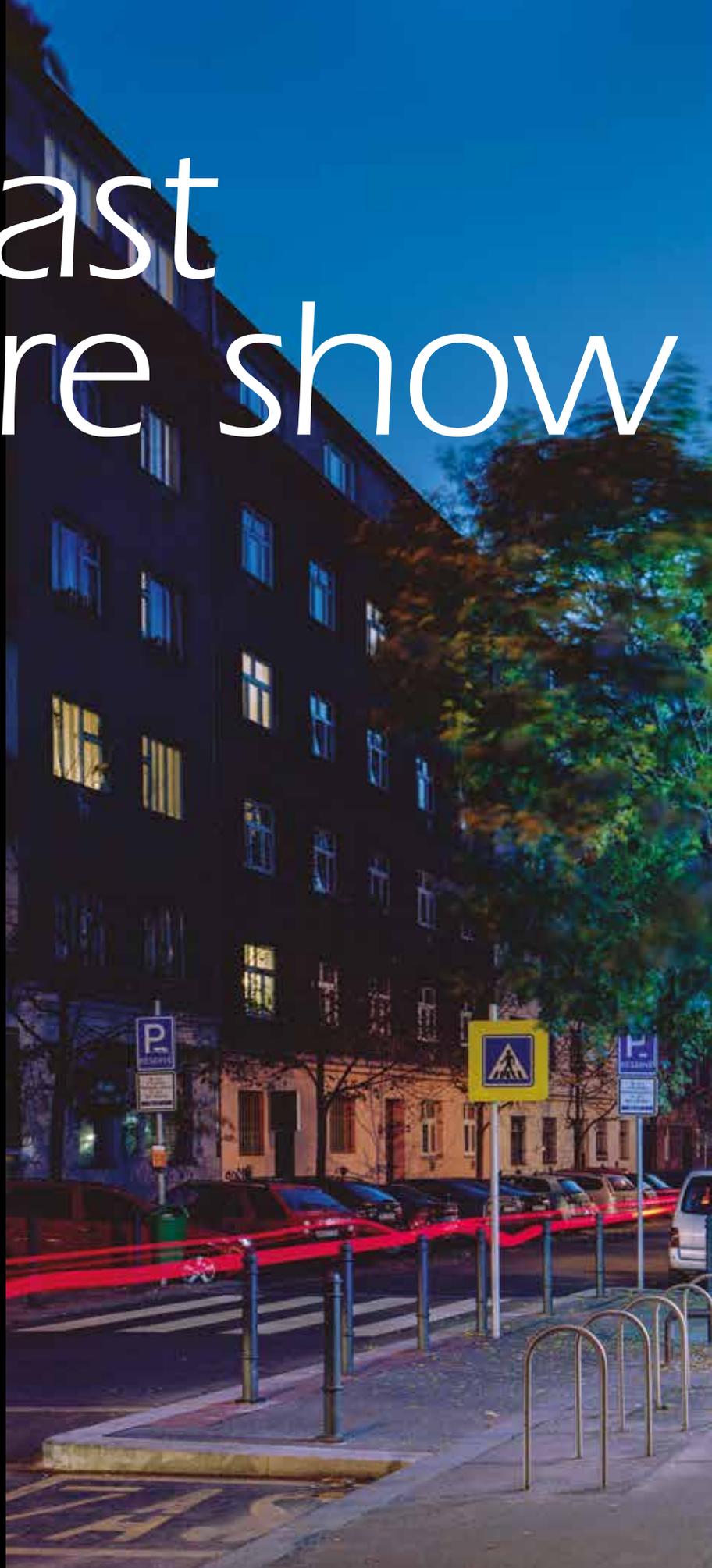
It's a pleasure that much of the world has been deprived of for many months. The pleasure of entering a cinema – slipping in between rows of seats, and letting the darkness envelope you, as you gaze fondly at the big screen, to immerse yourself into a story.

While these spaces remain temporarily inaccessible to us, we can reminisce about the movie experience through the photographs of French photographer Stephan Zaubitzer. He has travelled the world, photographing cinemas for a project he has been working on since 2003.

Zaubitzer's "portraits" of cinema theatres bring out the architectural uniqueness of this popular heritage – a world away from the sameness of multiplexes. The Rialto in Casablanca, the Roxy in Rio, and the Raj Mandir in Jaipur all display their imposing and rather outdated façades – like a show before the show.

These venues, which offer a collective experience like no other, have been hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic. In March 2020 alone, the global film industry recorded a \$7 billion loss in revenues. A number of cinema houses may never reopen.

As we celebrate the International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development in 2021, UNESCO is urging decision-makers to integrate culture into their recovery plans, and to address the precarious condition of artists and the risk that cultural production will become standardized.







The **Cinéma Le Palace** in Tunis, Tunisia, was built in 1903.



**Cinema Rialto**, built in 1929 in the Art Deco style, Casablanca, Morocco.



سينما  
بيامي  
GINEMA  
Miami



THE HOUSE



Cinema Miami, in Cairo, Egypt.



Cinéma L'Ecran, an arthouse movie theatre in Seine-Saint-Denis, France.



The Gala Cinema in London, built in the 1930s with opulent interiors, is now a bingo club.



The **Cine Mara**, in Havana, Cuba.



A **community cinema** on the outskirts of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.



The Raj Mandir Cinema in Jaipur, India.

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The **Roxy** in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, opened its doors in 1938.





The **Cinéma Murdjajo**, in Oran, Algeria.



The **Paramount Theatre**, in Oakland, California, was originally a concert hall built in the Art Deco style in 1931.



# Conspiracy theories: Linked to literature

Literary plots have long been connected to conspiracy theories, which are, in essence, acts of the imagination. But these fictitious notions – often created under the guise of making sense of the world around us – can sometimes have very real, even tragic, consequences on our lives, the author explains.

## Peter Knight

Professor of American Studies at the University of Manchester, United Kingdom, and visiting professor at Leiden University in the Netherlands. He is the author of *Conspiracy Culture* (2000) and *The Kennedy Assassination* (2007), and co-editor, with Michael Butter, of the *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories* (2020).

Literature has long had a fascination with esoteric knowledge, secret societies and conspiracies – from Euripides' *Bacchae* to Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. A good conspiracy by definition leaves no traces, and so a conspiracy theory is an imaginative speculation about the existence of a secret group behind the scenes, cunningly manipulating events.

Conspiracy theories create a narrative that promises to make sense of otherwise random events, seeing them as part of one vast, overarching plot.

While many conspiracy fictions merely provide entertainment, they can sometimes have a surprising effect on the real world. The storming of the Capitol in Washington DC on 6 January 2021, for example, was in part inspired by *The Turner Diaries*, a conspiracy-infused novel from 1978 that imagines an apocalyptic, white supremacist uprising.

That anti-government novel also influenced Timothy McVeigh, who blew up the federal building in Oklahoma City in 1995, killing 168 people.

## Forged document with tragic consequences

Although conspiracy theories about the Illuminati date back to the 1790s, many of the most fantastical versions of this story circulating on the internet today are unwittingly derived from *The Illuminatus! Trilogy* (1975), a madcap, counter-cultural novel written by Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson, two editors at *Playboy* magazine. Intrigued by the endless letters to the magazine asserting all manner of unbelievable conspiracy theories, Shea's and Wilson's starting premise for the novel was imagining what if "all these nuts are right, and every single conspiracy they complain about really exists".

The most significant example of a fabricated conspiracy text being taken for real is the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This forged document was first published in 1903 in Russia, and was presented as the record of a secret meeting of Jewish elders who are plotting world domination. By 1921, it was shown to be a forgery, but that did not stop it from becoming part of the Nazis' justification for the Holocaust.

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**Protocols was shown to be a forgery, but that did not stop it from becoming part of the Nazis' justification for the Holocaust**

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## The conspiracy is no longer a foreign plot to infiltrate the nation, but a more ambiguous and pervasive threat from within

→ *Protocols* still circulates in many countries today, and underpins many contemporary conspiracy theories directed against “elites”, “globalists” and “financiers” – often code words for Jews. Research has demonstrated that parts of the text were adapted from an obscure nineteenth-century German novel – *Biarritz*, published in 1868 by the anti-Semitic German writer, Hermann Goedsche – while other elements were taken from *Dialogue aux enfers entre Machiavel et Montesquieu* (*The Dialogue in Hell Between Machiavelli and Montesquieu*), a satirical French pamphlet published by Maurice Joly in 1864, attacking the regime of Napoleon III. Plagiarized from fiction, *Protocols* presents a fictional conspiracy, which in turn has – with tragic consequences – come to be taken as fact.

### Evil schemes and secret societies

For readers, fictional texts – including forgeries like *Protocols* – have the advantage over the modes (such as the exposé, the pamphlet, the documentary) in which conspiracy theories more often appear, because they can dramatize the supposed moments of conspiring in smoke-filled rooms. Although literature had long dabbled in conspiracies and secret societies, it was not until the nineteenth century that they became a central element of the drama.

The genres of the Gothic and the melodrama, for example, regularly feature lurid tales of villains secretly manipulating their innocent victims in evil schemes. The nineteenth century in Germany saw the emergence of the *Geheimbundroman* or secret society novel, while British writers were both fascinated and revulsed by the spectre of Masonic, Italian and Irish secret societies plotting against the government.

But it was with the detective story and the thriller that conspiracy fiction really came into its own around the turn of the twentieth century. These genres

were anchored in the suspicion that there is a deeper reality hidden beneath the confusion of surface detail.

### Identifying with a heroic figure

However, conspiracy fiction does not merely show the inner workings of the conspiracy in a way that eludes the paper trails of more supposedly factual versions. It also often encourages readers to identify with an individual character – usually a lone, heroic detective figure. In detective fiction and conspiracy thrillers there are actually two stories, pulling in opposite directions. One narrative is the detective’s journey of discovery, the page-turning story that rushes ever more rapidly forward – from the initial realization that everything he or she believed is a lie, to a final exposure of the plot and the hoped-for restoration of order in the present.

At the same time, however, there is the story of the original crime, which happens before the book starts. Often in conspiracy fiction, the more the detective discovers about the conspiracy, the more the imagined plot becomes vast. The tension between these two narrative structures helps explain why the path to the final discovery in conspiracy fiction is endlessly delayed, as we discover repeatedly that what we thought to be the truth was merely a false clue planted by the evil conspirators. Much of the pleasure of conspiracy fiction comes from wanting to get to the grand revelation, but also wanting to never quite reach that destination.

The literary focus on suspicion and interpretation has its roots in nineteenth-century writers such as Edgar Allan Poe and Henry James, and became a mainstay of modernist writing in the twentieth century. However, conspiracy fiction reached its full flowering in post-Second World War American literature. The theme of conspiracy is a central concern in some



of the most prominent post-war American writers, including William S. Burroughs, Don DeLillo, Joseph Heller, Ken Kesey and Thomas Pynchon.

### “Creative paranoia”

They repeatedly create scenarios in which the hero (nearly always a white man) feels that his liberty, identity and agency – and even his body – are in danger of being

controlled by vast, shadowy forces. In order to understand *What Is Really Going On*, these fictions wilfully embrace a form of what Pynchon has called “creative paranoia”. They present conspiracy theory as a way of understanding impersonal systems in the age of state power, corporate capitalism and mass media. The

existence of such plots. These more recent fictions often have ambiguous, inconclusive endings, as the detective surrogate is never entirely sure if the clues have merely been red herrings.

If modernist writing invites a form of paranoid reading – because it encourages readers to discover hidden

The focus of postmodern conspiracy literature on the uncertainty of knowledge is also in keeping with the dominant mode of literary and cultural criticism in recent decades – fuelled by what the French literary critic Paul Ricoeur called the “hermeneutic of suspicion”. The tradition of critique begins with Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, who sought to reveal the hidden economic, moral, and psychological forces that govern human behaviour and the unfolding of history.

### Nothing is as it seems

This mode of interpretation starts from the assumption that there is a deeper reality that lies beneath deceptive surface appearances, and it is the task of the critic to detect it. In a similar fashion, conspiracy theories start from the assumption that nothing is as it seems, nothing happens by accident, and everything is connected. Conspiracy theories often involve dangerous delusions, and the literature of conspiracy has at times contributed to those harms.

But at its best, conspiracy fiction creatively explores the blurred boundary between justified interpretation and paranoid over-interpretation. It forces readers to think about the nature of free will, especially in an increasingly complex global economy – leaving us to make an impossible choice between a world of pure randomness in which nothing makes sense, and a world of total conspiracy in which everything has been planned in advance.

By placing the reader in the position of the detective, the literature of conspiracy can help us understand the seductive attractions of conspiracy thinking, while also providing a thoughtful reflection on the problems of conspiracy as a way of making sense of the world. ■



conspiracy is no longer an easily detected foreign plot to infiltrate the nation, but a more ambiguous and pervasive threat from within.

Given this situation, it is not surprising that much of this fiction focuses self-consciously on the question of how we know what we think we know. There has been a shift from conspiracy narratives that dramatize plots, to conspiracy theory narratives that ponder the possible

significances and concealed allusions – then postmodernist writing demands what has been called “meta-paranoia”, a self-reflexive focus on questions of radical suspicion. As conspiracy fictions by sci-fi writers such as Philip K. Dick or films such as *The Matrix* suggest, what we assume to be reality might itself be a deceptive construct designed by an evil conspiracy. Trust no one, as *The X-Files* television drama series puts it.

# Conspiracy thinking:

## A scapegoat is always useful

Situations of societal crises may trigger conspiracy thinking in some individuals, but this does not fully explain the flourishing of conspiracy theories. The existence of an antagonistic outgroup that is deeply distrusted and despised often provides a convenient scapegoat during societal upheavals such as a pandemic, a terrorist strike, or a lost election, the author argues.

### Jan-Willem van Prooijen

Associate Professor at the department of Experimental and Applied Psychology of VU Amsterdam, and Senior Researcher at the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement (NSCR).

**W**hen an outraged crowd of supporters of Donald Trump – who was then president of the United States – stormed the Capitol building in Washington DC on 6 January 2021, they were motivated by the conspiracy belief that the country’s presidential elections had been stolen from them.

In the Netherlands, restrictive measures – particularly the implementation of a curfew – to fight the Covid-19 pandemic elicited violent protests in January 2021, that included riots and the destruction of property across the country. Many of these protesters endorse conspiracy beliefs assuming that the government has nefarious motives, such as exaggerating the dangers of the coronavirus to suppress the people, or imposing forced vaccinations

with mysterious substances that facilitate mind control.

What role do conspiracy theories play in polarization and radicalization? One often-cited research finding is that societal crisis situations trigger increased conspiracy thinking among otherwise well-functioning citizens, who show no sign of pathology. When people experience distressed feelings – such as uncertainty about the future, a lack of control, or anxiety – their natural response is to increase their mental efforts to make sense of, and hence understand, their physical and social environment. This response has had survival value in our evolutionary history, as a motivation to understand the nature and origins of threatening stimuli increases people’s capacity to effectively anticipate such threats.

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**In May 2020, twenty-six per cent of Canadians and thirty-nine per cent of Australians believed that the coronavirus was a bioweapon engineered in a lab**

## An identifiable hostile group

But while this process is part of the puzzle, it is also insufficient to fully explain conspiracy thinking. Societal crisis situations do not indiscriminately lead to conspiracy thinking. When the 9/11 terrorist strikes happened in New York in September 2001, certainly many citizens believed in conspiracy theories that the event was an

inside job of the US government. Many other citizens stood firmly behind President Bush, however – who, at the time, had the highest approval ratings ever recorded for a US President.

And while the surprisingly large number of citizens who believe in Covid-19 conspiracy theories is reason for concern – for example, in May 2020, twenty-six per cent of Canadian citizens and thirty-nine per cent of Australian citizens believed that the

coronavirus was a bioweapon engineered in a lab – an even larger number of citizens do not believe these conspiracy theories.

At least one additional factor which is necessary for increased conspiracy thinking to take hold is the existence of an antagonistic outgroup – a societal group that a perceiver deeply distrusts and despises. Such a group provides a convenient scapegoat that enables an easy and straightforward way to make sense of a



→ societal crisis situation such as a pandemic, a terrorist strike, or a lost election. The whole situation was deliberately caused by “them”; a malevolent and criminal plot of this evil group. In a way, the existence of such a scapegoat can even be comforting. It is difficult to prepare and defend oneself against bad luck (or an invisible enemy such as a virus), but one can prepare and defend oneself against a clearly identifiable hostile group.

One might object that citizens often endorse conspiracy theories about their *own* government – the leaders of their own nation, and hence part of their own group. How people categorize others into social groups is subjective, however, and possible at various levels of analysis. Within their own country, citizens are likely to perceive different subgroups – based on ethnicity, soccer team affiliation, city of residence, and so on – and they do not identify with all of them. One’s own government arguably is one of these subgroups, and citizens do not necessarily feel represented by it.

### Easier to point fingers

The combination of societal crisis situations and antagonistic outgroups helps explain conspiracy theories, and their relationship with polarization, throughout history. During the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic, a common conspiracy theory in the United Kingdom and the US was that the flu virus was a bioweapon, deliberately designed to kill people. Citizens specifically believed that this “bioweapon” was engineered by the Germans – their enemy group in the First World War.

Also, anti-Semitism has been widespread throughout the centuries, and accordingly, so were Jewish conspiracy theories. One common conspiracy theory in Nazi Germany was that Jewish people had caused the German defeat in the First World War. Moreover, Hitler believed in a Jewish conspiracy for world domination, and blamed Jewish people for both capitalism *and* communism.

Conspiracy theories are particularly likely when crisis situations and antagonistic outgroups co-occur. Explaining a complex crisis situation becomes easier when there is someone to blame. People start pointing

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**Explaining a crisis is easier when there is someone to blame**





fingers at different groups – sometimes suspecting the very groups that are sorely needed to resolve a crisis. For instance, many Covid-19 conspiracy theories accuse pharmaceutical companies of not being transparent about the true ingredients, or side effects, of the coronavirus vaccines.

### A threat to democracy

But interestingly, also without crisis situations, people sometimes accuse other groups of conspiring. The Apollo moon landings, for instance, were not a crisis situation. They were a testimony to human accomplishment, courage, and scientific progress. Yet, this was an impactful and salient societal event that many people sought to make sense of. The moon landings therefore stimulated many conspiracy theories among people who had a deep-rooted distrust in the US government or NASA. Even up to this day, a sizeable number of people believe that they were staged in a TV studio. In a 2019 survey,

eleven per cent of US citizens believed that the moon landings were faked.

These varied examples illuminate the relationships between conspiracy theories, polarization, and radicalization. When people polarize, they not only become more strongly entrenched in their own beliefs about pressing societal issues – such as the Covid-19 pandemic, immigration, climate change, and so on – they also see sharper distinctions with groups of people who hold different beliefs about these issues.

Conspiracy theories provide a narrative that demonize these other groups by ascribing evil intentions, criminal action, and destruction to them. Hence they turn other groups into “enemies”, making radical action against them seem legitimate.

For instance, many of the Dutch anti-lockdown rioters likely believed that they were standing up against a bad-intentioned government that tried to curtail citizens’ freedom. In their minds, the ends justified the means, and violence was the only remaining option to resist their powerful enemy.

Indeed, in the short run their conspiracy theories may have made the rioters feel special and important. As a select group of citizens who believed they truly understood the dangerous deception of their government, they were willing to fight against it.

These events underscore the perils of conspiracy thinking, for both society and the perceivers themselves. By fuelling polarization, conspiracy theories can stimulate radical action, and undermine the democratic institutions that were designed to help and protect these citizens. ■

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**When other groups are turned into ‘enemies’, radical action against them seems legitimate**



© Valérie Baeriswyl / K2d

▼ Yanick Lahens photographed in her home, February 2021.

# YANICK LAHENS:

## “Haiti questions modernity because we see its contradictions”

A leading figure on the Haitian literary scene, Yanick Lahens discusses her work. Inspired by the popular and vibrant culture of her country, it is a far cry from the usual miserable clichés that abound. Through her singular and poetic stories, she also recounts the history of the world’s first Black Republic, which is both “a product of modernity and a response to this modernity”.

Interview by **Agnès Bardon**

UNESCO

● **How does one decide to choose this very particular way of living that is the world of writing?**

Like the Haitian poet Georges Castéra, I believe that “words choose us because we are alone”. Words become a way of communicating with our own mystery, our intimate knowledge, and of communicating with those who, by reading us, explore their own mystery and the intimate knowledge that is theirs. Writing involves accepting solitude, and, at the same time paradoxically, trying to escape it.

To be a writer is to feel the need to make sense of reality, to put it into perspective in order to fill a fundamental void with words, as others might do through music, or through drawing and colours.

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**To be a writer is to feel the need to make sense of reality**

● **Could you describe the place where you write?**

There are many places in the house that I write in – I often carry pieces of paper in my pockets – but my favourite place is my bedroom. On my desk, I have a fetish object, a pebble on which a fish and seaweed are drawn on an ochre background. I think it sums up life well – mineral, fauna and flora all at once. It’s the human hand that has made it an objet d’art.

● **Port-au-Prince is the central character in your book *Douces dérives* [Gentle diversions]. It is also at the heart of *Failles* [Faults], which was written in the aftermath of the earthquake that struck the Haitian capital in January 2010. How do the city and the country inform your work?**

I am a daughter of this city. In my very first collection of short stories, *Tante Résia et les dieux* [Aunt Résia and the Spirits and Other Stories], there is a story called “La Ville” [The City], which describes the long journey of a



A major figure in Haitian literature today, YANICK LAHENS was born in Port-au-Prince, where she returned after attending school and university in France. Author of essays, short stories and novels, she has won many awards, including the prestigious Prix Fémina in 2014, for *Bain de lune* (Moonbath). Lahens’ work has been translated into English, Portuguese, Japanese and Italian. She previously taught literature at the university in Port-au-Prince, and worked for France’s Ministry of Culture. She is also involved in numerous projects dedicated to the fight against illiteracy in her country, and a project addressing the issue of slavery through art and literature.

→ character trying to catch a woman wearing a red dress. This wandering is a pretext for evoking the history of this city – its myths, its powerful, disconcerting, and lively present. From there, I reflect on myself – I question history, myths, geography, the life force, the world as it is, with its inequalities, its misfortunes and its beauty, against all odds.

● **What role have women played in the literature of Haiti?**

I think their role has become much more obvious since the late 1980s. This is thanks to the work of feminist groups that have highlighted the historical and political role of women in Haiti. This has enabled us to revisit our literary heritage – especially the work of the novelist and playwright Marie

Chauvet, who truly introduced the modern novel to Haiti with her trilogy *Amour, Colère et Folie* [*Love, Anger, Madness: A Haitian Triptych*]. Since then, two generations of female writers have emerged. It is interesting to note that they also write in Creole.

● **As the first person to hold the Francophone Worlds Chair at the Collège de France in Paris, you called the course you gave there in 2019 “Urgence(s) d’écrire, rêve(s) d’habiter” [Urgency to write, dream(s) of living]. What is the urgency that you referred to?**

We were born in Haiti during an emergency that has never left us. The Haitian revolution [1791-1804], the third

revolution in modern times after the United States and France, pushed the Enlightenment project further with its radicalism. It is anti-colonial, anti-racist and anti-slavery. We are the mould and the matrix of the North-South relations established by this modernity.

If our elites tried to reproduce the model of the old metropolis, an anti-plantation culture developed in parallel – with a religion, voodoo; a language, Creole; but also a way of occupying space, matrimonial relations, etc. The first writers who came from the elite, wrote in French to say that we exist as Blacks and as human beings. For over a century, an oral literature has been developed in Creole, and is now appearing in the written word. We are leaning on these two pillars of support.



© Valérie Baeriswyl / K2d

▼ Place Dessalines, the centre of history and power in the heart of Port-au-Prince, is home to statues of the leading heroes of independence and the Museum of the Haitian National Pantheon. “This square marks the social divide between those at the top, those who have, and those at the bottom, those who don’t,” Yanick Lahens says.

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## For over a century, an oral literature has been constructed in Creole, and is now appearing in the written word

Today, we are still in this state of emergency because, as far as I am aware, North-South relations have not fundamentally changed. Also, the complicity of the elites in maintaining these relations is still just as obvious for countries in the South. Writers, and artists in general, have created against a backdrop of distress and anger, but with the will to write “in a state of poetry”. As the Haitian poet René Depestre says: “The state of poetry is flourishing, light years away from the states of siege and alarm”.

● **In your essay, *L’Exil: entre l’ancrage et la fuite* [Exile: between anchorage and flight], you show that Haitian literature is marked by a paradoxical movement between a longing to be elsewhere and a desire to stay. How does this oscillation manifest itself?**

It has always existed. First, we are all transplanted people. Next, many people have worked hard to make this country uninhabitable. And finally, in the imagination of the ex-colonized, there is this idea – that must always be resisted – that the best can only be found elsewhere, in the North. The combination of these three factors has created this oscillation between anchoring and flight.

● **The Haitian revolution made the country the world’s first Black Republic. How does it continue to question modernity?**

We are both a product of this modernity, and a response to it. We are a recent civilization born from the mixing and meeting of the Atlantic and the Caribbean seas. We question modernity because we see its contradictions and limitations. From the very beginning, our existence has been a way of rethinking the universality of the Enlightenment.

● **What does Haitian literature have to say today?**

Migration is one of the major destinies of countries in the South, whose lands have been rendered uninhabitable. Many Haitians have therefore migrated since the beginning of the twentieth century – taking with them this culture, which was formed in the nineteenth century, and of which literature is one form of artistic expression among others.

Today, there are [several] Haitian literatures. One that is created in Haiti, in Creole and French. One that is being written in English, in the United States. One that is being written in Spanish, in Latin America and even in the Dominican Republic. And one that is being created in French, in France and Canada.

These literatures are a prefiguration of the multiple world that is emerging, and of the multilingualism that Édouard Glissant evokes in *Le Discours antillais* [Caribbean discourse]. ■



▼ The author Yanick Lahens' library.

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# The languages in cyberspace

Mila Ibrahimova

UNESCO

**B**y the end of the century, around half of the approximately 7,000 languages spoken in the world today could disappear, according to the 2021 UNESCO *World Report of Languages: Towards a Global Assessment Framework for Linguistic Diversity*, released in May.

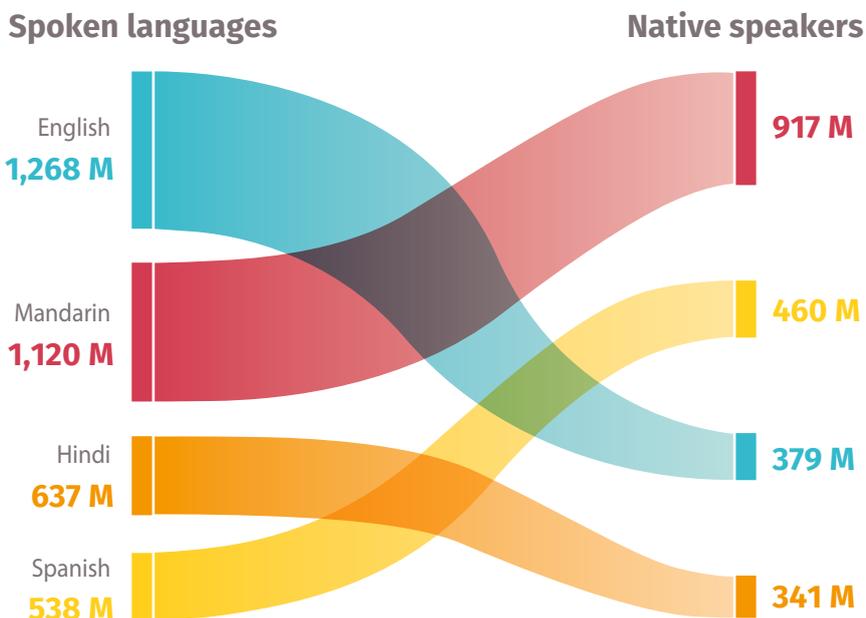
The internet, which is now the primary way of sharing information, has a key role to play in promoting multilingualism. In this area, the situation has changed considerably.

From once dominating the web, English now represents just one language in an online linguistic elite. The relative share of English in cyberspace has shrunk to around thirty per cent, while French, German, Spanish and Mandarin have all pushed into the top ten languages online.

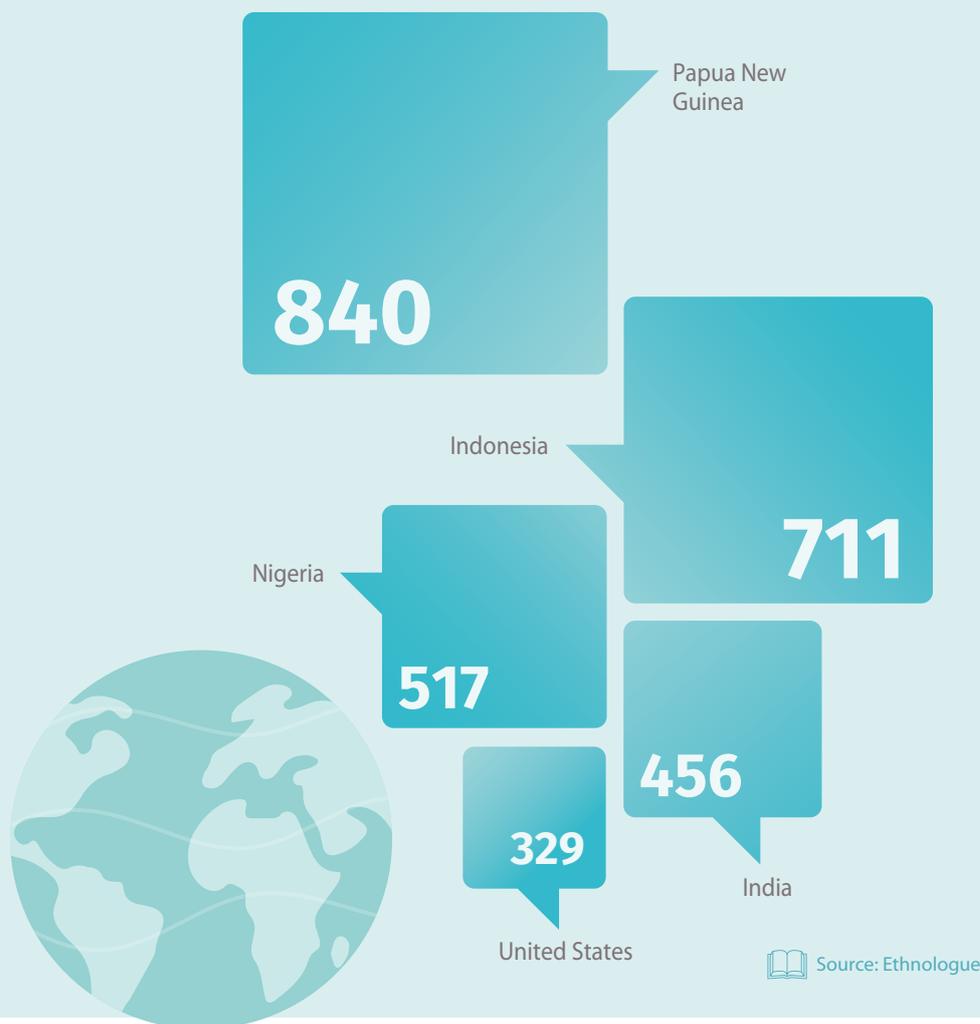
Some of these have seen a meteoric rise – Mandarin, for example, grew by over 1,200 per cent between 2000 and 2010. Access to devices and sources is not the only issue. Estimations indicate that nearly forty-three per cent of the world's languages and dialects are unwritten – posing another challenge for the way they could fit into the often text-based online world.

The *World Report* and the accompanying online platform, the *World Atlas of Languages* (WAL), present a new, in-depth assessment of the world's linguistic diversity. The online platform constitutes a comprehensive database of all the world's languages, including sign languages, which can be consulted by educational and scientific institutions, libraries, archives and the general public. ■

## Top 4 most spoken languages and native speakers

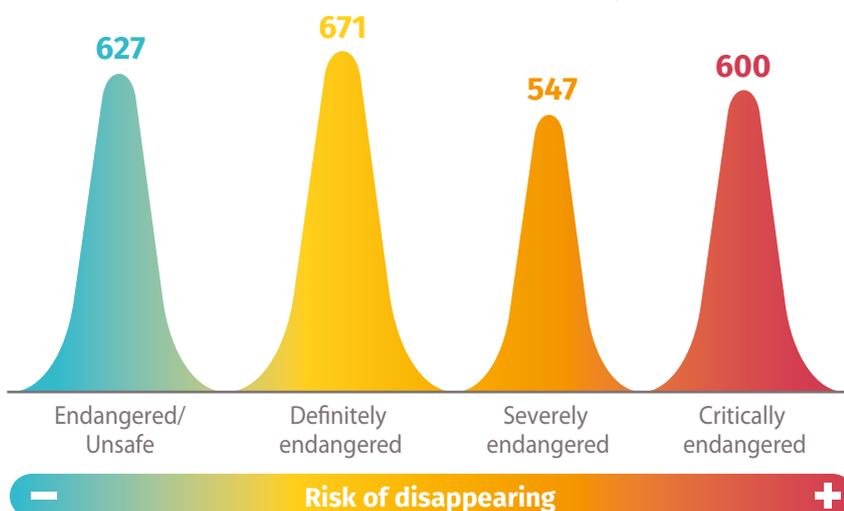


## Countries with the most languages

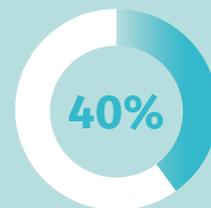


## Situation of the world's endangered languages

(Number of languages)



Source: Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, 2011



1 No less than 40% of known languages are endangered or have gone out of use



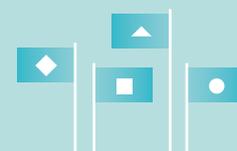
2 Language endangerment is primarily a problem of languages with few speakers



3 More endangered languages are being discovered



4 The number of endangered languages bears no connection to the level of economic development of a country or to its size

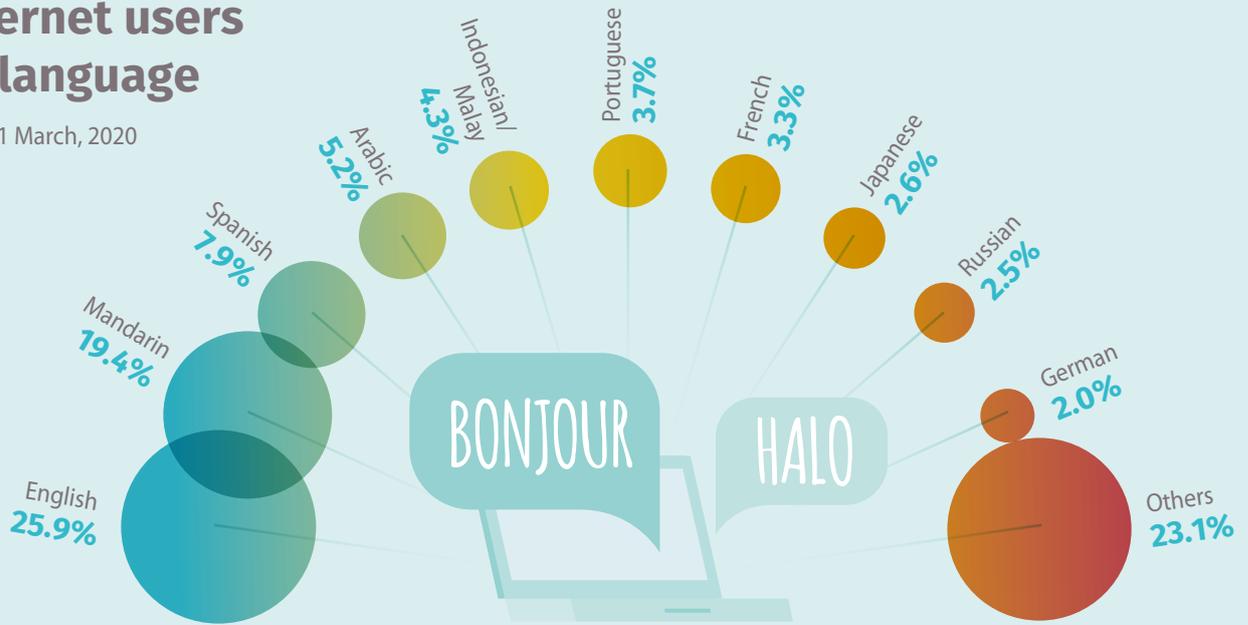


5 A great diversity of country typologies can be observed regarding the intensity of language endangerment

Source: Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, 2011

# Internet users by language

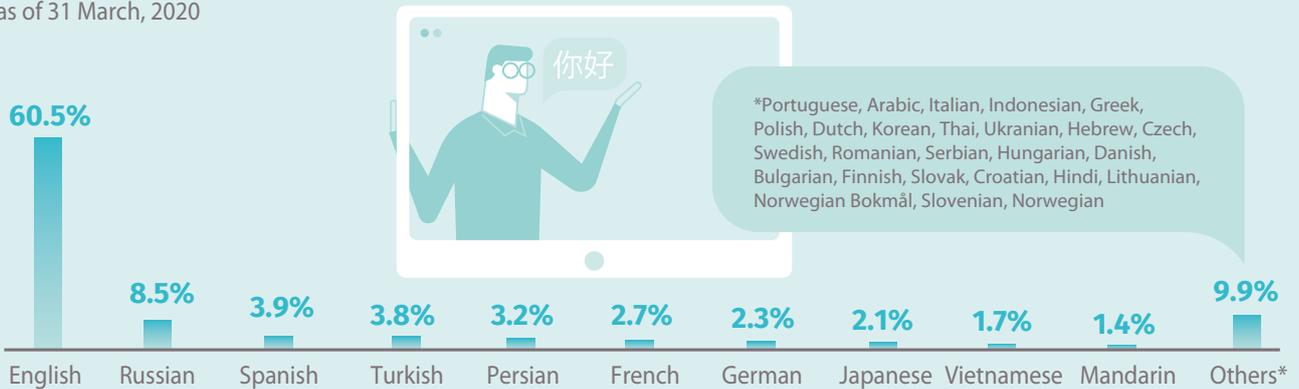
as of 31 March, 2020



Source: Internet World Stats

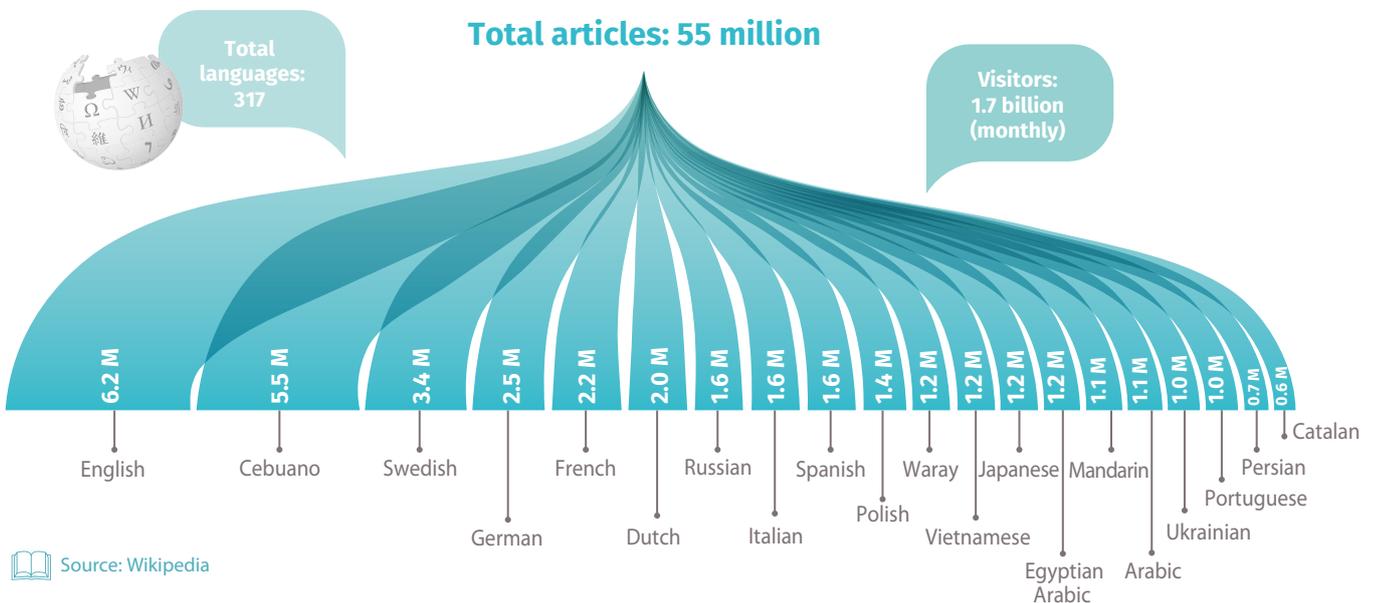
# Content languages for websites

as of 31 March, 2020



Source: W3Techs

# Distribution of Wikipedia articles in different languages

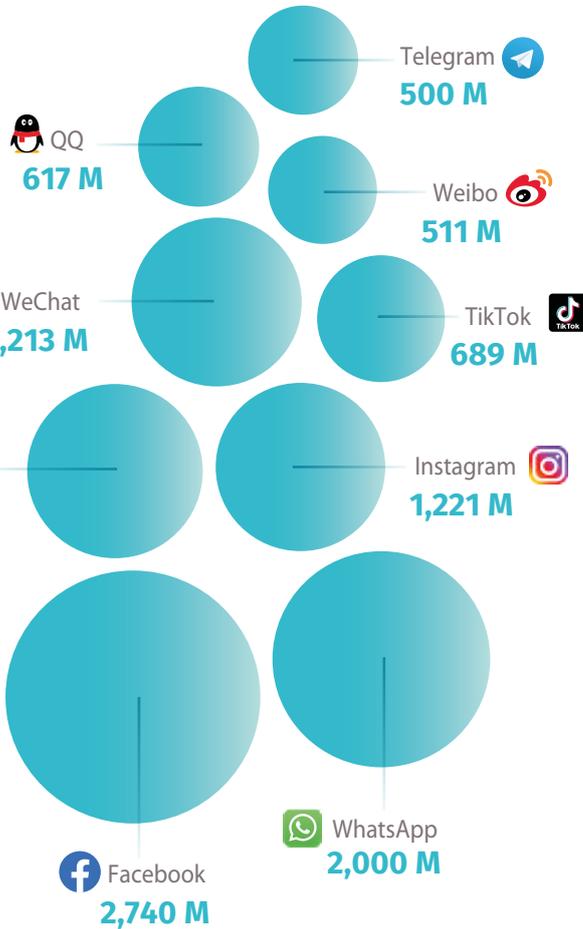


Source: Wikipedia

## Social Media

Active users

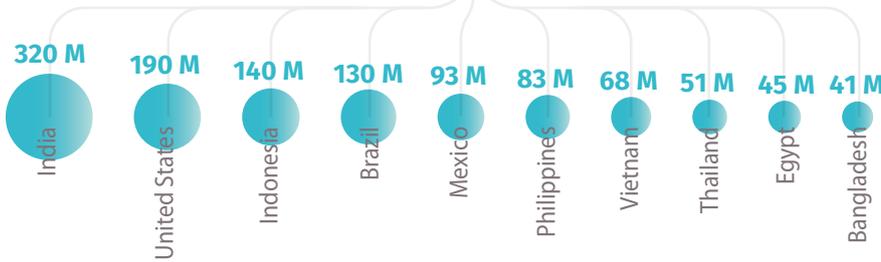
4.2 billion



Source: Statista

## Top ten countries with the most monthly Facebook users

as of January 2021



## Language Apps

Demand for bilingual candidates more than doubled between 2010 and 2015. Which is probably why billions of people are trying to learn a second language. Of those, around 150 million are using the free language-learning app Duolingo – which covers only 23 languages.

Source: World Economic Forum

## Most popular languages on duolingo

1. ENGLISH

2. SPANISH

3. FRENCH

4. GERMAN

5. ITALIAN

6. JAPANESE

7. KOREAN

8. PORTUGUESE

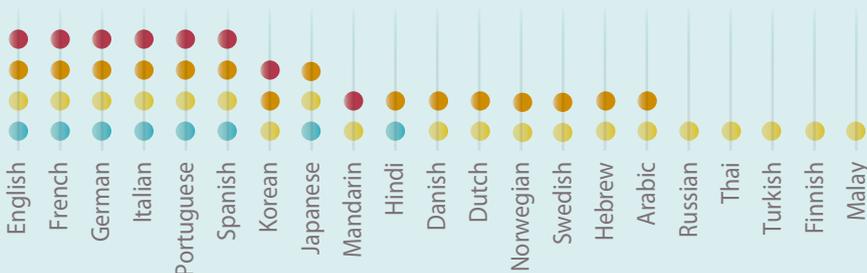
9. RUSSIAN

10. MANDARIN

## Languages covered by voice assistants

as of 11 June, 2020

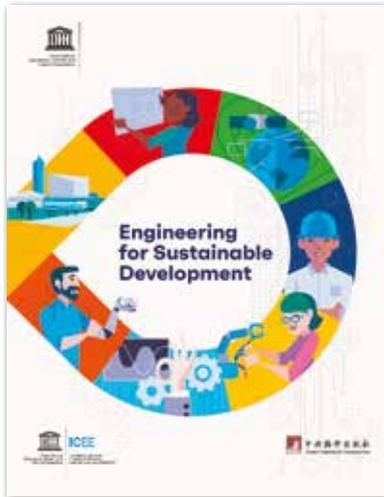
● Amazon Alexa ● Apple Siri ● Google Home ● Samsung Bixby



Source: 2021 UNESCO World Report of Languages

Source: 2020 Duolingo Language Report

# New publications

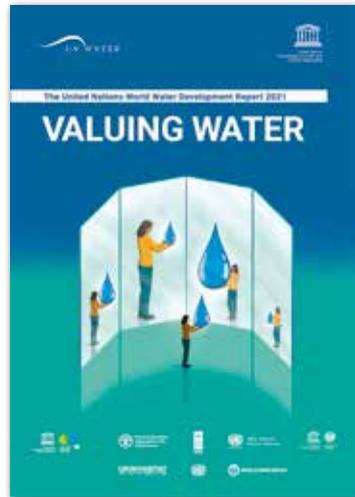


## Engineering for Sustainable Development

ISBN 978-92-3-100437-7  
185 pp, 215 x 280 mm, paperback, €55  
UNESCO Publishing/ICEE/CCTP

The report highlights the crucial role of engineering in achieving each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It shows how equal opportunities for all is key to ensuring an inclusive and gender-balanced profession that can better respond to the shortage of engineers for implementing the SDGs.

The 2021 report provides a snapshot of the engineering innovations that are shaping our world, especially emerging technologies such as big data and AI, which are crucial for addressing the pressing challenges facing humankind and the planet. It analyses the transformation of engineering education and capacity-building at the dawn of the Fourth Industrial Revolution that will enable engineers to tackle the challenges ahead. It also highlights the global effort needed to address the specific regional disparities, while summarizing the trends of engineering across the different regions of the world.



## The United Nations World Water Development Report 2021

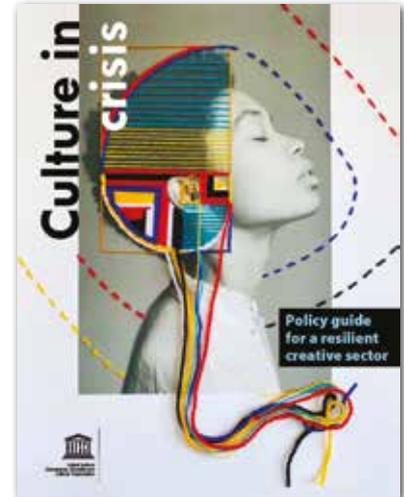
### Valuing Water

ISBN 978-92-3-100434-6  
208 pp, 210 x 297 mm, paperback, €55  
Published by UNESCO on behalf of UN-Water

Water is a unique and non-substitutable resource of limited quantity. But unlike most other valuable resources, it has proven extremely difficult to determine its true 'value'.

*Valuing Water*, the 2021 World Water Development Report (WWDR), assesses the current status of and challenges to the valuation of water across different sectors and perspectives, and identifies ways in which valuation can be promoted as a tool to help achieve sustainability.

The United Nations' flagship report on water, the WWDR gives an overall picture of the state of the world's freshwater resources, and aims to provide key stakeholders with the tools to implement the sustainable use of water.



## Culture in Crisis

### Policy guide for a resilient creative sector

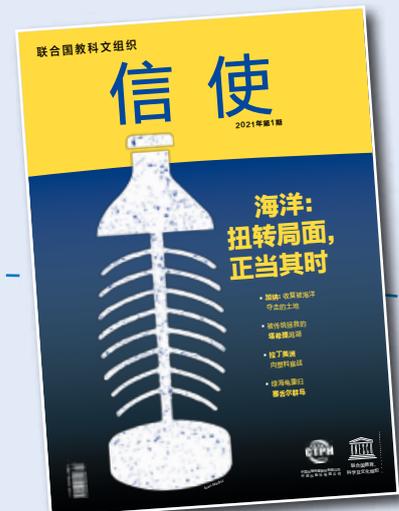
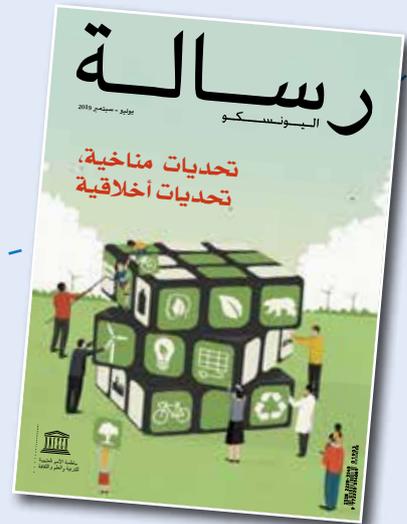
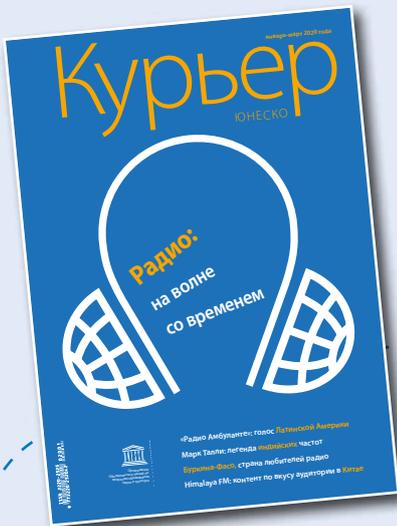
ISBN 978-92-3-100412-4  
51 pp, 215 x 280 mm, PDF  
UNESCO Publishing  
Publication available on: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/>

The Covid-19 pandemic and the crisis it created have had a devastating effect on the cultural and creative industries, revealing and magnifying their pre-existing volatility.

Drawing on policies and measures adopted during the crisis, this practical guide highlights emergency measures that have been deemed effective and beneficial; assesses emerging trends; identifies new and existing gaps, and offers practical advice to help policymakers position the cultural and creative industries in social and economic recovery plans.

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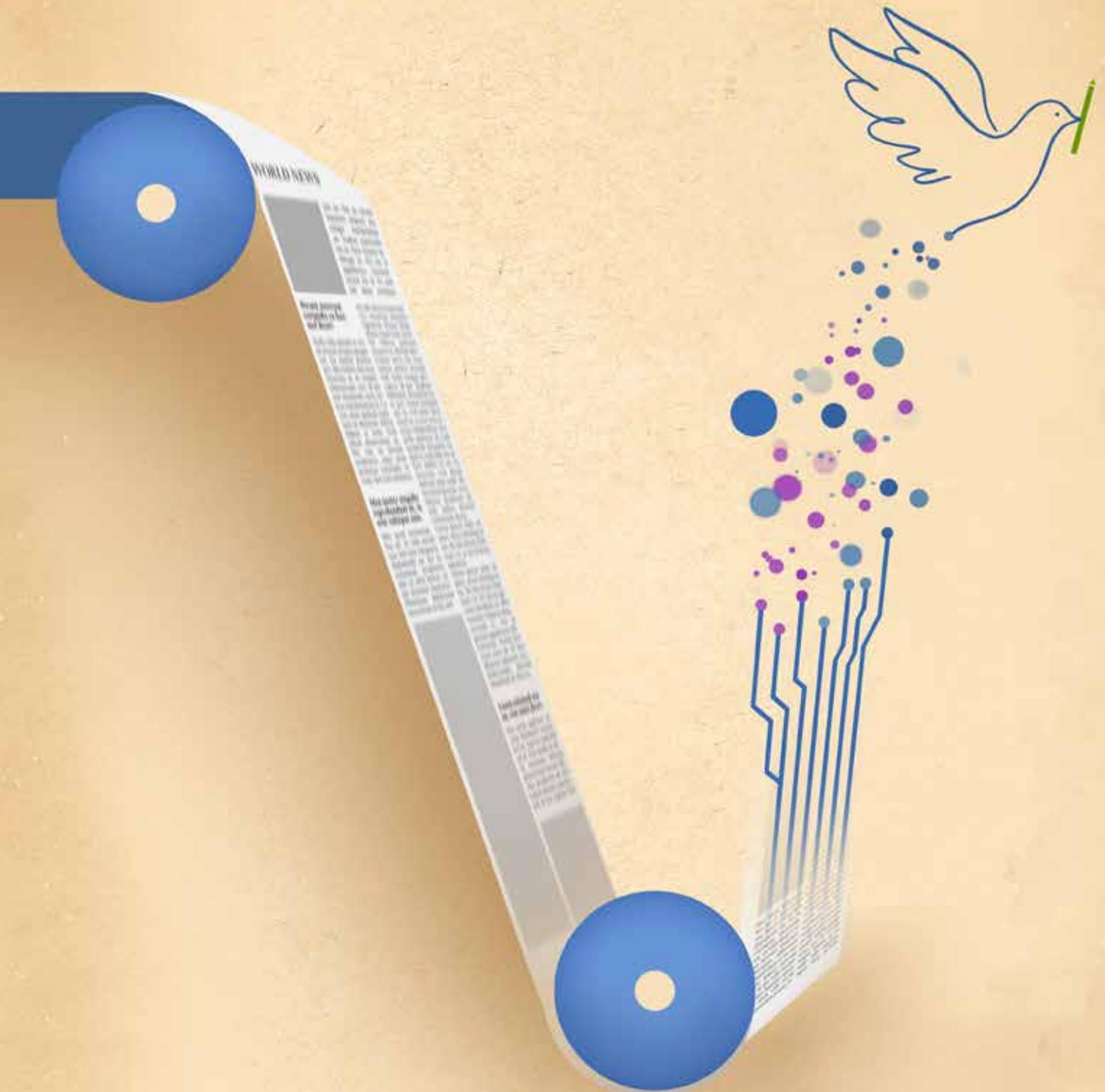
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30 YEARS OF THE WINDHOEK DECLARATION



# INFORMATION AS A PUBLIC GOOD

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