NEW MEDIA ACADEMY

HOW THE MIDDLE EAST USED SOCIAL MEDIA IN 2021

BY **NEW MEDIA ACADEMY**

AUTHORS: **DAMIAN RADCLIFFE** WITH **HADIL ABUHMAID**

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CONTENTS

3 Introduction

4 Executive Summary

10 Market Context

19 Facebook

27 Instagram

34 YouTube

41 TikTok

47 Snapchat

52 Influencers

58 COVID-19 & Online Misinformation

64 Messaging Apps

70 Twitter, LinkedIn & Clubhouse

80 Previous Reports

81 About New Media Academy

82 About the Authors

84 About the Designers

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INTRODUCTION
THE PURPOSE: NEW MEDIA ACADEMY



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Rashid Al Awadhi
Chief Executive Officer at New Media Academy

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NEW MEDIA ACADEMY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

21 KEY FINDINGS FROM 2021

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KEY STATS

1

Social Media users in Saudi Arabia are the most active in MENA, in terms of time spent on social.

They spend an average of 3 hours 16 mins on social networks every day, just ahead of UAE at 3 hours 12 mins a day.

2

UAE has the second-highest adoption of social media in the world, with Qatar ranked fifth.

In both countries, social media take-up is at—or near—100%.

3

Egypt, with at least 48 million active users is the biggest market for Facebook in MENA and the tenth largest market for the social network in the world.

4

Three Middle East nations—Turkey (49m users, ranked 6th), **Egypt** (16.1m, 19th) **and Saudi Arabia** (15.9m, 20th)**—are in the 20 largest markets for Instagram.**

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KEY STATS

5

Of nine markets in the world where TikTok reaches more than half the adult population, four of these are in the GCC (KSA, Kuwait, UAE and Qatar).

6

Snapchat has around 75 million users in the region, over 85% of daily users in MENA interact with Lenses every day.

Eight of the top 20 markets in the world—as a percentage of users—**can be found in the Middle East.**

7

LinkedIn has more than 43 million members in the MENA region (and over 800 million worldwide).

11 million members in Turkey, 6 million in Egypt and 5 million in both Saudi Arabia and UAE.

8

Saudi Arabia has the third-highest reach for Twitter globally. Just over half (51.1%) of the population **use the app. Kuwait** (42.4%) **is ranked sixth, and Bahrain** (33.4%) is in **tenth place.**

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DIGITAL CONTENT AND CAMPAIGNS

9

Music is an increasingly important genre on YouTube. As of August 2021, there are 170 music channels in MENA with more than one million subscribers, compared to only 18 in August 2017, a growth of 800%.

10

Nearly two-thirds (61%) of young Arabs aged 18–24 get their news from social, ahead of TV (43%) and online news portals (34%).

But over a quarter (28%) say social news is “not too trustworthy” or “not at all trustworthy.”

11

Twitter introduced a new language setting on the platform, Arabic Feminine, last year. The setting addresses the user in Arabic feminine form.

12

Kuwaiti activists launched a social media campaign—Lan Asket, meaning "I will not be silent" in Arabic. The campaign is designed to end sexual harassment and violence against women in the country.

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INFLUENCERS AND CONTENT CREATORS

13 **Mohamed Salah**, who plays for Liverpool and captains Egypt's national football team, **is the highest-ranked Instagram Influencer in the Middle East,** with 46.7 million followers.

14 **The most followed Arab music star on YouTube is Moroccan singer Saad Lamjarred**, Forbes revealed in April. He has more than 13.5 million subscribers.

15 **Amr Maskoun, a Syrian comedian and digital creator, won the inaugural "Middle Eastern Social Media Star of 2021" category in the E! People's Choice Awards**, the first time E! had honored stars from the region in a dedicated category.

16 **MENA gaming creator Aboflah** (real name Hassan Suleiman) **hosted a 28-hour livestream on YouTube raising over $1 million to aid refugees and the displaced in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan.**

17 **Egypt will tax "YouTubers and bloggers" earning more than 500,000 Egyptian pounds ($32,000) annually**, the Egyptian Tax Authority announced.

18 **YouTube Batala was relaunched in October featuring more than 250 women-led channels from across the region.** The channel is designed to highlight the best Arab female creators on YouTube.

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BRANDS, BUSINESSES AND DIGITAL MARKETING

19 ***Saudi Arabia is the fourth largest market globally for consumer spending in social media apps.***

Three other MENA nations, Turkey (9th), **Kuwait** (11th), **and UAE** (20th) also featured in the Top 20.

20 **More than three quarters (75.7%) of internet users in Morocco use social media to find out about brands and products,** way ahead of the global average (43.5%).

21 **The latest data published by eMarketer revealed $1.73 billion was spent on social advertising in MENA** (2020 figures).

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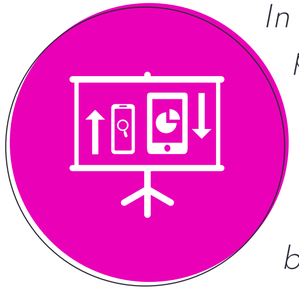
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CHAPTER 1:

MARKET CONTEXT

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In this opening chapter, we set the scene by providing an overview of some of the key trends and statistics that help to shape social media use in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

The report then continues on a platform-by-platform and thematic basis, diving into the biggest developments of the past year.

TREND 1: DIGITAL REACH & ENGAGEMENT

The internet is integrated into the way that many people in the region work, rest and play. **Four MENA nations, UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar enjoy 99% internet adoption levels, on a par with other world-leading nations like Norway and Ireland.**

Users also spend a lot of time online. **The average internet user in UAE** (8 hours 36 mins)**, Saudi Arabia** (08:05)**, Egypt** (08:02)**, and Turkey** (08:00) **all spent more time online each day than the worldwide average of 6 hours and 58 minutes.**

They also spend a lot of time on social media. Daily usage in the Gulf and Turkey continue to steadily grow, while it holds relatively steady in North Africa.

Because of this, it's perhaps no surprise that **some major technology and internet companies enjoy a healthy brand ranking in MENA's biggest markets**. These rankings typically feature local and national companies, with few non-MENA businesses usually appearing in the Top 10.

That said, in YouGov's customer rankings across 54 markets, **several major tech and social media brands failed to feature in the Top 10 for Egypt, Saudi Arabia and UAE**, in contrast to their global ranking. Moreover, in three MENA nations—Lebanon, Morocco and Turkey—none of these global tech giants are in the Top 10 for any of these countries.

TIME SPENT USING SOCIAL NETWORKS

COUNTRY	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
EGYPT	3:07	3:05	3:02	2:52	2:57
MOROCCO	2:23	2:34	2:31	2:34	2:31
SAUDI ARABIA	2:38	2:52	3:08	3:11	3:16
TURKEY	2:49	2:53	2:56	3:01	3:03
U.A.E.	2:56	3:01	3:04	3:07	3:12

Table: Average time spent using social networks on an average day in h:mm.
Source: GWI data Q1 2017-Q3 2021.

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Analysis **by Kepsios ranks UAE as having the second-highest adoption of social media in the world, and Qatar fifth**, with penetration at—or near—100%.

Meanwhile, **in numerous MENA nations, users spend more time on social media than the global daily average of 2 hours and 27 minutes**. In MENA, social media usage is **led by consumers in Saudi Arabia** (3 hours 24 mins), **Egypt** (3 hours 13 mins), **UAE** (3 hours 4 mins), **Turkey** (2 hours 59 mins) and **Morocco** (2 hours 29 mins).

Globally the average social networker uses 7.5 platforms each month. That figure is higher in Turkey (8.1), UAE (7.8) and Saudi Arabia (7.8).

GLOBAL BRAND RANKINGS 2021

	EGYPT	SAUDI ARABIA	U.A.E.	GLOBAL
Google	1	--	9	1
YouTube	3	9	5	4
WhatsApp	7	--	--	5
FACEBOOK	8	--	--	--
Apple	--	5	7	--
SAMSUNG	--	8	3	2

Table: Global Best Brand Rankings 2021, via YouGov.

RANKING OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE VS. POPULATION

Countries and territories with the 10 highest levels of social media use vs. population.

#	HIGHEST ADOPTION	% OF POP.	USERS
01	**BRUNEI**	116.5%	516,500
02	**U.A.E.**	106.1%	10,650,000
03	**CAYMAN ISLANDS**	100.8%	67,450
04	**MALTA**	100.8%	447,000
05	**CYPRUS**	100.3%	1,223,300
06	**QATAR**	99.8%	2,950,000
07	**GUAM**	99.8%	170,450
08	**PALAU**	98.6%	17,950
09	**ARUBA**	97.5%	104,700
10	**ICELAND**	96.2%	331,250

Table: Social Media Use vs. Population via DataReportal on SlideShare.

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TREND 2: THE IMPORTANCE OF MOBILE

The MENA region is home to some of the highest levels of mobile take-up, and mobile speeds, in the world. This technology often underpins social media habits. **In many cases, internet users spend more time online via their mobile than other devices such as laptops, desktops or tablets. Much of this time is spent on social media.**

One reason for this, especially in the Gulf region is the advanced mobile networks that are available.

AVERAGE TIME SPENT ON THE INTERNET PER DAY IN 2021

COUNTRY	VIA MOBILE	VIA COMPUTERS	SOCIAL MEDIA
SAUDI ARABIA	4 hrs. 35 min.	3 hrs. 30 min.	3 hrs. 24 min.
U.A.E.	4 hrs. 35 min,	4 hrs. 1 min.	3 hrs. 4 min.
EGYPT	4 hrs. 25 min.	3 hrs. 37 min.	3 hrs. 13 min.
TURKEY	4 hrs. 16 min.	3 hrs. 44 min.	2 hrs. 59 min.
WORLDWIDE AVG.	3 hrs. 43 min.	3 hrs. 14 min.	2 hrs. 27 min.
MOROCCO	3 hrs. 35 min.	*DATA NOT PROVIDED*	2 hrs. 29 min.
ISRAEL	3 hrs. 31 min.	4 hrs. 4 min.	1 hrs. 58 min.

Table: GWI Q3 2021, via via Data Reportal.

The Speedtest Global Index, monthly rankings of mobile and fixed broadband speeds from around the world, highlight how **four MENA countries—UAE (No 1), Qatar (No 5), Saudi Arabia (No 7) and Kuwait (No 10)—are in the Top 10 nations worldwide for mobile download speeds**.

Their rankings for Global Median Speeds in December 2021 show that the median download speed of 29.55 Mbps is comfortably exceeded by these GCC countries With many MENA nations moving to mobile ahead of fixed internet, it's perhaps not surprising that no MENA nations are in the Top 10 for fixed broadband, demonstrating mobile's dominance. (UAE is the highest-ranked in this index, at No 13.)

SPEEDTEST® GLOBAL INDEX

Ranking mobile and fixed broadband speeds from around the world on a monthly basis (**February 2022**).

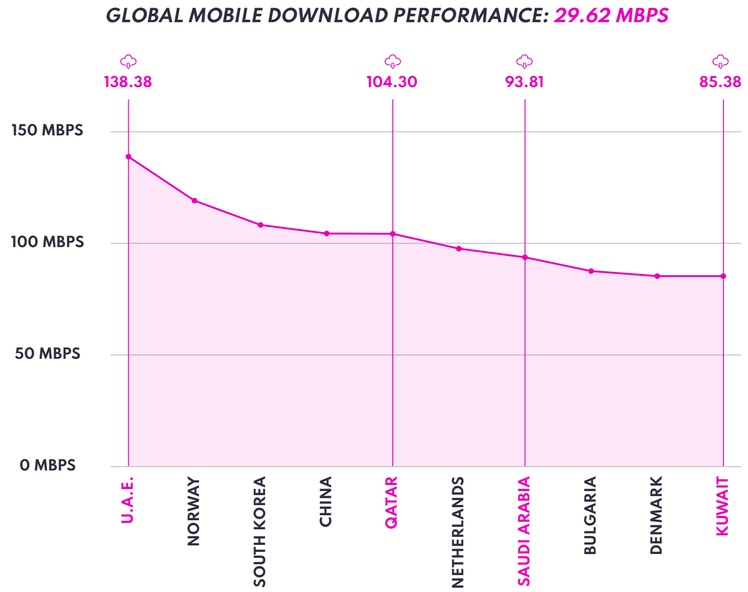


Chart: February 2022 Data showing mean download speed, via Speedtest® by Ookla®.

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TREND 3: THE POWER OF ARAB YOUTH

Around 146 million people, akin to c.34% of the Middle East is aged between 15 and 34. As the Washington Institute for Near East Policy notes, "the Arab states are collectively very young."

They also "have access to the rest of the world through the internet and social media in extraordinary ways," observes Dr. Yara M. Asi, a non-resident fellow at the Arab Center Washington DC and an Assistant Professor at the University of Central Florida.

Subsequently, **"more young people are seeing the world not through the eyes of a government or state driven media, but they are seeing the world through social media,"** says Sunil John, President Middle East and North Africa of BCW (Burson Cohn & Wolfe).

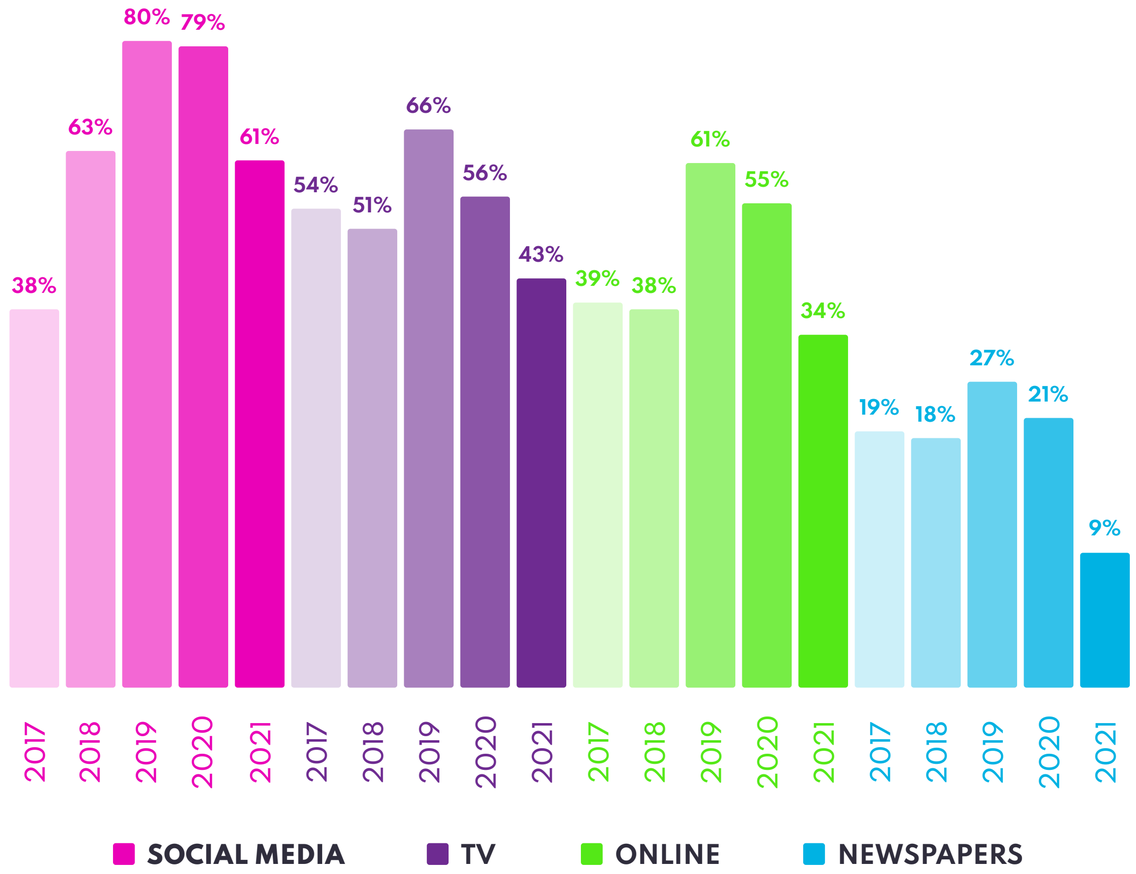
"The social media revolution has provided a view to these young people, which has dramatically changed their view of what they need and what they want and the government," John told CBS News last year.

Social media is the leading source of news among young Arabs. Nearly two-thirds (61%) of respondents to the 2021 Arab Youth survey said they got their news from social media, some way ahead of TV (43%) and online news portals (34%).

Across all age groups, social media can also be the leading source for hearing about breaking news stories. According to data published in February 2021 from the Arab Barometer survey, more than half of those surveyed in Jordan (52%) said they use social media as their primary source for breaking news, dropping to 43% in Lebanon and Algeria and 36% in Tunisia and Morocco.

WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR NEWS?

Social media has grown to become by far **the most common news source** among Arab youth.



Graph: News habits of Arab Youth, via Arab Youth Survey

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However, **younger users were much more likely to cite social media as the primary source for breaking news.** "The largest gap with respect to age is in Algeria," the researchers note, "where 71% of those aged 18-29 report using social media as their primary source for breaking news compared to 34% of those aged 30 and over."

Nevertheless, high levels of social media usage for news, does not necessarily translate into trust. "Arab youth trust social media outlets less than TV, newspapers, and online news portals," the latest Arab Youth Survey observes.

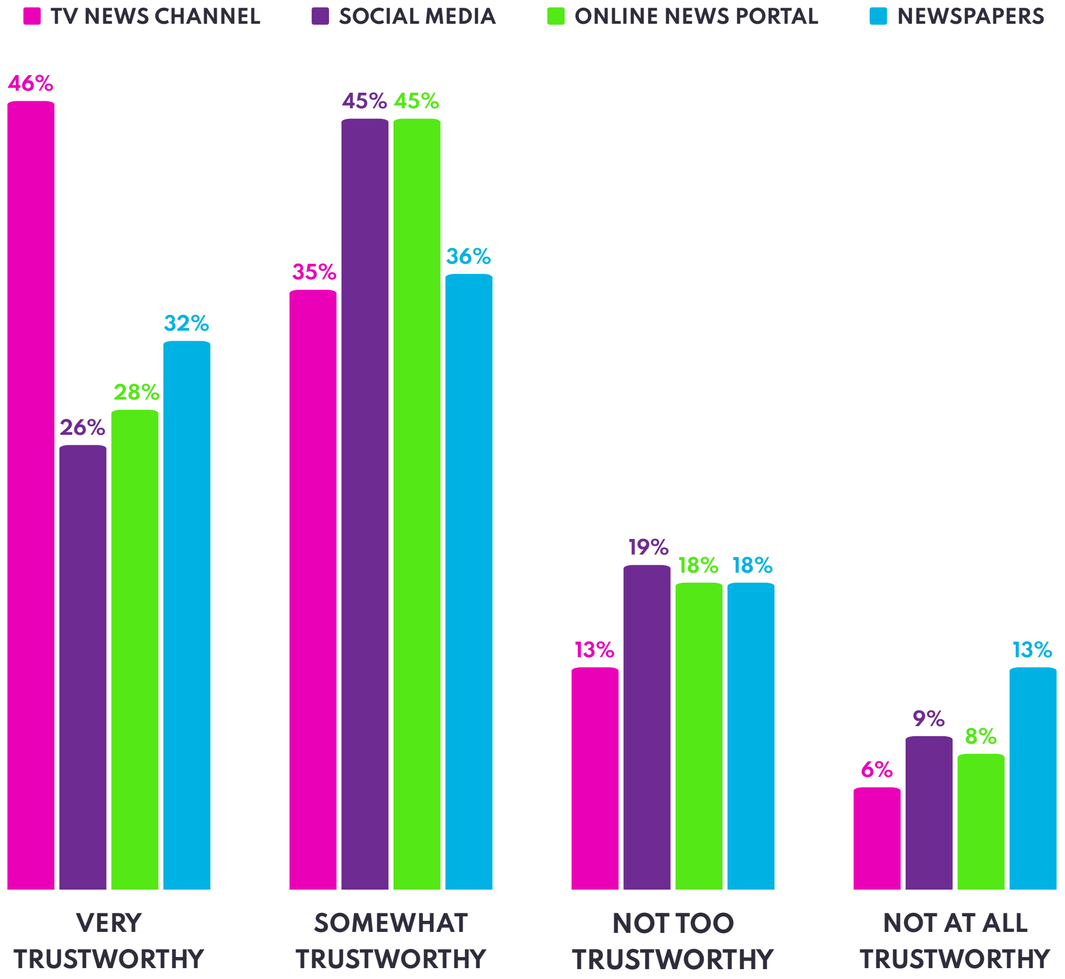
Over a quarter of respondents (28%) deemed social media as a source of news to be "not too trustworthy" or "not at all trustworthy." Similarly, **although nearly half of young Arabs (46%) describe TV channels as 'very trustworthy' this drops to a quarter (26%) for social media**

Well publicized issues, like algorithm-driven content moderation on platforms like Facebook, could be one reason for this, along with the role of social networks as potential engines for spreading misinformation. The Arab Youth Survey suggests "news fatigue at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic," and changing work/life lifestyles may also be factors.

Other considerations for this trust gap—mirroring findings seen in other regions might also be attributable to the speed and convenience of access (always on, and via a device in your pocket) with which news spreads on social media.

This is an asset, as well as a potential hindrance, with a lack of fact-checking and editorial oversight of news on social networks—often being in contrast to other traditional media platforms.

HOW TRUSTWORTHY IS EACH OF THE FOLLOWING IS AS A SOURCE OF NEWS?



Graphs: News habits of Arab Youth, via Arab Youth Survey.

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TREND 4: THE POTENTIAL FOR SOCIAL COMMERCE

"Social commerce is what happens when savvy marketers take the best of e-commerce and combine it with social media," Hootsuite says. In late-2020 they commented that "social commerce is a $89.4 billion market right now. It's projected to grow to $604.5 billion in the next seven years."

As we noted in last year's report, users across MENA often utilize social networks for brand research. More than three quarters (75.7%) of internet users in Morocco use social media to find out about brands and products. This is some way ahead of the global average (43.5%).

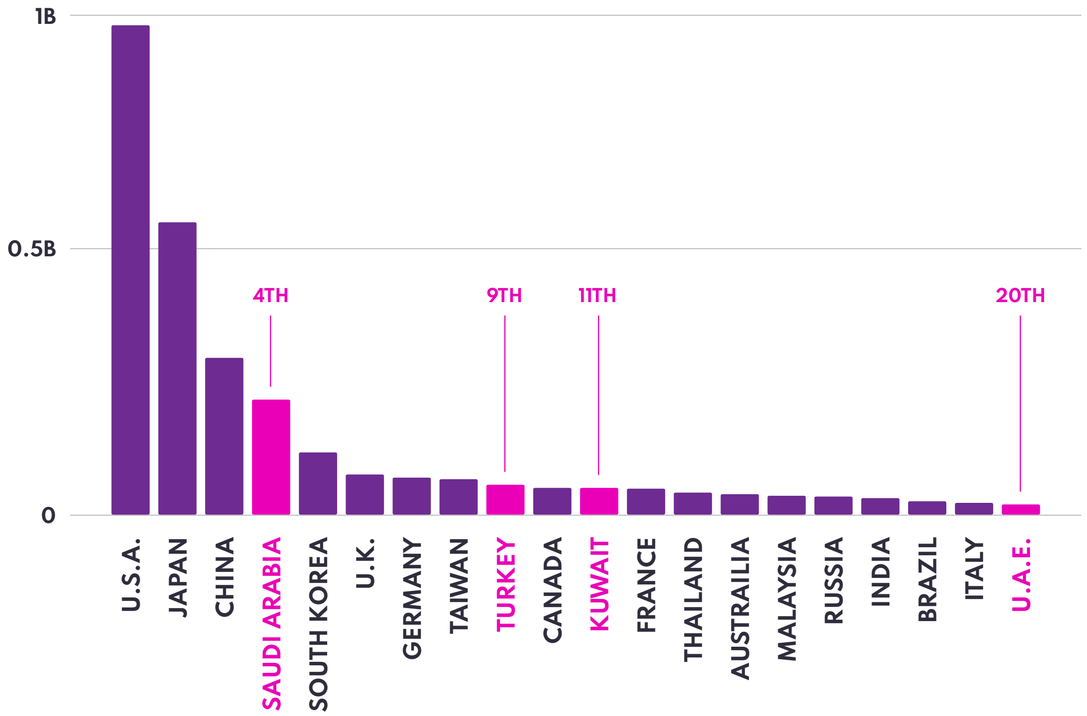
Users surveyed by GlobalWebIndex in **Saudi Arabia** (58%), **Turkey** (50%), **Israel** (49.9%) and **UAE** (48.8%) are also more likely to engage in this type of activity, with those in **Egypt** (42.6%) just behind the global curve.

As social networks like Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest and Facebook continue to integrate the ability to purchase products through their apps, it will be easier than ever for users to act on this research to buy goods without having to leave these networks.

Data from App Annie reveals that in the first half of the calendar year 2021, Saudi Arabia was the fourth largest market globally for consumer spending in social media apps. Three other MENA nations, Turkey (9th)**, Kuwait** (11th)**, and UAE** (20th) also featured in the Top 20.

In the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt "one out of three shoppers use online video to get inspired and explore options before they buy," Campaign Middle East reported, citing research from Kantar, and presenting another opportunity for content creators, with 90% of shoppers in those markets searching online before making purchase decisions.

TOP MARKETS BY SOCIAL APPS CONSUMER SPEND



Graph: Top Markets by Social Media Consumer Spend, App Annie, via Techcrunch.

According to a Mastercard study in the UAE, 72% of respondents surveyed discovered new brands through Facebook and 56% on Instagram. Just under three quarters (73%) UAE consumers shop more online than they did prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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TREND 5: THE VALUE OF SOCIAL VIDEO AND LOCAL CONTENT

Online users in the MENA spend an average of 90 minutes every day consuming short-form content, according to management consultancy RedSeer. This type of content constitutes **around 15% of their total media time.**

"Local content continues to be popular," Campaign ME commented, "with 7 out of 10 most-watched videos [on YouTube] in the Kingdom… locally produced by Saudi content creators."

In Saudi Arabia, one of MENA's biggest markets, **consumption of educational videos on YouTube related to science and math grew by 200%, and content focussed on practical skills was up by 95%**, Google announced.

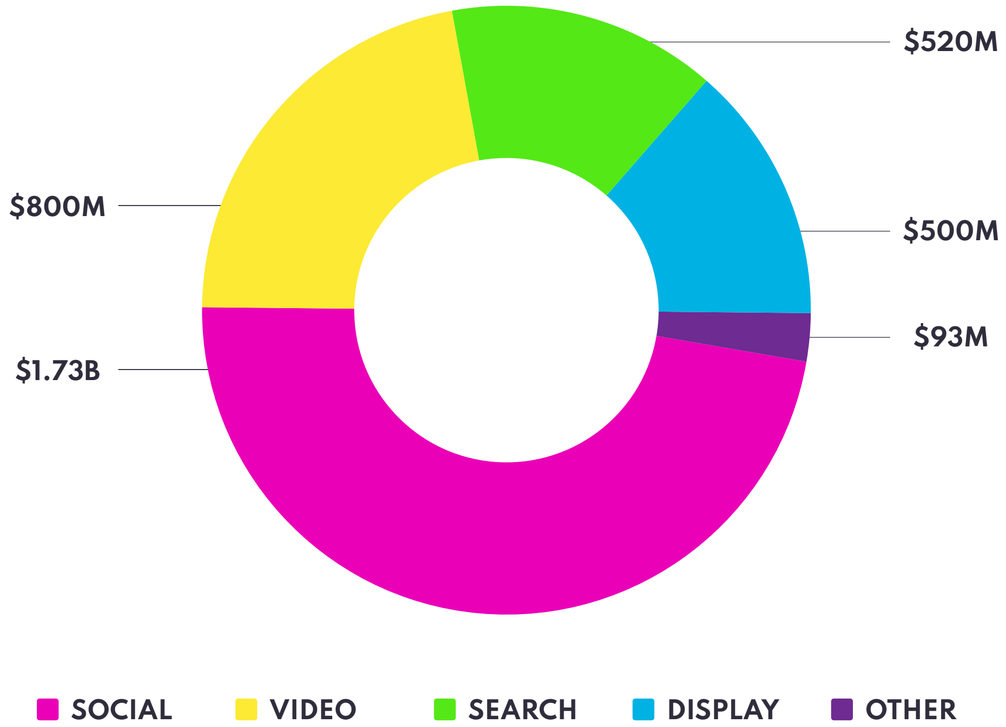
Pandemic-era needs are continuing to shape media habits. More than half of internet users in UAE (50.1%), Morocco (51%), Saudi Arabia (51.1%) and Turkey (62.7%) say they watch how-to videos, tutorials or education videos online each week, Q3 2021 data from GWI (GlobalWebIndex) reveals.

The creator economy and the influence of local creators are also discernible. Reflecting on one key market, Saudi Arabia, Souheil Soueid, head of advertising products and solutions at Google and YouTube MENA, observed that users "come to YouTube to catch more personalized content and high-quality entertainment produced by local creators." "They are looking for relevant and relatable video content that may not always be available in more traditional media," he added.

Given this, it's interesting to note that **advertisers in the Middle East and North Africa spend more on social media than on any other digital ad format.**

Data published by eMarketer in November 2021 *(although the figures relate to 2020)* **revealed that $1.73 billion was spent on social advertising in MENA, more than double the money spent on digital video.**

DIGITAL AD SPENDING BY FORMAT IN THE MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA IN 2020



Graph: MENA Digital Ad Spending, via eMarketer.

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MENA'S TOP SOCIAL MEDIA PAGES AND PROFILES

For this year's report, we worked in partnership with Emplifi to identify and share the biggest – and most engaged – social media pages and profiles in the Middle East.

Emplifi monitors more than 15+ million social media accounts, the largest social media dataset in the industry. Leveraging this data, Emplifi works with over 2,500 clients across 100 countries, helping marketers and brands gain knowledge about their industry.

In this report, for the first time, we share details of the most followed accounts in 2021 – across MENA - on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter, as well as the pages and profiles on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube which enjoyed the most engagement last year.



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CHAPTER 2:

FACEBOOK

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Facebook remains the most popular social network in the world. It has nearly 3 billion monthly active users (2.91 billion as of October 2021) some way ahead of its nearest competitor, YouTube (2.56B).

Egypt, with at least 48 million active users is the biggest market for Facebook in MENA and the 10th largest market for the social network in the world.

Users in Palestine are among the most active users to "Like" posts on the network.

The average user "likes" 18 posts a month. Palestine is ranked tenth, globally, for this type of engagement. **Israel** (13 likes) and **Egypt** (12 likes) are the only other MENA nations above the worldwide average of 11 post likes a month.

Facebook users in Palestine are the second most likely to comment on the social network, averaging 15 comments a month (behind Greenland with 19 a month).

Jordan, with an average of 12 comments per month, is also in the Top 10 for this type of interaction.

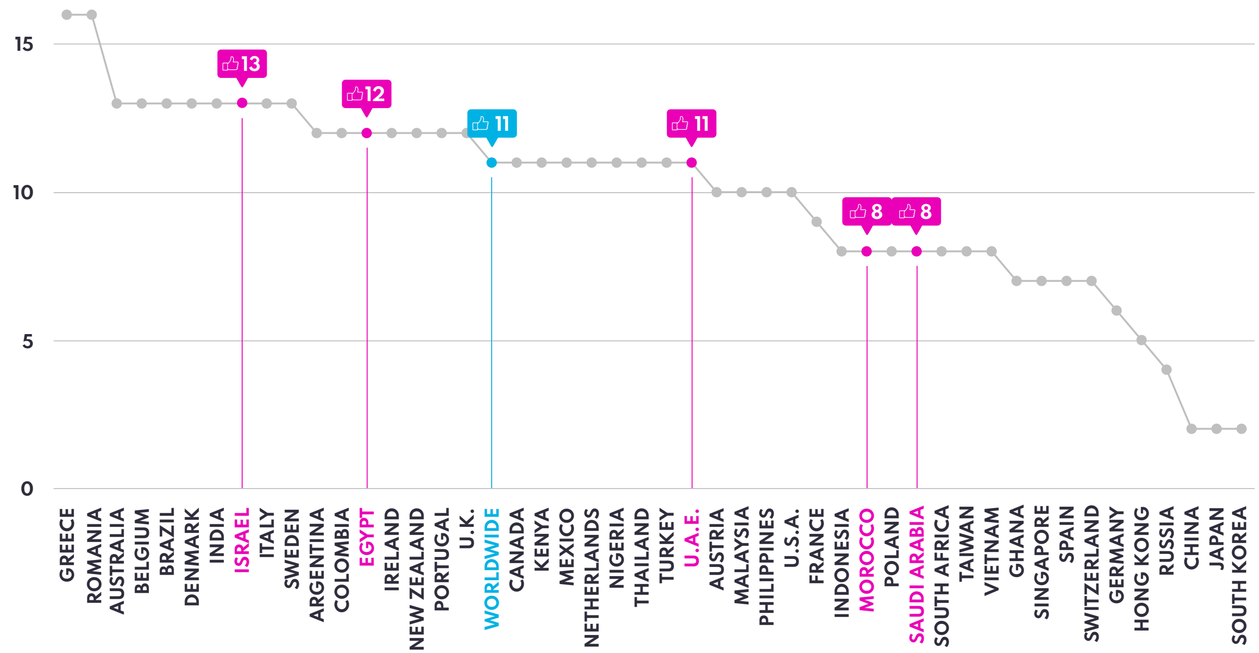
Users in Palestine also click on an average of 27 Facebook ads a month (the highest is 32, among users in the Faroe Islands).

Facebook's reach continues to be attractive to advertisers. **According to Emplifi, more than half of social media ad spend by brands in MENA during Q2 2021 went to Facebook news feeds (53.4%).**

This was followed by Instagram feeds (17.7%) and Instagram Stories (11%). Instagram, of course, is owned by Facebook/meta.

FACEBOOK MONTHLY POST LIKES BY GEOGRAPHY

Median number of times each month that the "typical" Facebook user **aged 18+** likes a post on Facebook. July 2021.



Graph: Facebook Monthly Post Likes by Geography, via DataReportal.

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Meanwhile, **ad spend on Facebook and Instagram increased 33.32% year-over-year (YoY) in the Middle East during Q3 (2021 vs. 2020)**, although this was lower than the 43.4% growth seen globally."

In the Middle East, brand spending on Facebook's News Feed was 21.48% higher than spending on Instagram's News Feed," The Arabian Marketer notes.



Image via Arab News.

Facebook launched the #MonthofGood campaign across its platforms to help celebrate Ramadan in 2021.

The global initiative featured creators, communities, publishers and NGOs around the world, with a focus on those making a positive impact on their communities.

Facebook also highlighted the work of NGOs, live suhoor talks and exclusive Ramadan Facebook Watch and IGTV series, working with creators like Abu Dhabi based Khalid Al Ameri, the food infused channel from Nefis Yemek Tarifleri and TV networks like MBC.

Another partner, UTURN, part of Webedia Arabia Group, launched more than 85 new long-form videos (3 min+) dedicated to Ramadan on Facebook pages 3a2ilati.com, Yasmina.com, AtyabTabkha.com, SaudiGamer.com and UTURN.

The platform also partnered with a leading Arabic podcast network, Sowt, for the "With Positivity" series, featuring community leaders from the Arab diaspora.

Interviewees shared how they were using Facebook's family of apps to support their work during Ramadan.

Repromoting the series in late-2021, Meta highlighted episodes featuring "FoodBlessed", a non-profit organization in Lebanon that tackles food poverty, while addressing and raising awareness on food waste; Missing Children, an NGO in Egypt for missing children that is calling on members to donate to orphanages around Egypt; and SAWA for Development and Aid in Lebanon, which works with Syrian refugees to help them restore the dignity, agency and ownership of their lives."



Images from Facebook's "30 Ideas for the Month of Good" PDF.

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The Facebook Journalism Project was one of the partners involved in the "I Will Not Stay Silent" initiative designed to protect journalists from gender-based violence.



Image: Tweet via the German Embassy Amman.

The project stemmed from a study by the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) and the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University, which found one in five respondents across 125 countries, said online harassment had gotten "much worse" since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other members of the "I Will Not Stay Silent Coalition" are:

ARIJ (Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism) Women in News programme at WAN-IFRA, the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF), and the global development and education organization IREX.

The project is supported by Germany's Federal Foreign Office.

In 2021, they held 13 webinars, offered a 4-month diploma programme and hosted over 200 sessions providing 1-1 psycho-social support. Through Facebook alone the webinars reached over 1.4 million participants, with around 2,000 people joining live.

Funding has been extended into 2022; with Meta partnering with ARIJ on a number of other initiatives too:

- #SafetyFirst, a new project training journalists in digital security and safety.
- Edit and Verify #حرّر_وتحقّق which focuses on tackling misinformation in the MENA region. Also working with the Arab Fact-Checkers Network (AFCN), the one-year project is particularly focussed on Algeria, Libya, Sudan, Yemen, Palestine and Iraq. It "targets journalists, investigative journalists, content creators and fact-checkers across the Middle East and North Africa region … to raise their capacity and skills, and help them verify all content disseminated online."

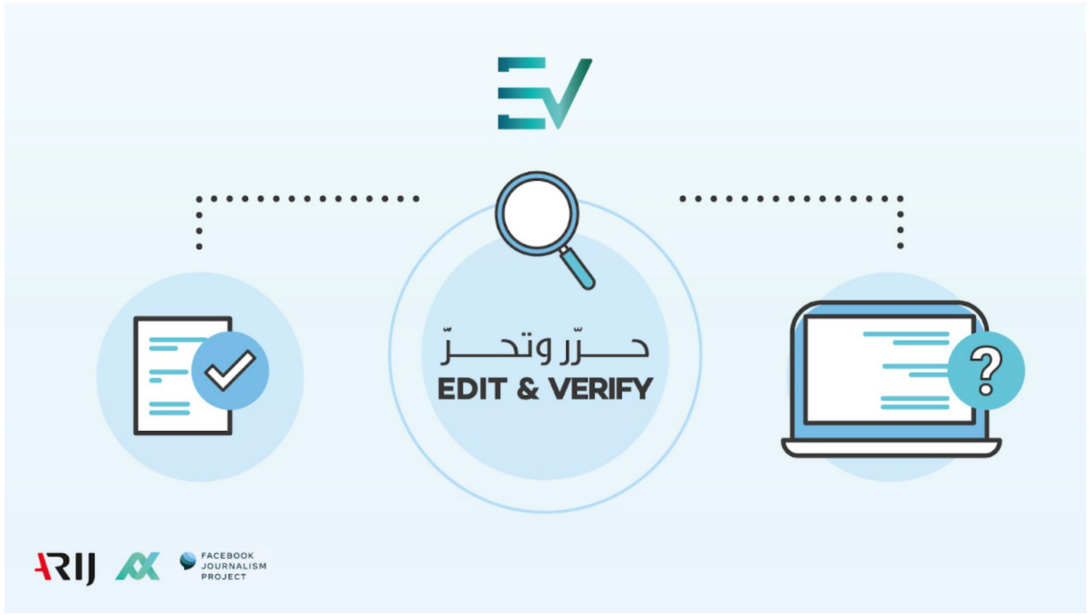


Image for the Edit & Verify initiative, via Meta.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

Facebook's operations in MENA came under fire from various quarters, including its own staff, during the past year with critics questioning moderation and takedown policies, as well as accusations of anti-Palestinian bias.

"Facebook is everywhere; its moderation is nowhere close," argued Wired, in an article which examined how "human reviewers and AI filters struggle to police the flood of content—or understand the nuances in different Arabic dialects."

Elsewhere, New America (among others), explored "how long-standing patterns of unexplained deletion of content have shaped how Middle Eastern users, particularly journalists and activists, share and engage with information on social media platforms."

AP reported, in their coverage of internal documents provided to the US Congress by a whistleblower, that the platform is prone to "an over-correction in crackdowns on Arabic content that critics say muzzles free speech while hate speech and abuse flourish."

The so-called Facebook Papers also highlighted issues of human trafficking and exploitation on its platforms.

Meanwhile, both pro-Israel pages and Palestinian news outlets have been shut down on the platform.

Facebook's Oversight Board subsequently recommended that the company "Engage an independent entity not associated with either side of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to conduct a thorough examination to determine whether Facebook's content moderation in Arabic and Hebrew, including its use of automation, have been applied without bias."

Internal Facebook document obtained by CNN:



A screenshot from an internal Facebook report showing an example of an Instagram post advertising a domestic worker for sale in Saudi Arabia. The post, which appears to be attempting to evade detection by breaking up words and using emojis in the text, advertises an Indonesian woman and says "we also have more to offer ... we bring to all of the kingdom [of Saudi Arabia]."

Editorial note: This image is from a document included in disclosures made to the Securities and Exchange Commission and provided to Congress in redacted form by Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen's legal counsel. A consortium of 17 US news organizations, including CNN, has reviewed the redacted versions received by Congress. CNN took this screenshot from one of the documents and blurred portions of this image to obstruct phone numbers and Instagram handles.

Image via CNN.

In response, Meta reported in October 2021, that "the due diligence process has already begun … We will publicly communicate the insights and actions of the due diligence in the first quarter of 2022," they said, "so that Facebook's approach can be effectively evaluated."

OTHER FACEBOOK TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS TO NOTE:

* **As e-commerce continues to take off in the region, social media will play a key role in its growth.**

  Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and Meta published a whitepaper exploring 'The SAR 50 Billion E-commerce Opportunity in Saudi Arabia,' noting the role of social as a tool for product discovery, growing opportunities to buy through shop's social media pages, and the time spent on social networks (more than 3 hours a day in KSA).



Image via Jordan Open Source on Facebook.

To mark Safer Internet Day in 2021, Facebook partnered with the Jordan Open Source Association (JOSA), to produce a Digital Safety Guide and a Digital Safety Toolkit.

In Egypt, Facebook partnered with the local National Council for Women (NCW), to launch "Women's Safety Resources," educating users on how to manage and adjust their privacy settings on the platform.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

* **Researchers are using publicly available information on platforms like Facebook and Google Earth - to investigate environmental crimes in MENA countries like Yemen and Iraq,** Deutsche Welle (DW) Germany's international broadcaster reported.

* **Tunisian student Ali Saidi has been jailed due to a Facebook post that was deemed "offensive to President Kais Saied"**, the al-Araby al-Jadid newspaper (AR) shared.

  The incident sparked a campaign (#الحرية_لعلي_السعيدي #FreedomforAliAl-Saeedi) on social media, calling for his release. It also prompted renewed criticism of the crackdown on free speech seen in Tunisia following the suspension of parliament in the summer, the sacking of the Prime Minister, and the President assuming judicial and legislative powers that allow him to rule by decree, observes Middle East Eye.

* **Facebook introduced new tools and policies to increase transparency and controls on electoral and political ads in Iraq**, ahead of parliamentary elections during October 2021.

  "Advertisers will also be required to label ads about elections and politics in Iraq with a "paid for by" disclaimer so anyone can see the individual or organization responsible," Arab News explained. Anyone wanting Facebook to run political ads on Facebook or Instagram has to be verified using an Iraqi government-issued photo ID, Wired Middle East added.

  These efforts contained loopholes, however, the DMC Digital Media Center, an NGO, reported, meaning that "offensive" political ads, and others "based on false news," could still be found on the platform they said.



Image via DMC Digital Media Center.

* **Facebook's rebrand to Meta in late-October 2021 prompted "ridicule" among Hebrew speakers, the BBC shared, as their new name "sounds like the Hebrew word for "dead"."**

  The move is the latest in a series of examples of company names that got lost in translation, the BBC noted.



Image via DMC Digital Media Center

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

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MOST FANS: FACEBOOK

The most followed Facebook account in the region is Supercar Blondie with more than 44 million followers. Founded in 2017 by Alex Hirschi and her husband Nik, Alex is a Dubai-based "car-obsessed content creator" who's arguably world's biggest female car and automotive influencer.



Image: Supercar Blondie via Facebook.

Originally from Australia, before founding Supercar Blondie, she was a broadcast journalist in Dubai. Their website notes that they employ more than 25 people and produce "content that is featured on all social media platforms to an audience over 70 million." Content is focused on "the coolest cars, tech, luxury and gaming in the world.

In second place is the Islamic preacher Mustafa Hosny (35 million followers). The Egyptian preacher is active on TikTok, Instagram, YouTube and other networks, but Facebook is his biggest audience, reaching twice the number of followers as his next biggest social channel (Instagram). The Egyptian televangelist Amr Khaled is ranked third with just over 30 million Facebook fans.

TOP FIVE MOST FOLLOWED FACEBOOK PAGES

RANK	NAME	LIKES
01	**Supercar Blondie** @SupercarBlondie	44.3 M
02	**Mustafa Hosny** @MustafaHosny	35M
03	**Amr Khaled** @AmrKhaled	31.1M
04	**Jerusalem Prayer Team** @JerusalemPrayerTeam	30.7M
05	**Nancy Ajram** @NancyAjram	30.5M

Table: MENA's Top Five Most Followed Facebooks Pages, Data via Emplifi.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

MOST INTERACTIONS: FACEBOOK

When we look at the most interactions on Facebook, Emplifi's data shows that there is not always a correlation between the accounts with the most followers and those with the most engagement.

Supercar Blondie, which has the most followers (44.3 million by the end of 2021) is ranked fifth in terms of interactions (e.g. likes and shares).

The cleric Mustafa Hosny, ranked second by followers (35m) leads the way in terms of engagement, with more than 70 million more interactions than the next MENA-originated page on Facebook, which belongs to the Egyptian news site Screen Mix.

Egyptian newspaper Youm7 and the Facebook page for the Kurdistan based news site, Rudaw, round out our Top 5.



Image: Mustafa Hosny via Facebook.

TOP PERFORMING PAGES ON FACEBOOK

RANK	NAME	INTERACTIONS
01	**Mustafa Hosny** @MustafaHosny	266.1M
02	**Screen Mix** @ScreenMixx	192.1M
03	**Youm7** @Youm7	175.6M
04	**Rudaw** @RudawEnglish	165.7M
05	**Supercar Blondie** @SupercarBlondie	152.4M

Table: MENA's Top Performing Facebooks Pages, Data via Emplifi.

NEW MEDIA ACADEMY

CHAPTER 3:

INSTAGRAM

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3593657



Instagram is now the fourth largest social media platform in the world, with an audience of nearly 1.4 billion. It reaches just under a quarter (22.7%) of the global population aged 13+. The network continues to grow. Worldwide advertisers can reach 235 million more users compared to this time last year.

Three Middle East nations are among the Top 20 largest markets for Instagram.

Turkey, with at least 49 million active users, **is the sixth-largest market** for Instagram in the world. **Egypt**, with 16.1 million users **is ranked 19th**. **Saudi Arabia** with 15.9 million users **is ranked 20th** in terms of countries with the largest Instagram audience.

Similarly, based on reach, three MENA countries also make the Top 20. As a proportion of the overall population, **Turkey is ranked eighth with 72.4% reach, Kuwait is ninth (70.7%) and Bahrain is 13th (67.8%).**

INSTAGRAM AD REACH RANKING

Countries and territories with the largest Instagram adverstising audiences.

GLOBAL AD REACH RANKING

#	COUNTRY / TERRITORY	REACH
01	**INDIA**	201,100,000
02	**U.S.A.**	157,1000,000
03	**BRAZIL**	114,900,000

MENA AD REACH RANKING

#	COUNTRY / TERRITORY	REACH
06	**TURKEY**	49,000,000
19	**EGYPT**	16,100,000
20	**SAUDI ARABIA**	15,900,000

Table: Instagram Reach: Largest Territories by Audience, October 2021, via DataReportal.

Instagram audiences in these Middle East markets also tend to skew male, with Bahrain (66.3% male, 33.7% female), Kuwait (63.9% male vs. 36.1% female) and Turkey (56.8% male, 43.2% female). Part of the reason for this can be attributed to labor patterns in countries with high levels of migrant workers. **Globally, the network is much closer to gender parity**, with 51.6% of the Instagram audience male and 48.4% female.

INSTAGRAM ELIGIBLE AUDIENCE REACH RATE RANKING

Countries and territories with the largest Instagram adverstising audiences compared to population **aged 13+**.

GLOBAL AUDIENCE REACH RATE RANKING

#	COUNTRY / TERRITORY	REACH VS. POPULATION	TOTAL REACH
01	**BRUNEI**	92.0%	328,600
02	**GUAM**	79.2%	107,300
03	**CAYMAN ISLANDS**	78.8%	44,500

AUDIENCE REACH RATE RANKING IN MENA

#	COUNTRY / TERRITORY	REACH VS. POPULATION	TOTAL REACH
08	**TURKEY**	72.4%	49,000,000
09	**KUWAIT**	70.7%	2,500,000
13	**BAHRAIN**	67.8%	1,000,000

Table: Instagram Audience Reach, October 2021 via DataReportal.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

Over the past year, the app introduced a number of new functions for users in MENA.

- **Reels—a tab featuring short videos—launched MENA-wide in March 2021, having come to Israel a month earlier.** The product first launched in August 2020, with Egypt the only MENA country featured in the initial rollout.
- The move came hot on the heels of the ability to **feature music on Instagram Stories**, a function that was **added to Instagram and Facebook in the region earlier in the month**.
- **Crowning a busy month, the platform also introduced Live Rooms, giving users the chance to go Live on Instagram with up to an additional three people** (instead of just one other person i.e. two maximum).

"It has been a long wait for Instagram to launch its music features for its Stories feature in the region," said GQ Middle East in March, commenting how this functionality—now available in UAE and the rest of the MENA region—has been available in much of the world since 2018.

> ***"No matter where they are, people want to be entertained and inspired by those that they love."***
>
> **- Michelle Lourie**
> Product Manager at Instagram

"After a three-year patient (but painful) wait, the social media giant finally launched music for Instagram and Facebook for UAE-based users." "Since we are not able to have Drake literally create the soundtrack to our lives, the music feature for Instagram Stories is our next (or only) best option," they added.

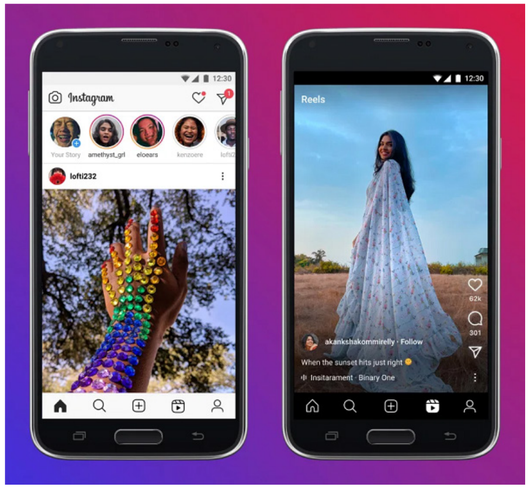


Image via Social Media Today.

Teams in New York and Tel Aviv created a less data-intensive version of the app, known as Instagram Lite. The Android product launched in March 2021, when it was rolled out to more than 170 countries around the world.

An earlier iteration of the service was shut down for a while in 2020, two years after first launching, although it appeared to return a few months later.

Designed to work even on 2G networks, the app requires 2MB to download, compared to nearly 30MB for the main app. It retains Instagram's video and messaging applications, which Facebook notes, "remote dwellers use more actively than their urban counterparts," as well as GIFS and stickers, but loses some advanced functionality like AR filters.

"It uses a lot less data," Tzach Hadar, senior director of product management at Facebook in Tel Aviv told Reuters, "so if you have a small data package you are not going to run out when you use the service. But the aim is for us to give the same breadth of experience you get on Instagram."

"No matter where they are, people want to be entertained and inspired by those that they love," explained Michelle Lourie, an Israel-based product manager for the company. "It's difficult to do that on Instagram with an entry-level phone that has storage constraints."

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

The app also comes with a "dark mode" option, replacing the white background with a black one and gray text. "For people who live in communal areas and close quarters, it's really important to browse more privately and not bother those around them," Lourie says.



Image via Hala AlAbbasi on Instagram.

Bahraini artist Hala Al-Abbasi created three new Ramadan stickers for the app. Hala "was inspired by her favorite aspects of the holiday," the official Instagram design account said, "and chose to reflect on the 'beautiful moments that we share together.'

"The first sticker features a mosque against the backdrop of a starry night and a crescent moon, the second represents Ramadan traditions through tea and dates, with the third containing colorful stars and a large crescent moon.

"Hala hopes that her stickers will be used throughout Ramadan to mark moments of celebration, from greetings to special suhoors and iftars, all the way to celebrating Eid," they added.

The digital artist told Emirates Woman that she had been approached by Instagram to produce the work. "I am very grateful and so happy to be chosen by the Instagram team," she said.

"I really loved and enjoyed working with them and am so proud to be the first in the region to work on the stickers and share them with the world."

Mohamed Salah, the Egyptian professional footballer who plays for Liverpool and captains Egypt's national team, is the highest-ranked Instagram Influencer in the Middle East, according to data compiled by Insiflow, US-based Influencer Data Analysis and Trending Insight Platform.



Image via Twitter.

Alongside his 46.7 million Instagram followers, Salah also has more than 15.5 million followers on Twitter and 14 million followers on Facebook.

He kicked off the New Year (2022) as the global cover for the magazine GQ. A post showcasing the image has garnered more than 1.5 million likes on Instagram.

No MENA Instagrammers make Insiflow's Top 200, with Salah ranked No 105, just behind Gucci (46.8m followers) and ahead of Louis Vuitton (46.7m).

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

Only two other MENA stars featured in Insiflow's Top 200: Nusret Gökçe, nicknamed Salt Bae, a Turkish chef, food entertainer and restaurateur, nicknamed Salt Bae, **(No 132, 41.8m followers)**, and the Lebanese singer **Nancy Ajram (No 198, 31.4m followers)**. The list is dominated by US-based celebrities and global brands.

"Instagram and Twitter blamed technical errors for deleting posts mentioning the possible eviction of Palestinians from East Jerusalem," the Thomson Reuters Foundation (TRF) reported in May, "but data rights groups fear "discriminatory" algorithms are at work and want greater transparency."

Zamleh, The Arab Center for Social Media Advancement, said it had received more than 200 complaints about deleted posts and suspended accounts related to Sheikh Jarrah.

"Palestinians living in the Sheikh Jarrah, a neighborhood claimed by Jewish settlers, have taken to social media to protest as they face eviction, but some found their posts, photos or videos removed or their accounts blocked starting last week," TRF explained.

The platform also came under fire for advertising properties in illegal Israeli settlements. Later in the month, the company disclosed that it would be changing the way that its algorithm highlights user content, Middle East Eye noted, after accusations that Palestinian voices were being suppressed on the network.

OTHER INSTAGRAM DEVELOPMENTS TO NOTE:

* **An Instagram post from Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the crown prince of Dubai, went viral** across the UAE **after he became a father of twins**, with nearly 1.3 million likes.
* **Arab News interviewed the anonymous founder of The World Sucks (TWS)**, "a Lebanese social video channel devoted to documenting acts of kindness. " The channel has nearly 60k followers on Instagram and has also expanded into Syria.
* **A proposed law restricting internet usage in Iran** would "deal a devastating blow to the rights to freedom of expression online and the privacy of internet users," says the human rights organization Article 19.

  The Bill **could remove access to Instagram**, which the Washington Post reports is Iran's most popular social network. At least 1 million people earn their living from Instagram, and it is also—by a considerable margin—the most popular social network used by businesses.

Middle East media has been full of great lists of recommended accounts to follow on Instagram over the past year. Here are some of our favorites:

* Obsessed With Luxurious Arab Weddings? Here Are 10 Instagram Accounts You Need To Follow *(Harper's Arabian Bazaar)*
* 10 Arab-American Social Media Influencers You Should Be Following *(Arab America)*
* 10 top Instagram accounts that represent the Middle East and North Africa indie music scenes *(The National)*
* Instagram Accounts to Follow If You're Learning Arabic, Part One and Part Two *(Pink Jinn)*

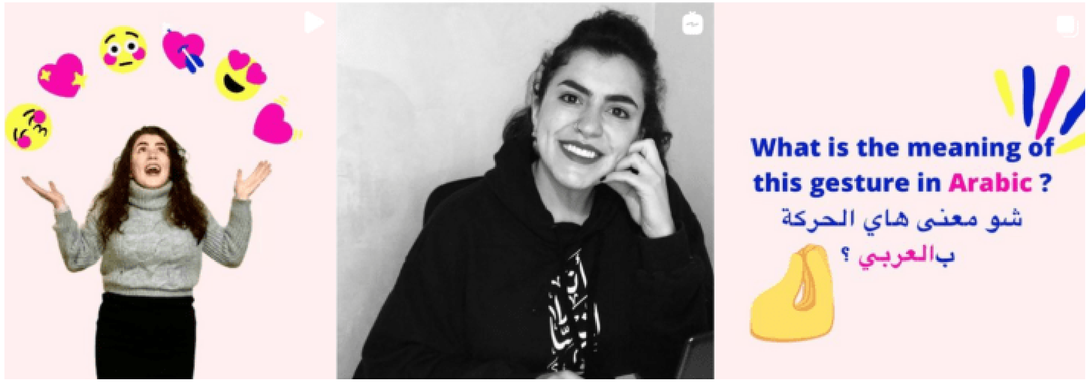


Image: Arabic with Rose (@arabicteacherrose) via Pink Jinn.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

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TOP FIVE MOST FOLLOWED INSTAGRAM ACCOUNTS

RANK	NAME	FOLLOWERS
01	**Gal Gadot** @gal_gadot	70.7M
02	**Jacqueline Fernandez** @jacquelinef143	57.5M
03	**Huda Kattan** @hudabeauty	49.8M
04	**Mohamed Salah** @mosalah	46.8M
05	**Nusret Gökçe (Salt Bae)** @nusr_et	41.2M

Table: MENA's Top Five Most Followed Instagram Accounts, Data via Emplifi.

MOST FANS: INSTAGRAM

Wonder Woman actor Gal Gadot is, by a considerable margin, the most followed Instagram account emanating from MENA. By the end of 2021, the Israeli actress had nearly 71 million followers on the platform, a number which has now grown to 77 million.

The Bahraini-Sri Lankan actress Jacqueline Fernandez comes second in terms of Instagram popularity (57.5 million followers) ahead of the make-up artist and blogger Huda Kattan (49.8 million). Fernandez was born in Bahrain's capital, Manama, before having success as a model and actor.



Image: Examples of Instagram Posts from Gal Gadot, Jacqueline Fernandez, and Huda Kattan in 2021 via Instagram.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

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MOST INTERACTIONS: INSTAGRAM

None of the profiles with most interactions seen on Instagram last year featured in our list of accounts with the most followers.

Manoto TV's Instagram page with 1.7 billion interactions last year was comfortably ahead of the next account. The international free-to-air Persian language TV channel scored 148% more interactions than its nearest competitor, the Turkish football team Fenerbahçe Spor Kulübü.

Çağrı Taner, also from Turkey, completes our Top 3 accounts with the most engagements in 2021.



Image: Manoto TV's last three Instagram posts of 2021, via Emplifi.

TOP PERFORMING ACCOUNTS ON INSTAGRAM

RANK	NAME	INTERACTIONS
01	**Manoto** @manotoofficial	1.7B
02	**Fenerbahçe** @fenerbahce	685.4M
03	**Çağrı Taner** @cagritaner	378.2M
04	**Beşiktaş JK** @besiktas	377.5M
05	**Varzesh3** @varzesh3	291.7M

Table: MENA's Top Performing Instagram Accounts, Data via Emplifi.

NEW MEDIA ACADEMY

CHAPTER 4:

YOUTUBE

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3593657

YouTube is now the second most-used social platform in the world with nearly 2.3 billion users. Each day, 1 billion hours of video are watched on the platform, 70% of that content is viewed on mobile devices.

Two MENA nations are in the Top 20 markets with the largest audience for YouTube. Based on total reach, **Turkey ranks 12th**, with 50.6 million users (64.6% of the adult population) and **Egypt is ranked 15th** (47.5% of those aged 18+).

At the end of the year, the platform published a dedicated page with links to the Top 10 Trending Videos in the region; as well as the Top 10 Music Videos, Creators, Breakout Creators and creators of Shorts.

The tech giant disclosed that the biggest content trends on the platform over the past year were Family Moments (such as reunions, birth announcements and Ramadan related creations)**, Gaming and Arabic Pop Music**.

Top of YouTube's trending charts was a video by the Anasala family, featuring the birth and delivery of their newest addition, a son called Noah. The family have 13.5 million subscribers to their YouTube channel, and their videos have been viewed more than 2.8 billion times.



Image from the gender reveal, via Insider.

Back in 2020, the family revealed the gender of their unborn baby on the side of the Burj Khalifa, the tallest building in the world.

With more than 31.6 million views, the Guinness Book of Records verified in January 2021 that this was the most viewed gender reveal video on YouTube.

In terms of creators, the list was led by MENA gaming creator Aboflah. The Kuwait based star has more than 23.5 million YouTube subscribers.

In October 2021, the Somali YouTuber (real name Hassan Suleiman), hosted a 28-hour livestream that raised over $1 million to aid refugees and the displaced in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan.

He began 2022 by living and working from a glass box in Downtown Dubai.

These efforts were part of a wider World's Coolest Winter campaign, launched by Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives and Galaxy Racer, a Dubai-based lifestyle organization that specializes in esports, gaming and lifestyle, with the goal of raising $10 million to support 100,000 refugees in MENA this winter.

He exceeded the target, raising $11 million after spending 12 days in the box, a period which also set two Guinness World Records, The National notes, the longest live-stream video (268 hours, 14 minutes and 20 seconds) and the most viewers for a live-stream charity donation event.

UNHCR estimates that there are 3.8 million refugees and displaced people in the Arab region alone.



Image: Tweet by Amina Aktouf, Senior Outreach Associate at UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

The Ansala's were ranked second on the Top Creator list, followed by عصومي ووليد —Assomi & Waleed two Jordanian brothers who once starred in a children's show created by their father.

In fourth place was the Jordanian-born, Saudi-raised travel filmmaker Joe HaTTab whose videos have featured more than 35 countries around the world.



Image: MENA's Top 10 Content Creators, via YouTube.

"I think it is important to create content that is as interesting now as it will be in five years' time," Hattab told Esquire Middle East in late-2021, "particularly when it comes to something like traveling because most people don't have the ability to jump on a plane and visit places constantly and see things that are 'on trend' right at that moment."

The list of YouTube breakout creators was led by ABOD, an 18-year-old content creator from Jordan, who plays video games—such as PUBG and GTA 5—with his Dad.



Image: Screenshot, MENA's breakout creator ABOD and his Dad, via YouTube.

To date, they've amassed more than 1.7 million subscribers on YouTube. This was followed by the UAE based Syrian's Lana and Leen Baraka, known as Super Sisters, and Loko Friends, channels with a focus on challenges, pranks and other adventures.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

In April, Google released an Arabic version of the YouTube kids service across 15 countries in the Middle East and North Africa, including Egypt, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. Later in the month, it added Turkey to the list.

The service first appeared in the USA in 2015. By the end of April 2021, when it launched in Turkey, it's been rolled out to 106 countries and 44 different languages, including Arabic, English, Spanish, Russian, French, German, Korean, Japanese and others. Globally, it has 35 million active weekly users.

The service offers a variety of parental controls, including the ability to set profiles to help ensure age-appropriate content is delivered to children, the ability to turn off search functionality and a timer that provides a "Time's up" notification when usage limits have been hit.

It does continue to serve ads, however. Parents must subscribe to YouTube Premium, a paid product, if they want their children to have an ad-free experience.

Working with regional content creators, the service includes Ahlan Simsim, the Arabic version of Sesame Street; the educational channel El Schoola, popular Arabic cartoon series Mansour and Learn with Zakaria. These popular channels already have several million subscribers.

The app's rollout in Turkey also included a partnership with content producers from Turkey, including NGOs, and local series such as Kral Şakir is a Turkish animated TV series produced for the Cartoon Network Turkey (their only local production to date), and other (older) animated shows such as Pepee.



Image via Twitter: The Dubai-produced cartoon 'Mansour' is one of the shows featured on the app.

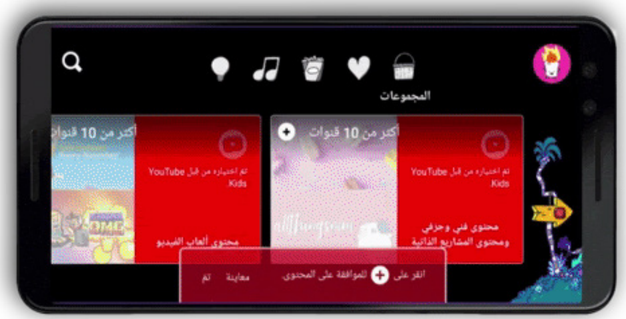


Image: The Arabic language version of YouTube Kids, via Google Arabia.

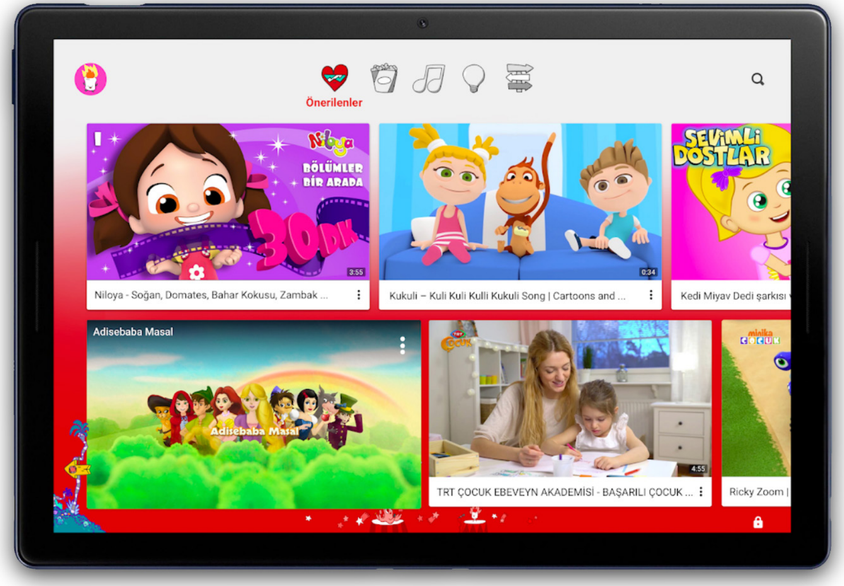


Image: YouTube Kids, Turkey, via Google Turkey.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

YouTube launched a new short-form format, YouTube Shorts in the region during the summer. First announced in September 2020, its beta roll-out was extended to "everywhere where YouTube is available," in July 2021.

YouTube Shorts are 15-second videos that can be created in the YouTube app on your phone. Users can feature music in their shorts from MENA labels, such as Mazzika, Watary, and AlFan, as well as major global providers like Universal, Sony and Warner.

In December, YouTube disclosed that its YouTube Shorts Fund—part of a global US$100M available to creators—would be available to YouTubers (that meet its eligibility criteria) **in Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon and Morocco.**

"Channels that fall under the requirement will be rewarded anywhere between $100–$10,000 USD (Dhs367–Dhs36,730) per month alongside bonus payments, depending on the channel's total Shorts performance and their audience's location," Cosmopolitan Middle East divulged.

YouTube has launched weekly music charts in the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The charts contain the Top 100 most played songs from the past week, the Top 100 artists, as well as the 100 most played music videos and the thirty new music videos that were immediately popular upon release. The service is also available in Israel and Turkey, as well as other countries around the world.

"YouTube has long been a launchpad to new and old music names in the Middle East and North Africa," observed Campaign Middle East.

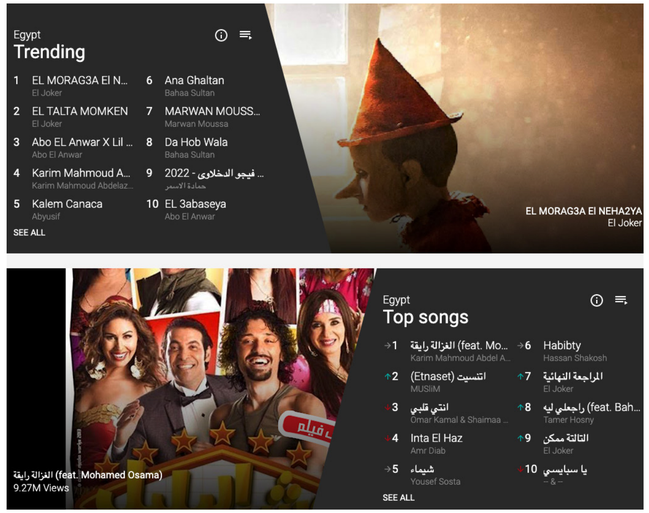


Image: Screenshot, YouTube music charts for Egypt on 15th January 2022, via YouTube.

Over the years, YouTube partnered with key music labels in the region to provide them with tools and knowledge to help them grow their music business on YouTube. **As of August 2021, there are 170 music channels in MENA with more than one million subscribers, compared to only 18 in August 2017, a growth of 800 per cent.**"

OTHER YOUTUBE STATS, TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS TO NOTE:

- **Across the two biggest markets in the Gulf region, Saudi Arabia and UAE, YouTube reached over 27.5 million people in July 2021.** A survey by Katar, also found that YouTube is the most popular video streaming service in these markets.
- **The past year saw YouTube surpass 20 million users in Saudi Arabia with visitors averaging 55 minutes on the site each day**, Mashable Middle East reported. Over 2.5k KSA based YouTube channels have more than 100K subscribers. That's an increase of over 25%, year-on-year.
- **In UAE, the average watch time is 70 minutes per day, with YouTube reaching more than 7 million people.** The percentage of YouTube channels making six figures or more in revenue (AED) is up over 40%, year over year.
- **Across Egypt, more than 400 channels enjoy over 1M subscribers. That's a 45% increase year-on-year**, while 4k+ channels have over 100K subscribers, an increase of over 40%, year-on-year, YouTube data finds.
- **Moroccan singer Saad Lamjarred is the most followed Arab music star on YouTube**, Forbes revealed in April, with more than 12.4 million subscribers to his channel at that time. This has since grown to 13.5 million.
- **Serie A, home to some of the biggest soccer teams in the world, is to stream some matches on their own Arabic-language YouTube channel.** Reuters shared their news in the summer, noting that the move came after the breakdown in talks for traditional TV distribution.

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TOP FIVE MOST FOLLOWED YOUTUBE CHANNELS

RANK	NAME	SUBSCRIBERS
01	**Mohammed Moshaya** mmoshaya	21.2M
02	**Enes Batur** Enes Batur	15.5M
03	**Anasala** Anasala	13.4M
04	**Saad Lamjarred** Saad Lamjarred	13.3M
05	**MBC** MBC	11.2M

Table: MENA's Top Five Most Followed YouTube Channels, Data via Emplifi.

MOST FANS: YOUTUBE

Mohammed Moshaya Al-Ghamd has been described by The National as "the king of Arabic YouTube." His channel, mmoshaya, has had more than 15 *billion* views since it launched more than a decade ago. The Saudi Arabian content creator has arguably pioneered the concept of the Arabic family vlog, with his YouTube channel enjoying more than 21 million followers.



#عائلة_مشيع

عيشوا معنا مغامرة "الحياة"

Image: mmoshaya's YouTube Channel, Data via YouTube.

Turkish actor and vlogger Enes Batur ranks second with 15.5 million YouTube subscribers. His account is the most followed in Turkey, and it his the 8 billion views milestone in 2021.

The Anasala family, who only launched their account in 2018, have rapidly established a social media presence, including MENA's third most popular YouTube channel. As we note in the report, in 2021 they published the most viewed baby reveal video in history.

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MOST VIEWS: YOUTUBE

Engagement on YouTube is dominated by Nas Daily, who with nearly 2 billion views last year, enjoyed more than double the views of his nearest rivals.

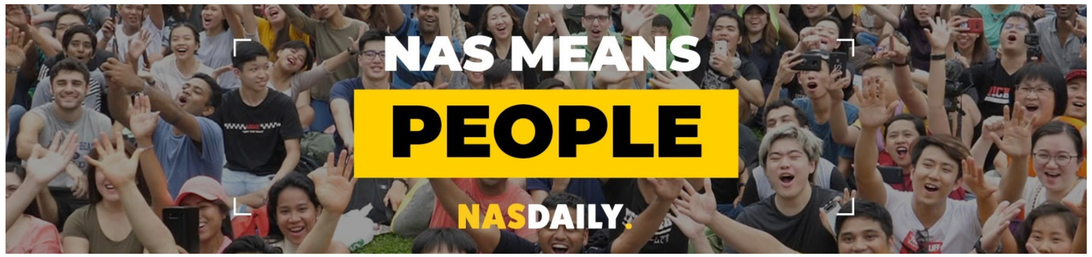


Image: Nas Daily's YouTube Channel, Data via YouTube.

Nas leads the Saudi Arabian engineer, technical consultant, vlogger, internet activist and YouTube content creator Mohammed Moshaya Al-Ghamdi (known as mmoshaya) and the Ansala family; both of whom were in our Top 5 most followed YouTube accounts (Nas was not).

The YouTube accounts for the Turkish TV network ATV and the ON Network - a group of 'free to air' Egyptian TV channels - also enjoyed considerable engagement last year, with both enjoying more than half a million views.

TOP PERFORMING CHANNELS ON YOUTUBE

RANK	NAME	VIEWS
01	**Nas Daily** Nas Daily	1.9B
02	**Mohammed Moshaya** mmoshaya	723.5M
03	**Anasala** Anasala	702.2M
04	**atv** atv Canlı Yayın	618.7M
05	**ON Network** ON	528.3M

Table: MENA's Top Performing YouTube Channels, Data via Emplifi.

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NEW MEDIA ACADEMY

CHAPTER 5:

TIKTOK

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3953857

In 2021, just five years after it launched, TikTok was the most visited website in the world, surpassing Google, Facebook and other companies. The network was ranked number seven in 2020, enjoying a remarkable year of growth worldwide in 2021.

The Middle East is home to three of the biggest advertising markets for TikTok in the world, with Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Egypt ranked at numbers 9, 11 and 12, respectively.

"The number of TikTok users in Saudi Arabia is equal to nearly 80% of the country's total population aged 18 and above, and the platform's local user base is already significantly larger than that of either Facebook or Instagram," observes Simon Kemp, CEO of Kepios, and chief analyst at DataReportal, who compiled the data.

That data only tells half the story, however, as these are also the three largest countries—by population—in the region.

As Kemp goes on to demonstrate, reach on a country-by-country level demonstrates that "TikTok appears to be particularly popular in the Middle East."

In terms of reach, four Middle East countries can be found in the Top 10 and six in the Top 20.

Put another way, **of the nine markets in the world where the app reaches more than half the adult population, four of these are in the GCC** (KSA, Kuwait, UAE and Qatar).

TIKTOK AD REACH RANKING

Countries and Territories with the largest TikTok advertising audiences **aged 18+**.

#	COUNTRY OR TERRITORY	REACH
01	**U.S.A.**	120,768,500
02	**INDONESIA**	87,504,000
03	**BRAZIL**	72,325,000
04	**RUSSIA**	48,805,000
05	**MEXICO**	41,648,000
06	**VIETNAM**	39,652,000
07	**THAILAND**	35,646,000
08	**PHILIPPINES**	33,047,500
09	**TURKEY**	24,599,500
10	**U.K.**	20,062,000

AD REACH RANKING IN MENA

#	COUNTRY OR TERRITORY	REACH
11	**SAUDI ARABIA**	19,825,500
12	**EGYPT**	19,338,500

Table: TikTok Ad Reach Rankings, October 2021 via TheNextWeb.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

TIKTOK ADDRESSABLE AUDIENCE REACH RATE RANKING

Countries and territories with the largest TikTok adverstising audiences **aged 18+** compared to population **aged 13+**.

#	COUNTRY OR TERRITORY	REACH VS. POP.	TOTAL REACH
01	**SAUDI ARABIA**	78.3%	19,825,000
02	**KUWAIT**	72.5%	2,367,500
03	**U.A.E.**	68.6%	5,682,500
04	**THAILAND**	63.7%	35,646,000
05	**CAMBODIA**	60.3%	6,541,500
06	**MALAYSIA**	57.0 %	13,459,500
07	**VIETNAM**	55.4 %	39,652,000
08	**QATAR**	55.0 %	1,363,000
09	**CHILE**	51.8 %	7,662,000
10	**KAZAKHSTAN**	49.2 %	6,272,500

AUDIENCE REACH RATE RANKING IN MENA

#	COUNTRY OR TERRITORY	REACH VS. POP.	TOTAL REACH
08	**BAHRAIN**	43.9%	606,600
11	**TURKEY**	40.4%	24,599,500

Table: TikTok Ad Reach on a Country Level, October 2021 via TheNextWeb.

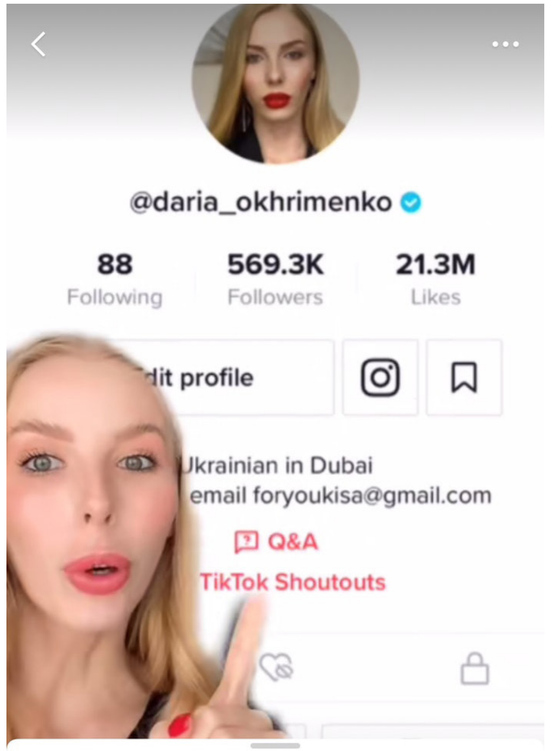


Image: Screenshot showing how TikTok Shoutouts appeared on the profile of Dubai-based TikToker Daria Okhrimenko, via BuzzFeed News.

Given this reach and impact, it's no surprise that the region is a potential testbed for new features on the app. In the summer, TikTok quietly began testing a "Shoutouts' feature in Turkey and Dubai.

BuzzFeed News, who broke the story, commented that it appeared to be "a Cameo competitor that allows people to request and pay for custom videos from their favorite creators."

Users can request a video—which they pay for upfront—from the creator, who has three days to accept your request.

A video from them will then be DM'd to you in about a week, BuzzFeed News explained.

"TikTok hasn't officially announced the feature, yet," said Input, a New York-based technology and culture publication focused on the objects, ideas, people, companies, and trends that are shaping the future, "so there's still a chance it won't roll out around the world."

"That would be fine, really;" they added, "TikTok can keep being TikTok and Cameo can keep being Cameo."

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TikTok has very quickly had a discernible influence on the music industry, and the music listening habits of audiences, around the world.

In the Middle East, the social network is "turning Israelis into Arabic music fans," Haaretz, Israel's long-running newspaper wrote in the summer. "Thanks to the open borders of social media, a growing number of young Israeli Jews are listening to Arabic music – much like their grandparents used to do," they added.

Issam Alnajjar, an 18-year-old musician from Amman, Jordan, was just one artist who went viral on TikTok last year.

First released in September 2020, his song "Hadal Ahbek" climbed the charts in 2021 driven by engagement on social media as well as Spotify, Apple Music and Deezer. The catchy opening features in more than 360k videos on TikTok.

With more than 1 billion streams in 2021, the star also featured on a giant billboard last year, as part of a Spotify campaign (known as RADAR) designed to promote new and emerging artists.

Alnajjar styles his music as A-Pop. "It's Arabian pop. You know how Koreans have K-pop, I just wanted it to be a possibility — you know — because the music that I am making is a little bit different than the normal Arabic music that we hear," he told Arab News.

The freelance social media and editorial strategist, Ayat Al-Muhaisen, writing for the online website and print magazine, AZEEMA, shared some of her favorite TikTok accounts, reflecting how young Arab TikTok creators are enabling audiences to gain an insight into the nuances of Arab culture and identity. **"By playing on the media's widespread aberrant perceptions of Arabs and Muslims, accounts** such as @ginasiscracked and @arabmum.com, along with countless others, **are literally taking back the very medium through which these** violence [sic] **assumptions about their identities are produced**," she said.

"Most significantly, by following these young creators, Arabs and non-Arabs alike, are able to experience the humor that can be found in wrestling with one's hyphenated identity," she argued.



Image via Instagram.

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That said, not everyone is experiencing such a positive experience with the app.

In June 2021, two Egyptian TikTokers were convicted of human trafficking and given long prison sentences.

The two girls were accused of "attacking society's values," "breaching public morals," and "exploiting girls through video-sharing," notes Dr. Nir Boms a research fellow at the Moshe Dayan Center at Tel Aviv University, observing that "the verdict came five months after another court overturned prison sentences for "violating family values" with videos they posted on TikTok." (A story we featured in our 2020 report.)



Image: Tweet by Mai El-Sadany, Managing Director; Legal and Judicial Director at The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, via Twitter.

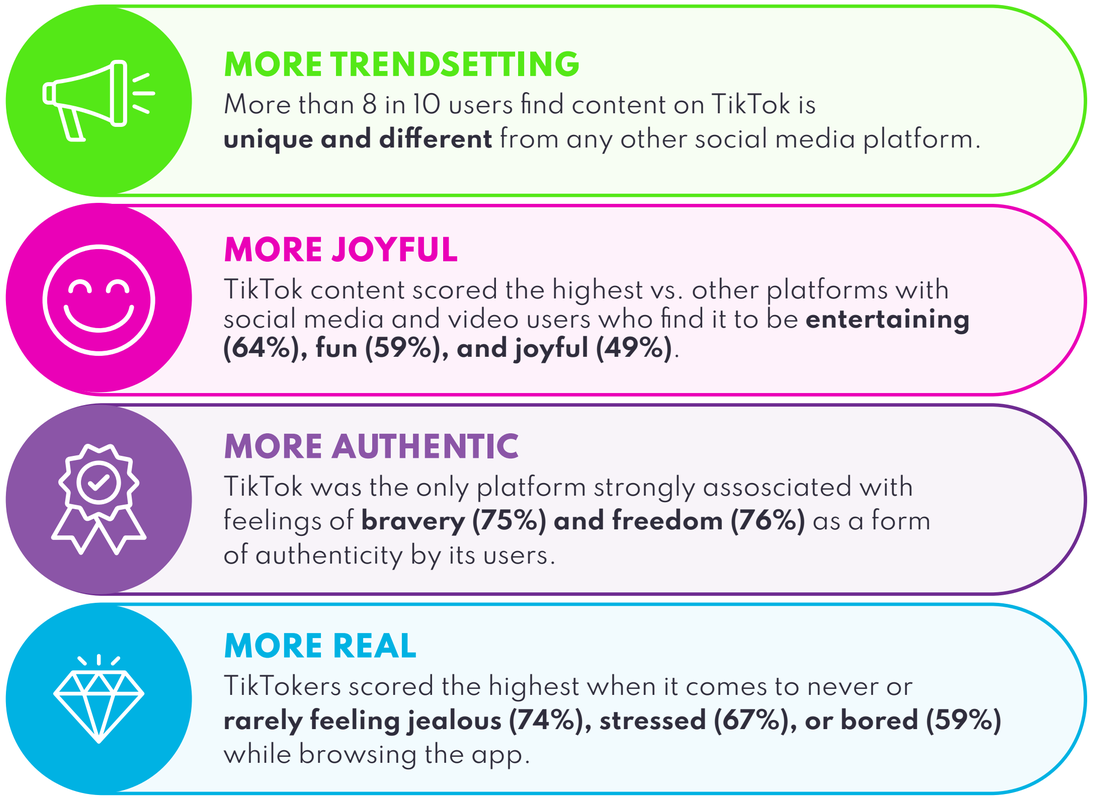
"Despite some international criticism by human rights groups, it appears that few are interested in issues pertaining to internet freedom or even women's rights in Egypt," Boms concluded.

"What does it mean for an Egyptian court to convict TikTok influencers Haneen Hossam and Mawada al-Adham on "human trafficking" charges?," asked the Human Rights Lawy Mai El-Sadany on Twitter.

"It means they're criminalizing what influencers globally do every day when they invite others to work with them and monetize TikTok activity."

Authenticity and joy are key ingredients that brands and businesses need to demonstrate if they want to succeed on the app, research in the region showed. The findings, based on a survey of over 4,000 social media and video users in Egypt, KSA, Turkey and UAE, mirrored similar global conclusions published by TikTok and Nielsen.

"No other platform is more associated with content [that] is engaging, fun and joyful," they wrote, highlighting how users were drawn by unique content on the app, as well as a desire to be both entertained and to discover new things.



Graphic: Findings from TikTok commissioned research to understand perceptions of the app in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and UAE, via TikTok.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

OTHER TIKTOK TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS TO NOTE:

* **TikTok launched a dedicated website offering training to help small and medium-sized businesses (SMB's) to use the platform.**
* In September, **TikTok launched a dedicated Arabic-language news page** providing updates on the latest features and developments in the region.

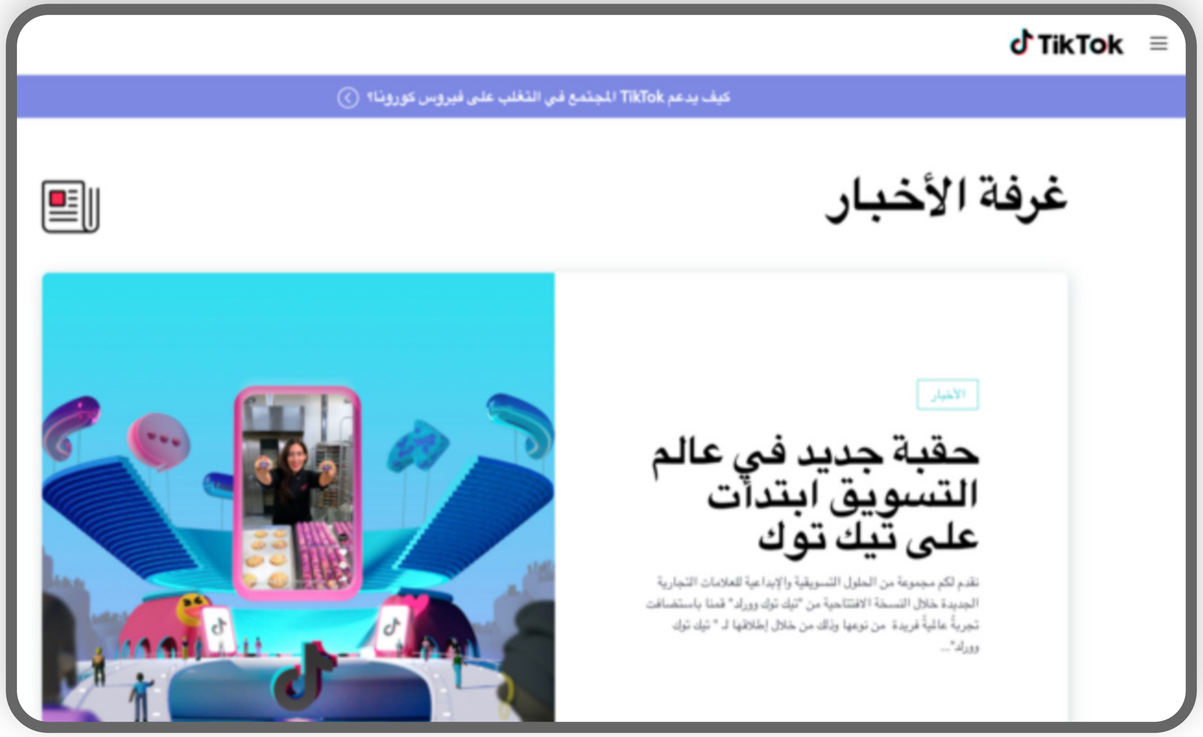


Image via Arab News.

* **Working with regional content creators**—including Hadeel Marei, Twinzy's Abdullah and Noor, Abeer Sinder, Zainab Al-Eqabi, Faris Al-Khalidi, and Nadin Smaili—**the app launched #PrivacyMatters, a campaign focused on online privacy.**
* **Partnering with Shopify, brands can now create shoppable video ads on the network.**
* **#RamadanVibes saw live events**—including cooking episodes with regional celebrities—as well as #ramadancheck, in which creators share their daily Ramadan routine, and other activities and in-app challenges, **come to the app**.

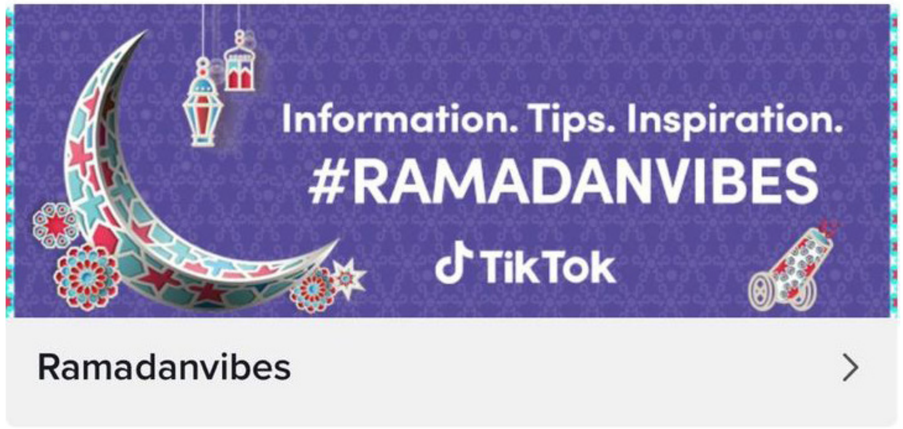


Image via GQ Middle East.

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NEW MEDIA ACADEMY

CHAPTER 6:

SNAPCHAT

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The ephemeral messaging app now reaches nearly 540 million users around the world, with more than 300 million using the platform each day. Daily users are up by 57 million, globally, since October 2020, and monthly users are up by 100 million. MENA remains a key market for the platform, with some of the most active users of the app.

Snapchat has around 75 million users in the region, and engagement is among the highest in the world. Over 85% of its MENA daily users interact with Lenses every day.

Eight of the Top Twenty countries in the world—as a percentage of users—can be found in the Middle East. Penetration of the app stands at more than 50% in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain, and above four in ten in Iraq and Jordan. Oman, Palestine and UAE also have sizable Snapchat audiences.

"The decision to open a Creator Studio in Saudi Arabia reflects the level of creativity we see on Snapchat amongst local users."

- Hussein Freijeh
General Manager for MENA at Snap

SNAPCHAT ELIGIBLE AUDIENCE REACH RATE RANKING

Countries and territories with the largest Snapchat adverstising audiences compared to population **aged 13+**.

#	COUNTRY OR TERRITORY	REACH VS. POP.	TOTAL REACH
01	**LUXEMBOURG**	72.2%	397,500
02	**SAUDI ARABIA**	70.9%	19,700,000
03	**NORWAY**	69.7%	3,250,000
04	**KUWAIT**	55.1%	1,950,000
05	**BAHRAIN**	51.9%	765,000

AUDIENCE REACH RATE RANKING IN MENA

#	COUNTRY OR TERRITORY	REACH VS. POP.	TOTAL REACH
08	**IRAQ**	46.2%	12,800,000
11	**JORDAN**	41.3%	3,050,000
15	**OMAN**	34.7%	1,450,000
18	**PALESTINE**	33.0%	1,150,000
20	**U.A.E.**	31.6%	2,750,000

Table: Snapchat Audience Reach, October 2021 via DataReportal on SlideShare.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

SNAPCHAT AD REACH RANKING

Countries and Territories with the largest Snapchat advertising audiences.

#	COUNTRY OR TERRITORY	REACH
01	**INDIA**	115,950,000
02	**U.S.A.**	106,200,000
03	**FRANCE**	24,100,000
04	**U.K.**	20,100,000
05	**SAUDI ARABIA**	19,700,000
06	**PAKISTAN**	17,050,000
07	**MEXICO**	16,550,000
08	**GERMANY**	15,000,000
09	**IRAQ**	12,800,000
10	**EGYPT**	12,750,000

AD REACH RANKING IN MENA

#	COUNTRY OR TERRITORY	REACH
11	**TURKEY**	12,650,000
19	**ALGERIA**	5,900,000
22	**MOROCCO**	5,650,000

Table: Snapchat Ad Reach Rankings, October 2021 via DataReportal on SlideShare.

Five of the biggest markets, based on the total number of users, can also be found in MENA. Saudi Arabia (5th, 19.7 million), Iraq (9th, 12.8m), Egypt (10th, 12.75m), Turkey (11th, 12.65m) and Algeria (19th, 5.9m), all make the Top 20.

Saudi Arabia remains a Snapchat powerhouse. Snap announced that Riyadh will be the home of its second Snap Creator Studio. The studio will launch in 2022.

"The decision to open a Creator Studio in Saudi Arabia reflects the level of creativity we see on Snapchat amongst local users, the high levels of engagement on the app, and our desire to deepen the level of support that we can provide to the creator community and our business partners," said Hussein Freijeh, General Manager for MENA at Snap, in a press release. "In Saudi Arabia, there's a real understanding of Snapchat's full value proposition, whether in communication, entertainment, commerce, or elsewhere," he added.

FIVE KEY STATS

1. **Snapchat reaches more than 19.5 million in the Kingdom each month.**
2. **90% of users in KSA are 13-34 years old.**
3. **83% of Snapchatters in KSA use AR on a weekly basis (that's the highest percentage of AR users in the world).**
4. **More people watch content on Discover than any of the Top 10 TV channels.**
5. **71% of parents in Saudi Arabia are on Snapchat.**

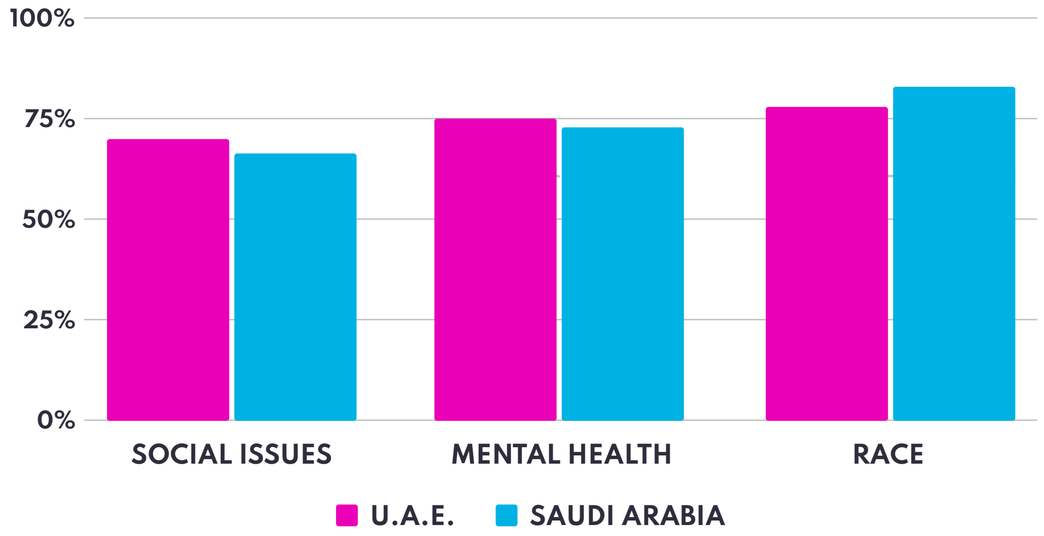
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In February, the company published a global report on the "Snapchat Generation," highlighting the visual communication preferences of users, their willingness to embrace augmented reality (AR) to try on products and desire to interact with brands aligned to social causes who are willing to share their origin stories and "secrets to their success."

A MENA oriented version of the study revealed that "the Snapchat Generation within MENA are less likely than their global counterparts to report stress."

"While holding similar values, the markets in MENA are nuanced as well," the report noted. "In Saudi Arabia, they have an affinity towards nostalgia. UAE is more focused on physical health."

SNAPCHAT USERS OPENNESS TO DISCUSSING TOPICS



Graph: Insight into the Attitudes of Snapchat Users, via Snapchat.

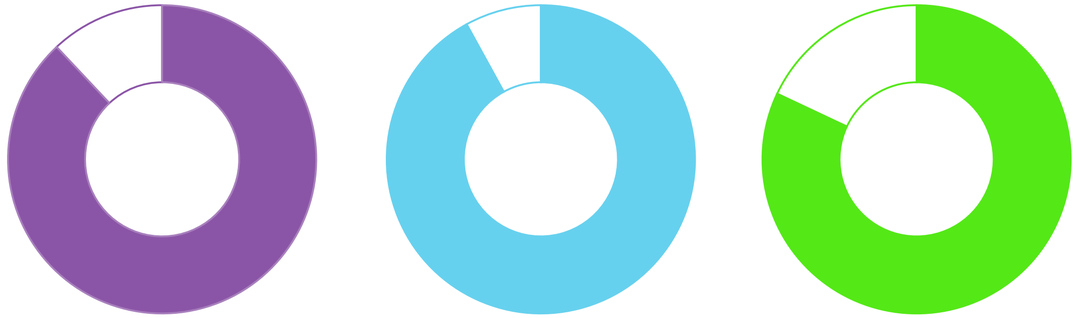
It also discovered that **having brand named items also matter to Snapchat users in MENA compared to their global peers**. Users in KSA and UAE were 1.5x and 1.4x more likely to agree with the statement "It is important to me to have brand name items."

Parents have also started to use the app in a big way, especially in Saudi Arabia.

Insights published by Snap in September 2021 showed how in KSA the app is "a powerful and scalable way for brands to reach and communicate with parents as well as their teenage and adult children."

Parents in MENA revealed an openness to advertising on the platform, and also indicated that it has often shaped their purchase decisions.

SNAPCHAT PARENTS ARE RECEPTIVE TO ADVERTISING



88%
Feel positively about advertising on Snapchat

92%
Take an action after seeing an interesting ad

82%
Say advertising influences their purchases

Chart: Snapchat Advertising, via Snapchat.

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Snapchat brought more than 60 new shows to the platform from content partners during Ramadan 2021.

As we highlighted in last year's report, the Holy Month is a busy time for the platform. During Ramadan 2020 (the last period for which data is currently available), Snapchatters in UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, spent 77 minutes a day on the app, opening it on average 41 times per day.

In a press release promoting this new slate of shows, Sara Abu Zahra, Strategic Media Partnerships, for MENA & India at Snap, identified how users "want to consume content on their mobile phones and at their own convenience."

"Snapchat's Discover is the new digital majlis for Snapchatters during Ramadan," she said, noting how these developments were "the natural evolution of the story format, with shows that are made by the region's top media publishers, editorially selected, brand-safe, and made just for Snapchat."

Separately, Snap Inc. Founder and CEO Evan Spiegel remarked to Al Arabiya English how: "The Middle East was one of the first places we saw a real evolution of [Snapchat] stories into almost broadcast-like shows. I remember in the very early days, folks having their own weather shows, for example, on stories and that actually inspired a lot of our thinking about how stories could evolve as a format."



Image: promotional shot for Ramadan 2021, via DigitalStudioME.

OTHER SNAPCHAT DEVELOPMENTS TO NOTE:

- **In the UAE, Snapchat reaches over 60% of 13-24-year-olds, and one in three 18-34-year-olds.** The platform launched an in-app mental health portal, 'Here for You' in the country on World Mental Health Day, partnering with the UAE Digital Wellbeing Council.
- **In May, Snap made its "Spotlight" function available to users in the Middle East. The feature curates content each day from across their network.** Audiences can view the content in-app, or online, even if you don't have a Snapchat account, via: Snapchat.com/Spotlight
- **Snap also expanded ways to support creators around the world by introducing a new feature called Gifting.** "When a subscriber sees a Snap that brings delight to their day, they can purchase Snap Tokens to send a Gift, and kick start a conversation with the Snap Stars they love," Snap explained. "In the Middle East, where the Creator community is thriving, over 90% of Snap Stars receive Story Replies from their fans," they said.
- **Snapchat also launched a number of other initiatives designed to support creatives.**

  In October, they launched a new **Snapchat Creator Hub**, an online resource providing tips, tricks, and other useful information, in a number of languages including English and Arabic.

  The site explains how to use built-in tools like Filters, Lenses, and Sounds, as well as how to get paid for your work, showcase it on Spotlight and understand the platform's analytics.

  Creator Marketplace (AR/EN) enables those with a business account on Snapchat to partner with Lens Creators, Lens Developers, Lens Partners and Snap Stars (verified accounts) by allowing them to connect directly with one another.

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NEW MEDIA ACADEMY

CHAPTER 7:

INFLUENCERS

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3593657

The creator economy continues to grow. Online influencers can enjoy huge audiences online for a wide variety of different types of content. As a result, brands and government agencies are often looking to find ways to work with creators on key campaigns. Meanwhile, platforms are increasingly rolling out new programs to further support the work of influencers.

Amr Maskoun, a Syrian comedian and digital creator, won the inaugural "Middle Eastern Social Media Star of 2021" category in the E! People's Choice Awards. This was the first time that the outlet had honored stars from the region in a dedicated Middle East category.

Originally from Aleppo, Maskoun left Syria aged 13 to seek asylum in Turkey and France. In summer 2021 he graduated with a bachelor's degree in architecture from ENSA Paris Belleville Architecture College in France. As he told the Khaleej Times, "comedy was just a place for me that allowed me to escape."

His YouTube series, *Sabe' Jiran*, which means seven neighbors in Arabic, sees Maskoun play more than 22 characters, including women, men, boys and girls. He has nearly 4 million subscribers on both YouTube and Instagram and 1.6 million on Facebook.

Cosmopolitan Middle East noted that other notable influencers and content creators nominated in the category included, "Kuwaiti style icon and fashion influencer Ascia, Saudi Arabian fashion and style influencer Fozaza, Lebanese influencer and business entrepreneur Karen Wazen, Emirati creator Khalid Al Ameri, Egyptian Instagram influencer Logina Salah, Iraqi YouTuber Noor Stars, and Bahraini filmmaker Omar Farooq."

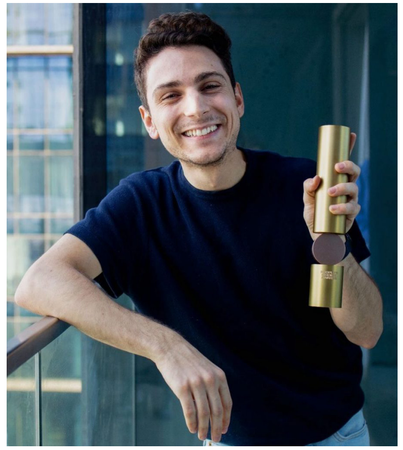


Image via Instagram.

YouTube Batala was relaunched in October featuring more than 250 women-led channels from across the region.

The channel is designed to highlight the best Arab female creators on YouTube, and is part of a wider series of investments that the company has been making—including hosting workshops for female producers in the region—to help support creators develop their production and storytelling skills.

When it first launched in 2016, only five women-led creators in the region had more than one million subscribers on the platform. **Today, there are more than 150 women-led channels with more than one million YouTube subscribers in MENA**, the company said.

The channel features content such as gaming, music, cooking and lifestyle videos.



Promotional image via Zawya.

"Some of YouTube Batala's most prominent creators are Meshael from Saudi Arabia and Kafa from Tunisia, leading gaming communities; Manola from Saudi Arabia, who is taking lifestyle content to the next level by not just reviewing clothes or posing in them but by also making them; and Nedal from Egypt, who started a virtual book club on YouTube," wrote BroadcastPro Middle East.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

Ahead of the first World Expo to be held in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia (MEASA), more than 100 prominent social media influencers and content creators came together to discuss how to promote Expo 2020 Dubai and its activities.



Image via the Dubai Press Club on Twitter.

The event, which took place at the Expo 2020 Dubai site, was held as part of the 'Arab Social Media Influencers Majlis'.

At the meeting, Maitha Buhumaid, Director of the Dubai Press Club spoke of the growing role social media influencers and content creators play in showcasing the region to the outside world.

An Istanbul street dog has become a social media influencer, Al-Monitor reported in late-2021. **Boiji, an Anatolian shepherd mix, can be seen across social media (his own accounts and those of others) riding public transport in Istanbul.**"

He enjoys traveling on the middle part of a subway carriage, or boji in Turkish—hence the name which officials gave him," Reuters explained.

Boji can be seen traveling by train, metro, bus and boat, with microchip data showing he travels across 18 miles around the city each day, frequenting nearly 30 metros stations in the process.

"You take the train and, suddenly, you see Boji," said Metro Istanbul's Aylin Erol. **"You just smile and catch the moment, really."**

Boji's adventures were recently captured by Chris McGrath—Chief Photographer for Getty Images News in MENA, who is based in Istanbul—and featured in photo essays published by CNN, The Washington Post and The Atlantic. Other international media also picked up on the story.

Local media reported that following this fame, Boji was accused of pooping on the seat of a tram he was traveling on. However, Boji "was absolved from the social media smear campaign when surveillance footage showed a man planting the poop on the train instead," the Hürriyet Daily News revealed.

In January 2022, he was adopted by the billionaire Turkish businessman Ömer Koç, with the city's mayor tweeting that "Boji will have a sheltered home where he can run around as he pleases, away from people who want to harm him."



Image: Boji rides the tram in Kadıköy. Photo by Chris McGrath/Getty Images, via CNN.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

Meanwhile, also in Turkey, **a Turkish based YouTuber came under fire for a stunt that saw them buried alive in a glass coffin for six hours, while another Turkish YouTuber jumped off a bridge onto a boat below.**

"People on the bridge, who did not see a boat passing by, watched him in panic, thinking that he committed suicide," Hürriyet Daily News said. Social media users criticized both influencers, the paper commented, with users asking "What else are you going to do more to get likes?"



Image via Onedio.

In Abu Dhabi, a social media celebrity was convicted for reckless driving, after traveling at more than 205 kilometers per hour on a public road. The stunt was being filmed. A second defendant was also convicted for "asking the celebrity to drive at high speed and filming him to publish the video to create excitement on social media to increase the number of viewers," WAM—the Emirates News Agency—reported.

Sentenced to three months imprisonment and fined AED100,000 each, the accused were also banned from using social media for six months. "The court also ordered the erasing of the video clip and closure of the social media accounts used for the purpose."

The past year has seen the continued emergence of platforms and apps focused on supporting influencers, or helping others to connect and/or work with them.

- **Vamp, an Australia-based platform that connects global brands to our invite-only community of content creators, opened an office in Saudi Arabia.** Founded in 2015, this is their eighth office around the world and second in MENA, having launched in Dubai back in 2017.
- **YELA, a platform that enables fans to request personalized voice and video messages from Arab celebrities, was launched last year.** It secured $2.2 million from global investors prior to launch. Messages start at $100 Techcrunch noted, observing that YELA's initial celebrities included Amr Diab, the multi-award-winning Egyptian singer, and Haifa Wehbe, three-time Big Apple Music Award winner.

  "By attracting the biggest influencers of our time, Yela is normalizing behavior around direct fan engagement," Marc Dakroub, Chief Product Officer at Yela told Entrepreneur Middle East.

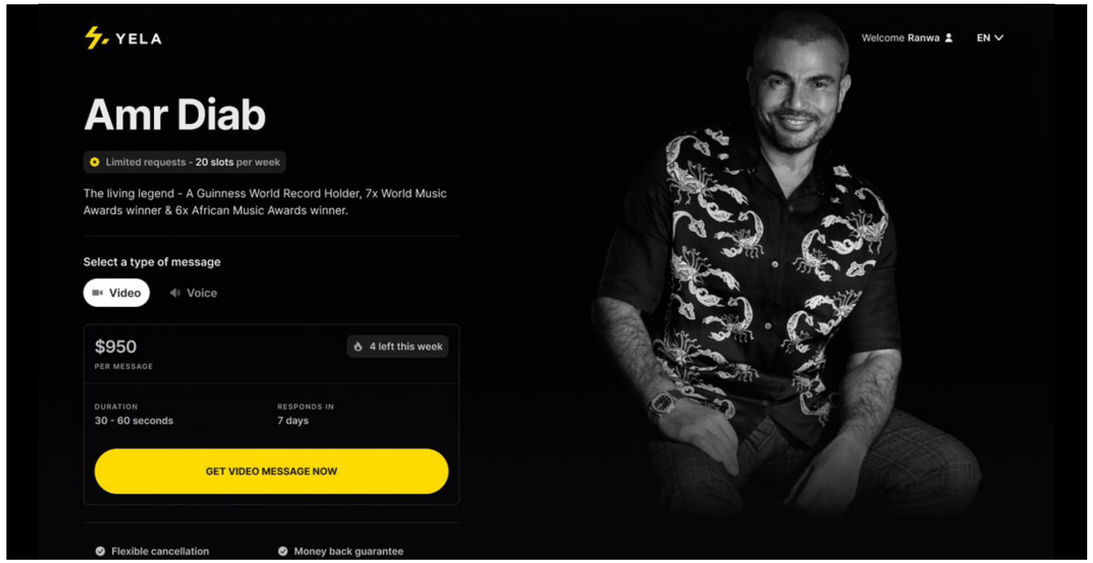


Image via Entrepreneur Middle East.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

* **Minly, a Cairo based celebrity shoutout platform, raised $3.6 million in seed funding during the summer.** The company has attracted 130,000 users and 1,000 celebrities over the past year.

  To aid expansion in the Gulf, in December 2021 it acquired Oulo, a Dubai-based celebrity shoutout platform.

  The platform emphasizes positivity and also notes that a portion of any purchase is donated to charity, the Magdi Yacoub Foundation, an Egyptian NGO "committed to providing high-quality health treatments to the underprivileged."

  Users can get video messages, or interact with celebs via voice notes and text messages.

  The company has also moved into online events. Egyptian rapper Wegz staged what has been billed as the biggest virtual concert in the Middle East on their platform last year.

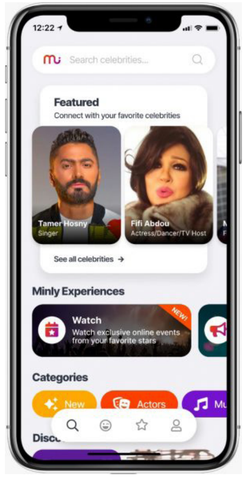


Image via TechCrunch.



Image via El-Shai.com.

"The virtual concert, which was held last week, attracted 23,000 of Wegz's fans across 31 countries in MENA, Europe, North America, and Asia," Daily News Egypt reported, with only 100 people in physical attendance at the gig. Users can still purchase tickets on the platform to watch a replay of the concert.

"Using the second largest CGI screen in the world, and the largest in the Middle East, the technology allowed the use of computer-generated imagery to storytell Wegz's lyrics, through immersive real-life scenes," The Technology Express, a MENA technology magazine said.

* **Another platform, Starzly, a Dubai-based celebrity engagement platform, also raised funding last year, although the amount was undisclosed.**

  Since its launch in 2020, it has been used by more than 1,000 celebrities, delivering unique curated virtual experiences to more than 200,000 users in over 71 countries all around the world since its launch last year, CEO Badr Kachibal said in a press release following the investment.

OTHER TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS TO NOTE:

* **Facebook announced the launch of a Creator Marketing Accelerator program in Turkey, specifically designed to support Instagram content creators.** The program focuses on helping "young people to earn income while expressing themselves," as well as business tools and fundamentals, such as the ability to collaborate with brands.
* **Facebook launched Reels on Facebook** (like Reels on Instagram) in September. **The feature will roll out in EMEA** (Europe, Middle East and Africa) **in the first half of 2022, offering further opportunities for creators.**
* **Egypt will tax social media content creators ("YouTubers and bloggers") earning more than 500,000 Egyptian pounds ($32,000) annually**, the Egyptian Tax Authority announced in September.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

* **In Lebanon, the local office of the German Berghof Foundation recruited 20 influencers with the goal of de-escalating heated online conversations.** "Communication is vital in promoting tolerance and mutual understanding," Ali Anan, head of the project in Beirut, told DW (Deutsche Welle, Germany's international broadcaster) "and social media is an ideal tool for that."

* **Kuwaiti activists launched a social media campaign—*Lan Asket*, meaning "I will not be silent" in Arabic—designed to end sexual harassment and violence against women in the country.**

  "Kuwait's #Me_Too movement started when the Kuwaiti blogger, Ascia Al-Faraj spoke [on Snapchat] about her experience in being sexually harassed in Kuwait," explains the Middle East news website Scoop Empire. Al-Faraj's video inspired Shayma Shamo, a 27-year-old doctor in the country, to create the Instagram account that sparked the wider campaign.

  Organizers also set up a Google Doc to enable other women to tell their stories which were then reshared.



Images via Instagram.

As the Kuwaiti magazine bazaar observed, that "highly visible women and influencers" were talking about this issue, "implicitly gave others permission to speak up too."

"We've never had these discussions before. Every single girl has kept this in her chest for so long," Najeeba Hayat—an activist and the Kuwaiti creative behind the luxury footwear brand Liudmila—said.

Lulu Al-Aslawi, a Kuwait media personality, told AFP she has been bullied online for the way she dresses. "Girls don't speak up over fears of being stigmatized, but we will not stop until we overcome this cancer in society," she said.

> ***"Girls don't speak up over fears of being stigmatized, but we will not stop until we overcome this cancer in society."***
>
> **- Lulu Al-Aslawi**

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NEW MEDIA ACADEMY

CHAPTER 8:

COVID-19 & ONLINE MISINFORMATION

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3593657

COVID-19 continued to occupy a big space on social media around the world in 2021. Social networks have been a leading source for many users looking for information regarding the virus. Alongside official data and news, the distribution of incorrect statements and information about the coronavirus has grown rapidly.

New research from the Institute of Strategic Dialogue (ISD), a London-based think tank concerned with extremism, shows that misinformation and false news about the coronavirus vaccine are spreading expeditiously in Arabic on Facebook.

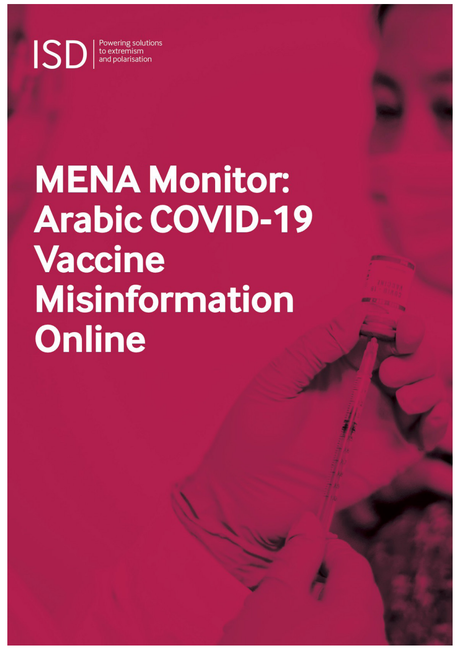


Image via the Institute of Strategic Dialogue.

Focusing on Arabic-language communities in MENA during January and February 2021, "researchers found an elaborate network of non-existent think tanks, ==vaccination watchdogs, and antisemitic, conspiracy-laden YouTube channels with millions of thousands of followers."

This "news" has attracted millions of views on videos promoting false information on the vaccine and managed to gain hundreds of thousands of followers.

Researchers used the Arabic translation of keywords like "corona lie," "Covid-19 conspiracy," and "no vaccine Corona has ended" to look for pages that contain false claims about the vaccine, its ingredients, and effects.

In several Arab countries including Jordan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, misinformation and conspiracy theories are believed to have led to vaccine hesitancy.

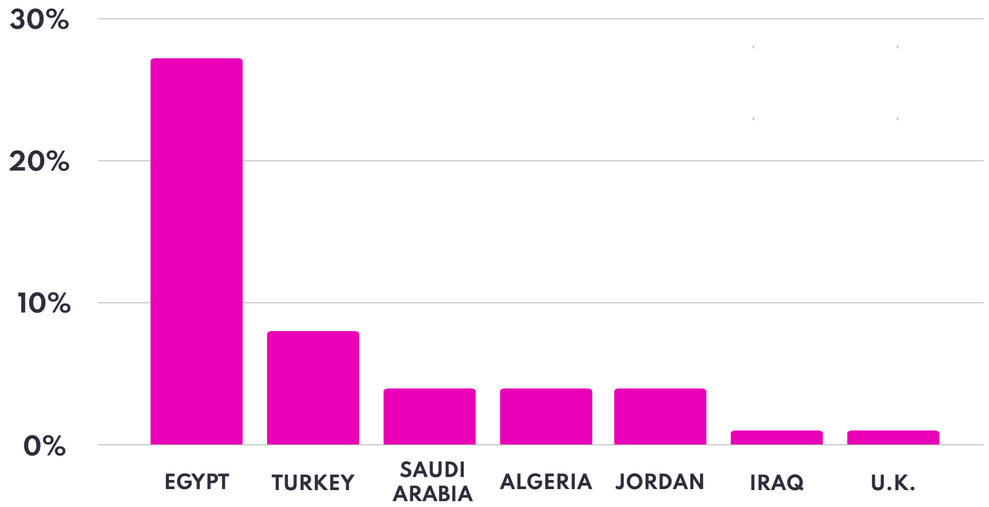
The researchers said that reliance on social media as the main source of information was also associated with vaccine hesitancy.

"It's not just a Facebook challenge," Moustafa Ayad, ISD's executive director for Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, told Wired. "**It just happens to be most of the content that we can track and monitor is on Facebook**, and it's connecting us to some of the other stuff."

Ayad told the tech publication that closer relationships with civil society groups and more local expertise were the key to effectively fighting conspiracy theories and online misinformation.

The past year also saw a number of non-COVID examples where online misinformation was seen to be dangerous, and potentially a threat to people's lives, physical and mental wellbeing.

LOCATIONS OF ADMINISTRATORS OF ARABIC-LANGUAGE COVID-19 VACCINE MISINFORMATION FACEBOOK PAGES



Graph: COVID-19 Vaccine Misinformation, via the Institute of Strategic Dialogue.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

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* **Over 70 fires swept across 13 prefectures in the north of Algeria this summer. The fires killed more than 90 people, including 33 soldiers who were combating the flames.**

  "When the fires started, the blame game began," noted the Algerian journalist Farah Souames.

  Alongside suggestions that the fires were started by criminals, were claims that and "terrorist" organisations, backed by Morocco and Israel had started them.

  A volunteer firefighter was burned to death by a mob, due to misinformation, Souames says, pointing to posts on Facebook accusing the "deep state" and arsonists of being behind the fires.

  "The murder was the result of wide-scale misinformation," she says, also adding that **the crime was filmed and posted to Facebook, before it was taken down**.



Image: Villagers attempt to put out a wildfire, in Achallam village, in the Kabylie region via Al Jazeera.

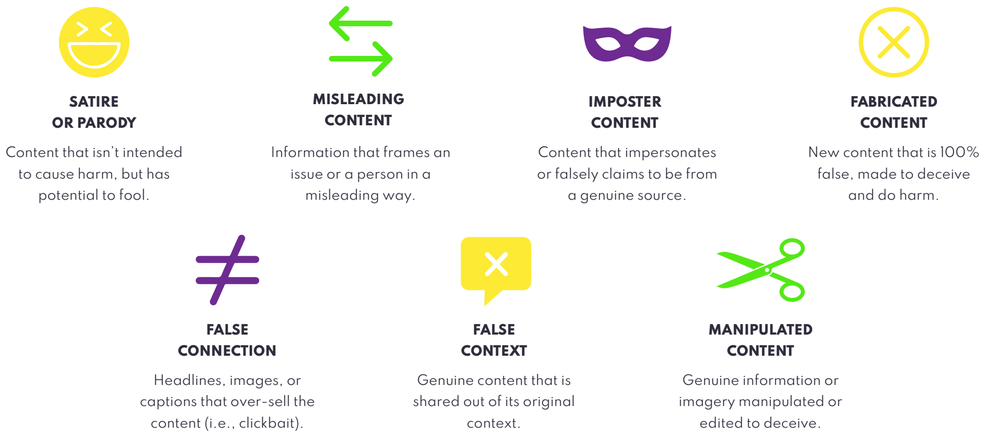
* **"Lies on Social Media Inflame Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,"** wrote the New York Times in May, observing how **"misinformation has flourished on Twitter, TikTok, Facebook and other social media about the violence between Israelis and Palestinians."**

  Highlighting examples of material taken out of context, misinformation on WhatsApp groups and misleading content, "the effect of the misinformation is potentially deadly," the Times wrote, as it risks "inflaming tensions between Israelis and Palestinians when suspicions and distrust have already run high.

  In line with many examples of misinformation worldwide, some of the material includes real footage, quotes and images. However, this content (described as false context) is often wrongly attributed and circulated out of its original context.

  "What makes it more confusing is that it is a mix of false claims and genuine stuff, which is being attributed to the wrong place or the wrong time," Arieh Kovler, a political analyst and communication consultant said.

THE DECEPTIVE SEVEN: SEVEN TYPES OF DISINFORMATION



Graphic: The seven types of misinformation, via First Draft

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

* **Alex Berenson, an American writer and former New York Times journalist, conspiracy theorist, was banned from Twitter for spreading false information about Israel's vaccination programme.**

  The anti-vaxxer, who in a profile by The Atlantic was described as "The Pandemic's Wrongest Man" has questioned Israel's efforts on fighting the coronavirus and doubted the safety of the vaccines.

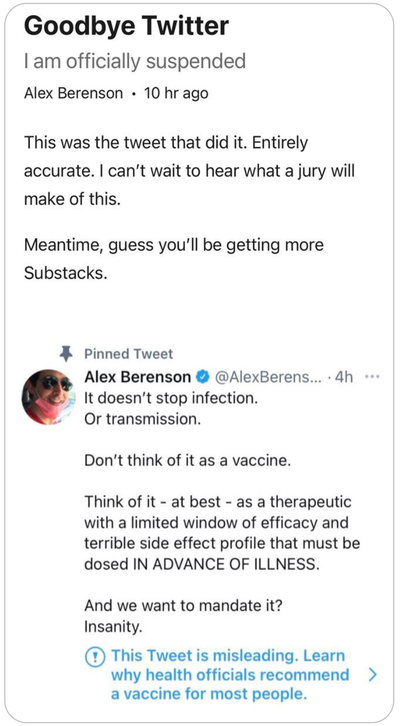


Image via Twitter.

In response, news outlets, civil society, governments and platforms have adopted a number of approaches to help combat online misinformation:

* **Reuters announced in March it was launching fact-checking initiatives in Iraq and Israel, in partnership with Facebook.**

  "The Reuters Fact Check unit will now review content from Facebook and Instagram users in Iraq and Israel," they noted in a press release, "expanding its media verification expertise in Arabic and Hebrew, in addition to existing verification in English and Spanish."

  Reuters will investigate claims shared on both platforms (Facebook and Instagram) and publish its findings on the Reuters Fact Check website (a version of which is also available in Arabic) and flag false or misleading information to Facebook.

* **In Libya, a group of journalists has come together to fight fake news.**

  The project is an initiative by the Libyan Organization for Independent Media and its founder Reda Fhelboom, a well-known Libyan human rights defender and journalist.



Image promoting vaccine take-up, via SABR platforms Facebook page.

The group publishes its articles that refute misinformation about the coronavirus on Facebook. Although they don't appear to haven't posted since July 2021, their page has more than 13,000 followers.

* **Saudi Arabia announced plans to stop the spread of misinformation related to weather forecasting and climate.**

  "According to the National Centre of Meteorology, unscrupulous social media users are issuing weather warnings in an attempt to gain followers or advertising revenue for unofficial websites," The National, an English-language daily newspaper published in Abu Dhabi, reported.

  Hussein Al-Qahtani, a spokesman for the center, told Arab News the ban is part of efforts to regulate meteorological work in the Kingdom. Breaching the rules could result in stiff penalties including jail time of up to 10 years or fines of SR2 million ($530,000). **The new guidelines aim to stop the spread of false information on social media and profiteering from false information.**

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* **In December, the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan said at the Istanbul Summit that the country is working on new measures to battle the spread of disinformation through social media. His solution: criminalizing it.**

  An earlier report from the summer, from the Independent Communication Network (BIA), a project that monitors and reports violations of freedom of expression in Turkey, said that **the Turkish government plans to introduce sentences between one to five years for publishing, spreading, and sharing fake news on social media**. This proposal has sparked some concern among critics who claim the legislation may be used to monitor speech and limit free speech.

"The cat-and-mouse game between Facebook and bad actors is escalating."

- The Washington Post

As we have seen in previous years, social networks continue to be platforms for targeted misinformation campaigns. This can take a myriad of forms, from fake accounts and pages, to false and misleading news. Here are some MENA related examples from 2021:

* In June, the U.S. Justice Department revealed it had seized 36 Iranian-linked websites, Reuters reported, "many of them associated with either disinformation activities or violent organisations, taking them offline for violating U.S. sanctions."



Screengrab of the website for alalamtv.net showing that it has been seized by the United States government as part of law enforcement action, via Reuters.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

* **Meta (Facebook) reported taking down content throughout the year for violating their policy on Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior (CIB).**

  In November 2021, they removed 110 Facebook accounts, 78 Pages, 13 Groups and 17 Instagram accounts from Gaza and linked them to Hamas, which were believed to be using fake accounts.

  Earlier in the year, hundreds of accounts and pages from Algeria, Sudan Iraq and Iran were removed, as well as content linked to the Sudanese Rapid Support Forces, a paramilitary group operated by the Sudanese Government and Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard.

  Meanwhile in December, accounts from Turkey - and targeting people in Libya - were removed after being linked to the Muslim Brotherhood's affiliated Libyan Justice and Construction Party.

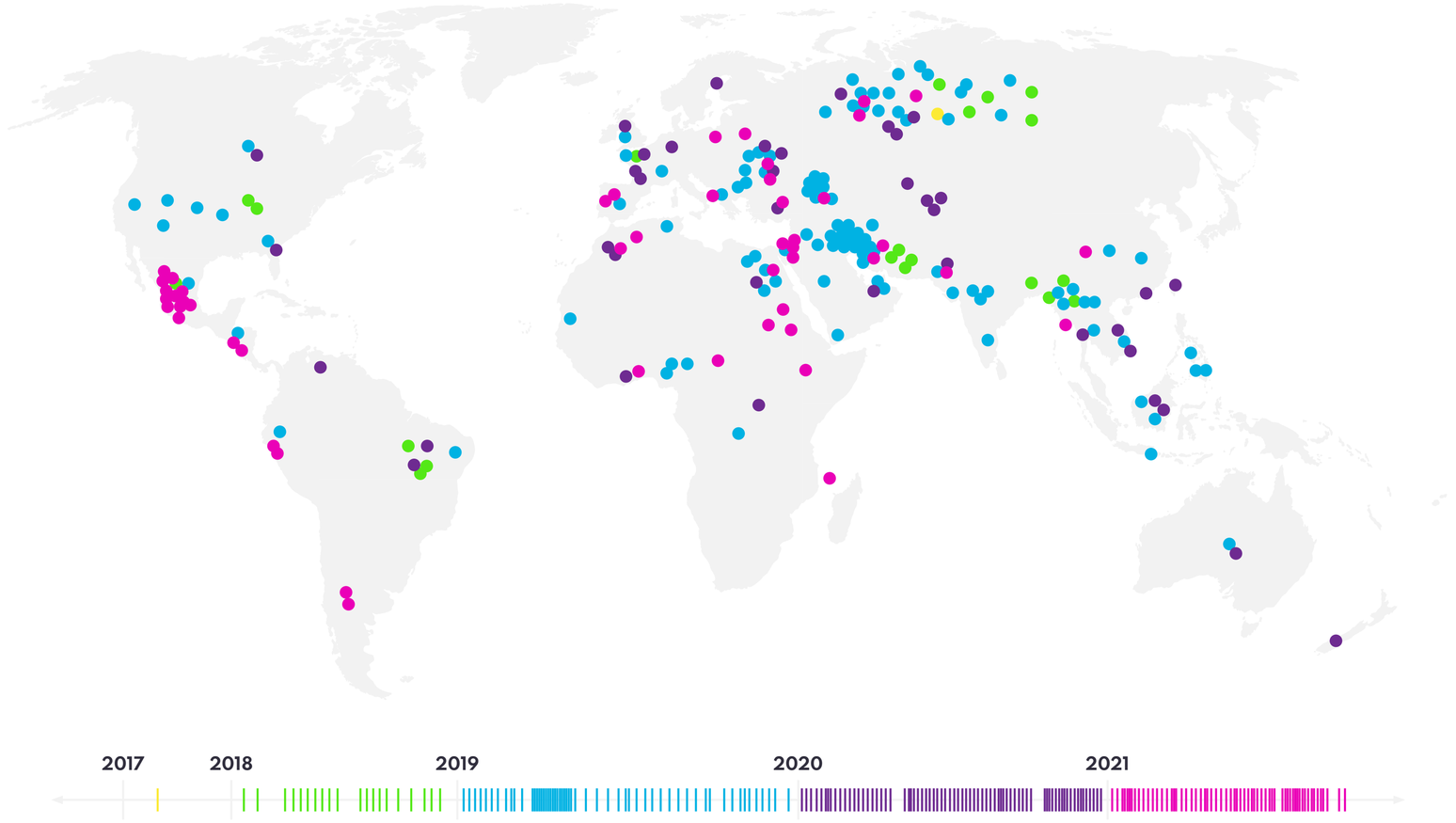
  Since 2017, Meta has shared details of over 150 operations designed to influence their social networks. In 2021 alone, they removed 52 networks that "engaged in coordinated efforts to manipulate or corrupt public debate for a strategic goal, while relying centrally on fake accounts to mislead people about who's behind them."

  These efforts came from 34 countries, including Latin America, the Asia-Pacific region, Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

  As The Washington Post commented, "The takedowns described in the company's latest threat report demonstrate how the cat-and-mouse game between Facebook and bad actors is escalating."

GLOBAL CIB DISRUPTIONS

By country of origin, from **January 2017 to December 2021**.



Map: December 2021 Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior Report via Meta.

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NEW MEDIA ACADEMY

CHAPTER 9:

MESSAGING APPS

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3393857

The number of people using messaging apps surpassed three billion in 2021, with the vast majority using three services: WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and WeChat. However regional differences can be seen, with some newer apps—two of which are featured in this report for the first time—garnering attention in the past year.

WHATSAPP

"Meta hasn't published any official updates to global WhatsApp user numbers in the past year," notes the analyst Simon Kemp, "but it's likely that the platform still ranks third, with at least 2 billion active users per month."

The app has historically always had a sizable reach in the region, often topping lists of the most used social networks. **According to The National, the app has around 200 million users in the Middle East.**

Among internet users aged 16-64, **in UAE 30% say that WhatsApp is their favorite social media service. In Saudi Arabia, 20% say the same thing**, recent data from GlobalWebIndex (GWI) finds.

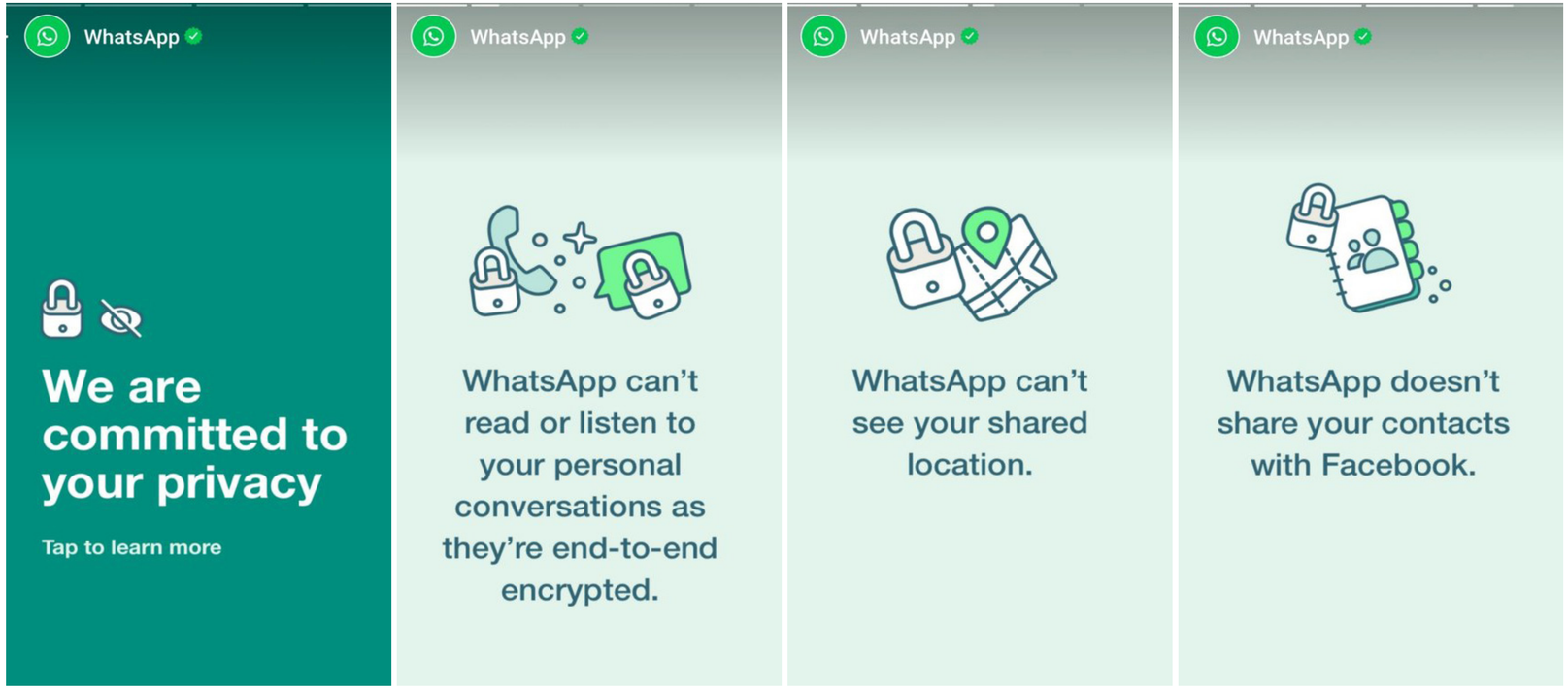
Early in the year, privacy concerns drove many users around the world—including the Middle East—to explore other messaging apps. Signal and Telegram were among the most popular replacement apps being downloaded in the region, Middle East Eye reported.

In Turkey, the government encouraged citizens to stop using WhatsApp and use local messaging services (such as BiP and Dedi) instead.

The hashtag #WhatsAppSiliyoruz (We Are Deleting WhatsApp) trended on Twitter in Turkey around this time.

Users in Turkey also shared how WhatsApp also used the status feature to share an update seeking to allay the privacy concerns of many users in the country.

Later in the year **outages to Meta owned services, including WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and Facebook Messenger, also drove users to download alternative services**. Messaging app Telegram gained a "record" 70 million new users during this time, The Verge revealed.



Images via Twitter.

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In November, **a U.S. appeals court determined that Meta/WhatsApp can sue Israeli firm NSO Group**. The court ruled that "the immunity from civil litigation in US courts enjoyed by foreign governments does not extend to the private Israeli surveillance company," Al Jazeera wrote. As we noted in our 2019 report, **WhatsApp had accused NSO of facilitating government hacking sprees in 20 countries, including the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.**

In an email statement shared by Reuters, a WhatsApp spokesman called the court's decision "an important step in holding NSO accountable for its attacks against journalists, human rights defenders and government leaders."

Murat Kalkavan, a freelance illustrator based in Istanbul, designed Ramadan stickers for WhatsApp. "The Design process of these stickers took me back to my childhood," he wrote on his website, "and I tried to create a warm Ramadan feeling from this inspiration."

"I try to emphasize the comical elements in my illustrations because I think humor has a strong, positive effect for the brands," he adds.

Kalavan also designed a COVID-19 and Ramadan themed sticker set for Turkcell's BIP app.



Images via Murat Kalkavan on Twitter.

TELEGRAM

According to data from App Annie, Telegram was the fifth most downloaded mobile app of 2021, behind TikTok, Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp. In January 2021, it was the most downloaded app worldwide.

APP DOWNLOAD RANKING

App Annie's ranking of mobile apps and mobile games by total number of downloads between **January and December 2021**.

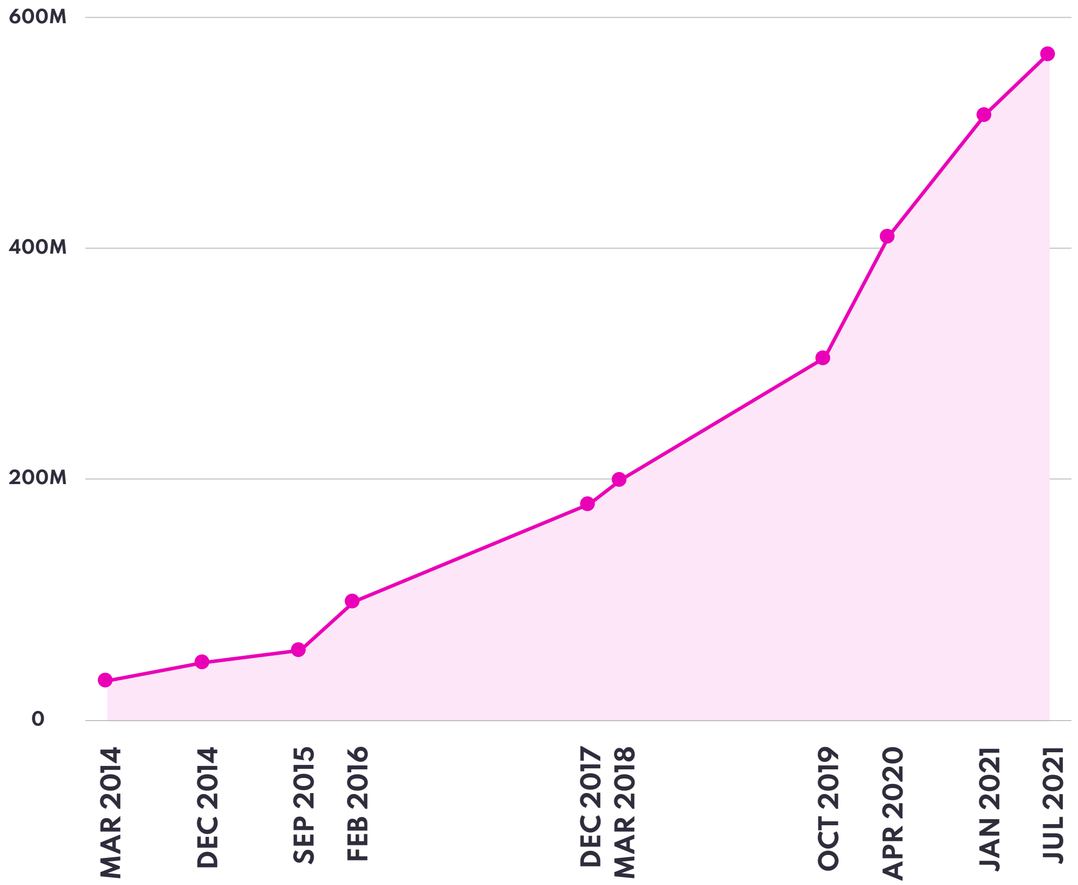
#	MOBILE APP	COMPANY
01	TIKTOK	ByteDance
02	INSTAGRAM	Meta
03	FACEBOOK	Meta
04	WHATSAPP	Meta
05	TELEGRAM	Telegram
06	SNAPCHAT	Snap Inc.
07	FACEBOOK MESSENGER	Meta
08	ZOOM CLOUD MEETINGS	zoom
09	CAPCUT	ByteDance
10	SPOTIFY	Spotify

Graphic: The Seven Types of Misinformation, via First Draft.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

Telegram has 550 million monthly active users, DataReportal said in their latest report on global social media use. In mid-2021, Sensor Tower disclosed that—since its launch—**the app had now been downloaded over 1 billion times globally**.

TELEGRAM USERS OVER TIME



Graph: Monthly Active Telegram Users from March 2014 to July 2021, via Backlinko.

Originally founded in Russia in 2013, Pavel Durov, the founder and owner of the messaging app, is the richest UAE resident, Forbes says.

Telegram's global development center has been in Dubai since 2017.

Last summer, the app introduced video calls for the first time and announced plans to introduce Sponsored Messages channels with more than 1,000 members. Durov had previously outlined that he was intending to start monetizing the platform.

However, **the app's content moderation policies have come in for criticism**.

"There's reason to believe that Telegram does not treat content moderation as seriously as other platforms," suggests recode, outlining how these "lax" policies and encrypted chats "make it a convenient tool for extremists."

The German news giant Der Spiegel meanwhile has argued, "Telegram is home to almost every imaginable infraction that can be committed on the internet."

Despite these criticisms, the app's user base continues to grow. As does wider interest in it.

Telegram raised over $1 billion through bond sales to multiple investors, the messaging app revealed in March.

The **Abu Dhabi-based sovereign investor Mubadala Investment Company invested US$75 million** in 5-year pre-IPO convertible bonds, with **Abu Dhabi Catalyst Partners investing a further US$75 million**, WAM—The Emirates News Agency—reported.

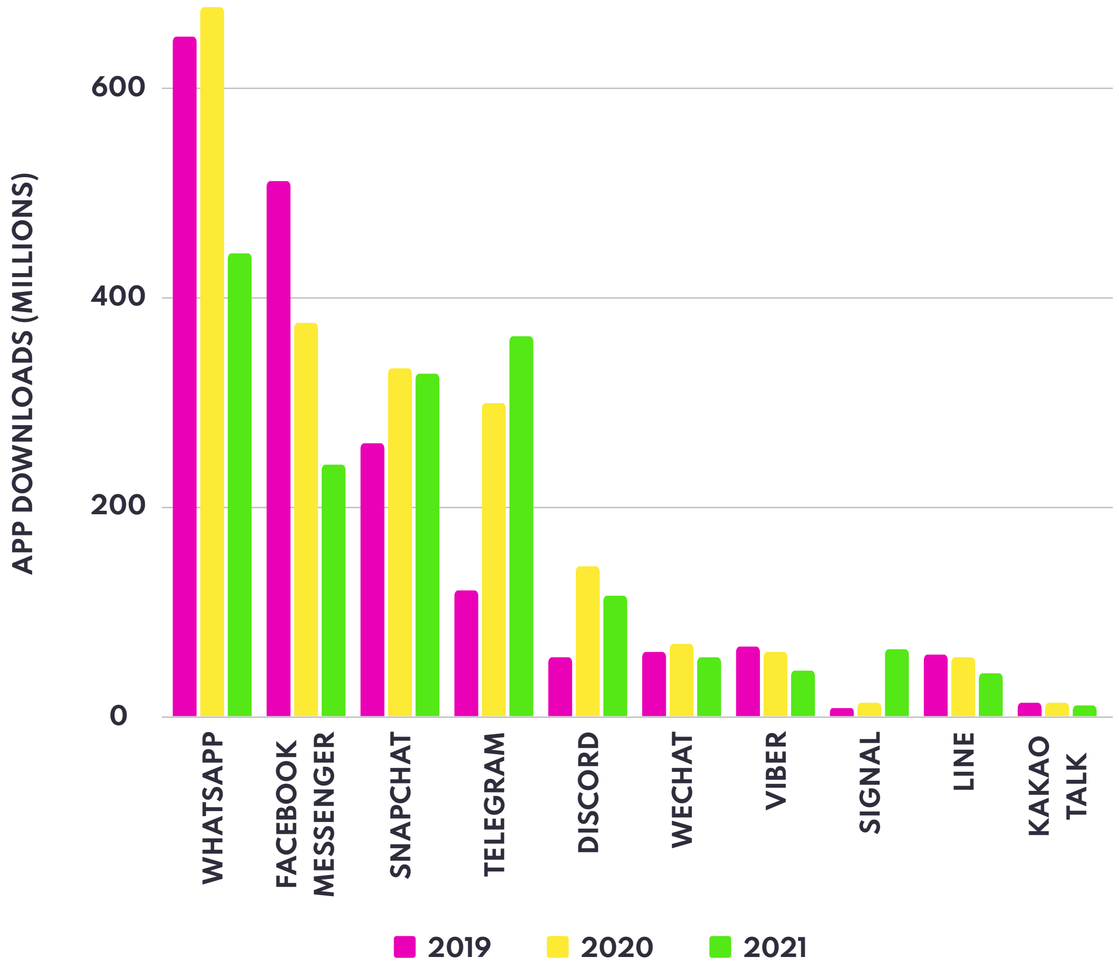
Following this cash injection, Telegram will open a new office in Abu Dhabi, Mubadala said.

Although banned in Iran since 2018, data from The Statistical Center of Iran (SCI), shows that **45 million Iranians are using Telegram, sending fifteen billion messages on the app every day.**

Telegram and Signal were the only messaging apps, globally, to see more downloads in 2021 than in 2020.

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MESSAGING APP DOWNLOADS



Graph: Messaging App Revenue and Usage Statistics (2022), via Business of Apps.

YALLA

Yalla, a Chinese-backed social network based in the United Arab Emirates that means "Let's Go" in Arabic, became the first Emirati technology company listed on the New York Stock Exchange when it joined the NYSE in October 2020.

"Its flagship mobile application primarily features Yalla rooms," explains the United Arab Emirates Ministry of Economy, **"a reimagined online version of the majlis or cafés where people spend their leisure time in casual chats."**

"With the app encouraging voice chats over video chats, Yalla has managed to stay within the cultural norms of the Middle East while developing a product that appeals to a specific demographic," notes Andrey Demiyanov in Jordan News.



Image: iPhone Screenshots for Yalla Chat via Apple's App Store.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

Yang Tao, the chief executive of the company, told the Financial Times that **users spend an average of five hours a day in the app**.

Much of that time is not spent talking, the FT explains "but hanging out or listening, akin to having a radio on in the background."

This type of online functionality grew in popularity over the last year as Clubhouse and other social audio products took off. Some of that initial enthusiasm has waned, but as major social networks like Twitter and Facebook continue to promote audio, it suggests that these features will become an ongoing part of our social media experience.

Yalla's "virtual majlis" are usually limited to 20 people, with friends inviting you to join the online room. "And, like a majlis, guests bring gifts," Wired Middle East says, pointing out that "Yalla's profits come from the virtual presents users send each other."

This isn't the only activity users can engage with on the platform. Or the only one that makes them money.



Image for Yalla Ludo, via Google Play Store.

"**The company also operates Yalla Ludo, a mobile application featuring online versions of board games that are popular in the region.** They include in-game real-time chats and Ludo chat room functions," the United Arab Emirates Ministry of Economy adds.

"In-game real-time chats and Ludo chat room functions are popular social networking features among users," the company noted in October after the platform won a 2021 Middle East Technology Excellence Award, in the Gaming – Media & Entertainment category.

"I think that regions with their own unique culture, language, and life needs should have their own IM products," Yang Tao, the founder, chairman and CEO of Yalla Group, told the website CoinYuppie in November. "No one has ever tried to make an IM product specifically for locals in the Middle East."

> ***"No one has ever tried to make an IM product specifically for locals in the Middle East."***
>
> **- Yang Tao, founder, chairman and CEO of Yalla Group**

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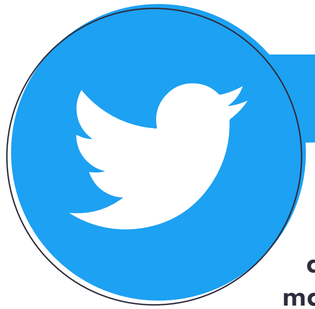
NEW MEDIA ACADEMY

CHAPTER 10:

TWITTER, LINKEDIN AND CLUBHOUSE

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3953857

In our final chapter, we explore three final social media networks, two of which are long established in the region and globally, with the other a newcomer to the scene.



TWITTER

Twitter's impact and significance in the region have arguably declined over time. Nonetheless, **MENA remains an important area for the network, with three of its biggest markets to be found in the region**.

Data from October 2021 shows that **Turkey has roughly 16.3 million active Twitter users, ranking seventh in the world by market size,** while **Saudi Arabia has roughly 14.2 million active Twitter users, making it the 8th largest national market** for the platform. With **5.3 million users, Egypt is Twitter's 18th biggest market.**

MENA remains an important market for Twitter, with three of its biggest markets to be found in the region.

TWITTER AD REACH RANKING

Countries and Territories with the largest Twitter advertising audiences.

#	COUNTRY OR TERRITORY	REACH
01	**U.S.A.**	77,750,000
02	**JAPAN**	58,200,000
03	**INDIA**	24,450,000
04 =	**BRAZIL**	19,050,000
04 =	**U.K.**	19,050,000
06	**INDONESIA**	17,550,000
07	**TURKEY**	16,250,000
08	**SAUDI ARABIA**	14,200,000
09	**MEXICO**	14,000,000
10	**THAILAND**	11,250,000

AD REACH RANKING IN MENA

#	COUNTRY OR TERRITORY	REACH
18	**EGYPT**	19,825,500

Table: Twitter Reach:Largest Territories by Total Audience, October 2021 via TheNextWeb.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

In terms of potential reach on a country-by-country basis, three MENA nations can be found in the Top 10.

Saudi Arabia is ranked third, with just over half (51.1%) **of the population using the app**. **Kuwait** with 42.4% reach **is ranked sixth**, and **Bahrain** where 33.4% of the county is on the network, **is in tenth place**.

TWITTER ELIGIBLE AUDIENCE REACH RATE RANKING

Countries and territories with the largest Twitter adverstising audiences compared to population **aged 13+**.

#	COUNTRY OR TERRITORY	REACH VS. POP.	TOTAL REACH
01	**LUXEMBOURG**	52.6%	289,700
02	**JAPAN**	51.7%	58,200,000
03	**SINGAPORE**	51.2%	2,700,000
04	**SAUDI ARABIA**	51.1%	14,200,000
05	**ANDORRA**	47.4%	32,650
06	**KUWAIT**	42.4%	1,500,000
07	**GUERNSEY**	42.4%	23,300
08	**ICELAND**	36.1%	103,450
09	**PUERTO RICO**	35.7%	885,650
10	**BAHRAIN**	33.4%	492,100

Table: Twitter Reach:Largest Territories by Potential Audience, October 2021 via DataReportal.

Twitter introduced a new language setting on the platform, Arabic Feminine, last year. The setting addresses the user in Arabic feminine form.

As several Twitter users noted, Twitter purports to be "the first social media platform to offer a language setting that acknowledges and supports the Arabic feminine form, addressing Arab women as women."

"With this update, we're hoping to provide Arabic-speaking women with an option to share their unique voice and participate in an inclusive conversation, while being addressed based on their preferences," said Carla El Maalouli, Head of Business Marketing, Twitter MENA.

To access the new setting, users can log onto Twitter, and navigate their way to "settings and privacy." Under "Accessibility, display, and languages" users can select "Arabic (feminine)" from a list of drop-down options in the display language menu.

The move matters, Wired Middle East explains, because verb formations in Arabic are different, depending on the gender of the person you're speaking to. It's a characteristic also seen in other languages such as French and Hindi.



Image via Twitter.

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"But **social media platforms have rarely acknowledged this nuance, building sites that address users as men by default.**"

"That's a language convention that predates tech platforms, of course, but it has left Arab women navigating so-called "user-centric" social media sites that don't fully acknowledge them," they add.

"For years, female Arabic speakers have been treated as men when asked to tweet, explore, search, like, and reply." **The move by Twitter "now seeks to flip that convention on its head."**

Brands such as Mastercard MEA, Microsoft, Nissan, Adidas and Mobily tweeted about the new language setting.



Image: Screengrab via Twitter.



Image via Twitter.

The launch of Twitter Spaces, a new feature enabling live audio conversations to take place on the platform coincided with Ramadan.

Saudi telecoms provider stc partnered with Rotana Music to broadcast a show three times a week throughout Ramadan on Twitter Spaces, hosted by Sawalef Ramadaniya.

Each episode saw Ramadaniya chatting from home with different celebrities about their Ramadan routines and experiences.

Supported by a range of marketing efforts including pre-roll content across Twitter, pinned product Tweets, and post-show highlights posted on the platform, the campaign generated more than 78.5M impressions and more than 8.1M video views.

The platform also shared lessons from Ramadan 2021 Twitter Marketing Campaigns, examples of how brands connected with the Saudi National Day 2021 and wider highlights from the past year.



Image: Screengrab via Twitter.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

TOP FIVE MOST FOLLOWED TWITTER ACCOUNTS

RANK	NAME	FOLLOWERS
01	**Al Arabiya** @AlArabiya_Brk	21.1M
02	**Mohamad Alarefe** @MohamadAlarefe	19.6M
03	**Recep Tayyip Erdoğan** @RTErdogan	18.3M
04	**Al Jazeera Arabic** @AJArabic	17.5M
05	**Elissa** @elissakh	15.7M

Table: MENA's Top Five Most Followed Twitter Accounts, Data via Emplifi.

MOST FANS: TWITTER

The breaking news account for the Dubai based Arabic TV news channel Al Arabiya, is MENA's most followed account on Twitter. With more than 21 million followers, the account is 1.5 million followers ahead of the second placed profile, which belongs to the Muslim scholar Mohamad al-Arefe.



Image: 2020's most followed Arab on Twitter, Elissa's pinned tweet from 2021, via Twitter.

Al Arabiya's main Twitter account has over 5 million fewer followers, reflecting the popularity of breaking news on Twitter for many social media users.

Turkish premier Recep Erdoğan is ranked third, while last year's most followed Arab on Twitter - the Lebanese artist Elissa - is in fifth place overall, based on Emplifi's data.

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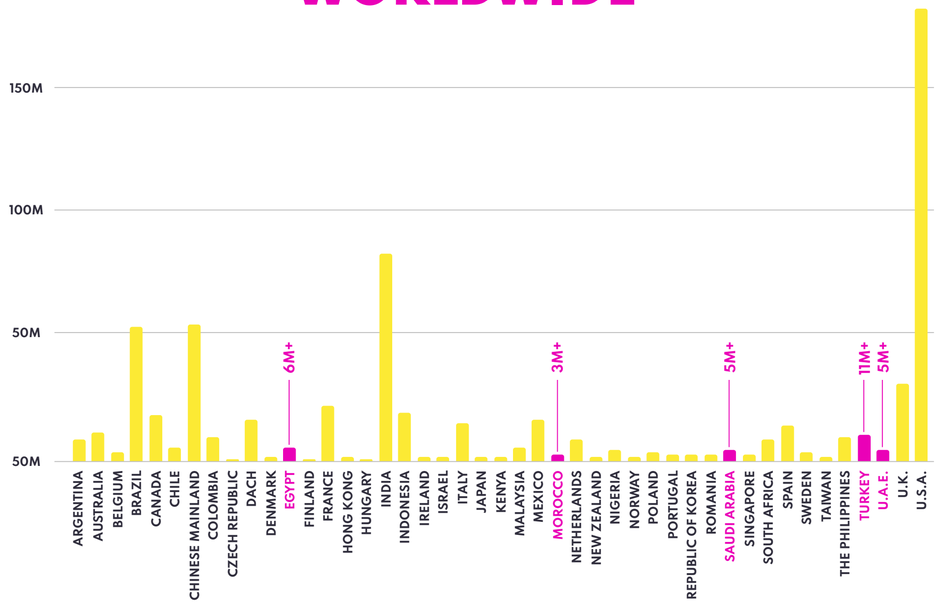
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LINKEDIN

LinkedIn has more than 43 million members in the MENA region and over 800 million around the world. **The company has 11 million members in Turkey, 6 million in Egypt and 5 million in both Saudi Arabia and UAE.**

Globally, UAE is ranked ninth in terms of the percentage of the population (63.9%) using the network. It is the only MENA nation in the Top 20.

NUMBER OF LINKEDIN MEMBERS WORLDWIDE



Graph: Worldwide Members via LinkedIn (Data as of 25 January 2022).

LinkedIn Middle East partnered with Médecins Sans Frontières UAE (Doctors Without Borders) to showcase the non-profit's work globally and in the region.

"At a time when there is much discussion about the future of home working and flexible models for employees, it is important to remember that not everyone has the luxury to choose from the new and flexible work models," Ali Matar, Head of LinkedIn MENA and Emerging Markets, said.

Using the hashtag #LinkedInForAll, the platform showcased the experiences of MSF's staff members across the region and told their stories.



Image via Twitter.



Bayan Hisham, Community Outreach & Media Officer and the first Emirati woman on the "Doctors Without Borders" team. Image via Facebook.

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LinkedIn published its Top Startups list covering Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Egypt, Europe, India, Indonesia, Israel, Mexico, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, and Singapore, the UK, and the US. **It was the first time they had featured UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel in this series.**

They also published another list focused on **"The 10 best workplaces to grow your career" with separate features for the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar**.

TOP FIVE START-UPS

#	EGYPT	ISRAEL	SAUDI ARABIA	U.A.E.
01	Khazna	Hunters.	Sary	CAFU
02	trella	Elementor	tamara	KITOPI
03	CAPITER	GRANULATE	Jahez	Inspire Integrated
04	Brimore	WIZ	THE CHEFZ	YELLOW DOOR ENERGY
05	maxab	optibus	salasa سلاسة	hellō chef

Table: Top Five Start-Ups Identified by LinkedIn in Four Major MENA Markets.

As podcasting in the Arab world continues to grow in popularity, LinkedIn Learning launched a new audio course, "Creating a New Market: Podcasting in the Middle East."

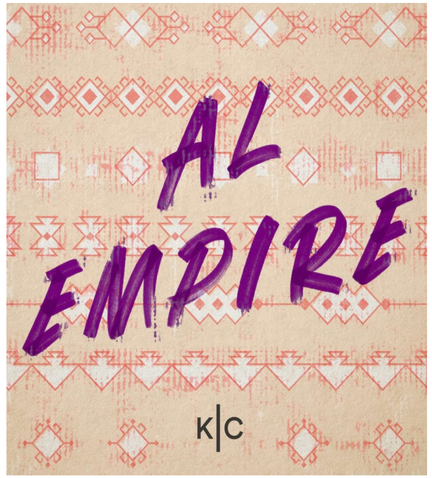
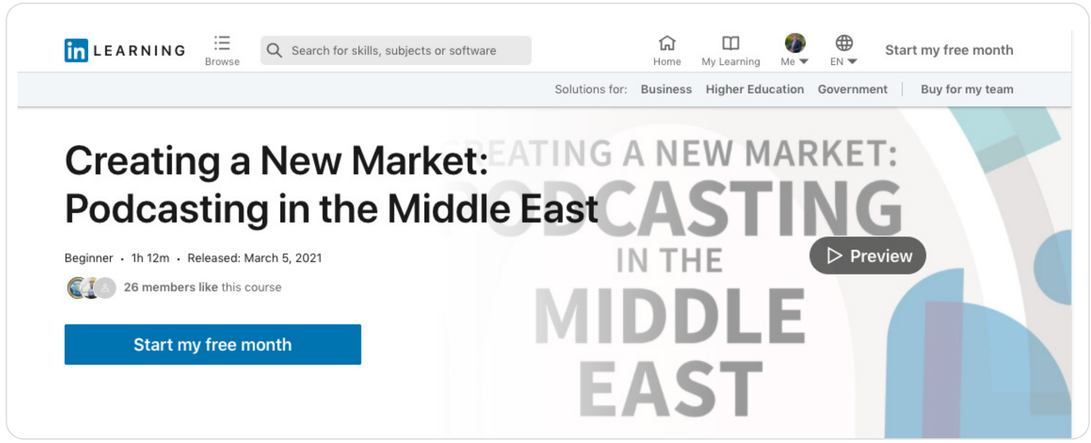


Image via KC Network.

The course adapted from the podcast al empire—which features exceptional Arabs around the world—finds Dana Ballout interviewing Hebah Fisher about the founding of Kerning Cultures Network, the first venture-funded podcast company in the Middle East; and one that is female-led.

At the end of the program, learners receive a Certificate of Completion and a greater understanding of this emerging market.



Screengrab via LinkedIn.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4353017

CLUBHOUSE

The voice-based social network Clubhouse generated a lot of buzz at the start of the year. Its emergence, coupled with that of Twitter Spaces, were part of a wider move in 2021 towards "social audio," real-time discussions on social networks which users can listen to and participate in.

These efforts have been supported by the emergence of other functionality such as audio tweets and "soundbites" short audio clips you can share on Facebook.

As Amaeya Media noted in their "Podcasts in MENA, State of the Industry 2020" report, "There is little doubt that audio will continue to play a significant role in our future."

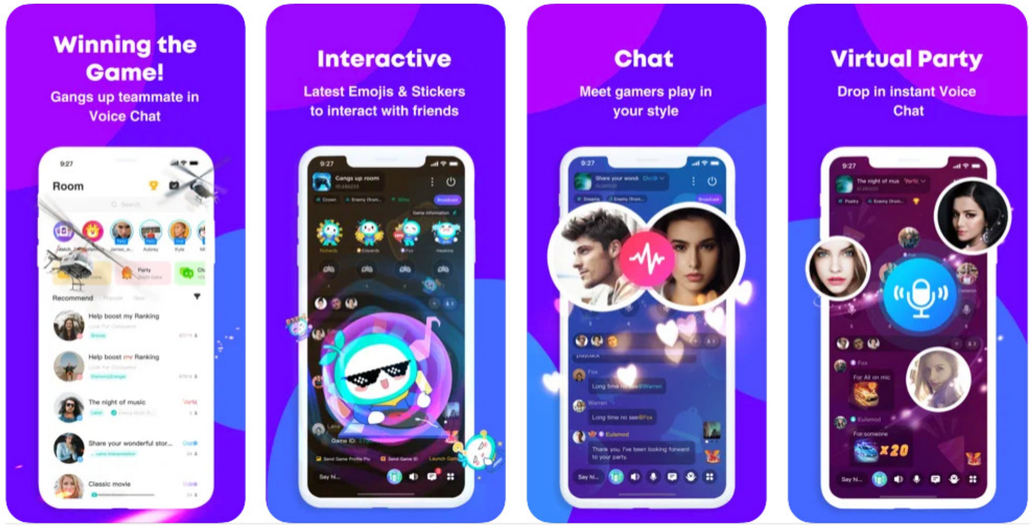
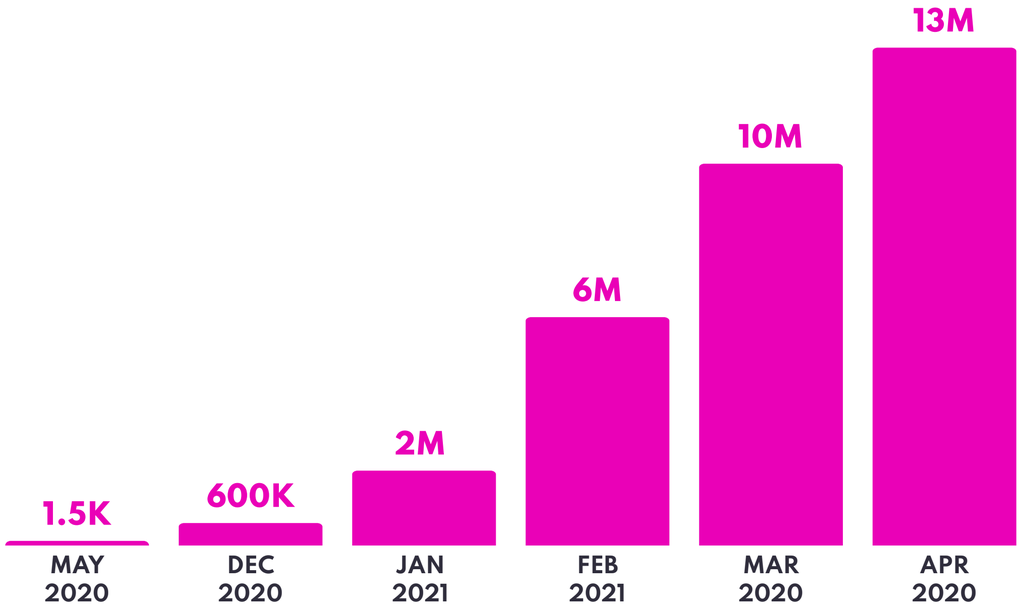


Image: Sango is an example of an audio social app with a key focus on MENA.

One key reason for this social audio's emergence is the intimacy that voice-led communication provides. "Social audio is especially effective and important because it provides a depth of contextual understanding that isn't supported by text, says Social Media Examiner. "For example, when you hear someone's voice, your understanding of what they're saying is influenced by their intonation."

Clubhouse dominated early interest in social audio. Commenting on "how quickly the Clubhouse rocket ship has ascended," CB Insights, a New York-based technology intelligence platform notes how the app went "from a $100M valuation at beta to $4B in 11 months." "When a company starts flying that quickly, it gets attention and also invites investors and companies, big and small, to join the fray," they add.

CLUBHOUSE APP USER GROWTH



Graph: Chart showing the early growth of Clubhouse, via Vajresh Balaji. By April 2021 it had 13 million users globally, up from just 1,500 in May 2020.

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MENA was not immune to the surge of interest in this platform. Of 10 million global downloads, 1.5 million of these were in the Gulf, Lebanon and Israel in the first half of 2021.

"As Clubhouse wasn't released on the much more widely-used Android platform until the end of May, this means that **practically every person who owns an iPhone in those eight countries has downloaded Clubhouse**," said Craig Chapple, a senior strategist at Sensor Tower, the analytics firm who compiled the data.

Initially invite-only, users in Saudi Arabia could be found selling invitations on Twitter, Arab News reported, with prices ranging between the equivalent of $4 and $53.

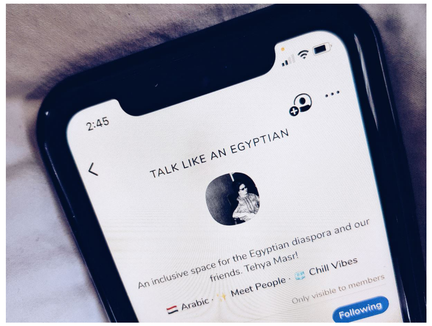


Image via Egyptian Streets.

Part of the appeal of the app, the Cairo-based media outlet Egyptian Streets observes, stemmed from the loneliness that many users have experienced during the pandemic. Alongside this, it also offers the chance to connect with like-minded people and discover new professional opportunities. They also highlight its appeal to diaspora communities.

These developments attracted articles in The Economist, Reuters, Le Monde, The New York Times and other august publications, with pieces focussed on the range of discussions being seen on the app, how it might encourage freedom of expression and the risk of this being curtailed.

Oman blocked the app in March for "operating without a proper license,' and others urged users to be cautious about using the app, given the ability for conversations to be recorded and the risk of doxxing by rogue users.

"There have also been instances, in Saudi Arabia for example, of sensitive conversations being screen-recorded and posted online," Middle East Eye wrote (a move which is against the terms of use of the app) while "in Egypt, a pro-government TV show claimed it had uncovered—and recorded—a "terrorist"

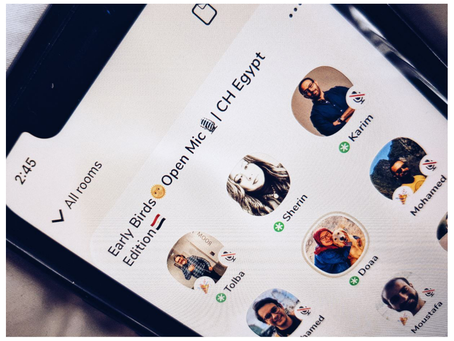


Image via Egyptian Streets.

network on Clubhouse."

The startup's co-founder and chief executive Paul Davison recently told CNBC how **the app created opportunities for users to connect with people they might not otherwise encounter**.

One example of this dynamic, Wired Middle East noted, is the "Meet Palestinians and Israelis" room. Starting out as a private chat between friends, "in the course of a week it was visited by more than 450,000 people."

Users also don't know who might pop into a room. Dr. Dina Matar, Chair of the Centre for Global Media and Communications at SOAS University of London recounted how "Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif made an unannounced appearance in a virtual conversation on the audio-chat app, in which he addressed a range of topics, including the recent agreement with China, Iran-US relations, and the June presidential elections."

"By no means is the success of social audio guaranteed. Key players—creators and platform companies alike—will need to think carefully about how they'll continue their foray into social audio," Forbes suggests, in an article which explores whether "social audio is destined to be no more than a "supplementary feature" on a platform like Discord or Twitter, rather than a dedicated, standalone platform."

Whether we will still be talking about social audio—or Clubhouse at least—in our 2022 report remains to be seen. But, for now, it remains one of the most high-profile social media innovations that we have seen in the past year. What happens next, only time will tell.

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THANK YOU!

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PREVIOUS REPORTS

2020 **How the Middle East used Social Media in 2020**
by Damian Radcliffe and Hadil Abuhmaid, with New Media Academy
Available in English and Arabic from the New Media Academy website. Also available via University of Oregon Scholars' Bank, ResearchGate, Academia.edu, SlideShare and SSRN.

2019 **Social Media in the Middle East: 2019 in review**
by Damian Radcliffe and Hadil Abuhmaid
Download, or view online, via the University of Oregon Scholars' Bank, Scribd, SlideShare, Academia.edu and ResearchGate.

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by Damian Radcliffe and Payton Bruni
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2017 **Social Media in the Middle East: The Story of 2017**
by Damian Radcliffe and Amanda Lam
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2015 **Social Media in the Middle East: The Story of 2015**
by Damian Radcliffe
Also available on Scribd, SlideShare, University of Oregon Scholars Bank, Academia.edu, SSRN and the UNESCO Media Literacy Portal.

2014 **Social Media in the Middle East: The Story of 2014**
by Damian Radcliffe
Also available on Scribd, SlideShare, SSRN and Academia.edu.

2013 **Social Media in the Middle East: The Story of 2013**
by Damian Radcliffe (English, Arabic)

2012 **Social Media in the MENA – 2012 Review**
by Damian Radcliffe (English, Arabic)

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ABOUT NEW MEDIA ACADEMY

NEW MEDIA ACADEMY

New Media Academy (Arabic, English) was launched in 2020 by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, to train Emirati and Arab youth to lead the rapidly growing field of digital media.

To improve their career prospects and enable them to lead as digital citizens in the new economy, the institution provides a range of interactive online programs that are delivered by top digital practitioners and academics from around the world.

Additionally, the academy collaborates with an elite group of influencers in the Arab world and helps institutions and businesses to create digital strategies and creative digital content.

New Media Academy's goals are in line with the four basic requirements in the UAE and the region: talent development, capacity building, preparation for the future and open learning. This reflects the key role the institution plays to ensure a promising future for the country and the region.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Damian Radcliffe is the Carolyn S. Chambers Professor in Journalism, a Professor of Practice, an affiliate of the Department for Middle East and North Africa Studies (MENA) and the Agora Journalism Center, and a Research Associate of the Center for Science Communication Research (SCR) at the University of Oregon.

He is also a three-time Knight News Innovation Fellow of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University, an Honorary Research Fellow at Cardiff University's School of Journalism, Media and Culture Studies (JOMEC), and a life fellow of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA).

An experienced Digital Analyst, Consultant, Journalist and Researcher, Damian writes about digital trends, social media, technology, the business of media, and the evolution of journalism. He tweets @damianradcliffe.

Damian has worked in editorial, research, policy, and teaching positions for the past two decades in the UK, Middle East, and USA. This includes roles in all media sectors (commercial, public, government, regulatory, academic, and nonprofit/civil society) and all platforms (print, digital, TV and radio).

In these roles, and through his company Kenja Media Consulting, he undertakes a wide range of teaching, consultancy, research and journalistic work, which includes writing a monthly column on technology in the Middle East for ZDNet (which he has done since December 2013).

He writes, speaks and has been quoted, across a wide range of media on Middle East matters. He has produced an annual report charting social media developments across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) since 2012. Between 2012-2014 he worked for Qatar's Ministry of Information and Communications Technology (ictQATAR) as an analyst and researcher. He joined the University of Oregon in 2015.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Hadil Abuhmaid is a Media Studies Doctoral Candidate at the University of Oregon, Oregon. She earned a BS in Journalism and Political Science from Bir-Zeit University in Palestine and an MA in Nonprofit Management from the University of Oregon, with a focus on Arts Administration.

She is the co-founder of Filmlab: Palestine, a nonprofit company based in Ramallah, that aims at developing the cinema industry in Palestine. Her work in the field of cinema has created a base for her research interest in Palestinian self-representation.

Through her research, Hadil aims at examining the effects of soft and hard borders constructed by the occupation on the formation and self-representation of the national identity in Palestinian feature films. Her research interests include cinema studies, diasporic studies, representations, and national identity.

In addition to academic work, Hadil is a member of the Graduate School Advisory Board at the University of Oregon, a member of the Student Advisory Board for the Office of the Dean of Students, and a board member of Creating Connections; a graduate student group that supports traditionally marginalized population in the U.S. higher education.

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ABOUT THE DESIGNERS



Terra Johnston is a content creator and digital marketing strategist based in Seattle, Washington. She specializes in brand development and management, and her areas of service include graphic design, social content creation, web design, media relations, and copywriting. She received her Bachelor's degree from the University of Oregon in public relations.



Patrick Miller is an independent graphic designer and illustrator based in London, UK. With 25 years experience in content creation for digital and print media, he works with some of the UK's leading charities providing creative direction, layout and artwork for editorial, educational and organizational assets. He is also a published children's book illustrator.

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REFERENCES

All of the sources used for the creation of this report are hyperlinked throughout.

DISCLOSURE

Damian Radcliffe is owner/director of Kenja Consulting, LLC (UK) and Kenja Media Consulting (US). The work Professor Radcliffe does for the University of Oregon and for Kenja Consulting are related or overlap in that Professor Radcliffe undertakes research journalism, training, public speaking and consulting in areas which are, or may appear, related to Professor Radcliffe's University of Oregon (UO) duties. Thus, this study could affect Damian Radcliffe's personal financial status.

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Professor Radcliffe's outside work activity was reviewed and approved by the University of Oregon in accordance with its conflict of interest and commitment.

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NEW MEDIA ACADEMY

HOW THE MIDDLE EAST USED SOCIAL MEDIA IN 2021

BY **NEW MEDIA ACADEMY**

AUTHORS: **DAMIAN RADCLIFFE** WITH **HADIL ABUHMAID**

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