

Social Media in the Middle East 2022: A Year in Review

By Damian Radcliffe and Hadil Abuhmaid with Nii Mahliaire

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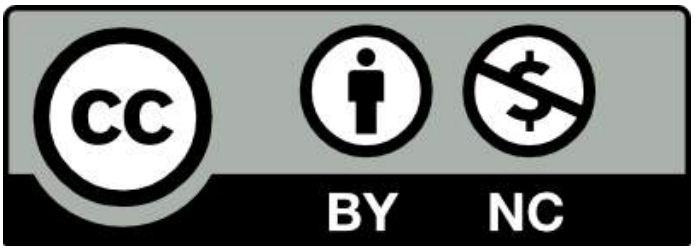
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About this report

Welcome to the latest annual study on Middle East Social Media Trends. This report, the eleventh in a series dating back to 2012, provides an in-depth analysis of the current state of social media in the Middle East. As the most comprehensive and up-to-date study of its kind, it is an invaluable resource for anyone interested in the region's digital landscape.

In this report, we examine the most popular social media platforms and the ways in which people are using them. We explore the impact of social media on politics, business and culture in the region. Our findings will be of interest to anyone interested in how social media shapes the way we connect with one another, as well as the ways in which we consume and find information. These trends are relevant to marketers, journalists, brands and businesses, as well as government agencies and public bodies.

Over the past decade, the Middle East has seen a significant increase in social media adoption. Today, it boasts some of the highest penetration rates of social media in the world, making it a key market for platforms and businesses looking to engage with Arab audiences.

From staying in touch with friends and family to consuming news and entertainment, social media - as it is around the world - is an integral part of daily life in the region. Social media is also playing an increasingly important role in politics, with many politicians and activists using the platforms to connect with the public and mobilize support for their policies.

Much of this takes place on Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. These platforms, all part of the Meta family, have a combined user base of over 200 million in the region. Other platforms such as Snapchat, TikTok and Twitter also have a significant audience.

Social networks are changing shopping habits too. Networks like TikTok, Instagram and Facebook are becoming key channels for e-commerce, both in terms of direct sales and inspiration for purchases. The rise of social commerce offers opportunities and challenges for businesses and brands looking to tap into the digital habits of connected consumers.

This is the fourth report we have written together, drawing on our extensive experience and expertise in the region. We are grateful, as always, to the phenomenal data produced by Simon Kemp, CEO of Kepios, a marketing strategy consultancy, and chief analyst at DataReportal, whose work informs so much of the material that we present.

Our further thanks to Professor Peter Laufer and the University of Oregon-UNESCO Crossings Institute, which is publishing this report for the first time; and continued support from the University of Oregon's School of Journalism and Communication. Nii Mahliaire, a communication and media studies doctoral student, provided additional research assistance.

We hope you enjoy reading this latest annual report.

Damian Radcliffe & Hadil Abuhmaid
March 2023

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Executive Summary

This report examines social media trends in the Middle East during 2022. To help us do this, as in previous studies, we absorbed information from over 100 different online sources, in English and Arabic. This includes research reports, media coverage, interviews and articles.

Three key themes stood out to us this year: 1) How the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is a market leader for social media use on multiple platforms, 2) Growing issues related to Freedom of Expression; and 3) The role of social media in the 2022 Iran protests.

None of these are new developments (social media has also played a role in previous protests across Iran), but these trendlines have become more pronounced in the past year.

Theme 1: MENA is a Social Media Market Leader

Social media is highly prevalent in the MENA region, with a significantly higher adoption rate across many platforms than in other countries. Some notable examples include:

- **Five MENA nations can be seen in the Top 10 for take-up of social networks**. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Qatar, have the highest levels of adoption in the world, according to findings published[1] by DataReportal.

- **Globally, social media use around the world remains at 2019 levels. With one exception: MEA.** The Middle East and Africa region surveyed[2] by GlobalWebIndex reveals that users are often on social media for more than three hours a day.

Egypt and Turkey, MENA's most populous countries, often appear on the Top 20 lists for the biggest national markets for many social networks. More notable, however, is the prevalence of countries in the region at the top of the charts when platforms are analyzed by reach.

- **The Top 5 countries in the world for reach on YouTube are all in the region, with Lebanon leading the way.**

- Similarly, **TikTok's ascendancy means the top five spots for the app - by reach - are all held by Middle East nations.** Nine MENA nations are in the Top 20.

- In terms of reach, **nine of the Top 16 nations in the world using Snapchat are in MENA, as are five of the Top 20 markets - by total audience size - globally. Bahrain,** with 79.8% are on the app, **has the highest reach of any national market**.

- **On Facebook, Libya has the largest reach for the platform globally**, with 96.1% of those aged 13+ using the social network.

[1] https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview-report
[2] https://www.slideshare.net/LetciaXavier2/2022-gwi-report-social

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- **For Instagram, four MENA nations can be found in the Top 20 for reach**, while Turkey is now the 5th largest market for Instagram, globally, with nearly 49m users.

- **Four MENA nations are also found in the Top 20 for Facebook Messenger** users worldwide. Libya is ranked second, with 75% of the population using the app.

- And **three countries in MENA can be found in the Top 20 markets for Twitter.**

Theme 2: Challenges to Freedom of Expression

We have charted[3] in previous annual reports the rise in obstacles to free speech[4] on social media in the MENA region. This has included examples of governments blocking certain apps,[5] particularly during times of protests and even exam periods.[6]

Alongside this, we have seen the emergence[7] of (often purposefully vague) laws pertaining to the spread of "fake news" and a number of high profile cases of users being given jail time as a result of posts on social media.

The last of these trends feels particularly prevalent this year, and we have highlighted a number of cases throughout the report, not just in the final two chapters which specifically detail developments related to Freedom of Expression and Online Misinformation.

Some of the key findings in these areas from the past year include:

- **Continued platform manipulation** by governments and other agencies pushing state narratives; and the efforts by platforms and law enforcement to manage this.

- **Arrests in a number of countries** including Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey, **of social media users**. Often the driver for these arrests are posts that are critical of a regime, leading to charges of spreading misinformation or attempts to destabilize the country and/or government. Account holders often do not have a large number of followers.

- **Female social media influencers can seem particularly vulnerable.** Many of the most high profile case studies that we highlight from nations such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia feature women posting content that is not deemed culturally acceptable.

We have seen these trends in previous years too, but in 2022 they feel more pronounced.

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[3] https://medium.com/damian-radcliffe/censorship-and-freedom-of-expression-online-in-the-middle-east-4dfd7a2540d2 (extract from the 2020 study)

[4] https://medium.com/damian-radcliffe/censorship-and-freedom-of-expression-in-the-middle-east-eda09f372aee (extract from our 2019 report)

[5] https://damianradcliffe.wordpress.com/2018/07/11/social-media-in-the-middle-east-censorship-privacy-and-freedom-of-expression/ (extract from 2018's round-up)

[6] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36570808

[7] https://www.zdnet.com/article/middle-east-has-a-big-problem-it-loves-tech-but-cant-stop-blocking-it/

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Theme 3: Social Media and Protests in Iran

As protests continue[8] in Iran, social media remains an important platform - as it was during the Arab Spring - for organizers on the ground, as well as a means to share what is happening with the wider world.

This is despite repeated attempts by the government in Iran to block access[9] to the internet and various social networks, and the efforts[10] of citizens to by-pass[11] these attempts to restrict access to information and to control the narrative, both within Iran and outside it.

Arguably, this is the biggest geo-political story of the past year in the region, so it's not surprising that dimensions of this story can be seen throughout our report.

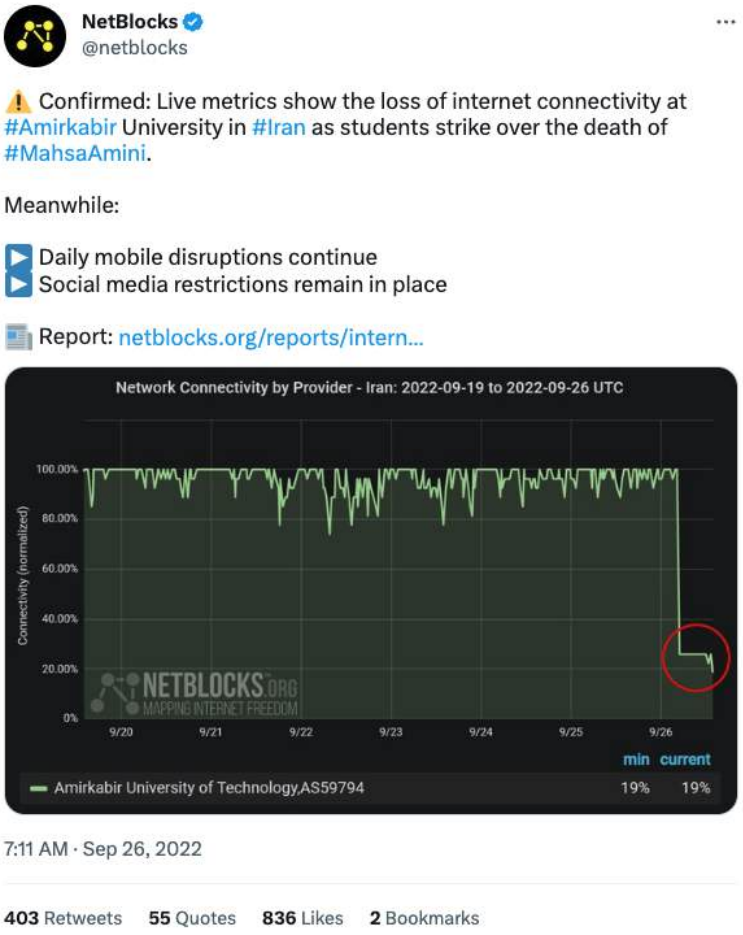


Image via Twitter

The Bigger Picture

Beyond these themes, we've continued to see other important developments, ones that we have charted in this study.

This includes the use of social media for good (such as charitable and public health campaigns) as well as Ramadan based programing, creativity manifest in the growing creator economy, and the use of social networks for a range of purposes related to travel, tourism and global events such as the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™.

Collectively, these examples - and this report - highlight the evolving nature of social media as a tool for communication and entertainment, while also acknowledging the challenges faced by users in a region where freedom of expression is not always guaranteed. These are trends that we will continue to monitor, map and share during the coming year and beyond.

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8 https://www.npr.org/2023/04/02/1167645484/six-months-after-the-death-of-22-year-old-mahsa-amini-iranians-are-still-protest

9 https://www.foxbusiness.com/technology/iran-blocks-internet-social-media-mahsa-amini-protests-grow

10 https://www.rferl.org/a/iranians-circumvent-internet-restrictions/31933593.html

11 https://vpnoverview.com/unblocking/censorship/internet-censorship-iran/

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1: Market Context

In this opening chapter we provide an overview of the key data related to social media adoption and usage in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

- Social Media Take-Up

The Middle East is a market leader in social media use. Multiple countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region rank above the global average in terms of the percentage of the population using social networks.

Five MENA nations can be seen in the Top 10 for take-up of social networks.

- UAE (1st) is ranked top with over 100%, a figure which can be attributed to duplicate and fake accounts, this is followed by Bahrain (2nd, 98.7%), Qatar (3rd, 96.3%), Lebanon (6th, 90.5%) and Oman (7th, 90.5%).

- At the other end of the spectrum, South Sudan has one of the lowest levels of social media use. Less than 5% of the population (4.3%), some 470,000 citizens in a country of nearly 11 million people, use social media.

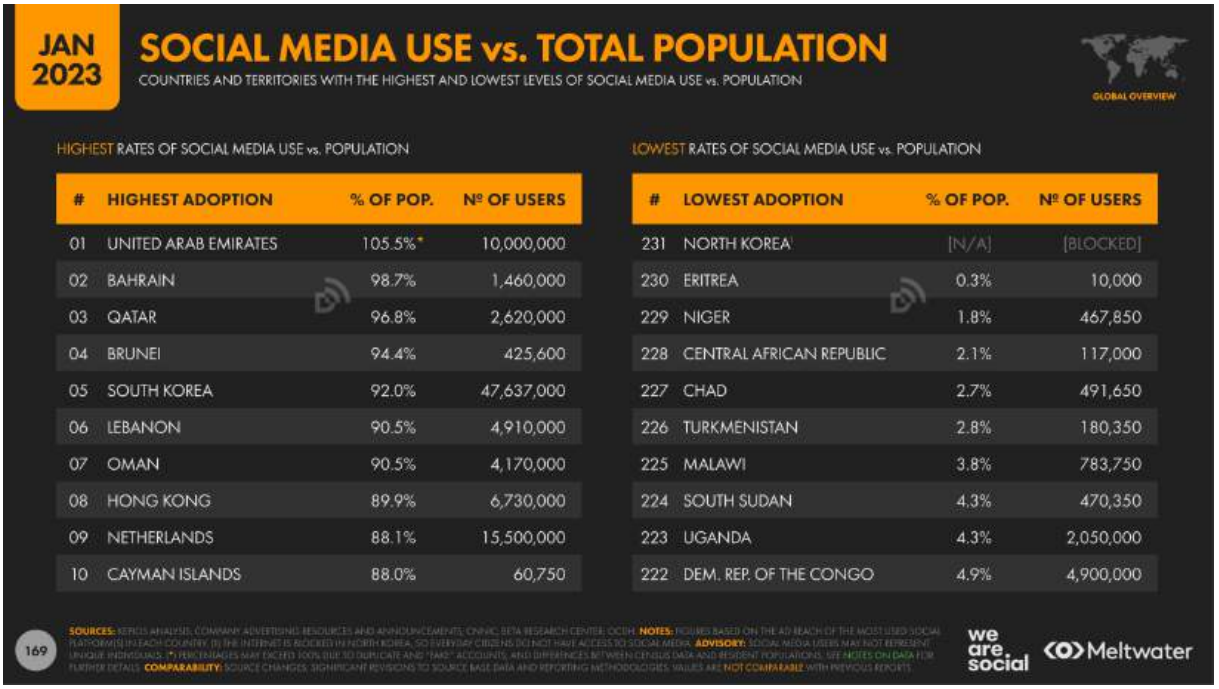


Image: Social Media Use vs. Total Population, via DataReportal

- **And when examining social media adoption in larger markets, five MENA nations - UAE, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Israel and Morocco - all rank above the worldwide average of 59.3%.**

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- Egypt, the region's most populous nation, is still some way off this level of adoption. Under half (44.5%) of the country's 112 million inhabitants are currently social.

- Social Media Use

Around the world, "social media usage has plateaued" GlobalWebIndex says,[12] with the exception of markets in the Middle East and Africa (MEA) region. "If we take MEA out of the equation, the global is what it was three years ago."

- GWI's MEA data (published in 2022, but only including data at that point for up to the end of 20221) also includes African countries such as Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa.

- In those nations, users all average more than three hours a day on social, which pushes the overall MEA figures some way above the global average. Nonetheless, we can see that many Middle East nations surveyed also exceed the global average.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Global ave	2:16	2:20	2:26	2:25	2:26
Egypt	3:07	3:05	3:02	2:52	2:57
Israel	-	-	1:59	2:02	2:02
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
UAE	2:56	3:01	3:04	3:07	3:12

Table: Average time using social networks on an average day in h:mm. Source: GWI

Many MENA social networkers use a wide variety of social media platforms; often ahead of - or in line with - the global average.

- On a monthly basis, the average number of social media platforms harnessed by internet users aged 16-64 was 8.2 in UAE, 7.9 in Saudi Arabia, 7.6 in Turkey and 7.2 social networks in Egypt.

- Globally, the average user can be found on 7.2 networks in a given month. Internet users in India use the most social networks, averaging 8.7 platforms in a given month.

[12] https://www.slideshare.net/LetciaXavier2/2022-gwi-report-social

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Globally, the wider Middle East and Africa (MEA) region is ranked second for time spent on social and messaging.

- In H1 2022, internet users in the region spent an average of 3 hours, 5 minutes (3:05) per day using these services, Insider Intelligence reveals.[13]

- Only internet users in Latin America do this for longer (3 hours, 35 mins a day).

Where the World Spends Its Media Time, H1 2022

hrs:mins per day among internet users

	Asia-Pacific	Southeast Asia	Western Europe	Central & Eastern Europe	Latin America	Middle East & Africa	North America
PC/laptop/tablet	2:25	3:08	3:09	3:43	4:08	3:50	3:39
Mobile	3:27	4:31	2:41	3:49	5:07	4:35	3:26
Social/messaging	2:12	2:56	1:48	2:26	3:35	3:05	2:11
Broadcast radio	0:59	0:44	1:19	0:55	1:01	1:05	1:11
Music streaming	1:34	1:33	1:15	1:11	2:04	1:45	1:54
Podcasts	1:07	0:57	0:38	0:33	1:04	1:03	0:57
Broadcast TV	1:31	1:38	2:20	2:17	2:26	2:05	2:52
Online TV/streaming	1:34	1:20	1:13	1:08	1:35	1:53	1:52
Print press	1:04	0:44	0:35	0:26	0:37	0:51	0:41
Online press	1:19	1:13	0:50	0:46	1:56	1:19	0:56
Gaming	1:16	1:21	0:52	0:43	1:14	1:29	1:22

Leader Laggard

Note: respondents were asked, "Roughly how many hours do you spend on a given media activity during a typical day?"; respondents selected a period of time (ranging from less than 30 minutes up to 10 hours), with GWI then averaging these figures; the averages also include those who selected "do not use"

Source: GWI, August 2022

g278311

INSIDER INTELLIGENCE | eMarketer

Image via Insider Intelligence

Given these adoption levels, it's no surprise that online ad spend in the region is heavily focused on social networks.

- Internet ad spend in MENA[14] amounts to around $4.4 billion U.S. dollars a year. This market is anticipated to grow to be worth $7.9 billion U.S. dollars a year by 2024.

[13] https://www.insiderintelligence.com/content/global-media-intelligence-2022-middle-east-and-africa
[14] https://www.statista.com/statistics/799847/mena-internet-advertising-spending/

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- In 2020 (the last year for which this data[15] is available), 47% of this outlay was spent on social media.

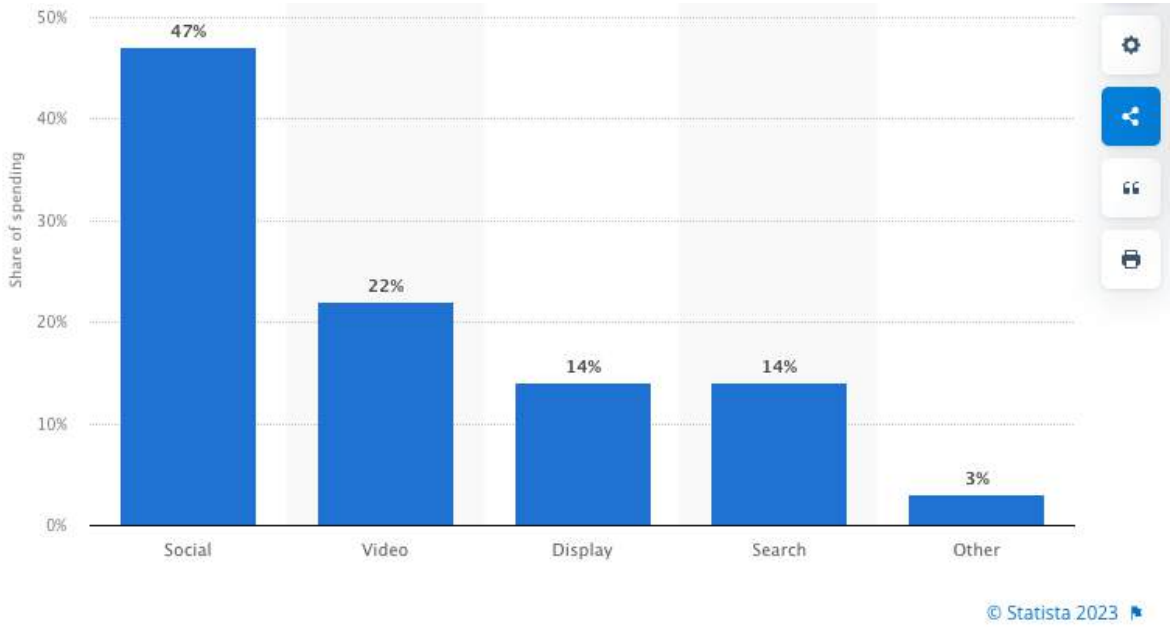


Image: Distribution of digital advertising spending MENA 2020, by format, via Statista

- Drivers for Social Media Usage

There are multiple factors that continue to drive social media habits in the Middle East, including high levels of smartphone adoption and mobile internet speeds.

- **Data for December 2022 from Ookla, ranked Qatar and then UAE as the fastest markets in the world for mobile.** UAE was also ranked fourth for fixed broadband.

- Positions can fluctuate, but these two Gulf nations are consistently near the top of the monthly Speedtest Global Index, which ranks mobile and fixed broadband speeds from around the world. **Kuwait** can also be found in the Top 10 for mobile speeds most months.

- At the other end of the spectrum, **Yemen and Syria** are often found in the list of nations with the slowest mobile broadband.

15 https://www.statista.com/topics/9068/digital-advertising-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/#topicOverview

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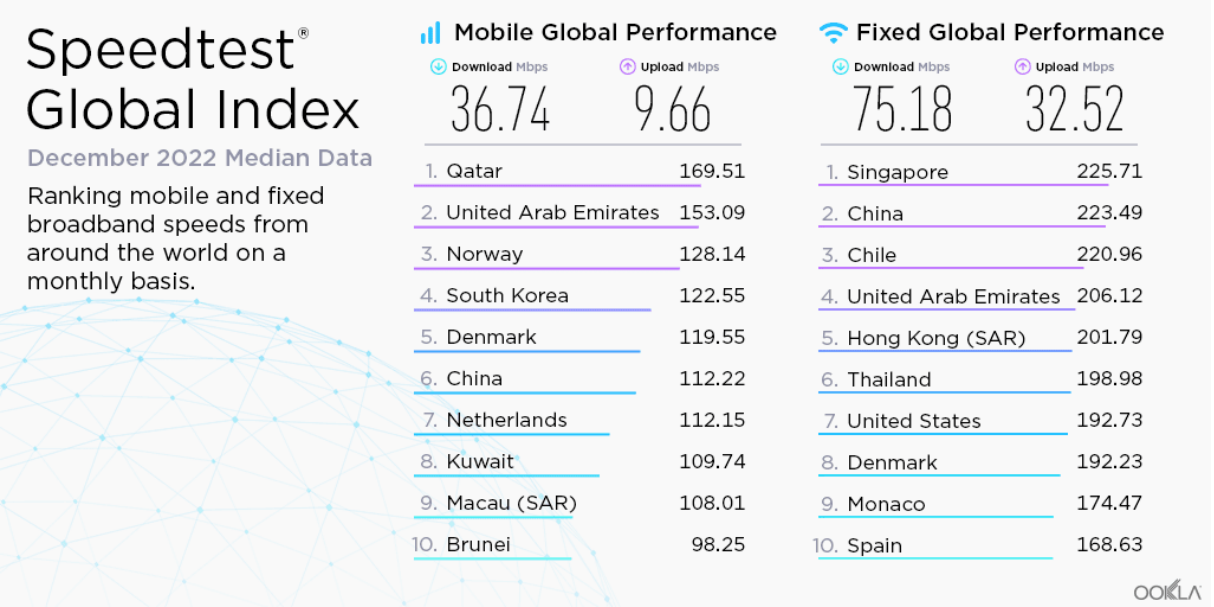


Image via Ookla on Twitter

- Similarly, **Social Commerce on Facebook Marketplace and Instagram's Shopping Bag has the second highest regional engagement in MEA**, with 38% of social media users having used this service in the past month, GlobalWebIndex (GWI) 2022 Social Media Report shows.[16]

- However, it's worth noting that this data is from Q3 2021, although published in 2022 and MEA only covers the biggest markets. Within that, there are wide fluctuations…

With that in mind, a report[17] by the World Bank posits that the MENA region is home to a "digital paradox."

- The region's use of social media accounts is high relative to what would be expected given its level of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita—an indicator of economic development - yet its use of digital tools, such as the internet, to make payments is low," the authors note.[18]

- They argue that "without wider diffusion of digital payments, the region's digital economy will remain nascent," and that to address this it is essential to boost societal trust in the government (especially e-government) and in connected banking and financial services.

To this, we also need to add the continued need for more Arabic language content.

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[16] https://www.slideshare.net/LetciaXavier2/2022-gwi-report-social

[17] https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/37058/9781464816635.pdf?sequence=10&isAllowed=y

[18] Cusolito, A. P., Gévaudan, C., Lederman, D., & Wood, C. A. (2022). The Upside of Digital for the Middle East and North Africa.

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- **Arabic is just 15th on the list of the most common languages found across content online.**

- **According to Babel,** the language learning provider, **Arabic is the fourth most popular language in the world in terms of native speakers (362 million),** behind English (373m), Spanish (485m) and Chinese (1.3 bn).[19]

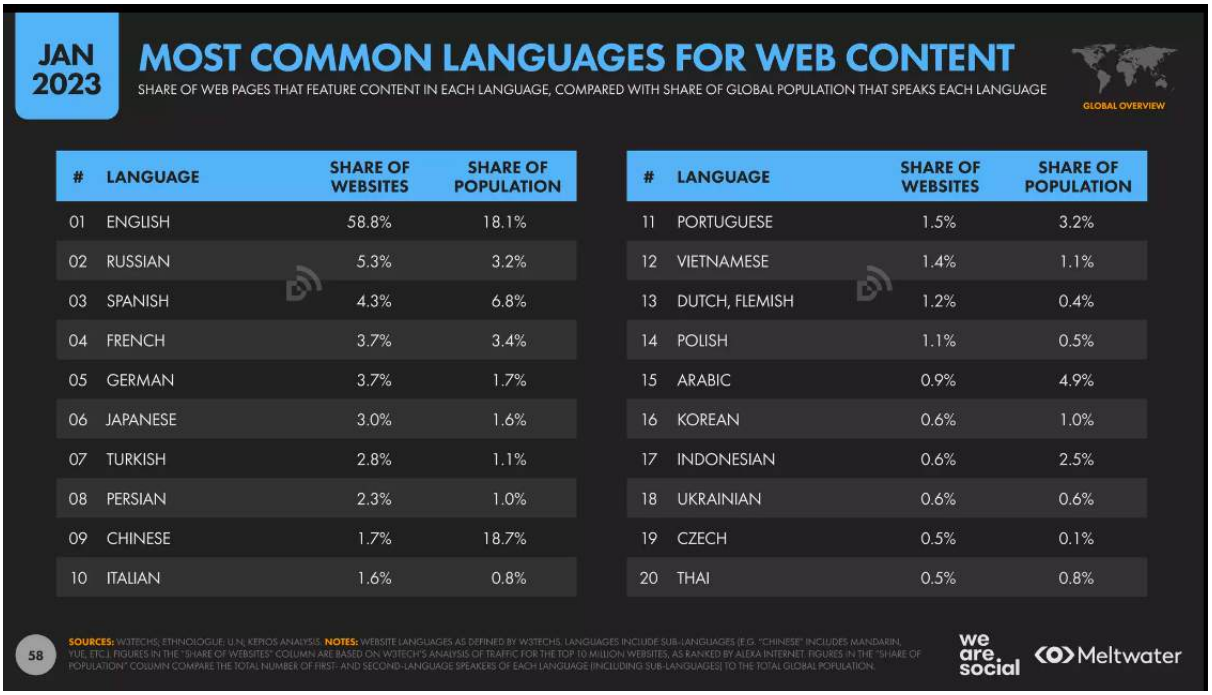


Image via DataReportal

Digital Content Purchased in major MENA markets is also typically behind the curve.[20]

- Globally, more than 7 in 10 internet users (71.5%) aged 16-64 pay for some kind of digital content each month. **The only MENA nations above this average are Morocco (76.9%) and UAE (72.4%).**

- Others, like Turkey (66.6%), Egypt (56.1%) and Israel (48.5%), are some way behind.

- Adoption by MENA nation

Looking more widely at adoption on a country-by-country basis in the region:

- **Internet penetration is almost universal across the Gulf Region**, with five GCC countries having adoption levels of 99%. Not surprisingly, poorer and/or war-torn nations such as Sudan, Syria and Yemen rank lowest in take-up.

[19] https://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/the-10-most-spoken-languages-in-the-world
[20] https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview-report (Slide 385)

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- **There is some variance between the number of Internet and Social Media Users.** Social Media adoption is also highest in the Gulf.

Country	Total Population	Internet Users %	Active Social Media Users %
Algeria	45.3 million	70.9% (32.09m)	52.9% (23.95m)
Bahrain	1.5 million	99% (1.46m)	98.7% (1.46m)
Djibouti	1.1 million	68.9% (778k)	8.3% (94.1k)
Egypt	111.8 million	72.2% (80.8m)	41.4% (46.3m)
Iran	88.8 million	78.6% (69.8m)	54% (48m)
Iraq	45 million	74.9% (33.7m)	56.7% (25.5m)
Israel	9.1 million	90.3% (8.2m)	77.5% (7m)
Jordan	11.3 million	88% (10m)	58.4% (6.6m)
Kuwait	4.3 million	99% (4.3m)	83.7% (3.6m)
Lebanon	5.4 million	86.6% (4.7m)	90.5% (4.9m)
Libya	6.9 million	45.9% (3.1m)	82.5% (5.7m)
Morocco	37.6 million	88.1% (33.2m)	56.6% (21.3m)
Oman	4.6 million	96.4% (4.4m)	90.5% (4.2m)
Palestine	5.3 million	74.6% (4m)	55.6% (3m)
Qatar	2.7 million	99% (2.7m)	96.8% (2.6m)
Saudi Arabia	36.7 million	99% (36.3m)	79.3% (29.1m)
Sudan	47.5 million	28.4% (13.5m)	Unavailable
Syria	22.7 million	35.8% (8.1m)	Unavailable
Tunisia	12.4 million	79% (9.8m)	58.4% (7.2m)
Turkey	85.6 million	83.4% (71.4m)	73.1% (62.6m)
UAE	9.5 million	99% (9.4m)	105.5% (10m)[21]
Yemen	34 million	26.7% (9.1m)	9% (3.1m)

Table: Data via DataReportal[22]

[21] Per Data Reportal's explanatory notes (slide 169) "Social Media users may not represent unique individuals. Percentages may exceed 100% due to duplicate and "fake" accounts, and differences between census data and resident populations."
https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview-report
[22] https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-local-country-headlines

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2. Meta (Facebook and Instagram)

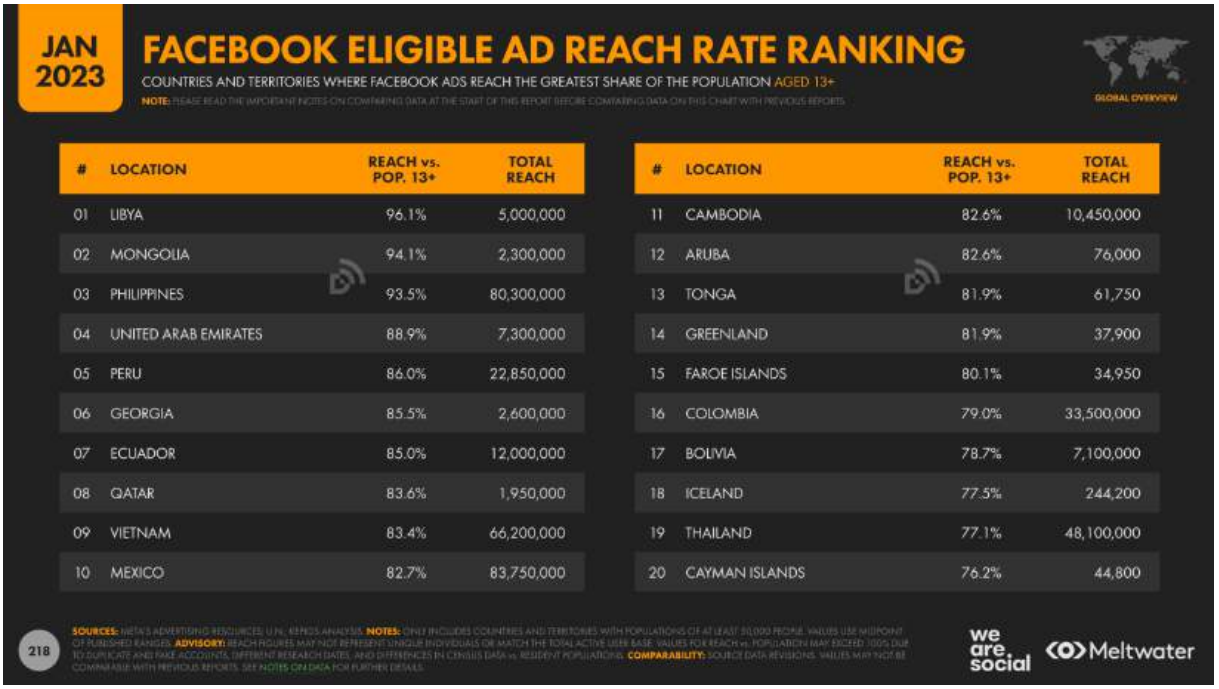
Meta is a social media behemoth. For ease of use, we have included two of its biggest social networks - Facebook and Instagram - in one combined chapter. Insights related to two of its other major channels - WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger - can be found in a dedicated chapter looking specifically at Messaging Apps.

- Facebook

Two of the biggest audiences for Facebook[23] can be found in the MENA region. **Egypt is home to 42 million users, making it the 10th biggest national market for the platform. Meanwhile, Turkey, with 32.8 million users is ranked 14th.**

Libya has the largest reach for the platform globally, with 96.1% of those aged 13+ using the social network. UAE with 88.9% reach is ranked 4th and Qatar at 83.6% is 8th on the list.[24]

Cairo is home to the 7th largest audience on Facebook, with 8.9m users, while Istanbul is ranked 11th with 7.7million users.[25] Dhaka (14.8m), Delhi (13m) and Bangkok (10.5m) are the three cities with the biggest reach for the network.



#	LOCATION	REACH vs. POP. 13+	TOTAL REACH
01	LIBYA	96.1%	5,000,000
02	MONGOLIA	94.1%	2,300,000
03	PHILIPPINES	93.5%	80,300,000
04	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	88.9%	7,300,000
05	PERU	86.0%	22,850,000
06	GEORGIA	85.5%	2,600,000
07	ECUADOR	85.0%	12,000,000
08	QATAR	83.6%	1,950,000
09	VIETNAM	83.4%	66,200,000
10	MEXICO	82.7%	83,750,000
11	CAMBODIA	82.6%	10,450,000
12	ARUBA	82.6%	76,000
13	TONGA	81.9%	61,750
14	GREENLAND	81.9%	37,900
15	FAROE ISLANDS	80.1%	34,950
16	COLOMBIA	79.0%	33,500,000
17	BOLIVIA	78.7%	7,100,000
18	ICELAND	77.5%	244,200
19	THAILAND	77.1%	48,100,000
20	CAYMAN ISLANDS	76.2%	44,800

Image via DataReportal

[23] https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1dcFScsqn1m_VRNZRn3rui1Rl5qB6u-Ox (Slide 217)
[24] https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview-report (Slide 218)
[25] https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview-report (Slide 221)

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Although, as we noted in the opening chapter, **Arabic is the 15th most common language for content on the internet, it is ranked 4th in terms of the primary language used by those on Facebook.**[26] Turkish is ranked 14th.

Over a third (35%) of internet users aged 16-64 in Egypt say Facebook is their favorite social network, with just under a third of this cohort (31%) in Morocco saying the same thing.[27]

Meta opened its regional headquarters in Dubai Internet City in March 2022. Shaikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai and chairman of the Executive Council, inaugurated the office. Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operating Officer of Meta, also attended the event.[28]



Image via Twitter

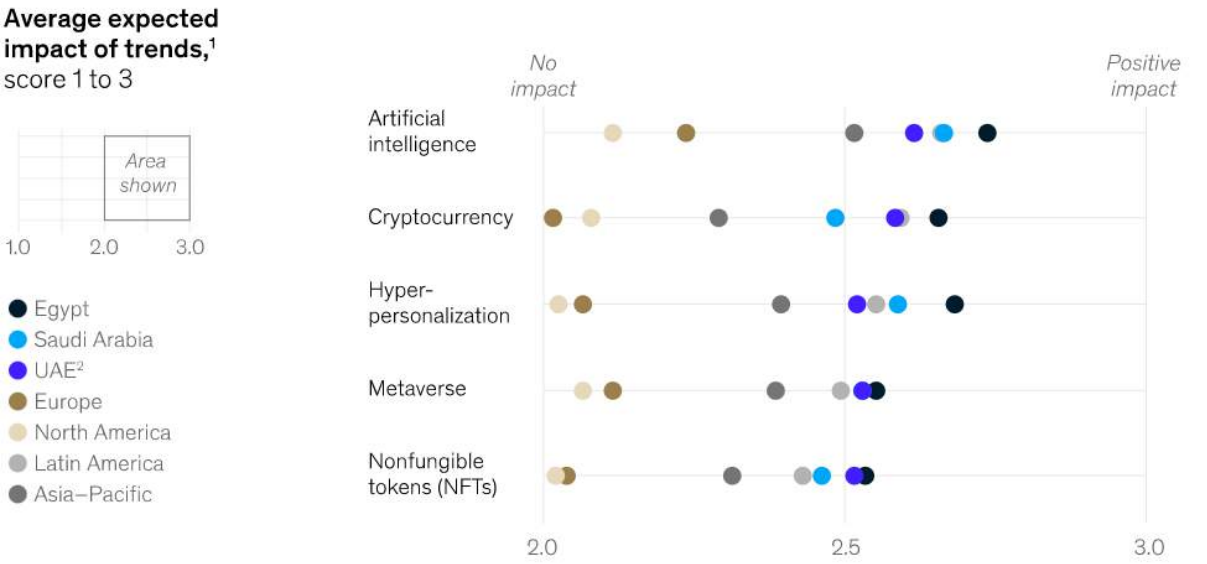
[26] https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview-report (Slide 220)
[27] https://www.slideshare.net/LetciaXavier2/2022-gwi-report-social
[28] https://www.wam.ae/en/details/1395303027845

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There's some potentially good news for Meta (the company formerly known as Facebook), and other tech players, after a **new study[29] from McKinsey found consumers in the MENA region are among the most enthusiastic about the potential for AI, hyper-personalization, the Metaverse, and other emerging new tech.**

"To date, the potential of these offerings hasn't translated to widespread adoption, because consumers are still seeking to determine their utility," McKinsey notes. "However, digital users in the region expect these new trends to have a significantly positive impact, with Egypt slightly ahead of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates."

Middle Eastern users are among global leaders in embracing emerging technologies.



Note: No country or region averaged a negative expected impact score.
[1]Question: "How do you think these new trends and technologies will impact your digital interactions in the future?" Answer options: "1: Negative impact"; "2: No impact"; and "3: Positive impact."
[2]United Arab Emirates.
Source: McKinsey Global Digital Sentiment Survey



Meta's Ramadan #MonthofGood hashtag included a range of content and initiatives during the Holy Month.[30] This included Ramadan Talks, live content on Facebook and Instagram, as well as a Ramadan-themed AR effects filter on both services.

Image via Instagram

29 https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/mckinsey-digital/our-insights/digital-consumers-in-the-middle-east-rising-adoption-and-opportunity
30 https://campaignme.com/ramadan-2022-meta-is-bringing-back-monthofgood-this-april/

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In partnership with Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives (MBRGI), Meta's 'Meals for Reels' campaign worked with more than 120 influencers and 70 content creators across the region and around the world.

Content creators sought to raise awareness and funds for the distribution of over one billion meals in 50 countries, SME10x reports.[31] They did this by including a #MealsForReels donation wallet on their 'Ramadan Reels' on Facebook and Instagram throughout the month.



Image via Grazia

Participants in the initiative included Emirati chef Manal Al Alem, Iraqi chef Shaheen, Emirati influencer Khalid Al Ameri, Egyptian actor Mohamed Henedy, and Lebanese-British influencer and fashion entrepreneur, Karen Wazen.



Image via Campaign Middle East

31 https://www.sme10x.com/10x-industry/middle-east-records-more-than-321-million-mentions-across-social-media-during-ramadan

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4411239

The Meta Journalism Project, working with the Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ) and its Arab Fact-Checkers Network (AFCN), launched[32] an interactive course focused on learning fact-checking in Arabic. The self-guided training, which was announced in October 2022, takes about 2 hours to complete. At the end of it, trainees receive a certificate of completion signed by both Meta Journalism Project and ARIJ.



Header image for Meta Journalism Project's Facebook group for Arabic-speaking journalists

Meta and the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) also unveiled a new training program, "Engage" which offers training in Storytelling, Video reporting, Data Journalism, and Engagement and Audience Development. The initiative included[33] 24 90-minute webinars followed by a Q&A session, led by expert trainers, as well as 20 grants, each worth c.$1,500, so that participants could apply some of the lessons from the training to new projects.



Image via ICFJ

[32] https://www.facebook.com/formedia/blog/MENANews2022H2Update
[33] https://www.icfj.org/our-work/engage

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Other noteworthy developments, include:

Hacking, platform manipulation and issues related to freedom of expression continue to dominate Meta's platforms in the region (and indeed globally). Here are a few of those stories from the past year:

- In March, Pakistan's Foreign Office disclosed[34] that several of the social media accounts belonging to their embassy in Algeria, including Facebook, had been hacked.

- Jordanian journalist Adnan Al-Rousan was arrested in August following critical columns posted on Facebook, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) highlighted.[35]



Adnan al-Rousan, 71, was accused of "inciting conflict, sowing division... spreading false news that harm the prestige of the state, slandering an official body and humiliating a civil servant", AFP reported.[36]

In one Facebook post, Al-Rousan wrote Jordanians "are silent and stifled by anger, waiting for the king to reform himself and abandon festivals, films, trips and conferences and focus on the country."

He was purportedly[37] released on bail a month later and is again active on Facebook.

Image via Facebook

- Tunisian authorities handed down a six-month prison sentence[38] to the blogger and civil society activist Amina Mansour in May 2022, following satirical posts on Facebook the year before. The move was a reduction on a 12 month sentence issued in absentia in 2021 The New Arab notes.[39]

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34 https://tribune.com.pk/story/2346014/social-media-accounts-of-pakistan-mission-in-algeria-hacked-fo

35 https://cpj.org/2022/08/jordanian-journalist-adnan-al-rousan-arrested-over-critical-columns-posted-on-facebook/

36 https://www.barrons.com/news/jordanian-journalist-on-trial-over-social-media-posts-lawyer-01661184307

37 https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20220914-jordan-releases-writer-who-criticised-the-king-on-bail/

38 https://ifex.org/tunisia-activist-amina-mansour-faces-six-month-jail-term-for-facebook-posts/

39 https://www.newarab.com/news/tunisian-blogger-sentenced-6-months-prison-over-fb-post

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4411239

She had previously[40] been charged back in 2018 with violating article 128 of the penal code and article 86 of the telecommunications code.



Image via Facebook

- Meanwhile, Turkey's competition authority levied fines of 346.72 million lira ($18.63 million) on Meta platforms in October writes[41] Middle East Monitor. The move stemmed from a decision that the company operated in violation of the country's competition laws.

- Meta promoted[42] Fares Akkad to the role of regional director for the MENA region earlier in the year. Prior to this he had been the Global Director of Media Partnerships for Facebook & Instagram for Growth Markets (APAC, LATAM, MEA). As he notes[43] on his LinkedIn, in the role his job is “to design and lead the commercial growth of META and its portfolio of apps, services and businesses across MENA.”

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40 https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/tunisia-cracks-down-on-bloggers-for-speaking-against-the-government-24646

41 https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20221027-turkiye-fines-meta-platforms-18-63m-for-violating-competition-law/

42 https://www.arabnews.com/node/2021541/media

43 https://www.linkedin.com/in/faresakkad/

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4411239

- Instagram

Turkey is now the 5th largest market for Instagram, globally, and the 4th largest in terms of reach. The visual-led platform has nearly 49 million users in the country, representing more than 7 in 10 people (71.1%) in the country aged 13+.

Nearly half (45%) of internet users aged 16-64 in the country told GlobalWebIndex (GWI) that Instagram was their favorite social network.[44]

In terms of sheer number of users, **Egypt is ranked 19th with 15.4m users (19.3% reach) and Iraq 20th with 14m users (46.5%).**

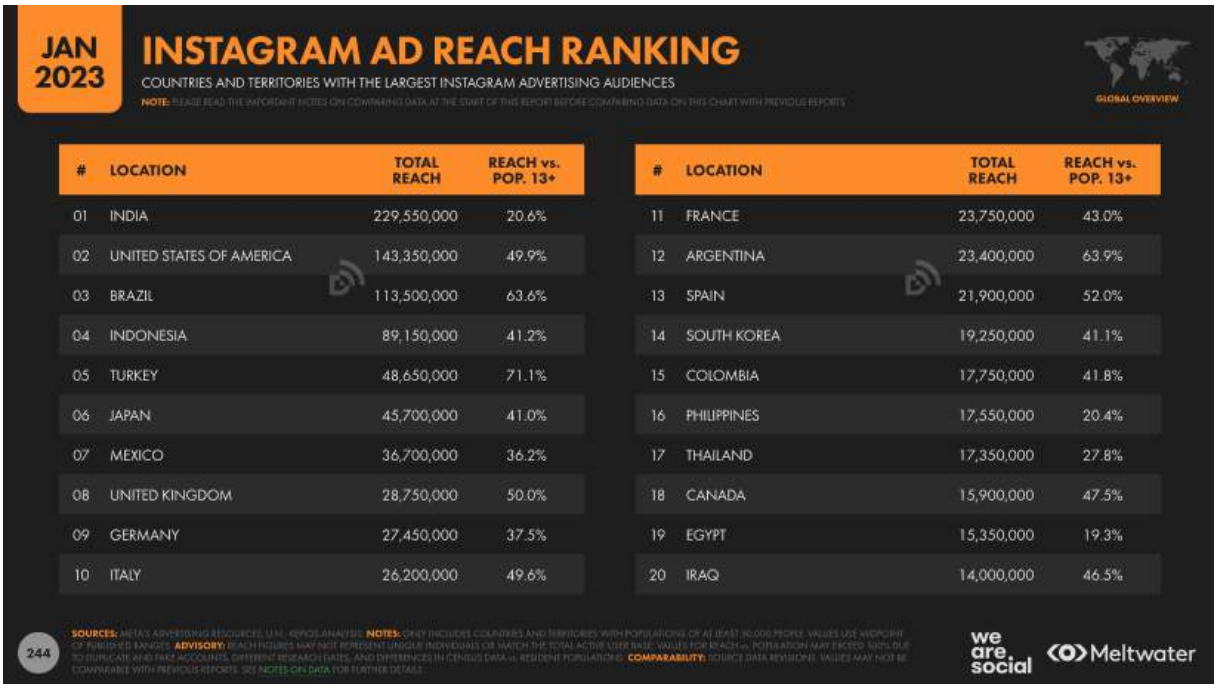


Image via DataReportal

When it comes to reach, four MENA nations can be found in the Top 20.

DataReportal records[45] Bahrain **is ranked 3rd with 72% reach, just ahead of Turkey, while UAE is ranked 17th (60.3%) and Kuwait 20th (58%).**

But user habits are changing. "Instagram will lose its No. 2 ranking in the Middle East and Africa to TikTok," Insider Intelligence predicted[46] in May.

[44] https://www.slideshare.net/LetciaXavier2/2022-gwi-report-social
[45] https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview-report (Slide 245)
[46] https://www.insiderintelligence.com/insights/instagram-user-statistics-trends/

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4411239

An Instagram post[47] by the Argentinian footballer Lionel Messi, after his team won the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, has become the most-liked post in the history of the platform, garnering more than 75.4 million likes.

"I almost got trapped, but just got trapped in the right place," says Getty photographer Shaun Botterill who snapped the image. "I think if most of us [photographers] are honest, you always need a bit of luck and I had a bit on Sunday night," he told CNN.[48]

"Qatar was Mr Botterill's eighth World Cup finals as both an editor and a photographer," the BBC commented.[49] "His first was in 1986 - coincidentally when Argentina last won the tournament."

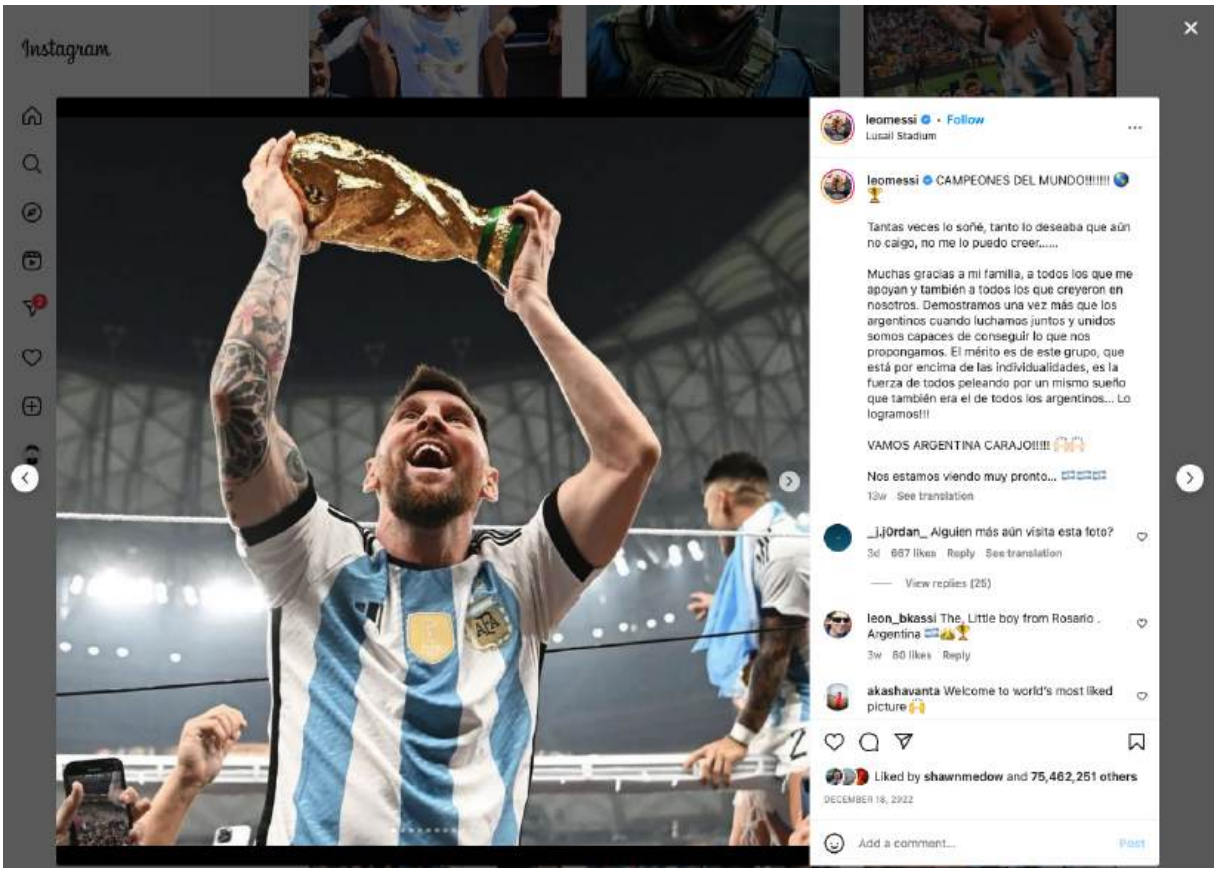


Image: Screenshot via Instagram

Alongside influencers and food porn, Instagram is also a hub for archive content too. In a September 2022 feature, GQ spotlighted[50] five of them: AfrooFruits, Egyptian Cassette Archive, Vintage Zaman, Algerian Archives and Waasta.

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[47] https://www.instagram.com/p/CmUv48DLvxd/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

[48] https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/21/football/shaun-botterill-photographer-lionel-messi-instagram-most-liked-spt-intl/index.html

[49] https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-northamptonshire-64075826

[50] https://www.gqmiddleeast.com/culture/best-instagram-accounts-archiving-middle-eastern-north-african-culture

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Later in the year, the also explored[51] the origins of the Instagram account, Doha Fashion Fridays, which "showcases the best of migrant worker street style." (The Guardian produced[52] a feature on the same topic later that same month.)

Founder Khalid Albaih who has lived in Qatar since the 1990s explained that a key driver for the account was to find "a way that brings out the worker's voice without victimization and showcases the individualism that they are so clearly trying to show."

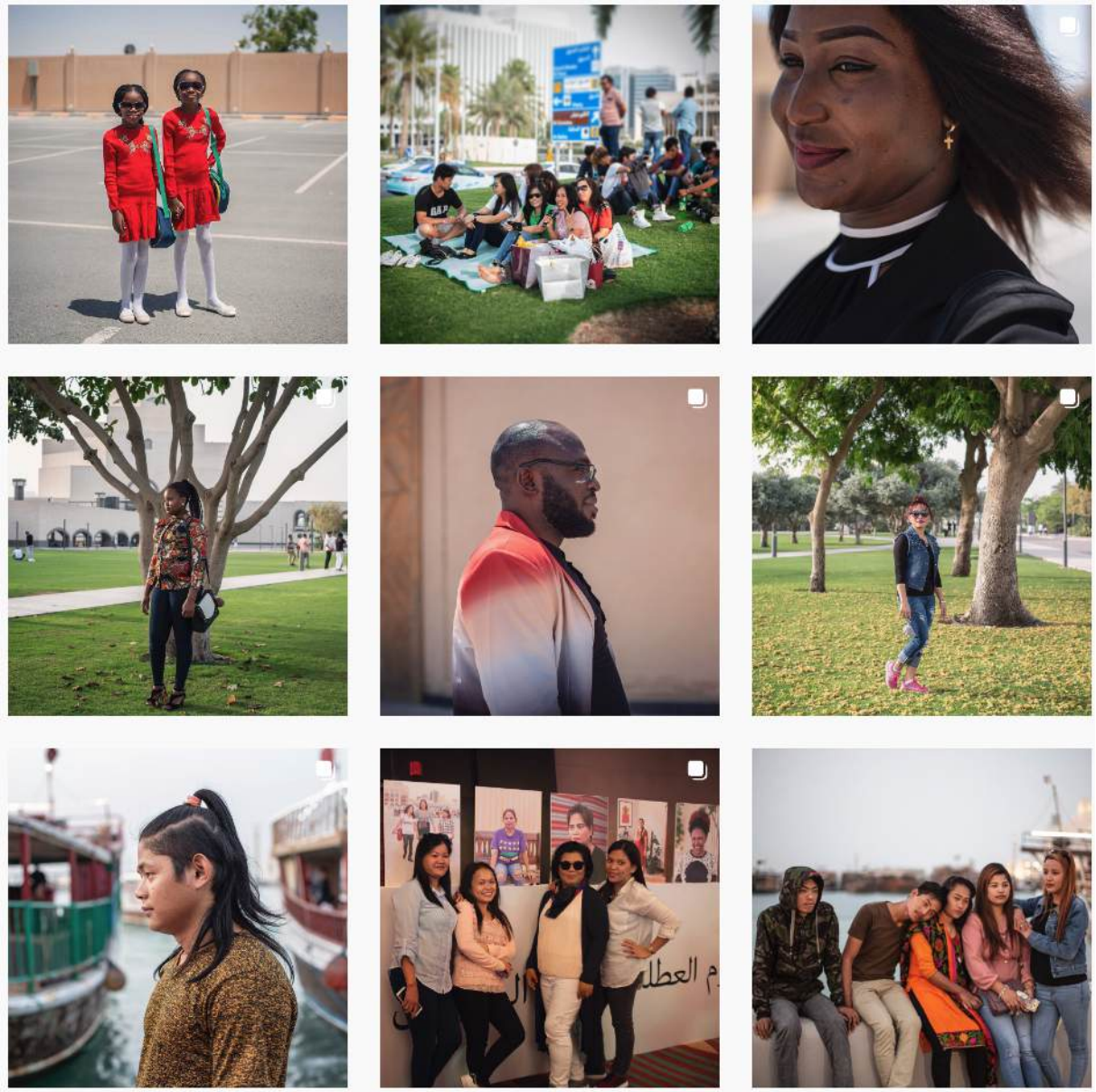


Image: Screenshot of Doha Fashion Friday's Instagram grid

[51] https://www.gqmiddleeast.com/style/doha-fashion-fridays-migrant-worker

[52] https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/nov/25/doha-fashion-fridays-migrant-workers-show-off-their-style-a-photo-essay

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A report into actions by Meta during 2021's Gaza war shows that the company "violated the rights of Palestinian users to freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, political participation and non-discrimination," the AP said.[53]

The report[54] from the independent consulting firm Business for Social Responsibility (BSR) was commissioned by Meta, in response to criticism of how the company had handled content related to the war on Facebook and Instagram.

As The Washington Post explained,[55] BSR's analysis "found that the social media giant had denied Palestinian users their freedom of expression by erroneously removing their content and punishing Arabic-speaking users more heavily than Hebrew-speaking ones."

The Intercept, which broke the story[56] ahead of the report's publication pointed out that the report "absolves Meta of 'intentional bias.' Rather, BSR points to what it calls 'unintentional bias,' instances 'where Meta policy and practice, combined with broader external dynamics, does lead to different human rights impacts on Palestinian and Arabic speaking users.'"

Meta has undertaken to implement, or consider implementing, 20 of the 21 recommendations in the study, The Intercept says.

Other noteworthy developments, include:

- Eye on Palestine, an account with 3.2 million followers was briefly suspended in October, Middle East Eye recorded.[57] The account highlights Israeli human rights abuses against Palestinians. It was back up and running a few hours later.



Image via Eye on Palestine's back-up account on Instagram

[53] https://apnews.com/article/technology-middle-east-israel-8587529541424ca7882bf88ba96e2799
[54] https://www.bsr.org/en/reports/meta-human-rights-israel-palestine
[55] https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/09/22/facebook-censorship-palestinians/
[56] https://theintercept.com/2022/09/21/facebook-censorship-palestine-israel-algorithm/
[57] https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/instagram-eye-on-palestine-suspended-not-following-guidelines

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- In partnership with Art d'Egypte, Meta released 11 AR filters "to transport visitors into the heart of the art" of the *Forever is Now II* exhibition at the Pyramids of Giza.



As the company explained, "each filter features a guide, Bastet, an animated cat inspired by the ancient Egyptian deity of the same name, who accompanies people as they explore the backstory of each art piece and its creation through immersive videos, images and illustrations — all powered by AR technology."

Image via Meta

- Iranian intelligence officials have offered Instagram content moderators money to remove the Instagram accounts of journalists and activists, BBC News claims.[58]

- ARTICLE 19, Access Now and the Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI) came together to offer recommendations[59] to Meta and Meta's Oversight Board designed to ensure freedom of expression is protected for users relying on the platform in Iran. Nearly half the population[60] (c.44%) use Instagram, one of the few western social media platforms available in the country. That figure has dropped from nearly 90% earlier in 2022, however, data from Statcounter Global Stats suggests.

- Earlier in the year, Meta removed a network[61] of more than fake accounts targeting Instagram users in Scotland with content supporting Scottish independence. The accounts originated in Iran; part of ongoing statecraft concerned with platform manipulation. About 77,000 accounts followed one or more of these Instagram accounts, Meta revealed.[62]

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[58] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-61516126
[59] https://ifex.org/iran-meta-must-overhaul-persian-language-content-moderation-on-instagram/
[60] https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/iran
[61] https://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/tech/meta-removes-iran-based-fake-social-media-accounts-targeting-scots-and-indy-3537554
[62] https://about.fb.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/December-2021-Coordinated-Inauthentic-Behavior-Report-2.pdf

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3. Messaging apps

Here we explore take-up and developments related to popular messaging applications such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Telegram, Yalla and Clubhouse.

- WhatsApp

With more than 2 billion users, WhatsApp is the most popular messaging app in the world, and the third most popular social network (after Facebook, 3bn and YouTube 2.6 bn users).

- **WhatsApp is the most popular social network among internet users aged 16-64 in Israel, Saudi Arabia and UAE**, data from GlobalWebIndex (GWI) reveals. Their 2022 Social Media Report[63] found that 51% of those sampled in Israel, 20% in Saudi Arabia and 30% in UAE, identified WhatsApp as their favorite messaging service.

- Research by the Saudi Center for Public Opinion Polling, during February 202, reinforced[64] other findings related to the popularity of WhatsApp in the Kingdom. Results indicated that **92% of Saudis use WhatsApp**, some way ahead of YouTube (79%), Snapchat (77%) and Twitter (61%).

  WhatsApp was also the most preferred application (indicated by 32% of respondents), although this result skews older, with younger consumers preferring TikTok and Snapchat.

- In **UAE**, WhatsApp is used[65] by more than eight in ten (80.2%) of the population, some way ahead of Facebook Messenger (64%).

- **In Turkey, the average WhatsApp user spends 11.9 hours a month[66] using the app.** That might seem like a lot, but it's actually some way behind the global average of 17.3 hours.

WhatsApp is the most popular platform among Arab Youth. The 14th annual Arab Youth survey, which features findings from 3,400 Arab men and women aged 18-24, revealed[67] that more than 8 in 10 said they used the messaging app daily, some way ahead of Facebook (72%), Instagram (61%) and YouTube (53%).

Reflecting on these wider social networking habits, the authors comment that "Arab youth are hooked on social media more than ever." Given the breadth of services available to them, "76% find it hard to disconnect from social media," they noted, adding that this rises to "83% in the GCC."

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[63] https://www.slideshare.net/LetciaXavier2/2022-gwi-report-social
[64] https://www.arabnews.com/node/2054631/media
[65] https://www.statista.com/statistics/1276849/uae-share-of-messenger-app-users-by-app/
[66] https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview-report (Slide 308)
[67] https://arabyouthsurvey.com/en/whitepaper/ *(NB: you need to download the paper and this URL remains the same for each annual study)*

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4411239

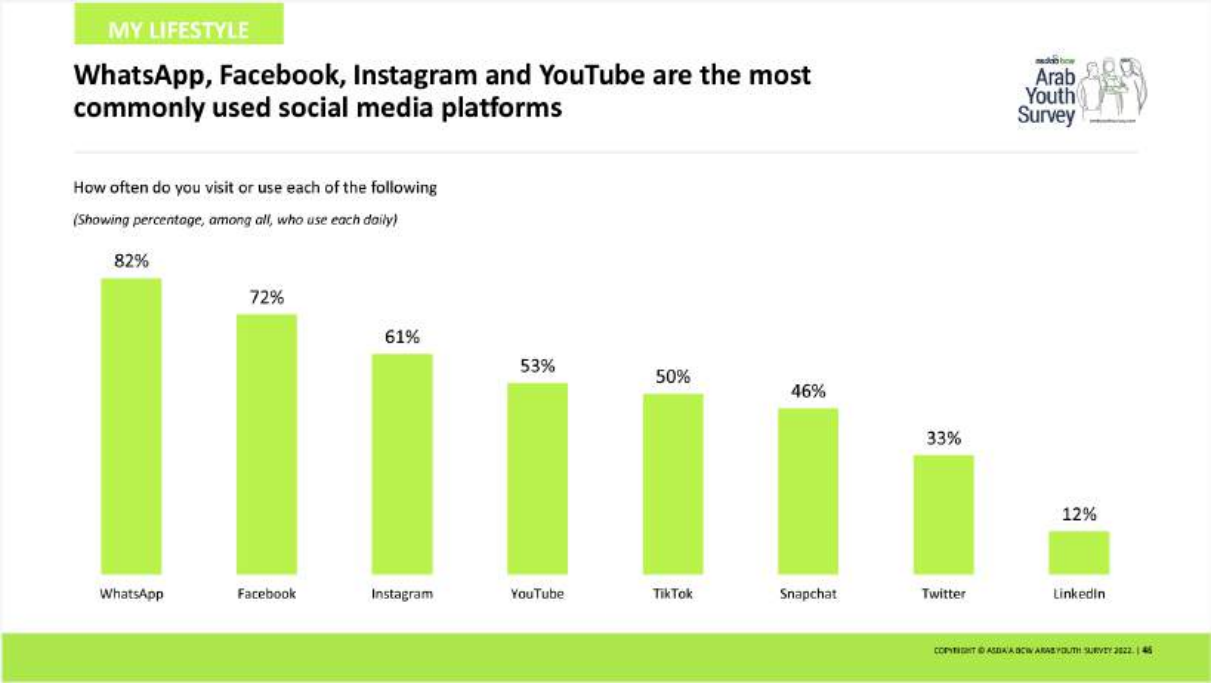


Image via Arab Youth Survey 2022

Prism Digital, a digital marketing agency in the UAE launched an AI-Driven WhatsApp Chatbot Service designed to support the Hotel Industry in MENA.

WhatsAppotel Chatbot enables customers to search for, and book rooms directly, through the app. The chatbot can be programmed to communicate in over 50 languages, they state in a press release,[68] and is fully automated to deal with 15,000 potential instructions.



The CIO website comments[69] that "the development and adoption of Arabic chatbots are picking up speed." Deployment of chatbots in the Middle East has been slower than in some regions due to nuances and complexity of the Arabic language, but "technological advances in the field of machine learning have introduced a bevy of new automated chat services that use natural language processing (NLP) to engage customers in organic conversations in local dialects like Egyptian, Emirati, and Saudi Arabic."

Image via CampaignME

68 https://www.zawya.com/en/press-release/companies-news/prism-digital-introduces-whatsapp-auto-chatbot-service-for-the-hotel-industry-hw1tcdyl

69 https://www.cio.com/article/307232/arabic-chatbots-make-inroads-in-the-middle-east.html

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In a detailed interactive, The New Humanitarian's illustrated Lebanon's collapse - with 80% of the population thrown into poverty in recent years - through the conversations of five people using WhatsApp. *WhatsApp, Lebanon?* sought to get people to share their exchanges and experiences behind the headlines, as reflected in their WhatsApp messages.

WhatsApp messages [are] an excellent – and untapped – reporting tool," The New Humanitarian observed[70].

> "Such conversations are a way into moments journalists just don't see or hear. But asking people to share their exchanges had its challenges, too… [including the risk of traumatizing participants by asking them to review years of WhatsApp messages; and how they came to question the traditional relationship between journalists and their sources."



Screenshot via The New Humanitarian

Given the financial challenges faced by many people in Lebanon, getting access to hard currency can be difficult, reports Abby Sewell, in a feature[71] for Rest of the World. As a result, "many people turn to black market money changers operating on WhatsApp," she explains.

In the story she profiles Mohamad, a former chef turned freelance currency exchanger, who she notes "begins each day by scrolling through some of the 100 or so groups that have popped up on WhatsApp and other platforms that are dedicated to buying and selling U.S. dollars in Lebanon."

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[70] https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/2022/07/28/whatsapp-lebanon-go-behind-scenes
[71] https://restofworld.org/2022/how-to-buy-dollars-in-beirut/

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- Facebook Messenger

Globally, nearly 1 billion people are using Facebook Messenger and it's a major platform in multiple MENA nations. **In terms of reach, four MENA nations are found in the Top 20 for the app worldwide.**

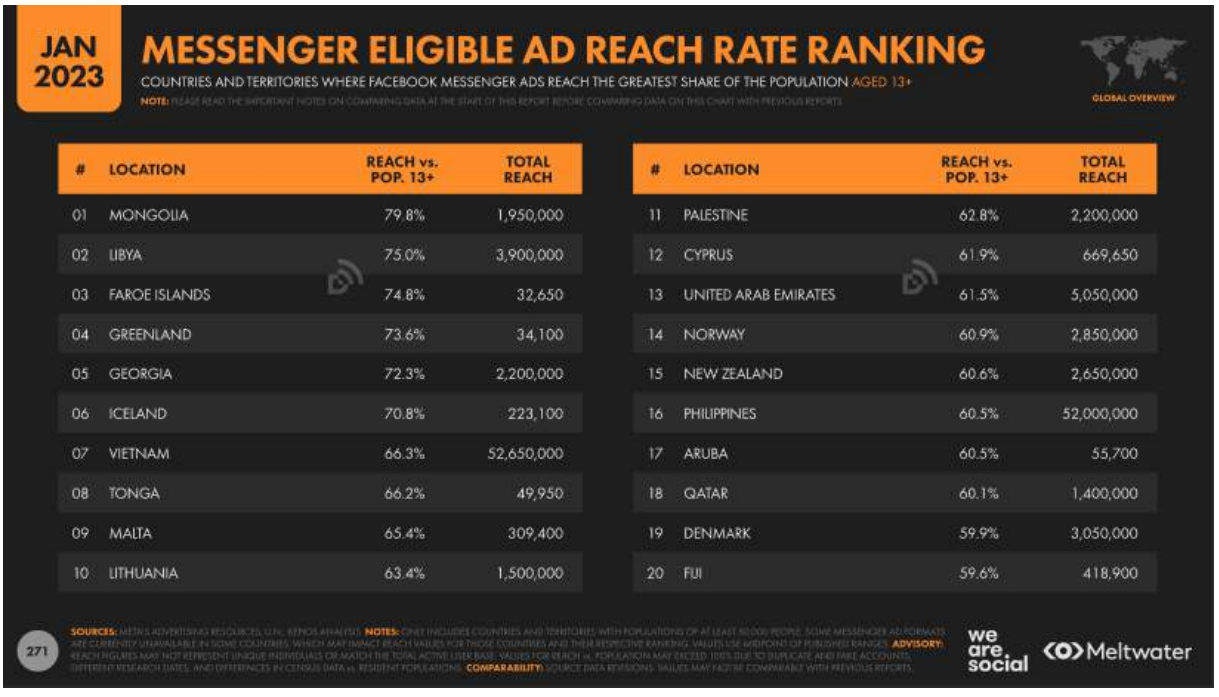
- In **Libya three-quarters of those aged 13+ (75%) use the app**, the second highest reach globally for the service.

- Nearly **two-third of Palestinians (62.8%)** use the service, as well as **61.5% of people in UAE and 60.1% in Qatar**. This reach means three nations are ranked 11th, 13th and 18th, respectively.

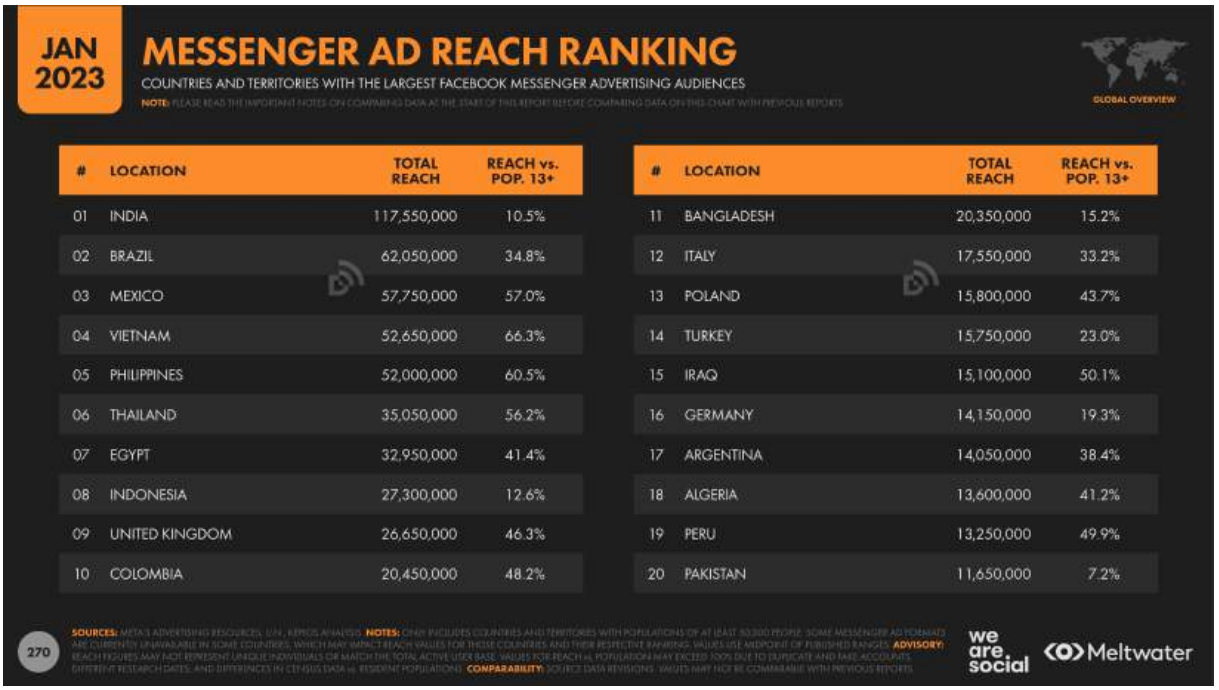
Meanwhile, **four MENA nations can also be found in the Top 20 for the app worldwide, based on the largest national markets.**

- **Egypt is home to nearly 33m users of the service, akin to 41.4% of the population aged 13+. This makes it the seventh biggest market for the app.**

- **This is followed by Turkey (14th with 15.8m users), Iraq (15th, 15.1m users) and Algeria (18th, 13.6m users).**



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Images via DataReportal

Meta introduced custom camera stickers for Messenger to be used in Ramadan. Social networks have often developed stickers and other special materials for the Holy Month. The company also provided users with Ramadan Avatar Stickers on Facebook and Instagram.

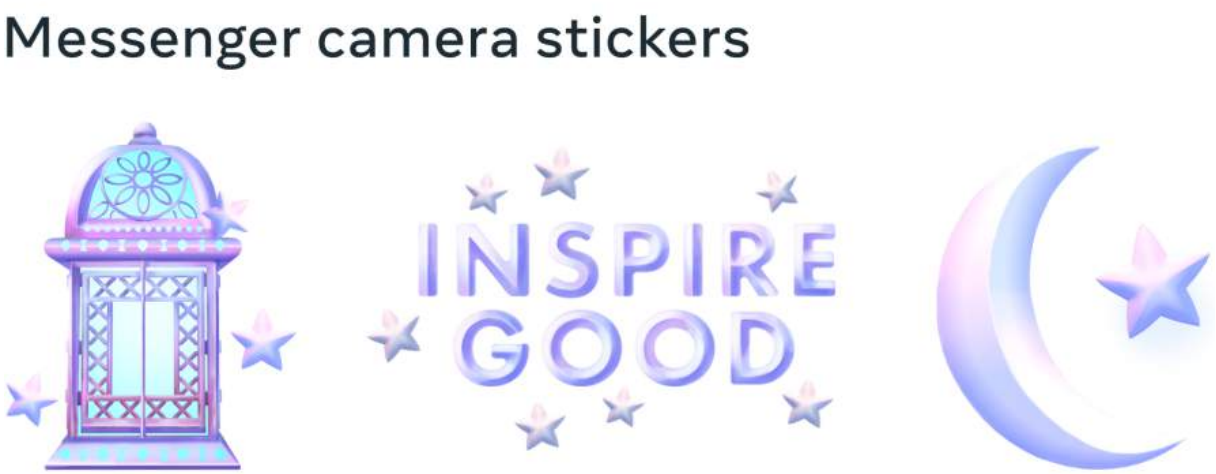


Image via Meta

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- Telegram

Dubai-based Telegram now has 700 million[72] monthly active users. In June it announced[73] the **launch of a paid-for premium service** offering a range of benefits from increased storage to no ads, premium stickers and faster downloads.

The service has long been popular in Iran. According[74] to IFP News (Iran Front Page) an English-language publication based in Tehran, "**Telegram posts and messages had 1.2 billion visits over the one month period before September 6 and that figure has surged to 2.8 billion in the one month period after the date**."

They also note that despite the service being very popular in the Republic, "Telegram has been blocked for at least the past four years in Iran and is only accessible with VPNs."

VPN rates soared an Iran, as users sought to use services blocked by the authorities[75] in response to rallies triggered by the death of 22 year-old Mahsa Amini. VPN downloads soared more than 3,000% in the country, part of a global trend highlighted[76] by TechRadar.

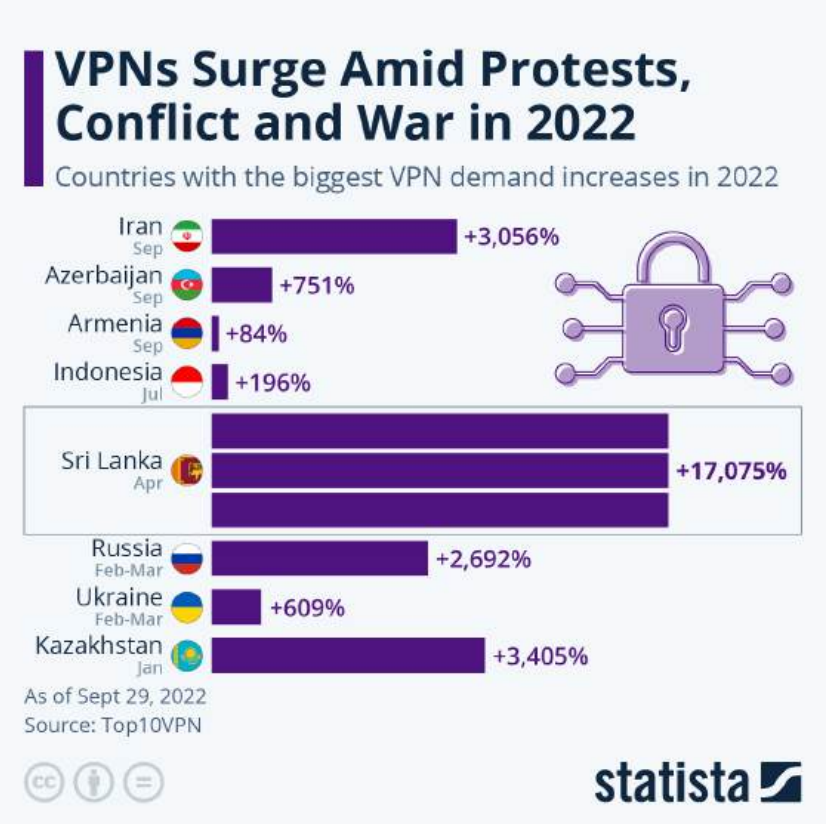


Image via Statista

RadioFreeEurope described[77] how Iranian authorities had blocked two-step verification codes from social media applications, noting that "text messages containing login codes for the applications for Telegram, Twitter, and WhatsApp were filtered by cell phone operators in Iran and could not be received."

"This means that if a user in Iran is logged out of the application, it is not possible to log back into the account again," they explained.

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[72] https://datareportal.com/social-media-users
[73] https://telegram.org/blog/700-million-and-premium
[74] https://ifpnews.com/telegram-app-doubled-iran-protests-riots/
[75] https://www.techradar.com/news/iranian-authorities-restricts-instagram-as-last-effort-to-silence-protesters
[76] https://www.techradar.com/news/vpn-use-soars-in-worldwide-period-of-unrest-and-warfare
[77] https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-two-factor-verification-codes-blocked/31994626.html

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Outside Iran, social media posts - many originating on Telegram and Instagram - were a key way[78] for audiences around the world to keep up to date with the protests happening in the country.

It's also been a key way for Iranian youth to "see the misfortunes of their country in real time, be it through nationwide or localized protests, violent crackdowns viewed on Instagram accounts like @1500tasvir, or the disparity of wealth between themselves and regime elites through viral posts and accounts like @therichkidsoftehran," writes[79] Holly Dagres, an Iranian American, in Foreign Policy.



Image via Twitter

[78] https://www.dw.com/en/iranians-use-social-media-to-keep-protest-movement-alive/a-63767075
[79] https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/11/01/iran-protests-gen-z-mahsa-amini-social-media/

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The Iranian government has begun using Telegram to "identify and harm" protesters activists. Middle East Eye reported[80] that “the Telegram channel called Setade114, which has been linked to the Iranian government, has garnered almost 20,000 subscribers, in what activists are calling a “snitch line.’”



Image via Twitter

80 https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/mahsa-amini-iran-protests-authorities-accused-telegram-snitch-line-track-protesters

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4411239

Other noteworthy developments, include:

- In response to protests, Iran [restricted access](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-restricts-access-instagram-netblocks-2022-09-21/)[81] to a range of social media and messaging platforms, including Instagram and WhatsApp. On Twitter, Meta took the unusual step of [publicly stating](https://twitter.com/WhatsApp/status/1572976018771656706?s=20)[82] that it would "do anything" within its technical capacity to keep the service accessible.



[81] https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-restricts-access-instagram-netblocks-2022-09-21/
[82] https://twitter.com/WhatsApp/status/1572976018771656706?s=20

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- Signal, an encrypted messaging app blocked in Iran back in 2021, [compiled a short user guide](#)[83] so Iranians can use proxies to bypass censorship and access the app.

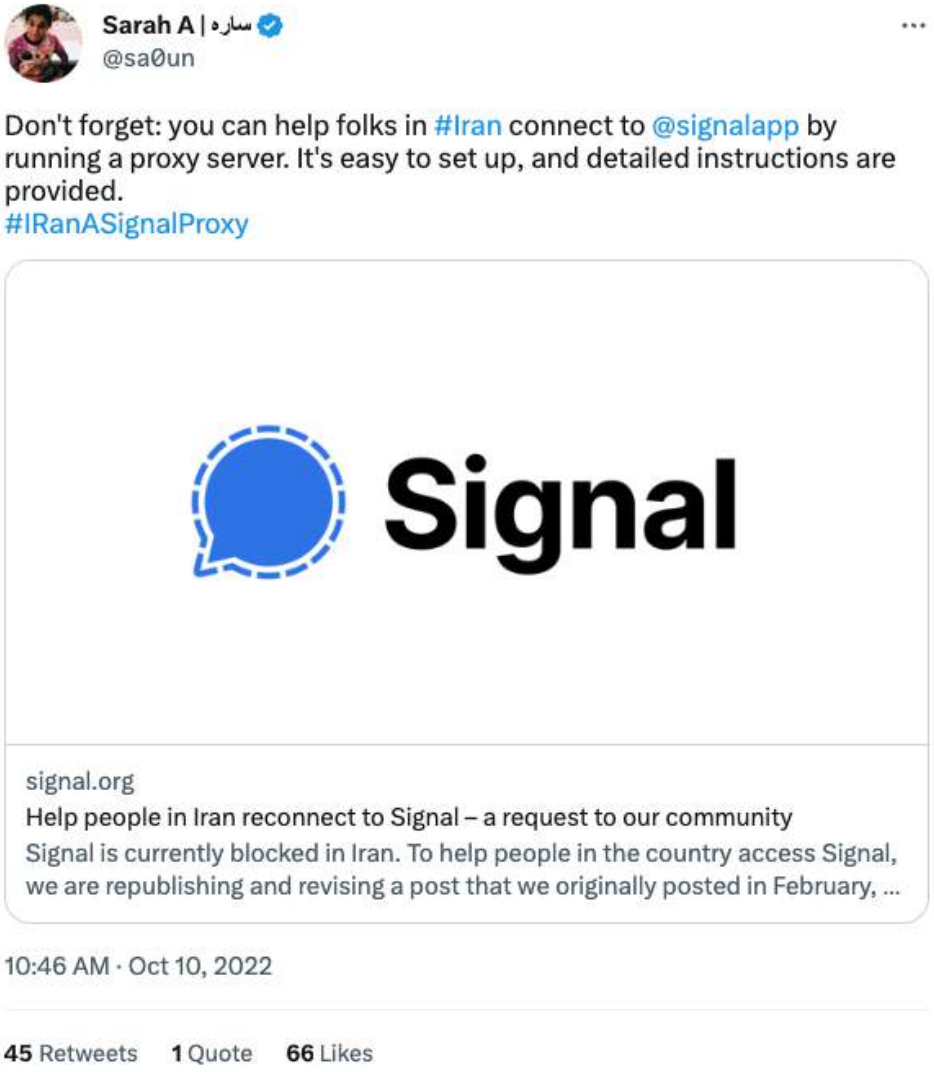


Image via Twitter

- **Saifi Ismail, the Group President of Yalla, was included in Arabian Business' list of the Middle East's 50 Most Inspiring Business Leaders.**[84] He joined the voice-centric social networking and entertainment and the UAE's first unicorn technology company to list in the New York Stock Exchange, in 2019.

  Social media influencer and businesswoman **Huda Kattan** also featured in the list. Her company, Huda Beauty, sells more than $200 in sales from 140 product lines.

  Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Al Saud, a prominent investor in social media, and Sultan Al Jaber, UAE's Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology, also made the list.

[83] https://www.signal.org/blog/run-a-proxy/
[84] https://www.arabianbusiness.com/powerlists/2022-most-inspiring-business-leaders

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Yalla's revenues hit AED 1.1 billion, ($303.6 million) in 2022, an increase[85] of 11.2% compared to AED 1.0 billion in 2021.

Monthly active users (MAUs) were up 14% to 32 million during Q4 2022, up from 28.1 million in Q4 2021.

Image via Asian Business Review

- **Baaz, which aims "to be the largest gathering of Arab communities on cyberspace (the Internet), the widest in the Arab world, and the most used by all Arabs and Arabic speakers," launched in Egypt**,[86] the region's most populous country last year. It's been downloaded[87] more than 5 million times, according to the Google Play Store; and had 3 million users at the time of its rollout in Egypt.

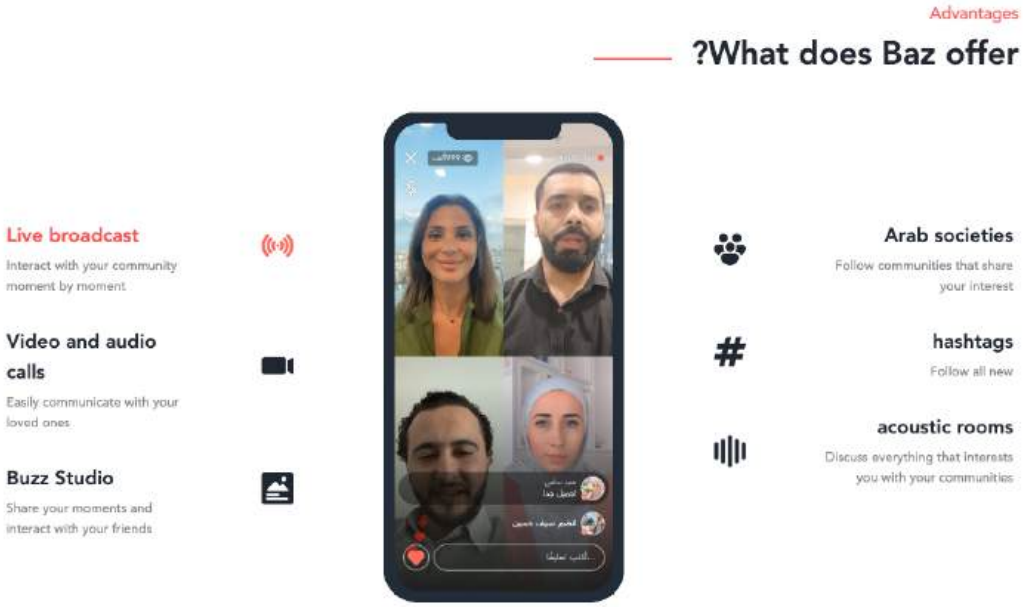


Image: Screenshot from the Baaz website. (NB: browser translated text Arabic to English)

85 https://menafn.com/1105797888/Yalla-Group-Reports-Record-Revenues-Of-AED-11-Billion-In-2022-Mid-EastInfo

86 https://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2022/09/15/first-arab-social-media-platform-baaz-launches-in-egypt/

87 https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.baaz.baazapp&hl=en_US&gl=US

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4. Snapchat

Snapchat's community in the MENA region continues to grow and the Middle East remains a major market for the app.

- **There are now more than 75 million unique Snapchatters in the Middle East, with numbers growing 33% year over year.**[88]

In terms of major markets for the app some of the biggest are in MENA.

- **Five of the Top 20 markets - by total audience size - are in MENA. Three of these are in the Top 10, with one just outside** (Turkey at No 11).

- **Saudi Arabia** ranks highest (6th) with 21.2 million users, followed by **Iraq** (9th) at 16.1m, **Egypt** (10th) has 15.4m users, **Turkey** (11th) 14.8m Snap users and **Algeria** (18th) enjoys 6.95 million users, according to data shared[89] by DataReportal.

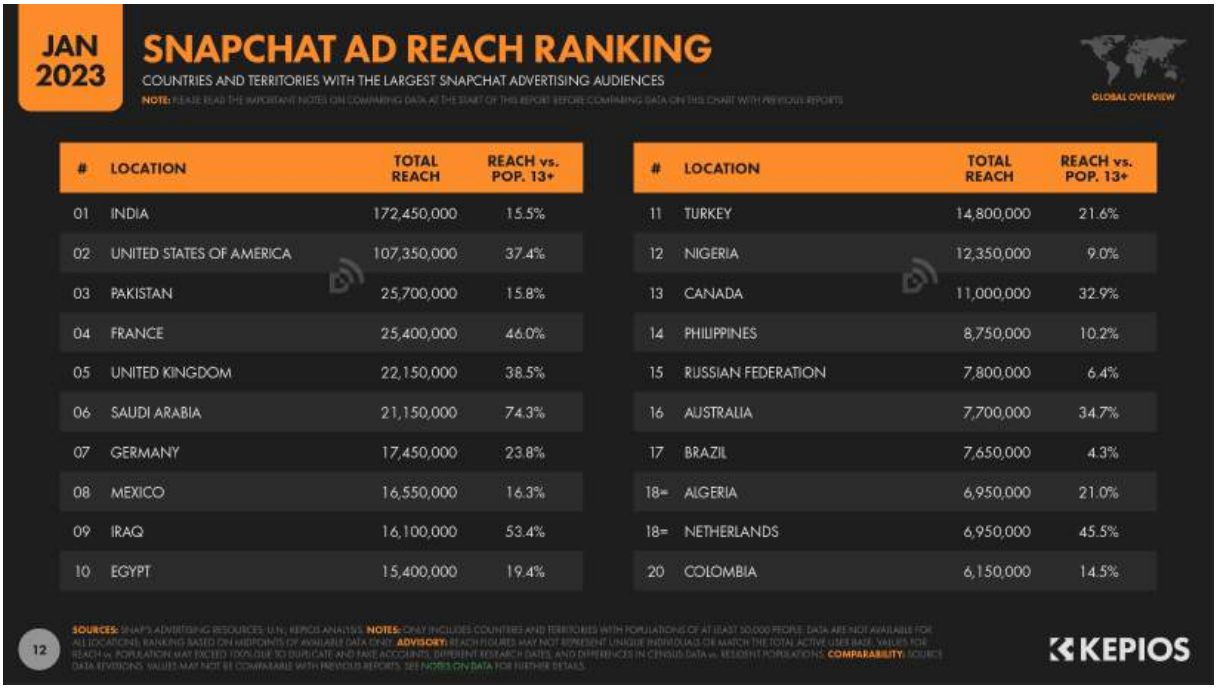


Image via Digital 2023 Snapchat Platform Report Q1 2023 v01, by DataReportal

When we look at reach, nine of the Top 20 nations in the world are in MENA. In fact, it's actually nine of the top 16! **Six of the countries featured in the Top 10 can be found in the Middle East,** underscoring the importance of the Middle East region for the app.

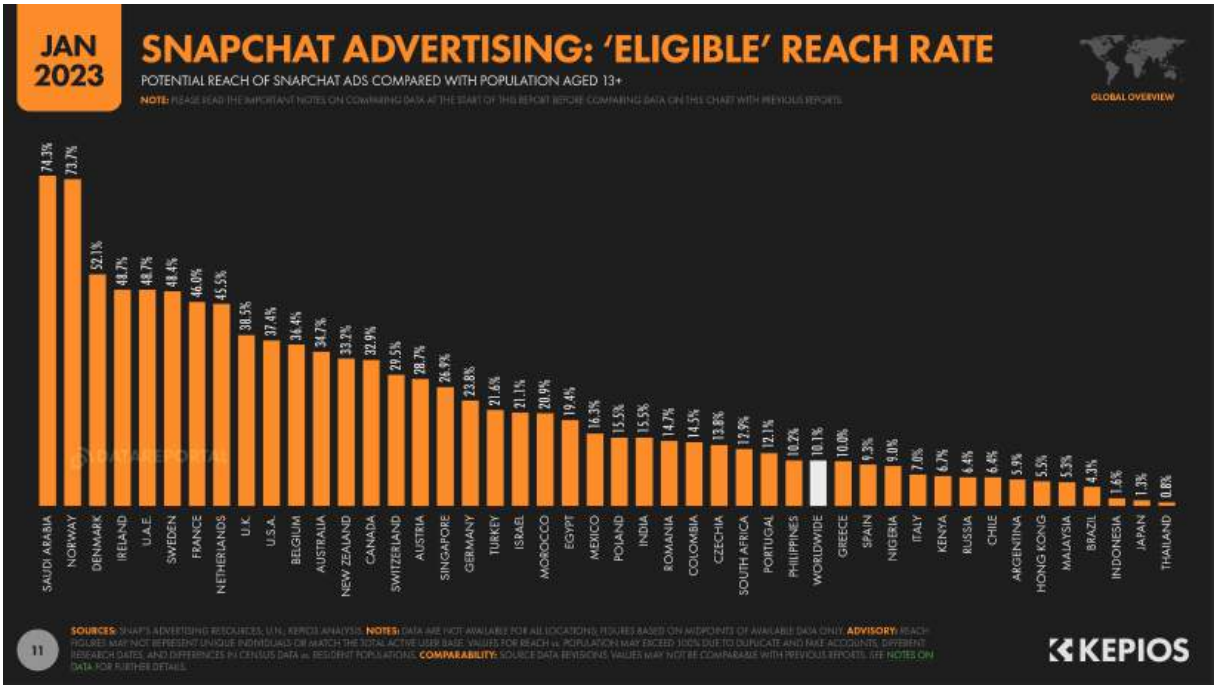
- **Bahrain leads the world, with 79.8% of those aged over 13 on the app.**

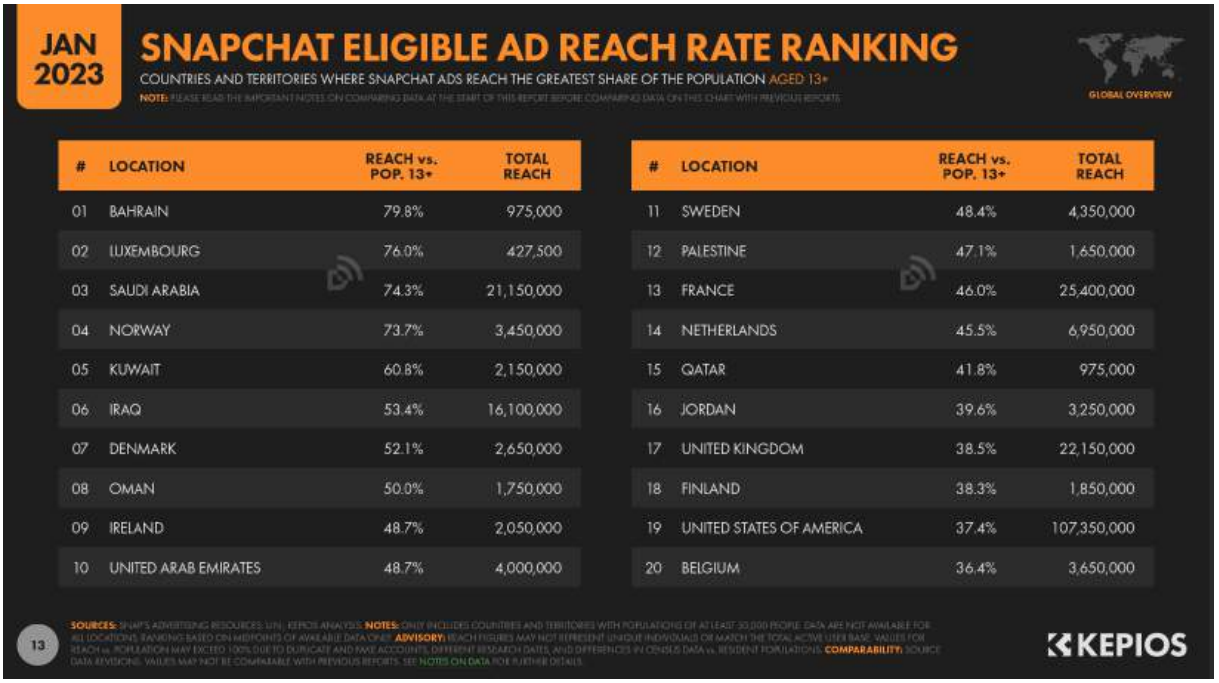
[88] https://www.arabadonline.com/en/details/news-in-brief/MBC-GROUP-programs-will-air-on-Snapchat

[89] https://indd.adobe.com/view/f399453c-c3af-4f49-88bc-a355a3adfb1c?allowFullscreen=true&wmode=opaque

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- Other MENA nations in this list are: **Saudi Arabia** (3rd with 74.3% of those aged 13+), **Kuwait** (5th, 60.8%), **Iraq** (6th, 53.4%), **Oman** (8th, 50%), **UAE** (10th, 48.7%), **Palestine** (12th, 47.1%), **Qatar** (15th, 41.8%) and **Jordan** 16th (39.6%).





Images via Digital 2023 Snapchat Platform Report Q1 2023 v01, by DataReportal

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In August, Snap signed[90] a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Qatar's Government Communications Office (GCO) to open a new office in Doha, as part of its efforts to expand its footprint in the MENA region. They opened an office in Dubai[91], their first in the region, back in 2017.They also have offices in Tel Aviv and Riyadh.

In December, it was announced that **Snap is moving to the Jax cultural district in Diriyah as the home for its latest Saudi base, which includes a content creator studio** (the latter of which was revealed[92] in 2021).

"Jax district is considered the Kingdom's trendiest creative hub boasting galleries, studios, and capabilities that incubate art and artists alike while inspiring the nation's cultural movement," Saudi Gazette noted.[93]

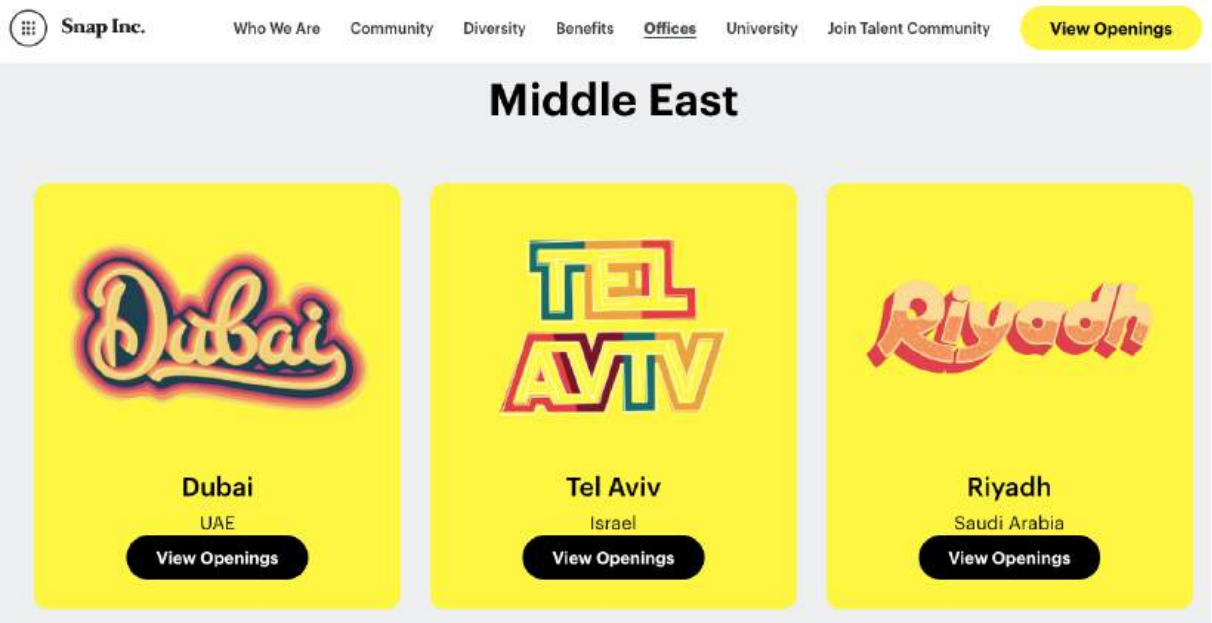


Image via Snap

Nearly 90% of our daily users in Saudi Arabia use lenses every single day; and in the UAE and KSA brand-integration with an AR experience leads to a 94% higher conversion rates, Sophia Dominguez, Head of AR Platform Partnerships at Snap Inc, told[94] Digital Studio last summer.

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90 https://www.zawya.com/en/business/technology-and-telecom/snap-plans-mena-expansion-with-new-office-in-qatar-yb5rn970

91 https://www.digitalstudiome.com/production/content-business/article-10708-snapchat-opens-office-in-dubai

92 https://campaignme.com/snap-inc-will-launch-creator-studio-in-riyadh-to-empower-local-creative-community/

93 https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/628265

94 https://www.digitalstudiome.com/technology/the-genius-of-snapchat

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4411239

MBC has partnered with Snap to bring more of its content to users in the region. The move enables[95] Snapchatters across the region enjoy access to popular MBC shows, daily news content from *Al Arabiya*, as well as exclusive and behind-the-scenes content from across the group.

Image via ArabAd

"Last year, MBC Group recorded 4.2 billion views on Snapchat during Ramadan, marking a 392% increase compared to the previous Ramadan," Arab News reported.[96]

During Ramadan 2021, Snapchatters in the KSA viewed AR Lenses over 90 billion times, 2021 data released in early 202 revealed.[97]

In keeping with the emphasis that the platform has demonstrated over the past few years, **Snapchat has partnered with broadcasters, digital publishers and creators across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to bring 70 shows to its Discover platform during Ramadan.**



Image via Arab News

[95] https://www.arabadonline.com/en/details/news-in-brief/MBC-GROUP-programs-will-air-on-Snapchat
[96] https://www.arabnews.com/node/2056836/media
[97] https://communicateonline.me/category/industry-insights/post-details/saudis-snapchat-community-hits-20-million-milestone#:~:text=Concepts%20that%20many%20consider%20futuristic,billion%20snaps%20to%20their%20stories.

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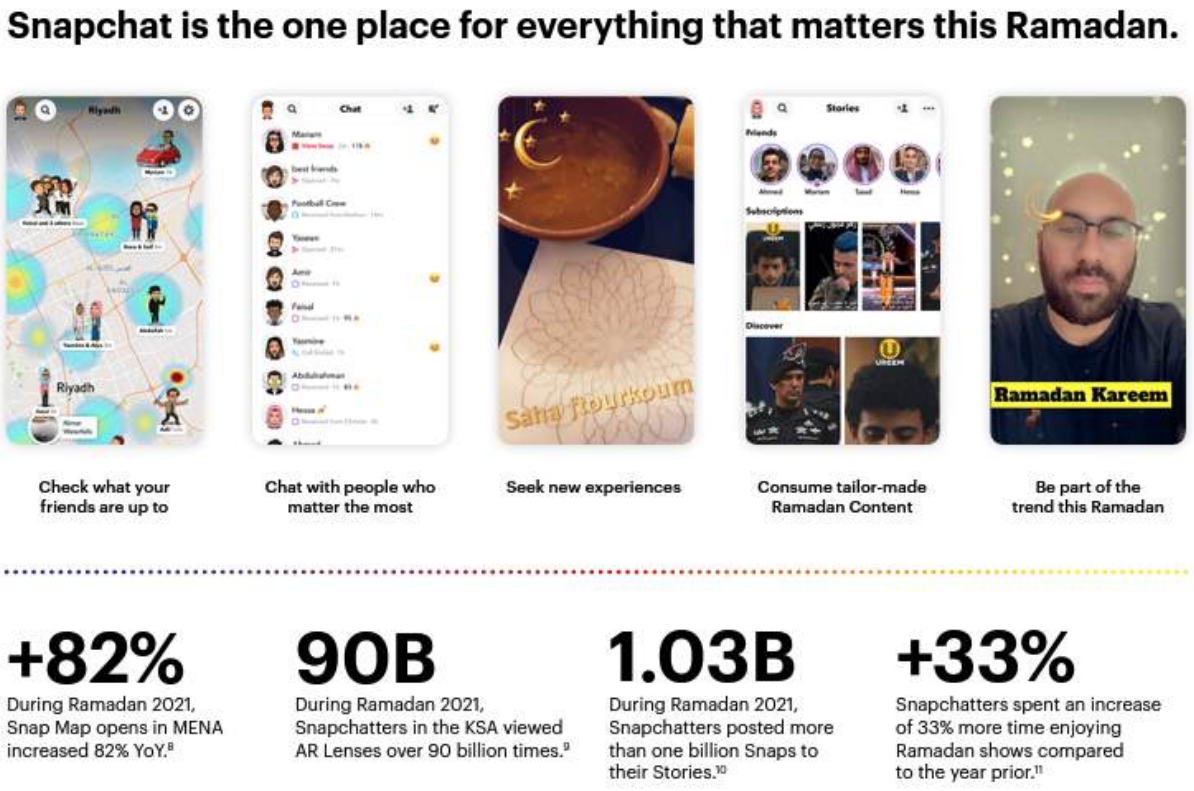


Image: Screenshot of data from Snapchat's "Your Ramadan 2022 Guide" via Snap.

During Ramadan 2022, Snap introduced[98] Snap Ramadan Mall, the first-ever, AR-powered virtual mall in the MENA region. Accessed via a Snapchat World Lens through the platform's outward-facing camera, the virtual mall featured popular consumer brands in MENA, such as L'Oreal, AL Futtaim- IKEA, Namshi and Samsung.

Jake Thomas, Head of UAE at Snap Inc. said, "Snapchatters in the region are seeking inspiration for their shopping experience this Ramadan. Today, shoppers want an experience that is more than just transactional. While they expect the convenience and efficiency of online shopping, they also want a true-to-life, in-store experience. AR caters to this need when accessed through universally available and always-on mobile devices - a game-changer for both retailers and shoppers.

Our virtual mall is the perfect platform for this, bridging the gap between the digital and physical world and offering consumers and brands the opportunity to explore the potential of digital commerce. Catering to consumers' needs during Ramadan, Snapchatters can browse from beauty and apparel, home and design and electronics brands at any time, wherever they happen to be. We are confident that Snapchatters will enjoy this unique offering and explore some of the leading brands we have on board."

98 https://www.zawya.com/en/press-release/companies-news/snap-introduces-snap-ramadan-mall-the-first-ever-ar-powered-virtual-mall-in-the-mena-region-oxf8pw83

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4411239



Image via Zawya

"**Snapchat's monthly addressable reach in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has reached 20 million**. Today, Snapchat is one of the most popular platforms in Saudi Arabia, **reaching 90% of 13-34 year-olds**," Communicate reported in March 2022.[99]



Image via Snap

Snapchat has proven popular not only with younger audiences in the Kingdom but also with parents. A 2021 study conducted by Kantar and Snap, discovered[100] that 71% of parents in Saudi Arabia are on the app.

KSA was among the first Arab countries to launch[101] Snap's new Family Center service.[102] Thein-app tool enables parents to see their friends list on Snapchat and who they have been communicating with, without revealing the substance of those conversations.

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99 https://communicateonline.me/category/industry-insights/post-details/saudis-snapchat-community-hits-20-million-milestone

100 https://forbusiness.snapchat.com/blog/understanding-snapchat-parents-in-ksa

101 https://www.zawya.com/en/press-release/companies-news/snap-inc-launches-family-center-in-saudi-arabia-hm08lr2x

102 https://values.snap.com/news/introducing-family-center-on-snapchat

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5. YouTube and Online Video

YouTube is now the second most popular social network in the world, with more than 2.5 billion users. In the MENA region it's a powerhouse, especially in the Gulf region.

The impact of YouTube in the Middle East can be seen by the fact that the Top 5 countries in the world for reach are all in the region. More widely, eight of the Top 13 spots are allocated to MENA nations.

Charts for YouTube's reach, by nation, are topped by Lebanon, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and the UAE. Kuwait (10th), **Israel** (11th) and **Saudi Arabia** (13th) also rank highly,[103] with the platform being used by more than 9 in 10 adults in those countries.

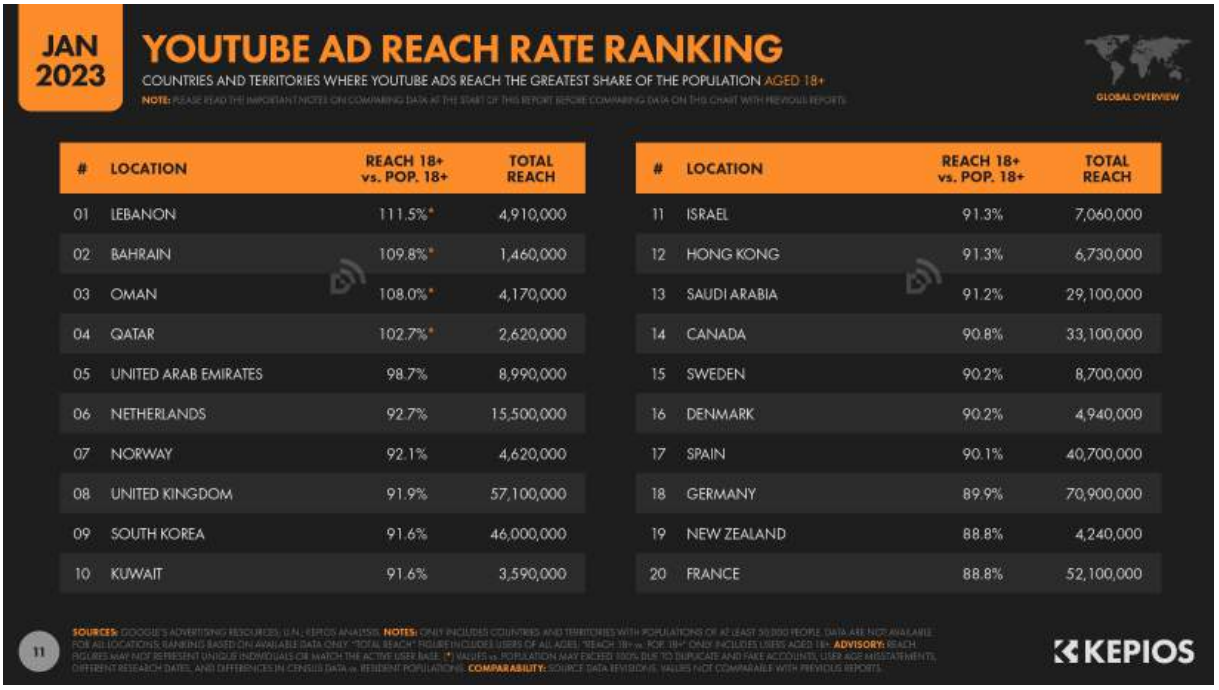


Image from Digital 2023 YouTube Platform Report Q1 2023 v01, via DataReportal

NB: Reach figures may not represent unique individuals or match the active user base. (*) values vs. population may exceed 100% due to duplicate and fake accounts, user age misstatements, different research dates, and differences in census data vs. resident populations. comparability:

In terms of the **biggest numeric markets for YouTube around the world, MENA's two most populous nations feature in the Top 20. Turkey is ranked 10th** with 57.9m users (and 74% reach), while **Egypt is ranked 15th** with 45.9 million users (and 50.7% reach).

103 https://indd.adobe.com/view/c06e0e61-16d0-4df2-99ae-b12dd56c1d9f?allowFullscreen=true&wmode=opaque

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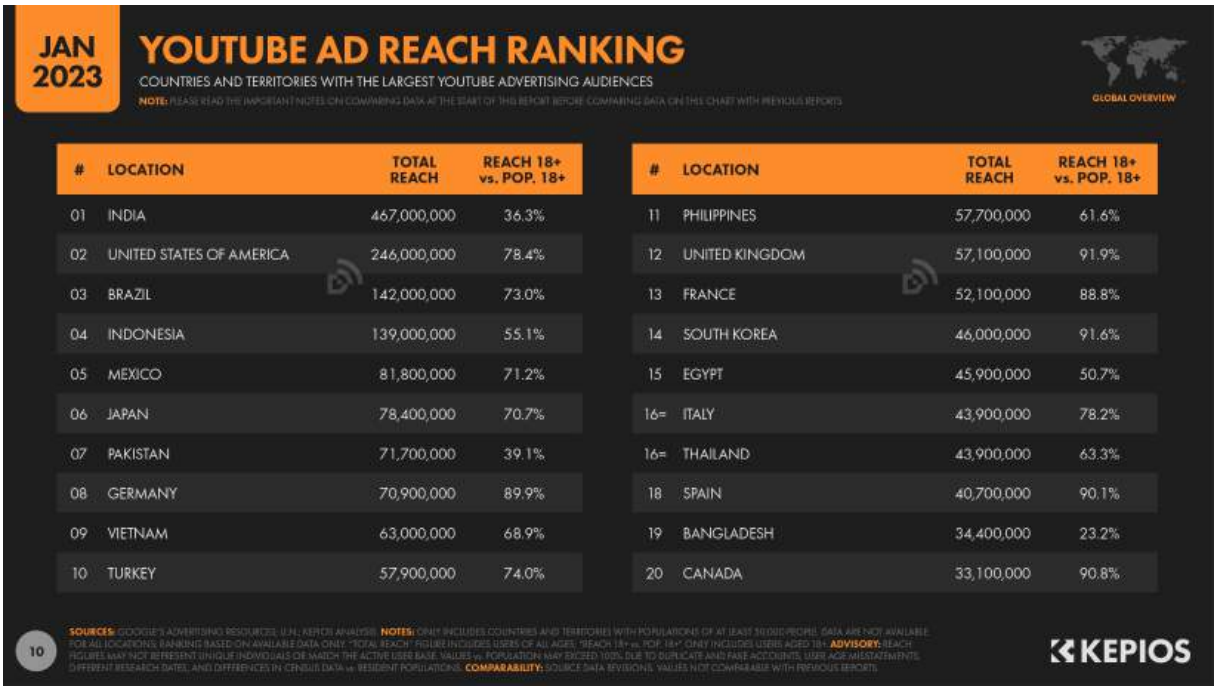
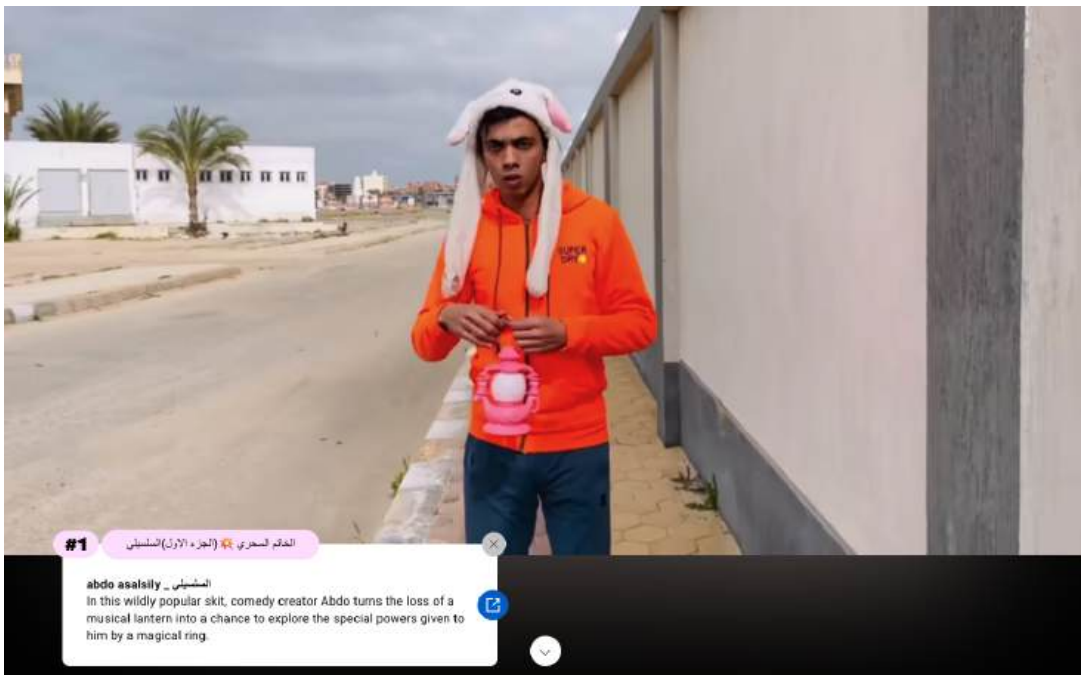


Image from Digital 2023 YouTube Platform Report Q1 2023 v01, via DataReportal

At the start of December, YouTube unveiled a series of lists for major markets around the world, including the Middle East and North Africa.[104] The lists explore the most popular videos and creators of 2022 and features five Top 10's covering trending videos, top shorts, music videos, creators and breakout creators.



A special microsite allows users to scroll through content from each of the 10 entrants in a given list.

Each entrant features a short introductory text about each channel/video.

Image: Screenshot of the top trending via from abdo asalsily _ السلسيلي

[104] https://www.youtube.com/trends/2022/mena/

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Reflecting on the list, Digital Studio pointed out[105] that gaming creator **AboFlah** was the top creator for the second year in a row, the " Top Shorts" list, was topped by Omani football freestyler, **Mohamed Alnoufali** who shared three tricks on Shorts, while the music videos list showed the **growing emergence of the North African rap and hip-hop scene**.

The top breakout creator is an Arabic voiced version of content produced by the American YouTuber MrBeast. It already has 2.3 million subscribers (his original, English language channel has 138 million subscribers).

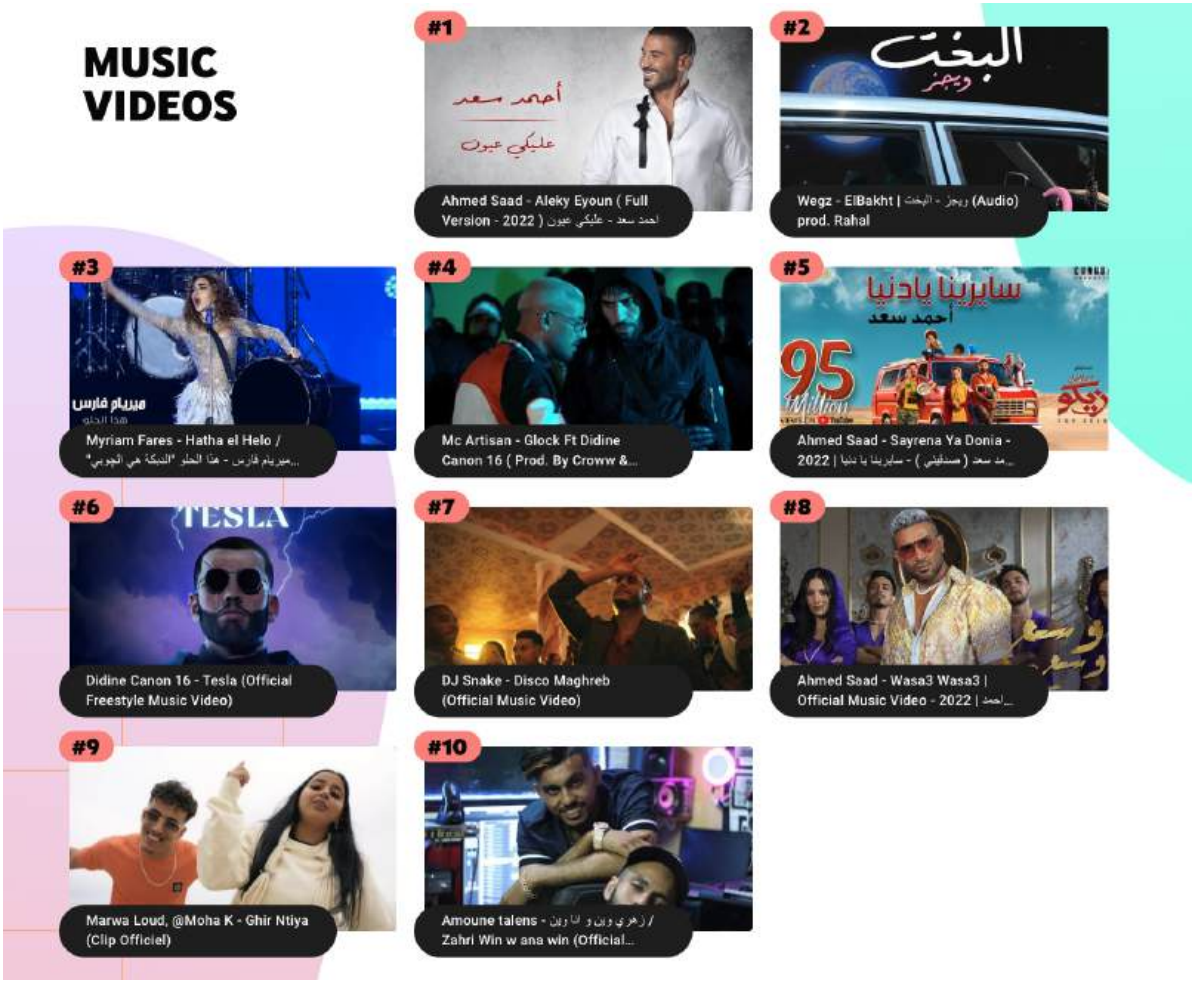


Image: Screenshot showcasing the Top 10 Music Videos viewed in MENA in 2022

Writing on *Think with Google*, the tech giant's marketing blog, Roya Zeitoune - who oversees YouTube's Culture and Trends team for Europe, the Middle East, and Africa - and Abdu Hussein outlined[106] some further consumer trends on the platform.

105 https://www.digitalstudiome.com/technology/youtube-unveils-2022-end-of-year-lists-in-the-middle-east-north-africa

106 https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/intl/en-145/consumer-insights/consumer-trends/gen-z-soothing-videos/

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"**Popular forms of soothing content in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) include journaling, cooking, and ASMR videos (aka whisper videos).**

However **compilations of 'oddly satisfying' clips and mukbang**, live-streamed videos often produced by South Koreans and featuring a person eating large quantities of food while chatting to viewers, are also popular," they wrote.

"In MENA, **exploratory travel videos** are particularly popular," they added. "Their travel-show like visuals and narrative really do inspire wanderlust, if the many comments underneath these videos are anything to go by."

"Play it Forward with YouTube," a new short video and podcast series (Hekayat YouTube in Arabic) launched[107] at the end of 2022.

The five part series aims to shed light on the path and goals of Middle Eastern and North African content creators. It is available on Google Podcasts, Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and Deezer as well as the YouTube Arabia channel.

In the limited series, **Tarek Amin, YouTube's Director of Partnerships in MENA interviews creators from Egypt (Passant Nur El Din and Mostafa Attia), Iraq (Zainab Al Eqabi), Saudi Arabia (Rehab Saad) and the United Arab Emirates (Anas Bukhash).**



Image via CampaignME

[107] https://campaignme.com/youtube-announces-play-it-forward-video-and-podcast-series/

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YouTube is the most popular social network platform in the UAE,[108] Statista reports, overtaking Facebook in the share of users. Perhaps not surprisingly, in the UAE, the main online activity[109] Internet users do is watch videos.

Data from Ipsos (on behalf of YouTube) as part of their YouTube Culture & Trends Report 2022[110] revealed that across the 13 major markets they surveyed (which included Egypt and Saudi Arabia) **69% of Gen Z say they often find themselves returning to creators or content that feels comforting to them. Turning to MENA,[111] 76% of Gen Z in Saudi Arabia have used YouTube to watch content to feel nostalgic, jumping to 81% in Egypt.**

A New York Times feature[112] in June highlighted how "the rise of social media platforms, YouTube in particular, is changing the power dynamic for Arab women, allowing them to turn the kitchen into a source of income and influence."

The trend is especially notable given that only about 25 percent of women in the Middle East participate in the labor force — the lowest such figure in the world - the report notes, with YouTube offering a means to enable women to work from home and generate income for their families.



Image: Screenshot of Karima Boukar's YouTube channel, via The New York Times. The channel features more than 1,000 videos and 4.4 million subscribers.

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[108] https://www.statista.com/statistics/1276846/uae-share-of-social-network-users-by-platform/
[109] https://www.statista.com/statistics/1274015/uae-share-of-online-content-by-activity/
[110] https://www.youtube.com/trends/report/2022
[111] https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/intl/en-145/consumer-insights/consumer-trends/gen-z-soothing-videos/
[112] https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/05/dining/arab-women-youtube-cooking-videos.html

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In terms of online video, the US-based streaming technology company Brightcove signposted some of the key data points in a 2022 blog post.[113] Using 2021 data, they pointed out that **SVoD use in Egypt had jumped from 46.8% of internet users in 2020 to 57.2% in 2021. Meanwhile, in Saudi Arabia and UAE the reach of digital video trumps traditional TV.**

"In Saudi Arabia, the vast majority (95.5%) of internet users watched digital video in 2021–this is more than the share of internet users that spent time with broadcast TV (91.4%)," they wrote. "In the United Arab Emirates, digital video also beat traditional TV with a greater percentage of internet users watching streaming over broadcast–95.4% vs. 86.1% respectively."



In Turkey last summer, a YouTube journalist and her cameraman were attacked in the street by men carrying guns, IFEX shared.[114]

Reporter Ebru Uzun Oruç and her partner and cameraman Barış Oruç were attacked following threats from ultra-nationalist groups in response to her street interview series on the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli.

Street interviews for *Sokak Kedisi TV* feature interviews with citizens asking their opinions about a certain political figure or an official. Oruç later posted on social media reporting that they were uninjured and condemning the attack.

Image: Tweet from the International Press Institute (IPI)

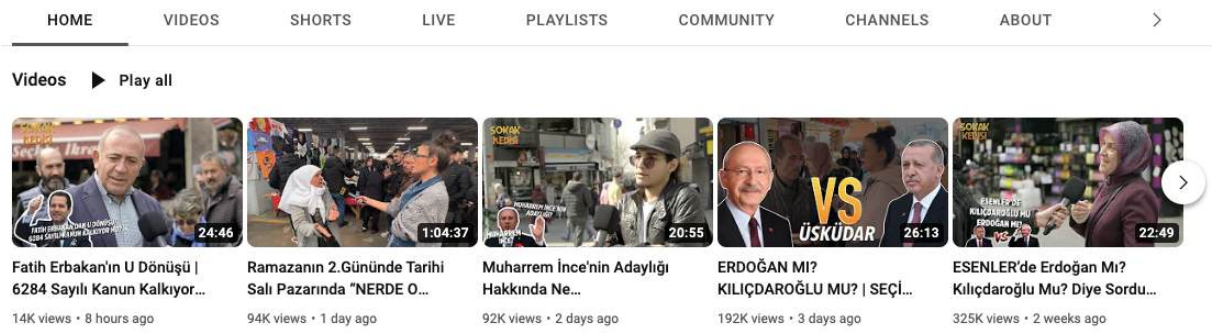


Image: Screenshot from the Sokak Kedisi TV YouTube page

[113] https://www.brightcove.com/en/resources/blog/mena-ott-opportunity-2022/
[114] https://ifex.org/turkey-youtube-journalist-and-cameraman-attacked-in-street-by-men-carrying-guns/

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Lebanese singer Nancy Ajram came under fire after putting on blackface to 'prank' her fans for a video, in a story covered by Middle East Eye, The New Arab[115] and others.

The video, which shows Ajram darkening her face with make-up and putting on a black curly wig is still on her Instagram account[116] where it has enjoyed more than 2.5 million views. In the film she walks around Beirut to see if people will recognize her.



It ends as she removes her make-up in a restaurant and taking pictures with fans.

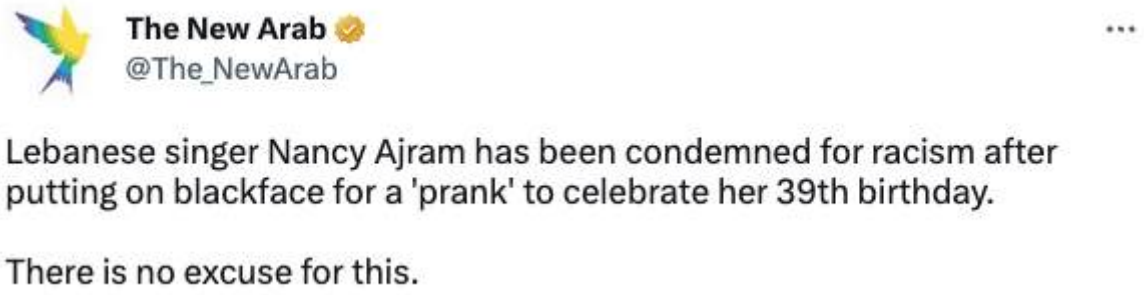
Middle East Eye points out that alongside criticism on Twitter and elsewhere, "the Instagram comments for Ajram's post were littered with posts of support, with many not identifying anything wrong or controversial about the singer's actions."

Others were more open in their condemnation.

Image: Screenshot taken 3-25-23 from Instagram



Image: Tweet from the Lebanese-American music writer Danny Hajjar and from The New Arab



[115] https://www.newarab.com/news/lebanese-star-nancy-ajram-blasted-blackface-prank
[116] https://www.instagram.com/p/Cdn5nFcr5YB/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

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6. TikTok

The short video app continued to grow in usage and influence, including in the MENA region. However, this growth is resulting in increased scrutiny about the app, including its ownership model and usage trends.

Globally, seven of the Top 10 countries for the app - by reach - are in MENA; and nine of the Top 20. The top five spots are all held by Middle East nations.

- **Usage of the app is ubiquitous in UAE and Saudi Arabia where penetration is over 100%.***
- **That's closely followed by Kuwait (98.8% reach), Qatar (96.5%) and Iraq (94.5%).**
- **Meanwhile more than three-quarters of the adult population use the app in Bahrain (78.7%) and Lebanon (76.3%); and more than six in ten adults in Jordan (62.9%) and Israel (62.8%).**

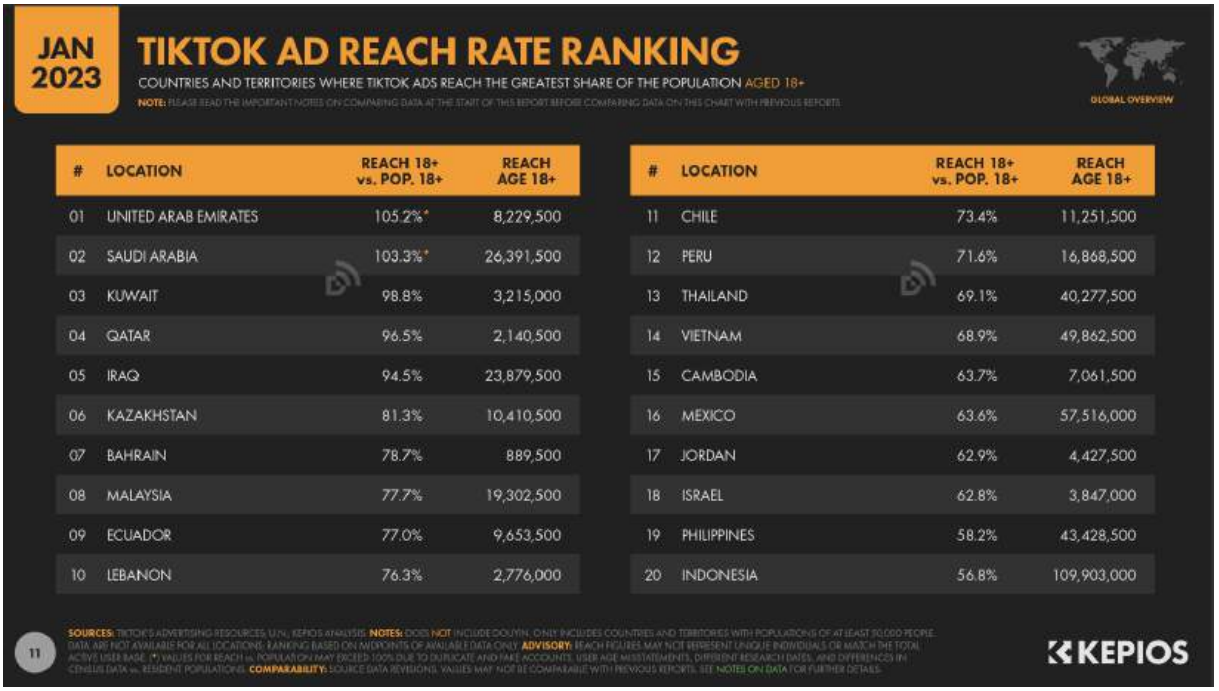


Image via DataReportal

**NB: Reach may exceed 100% due to duplicate and fake accounts, user age misstatements, different research dates and differences in census data vs. resident population.*

When looking at the largest markets for the app, four MENA nations are in the Top 12. Turkey is ranked 9th (29.9m users, 48.2% penetration), Saudi Arabia 10th (26.4m, 100%+), Iraq 11th (23.9m users, 94.5%) and Egypt 12th (23.7m, 34.3%).

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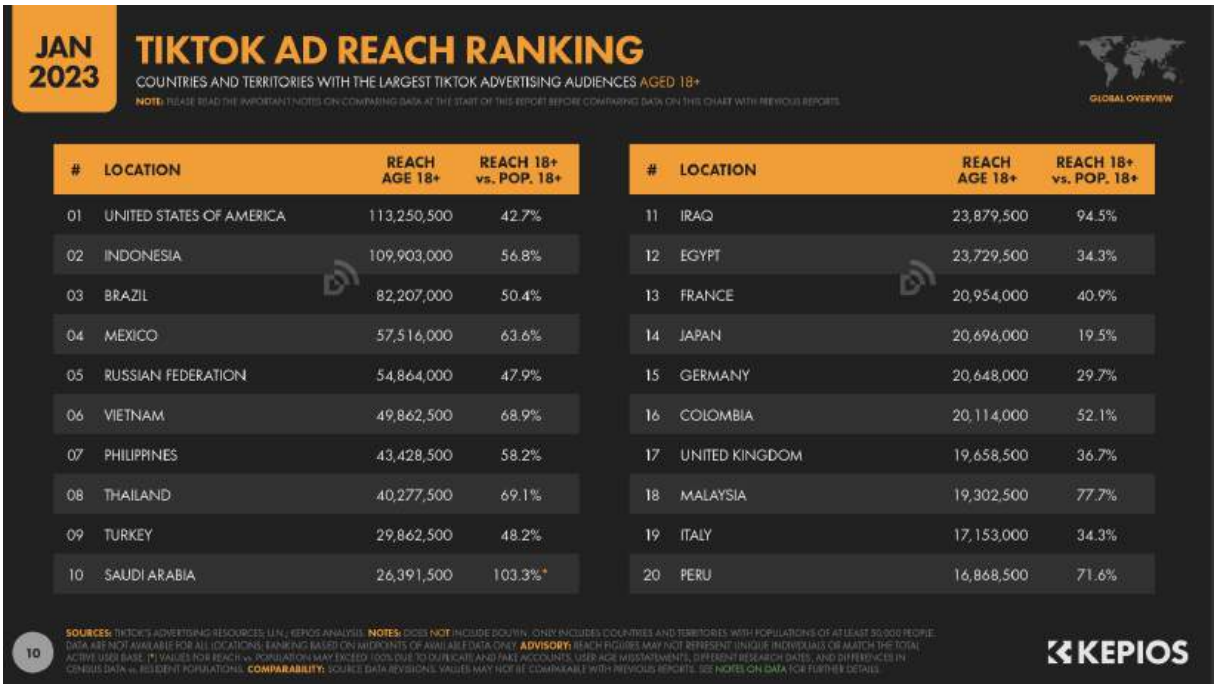


Image via DataReportal

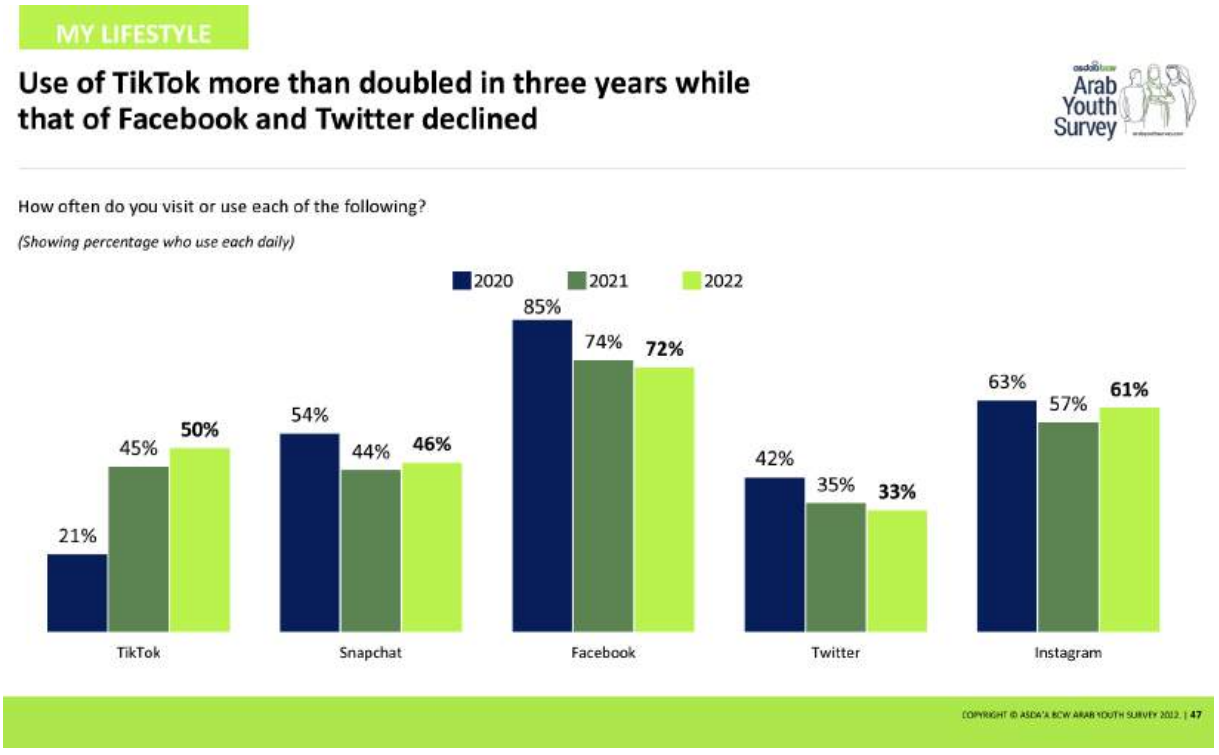


Image via Arab Youth Survey 2022

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TikTok marked[117] the end of 2022 in MENA with #ForYouParty, an immersive event held at Sound Stage 2, Dubai Studio City and in-app activations.



The event celebrated the most inspiring creators with the TikTok Creator Awards and the platform's popular communities, including #BookTok and #FoodTok.

Those communities, according to the app's regional manager, "have been a driving force behind some of the exciting trends of 2022."[118]

Image via Arab News

Awards were given to a host of TikTok creators. Abir El Saghir, a Lebanese chef and influencer who has more than 20 million followers, was named "Creator of the Year."

Meanwhile, **the "Breakthrough Creator" title was bestowed on business coach Nora Achmaoui**. After getting married in early 2023, her account name has been changed to noraandkhalid.



Image via Arab News

[117] https://www.arabnews.com/node/2220601/media
[118] https://www.arabnews.com/node/2220601/media

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4411239

Jordanian authorities imposed a temporary ban[119] on TikTok in December 2022, after a police officer was killed during protests over fuel price hikes. It was still banned[120] a month later, with no clear indication of when the ban would be lifted. Jordan's Public Security Directorate justified the suspension of the app "after its misuse and failing to deal with publications inciting violence and disorder."[121]

At the same time, in Egypt, a member of the Egyptian parliament requested a ban[122] on TikTok following the serious injury of a 13-year-old student who fractured his neck participating in the "Throw Your Friend" TikTok challenge. Several outlets, including Gulf News, citing[123] local and social media reports. reported that the student, "Egypt's judo champion Ahmed Khaled had been left paralyzed as a result.

Displaced Syrian families in refugee camps can be seen begging for money on the social media platform. However, a BBC investigation[124] found that the short video streaming app is taking up to 70% of the money given in donations.

According to the report, children in refugee camps spend hours on live streams during which they can earn up to $1,000 an hour. However, the families receive only a tiny fraction of this.[125] "In the camps in north-west Syria, the BBC found that the trend was being facilitated by so-called "TikTok middlemen", who provided families with the phones and equipment to go live," they said.



Image via Twitter

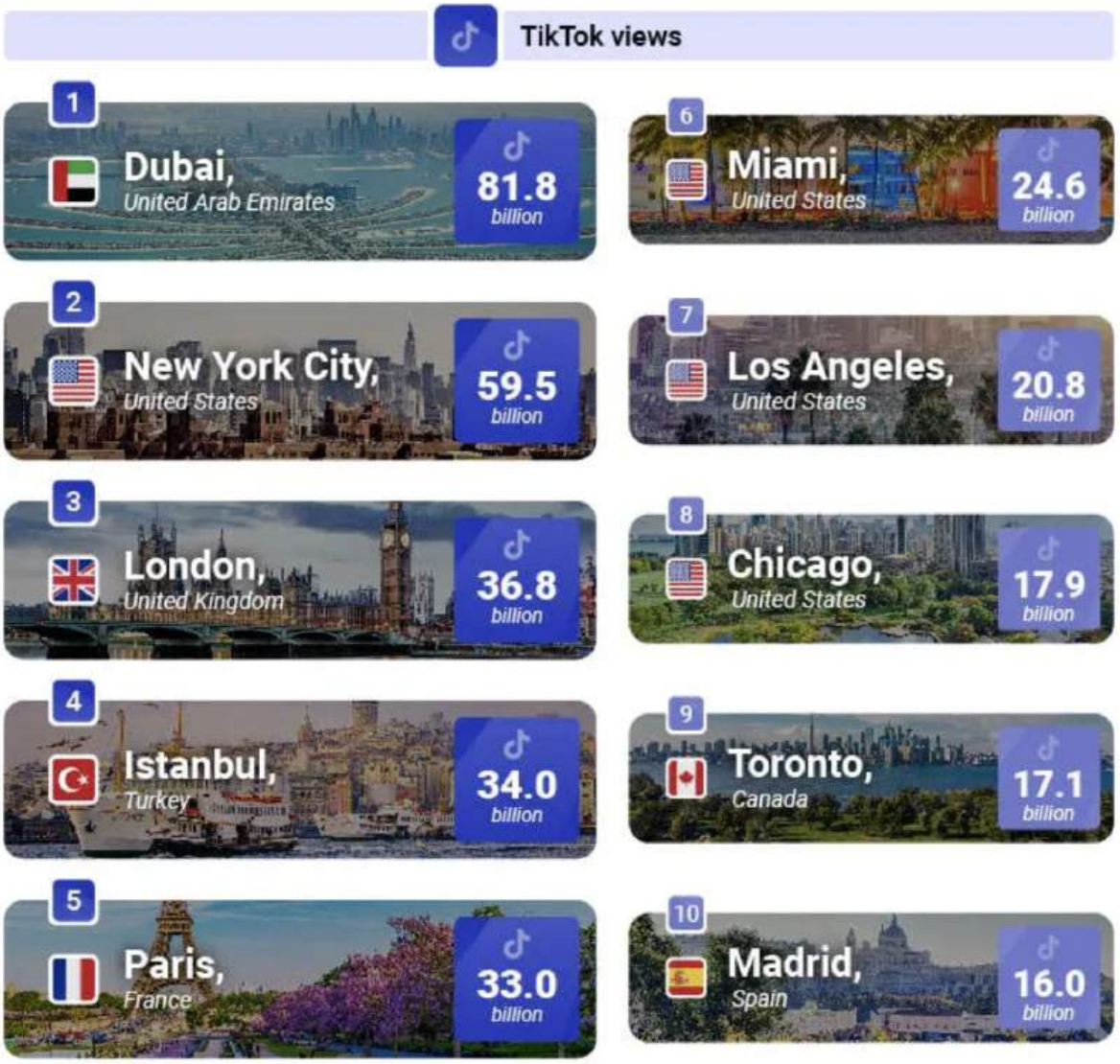
[119] https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/jordan-bans-tiktok-police-officer-killed-protests-rcna62229
[120] https://smex.org/beyond-jordans-tiktok-ban/
[121] https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/jordan-bans-tiktok-police-officer-killed-protests-rcna62229
[122] https://egyptindependent.com/egyptian-mp-calls-to-shut-down-tiktok/
[123] https://gulfnews.com/world/mena/egypt-13-year-old-student-paralysed-after-taking-part-in-tik-tok-challenge-1.92654616
[124] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-63213567
[125] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-63213567

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TikTok Travel Index[126] **2022,** published by the luggage storage service Bounce, **reported that more people have watched videos with the #Dubai hashtag than any other city in the world.**

> "Synonymous with wealth and luxury, Dubai has become one of the most sought-after destinations for holidaymakers who want to soak up the sun in style. This ultra-modern city is home to some of the world's most astounding architecture, such as the tallest building on Earth, the Burj Khalifa." *(Bounce)*

With c.82 billion views of the hashtag #Dubai, the city surpassed New York City as the most viewed destination last year. That number has leapt to 130 billion at the time of writing. Dubai ranked second in their list in 2021, behind NYC. Videos related to the emirate had more than 20 billion more views in 2022 than those related to the Big Apple, GQ MENA points out.[127]



The top TikTok travel destinations. Image via Bounce.

[126] https://usebounce.com/blog/tiktok-travel-index-2022
[127] https://www.esquireme.com/brief/dubai-is-the-most-popular-city-in-the-world-on-tiktok-by-far

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4411239

TikTok launched a limited podcast series titled The Future of Retail[128] to highlight the evolution of the retail industry in the lead up to Black Friday. The six part series, hosted by the Aref Yehia, the Head of Business Partnerships for Retail and E-Commerce at TikTok in the MENA region, are available through TikTok Channels.

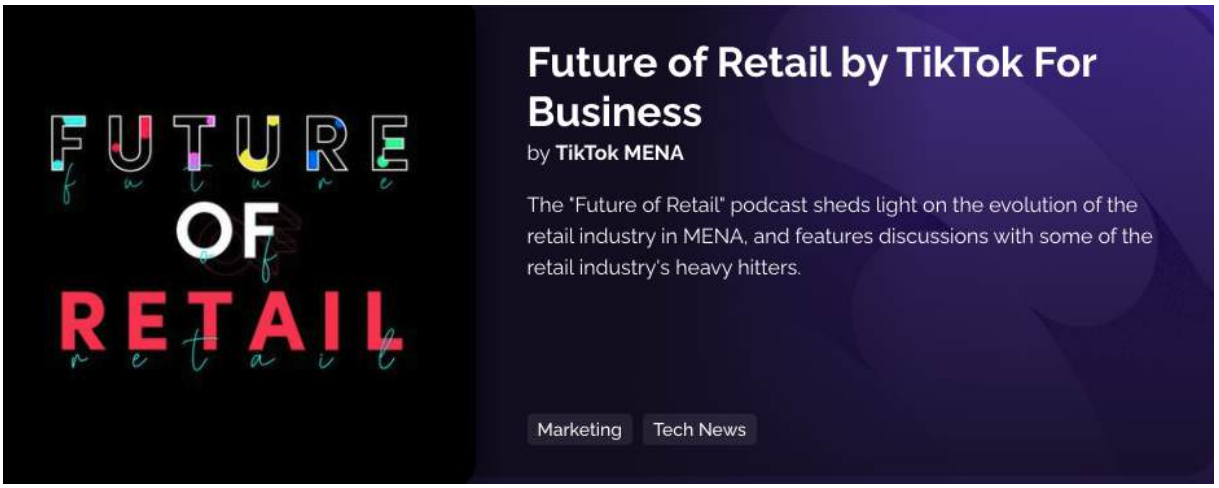


Image via RSS.com

In September, TikTok MENA launched[129] its inaugural TikTok Creator Hub program. Open to creators in the UAE and Egypt, the program will identify a theme each year for registered creators to produce a creative content around. With the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP27) taking place in Egypt, not surprisingly, the theme for the 2022 TikTok Creator Hub was Climate Change.



Successful applicants participate in three stages of activity: online learning modules, a live training session and the judging process to name the competition's winner.

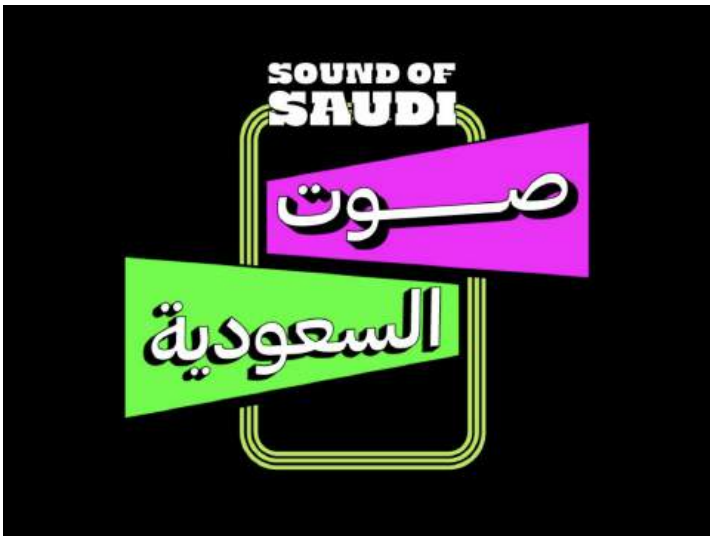
In November, five winners, (from left) Anfal Saheb, Deema Naser, Aya Shiha, Rabih Takkoush and Kareem Abdel Samad were announced.

Image via The National

[128] https://rss.com/podcasts/future-of-retail-by-tiktok-for-business/
[129] https://martechvibe.com/news/tiktok-launches-mena-creator-hub/

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In October, the MENA-based music and streaming platform Anghami launched a TikTok talent hunt, called "Sound of Saudi."



As their website explains,[130] Saudi's all over the world - and in the Kingdom - are "asked to show their talents whether it's singing, composing, producing, mixing or even playing musical instruments of any kind."

Image via Anghami

Using the Sound of Saudi hashtag #صوت_السعودية and a special branded filter, competition winners will see their work professionally produced, and distributed via Anghami. They will also be invited to perform at concerts in the region.

A month after launch,[131] "Sound of Saudi" had enjoyed over 327 million views on TikTok, and more than 22,000 talents had taken part. Engagement was bolstered by endorsements from regional celebrities such as Saudi hip hop rapper, DJ and Hip Hop artist Big Hass, Lebanese singer, actress and TV star Maya Diab, Saudi singers Zena Emad and Ayed Yousef and the multi-talented Iraqi singer and composer Saif Nabeel.

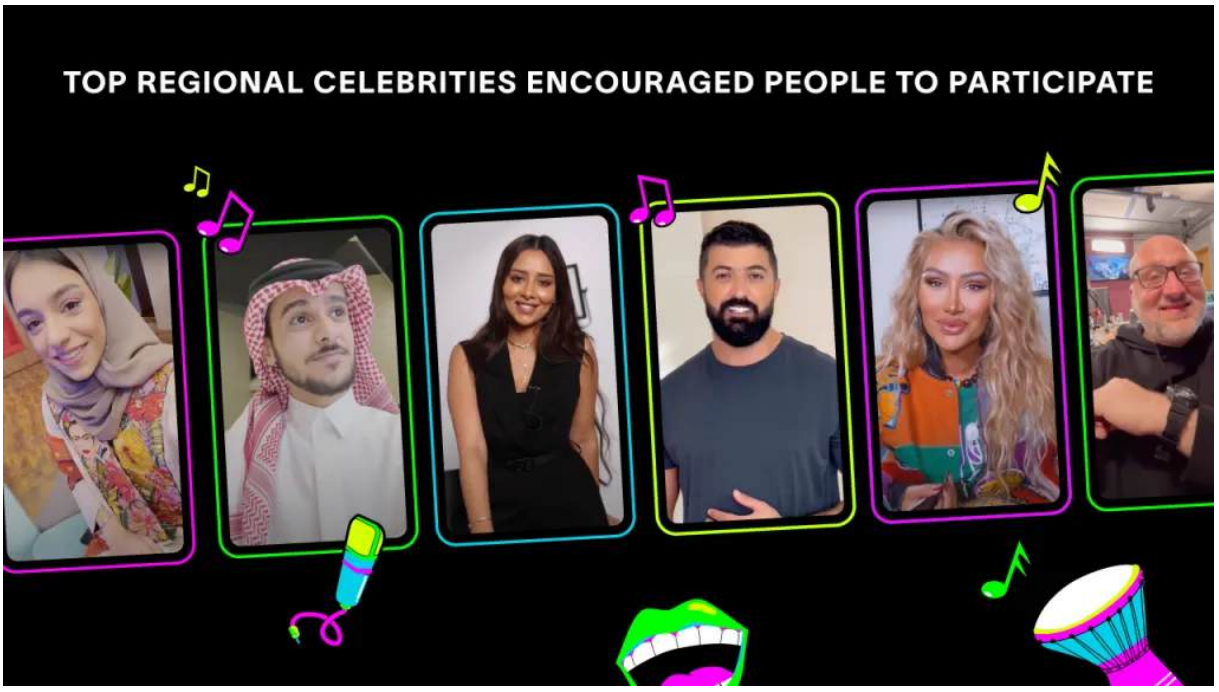


Image via Anghami

130 https://talks.anghami.com/anghami-launches-sound-of-saudi-global-contest-on-tiktok/#:~:text=Celebrating%20the%20Kingdom's%20expanding%20music,social%20media%2Dbased%20talent%20hunt.

131 https://talks.anghami.com/anghamis-sound-of-saudi-talent-hunt-in-collaboration-with-tiktok-receives-saudi-arabia-music-commission-endorsement/

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4411239

TikTok Israel invited startups in the country - or startups backed by an Israeli VC fund - to take part in a short once session a week, four-week training program.[132] Participants have to be new to TikTok (i.e. they don't already advertise on it,) and demonstrate "a real interest in making TikTok a meaningful marketing channel."

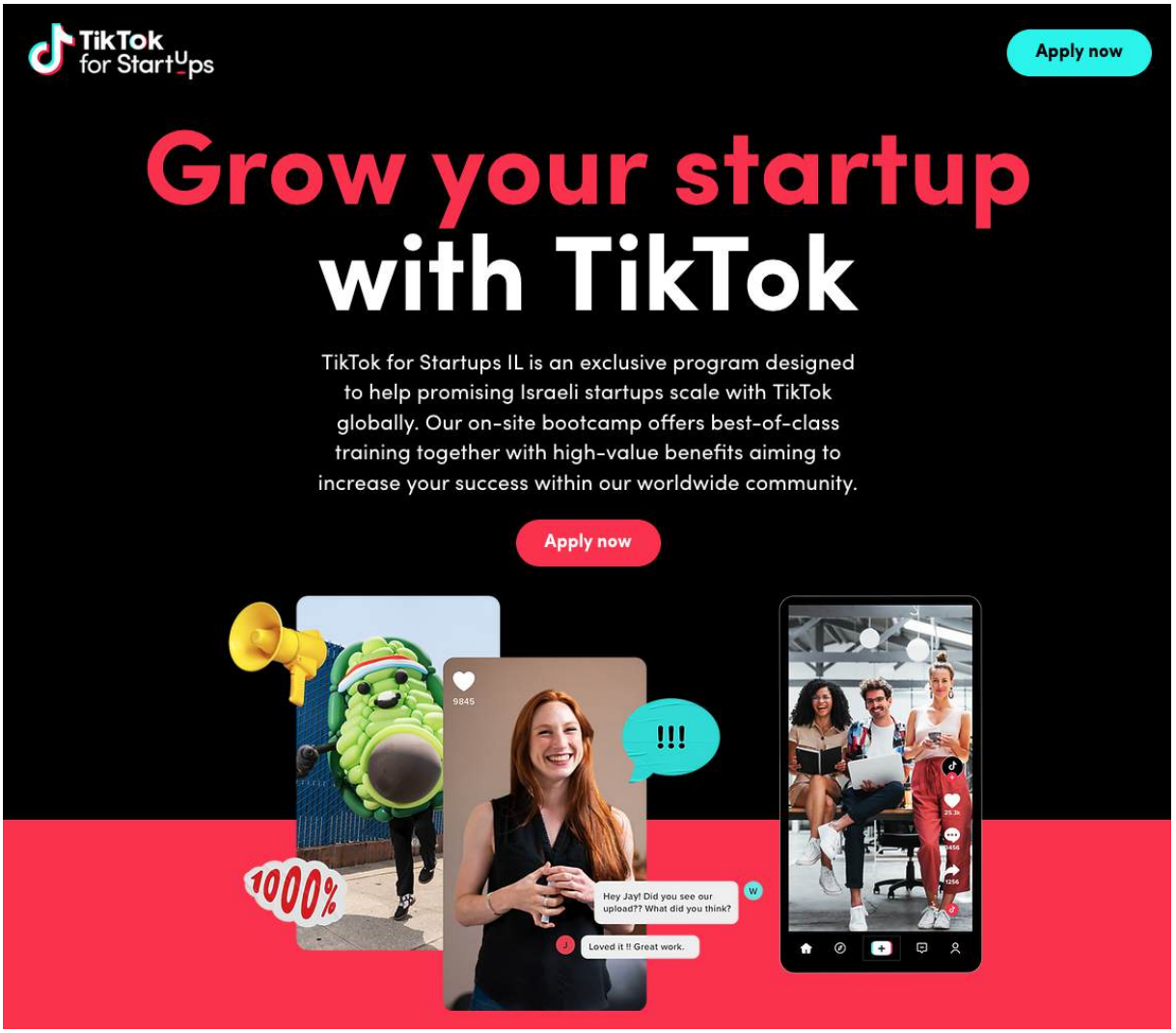


Image via TikTok for Startups

As TikTok grows in popularity, issues of inappropriate content, and attempts to stifle freedom of expression are growing. Here's a few examples of this in action:

- **TikTok moderators in Morocco have reported they're watching hours of graphic videos with little psychological help and monetary compensation.** In an investigation[133] by Insider, moderators noted[134] they were paid less than $3 an hour and that graphic content - such as videos of suicide and animal cruelty - are becoming more common as the app grows in popularity.

[132] https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/07/tiktok-launches-new-program-israeli-startups
[133] https://www.businessinsider.com/tiktoks-african-factory-line-of-terrors-2022-7
[134] https://www.businessinsider.com/tiktok-moroccan-content-moderators-speak-out-psychological-distress-abuse-2022-7?r=US&IR=T

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4411239

The article contains several harrowing examples of these cases and the psychological impact of this on moderators. Live videos can be especially difficult to deal with, as moderators see potentially traumatizing events, such as those related to violence and suicide, unfolding in real time in front of them.

A former moderator, Samira aged 23, described how "she was tasked with reviewing 200 videos every hour while maintaining an accuracy score of 95%," after three months, "her manager increased those metrics so much that she only had 10 seconds to review a video."

"The devil of this job is that you get sick slowly — without even noticing it," says Wisam, a former content moderator at Facebook who now trains others for the Luxembourg-based firm Majorel (TikTok outsourced some of this work in areas like MENA). "You think it's not a big deal, but it does affect you," he told Insider.

- **Egyptian TikTok star, Haneen Hossam, was sentenced[135] to three years in jail and a fine of 200,000 Egyptian pounds ($10,759) for "indecency," "violating family principles," and "human trafficking" charges.**



Hossam, who had more than one million followers at the time of her arrest, argued that her content was taken out of context.

"Human rights activists say she has been prosecuted as part of a crackdown on female social media influencers," in the country the BBC says.[136]

Image via Egypt Today

"They argue that the charges Hossam and at least 11 other women with millions of followers have faced since 2020 violate the rights to privacy, freedom of expression, non-discrimination and bodily autonomy.

- **Ibrahim Malik, an Egyptian TikToker, was arrested[137] in October 2022 on charges of "promoting immoral content."** Malik gained notoriety on TikTok for going live and asking girls and women to do various challenges, which the court claimed to be disrespectful and insulting.

- **Another Egyptian TikToker with five million followers, Tala Safwan, was arrested[138] in Saudi Arabia and accused of posting sexually suggestive content**

[135] https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/egypt-tiktok-star-three-years-jail-human-trafficking
[136] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-61139566
[137] https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/10/another-tiktok-star-arrested-egypt
[138] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-62289674

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with lesbian undertones. Safwan argued that the clip in question was taken out of context.

- In late-September, **the Kuwaiti Public Prosecution sentenced two TikToker on charges of violating public morals.** The two female influencers will face two years of prison and a fine between $6,500 and $16,200.[139]

Other developments to note include:

- **TikTok launched[140] a sector-first advisory council for the MENAT region, two years after setting up a similar council in the United States.** The council is made up of six inaugural experts from academia and the civil society who will provide advice on the platform's content moderation policies and practices.

- **In the summer, TikTok launched a new safety campaign[141] in MENA, based on a series of video tutorials to shed light on the safety features available on the platform.**

  The campaign is part of TikTok's #SaferForYou program. The videos, featuring creators Logina Salah and Fadi AlKhatib, teach users step-by-step how to access safety features such as screen time management and family pairing.

  Also during the summer, **TikTok rolled out[142] a number of new features and tools,** designed to diversify recommendations, as well as offer parental controls and a content classification system.

- In April, FIFA launched[143] their @FIFAWorldCup account on TikTok, to provide fans with behind the scenes action - and during - the **FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022**.

- **In conjunction with World Mental Health Day, TikTok hosted[144] its first mental health summit in Egypt using the hashtag #EndTheStigma**.

  The summit aimed to provide support to the TikTok community by focusing on how to manage their mental health on/using the app, as well as managing screen time and search interference, content alerts, and how the platform addresses bullying and harassment.

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139 https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20220930-kuwait-sentences-tiktok-influencers-to-2-years-for-violating-public-morals/

140 https://www.zawya.com/en/press-release/tiktok-establishes-regions-industry-first-menat-safety-advisory-council-to-guide-safety-best-practice-and-wlz77c5f

141 https://www.broadcastprome.com/news/tiktok-launches-saferforyou-campaign-in-mena-region/

142 https://www.digitalstudiome.com/news/tiktok-launches-new-content-classification-system-and-tools-to-customize-viewing-experiences

143 https://campaignme.com/fifaworldcup-launches-channel-on-tiktok/

144 https://egyptindependent.com/tik-tok-launches-first-mental-health-summit-in-egypt/

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TikTok launched the #RamadanValues camping championing the spirit and values of kindness, togetherness, tolerance, and giving of the Holy Month.

The short video platform positions itself as the main regional and cultural entertainment source during Ramadan. It saw noticeable growth during the month of Ramadan in 2021 with video views increasing by 21% and engagement increasing by 22%, CampaignME reports.[145]



Image via TheBrandBerries

[145] https://campaignme.com/tiktok-ramadan-values-campaign-a-creative-and-social-success/

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7. Influencers

Brands and marketers continue to want to work with influencers, and they play a significant role in the online experience of many social networkers too.

Data from GWI, and featured in DataReportal's Digital 2023 Global Overview Report,[146] demonstrates that **in multiple MENA markets** (only the biggest were surveyed), **social media users in the region are more likely to follow influencers on social media than the global average.** That said, numbers might be lower than you expect…

- **In Saudi Arabia just over 3 in 10 (30.1%) social networkers follow influencers.**
- **UAE (27.2%) and Egypt (24.2%) also ranked above the global average (22.1%).**
- In contrast, **fewer than one in five users in Morocco (18.7%), and only just over one in ten in Turkey (11.7%) of social networkers say they follow influencers or other experts on social media.**

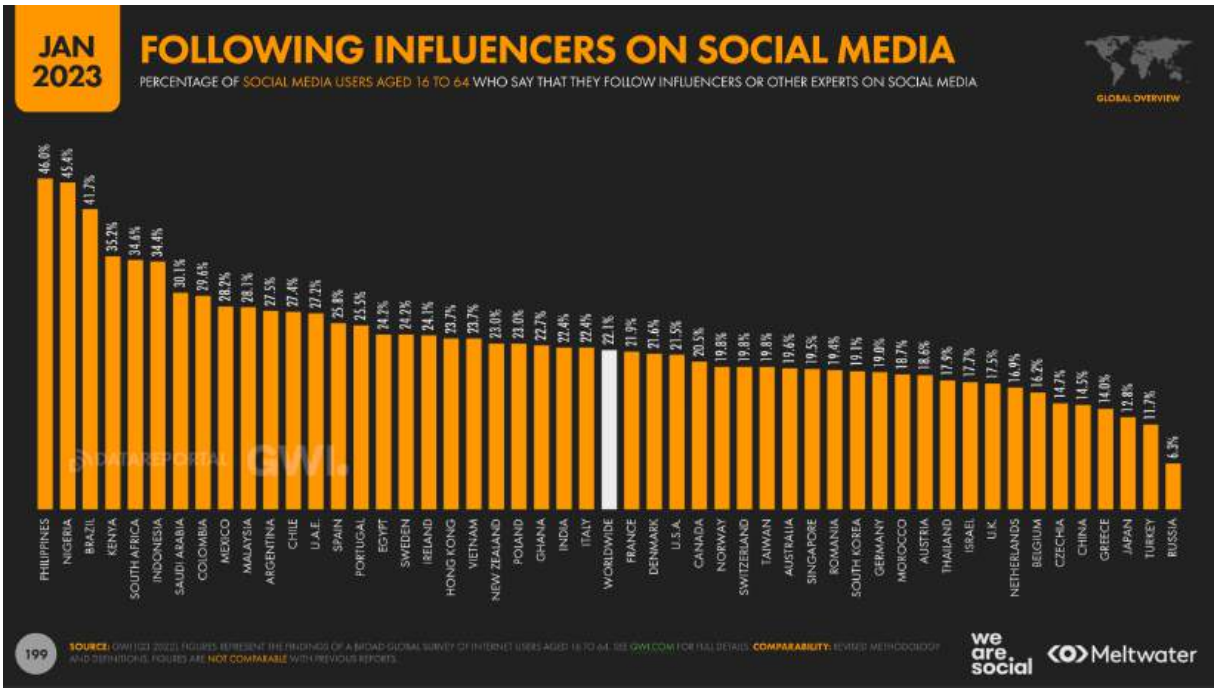


Image via DataReportal

One of the reasons why these numbers might be lower than you expect (especially given the media narrative about the rise of the Influencer) can be seen in the latest Arab Youth Survey.

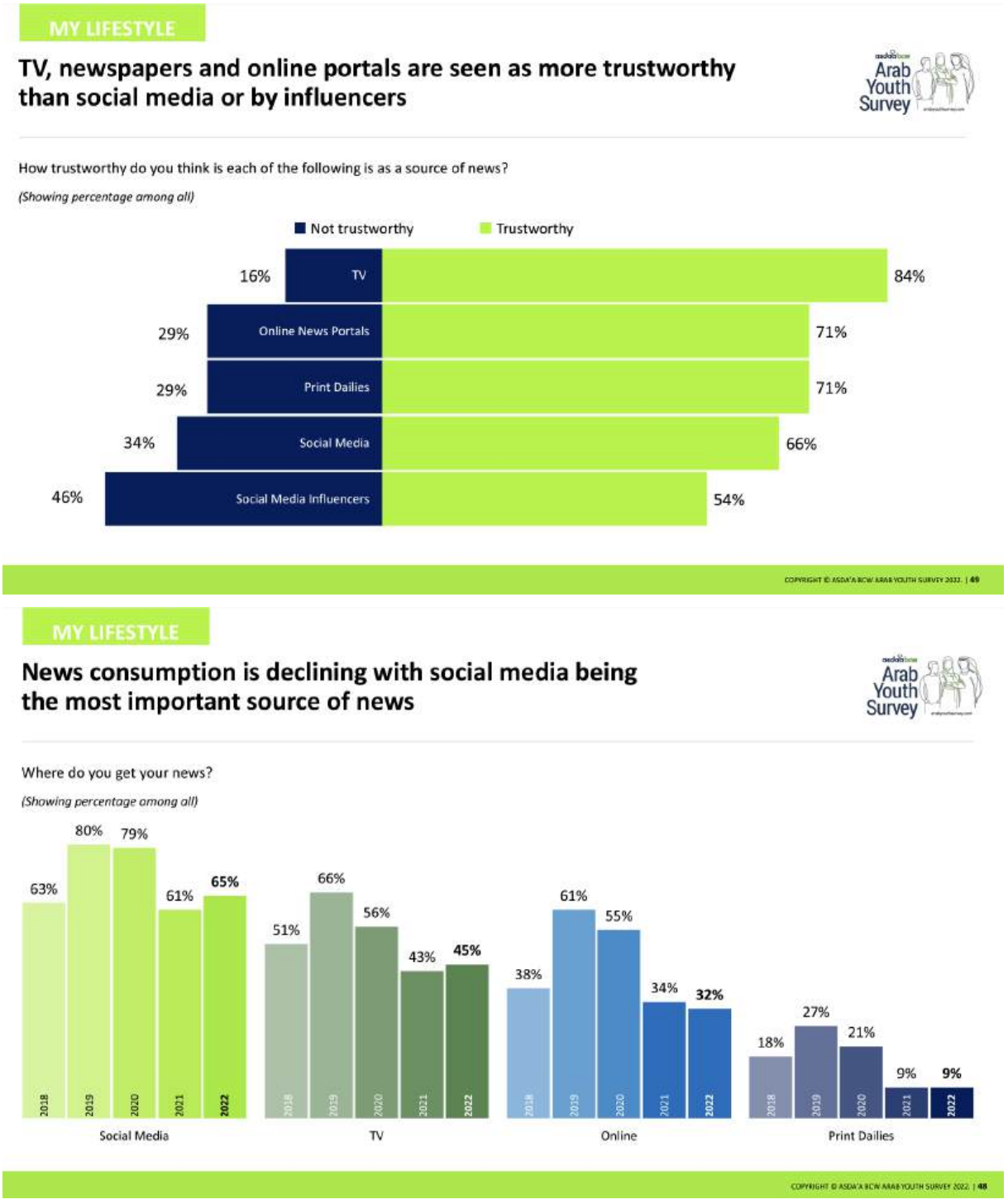
The 14th Arab Youth Survey highlighted that among 18-24 years old in the region, this is a cohort that is pretty evenly split about the trustworthiness of social media influencers. Just over half (54%) said influencers were trustworthy as a source of

[146] https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview-report

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news, with only 8% fewer (46%) disagreeing. TV remains the most trustworthy news source for Arab Youth, even though only 45% use this medium regularly.

More widely, social media is only in fourth place in this trust index, behind TV, newspapers and online news portals. This is [despite the fact](#)[147] "that news is largely consumed via social media (up 4% to 65% in 2022)."



Images via Arab Youth Survey 2022

147 https://arabyouthsurvey.com/en/whitepaper/

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"**Such a low level of trustworthiness is to be expected, particularly in the Arab world**," argues Iain Akerman - a writer, journalist and editor based between Dubai and Beirut - in the latest annual Arab Youth Survey.

There are multiple reasons for this, he notes, including concerns about "fake news" and criticism of suppression on social media (e.g. Palestinian voices), both of which are covered in this report and in our previous studies over the past few years.

To this, Akerman contends, "**misinformation and deceit have hampered the influencer market, particularly in the GCC**, where influencers have consistently failed to disclose branded content or brand partners." "Only when transparency is embraced is that likely to change, although the chances of that occurring remain slim," he suggests.

Nevertheless, as we have seen throughout this report, influencers do still play a role in MENA's social media scene. And their role can be influential, as well as potentially contentious.

At the end of 2022, Cosmopolitan Middle East created a list of 40 must-know Middle Eastern influencers. The list[148] included names such as the Lebanese fashion star Karen Wazen, YouTuber MoVlogs, the Canadian-Syrian Saif Shawwaf, and many other content creators with thousands - or millions - of followers.

In March 2022, Meta unveiled[149] #SheCreates 2.0, an eBook celebrating the work of "30 women from the region's tech and media industries who have created meaningful change, broken down barriers and inspired others with their leadership."



Image via Meta

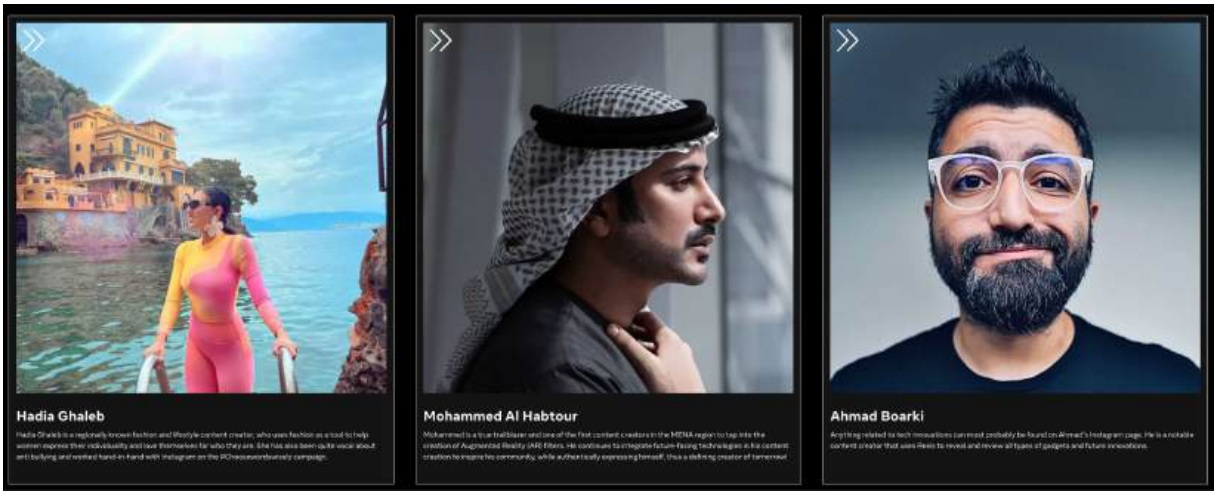
[148] https://www.cosmopolitanme.com/celebs/middle-eastern-tiktokers-to-follow

[149] https://about.fb.com/news/2022/04/shecreates-initiative-returns-for-a-second-year-celebrating-30-women-in-mena/

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Meta also launched[150] 'Creators of Tomorrow' which they described as a "new global campaign that celebrates emerging talents who are inspiring a new movement of creative content online." **In the MENA region, 12 content creators were selected** "for displaying innovative approaches to video content and being recognized amongst their communities for championing key creator territories," a press release noted.[151]

They are technology gurus Faisal Al Saif and Ahmad Boarki; lifestyle and fashion creators Hadia Ghaleb, Yara bou Monsef, and Hadban twins; graphic illustrator and artist Nourane Oweis; Augmented Reality (AR) pioneer Mohammed Al Habtour; comic creators Amr Maskoun and Mai Abdelal; and avid gamers Ahmad AlNasheet, Bashar Kayal, and Ahmed Al-Maimani. Separately, a post on Meta's corporate newsroom also highlighted the contributions of "AR pioneers like Mohammed Sultan from the UAE… [and] NFT artists such as Inbar Levii from Israel, Ecem Dilan Köse from Turkey."



Screenshot via the Creators of Tomorrow website

In December, Dubai hosted a One Billion Followers,[152] an "Expo for Content Creators" featuring more than 100 influencers and content creators from all around the world.

The summit, which was hosted at Atlantis The Palm, included two full days of sessions, workshops, and discussion from industry experts.[153] Their Instagram[154] bio suggests they'll do it all again in 2023.

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150 https://www.zawya.com/en/press-release/companies-news/meta-launches-creators-of-tomorrow-in-the-emea-region-nw4zhlpk

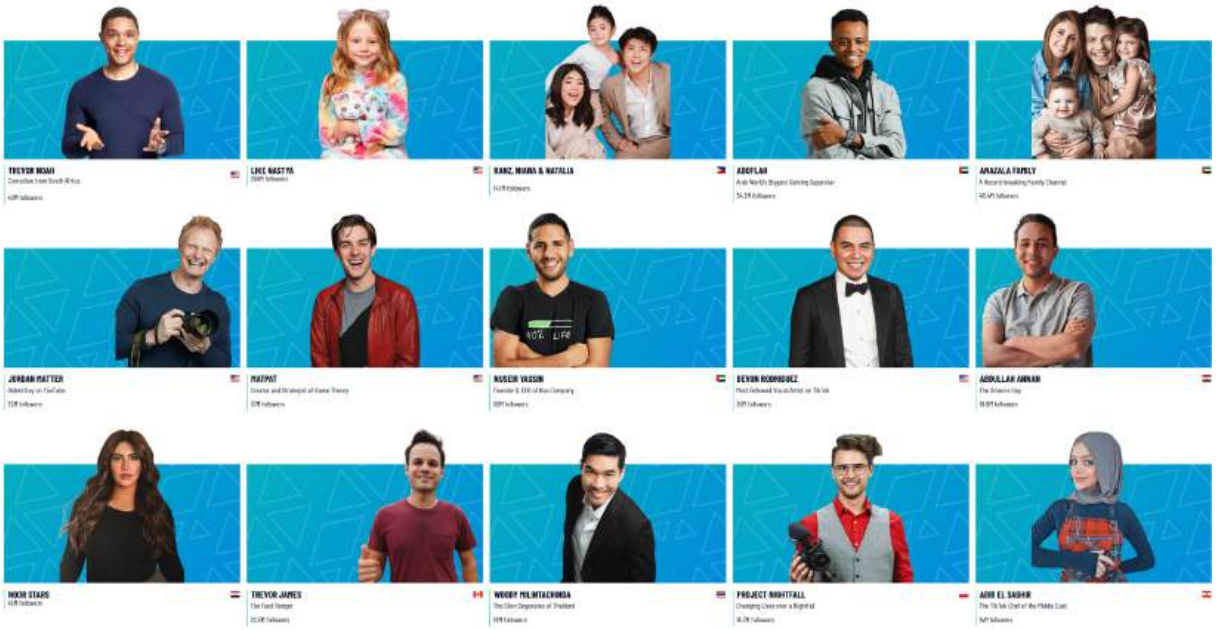
151 https://www.zawya.com/en/press-release/companies-news/meta-launches-creators-of-tomorrow-in-the-emea-region-nw4zhlpk

152 https://1billionsummit.com/

153 https://www.arabianbusiness.com/lifestyle/arts/dubai-hosts-one-billion-followers-influencer-summit-global-social-media-stars-attending

154 https://www.instagram.com/1billionsummit/

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Screenshot of some of the speakers at the 1 Billion Followers Summit, via their website

Mr Q, a Qatari whose real name is Khalifa Al Haroon, gained popularity during the days leading up to the World Cup Qatar 2022, Al-Monitor reported,[155] by sharing cheerful #QTip videos on several topics from labor rights to saying "Hello" in Arabic.



Haroon has been producing these videos on multiple social media platforms for the best part of a decade, but the hosting of the FIFA 2022 World Cup in Qatar brought his informative, short, light-hearted, videos to a wider audience.

Mr Q, aka Khalifa Al Haroon, in action. Image via Al-Monitor.

Another Qatari gained social media prominence in the wake of the World Cup: 16-year-old Abdulrahman Fahad al-Thani. As the South Morning China Post explained[156] "Facial expressions of sadness and exasperation as his country's soccer team slumped to an opening game defeat at this year's soccer World Cup have propelled a 16-year-old member of Qatar's royal family to social media stardom in China."

155 https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/09/ahead-world-cup-influencer-mr-q-lifts-veil-qatar#ixzz7rEgledMN

156 https://www.scmp.com/news/people-culture/article/3201536/dumpling-wrapper-prince-millions-go-mad-china-cute-young-qatari-royal-whose-world-cup-antics-make

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Al-Thani's facial expressions along with his Qatari headdress led Chinese on social media to compare him to La'eeb, the World Cup mascot. This has gained him 15 millions followers on Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, Shanghai Daily reported.[157]



A collage of images comparing Al-Thani to La'eeb. Image via WION.

On the sidelines of the main event, content creators from across the globe took part[158] in The Influencer Cup, representing America, Europe, Asia and MENA. Meanwhile, **10 Regional YouTube stars took place in a giant game[159] of Hide and Seek in Qatar's Al Bayt Stadium.** At stake, $10,000…

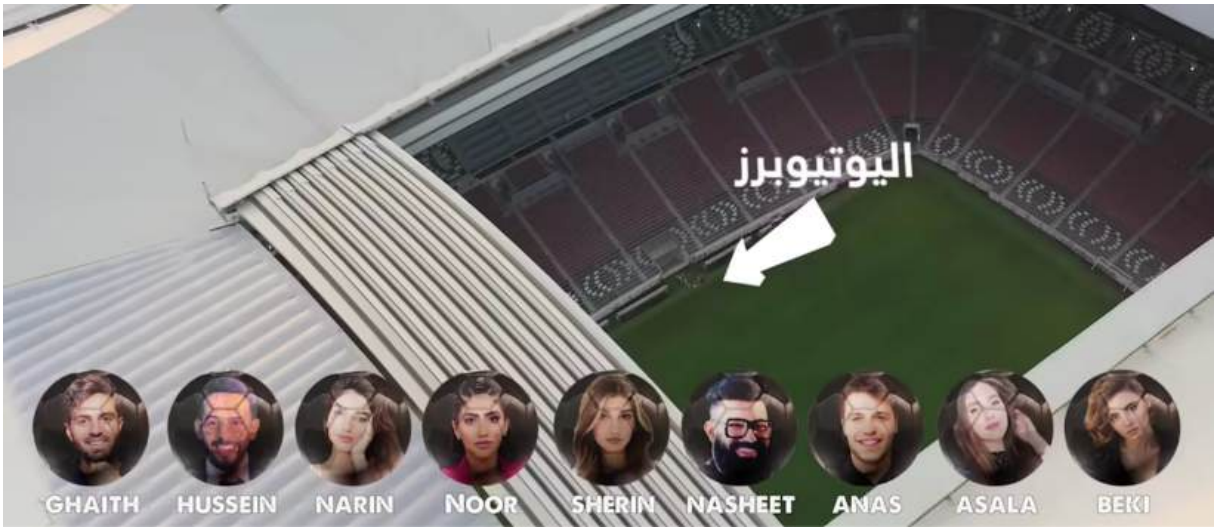


Image: Screenshot via YouTube

[157] https://www.shine.cn/news/in-focus/2212204213/

[158] https://www.goal.com/en-us/news/influencer-cup-2022-what-is-it-who-s-playing-and-how-to-watch/blt10de235894d85e2f

[159] https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/pop-culture/2022/11/26/top-youtube-stars-in-the-middle-east-to-check-out/

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4411239

The Jordanian YouTuber, Ahmad Aburob, was crowned as the Middle Eastern Social Media star by E! at the 2022 People's Choice Award.



The Middle Eastern version of the Award was introduced in 2021.[160]

As Cosmopolitan notes: "Ahmad Aburob was born in Dubai and raised in Amman, Jordan. He's a 25-year-old YouTuber who started his YouTube channel in 2018.

With over 15 million followers across all his social media channels, he quickly became one of the most popular content creators and social media personalities in this region with his skits and challenge-based vids."

His YouTube channel has had more than 1 billion views and has nearly 6.5 million subscribers.

Announcement poster via ITP Live.

Moroccan influencer and activist Ihssane Benalluch, won[161] the Sharjah Government Communication award for "Best social media influencer in the Arab World." Benalluch is a goodwill ambassador of the European Union who worked on projects related to raising awareness on various social and environmental issues. Currently, she has four million followers on Instagram.[162]

The Content Creator Awards, a new event for MENA hosted by Brand Ripplr, in collaboration with Mediaquest, **took place for the first time in 2022**. "Sponsored by YouTube, the event was attended by over 600 leading brands in the industry and top content creators in the region, where they announced 45 winning content creators[163] across 25 award categories, including Food Vlogger, Beauty Icon, YouTube Trailblazer, YouTube Gaming Creator and more," Arab News reports.[164] Between them, attendees have a potential audience of 150 million, Campaign Middle East noted.[165]

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160 https://www.cosmopolitanme.com/celebs/ahmad-aburob-winner-at-2022-pca

161 https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2022/10/351663/moroccos-ihssane-benalluch-receives-best-arab-influencer-award-in-uae

162 https://www.instagram.com/ihssanebenalluch/?hl=en

163 https://menacreatorsawards.com/winners

164 https://www.arabnews.com/node/2094731/corporate-news

165 https://campaignme.com/mena-content-creators-awards-the-regions-largest-event-for-content-creators-and-talents/

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Image via Arab News

Other developments worth noting include:

- **A new social media influencer licensing system took effect in Saudi Arabia in October.**[166]

The law requires every Saudi and non-Saudi content creator who earns revenue through advertising on social media platforms to obtain a permit from the General Commission for Audiovisual Media (GCAM). The permit (a similar system exists in UAE) costs roughly about $4,000.



Image via Arab News

- **Two Tunisian women sparked controversy**[167] **over posting videos on social media "glamourizing" risky migration from Tunis to Italy through the Mediterranean.** Many criticized the influencers for "normalizing" a journey that has left thousands dead every year.

[166] https://www.arabnews.com/node/2140406/media

[167] https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/2022-02-15/ty-article/tunisian-influencers-glamorize-risky-migrant-crossings-to-europe/0000017f-f1ae-d497-a1ff-f3aea5c70000

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- **An Arab female Snapchat influencer has been banned from advertising in Saudi Arabia**, Gulf News reported[168] in the summer, **after the creator published videos promoting tobacco.** The influencer violated laws promoting smoking, as well as advertising without a license. They were fined SR400,000 (c.$106k).

Three Arab female influencers, Amy Roko, Hadeel Marie, and Maha Jafar, starred[169] in a new Discovery+ Original reality show, Dare to Take Risks. The show aired on the regional channel Jawwy TV in October. The six-part series depicted the influencers traveling through Saudi Arabia while doing adventurous challenges.



Image: Hadeel Marein, Amy Roko, and Maha Jafar in Saudi Arabia, via Gulf News.

168 https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/saudi/saudi-arabia-bans-influencer-from-advertising-for-promoting-smoking-1.88283621

169 https://gulfnews.com/entertainment/arab-celebs/arab-influencers-amy-roko-hadeel-marei-and-maha-jafar-star-in-new-reality-show-dare-to-take-risks-1.91212863

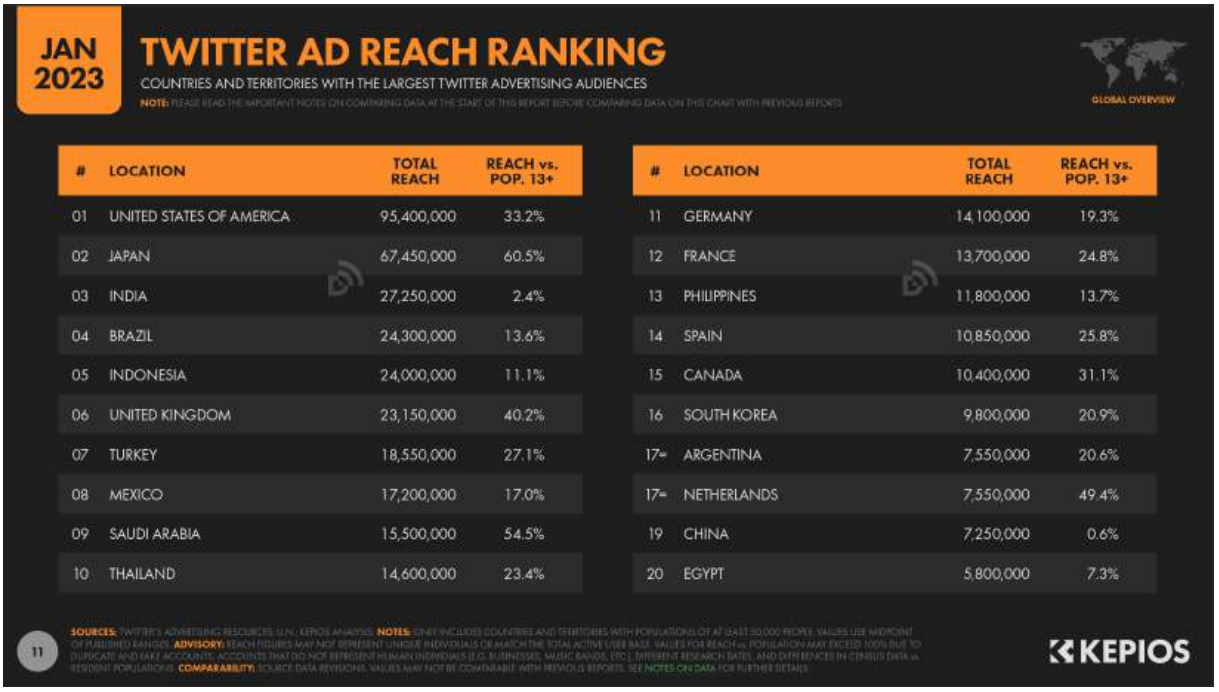
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8. Twitter

It was all change at Twitter HQ in 2022 after Elon Musk purchased the platform. Although usage of the platform in MENA garners fewer headlines than a decade ago, it continues to be a significant part of the social media landscape.

MENA is home to three of the biggest markets for Twitter in the world.

Turkey is ranked 7th with 18.6 million users, and Saudi Arabia is 9th at 15.5 million users. With 5.8 million users, Egypt is the platform's 20th largest national market.



#	LOCATION	TOTAL REACH	REACH vs. POP. 13+
01	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	95,400,000	33.2%
02	JAPAN	67,450,000	60.5%
03	INDIA	27,250,000	2.4%
04	BRAZIL	24,300,000	13.6%
05	INDONESIA	24,000,000	11.1%
06	UNITED KINGDOM	23,150,000	40.2%
07	TURKEY	18,550,000	27.1%
08	MEXICO	17,200,000	17.0%
09	SAUDI ARABIA	15,500,000	54.5%
10	THAILAND	14,600,000	23.4%
11	GERMANY	14,100,000	19.3%
12	FRANCE	13,700,000	24.8%
13	PHILIPPINES	11,800,000	13.7%
14	SPAIN	10,850,000	25.8%
15	CANADA	10,400,000	31.1%
16	SOUTH KOREA	9,800,000	20.9%
17=	ARGENTINA	7,550,000	20.6%
17=	NETHERLANDS	7,550,000	49.4%
19	CHINA	7,250,000	0.6%
20	EGYPT	5,800,000	7.3%

Image via Digital 2023 Twitter Platform Report Q1 2023, by DataReportal

When viewed by market share, however, the region has five spots in the top twenty.

More than half of those aged 13+ in **Saudi Arabia** (7th, 54.5%) and in **Bahrain** (8th, 51%) use the network. **Kuwait** (11th, 45.2%), **Qatar** (12th, 45%) and **UAE** (20th, 37.1%) round-out MENA's spots in this list.

Collectively these five markets are home to 21,822,850 million users of the micro-blogging social network.

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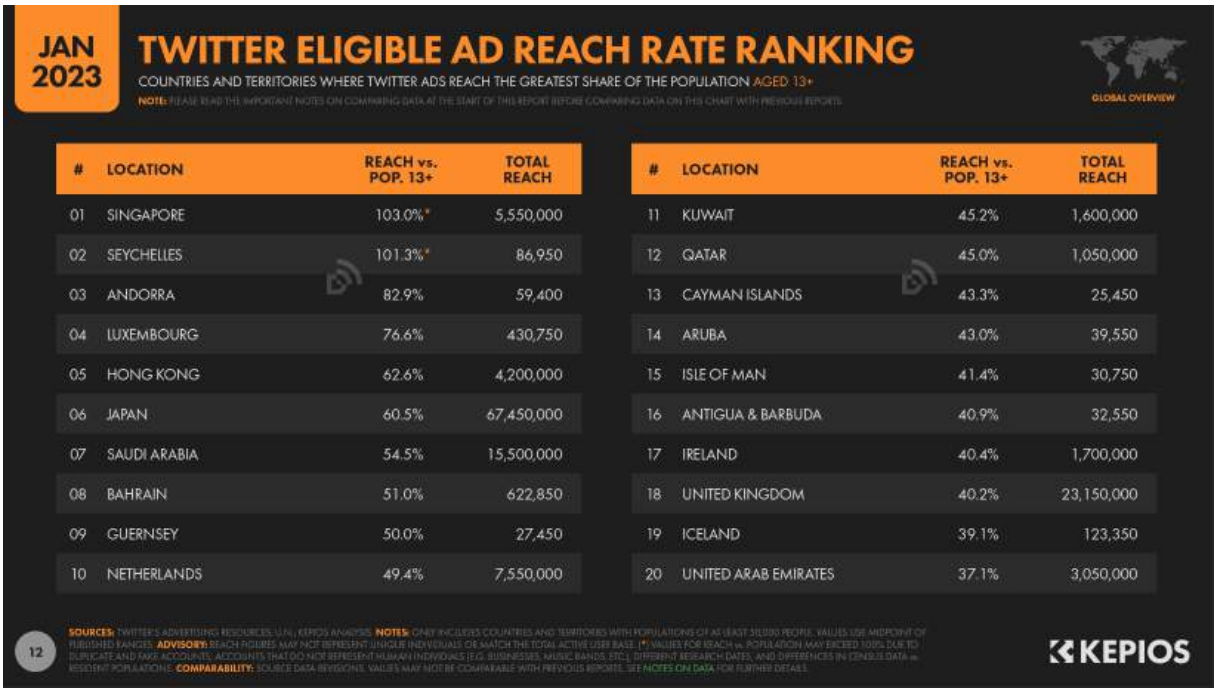


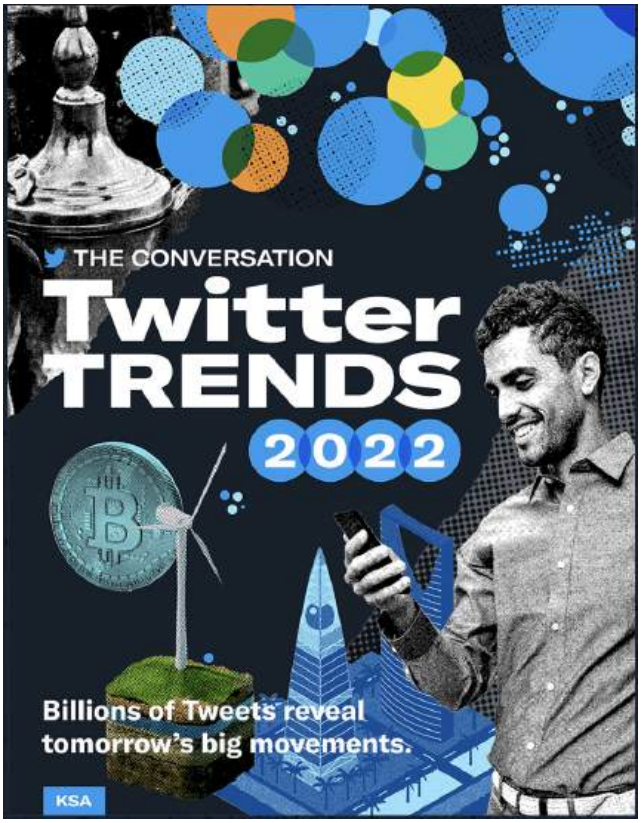
Image via Digital 2023 Twitter Platform Report Q1 2023, by DataReportal

Twitter MENA released a report[170] on the emerging topics people in Saudi Arabia are talking about on the platform.

Three key trends - Finance Goes Social; Eco-innovation; and Identity in Transit - were identified. These translate into conversations about smart cities like Neom,[171] "chasing the Saudi dream," cryptocurrencies and Saudi's 2030 vision.[172]

Another popular theme[173] is soccer. In August, Twitter saw a 74% increase in average monthly football conversations compared to the previous 12 months.

Image via Twitter



[170] https://marketing.twitter.com/en_gb/insights/the-conversation-twitter-trends-2022-ksa (registration required)

[171] https://www.zdnet.com/article/a-city-that-knows-your-every-move-saudi-arabias-new-smart-city-might-be-a-glimpse-of-the-future/

[172] https://www.zdnet.com/article/can-oil-shock-help-kickstart-a-new-tech-dawn-for-saudi-arabia/

[173] https://gulfbusiness.com/twitter-mena-reports-16-yoy-growth-in-average-monetisable-daily-active-users-in-q2-2022/

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4411239

Talking of soccer… **the hashtag #Morocco was tweeted more than one million times in less than an hour after Morocco's victory over Portugal**[174] **in Qatar's World Cup 2022.** The country became the first African and Middle Eastern team[175] to ever reach the international soccer competition's semi-finals.

Their dream of reaching the World Cup final was scuppered by a 2-0 loss to France in the semi-finals, after a run of victories that defied the expectations of many football fans.



Image (r) via Twitter

Twitter signed a deal with beIN Sports who holds exclusive media rights to the 2018 and 2022 World Cups across the MENA region.

The deal entails highlighting major moments throughout the Qatar 2022 World Cup and provide brands and marketers with association opportunities via Twitter Amplify sponsorship.[176]

Through the partnership,[177] **each match would be highlighted on Twitter through content clips, one match recap and an in-studio analysis, aired through the beIN SPORTS official handle, @beINSPORTS.**

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174 https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2022/12/352945/world-cup-morocco-tops-twitter-hashtags-after-victory-against-portugal

175 https://www.newsweek.com/twitter-reacts-morocco-makes-history-reaching-world-cup-semi-finals-1766151

176 https://www.sportbusiness.com/news/twitter-and-bein-strike-2022-world-cup-content-deal-in-mena-region/

177 https://www.albawaba.com/sport/bein-sports-and-twitter-partner-ahead-fifa-world-cup-qatar-2022-1487513

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A former Media Partnerships Manager for Twitter MENA, Ahmad Abouammo, was convicted[178] by a federal jury in the USA on spying charges in December. According to court documents, Abouammo received bribes in exchange for accessing, monitoring, and conveying personal identifiable information for over 6,000 Twitter accounts to officials of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi Royal Family.

“Mr. Abouammo violated the trust placed on him to protect the privacy of individuals by giving their personal information to a foreign power for profit,” said[179] Assistant Attorney General Matthew G. Olsen of the Justice Department’s National Security Division. “His conduct was made all the more egregious by the fact that the information was intended to target political dissidents speaking out against that foreign power.”



Image via Twitter

An investigation based on Twitter's internal files reported that Twitter worked with the Pentagon to promote the United States military’s activities in the Middle East.

“The social networking giant provided direct approval and internal protection to the U.S. military’s network of social media accounts and online personas, whitelisting a batch of accounts at the request of the government,” revealed Lee Fang, an investigative reporter for The Intercept.[180] “The Pentagon has used this network, which includes U.S. government-generated news portals and memes, in an effort to shape opinion in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, and beyond,” he added.

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178 https://americansecuritytoday.com/former-twitter-employee-guilty-of-spying-on-behalf-of-saudi-arabia/

179 https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/former-twitter-employee-sentenced-42-months-federal-prison-acting-foreign-agent

180 https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2022/12/21/twitter-secretly-boosted-us-military-propaganda-investigation

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Assistant professor of Middle East Studies and Digital Humanities at Doha's Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Dr. Marc Owen Jones, shared in a Twitter thread[181] that around 5,000 fake Twitter accounts were used to disrupt a trend which saw Arabic hashtags expressing discontent against normalizing relationships between Saudi Arabia and Israel.

Jones analyzed approximately 40,000 tweets from 12 to 22 July 2022, using the Arabic hashtag "millions_against_normalisation" and the rival hashtag "million_".



Images: Tweets 1 and 8 (of 8) from Jones' analysis of the anti-normalization tweets.

181 https://twitter.com/marcowenjones/status/1550455406652268547?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1550458824976384000%7Ctwgr%5Ea85d4d8cc1801a491397eedd9c4d36e43ccd248f%7Ctwcon%5Es2_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.middleeastmonitor.com%2F20220726-5000-fake-accounts-drowned-out-anti-normalisation-hashtag-during-bidens-saudi-trip%2F - see also https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20220726-5000-fake-accounts-drowned-out-anti-normalisation-hashtag-during-bidens-saudi-trip/

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The Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal is the second largest shareholder of Twitter with 34,948,975 shares - $1.89 Billion. The prince posted a statement[182]t on Twitter addressing Musk and announcing his commitment to the deal.



Image via Twitter

182
https://www.forbes.com/sites/mattdurot/2022/10/31/saudi-prince-alwaleed-becomes-twitters-second-largest-shareholder/?sh=3dc17fdc523a

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Following the launch of Elon Musk's new paid subscription, Twitter Blue, several users took advantage[183] of the service to tweet ironic and offensive remarks while pretending to be high profile figures or brands.

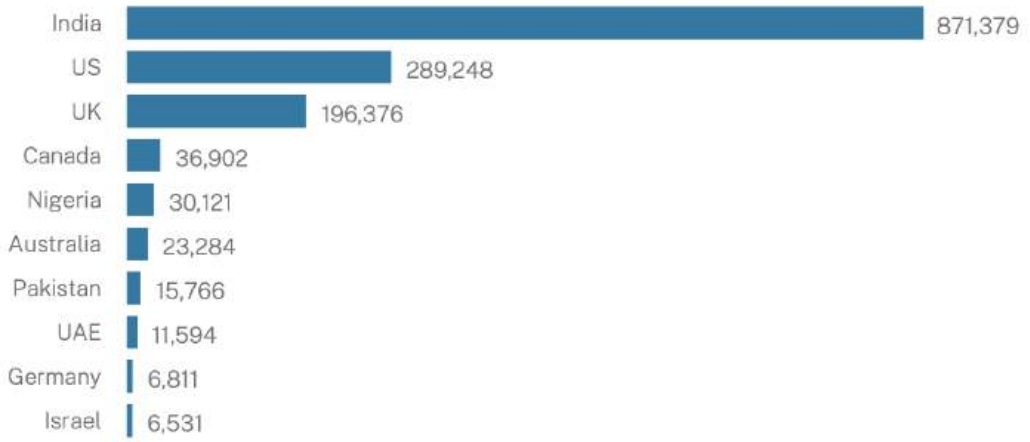
Some of those tweeted about Israeli rights abuse, islamophobia, the Iraq war, and the 9/11 attacks.



Image: A screengrab of two blue-ticked profiles tweeting as the former U.S. President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

A report[184] by the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) in Australia found that nearly 86% of geo-located anti-Muslim posts on Twitter come from the United Stated, the United Kingdom, and India. There were at least 3,759,180 Islamophobic posts made on Twitter between 28 August 2019 and 27 August 2021, the report found.

In response, their recommendations included calling on policymakers to impose a statutory duty of care to protect users from Islamophobia on social media platforms, and for Twitter to begin developing new capabilities for the automatic detection and removal of hateful content; as well as working with experts in Islamophobia to establish an independent oversight body comprised of "to continuously evaluate the effectiveness of moderation policies."



The top 10 countries have the largest number of geolocated Islamophobic tweets. Figure source: Islamophobia in the Digital Age: A Study of anti-Muslim Tweets.

[183] https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/twitter-blue-descends-farce-fake-middle-east-takes-spread
[184] https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2022-08/apo-nid318935.pdf

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4411239

In November, Twitter suspended[185] the Palestine Online account which has over 80,000 followers and is considered to be one of the most influential Palestinian news outlets. The now-active account was suspended for violating Twitter rules, argued Twitter without giving any further details.

Twitter took down[186] the Arabic-language account of the Houthi military spokesman Brigadier General Yahta Saree. By the time of suspension, the account had over 300,000 followers and has been active since 2018. However, at the time this was reported, a second English-language account was still active on Twitter.[187]

Over 100,000 people have signed a petition urging Elon Musk to ban Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenie from Twitter.

A petition on Change.org[188] argues that Ayatollah's regime uses Twitter to spread calls violence and hate while at the same time banning 83 million people from using the platform in his own country. The Ayatollah has nearly two million followers across his five Twitter accounts (which are in English, Spanish, Russian, Farsi and Arabic).



A tweet (r) from the Iranian journalist and activist Masih Alinejad urging Twitter to ban Ayatollah from the platform. Screengrab via Twitter.

The head of research at Twitter MENA said that Twitter users in Saudi Arabia "are spending more consciously - in an era of high inflation, frugality is a hallmark of smart living." The report was based on a survey on shopping habits ahead of White Friday, the Middle Eastern equivalent of Black Friday.[189]

Nearly half (52%) of buyers are actively using Twitter to discover White Friday offers. Nearly half (49%) said when looking to buy a new product that they trust Twitter, and 32% would visit a retailer if they saw a tweet about a sale.

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185 https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20221117-twitter-suspends-palestine-online-account/

186 https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20220411-twitter-suspends-arabic-language-account-of-houthi-military-spokesman/

187 https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20220411-twitter-suspends-arabic-language-account-of-houthi-military-spokesman/

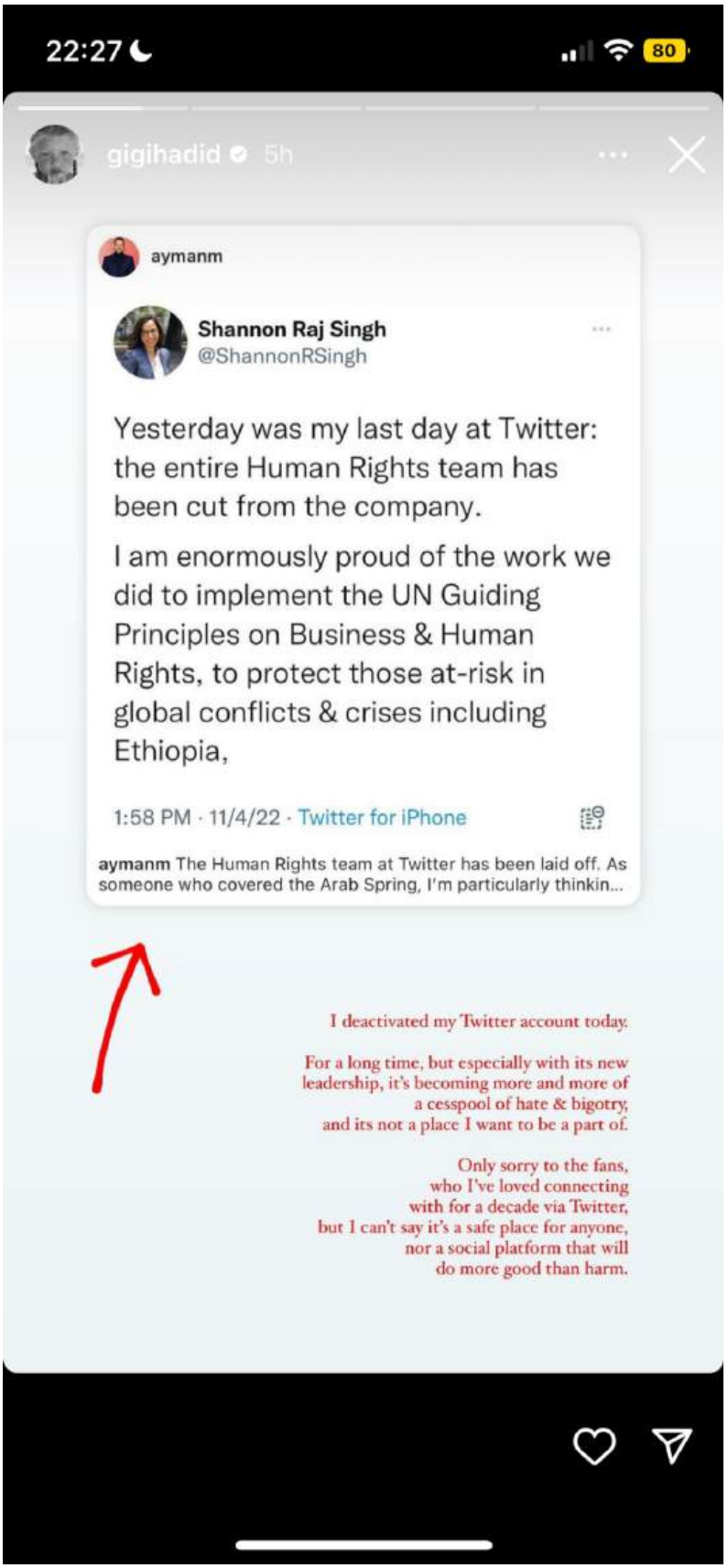
188 https://www.change.org/p/elon-musk-ban-ayatollah-khamenei-from-twitter

189 https://www.arabnews.com/node/2180751/media

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4411239

In September, Twitter replaced[190] the "like" emoji with the flag of Saudi Arabia on the occasion of the Kingdom's 92nd National Day calling users to express feelings of love using the hashtag #Hey_Lana_Dar92.

The Palestinian-Dutch model Gigi Hadid quit Twitter[191] in November, following Elon Musk's takeover of the platform. In her statement, Hadid mentioned that Twitter has become a place of a cesspool of hate and bigotry and that it's no longer a safe place for anyone, especially with its new ownership.



Hadid announcing that she is leaving Twitter on Instagram. Image via Elle.

[190] https://www.spa.gov.sa/viewfullstory.php?lang=en&newsid=2386701
[191] https://people.com/style/gigi-hadid-quits-twitter/

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4411239

9. Freedom of Expression

One of the biggest, and most notable trends seen in 2022 has been multiple efforts to stifle freedom of expression and free speech on social media in the MENA region.

Amnesty International reported[192] that at least 75 people are in jail in at least four countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in what they referred to as violation of the right to freedom of expression, association, or peaceful assembly.

> "Governments in Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain repeatedly repress dissent while investing heavily in rebranding themselves as rights-respecting states. Sport fans should pause for thought and consider the dozens of people languishing behind bars in GCC countries simply for exercising basic rights, and call for their release," said Amna Guellali, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for Middle East and North Africa.



Among the cases highlighted by Amnesty is the imprisonment of Salma al-Shehab who received a 34 year prison sentence - followed by a 34-year travel ban - for her Twitter activity.[193] She used Twitter to follow and retweet dissidents and activists, the Guardian noted.[194]

Image: Salma al-Shehab and her family, via European Saudi Organisation for Human Rights (ESOHR)

Shehab, a PhD student at Leeds University in the UK, was arrested in early 2021 after returning to Saudi Arabia for a holiday. Shehab was given a six-year prison sentence for violating the country's counter-terrorism and anti-cybercrime laws.[195] This was increased to 34 years on appeal, with the additional travel ban added on to the end of her prison sentence. **"The ruling is the longest prison sentence given to a Saudi women's rights defender,"** remarks[196] The Freedom Initiative, a Washington D.C. based NGO.

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192 https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/10/gulf-dont-believe-the-hype-gcc-states-are-as-repressive-as-theyve-ever-been/

193 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-62574102

194 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/16/saudi-woman-given-34-year-prison-sentence-for-using-twitter

195 https://thefreedomi.org/statements/saudi-womens-rights-activist-and-mother-of-two-sentenced-to-34-years-in-jail/

196 https://thefreedomi.org/statements/saudi-womens-rights-activist-and-mother-of-two-sentenced-to-34-years-in-jail/

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“A Saudi court has sentenced a woman to 45 years in prison for allegedly damaging the country through her social media activity,” AP reported[197] in August. According to court documents, Nourah bint Saeel al-Qahtani was accused of damaging the country and “disrupting the cohesion of society” with her posts. “It remains unclear what al-Qahtani posted online or where her hearing was held,” AP added.

In October, the Saudi government sentenced[198] a 72-year-old U.S.-Saudi dual national to 16 years in prison - plus a 16-year travel ban - after tweets were used to find him guilty of trying to destabilize the kingdom and of supporting and funding terrorism.

Almadi was released from prison in March 2023, Axios reports[199], “but the 72-year-old is still under a Saudi imposed travel ban that prohibits him from returning home to Florida.”

The tweets in question were “posted while inside the United States, some of which were critical of the Saudi regime,” The Washington Post said.[200] Saad Ibrahim Almadi, was arrested in November after he traveled from Florida to Riyadh to see his family.

His sentence was based on 14 tweets, Almadi’s son told the BBC. These included criticism of the demolition of old parts of the cities of Mecca and Jeddah, a reference to the slain Saudi Journalist Jamal Khashoggi and concerns over poverty in the Kingdom.



Image: Saad Almadi and his son Ibrahim (left) in an image shared by the Almadi family, via AFP - Getty Images and NBC News

A university professor in Algeria, Hakima Sabayhi, faces six months in prison and a fine of 50,000 dinars on charges of using Facebook to insult the President of the Republic and a statutory body. “Since the news of her prosecution broke, many academic peers, politicians and citizens have stood in solidarity with Sabayhi,” writes[201] Middle East Monitor. “They contend that her trial was part of the effort to restrict activists and prevent them from expressing their opinions.”

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197 https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-social-media-dubai-united-arab-emirates-012f564dd8590142b03d23bff21be0dd

198 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-63301158

199 https://www.axios.com/2023/03/22/saudi-arabia-american-saad-ibrahim-almadi-prison-tweets

200 https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/10/17/almadi-sentenced-tweets-saudi-arabia/

201 https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20221110-algeria-judge-issues-prison-notice-to-professors-for-facebook-posts/

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4411239

A group of 38 regional and international organizations launched[202] a 9-day social media campaign last May to draw attention to attempts by the Algerian authorities to stifle dissent. The online #NotACrime campaign saw bodies such as Human Rights Watch, Justitia Center for Legal Protection of Human Rights in Algeria and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) use their social media accounts to call for an end to the criminalization of those exercising their right to free expression.

More than 300 people had been arrested in the first 3.5 months of 2022 for activities related to freedom of speech, peaceful assembly or association, Amnesty said.[203] Hundreds of others were arrested between 2019-2021 as part of a series of pro-democracy protests[204] known as 'Hirak' (Arabic for "movement").



Image via Article 19

According to a report[205] by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), Russia, Iran, and Saudi Arabia are the three most "prolific perpetrators" of state-linked disinformation on social media. The impact of this may well shape freedom of expression in these countries; as well as overseas.[206]

"Our analysis demonstrates that there is a proliferation of state actors willing to deploy information operations targeting their own domestic populations, as well as those of their adversaries," they wrote. The report was accompanied by a website that provided analysis on 17 countries with accounts taken down by Twitter over recent years.

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[202] https://www.article19.org/resources/notacrime-stop-assault-on-fundamental-freedoms-in-algeria/

[203] https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/05/algeria-campaign-against-increasing-government-repression-of-human-rights/

[204] https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/02/21/algeria-3-years-repression-protest-tightens

[205] https://www.aspi.org.au/report/understanding_global_disinformation_information_operations

[206] https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/twitter-disinformation-state-sponsored-russia-iran-saudi-arabia-worst

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In January 2022, a missile attack by Yemen's Houthis on the UAE capital Abu Dhabi was thwarted[207] by the US military and their UAE partners.

Subsequently, WAM, the official Emirates News Agency, reported[208] that "the Public Prosecution has met with several individuals who circulated a social media video that showed defense forces intercepting Houthi terrorist attacks against critical facilities in the UAE."

"The Public Prosecution advised the public that such videos threaten vital and military facilities in the country and national security and stability," they added, "and urged the public not to circulate videos that may harm the country's security interests."



Image via Twitter

Twitter has blocked the account of the Palestinian journalist and author Dr. Ramzy Baroud claiming that his recent posts about the Israeli attack on Gaza violated their rules. In his response, Baroud argued Twitter's bias against Palestinian freedom of expression on the platform.[209]



A screengrab showing Baroud's ban from Twitter and a Tweet from Ramzy Baroud's Account announcing the lift of the ban and accusing Twitter of censoring him via Twitter.

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[207] https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/24/middleeast/uae-ballistic-missiles-abu-dhabi-intl-hnk/index.html
[208] http://wam.ae/en/details/1395303015124
[209] https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20220811-twitter-blocks-prominent-palestinian-academic-ramzy-barouds-account/

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4411239

In line with previous reports, **tech companies were again criticized[210] for allegedly suppressing Palestinian voices online. The freezing of social media accounts - and the blocking of content - on western owned platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and Twitter, has led Palestinians to move to TikTok, Arab News declared.[211]**



Tweet by Omar Ghraieb, Palestine based Policy and Campaigns Officer at Oxfam, via Twitter

Kollona Amn is an app that enables all citizens and residents in Saudi Arabia to "play the role of a police officer."

Designed to encourage citizens to flag incidents like road accidents, critics fear it's being used[212] to encourage people to point to areas of dissent on social media.

"Despite billing itself as a utility app to speed up 'rescue missions', rights campaigners say it helps authorities cast a wider net for activists and dissidents seen as a threat to the Saudi government," writes[213] Nazih Osseiran, for the Thomson Reuters Foundation (TRF).

Image via Twitter (Context News is run by TRF)



210 https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-palestine-gaza-social-media-companies-accusations-silencing-voices

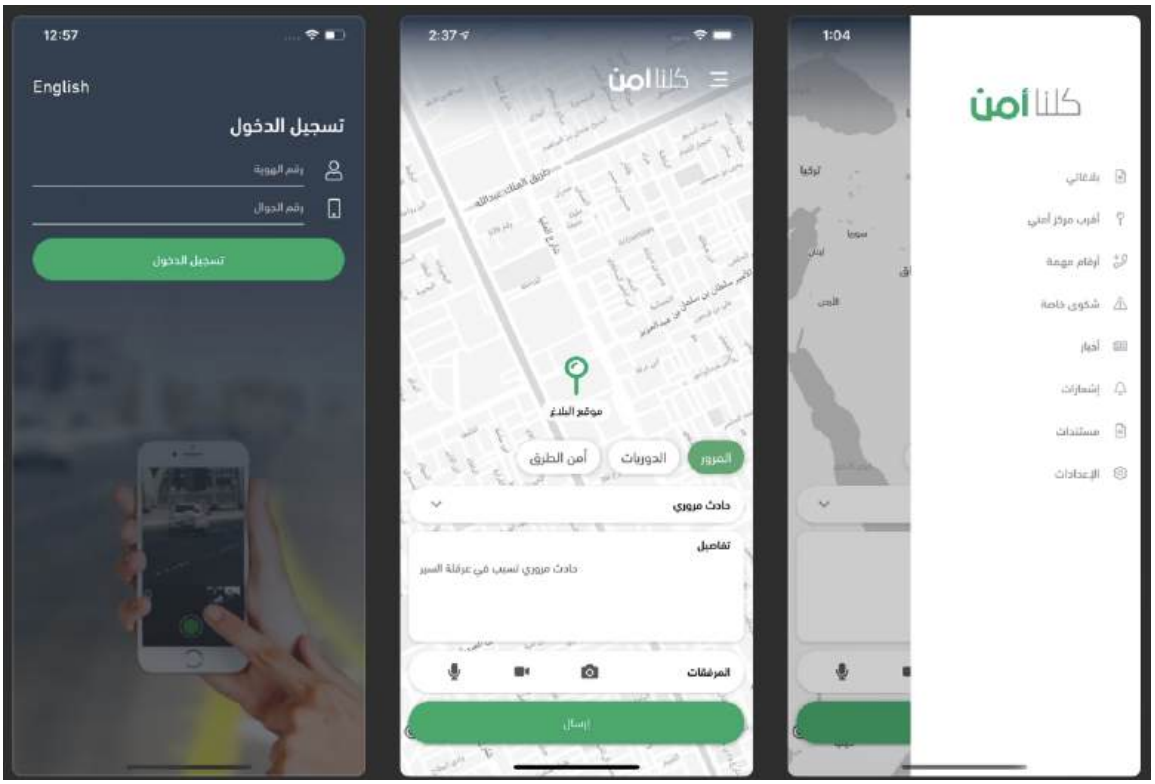
211 https://www.arabnews.com/node/2068206/middle-east

212 https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-palestine-gaza-social-media-companies-accusations-silencing-voices

213 https://jp.reuters.com/article/saudi-tech-rights-idINL8N302364

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Alongside this, “Rights groups say government-employed Twitter trolls scour social media on the lookout for dissent, harassing anyone who appears to digress from the official line,” the article says.



Kollona Amn app. Screengrab from the App Store

Iran imposed a near blackout of social media platforms such as Twitter following an outburst of anti-government protests across the country.

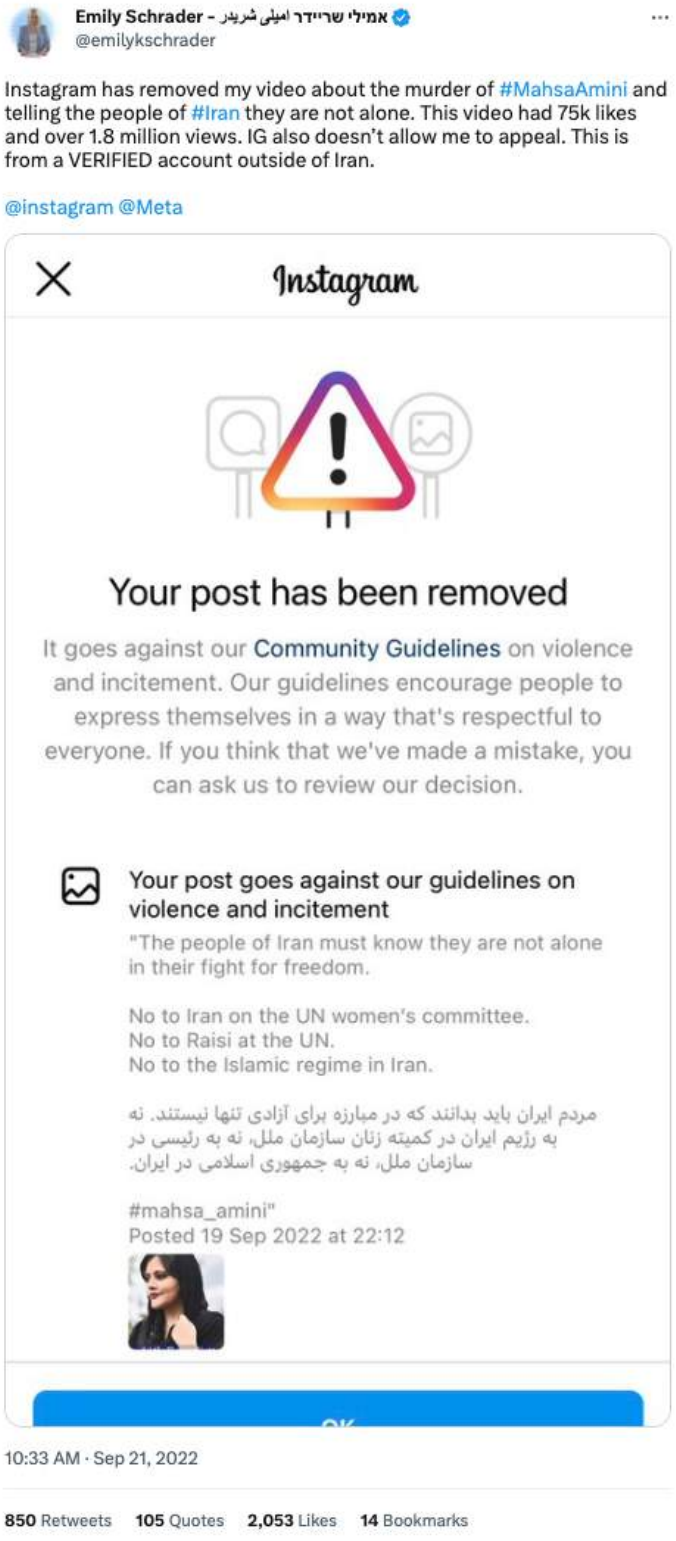
A fierce battle to control the narrative is now being fought online,” CNN wrote,[214] “where supporters and opponents of the government alike are taking to social media to tell their version of the truth and, in some cases, go beyond the truth.”

As part of this, the Iranian government is pushing citizens to use their own version of services like WhatsApp (the Iranian equivalent is called Rubika). However, these apps are vulnerable to surveillance and censorship, Scientific American warns.[215]

At the same time, as DW[216] and the BBC[217] explored, opposition groups and activists argued that platforms such as Twitter and Instagram were removing some anti-Government content.

[214] https://www.cnn.com/2022/10/05/middleeast/social-media-disinformation-mime-intl/index.html
[215] https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-iran-is-using-the-protests-to-block-more-open-internet-access/
[216] https://www.dw.com/en/iran-are-social-media-platforms-censoring-dissent/a-63347228
[217] https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-62996100

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Although the Iranian government is enforcing the blackout in an effort to control the narrative, critics argue this will only encourage the protests to go.

Dr. Babak RezaeeDaryakenari, and Iranian-born an Assistant Professor in the Institute of Political Science at Leiden University in the Netherlands, also points to a tension[218] for the Iranian authorities and their relationship with social media.

> "There are millions of Iranians who generate something of an income through Instagram and other social media. For instance, by advertising their shops or the products that they sell. We are talking about one million direct jobs and eight million indirect ones. This puts the Iranian regime in a bind…"

The Open Observatory of Network Interference (OONI) is just one body tracking the blocking[219] of major social media platforms as well as efforts to by-pass these controls.

"While some circumvention tools (such as Psiphon and Tor) seem to work in Iran, the blocking of Google Play Store and Apple App Store may limit Iranians' ability to install or update apps," they reflect. "Meanwhile, the increased blocking of encrypted DNS services in Iran raises alarms, because the blocking of encrypted DNS will make censorship circumvention – *in an already heavily censored environment* – harder."

Image (left) via Twitter

218 https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/news/2022/11/iranian-regime-in-a-bind-you-cant-just-block-social-media

219 https://ooni.org/post/2022-iran-blocks-social-media-mahsa-amini-protests/

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4411239

10. Fake News and Online Misinformation

False information - intentional and accidental - continues to plague online consumers around the world, including in the MENA region.

> **"**Suspected Kremlin agents peddle falsehoods masquerading as Instagram models. The terrorist organization Hezbollah posts propaganda updates as if it were a news organization. More than 2 million Iraqis join Facebook groups where guns are bought and sold without checks.
>
> Welcome to the world of Arabic-language social media — a Wild West where content moderation is minimal, foreign governments act with abandon, and jihadists foster online hate in arguably some of the world's most war-torn countries.**"**

This memorable opening featured in a Politico article[220] arguing that social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have little effort in enforcing rules that restrict misinformation and politically divisive information in Arabic-language social media.



The claims are based on an analysis by Digital Bridge, Politico's transatlantic tech newsletter, which highlighted issues such as "state-backed falsehoods," lack of monitoring and disparities between how tech giants are addressing misinformation in major western markets and other parts of the world.

Image via Khaled Desouki/AFP via Getty Images and featured in the Politico piece

Meta, Facebook's parent company, has determined[221] that the U.S. military was behind a coordinated campaign that targeted several Middle Eastern countries including Algeria, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Facebook reported that it removed 39 accounts, 16 pages, and two groups and 26 accounts on Instagram for their "coordinated inauthentic behavior."

In total, Meta found about 22,000 accounts followed on one or more of these pages, approximately 400 joined at least one of those groups, and around 12,000 accounts followed one or more of the Instagram accounts.

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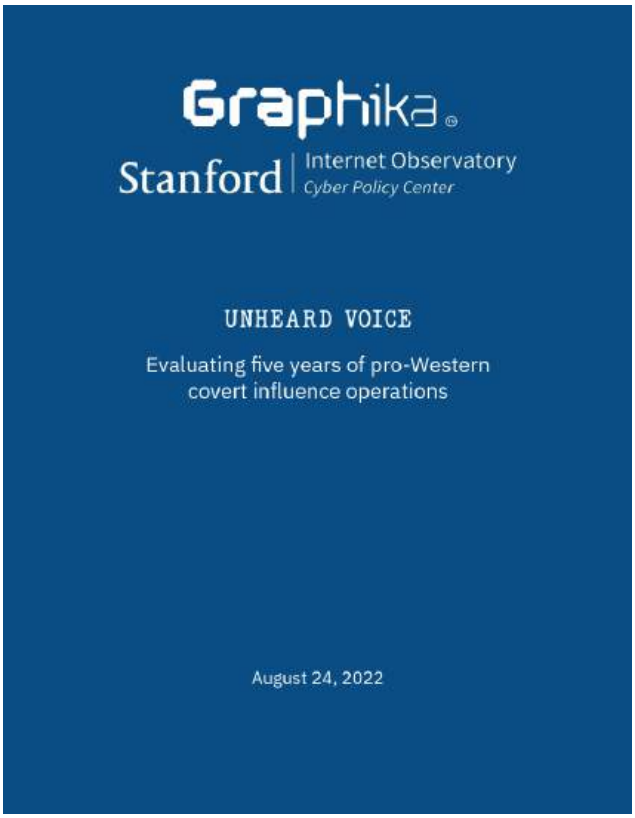
[220] https://www.politico.eu/article/social-media-arabic-twitter-facebook-content-moderation/

[221] https://therecord.media/facebook-attributes-fake-social-media-campaign-targeting-middle-east-to-us-military/

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"The people behind this network posed as locals in the countries they targeted," Meta said in their report.[222] "Some of these accounts used profile photos likely generated using machine learning techniques like GAN (generative adversarial networks)."

"Typically, each cluster posted about particular themes," they added, "including sports and culture in a particular country; cooperation with the United States, including military cooperation; and criticism of Iran, China, or Russia."



"With few exceptions, the study of modern IO (online influence operations) has overwhelmingly focused on activity linked to authoritarian regimes in countries such as Russia, China, and Iran," notes Graphika and the Stanford Internet Observatory, "with recent growth in research on the integral role played by private entities."

Their August 2022 report, "Unheard Voice" points out[223] that this is a global phenomenon, and "the wider range of actors engaged in active operations to influence online audiences."

Image screenshot of the report cover

Turkey's parliament adopted a new law that could jail journalists and social media users for up to three years for spreading disinformation. However, the law's Article 29 has raised concerns over freedom of expression as there is no clear definition of what constitutes false or misleading information, Reuters says.[224]

Two months later, in December 2022, a Turkish court ordered the arrest of a Sinan Aygul, journalist in southeast Turkey, on charges of spreading disinformation on social media.[225] Aygul's arrest comes after he tweeted that a 14-year-old girl was allegedly abused by men including police officers and military personnel. He later retracted the story and apologized for publishing it without confirming it with authorities first. **In February 2023, he was purportedly sentenced to 10 months in prison** the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) shared.[226] Aygül is the first journalist, that they have documented, to be prosecuted under this new law.

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222 https://about.fb.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Quarterly-Adversarial-Threat-Report-Q2-2022-1.pdf

223 https://purl.stanford.edu/nj914nx9540

224 https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/law-that-would-jail-those-spreading-disinformation-progresses-turkey-2022-10-13/

225 https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/first-turkish-court-arrests-journalist-under-disinformation-law-2022-12-15/

226 https://cpj.org/2023/02/turkish-journalist-sinan-aygul-sentenced-to-10-months-in-prison-under-new-disinformation-law/

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In a similar vein, the **Israeli authorities are preparing to pass a bill that, if approved, will allow the Israeli government to remove any social media content they believe constitutes incitement or causes harm.** Arab News reports[227] that the bill will also allow the authorities to block content on all websites including news sites.

A new report from ESET,[228] an IT security software and services provider, found that Android users in the Middle East and South Asia were being targeted by a government-linked group with spyware posing as a fake SecureVPN website.

The malware has no association with SecureVPN and is distributed through a fake SecureVPN website as trojanized versions of two legitimate apps – SoftVPN and OpenVPN. It was also distributed through two legitimate VPN apps, they explain.

"**Malware is able to exfiltrate sensitive data such as contacts, SMS messages, call logs, device location, and recorded phone calls.**

It can also actively spy on chat messages exchanged through very popular messaging apps including Signal, Viber, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Facebook Messenger," the author's comment.

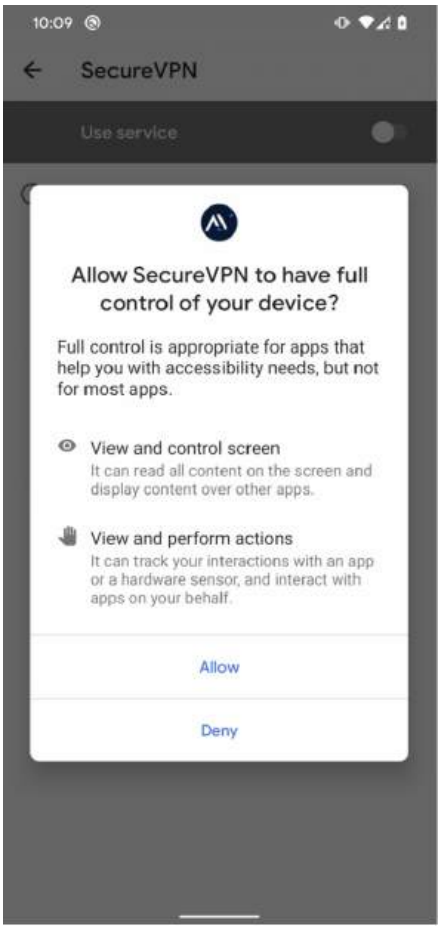


Image source: ESET

An assistant professor of Middle East Studies and Digital Humanities at Doha's Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Dr. Marc Owen Jones, shared that **an army of Twitter sockpuppets usually impersonating female characters are helping drive propaganda messages across the Middle East.** According to Jones, the use of female sock puppets was designed to attract men and aimed at having a "disarming effect" on Twitter users.[229]

Writing for Time, Owen Jones argued[230] that "**when it comes to social media manipulation, the US needs to look closer at its allies, not just its enemies.**" "Authoritarian regimes in the Gulf, along with Western companies and expertise, are using digital technology and social media to try and hack democracy wherever they find it, including in the U.S.," he wrote.

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[227] https://www.arabnews.com/node/2127121/media

[228] https://therecord.media/android-users-in-middle-east-south-asia-targeted-with-spyware-posing-as-fake-vpn-apps

[229] https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/young-female-and-fake-a-guide-to-online-disinformation-in-the-middle-east-53504

[230] https://time.com/6206725/disinformation-middle-east-allies-russia/

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4411239

“The effect is clearest, however, in the Middle East,” he added, noting the shift from the optimism of the Arab Spring and the excitement at that time of social media as a tool for good. “With critics silenced through incarceration, surveillance, torture, or death, opposition voices are increasingly fearful of self-expression, meaning that the digital public sphere is simply a space to praise the regime or engage in banal platitudes.”



Tweet 2 of 16 Jones published on his account examining and identifying MENA sockpuppet networks. Screengrab via Twitter.

“Yemen’s horrifying civil war is paralleled by a second conflict in the information space—in digital and traditional media and over control of the internet itself,” writes[231] the political scientist Robert Muggah in Foreign Policy. “As we all know by now, persistent contact with fake news is disruptive even in stable contexts. In war zones, it can be lethal,” he adds.

“Fortunately, a generation of tech-savvy Yemini activists is taking the lead in pushing back against digital harms,” he observes.

> “Young Yemenis are leveraging Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok to advocate for more attention to the crisis. Some users are weaving hard facts and figures about the armed conflict into catchy mini-videos reaching hundreds of thousands of viewers. Their efforts—together with outside support to bolster trusted networks and promote awareness of online influence operations—will help Yemenis build immunity against the digital warfare that is inflaming local grievances and prolonging the conflict.”

[231] https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/01/06/yemen-war-internet-media-houthis-iran-saudi-arabia/

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About the Authors and Report Team

Damian Radcliffe is a journalist, researcher, and professor based at the University of Oregon. He holds an endowed chair as the Carolyn S. Chambers Professor in Journalism, and he is also a Professor of Practice, an affiliate faculty member 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).



Damian is a three time Knight News Innovation Fellow at 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).

In spring 2023 he will be a Visiting Fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford, his alma mater.

With over 25 years of experience in the media industry, Damian has worked in editorial, strategic, research, policy and teaching roles in the USA, Middle East and UK. He continues to be an active journalist, writing regular features for leading trade publications such as Digital Content Next, International Journalists' Network (IJNet), What's New in Publishing, journalism.co.uk and other outlets.

He is a globally recognized expert on digital trends, social media, technology, the business of media, the evolution of present-day journalistic practice and the role played by media and technology in the Middle East.

Damian has produced an annual report charting social media developments across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) since 2012; and he wrote a monthly column on technology in the MENA region for ZDNet between December 2013 and May 2022. 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.

As an analyst, researcher and trainer, he has worked with a range of industry and academic organizations including the BBC World Service, Facebook, FIPP, INMA, Thomson Reuters Foundation, World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) and the United Nations.

He has been quoted on issues relating to digital media and journalism by major outlets such as AFP, BBC, Business Insider, Editor & Publisher, NPR, The New York Times, Snapchat, Wired and Voice of America. As a freelance journalist his work has also been published by leading publications and trade outlets such as the BBC, Columbia Journalism Review (CJR), Harvard's Nieman Lab, HuffPost, PBS MediaShift, Poynter, TheMediaBriefing and ZDNet.

Originally from the UK, Damian lives on the west coast of the US with his wife and three young children. He tweets @damianradcliffe.

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Hadil Abuhmaid is a Media Studies Doctoral Candidate at the University of Oregon, Oregon. This is the fourth annual social media report she has co-authored with Damian Radcliffe

Hadil 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 identity and 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 produced post-second *Intifada*.

Her research interests include cinema studies, diasporic studies, race and representation, 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, a member of Rehearsals for Life; a theater ensemble made up of graduate students that utilizes applied theater to inspire dialogue and provide experiential learning experiences around issues of diversity, equity and access across campus and beyond, and a board member of Creating Connections; a graduate student group that supports traditionally marginalized populations in U.S. higher education.



Nii Mahliaire is a Ph.D. Candidate in Communication and Media Studies at the University of Oregon. They are proudly enrolled in the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior (Ojibwe) having grown up in Northern Minnesota, surrounded by a wonderful community and traditional Indigenous values.

She graduated from Bemidji State University with a B.S. in Mass Communication and a B.F.A. in Creative and Professional Writing.

Her focus is on Health Communication. Nii provided Damian and Hadil with additional research support for this report.

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Previous Annual Research Reports

How the Middle East Uses Social Media: 2021 edition
By Damian Radcliffe with Hadil Abuhmaid

Available via University of Oregon Scholars' Bank, ResearchGate, Academia.edu and SSRN.

How the Middle East used Social Media in 2020
By Damian Radcliffe and Hadil Abuhmaid

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.

Social Media in the Middle East: 2019 in review
By Damian Radcliffe and Hadil Abuhmaid

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State of Social Media, Middle East: 2018
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Available on University of Oregon Scholars' Bank, SlideShare, Scribd, Academia.edu, UNESCO / United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Media Literacy Portal, SSRN. or download it here.

Social Media in the Middle East: The Story of 2015
By Damian Radcliffe

Available via Scribd, SlideShare, University of Oregon Scholars' Bank, Academia.edu, ResearchGate, SSRN and the UNESCO Media Literacy Portal.

Social Media in the Middle East: The Story of 2014
By Damian Radcliffe

Also available from Scribd, SlideShare, SSRN, ResearchGate and Academia.edu.

Reports produced by Damian Radcliffe for Qatar's Ministry of Information and Communications Technology (ictQATAR):

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

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

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This report is being hosted by the University of Oregon-UNESCO Crossings Institute.

The University of Oregon-UNESCO Crossings Institute for Conflict-Sensitive Reporting and Intercultural Dialogue was launched at the University of Oregon in 2013 with offices at the School of Journalism and Communication Turnbull Center in the White Stag block in Portland and on the University of Oregon campus.

It continues the work begun by the UO's Center for Intercultural Dialogue – which was established in 2008 to engage students, faculty and community members in building a global community through education and dialogue.

The faculty directors at the University of Oregon are Peter Laufer, the James Wallace Chair Professor in Journalism, School of Journalism and Communication; and Steven Shankman, Professor Emeritus, UNESCO Chair in Trans-cultural Studies, Inter-religious Dialogue, and Peace; Distinguished Professor of English and Classics; Participating Faculty Member, Comparative Literature.

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A stipend was made available to Damian Radcliffe to work on this report, in his role as the Chambers Chair in Journalism at the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication (SOJC)

With a century-long history, the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication is one of the first professional journalism schools in the country, the only accredited comprehensive journalism program to include advertising and public relations in the Pacific Northwest, and one of only 112 accredited programs worldwide.

It is home to nearly 2,000 undergraduate students in four majors and more than 150 graduate students in six programs, supported by over 75 instructional faculty members and 35 staff.

Founded in 1916 by renowned newspaper journalist Eric W. Allen, the SOJC is built on a legacy of ethics, innovation, action, and excellence that's over a century in the making. is a community dedicated to excellence in learning, research, and creative projects.

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