

Social Media in the Middle East and North Africa

2025 edition

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Executive Summary

Social media in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has become a primary source of how people in the Arab World work, rest and play. It is a means to view a wide variety of content, news and information, as well as a space for research, shopping, as well as the expression of opinions and cultural exchange. Here are the key headline findings from across the study.

1. The Creator Economy Has Come of Age

The GCC's creator economy has grown by 75% over two years, with Saudi Arabia alone recording 32% growth in Q1 2025. TikTok is arguably the main driver of this expansion, reshaping entertainment and shopping in much of the Gulf region.

The UAE has consolidated its position as the region's premier hub for content creators, supported by Golden Visa schemes, 0% income tax, and landmark institutional infrastructure including YouTube academies and the 1 Billion Followers Summit.

Meanwhile, influencer marketing has graduated from being a source of small, or often experimental marketing campaigns, to a cornerstone many brand strategies.

2. Arab Youth Are Defining the Digital Future

With approximately 55% of the MENA population under the age of 30, young people are not simply consumers of social media, they are often its architects, shaping the use of platforms to meet their own needs.

This demographic harnesses social media for a wide range of purposes and activities, covering entertainment, news, politics, community, commerce and culture, even as they navigate structural barriers such as high unemployment, political exclusion, and educational challenges.

3. Freedom of Expression Faces Mounting Pressure

The year 2025 was marked by escalating state restrictions on digital expression across much of the region. Saudi Arabia executed journalist Turki al-Jasser in June 2025, the first high-profile state killing of a journalist since the extra-judicial killing Jamal Khashoggi in 2018. Egypt arrested or prosecuted at least 29 content creators between July and August 2025. Jordan banned 12 independent news websites. Iran imposed sweeping internet shutdowns. TikTok removed nearly 19 million videos from MENA in Q2 2025 alone. At the same time, post-Assad Syria offers cautious optimism, with exiled journalists returning and independent outlets slowly rebuilding.

4. Platform Data Reveals MENA's Global Digital Prominence

Saudi Arabia and the UAE rank first and second globally for TikTok reach relative to population. Saudi Arabia also leads the world for YouTube reach, while the UAE tops the global LinkedIn ranking. These figures reflect the region's extraordinary social media saturation in these markets.

More widely, social media advertising in MENA is projected to reach \$4.26 billion in 2025, concentrated on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.

5. Tourism, Travel, and Influencer-Led Marketing

MENA governments and airlines have embraced creator-led promotion as a core tourism strategy.



Prominent examples from 2025 include Cristiano Ronaldo helped to promote Saudi Arabia's Red Sea Global development, Jordan's "Kingdom of Time" campaign drove 76,000 visits in its first two weeks.

Meanwhile, Qatar, the UAE, and Etihad Airways are among those formalizing partnerships with content creator, as influencer marketing continued to grow in popularity.

Image: Cristiano Ronaldo and Georgina Rodríguez [via](#) Red Sea Global

6. Regulation Is Diverging Across the Region

Regulatory approaches to social media and creator economies are far from uniform. All social media influencers and content creators, including freelancers, in the UAE must obtain a mandatory Advertiser Permit, while Iraq has introduced fees and content mandates that critics argue enable censorship. Egypt, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia are among the MENA nations that use platform policies and legal tools as part of their efforts to manage online expression. Sudan's conflict has effectively destroyed its domestic media, resulting in coverage being led by exiled journalists and outlets, alongside a new class of grassroots 'verification creators'.

The Road Ahead

MENA's digital trajectory walks the line between opportunity and peril.

The region is a major creative hub, home to investment, innovation and the rapid adoption of new social media habits, but progress is uneven and, in some countries, actively repressed.

This report demonstrates the promise and the complexity of that story.

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Introduction

The social media landscape in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) continues to shift in ways that demand fresh examination. This report is the latest in a [series](#)¹ dating back to 2012, led by Damian Radcliffe, and co-authored since 2017 with students at the University of Oregon.

The 2025 edition takes a different approach from the more platform-led iterations of previous years. Instead, we have intentionally focused on some of the biggest meta (no pun intended) trends shaping the social media scene in the MENA region.

This report offers a series of specialist lenses, each diving into a major issue shaping and influencing the Middle East's social media scene. Each chapter is authored by a different contributor, writing from their own vantage point, in their own voice.

That heterogeneity reflects the geographic coverage of this report. After all, the MENA region features more than 20 countries, several hundred million people, multiple languages and dialects, diverse histories and cultures, political systems, and starkly different levels of digital infrastructure and social media use.

Nevertheless, readers will notice that although each chapter has a different style and approach, they all share a commitment to grounding observations in quantifiable evidence. Throughout we have drawn on published data including platform statistics, reporting by leading business and trade publications, NGOs, academic literature, and other reliable sources.

Social media is integral to large parts of economic, political, and cultural life in MENA. For many people it is the primary means by which they understand the world around them. As such, it continues to be worthy of study, and we hope you find the insights in this report as interesting and insightful as we do.

Damian Radcliffe, Oregon, April 2026

¹ <https://unesco.uoregon.edu/middle-east/>

Methodology

This report covers social media developments principally from 2025, with some references to early 2026, and longer trends, where this context is helpful.

The report is a multi-authored, editorial compilation rather than a primary research study. Each chapter is the work of an individual expert contributor who has drawn on their own research expertise, professional experience, and source access to tell the story of one key area related to social media in the Middle East.

Chapters cover the following thematic areas:

- Freedom of expression, press freedom, and media repression
- The creator economy and influencer marketing
- Arab youth, Gen Z, and digital media consumption
- Platform data and the state of digital infrastructure across MENA

Contributors produced thematic chapters in Q1 2026 on the basis of their domain expertise and interest. They were then peer reviewed by the other authors and consolidated into a single report.

Editorial review focused on factual accuracy, source attribution, clarity, and internal consistency. Where contributors have offered interpretive judgments - as they are invited to do - these are their own and do not represent the position of any institutional sponsor or the editors.

The decision to preserve individual authorial voices across chapters is deliberate; and we believe that this makes for a more engaging and interesting report, as each chapter is written from the expert vantage point of its author.

In terms of geographic scope, the study centers on the Arab and Arabic speaking world, with Turkey and Iran included where their trajectories intersect significantly with the broader regional picture.

This report does not include a dedicated chapter on Israel and Gaza, and references to it are limited. That is a deliberate editorial decision, not an oversight, and it warrants explanation. We judged that the conflict's scale and complexity warranted dedicated treatment rather than compression into a single chapter, and that other researchers are better placed to provide this detail, and to tell this complex, fast-moving story.

Similarly, readers will notice that this report skews heavily toward the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, and in particular the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The reasons for this are structural rather than editorial. Publicly available data on social media use outside of these two markets is much more limited and is arguably harder to find than in previous years. As a result, this report reflects the availability of data and case studies at the time of writing. Where contributors have been able to address a wider range of countries they have done so.

We have cited sources throughout and encourage readers to dig deeper into these primary datapoints, which include industry reports, studies by NGOs and media reporting. They will allow audiences to further explore the themes in this report, and the latest developments in this space.

Chapter 1: Freedom of Expression in the MENA Region

Nishtha Yadav

Several countries in the MENA region lack laws that guarantee citizens' access to information. As a result, the region faces legal, institutional, and cultural barriers that hinder citizens' ability to exercise their right to information and to participate meaningfully in public life.

In turn, this also impedes their capacity to hold institutions and governments accountable. Furthermore, the right to free speech is fundamentally compromised when the public lacks access to information.

It is against this backdrop that events from 2025 played out and need to be understood. This report chapter examines different elements related to freedom of expression through the lens of digital rights, the ability of journalists to do their work safely and without impediment, activism and responses to it, as well as regulatory frameworks across MENA.

1.1 Digital Expression and Control

In Tunisia, the government dissolved the National Commission for Access to Information (INAI) in August 2025, thereby shutting down the [only independent body responsible for ensuring citizens' access to public information](#). By erasing this institution, [Article 19](#)² noted that the country has stripped citizens, journalists, and civil society organizations of the only effective mechanism to contest authorities' refusal to provide information, or to compel government disclosure. Tunisian human rights and journalist groups denounced this move, with the [head of the National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists \(SNJT\)](#),³ Zied Dabbar, stating that, "We cannot speak of press freedom if there is no access to information. From now on, there will only be the official narrative, which will lead to propaganda."

Later in the year, in Iran, protests began on December 28, 2025, [amid soaring inflation and the Iranian authorities' failure to uphold the economic, social and cultural rights of the citizens](#)⁴. The mass nationwide saw protests calling for the end of the Islamic Republic System and demanding a new system of government that protects and respects people's human rights and dignity. The protests were met with lethal force, mass arrests and internet blackout, and [according to a Reuters report](#)⁵, the U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) verified 3,090 deaths, including 2,885 protesters, and over 22,000 arrests.

² [Tunisia: An end to transparency – and the last safeguard of democracy](#)

³ [Tunisia rights groups denounce closure of freedom of information agency](#)

⁴ [What happened at the protests in Iran?: Amnesty International](#)

⁵ [Iran's leader Khamenei accuses Trump of inciting deadly protests](#)

While this is not the first time the Iranian authorities have temporarily shut down the internet during anti-government protests, [so far it is the longest and most extensive](#)⁶. Further, the Iranian regime has been accused by Article 19 of utilizing Russian and Chinese technology to aid its crackdown on recent protests. The report, [Tightening the Net: China's infrastructure of oppression in Iran, published by Article 19](#)⁷, outlines how China has provided support to Iran since 2010, expanding the country's surveillance and censorship infrastructure.

Michael Caster, Head of Article 19 Global China Programme, highlighted that in the pursuit of total control over the digital space, Iran borrows from China's model of digital authoritarianism. "From Chinese companies embedded inside Iran's infrastructure, to Iran's support for China's 'cyber sovereignty' principles based on censorship and surveillance, both countries align in their ambition to disconnect their populations from the open, global internet," added Caster.

These moves followed earlier developments, which had seen the [regime's parliament pass the "Combating the Spread of Untrue News Content" bill on July 27, 2025](#)⁸. While framed as the regime's effort to curb misinformation on social media, the bill has been criticized as an attempt to deepen censorship, criminalize dissent, and consolidate the state's monopoly over information. [Critics of the legislation](#)⁹ argued that it would prompt journalists and activists to censor themselves out of fear of prosecution. Further, the legislation sought to regulate every stage of news reporting, from gathering information to publication, through criminal law rather than civil law. However, after public outcry, on July 30, 2025, the administration of reformist President Masud Pezeshkian [withdrew the bill](#)¹⁰ "to maintain national unity."

1.2 Missing Journalists in the Region

As per [Reporters Without Borders](#)¹¹ (RSF), 67 media professionals were killed worldwide between December 1, 2024 and December 1, 2025. Nearly half (43%) were killed in Gaza by the Israeli armed forces, and 79% of the journalists were victims of armed forces or paramilitary groups (37) and criminal networks (16). Reflecting on this, Thibaut Bruttin, RSF Director General, said, "Let us be wary of false notions about reporters: no one gives their life for journalism — it is taken from them. Journalists do not just die — they are killed."

⁶ [Amid Two-Week Internet Blackout, Some Iranians Are Getting Back Online](#)

⁷ [Tightening the Net: China's infrastructure of oppression in Iran](#)

⁸ [Iran's Regime Passes Repressive "Untrue Content" Law as Internet Freedom Reaches New Lows](#)

⁹ [Iran Pushes Ahead With 'Fake News' Bill That Critics Say Guts Free Speech](#)

¹⁰ [Iran Withdraws 'Fake News' Bill After Public Outcry](#)

¹¹ [2025 ROUND-UP of journalists killed, detained, missing and held hostage worldwide](#)

In the MENA region, [violence and abuse against journalists escalated in 2025](#), RSF data shows¹². In Yemen, seven journalists were taken hostage by the Houthis in 2025, bringing the number of journalists held hostage by them to nine. This makes [the paramilitary group the world's leading captor of journalists](#)¹³. In Sudan, four journalists were killed, at least two of whom died after being abducted by the Rapid Support Forces. Meanwhile, a year after the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria, 37 journalists are still missing in the country, notes [RSF](#)¹⁴.

As per a [Committee to Protect Journalists \(CPJ\) report](#)¹⁵ published on February 25, 2026, 129 journalists were killed worldwide last year, of which Israel was responsible for two-thirds of the deaths, CPJ found.

Killers in five nations were responsible for 84% of journalist deaths in 2025

For a link to a full list of 129 killings, click [here](#).

Ranking	Country	Journalists killed
1st	Israel*	86
2nd	Sudan	9
3rd	Mexico	6
4th	Russia**	4
5th	Philippines	3

All counts include both *work-related and possibly work-related* killings of journalists and media workers.

*Includes journalists killed by Israel in Gaza, Yemen, and Iran; a *Palestinian militia* killed one Palestinian journalist, who was excluded from this count.

**Count represents Ukrainian journalists killed in Ukraine by *Russian forces*.

Table: Charles Spicer • Source: The Committee to Protect Journalists • Created with Datawrapper

Image via [CPJ](#)

More journalists and media workers were killed in 2025 than in any other year since the CPJ began documentation in 1992.

One alarming trend in the 2025 data is the growing number of journalists killed by drones, remotely controlled aircraft that can identify targets from the air. Turkey is responsible for 10% of all the journalists killed by drones in the last three years, CPJ says, with most of the killings taking place in 2024. Further, in March 2025, [three Sudanese state television network journalists and their driver were killed in a drone strike by the Rapid Support Forces](#).¹⁶

¹² [2025, a deadly year for journalists: this is where hate and impunity lead](#)

¹³ [Yemen: journalist arrests spike across the country, RSF calls for their immediate liberation](#)

¹⁴ [2025, a deadly year for journalists: this is where hate and impunity lead](#)

¹⁵ [Record 129 press members killed in 2025; Israel responsible for 2/3 of deaths](#)

¹⁶ [Sudan's Rapid Support Forces kill 3 state TV journalists and their driver in drone strike](#)

Amid war, combatants use drones more frequently to fatally silence reporters

Drone use against journalists has been escalating, with **two deaths** recorded in 2023, **21 in 2024**, and at least **39 in 2025**. In total, 62 journalists have been killed by drones in the last three years.

Israel was responsible for nearly 75% of the journalists killed by drones from 2023 to 2025. Turkey's attacks in Iraq and Syria account for another 10%.

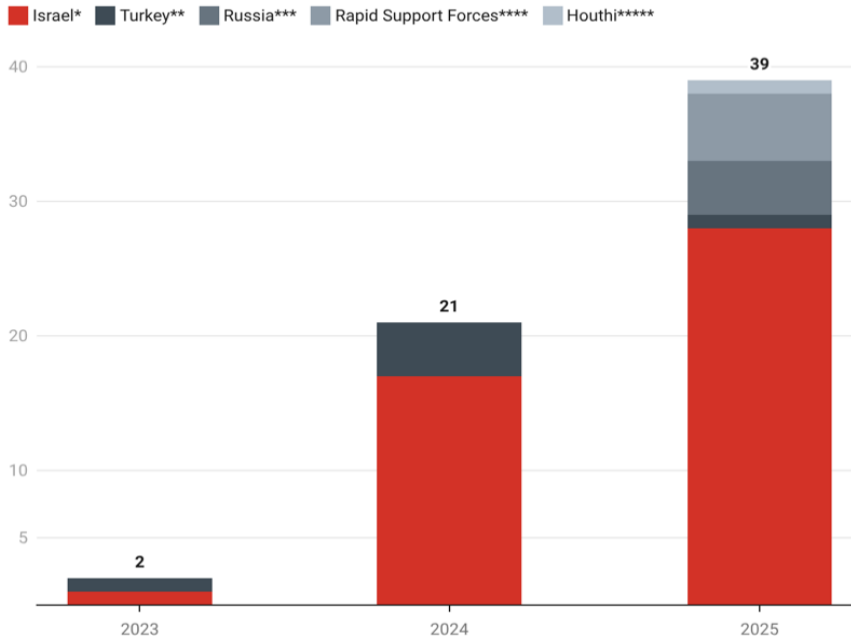


Image via [RSF](#)

*Israeli military forces (Killings of Palestinian journalists in Gaza)
**Suspected Turkish military forces (Killings in Iraq, Syria)
***Russian military forces (Ukraine)
****Paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) (Sudan)
*****Houthi rebel forces (Yemen)

Chart: Charles Spicer • Source: The Committee to Protect Journalists • Created with Datawrapper

1.3 Journalists, Creators and Activists Detained in the Region

Across the MENA region, authorities continue to suppress free expression and silence independent voices, including journalists, activists and influencers. Along with detention and politically motivated charges, state repressions also include police violence, censorship, denial of access to information, digital threats and incitement, arbitrary prosecutions and imprisonment.

Human Rights Watch noted in their [January 2025](#)¹⁷ report that in a severe crackdown on dissent, over 50 people were being held on political grounds for exercising their rights in Tunisia. In Tunisia, [the Decree-law No. 54 of 2022](#)¹⁸ on cybercrime is being used to prosecute and imprison political figures, activists and journalists, leading to self-censorship and eroding press freedom.

¹⁷ [Tunisia: Arbitrary Detention Crushes Dissent](#)

¹⁸ [MENA: Media freedom still under attack across the region](#)

Meanwhile, a 47-year-old teacher in Saudi Arabia, Asaad bin Nasser al-Ghamdi, was arrested in 2022 and sentenced to 20 years in prison, later reduced to 15 years, for social media posts criticizing the government’s Vision 2030 program and expressing condolences over the death of a prominent human rights defender. [He was released by the state in February 2025](#)¹⁹. As per reports by [Freedom House](#)²⁰ and the [US Commission on International Religious Freedom](#)²¹, he was also subjected to psychological and physical torture in multiple detention centers, including Dhahban and Al-Hayer prisons.

503 JOURNALISTS DETAINED

AS OF THE PUBLICATION OF THIS REPORT



At least*
77 WOMEN
422 MEN

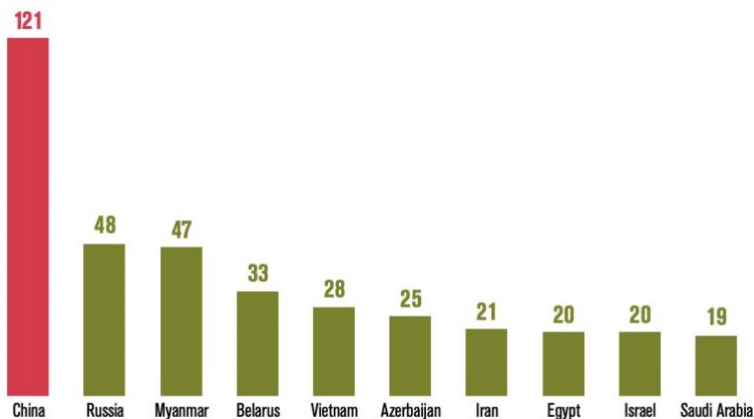


(*) The gender of anonymous detainees is not disclosed

The three largest prisons for Journalists

China (121), Russia (48) and Myanmar (47)

The world's ten largest prisons for Journalists



In Qatar, the internet activist [Umm Naseer was sentenced to three years in prison](#)²² for social media posts after criticizing judicial corruption in the country, with reports emerging that she was physically assaulted and ill-treated in detention.

[Her conviction](#)²³ comes after the Saudi Council of Ministers approved a security agreement to exchange personal data and information of citizens between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, a move IFEX notes “[puts their \[i.e. citizens\] digital privacy, including that of human rights and internet activists, at grave risk](#)²⁴.”

Ahmed Mansoor, a Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) advisory board member and member of the MENA Division Advisory Committee for Human Rights Watch, and academic Dr. Nasser Bin Ghaith from the UAE were among the five people who were sentenced to 15 years in prison.

¹⁹ [Saudi Arabia: Further Information: Asaad bin Nasser al-Ghamdi Released from Prison](#)

²⁰ [Saudi Arabia: Key Developments, June 1, 2024 – May 31, 2025 \(Freedom House\)](#)

²¹ [Assad bin Nasser al-Ghamdi: USCIRF](#)

²² [MENA: Media freedom still under attack across the region](#)

²³ [GGHR: Umm Naseer](#)

²⁴ [Internet activists sentenced to prison while security agreement made with Saudi Arabia](#)

The sentence followed accusations of “[cooperating with the terrorist organization and supporting it in articles and tweets they published on social media, knowing its anti-state objectives.](#)” Both were [already serving 10-year sentences for their human rights advocacy. Ahmed Mansoor remains in solitary confinement.](#)²⁵

In the GCC, [Saudi Arabia employs pervasive surveillance and criminalizes dissent](#)²⁶, while mobilizing sectarian and ethnic divisions to regulate political and online expression. Individuals who criticize the regime continue to face persecution, including prison sentences for even peaceful online speech.

After being detained for seven years, [in June 2025, Saudi journalist Turki al-Jasser was executed after being convicted of terrorism and treason charges based on online publications where he discussed politically sensitive issues](#)²⁷. [It was the first high-profile killing of a journalist by the state since the 2018 murder of Jamal Khashoggi](#)²⁸, the Washington Post columnist and prominent critic of the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman.

In response, expressing views also shared by others [CPJ Chief Program Officer Carlos Martínez de la Serna said](#)²⁹: “The international community’s failure to deliver justice for Jamal Khashoggi did not just betray one journalist; it emboldened de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to continue his persecution of the press, and today, another Saudi journalist has paid the price.”



Image [via](#) Sanad Organization

²⁵ [Supreme Court upholds sentences of those convicted in UAE84 case, including GCHR’s Board member Ahmed Mansoor](#)

²⁶ [Freedom on the Net: Saudi Arabia \(2025\)](#)

²⁷ [Reign of terror in Saudi Arabia: the execution of journalist Turki al-Jasser demands an international response](#)

²⁸ [A Saudi journalist tweeted against the government – and was executed for ‘high treason’](#)

²⁹ [Saudi Arabia executes journalist Turki al-Jasser on treason, terrorism charges](#)

Beyond media professionals and journalists, authorities in the MENA region have also targeted content creators and influencers for their voices, in many cases criminalizing their right to free speech. For instance, the Egyptian authorities arrested or prosecuted at least 29 people between July and August 2025 for online content.

As per [Human Rights Watch report](#)³⁰, the charges included “violating public morals, undermining family values, and money laundering, stemming from what they said were “indecent” videos posted on social media platforms like TikTok.”

One such example is Suzy El Ordoneya, an influencer from Egypt with nearly 9.3 million followers on TikTok, who discusses social issues, sings or dances. The public prosecution ordered her pretrial detention on August 4, 2025, with her detention being renewed for 15 days pending investigation on charges of publishing indecent videos and money laundering.



Image [via Qantara.de](#)

In September 2025, [four TikTok creators in Somalia were arrested after their video allegedly mocking President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud went viral online](#). The men were dancing to a remixed version of a campaign song originally used during Mohamud’s 2022 election campaign; however, the lyrics were remixed to include derogatory remarks directed at the President³¹. The arrests sparked a debate: while supporters of the creators argued that the video was satire and fell within free expression, others insisted that it crossed a line, especially in a country where political institutions are vulnerable.

³⁰ [Egypt: Mass Crackdown Targets Online Content Creators](#)

³¹ [Somali Authorities Arrest TikTok Users Over Video Mocking President](#)

According to a [February 2026 report by iMEdD](#)³², a non-profit organization established to enhance transparency, credibility, and independence in journalism, highlighted how journalists in Sudan face harassment, killings, arrests, and hunger. Moreover, in the case of female journalists, sexual violence is used as a “weapon to threaten them and to silence them.”

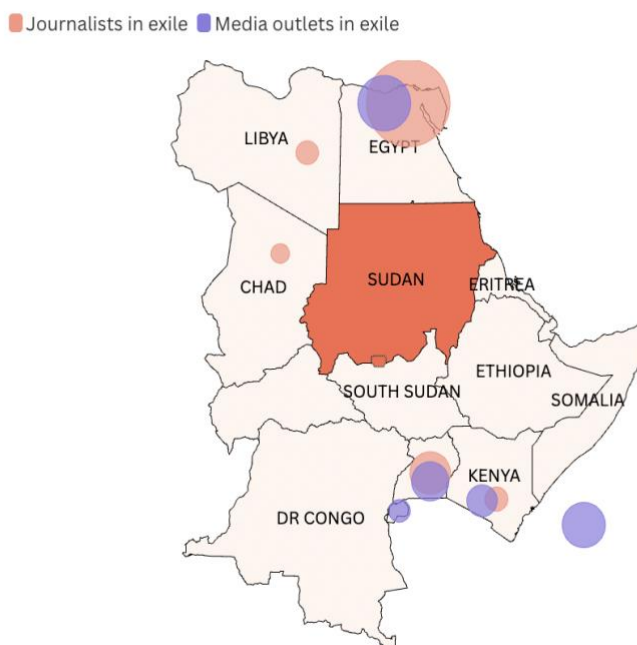
Sara Qudah, Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, CPJ, said, “The country is becoming like a black hole for independent reporting, where no information is coming out and no journalists are able to report freely and independently.”

As a result, “many Sudanese now rely on personal networks, social media influencers, and citizen journalists, sources they sometimes deem more credible than official channels,” [observes](#)³³ Meera Selva, the chief executive officer of [Internews Europe](#). Not surprisingly, “Trust in local Sudanese media has also deteriorated significantly,” Selva adds, “with audiences demonstrating a clear preference for international outlets, particularly Gulf news outlets.”

“In the absence of reliable traditional media, Sudanese citizens have turned overwhelmingly to social media platforms—particularly Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok—as primary information sources,” an [Internews report](#)³⁴ on the Sudanese Media Ecosystem said. However, with these spaces weaponized by warring factions, social media has become “an information environment characterized by alternative facts, misleading narratives, and hate speech, all of which continue to further entrench divisions and conflict.”

Over 400 journalists and more than a dozen media outlets forced into exile

Main countries of refuge for Sudanese journalism



Source : [Reporters Without Borders \(RSF\)](#), [Link to share this map](#)
© Côme Nottaris & Blanche Marès / RSF



³² [Sudan, the black hole of journalism](#)

³³ [Journalism is the oxygen of democracy: How Sudan’s information crisis reflects a global reality](#)

³⁴ [2025 Sudanese Media Ecosystem Report](#)

Despite brutal conditions, Sudanese journalists have found ways to survive, with hundreds fleeing to neighboring countries such as Egypt, Uganda, and Kenya, from where they continue to report on the civil war, providing vital reporting for citizens inside Sudan as well as the wider world. For instance, [Haydar Abdelkarim, a Sudanese freelance journalist living in Kenya](#)³⁵, left the country three weeks after the outbreak of the war. While he continued to work for [Aydin Network](#)³⁶, a nonprofit Sudanese media outlet, remotely, due to safety concerns, his work was published anonymously. Similarly, another Sudanese journalist, Eisa Dafallah, who lives and reports from Uganda, [shared his first-person experiences](#)³⁷ on the impact of exile and the lives of those who escaped from the country during the siege.

The Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) documented 137 press freedom violations in Turkey last year, [according to a report published by the Stockholm Centre for Freedom in February 2026](#). These violations impacted 259 journalists and media outlets, and measures used in this repression included legal action, physical violence, regulatory restrictions and digital controls. Nearly half of the cases in the country (49.6%) involved the arrest, detention, or imprisonment of journalists on charges related to disinformation, terrorism, insult, or national security.

With stricter legislation being introduced to stifle journalism in the MENA region, there is often little to no recourse for journalists who are wrongfully accused and imprisoned.

Although international agencies and watchdog organizations attempt to hold governments accountable, journalists may still face unpredictable sentences and mistreatment while incarcerated. In many cases, the laws are so broad and vague that journalists can be imprisoned for almost anything.

[CPJ](#)³⁸ noted that two of the top ten jailers of journalists are in the MENA region: Israel and Egypt.

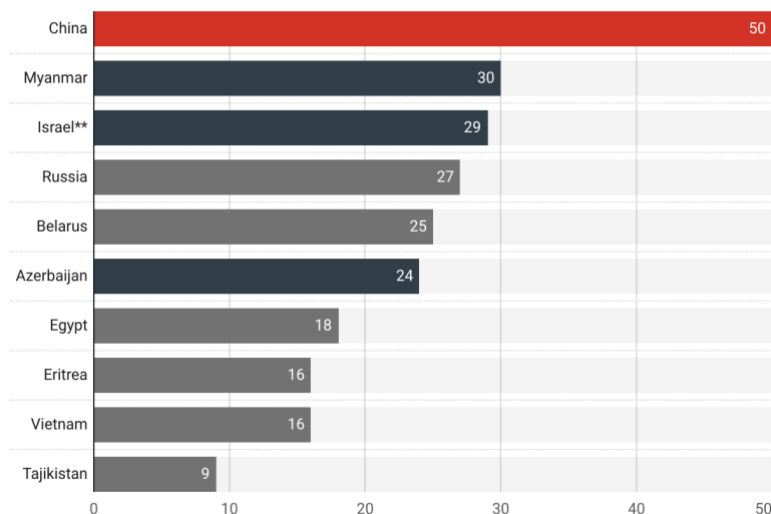
Image [via CPJ](#)

Top jailers of journalists

2025 is the fifth year that the Committee to Protect Journalists has recorded more than 300 journalists behind bars.*

A count by country reveals that **these 10 jailers are responsible for nearly 75% of the journalists behind bars globally**. China is responsible for 15% of the world's jailed journalists; Israel and Myanmar are each responsible for 9%.

Azerbaijan joined the top jailers' list for the first time since 2018.



*As of December 1, 2025 | Total imprisoned: 330 journalists

**Israel is detaining all 29 of the journalists, who are Palestinians. One of the journalists (Saeed Hasanein) also holds Israeli citizenship.

Chart: Charles Spicer • Source: The Committee to Protect Journalists • Created with Datawrapper

³⁵ [Sudan, the black hole of journalism](#)

³⁶ [Aydin Network](#)

³⁷ [Eisa Dafallah: The New Humanitarian](#)

³⁸ [2025 journalist jailings remain stubbornly high; harsh prison conditions pervasive](#)

1.4. Activism and Advocacy

In response to a [new online protest movement and in the lead up to the sixth anniversary of the Hirak movement](#)³⁹ in February 2025, Algerian authorities intensified their clampdown on peaceful dissent through arbitrary arrests and unjust prosecutions, with many activists facing lengthy prison sentences. [In April 2025 report by Amnesty International](#)⁴⁰, Algerian authorities have arrested and convicted at least 23 activists and journalists, many in connection with their support for the “Manich Radi” [I am not satisfied] online protest movement, launched in December 2024 to denounce restrictions on human rights and difficult socioeconomic conditions in the country.

One such example highlighted by Amnesty International is Soheib Debbaghi, who the NGO observes “was convicted of 'publishing content harmful to national interest', “publishing content harmful to national order and security”, and “inciting an unarmed gathering” based on [social media posts relaying the “#Manich_Radi” hashtag](#)⁴¹.

Also in North Africa, the power of Gen-Z protestors was on display, revealing how a digitally connected generation could mobilize public online and offline. [From September to October 2025, Morocco saw a wave of protests](#)⁴² in major urban centers such as Rabat, Casablanca, and Marrakesh, as well as medium-sized towns and smaller municipalities across the country. Moroccan youth are leading on the streets, demanding greater government accountability and structural reforms in employment, health, and education.

This mobilization, known as Gen-Z 212, refers to the generation born between 1997 and 2012, with the national telephone code +212 underscoring their connection to the Moroccan context.

The movement began on Discord and then gained prominence on TikTok, with between 120,000 and 150,000 members, many of whom were students and young workers from working-class neighborhoods and mid-sized cities.

[As of October 2025, more than 2,400 individuals are being prosecuted by the Moroccan justice system](#),⁴³ reports France 24, with charges ranging from rebellion in a group, insulting and violence towards law enforcement, or incitement to commit crimes and participation in armed gatherings.

³⁹ [Algeria: Authorities step up crackdown on peaceful dissent in the face of new expressions of discontent](#)

⁴⁰ [Algeria: Authorities step up crackdown on peaceful dissent in the face of new expressions of discontent](#)

⁴¹ [Amnesty Denounces Algeria Over 'Alarming' Crackdown](#)

⁴² [Gen-Z protests ignite across Morocco](#)

⁴³ [Gen Z in Morocco: More than 2,400 people are being prosecuted following protests](#)



Image [via GIS Reports](#)

Journalists working under authoritarian governments and regimes already face severe challenges, and at times are punished legally and financially, for reporting the news and holding institutions accountable. However, women journalists often experience even more intense forms of state repression. Many work under regimes where dissent is criminalized, making journalism more than a profession; for them, it is an act of resistance.

Mada Masr's founder and editor-in-chief, [Lina Attalah was questioned on 4 August by Egypt's Supreme State Security Prosecutor](#)⁴⁴, a counterterrorism court frequently used to prosecute journalists. She was accused of spreading "false information" following an article reporting alleged abuses against prisoners. Later, she was released on bail of 30,000 Egyptian pounds, but could face a fine and a prison sentence ranging from six months to five years [under the Egyptian Penal Code](#)⁴⁵. She is also accused of operating a website without authorization, as the authorities have yet to respond to Mada Masr's repeated license applications. Mada Masr remains one of the last independent media platforms operational in Egypt.

As digital surveillance by governments and regimes becomes a growing concern, citizens are increasingly worried about the tracking of their social media activity. According to the [Arab Opinion Index 2025](#)⁴⁶, published in 2026, 37% of respondents with social media accounts believe their activity is monitored, while 44% believe the platforms themselves monitor them.

⁴⁴ [Egypt: Ongoing harassment of Lina Attalah and escalating crackdown on Mada Masr and independent journalism](#)

⁴⁵ [Egypt: RSF condemns the authorities' persecution of Mada Masr and its journalists](#)

⁴⁶ [Arab Opinion Index 2025](#)

Figure 55: respondents with social media accounts who believe their social media activity is monitored

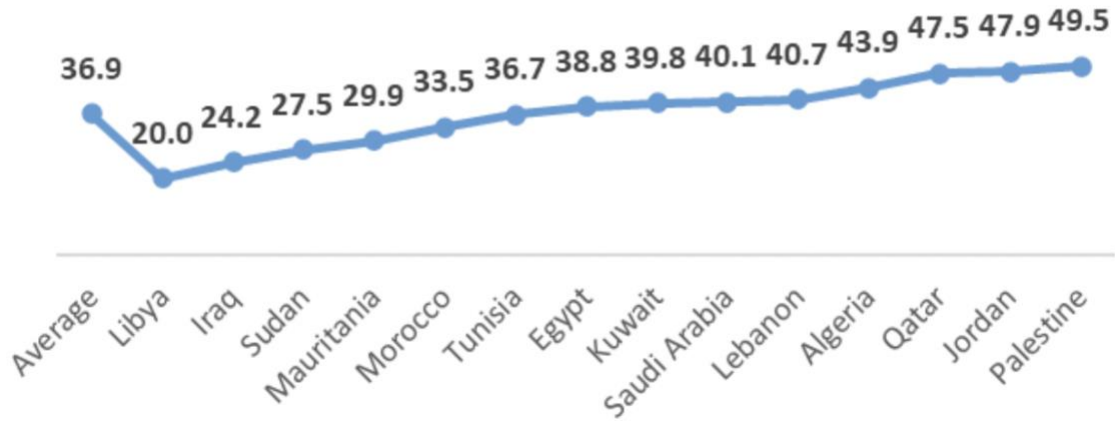


Image via [Arab Center Washington D.C.](#)

1.5. Regulatory and Legal Intimidation of Media

Along with attacks, intimidation, and the jailing and killing of journalists in the MENA region, authoritarian regimes have also muzzled media outlets critical of their actions. One method of doing this is to restrict access to information.

In December 2025, the [Israeli parliament approved an extension of a law that was passed in 2024, which allowed a shutdown of foreign media over national security grounds until 2027](#)⁴⁷.

The law (Preventing Harm to State Security by Foreign Broadcast Entities) was initially introduced to halt Al Jazeera’s operations in Israel; therefore, it has been referred to as the “Al Jazeera Law”. [This comes after Israeli forces raided the Al Jazeera offices multiple times](#)⁴⁸. In September 2024, under a military order, Israeli forces stormed their office in Ramallah, handed the staff a closure notice, confiscated all equipment and documents, and barred employees from using their vehicles. The closure of the Ramallah bureau was later extended for another 60 days on August 4, 2025.

[Beyond Al Jazeera, the government is also moving to shut down Army Radio network](#)⁴⁹, one of two publicly funded Israeli news outlets. The Israeli right-wing often criticized the radio station, arguing that this move would harm free speech. With half of Israelis relying on broadcast news for

⁴⁷ [Israel extends law that banned Al Jazeera for two more years](#)

⁴⁸ [Israeli forces raid Al Jazeera office in Ramallah, extend closure order](#)

⁴⁹ [Is Israel’s government waging war on Al Jazeera and the media?](#)

information and about a third relying on radio stations, shutting down outlets the government deems “critical” can undermine democratic access to information.

In Jordan, [the Jordanian Media Commission blocked at least 12 independent news websites⁵⁰](#), last year, following reports on alleged corruption in Gaza aid delivery. [As per the CPJ⁵¹](#), the media commission accused the websites of “spreading media poison” and attacking Jordan, “following the publication of allegations that the government unfairly profited from aid to Gaza”. Some of the websites that were blocked in Jordan include:

- London-based Middle East Eye
- Tunis-based Meem Magazine
- Independent regional Raseef22
- Regional Arabi21
- Istanbul-based Arabi Post
- Rassd News Network
- Satellite channel Al-Shoub TV
- Voice of Jordan
- Amman Net

Beyond regulatory shutdowns, governments can also undermine journalism by entangling independent media outlets in legal battles that slow reporting and threaten democratic and public accountability.

[In Lebanon, Daraj and Megaphone, independent digital media outlets, have been targeted by mass media campaigns and legal suits for their investigative reporting⁵²](#). Both outlets were accused of “undermining the state’s financial standing, undermining confidence in the local currency, inciting the withdrawal of bank deposits and the sale of government bonds, receiving suspicious foreign financing with the aim of undermining confidence in the state, inciting strife, undermining the reputation of the state, weakening national sentiment and attacking and conspiring against the security of the state.”

In March 2025, [CPJ, along with 59 other local and international media outlets and human rights organizations](#), called on the [Lebanese authorities to protect independent media outlets and support the country’s economy by ending the weaponization of charges to suppress the media](#).

⁵⁰ [Jordan bans 12 news sites for ‘spreading media poison’ following corruption report](#)

⁵¹ [Jordan bans 12 news sites for ‘spreading media poison’ following corruption report](#)

⁵² [MENA: Media freedom still under attack across the region](#)

1.6. Solutions and the Path Ahead

While freedom of speech and freedom of expression are under attack in many parts of the world, developments in the MENA region offer cautious optimism. Sustainable funding models, stronger independent media, and growing media literacy initiatives are helping support a more resilient media landscape. These moves shine a light on some potential avenues to support press freedom in the region, and demonstrate how challenges to reporting can be reversed or safeguarded. It also highlights the resilience of journalists and activists in the region, showing how they continue to persevere despite significant legal and safety challenges.

[After the downfall of the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria in December 2024, media organizations and journalists began to rebuild trust with audiences after they had only been served with propaganda under the regime](#)⁵³. Journalists discarded their pseudonyms and revealed their identities, and media professionals who had previously fled the country began returning without fear of violence or legal retaliation.

[In January 2025, independent newspaper Enab Baladi reestablished its presence in Damascus \(Syria\) following a decade of exile due to the country's civil war](#)⁵⁴.

After being forced to leave the country in 2014, Enab Baladi set up its operations in Germany and Turkey, where millions of Syrians sought refuge while fleeing the war.



Image [via Enab Baladi](#)

Despite its presence in two different countries, the newspaper maintained a network of journalists reporting from Syria.

⁵³ [Independent media in post-Assad Syria: A new chapter begins](#)

⁵⁴ [Syrian opposition paper announces return to Damascus after decade of exile](#)

[Media organizations that once operated in exile or rebel-controlled areas, including Radio Rozana, Al Joumhouria, and Aks al-Seir, have regained prominence.](#) Qatar-affiliated outlets such as Syria TV and Al Jazeera continue their strong presence in the country. However, funding for independent media remains a challenge, as [several Syrian news outlets have closed or lost funding due to recent USAID cuts](#), including Radio Al Kul and Aleppo Today.

Digital harassment remains a significant barrier for women in media and activism across the MENA region and beyond. [In Jordan, research conducted during the 2024 parliamentary elections found that 28% of comments directed at female candidates were abusive](#)⁵⁵.

In response, initiatives such as Strengthening Digital Resilience for Women Leaders in Jordan are addressing online harassment, including doxxing, cyberstalking, and coordinated smear campaigns. This endeavor is organized by Canada's International Development Research Centre and the SecDev Foundation, in partnership with the Jordanian National Commission for Women. [The initiative provides training in digital safety, threat identification, crisis management, and safer social media use to help women journalists and political actors navigate online spaces more securely](#)⁵⁶.

As new conflicts emerge in the MENA region, it is more important than ever to protect freedom of speech and expression to safeguard journalists, activists, and digital creators.

For instance, [the military escalation between Israel, the U.S. and Iran in March 2026](#)⁵⁷ [gravely impacted journalism and media workers](#)⁵⁸, with reports of arrests of journalists, interference with reporting, airstrikes damaging media infrastructure, and sweeping restrictions on coverage emerging from the region.

Therefore, by monitoring trends such as media blackouts, regulatory and legal intimidation of the media, and the detention of media workers, communities and citizens can hold institutions and authorities accountable.

We look forward to presenting those issues in our next report.

⁵⁵ [Strengthening Digital Resilience for Jordanian Women Leaders](#)

⁵⁶ [Programme launched to protect women leaders from online abuse in Jordan](#)

⁵⁷ [Iran war: What is happening on day 17 of US-Israel attacks?](#)

⁵⁸ [Press freedom violations in the Middle East during the Iran war](#)

Reporters Without Borders Index: 2020-2025 comparison			
Country	2020 World Press Freedom Index⁵⁹	2025 World Press Freedom Index⁶⁰	Change in Rank (+/-)
Algeria	146	126	+20
Bahrain	169	157	+12
Egypt	166	170	-4
Iran	173	176	-3
Iraq	162	155	+7
Israel	88	112	-24
Jordan	128	147	-19
Kuwait	109	128	-19
Lebanon	102	132	-30
Libya	164	137	+27
Morocco	133	120	+13
Oman	135	134	+1
Palestine	137	163	-26
Saudi Arabia	170	162	+8
Sudan	159	156	+3
Syria	174	177	-3
Tunisia	72	129	-57
Turkey	154	159	-5
UAE	131	164	-33

⁵⁹ [Reporters Without Borders \(RSF\) 2020 World Press Freedom Index](#)

⁶⁰ [Reporters Without Borders \(RSF\) 2025 World Press Freedom Index](#)

Chapter 2: The Creator Economy and Influencers in the MENA Region

Md Mudassir Hossain

2.1 Introduction

As of early 2026, the MENA region has moved past the "gold rush" phase of social media influence and entered a period of institutional maturation. Independent content creation was once criticized by traditional media in the region (and beyond) as peripheral novelty for hobbyists due to "[low quality content compared to studio produced content](#)"⁶¹. However, this perception has changed significantly as the creator economy boomed to over [\\$37 billion worldwide](#) in 2025⁶², driven by its organic reach and its influence on audiences' retail habits.

Furthermore, in the MENA region, influencer-based advertising plays a vital role in GDP growth. [In 2025](#), although we see uneven growth of the creator economy across the region (according to data from [Statista](#))⁶³, some countries such as the [UAE are expecting 5%](#) of their total GDP to come from this sector⁶⁴. By investing millions of dollars in support initiatives for creators, authorities in the MENA region have recognized content creators as a regulated workforce and 'digital ambassadors' for the country.

According to data from the influencer marketing intelligence platform **Qoruz**, **the number of monetized creators (aka influencers) grew by a staggering 75%** between 2023 and 2025 across the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)**.. It is now worth approximately **\$1.6 billion**.

This momentum in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, has continued into 2026. The presence of **263,000 professional influencers among 61.5 million people** in the GCC underscores the region's digital density as among the highest in the world. This massive creator-to-consumer ratio, akin to roughly one monetized creator for every 234 residents, explains why the economy will expand to a multi-billion-dollar scale by 2030.

According to [Campaign Middle East](#), the sector is projected to reach **\$5 billion by 2030**.⁶⁵ This density is significantly higher than mature markets like the United States, where there is only one creator for over 1600 residents ([Goldman Sachs Research, 2024; U.S. Census Bureau](#))⁶⁶. As a

⁶¹"Why influencer marketing is no longer a 'nice-to-have'," [Campaign Middle East](#), 2025. (MENA's leading business media for the marketing and advertising industry).

⁶² "Creator Economy Ad Spend to Reach \$37 Billion in 2025," [IAB \(Interactive Advertising Bureau\)](#),

⁶³ Influencer Advertising - MENA, [Statista](#), 2025,

⁶⁴ UAE creator economy aims to contribute 5% of GDP by 2031, (Khaleej Times, January 2024)

⁶⁵ GCC creator economy grows 74% in 2 years to 263,000 influencers: [the Campaign Middle East](#) , October 2025

⁶⁶ Goldman Sachs, The creator economy could approach half-a-trillion dollars by 2027, April 2023

result, creators often serve as the primary bridge to a highly connected, youthful audience in the region.⁶⁷⁶⁸

Influencer Growth Across Categories (2023–2025)				
Category	2023 Influencers	2024 Influencers	2025 (YTD) Influencers	2-Year Growth (%)
Lifestyle and travel	31K	48K	58K	87 per cent
Fashion and beauty	28K	45K	53K	89 per cent
Food and culinary	22K	29K	32K	45 per cent
Arts and entertainment	14K	22K	26K	85 per cent
Health and fitness	13K	18K	23K	76 per cent
Parenting and family	12K	16K	22K	83 per cent
Tech and gadgets	9K	13K	15K	66 per cent
Finance and business	8K	11K	13K	62 per cent
Gaming	7K	9K	11K	57 per cent
Others / Niche	6K	9K	10K	66 per cent
Total	150K	220K	263K	75 per cent

Image: GCC Influencer Growth, 2023-2025, [via CampaignME](#)

⁶⁸ “GCC creator economy grows 74% in 2 years to 263,000 influencers” [Middle East Campaign](#) (October 2025)

TikTok played a major role in the growth of [Saudi Arabia's creator economy](#), as it [grew by 32%](#) in the first quarter of 2025⁶⁹. Analysis of over 300,000 influencer-driven orders suggests a 15% increase in Gross Merchandise Value (GMV) and a 5% rise in sales volume ([Arabian Business, 2025](#)).

The most significant driver of this growth is the **content-to-commerce** convergence, which completely reshaped consumers' shopping experiences. **Arab News** reports [TikTok is now the primary discovery platform](#) for retail in the region⁷⁰, as consumers move from video exploration to app-based purchase in a single session. [Mastercard: Women's Entrepreneurship Study 2025](#) shows that in the UAE, entrepreneurial aspiration is growing significantly⁷¹. 56% of women and 52% of men have a side hustle and content creation is one of their top choices.

The trend of creator-based marketing expanded to the tourism and aviation sector across the region, and Saudi Arabia is now collaborating with global and regional stars, such as Cristiano Ronaldo, with millions of social media followers, to promote tourism destinations.

According to the **Saudi Tourism Authority (STA)**, the "Saudi Summer" 2025 campaign resulted in over 32 million domestic and international tourists visiting destinations in the Kingdom. This is an increase of 26% compared to the same time period in 2024, which equates to roughly [6.6 million more tourists](#).⁷²

This success has, partly, been fueled by the creator-lead campaign #VisitSaudi, which helped to promote over 600 destinations. Tourism alone contributed 5% to the kingdom's GDP in 2025.

According to **Lefty**, an influencer marketing platform, the top three global airlines from the MENA region, Emirates, Etihad, and Qatar Airways, pivoted away from traditional advertising and gained a combined **\$45 million in Earned Media Value (EMV) in Q1** alone through creator-led storytelling⁷³.



⁶⁹ "Saudi Arabia's creator economy surges 32% in Q1 2025, TikTok leads growth", [Arabian Business](#)

⁷⁰ "TikTok is reshaping shopping journey in MENA", [Arab News](#)

⁷¹ "Mastercard research: 84% of women in the UAE are considering starting their own business", [Mastercard](#)

⁷² "Saudi Arabia Attracts 32 Million Tourists in Summer 2025, Marking 26% Record Growth", [The Saudi Press Agency](#)

⁷³ "Q1 2025 State of Influencer Marketing, Hospitality & Airlines" [Lefty](#), a software platform for influencer marketing. (May 2025)

2.2. The Evolving Landscape of Influence and Commerce

2.2.1 Platform Dynamics and Genre Specialization

Globally, digital trends are often controlled by "Big Tech" and "Mainstream Media," whereas in the MENA region, digital trends are more platform-based. The use of social media platforms such as 'TikTok' and 'YouTube' in the "MENA-3" (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE) is not limited to hosting content; it also involves controlling the infrastructure of retail and monetization.



TikTok holds a strong position in viral, short-form retail. In the UAE, **TikTok LIVE features have been received positively by all types of brands**, from Samsung to local startups, as many brands go ["all-in" on live-streamed shopping](#)⁷⁴.

Samsung utilized TikTok LIVE to bridge the gap between digital entertainment and retail by supporting interactive 'Live Shopping' events where influencers demonstrated device features in real-time. During their **"Ramadan Souq"** campaign, they partnered with tech influencer **Ahmad Boarki (@slorks)** to host live sessions.

Source: TikTok (@slorks)

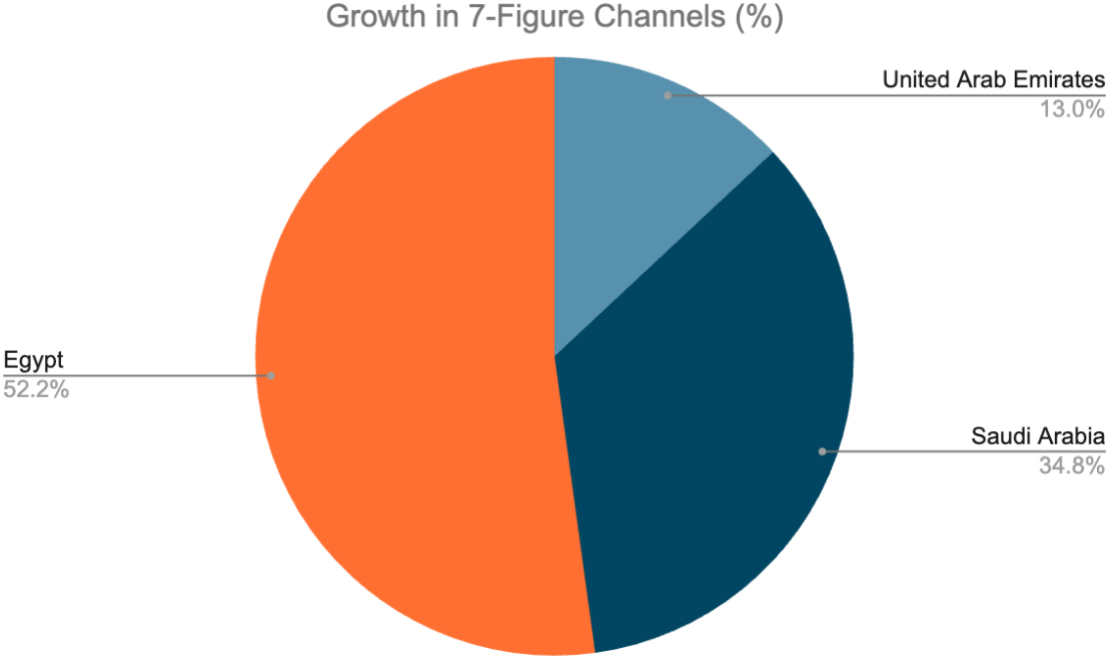
The live-shopping trend has seen strong adoption across the MENA region, including Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Local fashion brand Euphoria [Denims](#) achieved the milestone of monthly sales exceeding EGP 1 million through authentic storytelling, primarily on TikTok and other platforms. Similarly, TikTok became a key driver for KAK Squad, an Egyptian local restaurant, to promote their business, and they increased sales from EGP 8 million to EGP 102 million through humanistic and genuine storytelling.⁷⁵

YouTube remains the cornerstone of the MENA creator economy by offering high-tier monetization for long-form content. As the YouTube platform marks its **20th anniversary**, [it has reported a](#)

⁷⁴ "From Samsung to startups: Why UAE brands are going all-in on TikTok LIVE", [Gulf Business](#), (October 2025)

⁷⁵ "Egyptian entrepreneurs turn TikTok fame into flourishing businesses", [Ahram Online](#) (October 2025)

[massive surge in creators reaching the "seven-figure revenue" milestone](#) (in local currencies) as of December 2024 in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE (the MENA-3)⁷⁶. [A report by Cairo 360](#) suggests that the reasons behind booming sales are that independent creators prioritize community engagement on social.⁷⁷



Source: [Arabian Business](#)

Note: Visualization based on data from the cited source

Creators, artists, and media companies in MENA are among those to have benefitted over the last three years from the YouTube Partner Program (YPP), which has seen the platform pay **\$70 billion globally to creators and media partners**. Creators such as Saudi tech reviewer [Faisal Al Saif](#) and Egyptian entertainer Alhassan are using YouTube's diverse formats to build sustainable and high profit business that resonate with both local and global audiences⁷⁸.

⁷⁶“YouTube reports massive increase in creators in Saudi, Egypt and UAE taking slice of \$70bn payout”, [Arabian Business](#), (April 2025)

⁷⁷ “How TikTok Is Powering Egypt’s New Wave of Creative Entrepreneurs” [Cairo360](#), (September 2025)

⁷⁸ “YouTube launches ‘Recap’ as MENA viewing trends lean into AI, K-drama and gaming” [Arab News](#), (December 2025)

2.2.2 Commercialization of Comedy in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has successfully commercialized its long-standing tradition of satire. The [Riyadh Comedy Festival 2025](#) served as a landmark event for the nation⁷⁹, spreading a positive image and also an attempt to establish new economic revenue aligned with its future vision.

At the same time, the event also exacerbated the tension between financial growth and creative freedom as critics and human rights organizations, including [Human Rights Watch](#), described the festival as a form of "comedy-washing" designed to deflect attention from the Kingdom's record on free speech. As [TIME](#) noted, this was strict "content restrictions" in performer contracts that barred jokes about the government, royal family, or religion.

Critiques of the Saudi comedy festival sparked a discussion on how influencers and comedy intersect the nation's limitations on freedom of expression, as there were backlashes against international performers over the authority's control of political and social matters. A separate report by the [BBC](#) suggests that the festival premises did not provide sufficient space for the influencer and comedian to perform freely. Despite these controversies, Saudi sketch and stand-up comedy remain a dominant cultural export.

The festival is part of a broader [SR 4.3 billion \(\\$1.15 billion\)](#) investment strategy into the cultural economy under Vision 2030⁸⁰, aimed at transforming Riyadh into a global entertainment hub.

2.2.3 Gaming as an Economic Driver

According to data from [Niko Partners](#) and [Research and Markets](#), by early 2026, the combined gaming market of "MENA-3, (Saudi Arabia, the UAE) will have reached a value of approximately **\$2.2 billion to \$2.8 billion**.⁸¹ **Saudi Arabia** holds strongholds in the gaming industry, controlling the largest share of revenue in the region (approximately **\$1.1 billion** in 2024/25).

The Kingdom plans to invest \$37.8 billion in gaming through Savvy Games Group, as part of its initiatives to become the global gaming hub.⁸² **Egypt** has the largest gaming community by volume and the highest concentration of "digital natives" under 25, which forecasts the scope of the expanding gaming market across the region. **UAE** boasts the highest Average Revenue Per User (ARPU) in the region, driven by high disposable income and advanced 5G infrastructure.

⁷⁹ "Riyadh Comedy Festival 2025", [visitsaudi.com](#), 2025

⁸⁰ Cultural Investment Conference 2025 Concludes in Riyadh, Positioning Saudi Arabia at the Forefront of Global Cultural Investment, [GlobeNewswire](#), (October 2025)

⁸¹ "Games Market in Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt (MENA-3)", [Niko Partners](#) (market research and consulting), "MENA-3 Games Market Report", [Research and Markets](#), (February 2024)

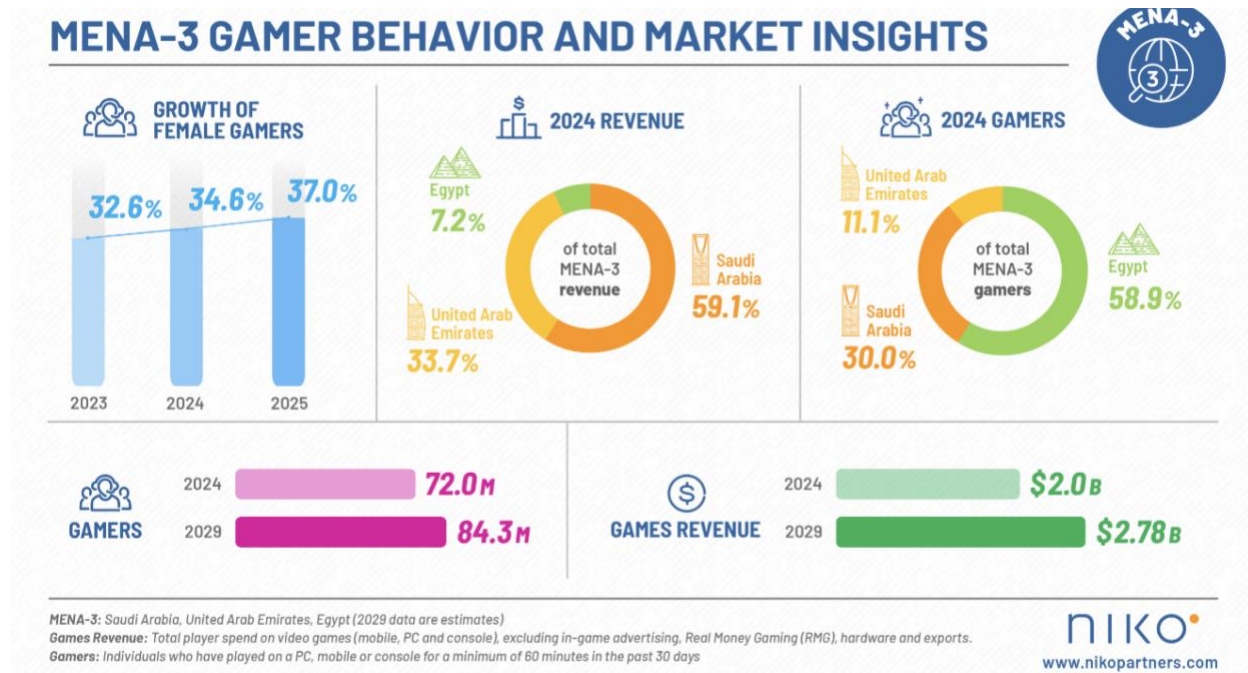
⁸² "Saudi wealth fund's Savvy Games Group to invest \$37.8 billion", Reuters (September 2022)

Gaming is now a major pillar of economic transformation in the MENA region, and this is reflected in activity on social media. Although seen previously as a hobby, the professionalization of this sector mirrors the journey of many passionate gaming content creators who have become professionals and are now leading gaming-related marketing.

In doing this, MENA creators are following in the footsteps of global stars such as **MrBeast**, a leading pioneer in gaming marketing, who has transformed gaming content into a \$1.1 billion entertainment and consumer brand. Collaboration is considered one of his “growth hacks.”⁸³

Such an approach can be seen in the MENA region as well, where creators often collaborate and expand their work from solo to corporate ventures.

One example is **AboFlah (Hassan Suleiman)**, who co-founded **8Flamez**, a venture studio and talent management firm that empowers creators to become founders⁸⁴. Using his studio in Dubai, AboFlah has transformed his gaming roots into a 360-degree media empire. It manages its own production, legal, and financial infrastructure, proving that regional creators are no longer just "talent" but are now the **CEOs of their own media companies**.



Source: [Niko Partners](#)

⁸³ “MrBeast Net Worth 2026: How a Teenager With a Camera Built a Billion-Dollar Empire”, [Social Life Magazine](#), January(2026)

⁸⁴ “A prominent talent management and technology agency”, [8FLAMEZ](#)

There are several factors worth considering to better understand the growth of the creator economy in the MENA-3 region, and how/why gaming is a cornerstone of this.

First, the market is uniquely driven by a young population; **76% of gamers** in these three countries are under 35⁸⁵. Second, participation in esports is a major cultural trend, with **73% of MENA-3 gamers** engaging as viewers, players, or competitors. A high concentration of youth and intense cultural engagement explains why the nations are aggressively investing in the gaming industry. It is projected that the gaming industry's contribution to GDP would exceed 13.3 billion and create over 39,000 jobs by 2030^{86,87}.

2.2.3 The Rise of Local and Female Influencers

The creator economy has reached a "post-global" phase in the MENA region. Once, dominated by global celebrities, the sector is now dominated by hyper-local authenticity and high-stakes female entrepreneurship across the **UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt**.

In the Arabian Gulf, female influencers have fundamentally changed the marketing landscape, moving from lifestyle models to venture capitalists and brand founders. **Karen Wazen from the UAE** successfully capitalized on her influence with [KE Partners](#),⁸⁸ a firm that offers strategic support to startups in securing investment and marketing in the region.

[KE Partners](#) featured by *Entrepreneur Middle East*.

Similarly, the Kuwaiti-born, Saudi-based influencer **Noha Nabil** has transformed [Noha Nabil Beauty](#)⁸⁹ into a regional powerhouse and recently collaborated with [Ulta Beauty for its 2026 Middle East expansion](#).⁹⁰



⁸⁵ "Games Market in Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt (MENA-3) Will Grow 56% by 2026", [Niko Partners](#) (a certified woman-owned market research and consulting firm)

⁸⁷ "National Gaming and Esports Strategy" [KSA Vision 2030](#)

⁸⁸ [KE Partners](#)

⁸⁹ [Noha Nabil Beauty](#)

⁹⁰ "Ulta Beauty for its 2026 Middle East expansion", [Global Cosmetic Industry](#), (January 2025)

Another success story is **Yara Al-Namlah from Saudi Arabia**, whose brand [So Matcha](#), capitalized on a niche culinary trend that saw a 210% surge in the Kingdom by early 2026. In **Egypt**, the rise of micro-entrepreneurs is also growing. For example, the content shared by [Gehad Elbana](#),⁹¹ a growing consumer preference for cultural relatability over traditional celebrity endorsements. Emirati founder **Salama Mohamed** has successfully scaled her skincare brand **Peaceful** from a personal platform into a [major retail presence](#).⁹²

According to [Mastercard's 2025 research, 84% of women in the UAE](#) are considering business ownership. Female founders across the region lead in digital efficiency, with 75% using AI tools to enhance creative output and decision-making.⁹³ This trend highlights a broader shift where women begin as content creators to build cultural capital, subsequently using that influence as a low-cost entry point to launch high-growth businesses in tech, retail, and finance.

2.2.4 Standardization and Institutional Support

State-supported infrastructure and consolidation, alongside private-sector efforts, are further helping to drive the professionalization of the MENA creator economy. Different organizations, such as OMG/Creo and The Arab Influencer Agency, are significantly contributing to standardizing the market by adapting performance-based metrics and structured talent pathways. By implementing standardized ROI tracking and professional contract management, these agencies bridge the gap between raw creative talent and corporate expectations.

The efforts to institutionalize the creator economy are noticeable, with landmark initiatives such as [Dubai's 1 Billion Followers Summit](#), which recently launched a \$100 million creator fund⁹⁴. This funding mechanism is designed to transform creative influencers into sustainable media SMEs by providing capital and infrastructure for advanced production and global distribution.

Whereas Saudi Arabia's Creators HQ is a dedicated production hub under the Kingdom's \$1.1 billion digital content strategy to localize the value chain of digital media, reducing the region's reliance on international production houses. [Dubai Creative Economy Strategy](#) has made SME-style licensing and formal business training more accessible, as part of efforts to develop a sustainable economic sector for creators.

⁹¹ "Top 20 Fashion Influencers in Egypt in 2026", [Favicon](#)

⁹² Who is Salama Mohamed? 5 Things To Know About The Emirati Beauty Mogul, [Grazia Magazine](#)

⁹³ "Mastercard's 2025 research, 84% of women in the UAE", [Mastercard](#) (March 2025)

⁹⁴ [Dubai's 1 Billion Followers Summit](#)



Source: [Creators HQ](#)

2.3 Governance, Regulation, and Geopolitical Resilience

2.3.1 The United Arab Emirates: The Pioneer of Institutionalization

The UAE and Saudi Arabia have successfully initiated the institutionalization of the creator economy and offer a creator-friendly environment, making the UAE one of the global hubs for creators. The UAE attracted **2,415 active members from 147 countries**, with over **2.45 billion followers** by August 2025, thanks to its Golden Visa scheme for influencers and its **0% income tax** environment ⁹⁵.

Digital governance in the Middle East marked a historic point in 2016. As of **February 1, 2026**, the UAE has enforced a mandatory **Advertiser Permit** for all social media promotions ⁹⁶. This applies to both residents and non-residents visiting creators, including those on a "Visiting Advertiser Permit," which lasts for three months. The permit is **free for the first three years** for UAE citizens and residents. That suggests an "enabling" approach that treats individual influencers as formal commercial entities ⁹⁷.

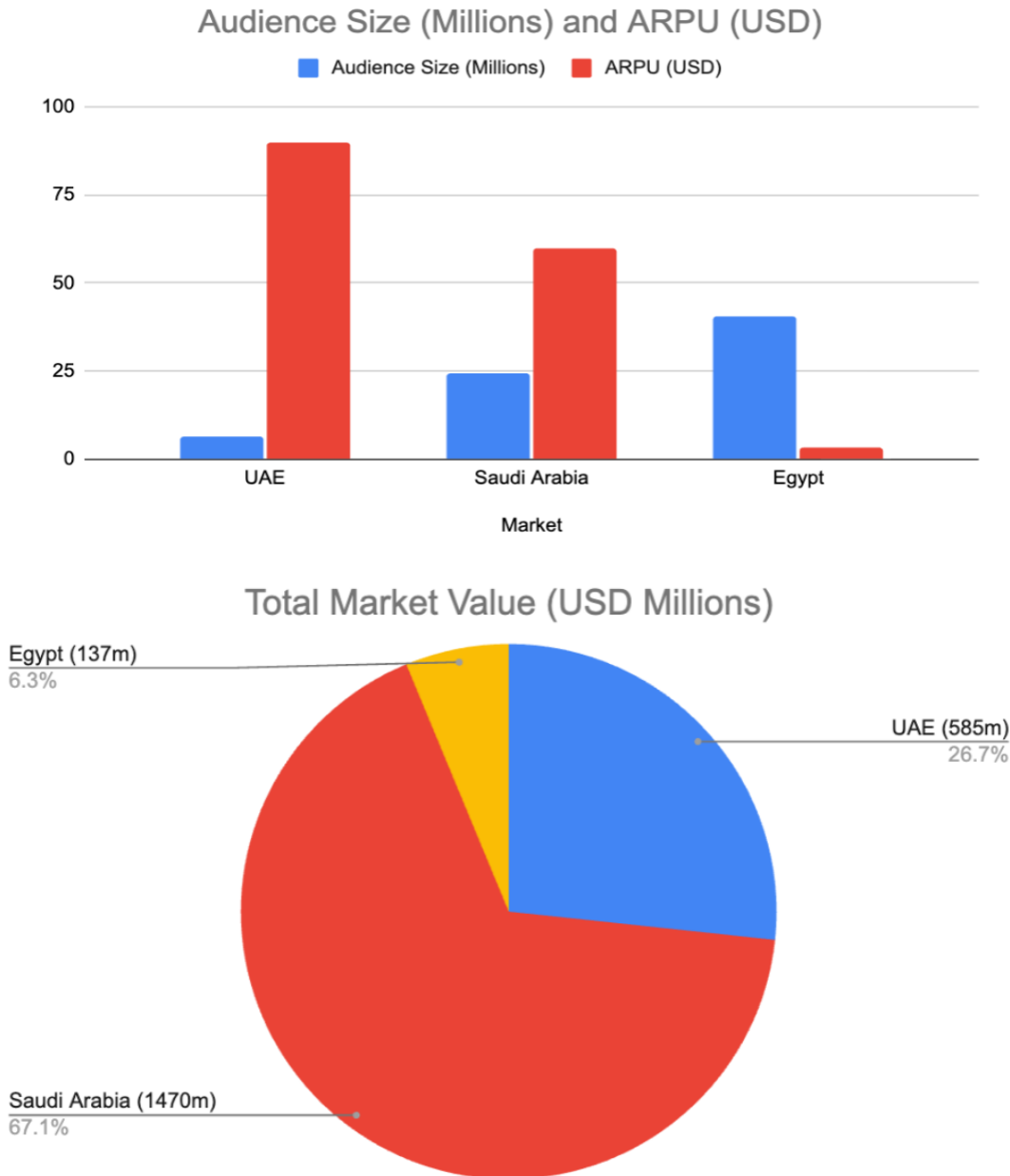
⁹⁵ "Creators HQ attracts 2,415 active members from 147 countries with combined following of over 2 billion", [Emirates News Agency \(WAM\)](#), (August' 2025)

⁹⁶ [UAE Media Council](#) (February 2026)

⁹⁷ "UAE Influencers Must Obtain Advertiser Permit Under New Media Law", [Middle East Briefing](#) (February 2026)

2.3.2 Saudi Arabia: The High-Growth Challenger

Saudi Arabia seems a little behind the UAE and is trying to capitalize on events, such as the Saudi Media Forum, to establish its brand as a hub for media production, aiming to create **150,000 to 160,000 media jobs by 2030**.⁹⁸



Source: [Niko Partners MENA-3 Games Market Report](#) > Visualization using data from cited source

⁹⁸ "Saudi Arabia's media industry undergoes transformation, aims for \$12 billion GDP contribution", [Saudi Gazette](#), (May 2025)

2.3.3 Egypt: High Content Consumption and Regulatory Friction

Egypt is the largest consumer market in the region, with a population of **119 million** and **82.7% internet penetration** by 2026 and shares the same language and similar culture to the UAE and, KSA. The growth of the creator economy is increasingly clashing with traditional governance of digital media. While the UAE focuses on transparency and creating a sustainable creator, some countries, including Egypt, have intensified crackdowns on creators under the pretext of preserving "family values," with several bloggers receiving prison sentences in late 2025 ([LDSF](#))⁹⁹.

2.3.4 Iraq: The Regulatory Crackdown

Iraq introduced a new digital policy that increases state control over digital expression. In March 2025, the Communications and Media Commission (CMC) launched the "**Regulations for Influencers and Digital Content Creators**" that require social media influencers to register and pay annual licensing fees based on their audience size ([The New Arab](#))¹⁰⁰ Annual fees range from **350,000 Iraqi dinars (~\$270)** for those with 100,000 followers to **1,000,000 dinars (~\$760)** for those with more than 5 million followers ([Shafaq News](#))¹⁰¹.

Beyond revenue collection, the regulation serves as a mechanism for content monitoring by mandating that creators "respect national sovereignty" and avoid content that "damages Iraq's reputation." This policy is part of a broader crackdown on what authority's label "**indecent content**,"¹⁰² **There is evidence that the CMC** already pressured various platforms¹⁰³, including Meta and TikTok, to restrict specific content in Iraq that alleges corruption or criticizes public officials ("**Geo-blocking**", 2025). This raises significant concerns about the future of digital¹⁰⁴. **TikTok** has faced scrutiny for large-scale content removals. In Q2 2025 alone, it removed nearly **19 million videos**.

⁹⁹ "Egypt Escalates Its War on Digital Freedom of Expression: Mass Sentences Against TikTok Content Creators", [Law Democracy Support Foundation](#) (December 2025)

¹⁰⁰ "Tax on fame': Iraq imposes new fees on social media influencers, [The New Arab](#), 2025

¹⁰¹ Iraq's media watchdog under fire for taxing content creators, [Shafaq News](#), 2025

¹⁰² "Iraq imposes annual fees on social media influencer", [964 Media](#), 2025

¹⁰³ "Iraq imposes annual fees on social media influencer", [964 Media](#), 2025

¹⁰⁴ "Iraq: Cooperation with Big Tech must not put freedom of expression at risk", [ARTICLE 19](#), (October 2025)

2.3.5 The Struggle and Resilience of Sudanese Creators

Although there is significant state-led investment to support creators and strengthen the creator-based economy, the broader MENA region sees a downfall or lack of support despite the growing audiences. Due to ongoing conflict, the Sudanese creator economy has transitioned into a decentralized '**Exile Economy**', with its primary creative hubs forced into Cairo, Riyadh, and Kampala. The sector now faces extreme hurdles, including a **90% loss of domestic media infrastructure that has been damaged**.

The country is totally reliant on satellite technology (Starlink) for connectivity¹⁰⁵. However, this crisis has also proven the sector's utility; in the absence of formal institutions, a new class of '**Verification Creators**' and grassroots influencers has emerged as the most trusted source of humanitarian coordination and news for over 61% of Sudanese youth. An example of displaced digital creators is [Yasir Faiz, a filmmaker and digital storyteller](#), who was forced to flee Khartoum with his family after violence escalated in his neighborhood.



Sudanese filmmaker Yasir Faiz posing for a picture. Photo courtesy: Yasir Faiz

Source: qazini.com

^{105 97} "Internet in Conflict: Sudan's Battle for Connection" The Tahrir Institute, (September 2024)

Now based in Nairobi, he produces films, collaborates with East African creatives, and mentors youth in grassroots storytelling¹⁰⁶. Despite the hurdles, many other Sudanese influencers, such as **Ezz Al-Mobahal and Alaa El-Mubarak**, maintained reasonable engagement on Instagram in 2026, illustrating their resilience as ¹⁰⁷.

2.3.6 Regional Synergy (Turkey & Qatar)

The strategic and symbolic connection to neighboring nations made their transition easier. Turkey's gaming and creative sector acts as the region's "Unicorn Factory", surpassing a **\$1 billion valuation in 2025**, as it provides the back-end technical talent and development studios that power the gaming IP at the heart of the regional creator economy¹⁰⁸.

Qatar, on the other hand, established itself as a "Boutique Hub" through Media City Qatar, offering 100% foreign ownership and specialized infrastructure for high-end gaming and digital media, successfully attracting global giants like **Tencent** to anchor its ecosystem. The individual strengths of the nations in the MENA region create a vibrant economic ecosystem for creators and benefit the national economy, enabling it to grow exponentially.

2.4 Travel and Tourism Shifting towards Influencers Lead Marketing

The countries in the Gulf region are aggressively creating the avenue and infrastructure to integrate content creators into their national tourism strategies. **Saudi Arabia has seen tourism contribute 5% in the GDP in 2025**; the Kingdom aims to increase that contribution to 10% by 2023.

In achieving this target, it adopted a new marketing strategy where influencer-led promotion plays a major role. The authority now collaborates with global influencers to promote destinations across KSA, including **NEOM** and **Red Sea Global**. In December 2025, **Cristiano Ronaldo** was unveiled as a homeowner at the Red Sea's "Nujuma" Ritz-Carlton Reserve, marketing the destination as a "private paradise" to his global audience of hundreds of millions ([Red Sea Global](#)).¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ "Sudanese Filmmaker Yasir Faiz on Storytelling, Survival and Rebuilding From Exile", [Qazini](#) (July 2025)

¹⁰⁷ "Top Instagram Influencers and Instagram Users in Sudan in 2026", [starnage](#) (February 2026)

¹⁰⁸ "Turkish gaming industry surpassed \$1B volume in 2025: Survey", [Daily Sabah](#), (February 2026)

¹⁰⁹ [Red Sea Global](#), (December 2025)



Footballing legend and longtime visitor buys luxury villas at Nujuma, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve Residence. Source: [Red Sea Global \(RSG\)](#)

The Jordan Tourism Board's "**Kingdom of Time**" branding in association with the national football team's 2026 World Cup campaign has proved a positive outcome. Jordan recorded over **76,000 visits** in just the first two weeks of January 2026 as the Jordanian Tourism Board adapted new digital marketing¹¹⁰. The kingdom continues partnering with local, regional, and international influencers, such as **Yasmine Ezz**, an Egyptian media personality and influencer with over 6.7 million followers, and Asmahan Alnaqbi, a prominent Emirati presenter and influencer (1M+ followers), who were part of the official Highlight Jordan creator lineup in 2025.

The top three airlines from the MENA region earned \$45 million Earned Media Value (EMV) for their strategic move towards non-traditional creator-led storytelling. By becoming the official airline partners of the **1 Billion Followers Summit** in 2025, Emirates and **Etihad Airways show the growing interest in partnering with the creators**¹¹¹. **Karen Wazen**, who utilized Qatar Airways' "Winter in Qatar" campaign to blend high-fashion lifestyle with destination travel for her 8 million followers¹¹².

¹¹⁰ "Over 76,000 visits to tourist sites in two weeks, Petra tops list", [Ammon News](#), (January 2026)

¹¹¹ "Etihad Airways named 'Official Airline' partner of 1 Billion Followers Summit", [Emirate News Agency](#), (December 2024)

¹¹² "Qatar Tourism launches influencer-led winter 2026 campaign", [Connecting Travel](#) (September 2025)

Although partnerships between airlines and creators are growing, there are sometimes reports of tension. Josh Chills, a German aviation blogger, was banned from Qatar Airways in 2023 after reviewing its service standards and finding them to be falling short. The airline asked him to delete the video in compensation for a free flight. However, he refused it, believing the review was based on a true experience. Two years later, in 2025, he was welcomed again to Qatar Airways during the Paris Air Show. This incident shows how influential independent creators are and their ability to share the right information with their viewers despite pressure from big companies¹¹³.



Photo: Josh Cahill YouTube

2.5 Future Outlook: Integration and Crossover

Looking ahead, perhaps the biggest trend to note is how the social media market is changing from "influencer marketing" to being a primary space for "**Creator-Led Businesses.**"

There are several success stories of influencers moving from promoting brands to owning the entire supply chain. For example, Saudi entrepreneur **Yara Al-Namlah**, through her holding company, **When Minds Meet (WMM)**, has scaled homegrown brands like **So Matcha** and the beauty label **Moonglaze** into global retail spaces like Sephora and Selfridges¹¹⁴.

¹¹³ "Josh Cahill Returns to Qatar Airways Aircraft After 2023 Ban, How?", [Aviation 2Z](#) (June 2025)

¹¹⁴ "Yara Al Namlah" [Forbes](#)

As more creators become entrepreneurs, fintech leaders such as Zand and STC Pay offer "Embedded Creator Finance" to help creators streamline financial transactions.¹¹⁵ Tech leaders are partnering with creators to launch co-branded financial tools or "Creator Wallets" that allow fans to transact directly within a creator's ecosystem.

The gap between independent content creation and the "silver screen" is significantly narrowing as new technologies, equipment, and the skills to produce content become more widely available.



Cinema YouTube's Premiere Creators in the frame (source: [Google Blog](#))

Production powerhouses like **Telfaz11** in Saudi Arabia have successfully scaled YouTube series into feature films,¹¹⁶ while individual creators like **Taha Essou** (Morocco)¹¹⁷ and **Omar Farooq** (Bahrain)¹¹⁸ are launching high-production documentaries and production companies that manage dozens of employees, notes the [Google Blog](#).

¹¹⁵ "Zand Adopts XDC Network to Advance Blockchain-Powered Payments" [Fintech Finance News](#), (January 2026)

¹¹⁶ "MBC & Telfaz 11 Studios Join Forces to Spotlight Saudi Stories", [Cairo Scene](#) (December 2024)

¹¹⁷ "Middle Eastern content creators unveil bold short films in collaboration with YouTube", [Arab News](#), (June, 2025)

¹¹⁸ "Omar Farooq on creative power and documentary making", [YouTube Official Blog](#), (August 2025)

2.6 Conclusion

The MENA region has begun to demonstrate a move beyond being a home for traditional "influencers" to an environment with an increasing focus on offering **Creator-Led Infrastructure and the economic impact this can potentially unlock.**

However, this is not the case across the region, as conflict and unrest persist in some areas, alongside differing levels of digital take-up, varying regulatory frameworks, and different levels of freedom of expression.

Collectively, this means that we do not see a single Creator Economy across this large, diverse region, but rather a series of different, often country-specific markets.

At the same time, as the gap between digital content and the silver screen narrows, the regional economy is no longer just consuming global trends but also exporting them, giving creators a platform to export their content beyond regional confines.

We can expect this impact and influence to grow, especially as fintech provides fresh opportunities for engagement (e.g., Live Shopping). Alongside this a growing number of MENA governments are looking to provide creator-friendly regulatory frameworks, enabling MENA's creators to play a role in a self-sustaining, digitally driven commercial future.

This shift provides a resilient economic alternative for both oil-dependent nations and those seeking to capitalize on their youthful, tech-savvy populations.

Chapter 3: Arab Youth, Gen Z and the Digital Trends shaping the Middle East

Damian Radcliffe



Image [via Unsplash](#)

Researchers have long been [interested](#)¹¹⁹ in how Arab Youth use social and digital media. Sparked by the role that [this demographic played](#) in the events of the Arab Spring,¹²⁰ interested has been further piqued by the prevalence of young people in MENA.

The OECD [highlighted](#)¹²¹ in 2022 that “young people (aged under 30) constitute more than half (55%) of the population across MENA, compared with 36% of the population across OECD countries.” Meanwhile, a year later, UNICEF determined over 250 million children and youth (ages 0-24) live in nations across the Middle East and North Africa, akin to 47% of the region’s population.

Given this, it’s perhaps not surprising that last year, [Eugene Willemsen](#), CEO International Beverages, PepsiCo, [argued](#)¹²² that:

¹¹⁹ <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/abu-dhabi-media-summit-arab-digital-generation-377971/> > Sabbagh, K., Mourad, M., Kabbara, W., Shehadi, R., Samman, H., & Insight, I. C. (2012). Understanding the Arab digital generation. *Booz & Company*.

¹²⁰ Hoffman, M., & Jamal, A. (2012). The youth and the Arab spring: cohort differences and similarities. *Middle East Law and Governance*, 4(1), 168-188.

¹²¹ https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/youth-at-the-centre-of-government-action_bcc2dd08-en.html

¹²² <https://www.worldgovernmentssummit.org/observer/articles/detail/empowering-mena-youth>

The region's future hinges on a simple truth: youth energy and digital transformation are inseparable. Those who invest in both will shape a resilient, globally competitive MENA.

At the same time, unlocking this potential means addressing a number of major systemic challenges. Navtej Dhillon, the former director of Brookings' Middle East Youth Initiative, [argued](#)¹²³ back in 2008 that the youth challenge is the most critical 21st century economic development challenge facing the Middle East.

"In a region where almost 65 percent of the population is under the age of 30, long-term prosperity and stability hinges on the opportunities afforded to this generation." Navtej Dhillon

Nearly two decades on, that remains the case. As the [World Governments Summit](#) team [posted](#)¹²⁴ on LinkedIn in July 2025, "Young people across the region have the energy, creativity, and ambition to drive economic change and help build stronger, more resilient societies. Yet, they continue to face major challenges."

Those challenges include unemployment, digital and financial inequalities, economic and political instability and "educational systems [which] often fall behind in providing the MENA youth with skills demanded by AI, green technology, and digital industries."



Image [via](#) World Governments Summit

At the same time, this digitally savvy demographic is also beginning to reshape the politics and economics of the region and has the [potential](#)¹²⁵ to further fashion this transformation.

¹²³ <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/middle-east-youth-bulge-challenge-or-opportunity/>

¹²⁴ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/menas-youth-demographic-advantage-missed-opportunity-worldgovsummit-jcbpf/>

¹²⁵ <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2025/03/30/the-impact-of-the-rise-of-a-new-youth-generation-in-the-middle-east/> - for a different take see <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/10/middle-east-climate-protest-arab-spring-lessons-learned>

This report chapter examines these shifts through the lens of social media developments over the past year, illustrating how change is taking place and how Arab Youth are continuing to create, innovate and lead MENA’s digital charge. It is worth noting that although much of the available data is concentrated in GCC markets, where information is more accessible, many of these trends - albeit at different stages of development and implementation - are evident across the wider region.

3.1 Platforms and Social Media Consumption

Social media ad spend in MENA is projected to be worth \$4.26 billion in 2025, [notes](#)¹²⁶ Communicate citing paywalled Statista data. These monies are heavily concentrated on three highly visual social media platforms: Instagram, TikTok and YouTube. For agencies, looking to reach Arab Gen Z and young millennials, these platforms tend to be both mobile-first and more popular with younger audiences.

Social media consumers are active on a number of platforms and are adept at using different networks to meet their news, information and entertainment needs. A typical Gen Z or young millennial in MENA might use TikTok for short-form entertainment, Instagram for lifestyle and creator content, and YouTube for longer video or specific genres (e.g. gaming¹²⁷ and comedy), as well as other networks for messaging, immersive media experiences, shopping inspiration, and the consumption of more niche content.

Selected Countries	Average Daily Time Spent on Social Media (Feb 2025)	Average Number of Social Media platforms used in last month (Feb 2025)
United Arab Emirates ¹²⁸	2h 59 m	8.6
Saudi Arabia ¹²⁹	3 h 01m	7.8
Turkey ¹³⁰	2h 43 m	7.6
Egypt ¹³¹	2h 49 m	7.0
Morocco ¹³²	2h 54 m	5.6

Table showing social media use by total users in select MENA countries, via DataReportal

¹²⁶ <https://communicateonline.me/news/mena-in-2025-big-bets-bigger-platforms-growing-industry/>

¹²⁷ As Strategy& has demonstrated gaming is a rapidly growing market in MENA
<https://www.strategyand.pwc.com/m1/en/strategic-foresight/sector-strategies/media/mena-media-outlook.html>

¹²⁸ <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-united-arab-emirates> - see PPT, Slide 84.

¹²⁹ <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-saudi-arabia>

¹³⁰ <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-turkey> - Slide 85

¹³¹ <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-egypt> - Slide 83

¹³² <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-morocco> - Slide 74

Although platform-specific demographic data by age group in the MENA region is often limited, high levels of uptake - coupled with the relatively young populations across many countries – mean that many social media adoption across much of the Arab world tends to skew younger.

As a case in point, a 2025 TikTok advertising-audience [analysis](#)¹³³ for Saudi Arabia showed that the platform reaches 34.6 million people in the Kingdom. “Saudi Arabia now has over one million active creators on TikTok,” Gulf News [reported](#),¹³⁴ remarking that “for many, the platform isn’t just entertainment — it’s a livelihood.”

“As in other countries, TikTok’s audience in Saudi Arabia is relatively young,” notes the Affect Group. “The share of users aged 18–24 is about 22%, and those aged 25–34 make up around 50%.” With more than seven in ten TikTok users in KSA under 35, this his reinforces TikTok’s importance as a key channel for engaging younger audiences in the Kingdom.

Age Group	Male	Female	Total
18-24	4,250,000	3,410,000	7.7M
25-34	11,041,000	6,394,000	17.4M
35-44	3,675,000	1,999,000	5.7M
45-54	1,226,000	715,000	1
55+	1,028,000	885,000	1
Total	21,220,000	13,403,000	34,623,000

Image: TikTok Audience Size and Demographics in Saudi Arabia [via](#) Affect

TikTok is also important in the United Arab Emirates, where the platform has the largest reach of all social networks, according to data [compiled](#)¹³⁵ by MRM Advertising, a Dubai-based agency specializing in Advertising and Digital marketing services. More widely, “the overwhelming majority of social media users in the UAE, approximately 85%, are aged between 18 and 44,” they state, once again underscoring the dominance – and importance - of younger audiences across the region’s social media landscape.

¹³³ <https://affectgroup.com/blog/tiktok-audience-size-and-demographics-in-saudi-arabia/>

¹³⁴ <https://gulfnews.com/business/markets/tiktok-fuels-billions-in-saudi-arabias-economy-as-creators-businesses-thrive-1.500263111>

¹³⁵ <https://mrmadvertisingdubai.com/blog/social-media-statistics-uae-2025>

Against this youth-oriented backdrop, Publicis Groupe Middle East partnered with Snapchat to launch Youth Studio, a regional hub designed to help brands understand and engage with Gen Z and Gen Alpha. It does this, ArabAd [explains](#) by blending “quantitative research, social intelligence, and platform behavior to map how youth connect, create, and shape culture as it happens.”



Over 75 million people use Snapchat every day in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), including one in three people in the United Arab Emirates and over 90% of Saudi Arabians aged 13 to 34. “Yet, only 15% of young people say they feel represented in advertising today,” notes ArabAd. “Youth Studio aims to close that gap by giving marketers the frameworks and insight to connect authentically and meaningfully,” they added.

Image [via](#) ArabAd

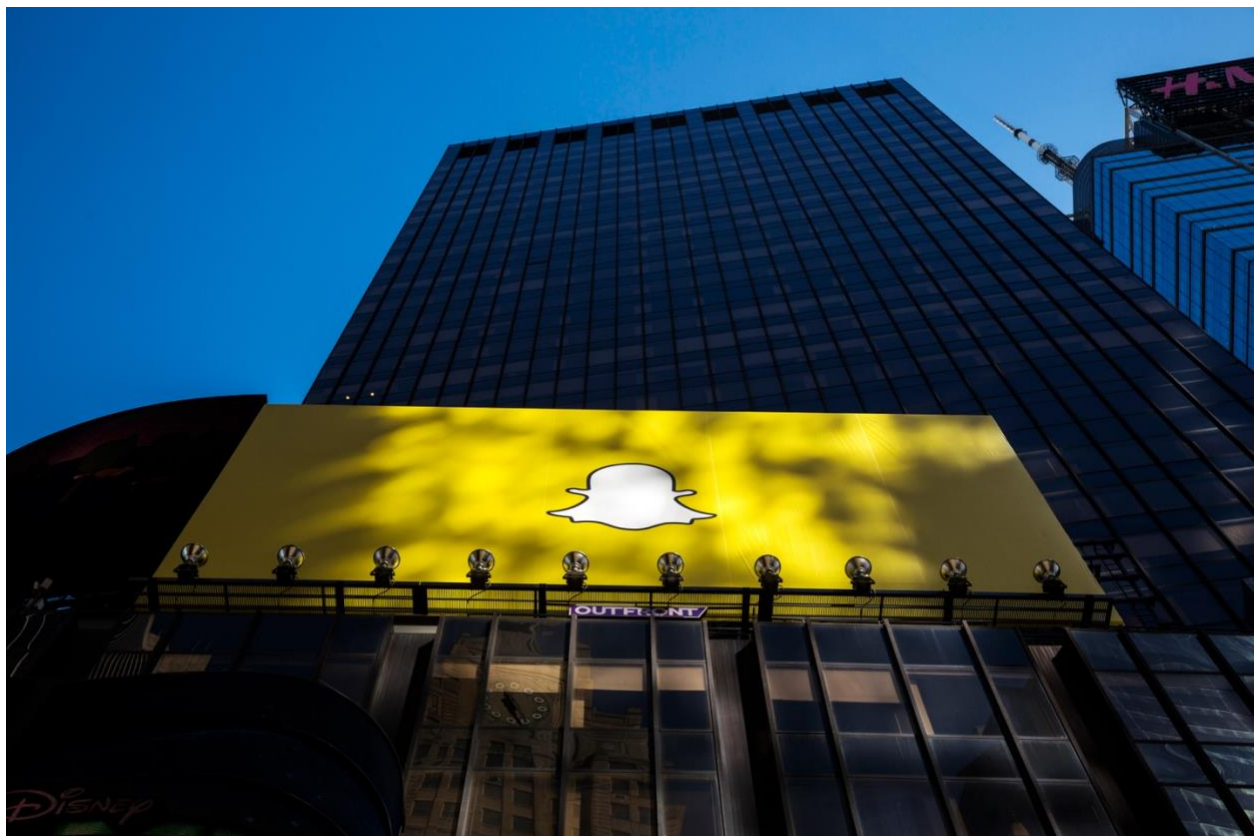


Image [via](#) Communicate

3.2 Social Commerce

One discernible impact of social media habits – especially in the GCC – can be seen in the emergence of social commerce.

Grand View Research, a market research and consulting company, [share](#) how “platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are no longer used solely for social interaction or entertainment; they now function as end-to-end shopping ecosystems.” “This shift is deeply rooted in the region’s demographic structure, mobile-first digital behavior, and government-led digital economy agendas,” they add, “rather than traditional retail expansion alone.”

Predicting the projected size, and growth, of social commerce isn’t easy, as reflected in wildly varying estimates about the scale and trajectory of this trend. For example, Grand View Research, states that the Middle East’s social commerce market will be worth \$35.78 billion in 2025, growing to a staggering \$328.1 billion in 2030. In contrast, a May 2025 report from Research and Markets [argues](#)¹³⁶ that this market will be worth \$9.92 billion by 2025 rising to \$19.60 billion in 2030.

These variances may be attributable to different methodologies, although this is difficult to determine without full access to their data (which is often paid for, or behind a paywall). Nevertheless, despite these variances, one thing is clear: social commerce is growing rapidly.

Platforms like Instagram Shopping, TikTok Shop, and WhatsApp Business are fostering direct purchases, supported by interactive content and influencer partnerships. Early in 2025, TikTok Shop was introduced in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, modernizing social commerce in the area by enabling influencers to directly drive sales through local content.

Research from TikTok, [cited](#)¹³⁷ by Arab News, found that 77 % of consumers in MENA have discovered new products on TikTok, and that TikTok is responsible for 15% of product discoveries across *all* media (a figure that includes different media channels, emails and even word of mouth).

“The data is clear: TikTok drives impact at every stage of the shopping journey, starting with discovery and continuing through purchase and post-purchase advocacy. In MENA, where creativity, culture, and commerce converge, TikTok is redefining how consumers and businesses connect.”

Aref Yehia, Head of Business Partnerships for Retail & E-Commerce TikTok, MENA.



¹³⁶ <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2025/05/15/3082022/28124/en/Middle-East-Social-Commerce-Market-Intelligence-Report-2025-Influencer-Partners-and-Live-Shopping-Events-Propel-Expansion-Future-Growth-Dynamics-to-2030.html>

¹³⁷ <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2620094/media>

SAUDI ARABIA vs EUROPE CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON TIKTOK SHOPPING

	SAUDI ARABIA	vs EUROPE
Fashion	Modest fashion, abayas	Trend-driven, experimental
Language	Arabic, local dialects	Multilingual, less localized
Humor & Trends	Gulf-centric humor	Global trends, satire, irony
Shopping Style	Family-influenced, respectful tone	Individualistic, bold messaging

Alongside this, TikTok’s research also [found](#)¹³⁸ that 69% of users in MENA say they are more open to seeing ads on TikTok than other platforms, presenting opportunities for brands provided that they can create compelling, relevant, adverts.

Image: Tips for success on TikTok shop in Saudi Arabia, [via AWISEE](#)

However, “The fact that commerce happens at all is partly a side effect of social entertainment and signaling done right,” [Joseph Russell](#), then the strategy director at advertising agency Dentsu Creative MENA, [told](#)¹³⁹ Fast Company Middle East.

“Nobody opens Instagram or TikTok thinking, ‘I can’t wait to see what brands want to sell me today’, he said. “People are there to be entertained, connect, escape, and put off going to sleep.”

To help brands ensure that their offerings are relevant and valuable to potential shoppers, the website CampaignMe [suggests](#)¹⁴⁰ that on TikTok “pairing products with trending audio or challenges maximizes shareability and can help reach spontaneous shoppers during their micro-moments.” Alongside this, they also recommended that “storyboarding the experience by showing how a product elevates a lifestyle, celebration or adventure can be a compelling narrative that beats a coupon code for an Explorer or Curator.”

Alongside this, high-end brands are also employing Instagram Live Shopping and Snapchat AR filters to engage consumers, particularly technology-leading cities such as in Dubai and Riyadh.

¹³⁸ <https://www.zawya.com/en/press-release/research-and-studies/tiktok-influences-the-entire-shopping-journey-uitmyhr5>

¹³⁹ <https://fastcompany.com/impact/from-scroll-to-sale-the-uaes-formula-for-social-shopping-success/>

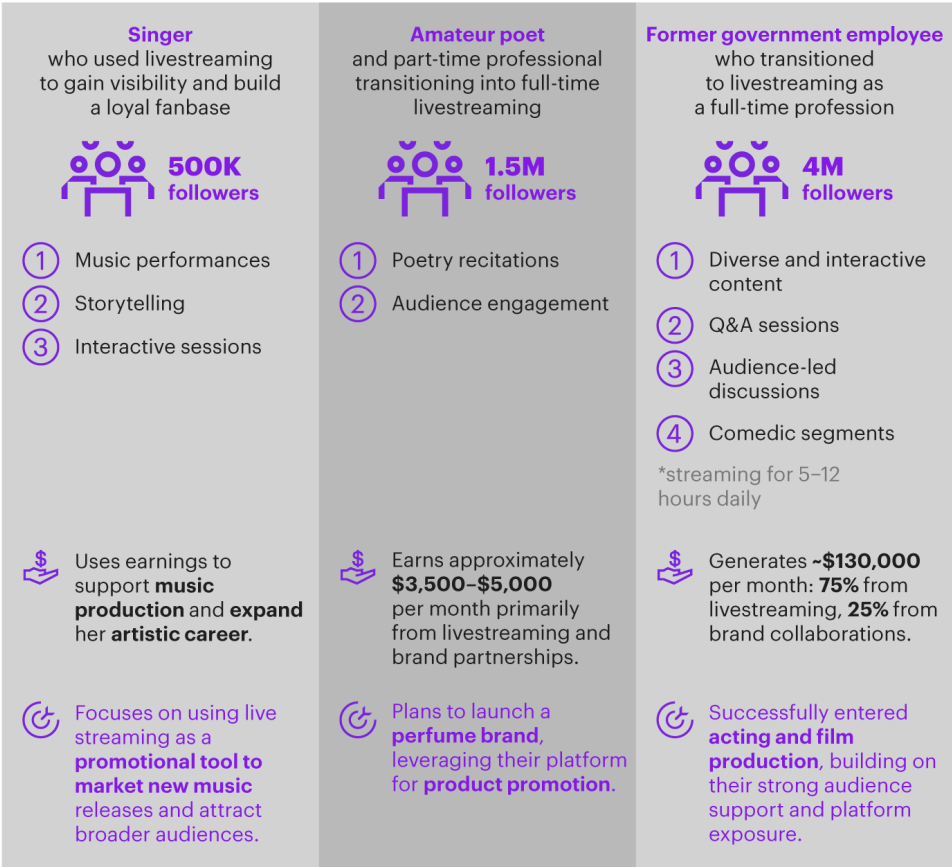
¹⁴⁰ <https://campaignme.com/inside-the-mind-of-the-q4-consumer-what-tiktok-is-teaching-us-about-buyer-behaviour/>

The emergence of live video may also aid the take-up of social commerce. A [report](#)¹⁴¹ by Kearney, contended that “Livestreaming sits at the center of the three main forces reshaping media: the shift to digital media, the growing demand for diverse and engaging content, and the enablement of new creation modes through accessible platforms and tools.”

The management consultancy firm is bullish about the potential impact of this trends on some of the most populous countries in the region.

As of 2024, 0.3% of Egypt’s GDP comes from the livestreaming sector. However, Kearney’s analysis project’s that this market, in MENA’s most populous country, will be worth c. \$4.7 billion by 2030. In Saudi Arabia, they project that by the end of the decade. the nation’s livestreaming industry will be responsible for 76,000 full-time jobs, and a further 60,000 indirect jobs.

Figure 10
People from all walks of life are finding audiences through livestreaming



Source: Kearney analysis

Image: Examples of ways in which people can interact with the live streaming Tips for success on TikTok shop in Saudi Arabia, [via AWISSE](#)

¹⁴¹ <https://www.kenarney.com/industry/media/article/the-livestreaming-entertainment-revolution-what-s-at-stake>

3.3 Influencers and the Creator Economy

Key developments in the region's social media habits are being further driven by initiatives like [Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030](#)¹⁴² and the [UAE's Digital Economy Strategy](#),¹⁴³ as well as the rise of the Creator Economy. Major online brands like [Noon](#)¹⁴⁴ and [Amazon](#)¹⁴⁵ are integrating influencer-led marketing and personalized recommendations to enhance their social commerce offerings, while at the same time capitalizing on the reach and impact that influencers can enjoy.

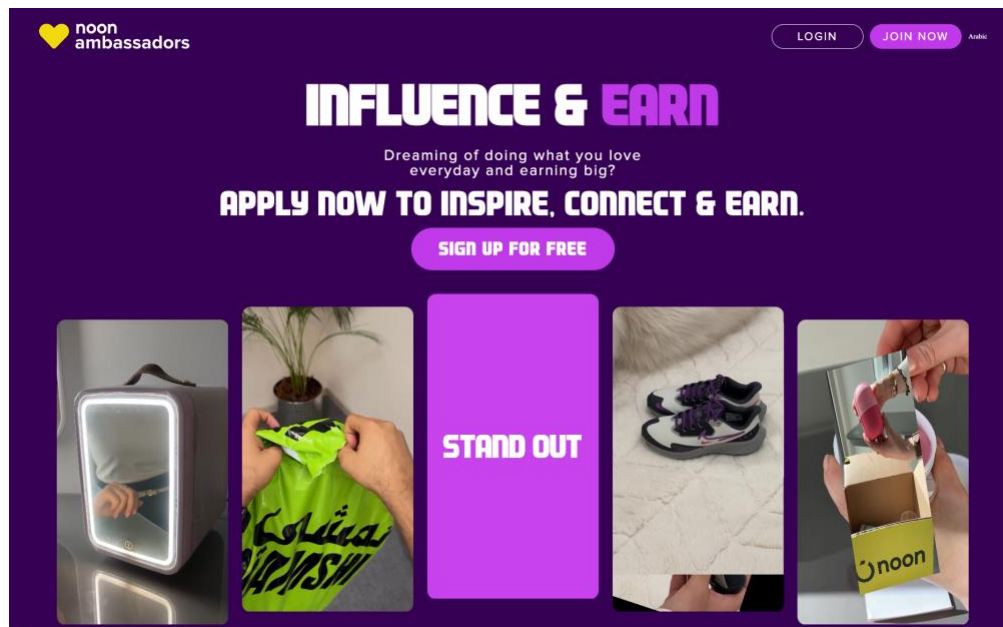


Image: Screenshot, [Noon Ambassadors program](#), 21st March 2026

The value of the GCC's influencer marketing was estimated at \$315.5 million in 2025, [revealed](#)¹⁴⁶ a report by the research and consulting services provider P&S Intelligence. Looking ahead, they projected that this field would grow at a CAGR of 13.9% during 2026–2032, more than doubling to be worth \$771.6 million by 2032.

The Arab youth are not content to be mere consumers of culture, they want to be its creators and curators.” *Arnab Neil Sengupta, a senior editor at Arab News*¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en>

¹⁴³ <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/strategies-initiatives-and-awards/strategies-plans-and-visions/finance-and-economy/digital-economy-strategy>

¹⁴⁴ <https://affiliates.noon.com/en>

¹⁴⁵ See, for example: <https://www.grynow.in/blog/top-amazon-influencers-in-dubai-uae.html>

¹⁴⁶ <https://www.psmarketresearch.com/market-analysis/gcc-influencer-marketing-market-report>

¹⁴⁷ <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2607143>

There are a number of factor driving this growth, they observe, including the region’s young demographic.

Market Size

GCC Influencer Marketing Market CAGR 13.9%



“...With over 70% of the population under the age of 35 and nearly 80% of Saudi citizens under 35 years old, [this] creates an ideal environment for influencer-driven campaigns,” they said.

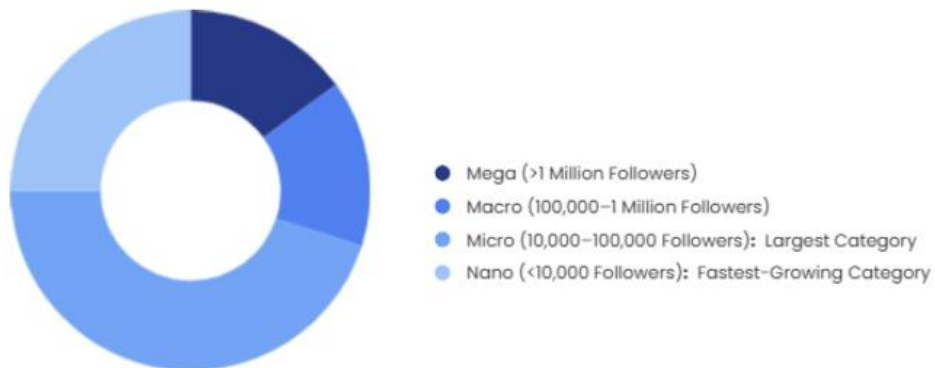
Image [via P&S Intelligence](#)

Alongside this, government initiatives to drive digital take-up and transformation, coupled with “exceptionally high social media penetration rates,” are also playing a significant role, alongside “the rapid emergence of micro and nano influencers who resonate deeply with culturally diverse audiences across the Gulf states.”

These micro- and nano-influencers (10k–100k and 1k–10k followers, respectively) connect “authentically” with the region’s diverse youth population and are increasingly central to campaigns and brand engagement in areas such as fashion, beauty and technology.

More widely, the report shared that around 40% of GCC influencer marketing spend in 2025 is in Saudi Arabia, making it the largest market (as befits that it is also the most populous). Meanwhile, the UAE is the fastest-growing market in the GCC region.

GCC Influencer Marketing Market Influencer Type



Source: P&S Intelligence

Image [via P&S Intelligence](#)

Platforms are also leaning into the potential of the Creator Economy, identifying ways to support, promote and benefit from the rapid growth of this sector.

After launching in 2024, the 2025 iteration of TikTok Change Makers program, featured [three creators from the MENA region](#)¹⁴⁸ [on its list](#).¹⁴⁹ The initiative supports 50 purpose-driven creators from around the world, who the platform has determined harness the social network (and other spaces) to advocate, inspire, and educate their communities, driving change in the process.

The MENA based creators are: Haya Sawan ([@haya_sawan](#)), a Saudi serial health and wellness entrepreneur who previously founded SheFit, a fitness brand based in Jeddah; Yara Abou Monsef ([@yaraboumonsef](#)), a Lebanese storyteller based in UAE She started creating TikTok videos to teach sign language and every day experiences with deaf and hearing audiences; and Dr. Eman Gamal ([@dr_emangamal](#)), who creates educational content focused on topics such as food, mental and physical health.

Over the course of a five-month program, TikTok provides creators with resources, training, and in-person opportunities, [designed](#)¹⁵⁰ to “amplify their impact as they meet each other at global events, learn from a community of their peers, and connect with leaders at the forefront of social change.”

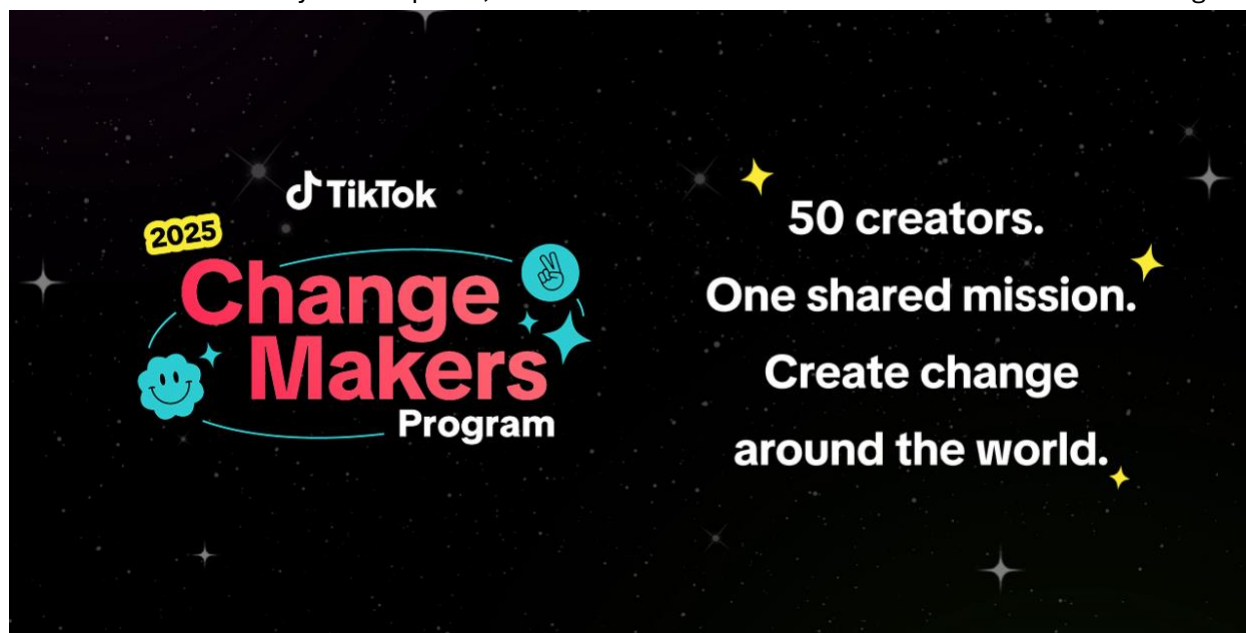


Image [via](#) TikTok

¹⁴⁸ <https://www.dubaichronicle.com/2025/09/25/unveiling-the-2025-tiktok-change-makers-program/>

¹⁴⁹ https://sf16-sg.tiktokcdn.com/obj/eden-sg/yweh7plmvhpeps/TikTok_Change_Makers_Creator_Lookbook.pdf

¹⁵⁰ <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/unveiling-the-2025-tiktok-change-makers-program-and-new-features-to-amplify-charitable-campaigns?lang=en>

Investment in this space looks only set to continue, driven by the popularity of short-form video formats on social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube and Instagram.

Moreover, as the Dubai Press Club shared in their [Arab Media Outlook 2024–2028](#)¹⁵¹ (which was [published](#)¹⁵² in May 2025), Gen Z and Millennials “increasingly favor authentic, engaging content over traditional advertising.” As a result, “influencer-led storytelling is becoming one of the most effective tools for reaching and converting digital audiences.”

3.4 Moving Forward

For Arab Gen Z, the distinction between “social”, “media” and “commerce” is increasingly blurred, with many young people in the Middle East inhabiting an online environment where social networks are their primary entry point to their consumption of goods and content, as well as communication with friends, family and other communities.

It’s a cliché to say that responding to this is both a challenge, and opportunity, for governments, business, platforms, creators and consumers alike. But it’s also true.



On the one hand, there are moves to build on these digital foundations, as part of efforts in the region to diversify their economies, enhance the breadth and depth of Arabic content online, as well as grow the creative and knowledge based sectors.

At the same time, we must also be alive to other considerations related to topics such as access and inclusion, online safety, and freedom of expression.

As social media platforms become even more deeply woven into all the different aspects Arab youth’s lives, questions around regulation, mental health, misinformation and inequality will only grow.

Image [via](#) Experience AI

¹⁵¹ https://dpc.org.ae/-/media/files/arab-media-outlook-report_english_digital-version_vf.pdf

¹⁵² <https://www.mediaoffice.ae/en/news/2025/may/27-05/dubai-press-club-unveils-arab-media-outlook-future-vision-report>

In early 2026, Egypt’s parliament began considering restrictions on children’s social-media use, mirroring conversations, and bans, in other [countries around the world](#).¹⁵³ The Associated Press [reported](#)¹⁵⁴ about 50% of children under 18 in the country use social media, and that President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi had “urged his government and lawmakers to consider adopting legislation restricting children’s use of social media, “until they reach an age when they can handle it properly.”” Egypt has also consistently [cracked down](#)¹⁵⁵ on young – often female - creators, who critics say are posting content online that would not be out of place on mainstream TV in the country.

Opportunities for social commerce and engagement in creator economy are typically concentrated in areas where connectivity, income and the infrastructure for digital payments are at their strongest. Predominantly this means the Gulf states and some of the largest cities across MENA.

Outside of these areas, social media often serves primarily as tool for basic online connectivity tool – a means to keep in contact with friends and family, as well as access critical news and information – but using this to consume content, especially video, can be difficult due to cost and connectivity issues. Moreover, opportunities to monetize creative work and run online businesses, can also be limited.

These digital and economic divides matter. While some young people in the MENA region are able to build personal brands, reach global audiences and participate in new forms of online commerce, others risk being left even further behind, especially in the AI-era, an age which may only exacerbate and speed up this digital inequalities.

“Key aspirations and priorities of Gen Z in the Middle East and North Africa are being shaped by rapidly changing economies, expanding digital cultures, and persistent structural challenges. More specifically, Gen Z is seeking economic security, meaningful work, education that matches opportunities, digital empowerment, and social inclusion and social mobility. This generation is trying to fulfill its aspirations for a better future, such as independence and purpose, amid local challenges that include unemployment, lack of inclusion, and calls for reform.”

Jihad Azour, Director, Middle East and Central Asia Department, International Monetary Fund¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ <https://techcrunch.com/2026/03/06/social-media-ban-children-countries-list/>

¹⁵⁴ <https://apnews.com/article/egypt-parliament-social-media-children-elsissi-8ea06fec852f3a2addb13eb341527732>

¹⁵⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/society-equity/egypt-rounds-up-teenaged-tiktokers-crackdown-social-media-2025-08-29/>

¹⁵⁶ <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2026/01/the-middle-east-promising-gen-z>

Alongside these considerations, in areas of conflict across the region (and even those that are not), there are also concerns about misinformation, surveillance¹⁵⁷ and access to accurate news and information.

As Kamal Yousif Elsadig, Editor-in-Chief of [Dabanga](#), an independent Sudanese news and information broadcaster and publisher, has observed commenting on the situation in Sudan, but in sentiments applicable to many other environs in MENA and beyond, “The war is not only fought with bullets and bombs but with tweets, fake headlines and misleading narratives.”

In Iran, Gen Z “are carving out new refuges in the digital world,” [reports](#) Al Jazeera, again highlighting principles that are also applicable to other areas across the region. Using tools like VPNs, and platforms like WhatsApp and Discord, “forums have become lifelines, serving as makeshift shelters, therapy rooms, and organizing hubs,” the broadcaster says, observing that these moves have been driven by the fact that “conventional safe havens [are] out of reach and communication networks under heavy surveillance or blocked entirely.”

Meanwhile, as [Razan A Nasr](#), WSA (World Summit Awards) Youth Ambassador in [Palestine](#), has written, “social media has emerged as a crucial digital tool for bringing the Palestinian narrative to the world.” “Many campaigns that began as small individual or collective initiatives online have managed to reach global media, influence public opinion, and pressure international institutions to act,” they add, despite potential challenges imposed by algorithms, content moderation policies and other factors which may impact the reach of this content.

Across the MENA region, governments, funders, platforms and policymakers are walking a tightrope between investing in – and growing – social media, as well as responding to the challenges that it presents. Social Networks are core to digital transformation efforts across the region, but tensions can arise due to their ‘glocal’ nature,¹⁵⁸ exposing users to global ideas and practices, and the need to navigate these within local structures and strictures. Put another way, “the balance between value and risk for MENA governments is delicate,” [explains](#)¹⁵⁹ Alice Gower, Director of Geopolitics & Security at Azure Strategy.

There are growing pressures to address issues related to misinformation, culturally inappropriate content (and determining what this is,) cyberbullying, and the impact of social media on mental well-being. Previous research [findings](#),¹⁶⁰ found that three-quarters (74%) of young Arabs across the region said they are struggling to disconnect from social media. Alongside this, in the same

¹⁵⁷ See for example: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2025_Moroccan_Gen_Z_protests and <https://www.dw.com/en/anonymous-digital-democratic-morocco-gen-z-protests/a-74266285>

¹⁵⁸ Gabsi, Z. (2025). Digital mediascapes and cultural transformation: youth identity formation in Tunisia’s post-revolutionary digital sphere. *Continuum*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2025.2574645>

¹⁵⁹ <https://azure-strategy.com/mena-strategic-bulletin-egypt-to-tighten-social-media-regulations-digital-governance/>

¹⁶⁰ <https://www.zawya.com/en/press-release/research-and-studies/majority-of-arab-youth-say-social-media-addiction-is-leading-to-decline-in-mental-well-being-oib89lmp>

report, nearly two-thirds (61%) indicated that social media addiction negatively impacts their mental health.

At the same time, it is clear social media is integral to the life of young people across the MENA region and beyond. Social media remains a major hub for the consumption and distribution of content, as well as digital advertising spend and engagement with brands and online shopping; with the Creator Economy becoming an increasingly significant part of their piece.

Arguably, the task for the years ahead is not to debate the role of social media in MENA, but to determine how best everyone – including Arab Youth – can benefit from the economic, civic and cultural contributions it can unlock. Doing this requires investment in infrastructure, media literacy and local content, and addressing issues of governance and regulation.

Perhaps missing, too often, from this is the voice of young people themselves. Alongside being consumers and creators, this is also a cohort who have lots to say about issues related to wellbeing, privacy, creativity and innovation. Their voice has always been valuable, and as the digital sphere continues to grow and evolve, it's a contribution that I would contend is needed now more than ever.

Report Authors



Damian Radcliffe is a journalist, researcher, and professor based at the University of Oregon. He holds the Chambers Chair in Journalism and is 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).

He is an 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. He has been leading the production of this report series, one of the longest of its kind covering the MENA region, since 2012.

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 and Summer 2023 he was a [Visiting Fellow](#) at the [Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism](#) at the University of Oxford.

An award-winning educator, analyst, journalist and researcher, Damian has more than 30 years of experience across the U.S., U.K., and Middle East, in commercial, public, nonprofit, academic, and policy-focused media organizations, spanning print, digital, television, and radio.

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As an interdisciplinary scholar of global media, social movements, and cultural studies, she examines the transnational intersections of race in the United States and caste in India.

She received her M.A. from Emerson College in Boston and a Post Graduate Diploma in Journalism from the Asian College of Journalism in India. She also served as a 2020-21 Princeton in Africa Fellow.

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Md Mudassir Hossain is a PhD student and researcher at the School of Journalism and Communication, University of Oregon.

His research focuses on climate communication and visual media ethics. He is interested in exploring the challenges and possibilities of Photography, Data, UX, GIS, and New Media in climate communication.

Mudassir is a multi-award-winning photographer with a decade of experience working with international media production.

He holds an MA from Goldsmiths, University of London, and completed undergraduate semesters at the Danish School of Media and Journalism.

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Luke Walker is a PhD student at the University of Oregon whose research centers on meaningful storytelling through Extended Reality (XR), including virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR).

As an XR developer, he examines how engagement with experiences in science communication, STEM, and mental health can influence users' attitudes and behaviors.

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ANNEX

Social Media key stats

Data provided by DataReportal.
Consolidated by Luke Wilson.

Social Media Snapshot: Q4 2025

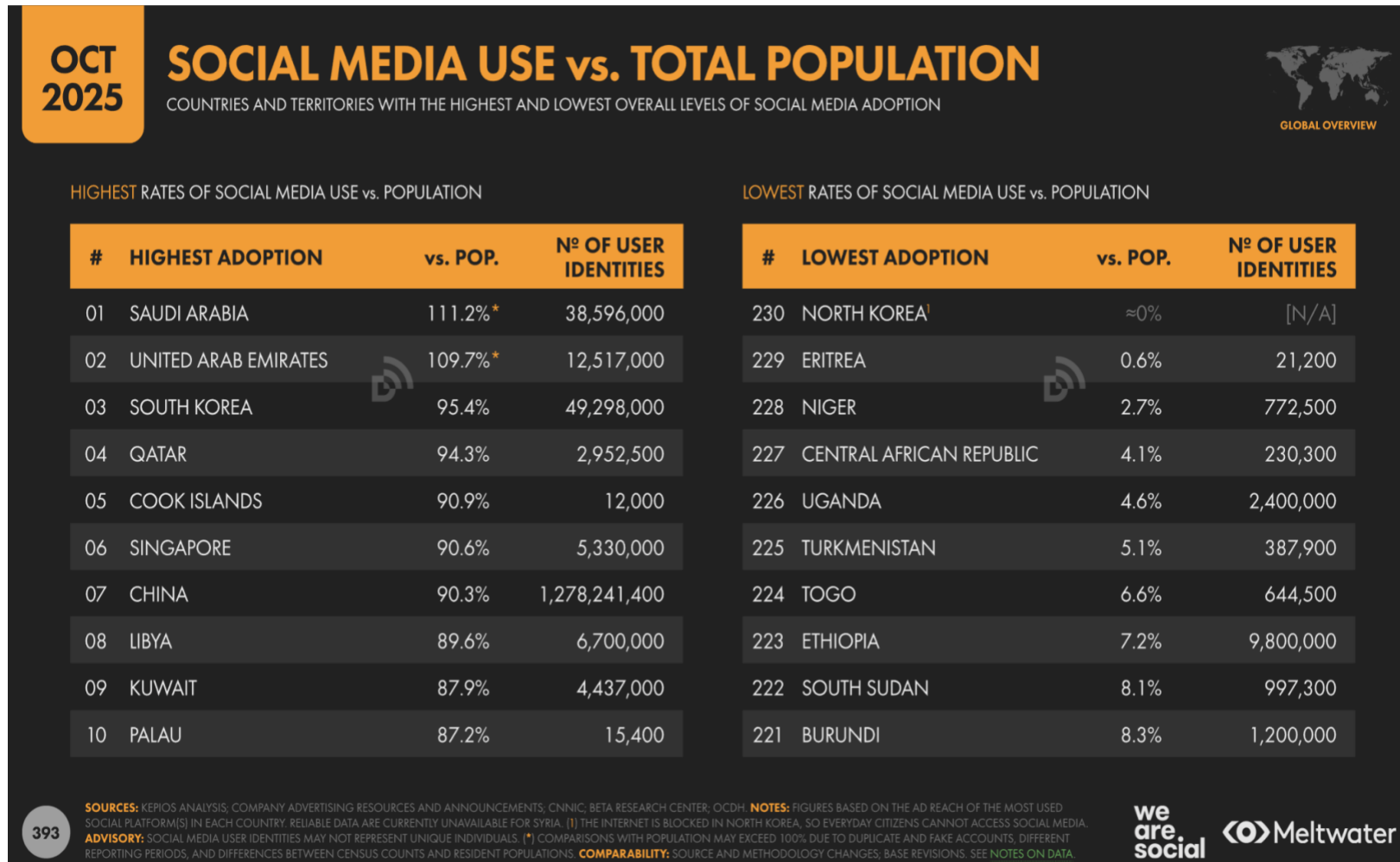
Country	YouTube	Facebook	Instagram	TikTok	LinkedIn	Messenger	Snapchat	X (Twitter)
Algeria	25.4 million 67.1 %	27.5 million 72.5%	13.5 million 35.7%	24.8 million 65.4%	5.50 million 14.5%	16.2 million 42.8%	9.78 million 25.8%	1.07 million 2.8%
Bahrain	1.23 million 75.2%	773,000 47.3%	1.10 million 67.3%	1.31 million 80.2%	720,000 43.6%	432,000 26.2%	1.10 million 67%	450,000 27.5%
Egypt	49.3 million 50.2%	51.6 million 43.4%	21.7 million 18.2%	48.8 million 49.7%	15.0 million 12.6%	37.0 million 37.7%	20.6 million 21%	4.64 million 4.7%
Iraq	24.7 million 62.4%	20.8 million 52.5%	21.5 million 54.2%	40.1 million 101.3%*	2.70 million 6.8%	14.9 million 37.6%	19.3 million 48.6%	2.74 million 6.9%
Israel	7.01 million 80.4%	5.05 million 57.9%	5.00 million 57.3%	4.49 million 51.4%	3.10 million 35.5%	2.70 million 31%	1.31 million 15.1%	881,000 10.1%
Jordan	6.80 million 63.9%	5.55 million 52.2%	4.55 million 42.8%	2.34 million 22%	2.20 million 20.7%	3.95 million 37.1%	4.20 million 39.5%	826,000 7.8%
Kuwait	3.31 million 66.3%	2.45 million 49%	3.00 million 60%	350,000 88.8%	1.30 million 26%	1.55 million 31%	2.43 million 48.6%	1.42 million 28.3%
Lebanon	3.12 million 58%	3.45 million 64.1%	2.95 million 54.9%	4.58 million 85.1%	1.40 million 26%	1.65 million 30.7%	1.46 million 27.2%	555,000 10.3%
Libya	NA	6.70 million 101.2%*	2.30 million 34.8%	6.19 million 93.5%	700,000 10.6%	4.90 million 74%	NA	534,000 8.1%

Morocco	21.6 million 60.8%	22.8 million 64%	15.1 million 42.5%	16.7 million 47.1%	6.90 million 19.4%	7.10 million 20%	7.64 million 21.5%	1.08 million 3%
Oman	3.44 million 65.2%	1.75 million 33.1%	2.80 million 53%	2.73 million 51.7%	1.30 million 24.6%	925,000 17.5%	2.35 million 44.4%	910,000 17.2%
Saudi Arabia	27.5 million 80%	17.7 million 51.4%	18.2 million 53%	38.6 million 112.3%*	12.0 million 34.9%	11.1 million 32.3%	25.3 million 73.6%	15.0 million 43.6%
Sudan	NA	NA	NA	6.06 million 40.6%	710,000 4.8%	NA	NA	NA
Syria	NA	NA	NA	46.500 0.5%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Tunisia	7.83 million 75.2%	7.80 million 74.9%	4.05 million 38.9%	6.00 million 57.6%	2.70 million 25.9%	5.85 million 56.2%	2.05 million 19.6%	356,000 3.4%
Turkey	57.9 million 74.7%	34.7 million 44.8%	62.3 million 80.4%	44.9 million 57.9%	21.0 million 27.1%	12.8 million 16.5%	16.2 million 21%	18.5 million 23.9%
UAE	8.37 million 74.1%	9.70 million 85.9%	8.05 million 71.3%	12.5 million 110.8%*	10.0 million 88.5%	5.65 million 50%	5.13 million 45.4%	2.85 million 25.2%
Yemen	NA	4.25 million 57.1%	2.30 million 30.9%	6.67 million 89.6%	730,000 9.8%	1.20 million 16.1%	NA	1.41 million 18.9%

Per DataReportal: *Advisory: we’re aware that usage rates in excess of 100 percent of the population, of the “eligible” population, and / or of internet users may seem implausible, but we’ve elected to republish source data “as is”, in order to enable readers to make their own judgements. Please see our detailed notes on data to learn more about potential causes of these anomalies.

Social Media Use Vs. Total Population

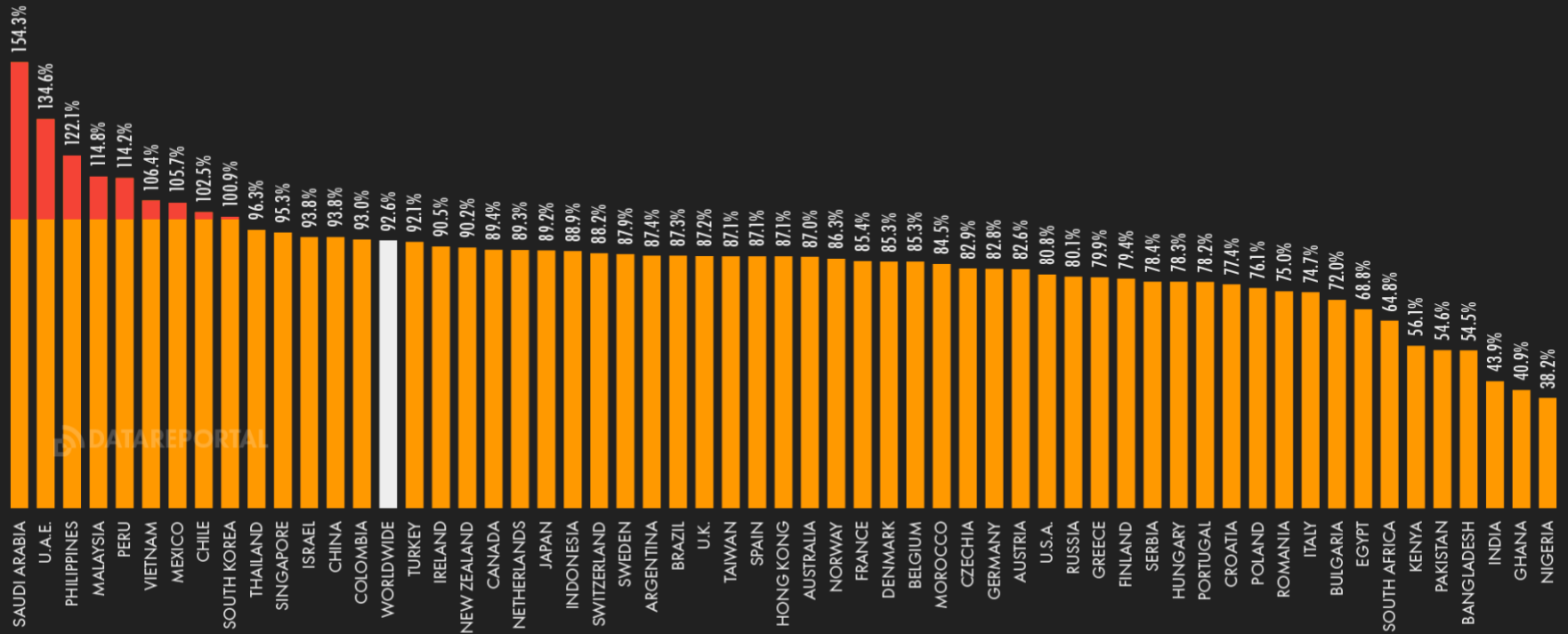
Five of the Top 10 countries in the world for social media penetration are in the MENA region: Saudi Arabia (No 1), UAE (2nd), Qatar (4th), Libya (8th) and Kuwait (9th).



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SOCIAL MEDIA USE vs. POPULATION AGE 18+

ACTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA USER IDENTITIES AS A PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION AGE 18+ (NOTE: USER IDS MAY NOT REPRESENT UNIQUE INDIVIDUALS)



394

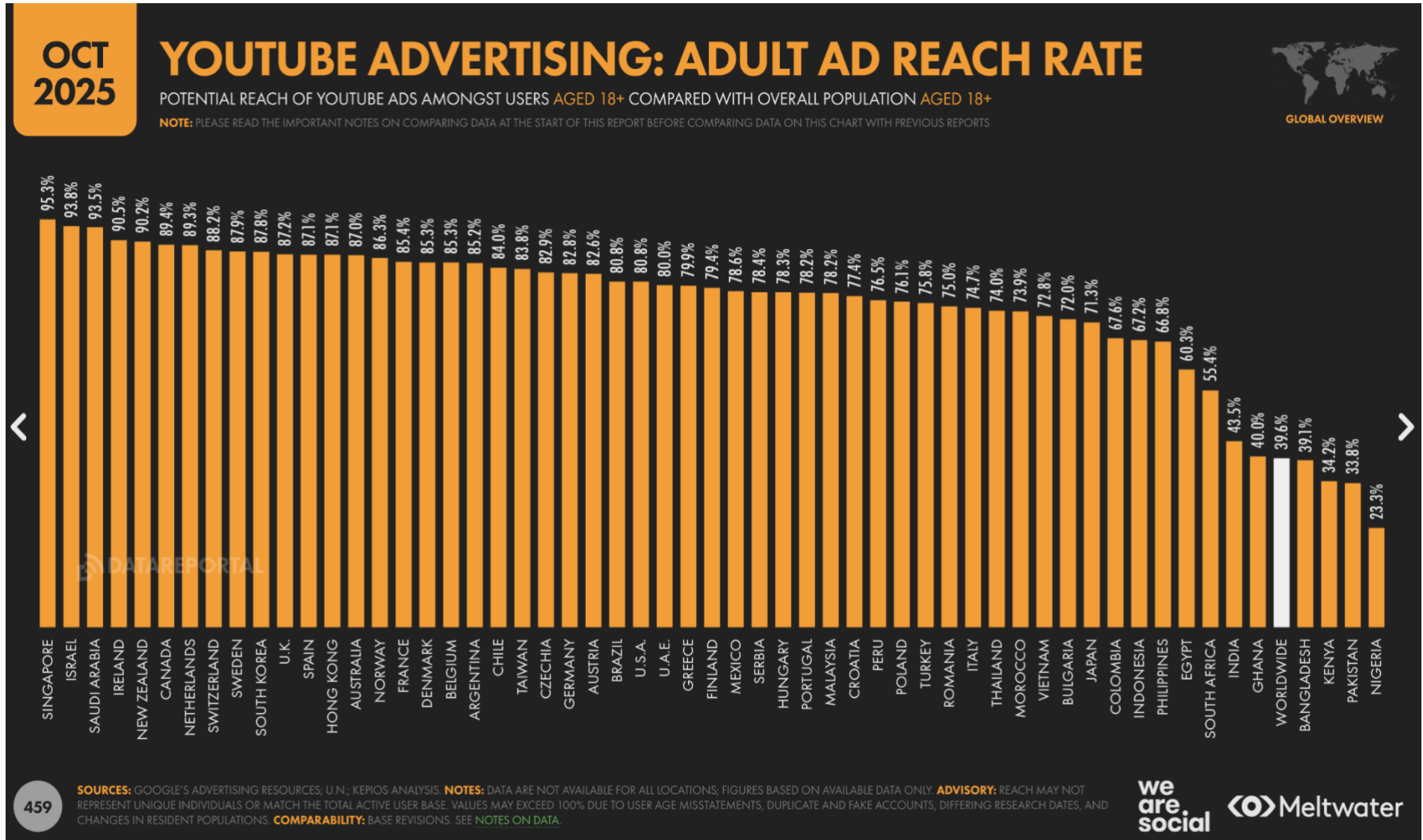
SOURCES: KEIPOS ANALYSIS; COMPANY ADVERTISING RESOURCES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS; CNNIC; BETA RESEARCH CENTER; OCDH. **NOTE:** FIGURES BASED ON THE AD REACH OF THE MOST USED SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM(S) IN EACH COUNTRY. **ADVISORY:** SOCIAL MEDIA USER IDENTITIES MAY NOT REPRESENT UNIQUE INDIVIDUALS. COMPARISONS WITH POPULATION MAY EXCEED 100% DUE TO DUPLICATE AND FAKE ACCOUNTS, DIFFERENT REPORTING PERIODS, AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CENSUS COUNTS AND RESIDENT POPULATIONS. **COMPARABILITY:** SOURCE AND METHODOLOGY CHANGES; BASE REVISIONS. SEE [NOTES ON DATA](#).

we
are
social

Meltwater

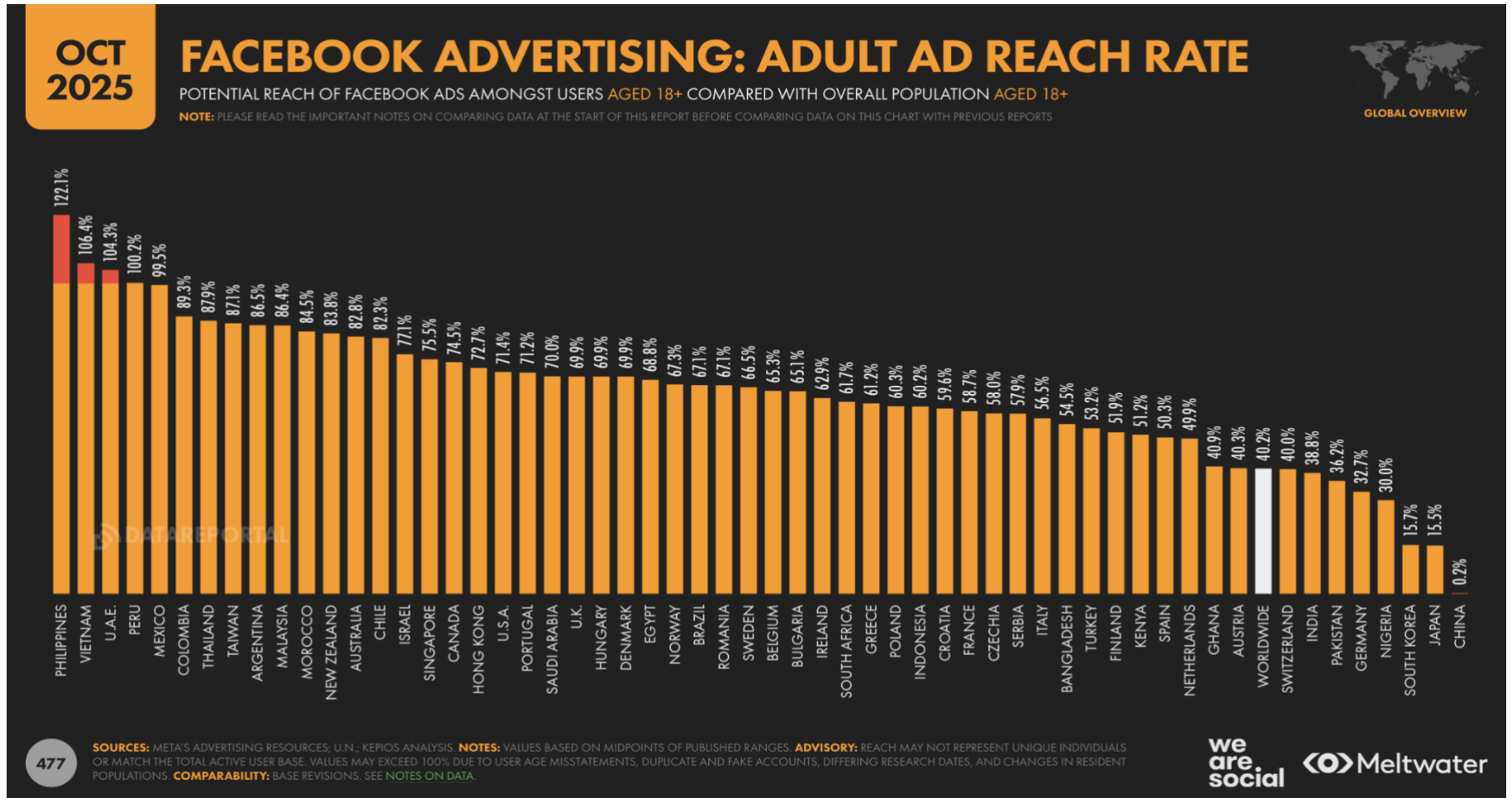
YouTube reach

Two of the Top 10 countries in the world for YouTube reach are in the MENA region: Israel (No 2) and Saudi Arabia (3).



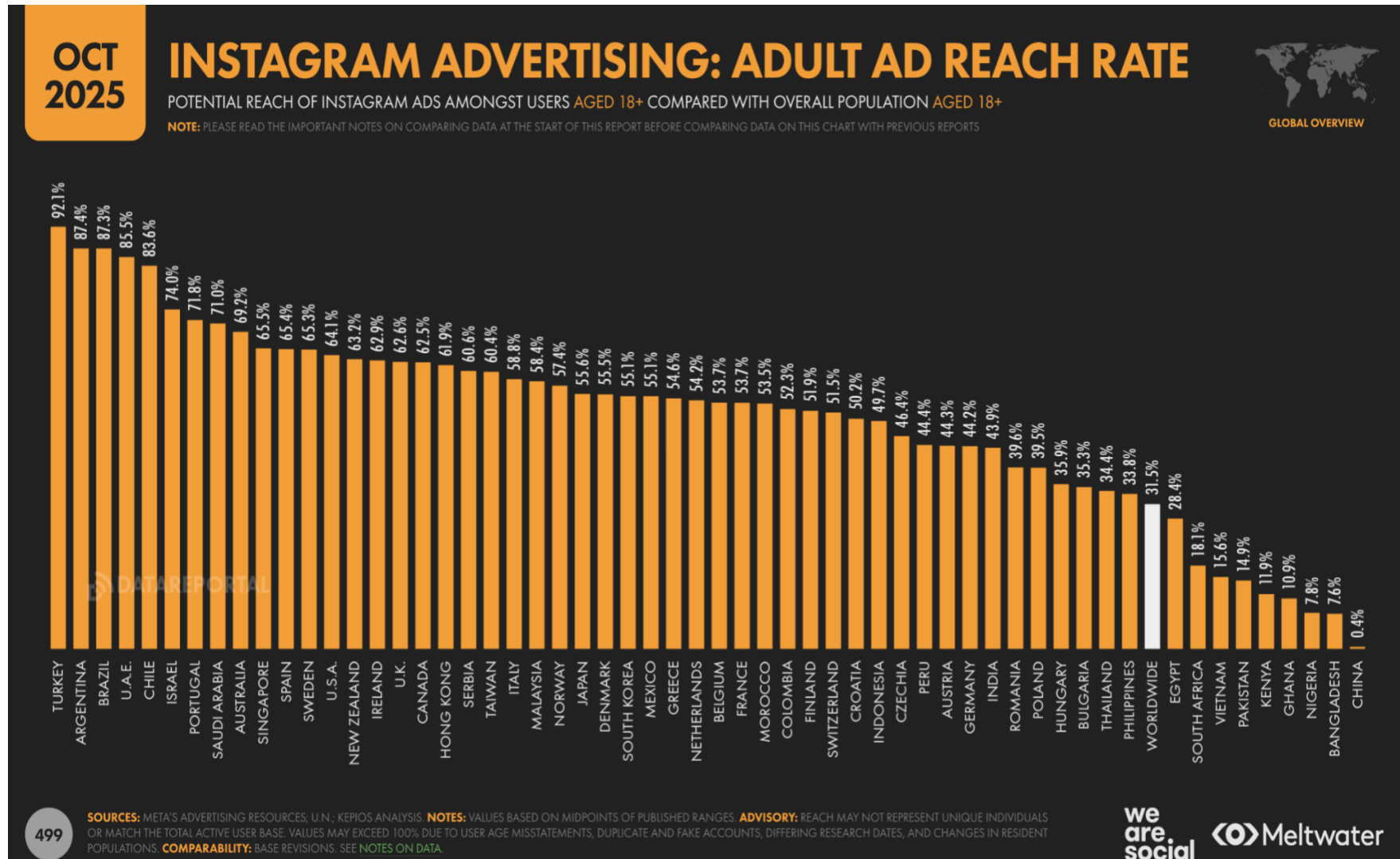
Facebook reach

Two of the Top 10 countries in the world for Facebook, in terms of reach, are in the MENA region: UAE (No 3) and Morocco (No 10).



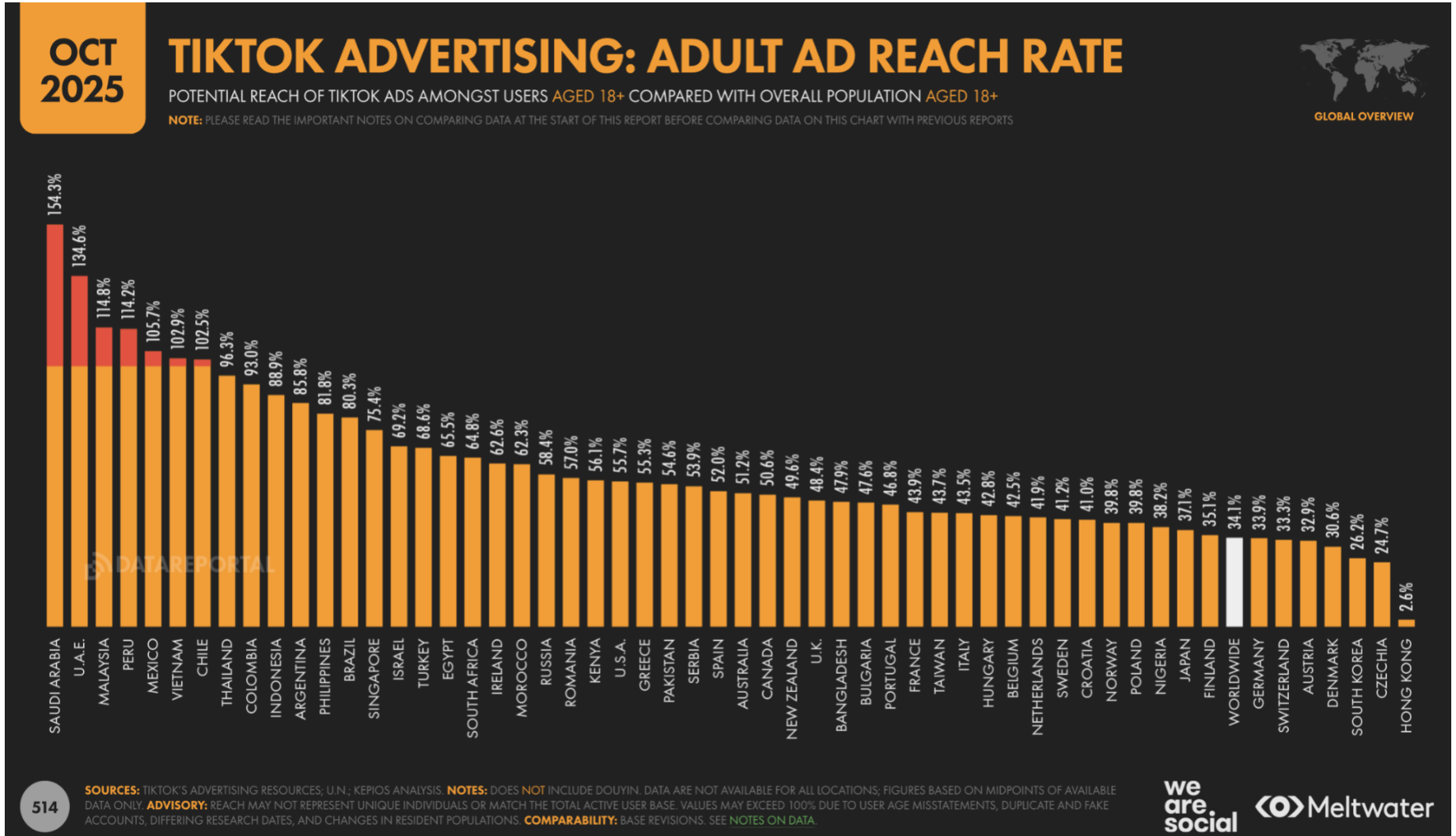
Instagram reach

Four of the Top 10 countries in the world for Instagram, in terms of reach, are in the MENA region: Turkey (No 1), UAE (4th), Israel (6th) and Saudi Arabia (8th).



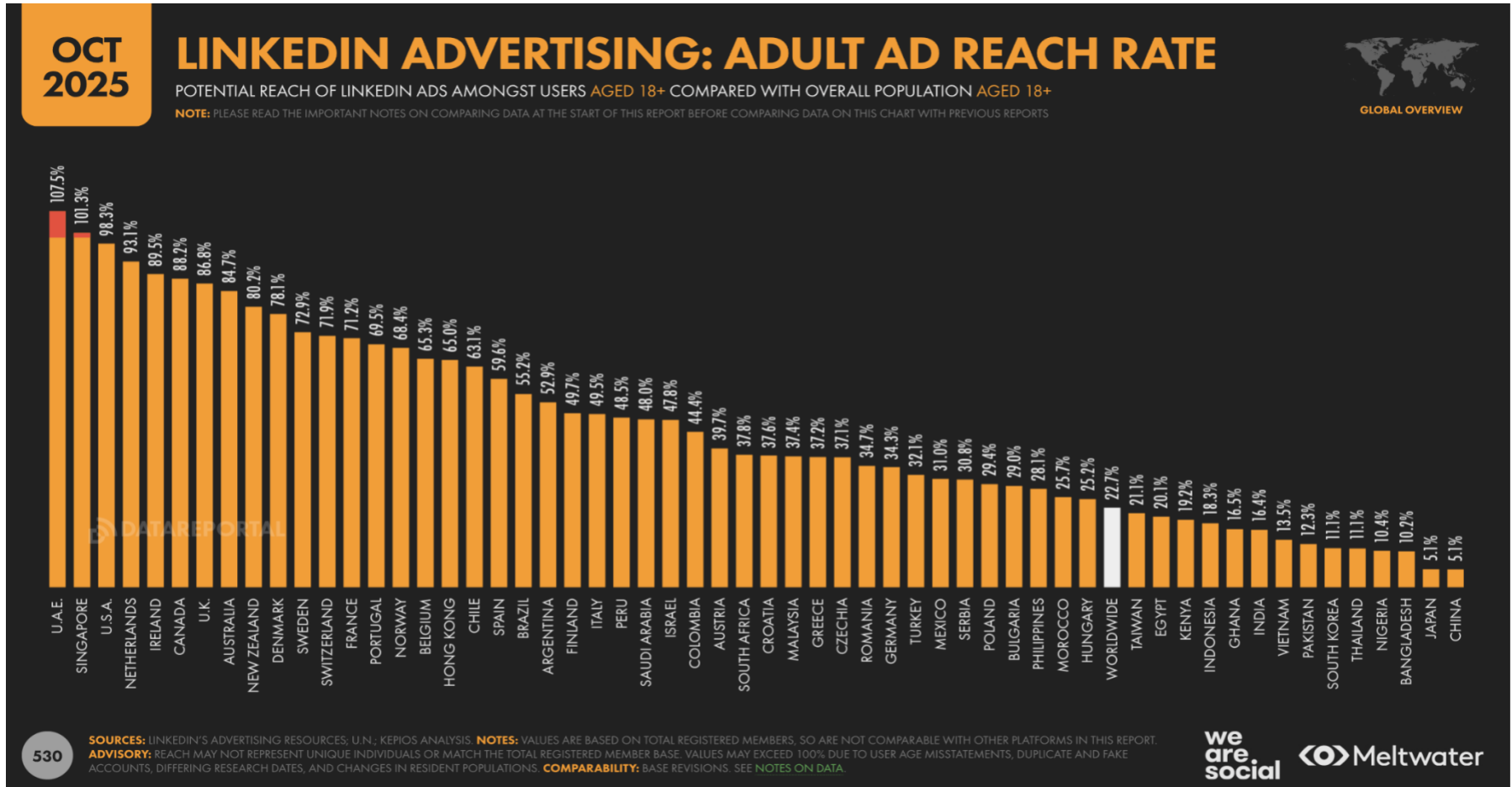
TikTok reach

Two of the Top 10 countries in the world for TikTok in terms of reach, are in the MENA region: Saudi Arabia (No 1), UAE (2nd).



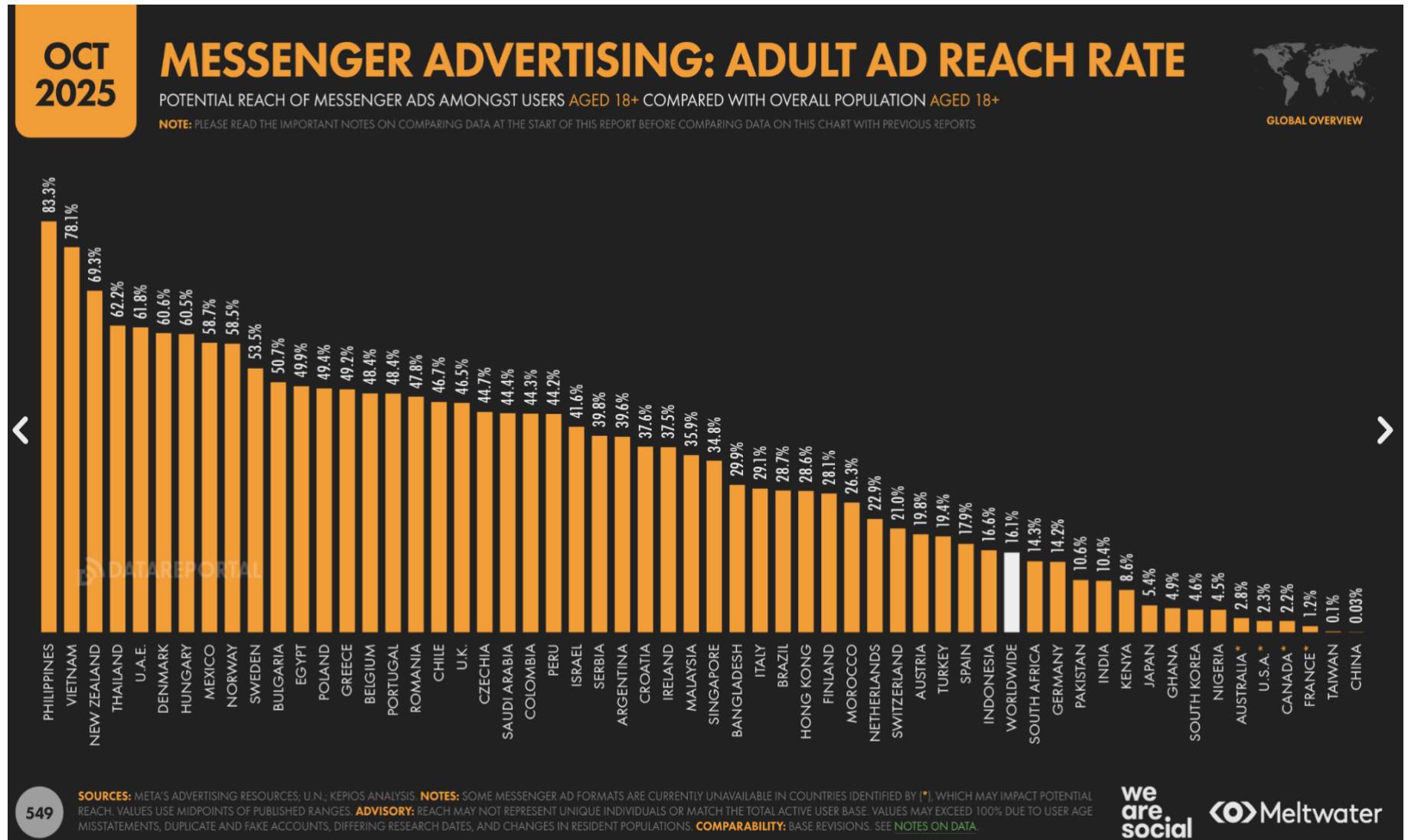
LinkedIn reach

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), tops the world for reach on LinkedIn.



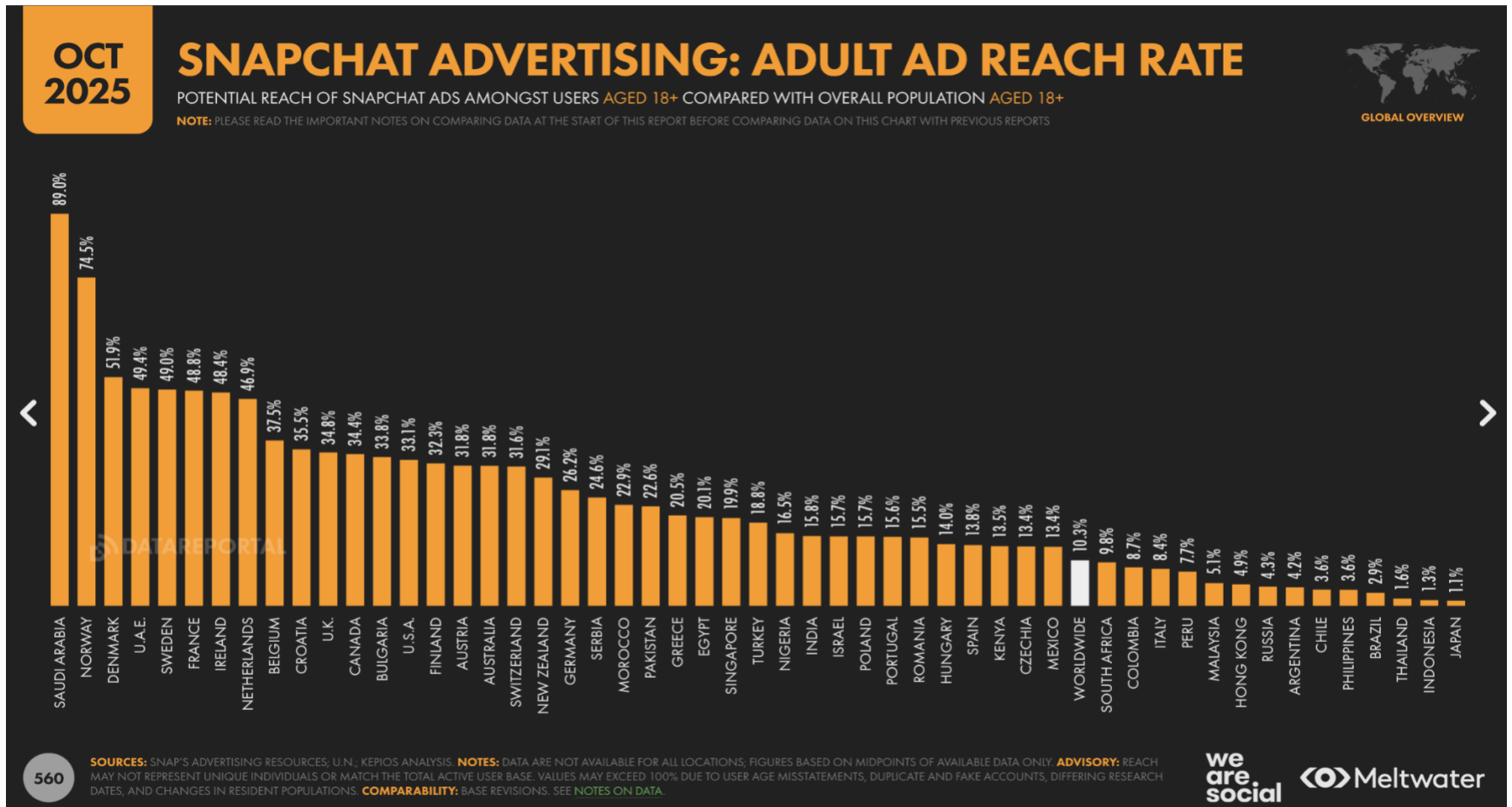
Facebook Messenger reach

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), is ranked fifth, globally, for the reach of Facebook Messenger.



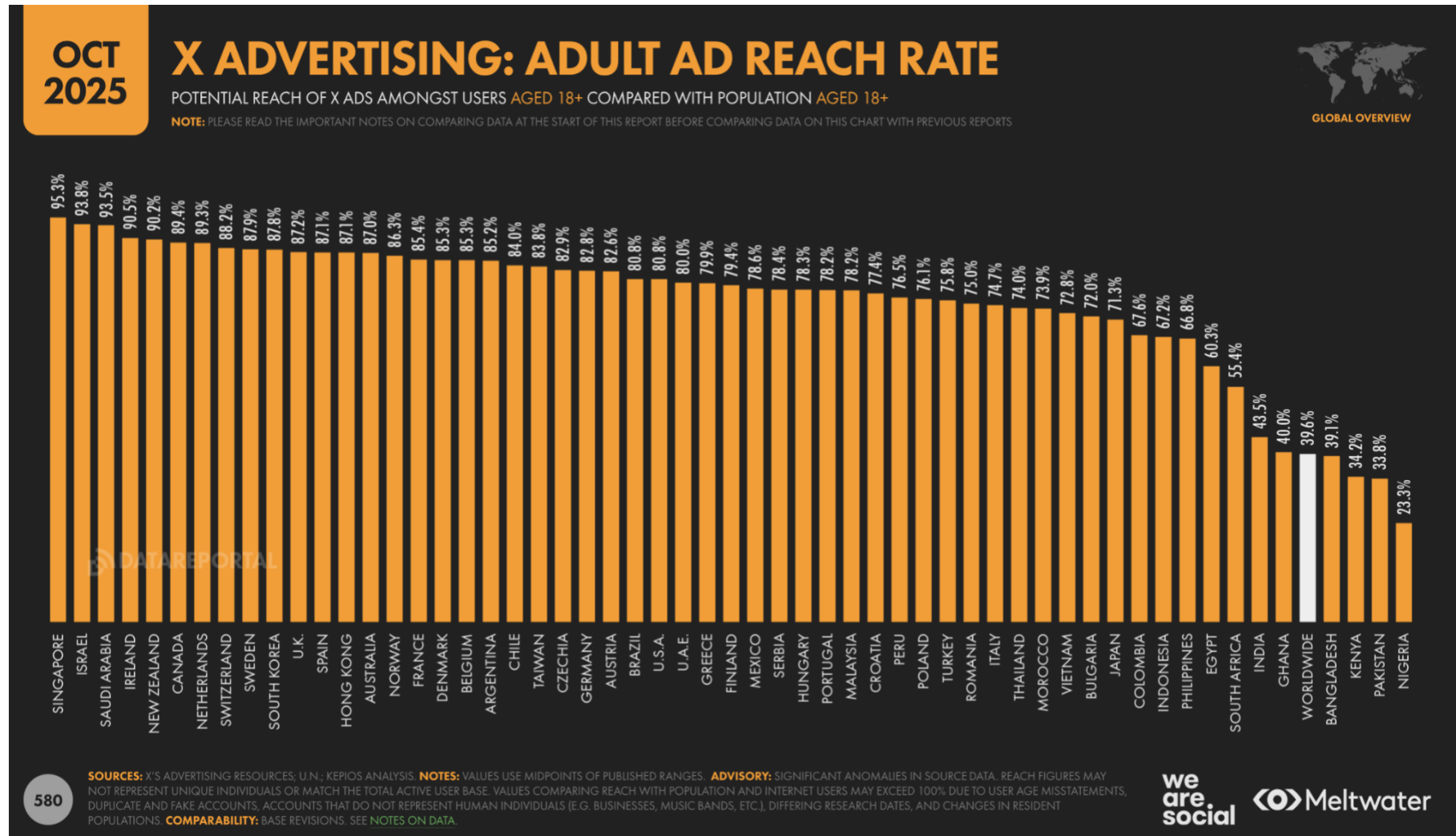
Snapchat reach

Saudi Arabia, is ranked first (No 1), globally, for the reach of Snapchat, with UAE ranked 4th.



X (Twitter)

Israel is ranked second and Saudi Arabia third, globally, for the reach of X (the platform formerly known as Twitter).



Acknowledgements

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