

Middle East Witnesses A Leap In Social Media And Internet Access

The Middle East has seen its biggest ever leap in internet users, with the number of people accessing online growing 11% over 2018, according to a Digital 2019 report launched by Socialize, in conjunction with We Are Social and Hootsuite.

The report delved into data from more than 230 countries and territories, examining social media and digital trends around the world.

According to the survey, the number of people across the world accessing the internet now stands at nearly 4.4 billion, with a million new internet users coming online every day in 2018. Almost 3.5 billion people globally are active on social media, accounting for 45% of the world's population—up from 42% in 2018.

The Middle East saw half a million new social media users every month during 2018, with the UAE and Kuwait among the world's top five most socially-engaged countries.

In Saudi Arabia, the social media landscape witnessed changes with both Snapchat and Facebook seeing a major decline in users. However, Saudis remain the biggest users of Snapchat in the world with almost 14 million users.

People around the world are spending more time on social media—the global daily average is now two hours and 16 minutes, or one seventh of their waking lives, according to Penny Wilson, CMO of Hootsuite.

The UAE tops the charts with the highest mobile connectivity and social media penetration in the world. The use of voice search and commands is gaining popularity—the UAE comes fourth in the world, with 45% of internet users using voice commands on a monthly basis. The UAE also enjoys high mobile connectivity, with an average of two mobile subscriptions per person and users tapping into a mobile internet service that is seventh fastest in the world.

The Middle East & Africa saw a 51% increase in mobile data traffic over the last 12 months, growing faster than anywhere else in the world.

Regarding e-commerce, around two thirds of internet users in KSA and the UAE made online purchases last year. The UAE is one of the top 30 countries worldwide when e-commerce expenditure is measured as a total of retail spend, with shoppers making 3% of all purchases online.

Saudi Arabia saw 34% growth in the number of internet users who reported having made an online purchase in the past month.

In 2018, the total value of the consumer goods e-commerce market in Saudi Arabia was estimated at \$6.36 billion, up 15% from the previous year. The highest spend was seen

within the travel (including accommodation) category, which accounted for 50% of total online spend.

Total online spend on consumer goods worldwide during 2018 is estimated at \$1.79 trillion, up by 14% on the previous year.

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