

INSPIRE YOUTH JOURNAL



The 24th Edition

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Climate Change & Disease
Viral Content
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Voices of the Past
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Crisis of Child Marriage
And More!

THE AGING POPULATION CRISIS

Hu Suri Trinh

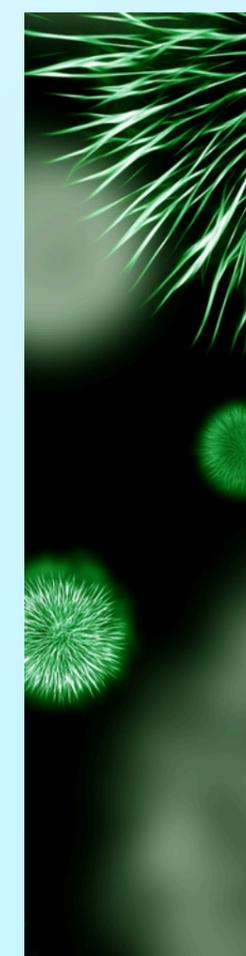
Around the world, societies are quietly entering a demographic era that few governments fully understand and even less are prepared to face. The population of older adults is increasing faster than at any single historical moment, and such a change is beginning to challenge the economic foundations, social institutions, and cultural assumptions that modern countries were built on. The narrative of huge, tremendous levels of progress— things like longer life expectancy, better healthcare, lower infant mortality —has always been popularised, but then comes an unexpected challenge: the possibility that human longevity could destabilize societies that are still structured around the idea of short retirements, large families, and an endless supply of working-age people. Rather than being a distant future concern, population aging has already begun to change everything from healthcare and education budgets to family expectations and workplace norms, creating pressures that are beginning to emerge.

For decades, the demographic structure of most nations was characterized by a predictable pyramid, a well-defined plan: a large young population at the base, a productive middle-aged sector contributing economically, and a relatively small elderly population relying on the support of younger generations. That pyramid is quickly inverting; societies are aging quicker than government planning can handle. Medical advances mean that people are surviving illnesses that once ended lives early, and improved living conditions have extended life expectancy far beyond what retirement systems were originally designed to handle. At the same time, cultural and economic shifts (such as less pressure to have children and higher costs of living) have led to smaller families, delayed parenthood, and declining birth rates, all of which reduce the number of younger people available to sustain the working population. As a result, the demographic balance that once seemed natural is gradually disappearing, leaving institutions facing pressures they were never built to absorb.

Healthcare systems are among the first institutions to feel the consequences of this demographic change. Longer life expectancy increases the need for long-term treatment, continuous monitoring, and chronic disease management, all of which require sustained medical attention rather than short episodes of care. Health services in many countries were founded on models designed to respond to immediate illnesses rather than long-term decline associated with aging populations. This creates a growing mismatch between the type of medical support required and the services available, especially in regions where specialized geriatric care is limited. Hospitals struggle with capacity, primary care networks become overwhelmed, and long-term care facilities—where they exist at all—often lack staffing and resources. What makes this particularly complex is that aging is not only a medical issue but also a social and emotional one, and the systems developed to respond to illness often fail to address the holistic nature of aging.

The responsibility for elderly support often shifts to families, which are themselves transformed by modern mobility, economic pressures, and changing social structures. In earlier generations, multiple family members lived within the same community—often the same household—and caregiving was implemented into everyday life. Today, family members live in different cities or different countries, careers require long periods of time, and younger adults frequently lack the time or even proximity to offer full-time care. Even in countries with strong cultural traditions of family responsibility, rapid urbanization has fundamentally changed how generations interact. As a result, caregiving increasingly becomes an emotional and financial burden that falls unequally on individuals, usually middle-aged or older women. These pressures tend to accumulate quietly within homes and rarely appear in the media, yet they also show the everyday realities of families trying to provide care without institutional support. Thus, there is a rising dependence and obligation on younger family members to care for the elderly.

A good example is the one child policy, implemented nationwide by the Chinese government in 1980. The impacts of such a policy is witnessed even until today. The overall rate of natural increase declined, estimated to be around 400 million births. At that period of time, because sons were preferred more than daughters, the overall sex ratio leaned towards male. Although the policy was rescinded in 2016, impacts are still felt today.



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Economies also begin to feel pressure as the ratio between working-age citizens and retirees change. Retirement systems, pension schemes, and insurance programs were designed during periods of different demographic structure, when large working populations supported relatively few retirees. Today's systems face the opposite challenge. With fewer workers contributing to taxation and more citizens relying on state-funded support, governments face difficult decisions about how to sustain pensions, medical subsidies, and social care without placing disproportionate burdens on younger generations. There is an emerging concern that younger workers may end up financing increasingly expensive care, while simultaneously confronting their own challenges: higher cost of living, increasing economic competition, and postponed financial stability.

The demographic shift therefore threatens to become a generational conflict, in which younger citizens feel overburdened by responsibilities while older citizens feel increasingly dependent and marginalized.

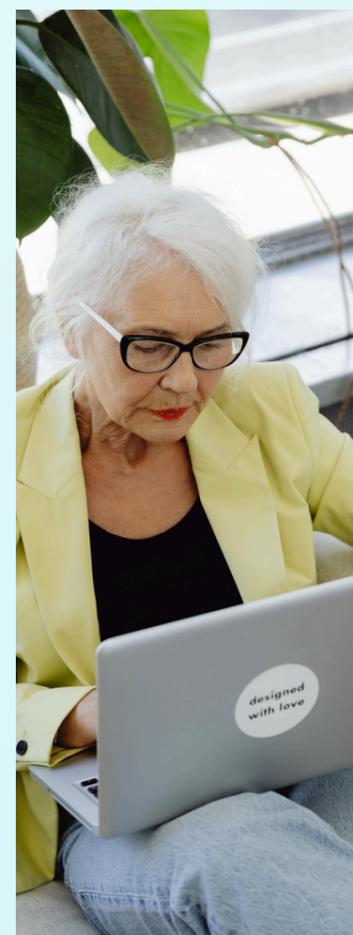
The workplace is changing too, as societies reconsider the meaning of working age and retirement. Many governments encourage older adults to stay in employment longer, hoping to maintain economic productivity and reduce pension pressures. However, workplaces often remain structurally designed for younger employees, with limited support for the health needs, flexibility requirements, and physical constraints of older workers. The result is a growing contradiction: older adults are encouraged to remain in employment, yet the professional environment does not adapt to their needs. At the same time, technological change threatens to exclude those who struggle with new digital tools, widening inequality not only between age groups but within older populations themselves. If societies want longer working lives, they may also need to rethink the meaning of work—its purpose, expectations, and accessibility.

Population aging cannot be reduced to just a crisis or a burden; it is also a sign of human progress. Yet progress always demands adaptation, and the institutions built for past generations must be reconsidered for future ones. Healthcare systems may need to expand into long-term community service networks rather than episodic treatment centers. Retirement may need to evolve from a fixed moment into a flexible transition. Families may require government support rather than bearing the burden alone. Most importantly, young and old generations will need to develop social arrangements based on cooperation rather than silent resentment. Ignoring demographic change increases the risk that aging becomes a source of political tension, economic strain, and social fragmentation.

Ahead is a very long transition that will most probably define the twenty-first century as clearly as urbanization defined the nineteenth or technological change defined the twentieth. The issue is not simply that societies are aging, but that they are aging without a clear plan for what comes next. The demographic reality is already here; the question is whether institutions, governments, and families can reshape themselves quickly enough to meet it. If they cannot, younger generations may inherit systems unable to support them, while older generations face uncertain futures despite having lived through decades of economic growth.

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HOW CLIMATE CHANGE IS AFFECTING THE RE-EMERGENCE OF NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES

Kolawole Olawuwo

Climate change is defined as the changes which can be recognised by the variability of the properties of climate that are extended for a longer period of time than usual. The issue of climate change is one which has been affecting different worldwide fields like agriculture, healthcare, manufacturing industries and some other aspects. However, with respect to the topic we're looking at, it's important to know what Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) are. Neglected tropical diseases is a term used for the diverse group of diseases which can be caused by different pathogenic agents which have been previously controlled but are trying to revive again due to negligence and some other factors, and they are very common in communities that have limited access to healthcare services, poor sanitation and lack of clean water. Some examples of these NTDs common in Nigeria include river blindness (onchocerciasis), dengue fever, loiasis, schistosomiasis, trichoma and helminthiasis. In sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria has the highest cases of NTDs, with a significant number of its population at risk. Most of the neglected tropical diseases, like lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis, schistosomiasis, trichoma and other examples based on research, have proven that Nigeria has the highest burden of these diseases. The purpose of this article is to educate the readers on how climate change can cause the re-emergence of previously controlled diseases; case studies and recent trends in Nigeria; public health implications; what Nigerian youth public health and climate change advocates are doing to respond to these changes; and what more needs to be done.

A brief history of neglected tropical diseases and what's been done to control them

Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) have existed in Nigeria for quite a number of years, especially in areas lacking clean water, sanitation, and hygiene, making the country one of the most affected globally. Historically widespread diseases such as onchocerciasis, lymphatic filariasis, schistosomiasis, and leprosy have caused severe disabilities, while others like Buruli ulcer and trachoma were documented as early as the 1950s-1960s. Deep-rooted stigma and cultural misconceptions often prevented affected individuals from seeking care. Over the decades, Nigeria's response evolved—from early vector control efforts to the establishment of national programmes like the Onchocerciasis Control Programme in 1982 and large-scale mass drug administration campaigns beginning in 1988. Major milestones include the elimination of guinea worm, participation in the 2012 London Declaration, and the development of strategic master plans toward 2030 disease elimination goals. Despite progress supported by global partners, challenges such as limited funding, weak health systems, logistical barriers, and ongoing stigma continue to hinder complete eradication.

Influence of climate change in reviving disease patterns.

Climate change patterns such as variations in seasonal temperature and the high increment in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, and changes in weather condition patterns can create suitable platforms for the spread of infections that may be waterborne, foodborne, airborne and vector-borne. Without any doubt, climate change can activate the spread of infectious diseases in Nigeria's rural communities by altering the habitats of vectors such as mosquitoes and ticks. Let's do a case study of how some of the ways by which climate change is reviving these previously controlled diseases in Nigeria. For example, the warmth in temperature of a particular environment and consistent rainfall may create breeding sites for mosquitoes, who transmit dengue diseases. On the other hand, other neglected tropical diseases can be affected even by the food people consume every day, and this may happen due to flooding which can destroy crops and agricultural infrastructure, leading to food insecurity and malnutrition, especially when combined with the displacement of communities. In short, climate change can also create a suitable conditioning habitat for some vectors like rodents, leading to the outbreak of Lassa fever.



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Public health implications.

Recent studies show that neglected tropical diseases are now re-emerging again due to lack of funding to villages and towns with low infrastructure and public health systems, thereby making it hard for these diseases to become controlled. Most of the time, these neglected diseases can cause stigmatization of patients, thereby also affecting their mental health. Not only that, but some of these NTDs have been causing death in a significant number of people who can't fully get access to good healthcare services.

Nigerian youths advocate actions, and what more needs to be done.

As of the 27th of November, 2024, the Premium Times reported that the Nigerian government confirmed that two of every three Nigerians have been affected by NTDs. This calls for actions of youth advocacy to create awareness to combat these health conditions. There have been youths that have been creating awareness in the country on good sanitation activities, and also the government bodies are doing their best to create viable solutions to the outbreaks of these diseases, but many rural areas have not been benefiting from it. Also, there has not been enough funding to make these diseases go to extinction totally. The changes must begin from youth to create more awareness and also form organizations to partner with other international parties to get funding to combat these challenges in our various communities.



In conclusion, it's highly recommended that youth participate actively in bringing an end to the outbreaks of the neglected tropical diseases, and one to do this is by creating more awareness in the areas where these conditions are more prominent. The government can try their best, but the youths also need to do their best to assist the government in combating these healthcare concerns that were previously controlled but are trying to emerge again.

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THE ALLURE OF VIRAL CONTENT

Prince Senanu Bedzo

What if?

Remember all those times where you wanted to build longer words in scrabble? Or just relax during a picnic with family? Or even feel nostalgia while listening to cool music from your favourites? Even if it's none of these, you still cherish heart-warming moments. Unfortunately, these moments are hard to come by in an ever-changing world. This change is facilitated by buttons that are clicked to boost likes, comments or shares. We call these changes TRENDS. These trends come in the form of dancing, singing or pranks. Of course, trends can be very fun. They are used for marketing and even expressing your creative skills. But are all trends necessary? This is not to say trends are bad; the main concern is how the effects of these trends are measurable in the lives of individuals. Now, let's explore two of the numerous constituents of trends.

Identity Crisis

When a person jumps on a trend, the next expectation is for the content to go viral. This is validated by the number of likes and comments the content attracts. If it is low, the individual has to do a self-check and try to follow every single trend with perfection. The pressures of this virality, amongst many other things, branches into meeting a standard. This standard creates a pressure for men to own fancy clothes, expensive cars the latest phones, and many other mundane benchmarks and for women, in addition to other things, to look like social media beauty icons which lures them to undergo surgeries to enhance their face, and attain the world's definition of the 'perfect body'. After this, they can gain virality in their contents. It is known that in 2024, cosmetic surgery shot up to approximately eighty-four percent. Even though there is just a twenty percent mortality rate, cosmetic surgery comes with many negative consequences. The average cost of a Brazilian butt lift surgery costs eight thousand, six hundred and eighty-six dollars. This shows the financial burden that exists in the lives of some women and leaves women who cannot afford these cosmetic surgeries to live in low self esteem. This is dire, as it has caused many to suffer regrets that are permanent due to the complications even after successful surgeries.

Oversharing Personal Information

Trends these days can involve sharing very personal information. Popular trends like "we listen, we don't judge" on TikTok have led many people to disclose very sensitive information to people who they don't even know online. TikTok and most social media companies turn our posts into personalized advertisements for our feed which manipulates the user into either buying or being compelled to buy products they see. Remember those times when we used to protect our personal secrets? It's not the same anymore. One thing we fail to recognize is that TikTok is able to collect data from the user such as contact lists, access to calendar and many others. As it is always said, the internet never forgets.

Conclusion

As already established, trends might be very engaging but let's consider our future aspirations, family, friends and loved ones who hold us to a high esteem.

Always reflect on what Tim Cook said, "When an online service is free, you are not the customer, you are the product".

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DIGITAL DREAMS AND LIVING MYTHOLOGY

Chau Do Minh

A group of gamers created a virtual world for fun. It began as a few friends stacking blocks into grand castles, but as time went on, their fans turned it into a scripture, carefully documenting every swing of the sword and each stroke of the pen. What does it mean when the Internet refuses to forget, much like generations upon generations refusing to give up oral tradition? Is a new kind of folklore taking root?

The Minecraft-based Dream SMP (survival multiplayer), along with its predecessors and successors, was immensely popular, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic season. The Dream SMP in particular was and still is the most celebrated, with tens of thousands of bored viewers tuning in to each stream. Opened on April 24th, 2020, it soon garnered a large and loyal fanbase, including talented artists and writers, to whom the Dream SMP wasn't just jokes on a video game—it was an entire series with fictional wars and presidential elections. The stakes emerged from heated conflicts, complex arcs, politics, and multiple creator perspectives, weaving together a myth with many narrators, unlike the single-voiced myths of the past. Fans shaped the myth as much as the creators did—casting characters as heroes, tyrants, martyrs, or villains.

Unlike traditional myths that erode over generations, digital myths remain archived, reinterpreted, and continually revived by their communities. The Dream SMP became what I'd like to call a "living myth": a storyworld that evolves long after its original events end, sustained by the memories and creativity of the people who keep retelling it.

"Fan fiction is a way of the culture repairing the damage done in a system where contemporary myths are owned by corporations instead of owned by the folk." —Henry Jenkins

This is directly relevant to "living myths" and "participatory culture". Doesn't this seem a bit... broad? It's a bit hard to define. According to Paul Booth, fan-works, including fan fiction, fanart, 'headcanons' (canon-adjacent theories), and other forms of fan-made media have connections, and "the connections between these separate texts become transmediated story", and as Pérez-Reverte puts it, this story "unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole."

If this sounds familiar, it's because ancient folklore worked the same way. Stories like the Odyssey and Ramayana were never fixed—the tales shifted with each perspective, should it be a warrior, a sailor, a king, or a son... Ancient folklore was invariably told in past tense: "Zeus *threw* a thunderbolt", "Maui *pulled* the islands from the sea", "Anasi *tricked* the sky god"... to reflect closure. The story is told as events that already occurred in the distant, unchangeable past. It implies: the story world is finished, and now we are recounting it.

On the other hand, *living* myths are told in the present tense. The unfold *live* in the form of ARGs (Alternate Reality Games), livestreams, gameplay, or posts that are constantly being updated in front of thousands, millions, or even billions of watching eyes. Fans narrate events as they are happening, and they branch out into fan-made content that grows even after the original events are done with. This means that the story can change at any moment, the past can be undone with just a few words, and the story remains *open* to discussion: "I believe that character X really shouldn't have done Y...", "You should watch X POV to see what's happening in Y!", "Character X is spiraling again... I think that things will get heated *fast*." This tense reflects *continuity*. The story is still alive and evolving.



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The Dream SMP and other game-based storytelling franchises stand out for two reasons. First of all, most fandoms, like those surrounding The Hunger Games, Percy Jackson and the Olympians, or Dandy's World usually revolve around finished games, books, movies, and other traditional formats. The story is fixed. Creating comes first, and interpretation comes second. Even if the fanbase is passionate, as is the case with fans of Hazbin Hotel, K-Pop Demon Hunters, Harry Potter, Star Wars and many other franchises, the creators ultimately control the narrative. And while this is still 'participatory culture' (which means fans interpret and discuss works part of and related to the original material, as well as create other affiliated works), the Dream SMP takes it a step further.

In the words of Claude Lévi-Strauss, "myths think themselves in people's minds without people being aware of the fact." This quite nicely summarizes how the Dream SMP functioned. Although the plot was loosely planned in advance, most of the Dream SMP was improvised in real time, with dozens of streamers with their own audiences influencing each other across several POVs. This collapses the barrier between audience and text. Fans essentially become the equivalent of ancient listeners who shaped the tale through collective memory, reaction, and retelling. Few fandoms offer this sense of "being there" as the Dream SMP.

So, if the Dream SMP has many narrators and is still evolving, what does that make it? A blend between the old and the new? Both a digital myth and a franchise? Perhaps. It contained the potential to reinvent and reinterpret. Its ambiguity means that one event may look heroic in one streamer's POV and downright villainous in the other. This mirrors myth cycles, such as Norse sagas with contradictory accounts, traditional folklore with different versions, and so on. This reciprocal loop is extremely rare in modern media. Most modern fandoms have an authoritative canon: character X is an antagonist, character Y does heroic acts, etc. The Dream SMP didn't. It had the power to turn a story into a living myth.

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ASF: THE REASON THAT LEADS TO 2025 MASS ELIMINATION OF SWINE IN VIETNAM

Thảo Trương Thanh

What is ASF?

ASF stands for African Swine Fever, whose origin was first acknowledged in Kenya in 1921. This infectious illness results from the African Swine Fever virus (ASFV). Due to its stability, ASFV can survive in frozen meat products, environmental conditions, and some body parts of pigs. Moreover, the ASF virus can affect wild boars and domestic pigs. There have been 83 countries around the globe with infected pigs.

ASF in Vietnam

Vietnam might be considered one of the Asian countries reaching the biggest number of ASF outbreaks. From 2019 to 2020 could be seen as the most intense outbreak phase. Specifically, Vietnam had the most damaging outbreak in 2019 with nearly 3 million pigs' deaths in just 7 months. It started spreading throughout the whole country. Additionally, 86,462 pigs with ASF were exterminated in 2020.

Since then, ASF in Vietnam has decreased significantly. However, the percentage of ASF is still high. For instance, in 2025 the ratio of ASF had declined evidently in the first five months, but it rose again since July, even more than in 2024 with the sum of over 1.05 million pigs culled according to VAHIS (Viet Nam Animal Health Information System). This situation might have the risk of skyrocketing.

Typical signs of ASF in pigs

There are numerous criteria that are used to identify ASF. Anorexia, high fever (at 40 degrees Celsius or 42 degrees Celsius), weakness, inertia, high mortality, lung disease, vomiting and diarrhea, the emergence of red and purple patches on ears, tails, stomach, legs are recognizable factors. Also, if that pig is pregnant, it might have an abortion. Besides, ASF could be detected through some diseases.

ASF's influences

ASF may take a toll on the productivity of pigs in Vietnam, people, and commerce. More clearly, sudden death is one of the ASF indications. As a result, it causes a wastage of pigs. Additionally, it threatens the domestic and international trading business as the more ASF-infected pigs, the less supply chain. Beyond that, if a percentage of the pigs they raise are infected by ASF, swineherds face financial burdens. The number of consumers could lessen since they are aware of food hygiene and safety. Although ASF does not directly affect humans, eaters could have vomit and diarrhea.

Precautions

African Swine Fever is a terminal illness. The cure for ASF has not been found. Consequently, in order to minimize the possibilities of ASF, herdsmen should take precautions by paying attention to hygiene and sterilization of livestock facilities, clothes and shoes of whoever goes to the place, vaccinating pigs to build up resistance towards ASF. In addition, reinforcing the pigs' strength frequently is crucial. Swineherds also should ensure the quality of the food their pigs consume. Should any of the pigs show suspicious symptoms, it needs to be taken for testing. Moreover, the Prime Minister and MARD (the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development) have boosted quarantine and taken control of pig transportation, enhanced more and more propaganda campaigns to get people cautious about this fatal disease.



ASF: THE REASON THAT LEADS TO 2025 MASS ELIMINATION OF SWINE IN VIETNAM

Thảo Trương Thanh

Inclination

There is a strong possibility that ASF in Vietnam will continue to increase.

The likelihood of more uncontrolled ASF outbreaks is still potential.

Therefore, everyone should do the most they can so as to avert a high future ASF rate.

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SHADOWS BENEATH THE NETWORK: THE TRUTH OF DIGITAL INEQUALITY

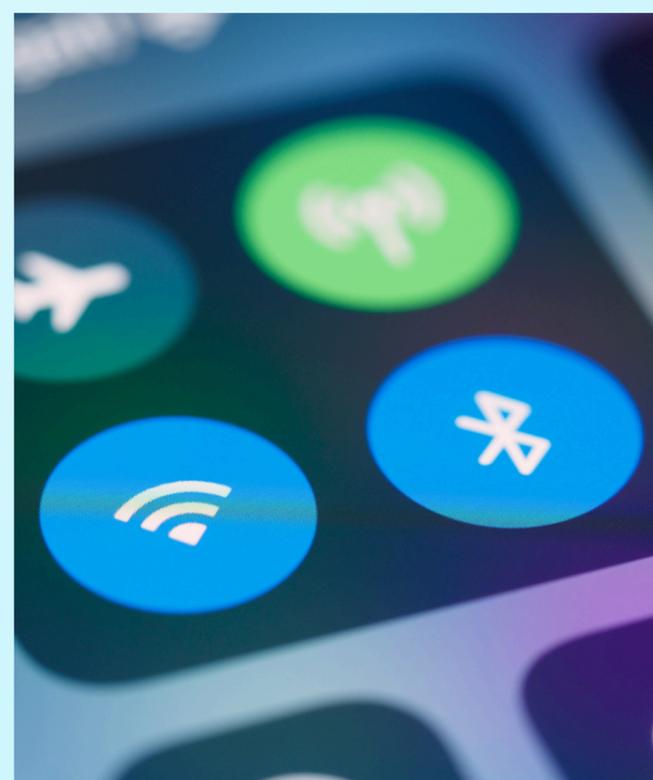
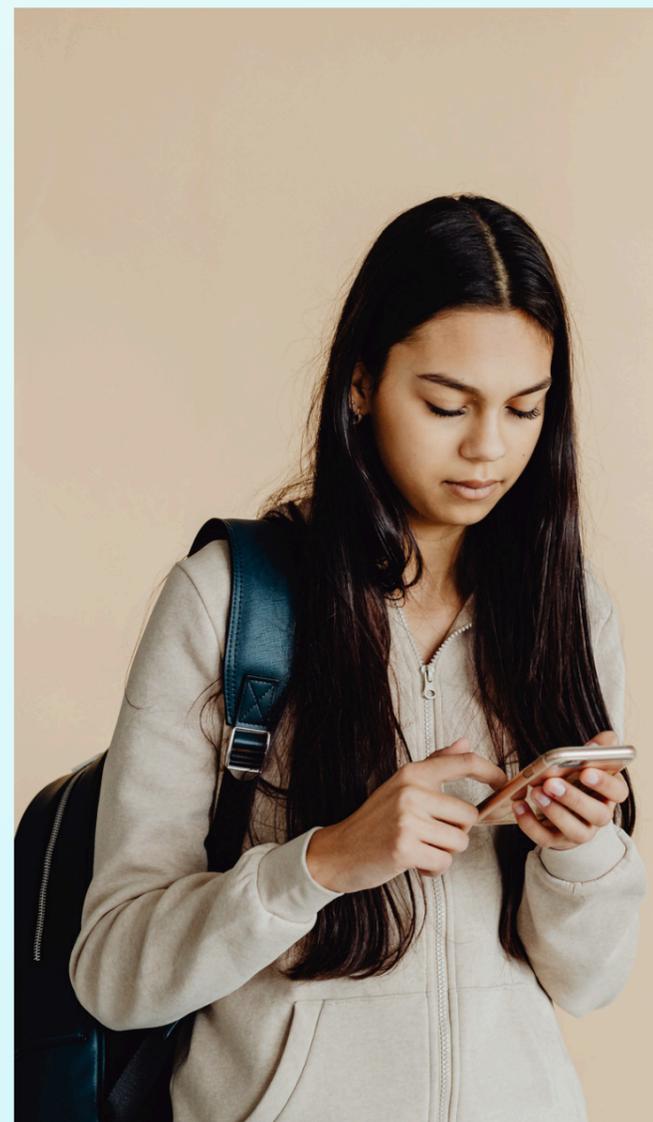
Ngan Le

Digital inequality refers to the disparities in knowledge and ability to use digital and information technology based on different socioeconomic backgrounds, demographics and information technology experience and competencies. Digital inequality significantly influences youth by limiting their access to education, career prospects, and social services. One key reason for this impact is that digital inequality affects the capability of youth to have access to quality education, which is crucial for their future. Without equitable access to the internet, youth may not catch up on online learning opportunities during crises like COVID-19 pandemic. According to UNESCO, nearly 43% of students in low-income countries lacked reliable internet during the pandemic. Furthermore, digital skills are increasingly required in the job markets. Young people who lack these skills may face insurmountable obstacles securing employment, which can contribute to higher unemployment rates and financial stability. In addition to affecting education and job prospects, digital inequality also limits young people's ability to apply technology safely and effectively. Being digitally literate is important for navigating online spaces responsibly. Youth who don't receive proper guidance or training in digital skills may be more susceptible to online risks, such as scams or misinformation, and may struggle to take advantage of educational, social, and career opportunities available online.

As the world becomes more interconnected through technology, the gap between those who can access and effectively implement these technologies and those who cannot continue to widen.

This divide is not merely about having access to devices or the internet, it encompasses a range of factors that hinder equal participation in the digital world. One of the most significant factors contributing to digital inequality is socioeconomic status. The ability to afford digital technologies such as computers, tablets, smartphones and high speed internet is often out of reach for people from lower-income households. In many developing nations, where average income levels are much lower than incomes in developed nations, the price of even a basic smartphone or affordable data plan can exceed the monthly income of a typical household. Consequently, individuals in these areas are unable to access essential digital resources that are critical to education, employment, and overall economic development.

Geographic location is another key cause of digital divide. Urban areas typically have access to high-speed broadband and advanced digital infrastructure whereas rural and remote areas frequently suffer from limited or no internet connectivity. The lack of infrastructure in these regions make it impossible for residents to access the Internet, resulting in a significant gap in literacy between urban and rural populations. In many parts of the world, rural areas are not only geographically distant from technological hubs but also lack the necessary physical infrastructure, such as fiber-optic cables, cell towers or reliable electricity, to support digital services.



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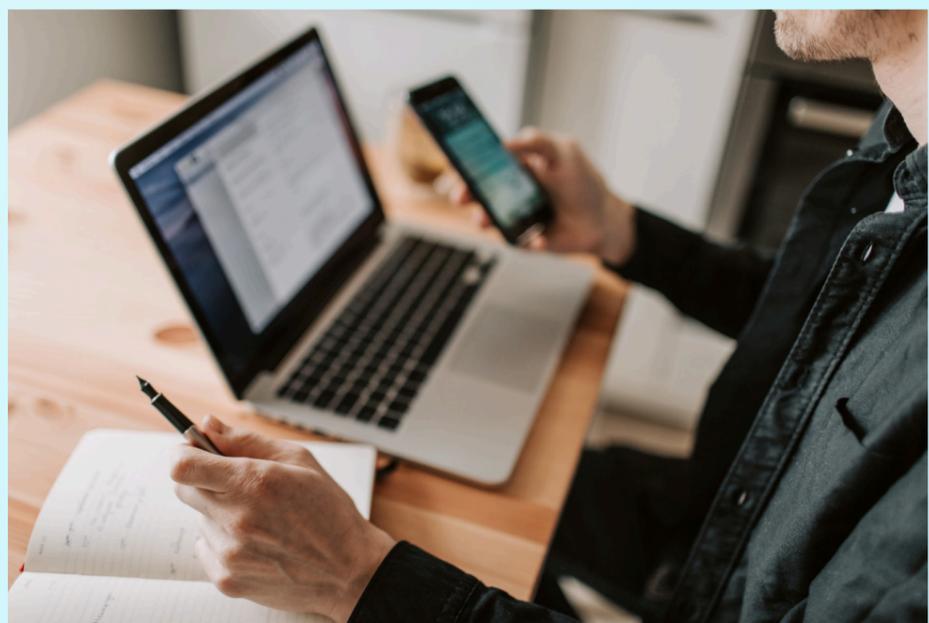
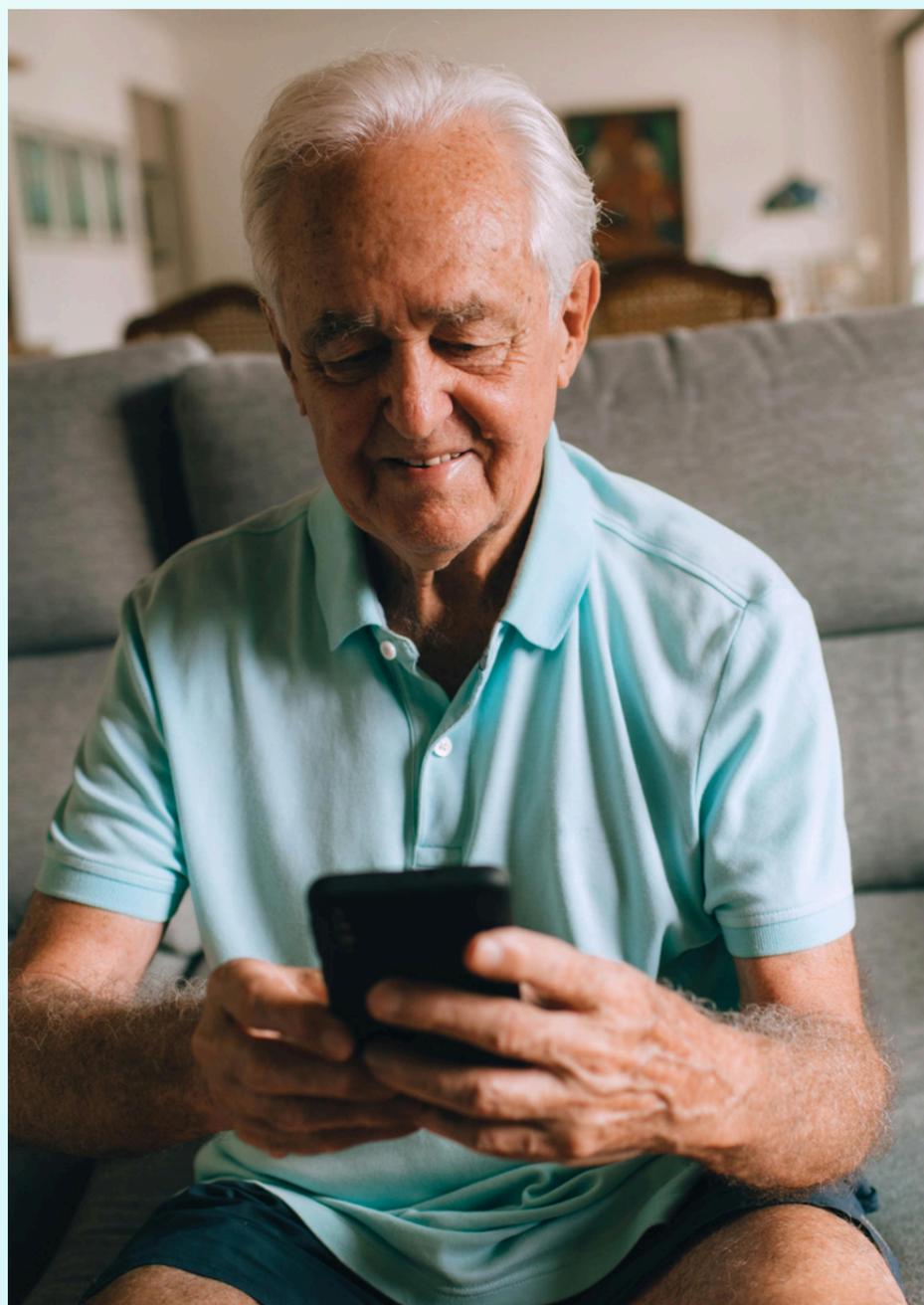
Ngan Le

Also, many prosperous countries' education systems lack the resources to teach digital skills, and a majority of students are not supplied with access to computers or the internet. The impacts of digital inequality are far-reaching. Individuals without digital skills are less likely to obtain higher-paying jobs, and countries with weak digital infrastructure may face slower economic development. Socially, people without internet access risk isolation, as they are excluded from online communication, information, and community activities. This isolation can be particularly severe for elderly individuals who might not have the digital skills to use social media or video conferencing tools, further distancing them from their social support systems.

Moreover, marginalized groups, such as those living in remote areas or those with low incomes, may find themselves cut off from essential online services, including healthcare consultations, government services, and social welfare programs. In terms of politics and democracy, people without digital access or digital literacy are less likely to engage in democratic processes such as voting systems, public policy debates and civic engagement activities. In conclusion, tackling digital inequality requires improving access to technology, strengthening digital skills, and expanding infrastructure so that all individuals can equally benefit from the opportunities of the digital world.

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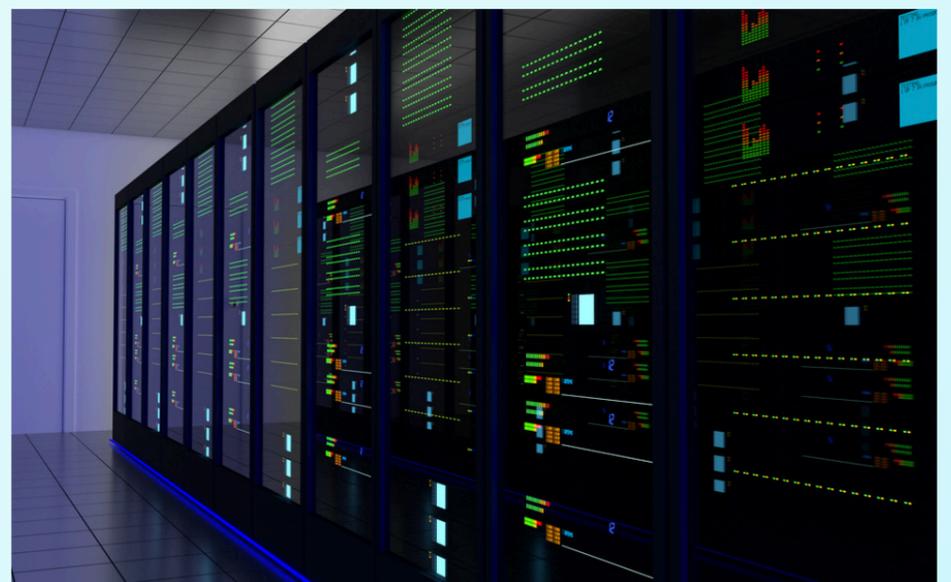


THE SILENT RIVER: HOW DIGITAL WASTE IS CHOKING OUR PLANET

Gia Phong Nguyễn Vũ

Young people are the streaming generation, living in a world with digital content. With a click, we can watch any movie, video call across continents, and store a lifetime of photos in a space no bigger than our finger. This world feels weightless, clear, and ethereal. But what if that cleanliness is the greatest trick ever sold? Behind the glow of our screens lies a hidden, growing environmental footprint: the staggering cost of our digital waste. The data we create and store is not stored in a “cloud”; it lives in massive, energy-guzzling data centers that are quietly contributing to climate change. Understanding this invisible impact is the first step toward building a truly sustainable digital future.

The term “cloud” is a masterstroke of marketing, evoking something fluffy and intangible. In reality, this network is a physical infrastructure of over 8,000 data centers worldwide—warehouse-sized buildings filled with servers that run 24/7. These facilities are the engine rooms of our online lives. Every email sent, every show streamed, and every file saved to the cloud is processed and stored on these machines. To function and avoid overheating, they require a constant, immense amount of electricity. According to the International Energy Agency, data centers consumed 220-320 TWh (terawatt-hour) of electricity in 2022, accounting for 0.9% to 1.3% of global final electricity demand—a figure projected to double by 2026.



Even more astonishing than the energy consumption is the prodigious water use. Those same cooling systems, keeping servers from melting down, are very often water-intensive evaporative cooling. In 2021, a scientific study published in *Scientific Reports* estimated that the water footprint of data centres is already significant, with a growing strain on local water resources, particularly in water-scarce regions. This puts a critical strain on the local water resources, especially for those areas that already struggle with water scarcity. The pure, drinking-quality water allocated for the cooling of servers hosting our digital repository is water no longer available for agriculture, drinking, or sustaining native ecosystems.

The digital waste problem is not only operational; it also has a tangible, physical impact. Data servers have a limited lifespan, typically 3 to 5 years, before they are replaced with more efficient modern models. This creates a massive stream of electronic waste, or e-waste.

The world generated a record 62 million tonnes of e-waste in 2022, a figure that is growing rapidly each year. While some components can be recycled, the complex and toxic nature of e-waste makes proper disposal challenging. This e-waste often ends up in landfills in developing nations, where it can leech heavy metals and other contaminants into the soil and groundwater, creating severe health and environmental hazards.

The solution is not to abandon our digital tools, but to use them more mindfully. On a systemic level, tech companies are being pushed to power their data centers with renewable energy and to innovate with more efficient cooling. As individuals, and particularly as digital natives, we have the power to drive change through our habits. We can consciously reduce our digital footprint by deleting old emails and unused cloud files, unsubscribing from newsletters we never read, and streaming videos in standard definition rather than 4K when high quality is not essential.

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These small actions, multiplied by millions of users, can collectively reduce system load.

The challenge of digital waste reveals a fundamental truth about our time: there are no truly free lunches (in the sense that what seems too good to be true probably is), and even our virtual actions have real-world consequences. As the generation that will inherit both the digital and natural worlds, we have a responsibility to bridge the gap between them. By demanding transparency and sustainability from tech giants and by adopting more conscious digital habits, we can steer our future.

The final question isn't about whether we can afford to live online, but whether we can afford not to clean up the world that makes it possible. The power to clean up the silent river of digital waste is quite literally, at our fingertips.



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WHY DOES SO MUCH PACKAGING HAVE CYAN, MAGENTA, AND YELLOW?

Khánh An Trương

1. The Printing System Behind Almost Every Package: CMYK

Have you ever looked closely at your milk carton and saw that the illustrations have blue, yellow or magenta outlines?

This is not a coincidence! The printed packages that your milk carton, chip bag, cereal box, or shampoo bottle have markings that are the result of an industrial printing process using the so-called CMYK color model. What is the CMYK color model? CMYK is short for Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black, and those four inks are the usual colors that commercial printers use when producing full-color images on physical mediums. In contrast to digital surfaces (screens), physical objects are built from layers of ink that absorb light — therefore, printing with CMYK is more common.

But why these 3 specific colors? Cyan, magenta, and yellow are known as “subtractive primaries”. When printers combine them in different densities, they can build almost any color needed on packaging. For example:

Cyan + Yellow → Green

Magenta + Yellow → Red or Orange

Cyan + Magenta → Blue or Purple

All three + Black → Rich dark tones

This system is incredibly precise, and it allows huge factories to print millions of packages with the same accuracy of colors.

Even packages that do not look like they have any of the colors in the CMYK system will still rely on these inks underneath, layered in extremely fine patterns called halftone dots. This is why these three colors appear everywhere—they are the foundation of the printing world.

2. Industrial Practicality: Cheap, Fast, and Universally Compatible

Another reason CMYK colors dominate packaging is because they are economically efficient. Most packaging is printed on massive industrial machines that are required to run at high speed and low cost. The more universal the ink system, the cheaper it becomes. CMYK inks have been the standard for decades because they are easy to manufacture. They work on all kinds of surfaces like cardboard, plastic film, foil, paperboard, and labels. Also, since machines around the world use the same four colors, designs can be reproduced anywhere with accuracy and efficiency.

If every company used its own custom ink colors, printing would be significantly more expensive. A special branded ink (called a “spot color”) costs more money, slows down production, and requires extra machine cleaning and recalibration.

3. Hidden CMYK Clues: Color Bars, Dot Patterns, and Printing Marks

If you look closely at almost any package you’ll find small color bars in cyan, magenta, yellow, and (occasionally) black. They are printer calibration marks used to check:

- whether the colors are aligned correctly
- whether the ink density is consistent
- whether the machine is printing cleanly
- whether any of the inks are running low

These marks appear because printers need constant supervision while running thousands of sheets per hour. The reason they’re always in CMYK is simply because those are the inks the printer uses. So, the next time you see those bright CMYK shades on a carton or wrapper, remember that you’re really seeing the hidden machinery of modern printing at work.



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VOICES OF THE PAST: HOW ORAL TRADITION REMAINS RELEVANT

Tyra Awuku

The concept of oral tradition is as old as mankind itself. It consists of spreading stories through speech and gestures, thus passing knowledge to the next generations. Before people were able to write, speech is what shaped cultures, maintaining the ideologies and values of differing societies within the world.

Society today, dominated by constant technological advancements, allows people access to more resources than ever before. This includes non-verbal means of communication as opposed to the 'ancient' oral practices. For example, Ancient Greek culture is known for its plethora of legends, myths and values instilled within the culture. Similarly, the Ancient Egyptians' livelihoods relied heavily on the worship of Gods whose stories were passed down orally along with tales of wars, royal families and fairy-tale creatures in order to secure the civilisations position within history.

However, multiple cultures today remain heavily influenced by oral tradition and its ability to preserve information. The Maori people in New Zealand are a prime example of the power of oral tradition, as many ancient practices are still employed and taught to the younger generations. The influence of dragon myths on Chinese culture today will also be explored in this article, as the fantastical creatures symbolise more than just what is recognised by people from other parts of the globe.

Maori Oral Tradition:

Most, if not all of the Maori tradition is spread orally, involving the memorising and performing of different types of poems, war chants, and laments. By carrying and passing these stories over to the youth, Maori remain connected with their ancestors, deities, and are able to strengthen their overall community relationship beyond direct family and friends. The oral aspect of the culture is seen to have religious connotations as language and knowledge are thought to have been a gift from the Gods.

Despite seeming simple, Maori storytelling is far from direct. Complex and fantastical imagery are used to understand history, develop the culture and impart wisdom constantly whilst communities stay up to date with modern advancements. Proverbs such as "Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua" meaning "I walk backwards into my future with my eyes fixed on my past" illustrate the importance of the past, present and future to Maori; the link between the 3 periods of time allow the culture to exist as it does today.

Waiata and Haka:

In Maori, traditional songs are known as Waiata of which there are 3 different types: Waiata Tangi - laments for the dead, Waiata Aroha - love songs, and lastly, Waiata Oriori - lullabies. Today, Waiata serves many functions. They can be performed at formal meetings, funerals, used as an aid to teach children and have also been used in the past to settle historical debates. New Waiata continue to be produced today depicting current world issues and struggles helping the relevance of this age-old practice to stay significant.



VOICES OF THE PAST: HOW ORAL TRADITION REMAINS RELEVANT

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As well as songs, Maori oral tradition includes chants that are recited rather than performed, known as: Karakia, Paatere, Kaioraora and Haka. Of these recitations, Haka, war chants, are the most recognised by communities outside of the Maori tradition for its fierce gestures, expressions and rhythms. New Zealand sports teams, such as the All Blacks, are known for performing Haka before games as to 'challenge' their opponents, filling the team with the Wairua (spirit) of Haka, which allows them to weave their culture into aspects of life others may deem futile. Such chants are also used to welcome guests and acknowledge achievements like marriage or even a graduation.

Like all Maori traditions, Haka has its roots in legends. Tānerore, the God of Haka, dances during the summer for his mother Hine-Raumati, and can be seen 'quivering' air on the horizon when days are extremely hot. This same energy is symbolised through powerful hand gestures (wiri), and stamping, the basic movements within Haka. New Zealand rugby player Lima Sopoaga speaks about the importance of Haka to him and his community stating:

"It's a spiritual experience. It's special because you dance it not only for yourself or your team, but also for the whole country, the Maori heritage, the native peoples."

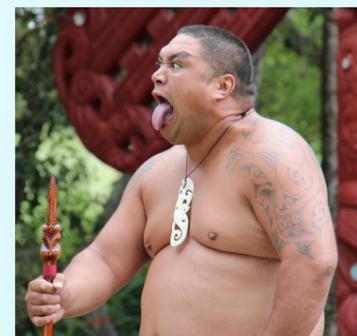
Chinese Dragons:

Dragons are well-known creatures around the world. They are incorporated in children's stories, and adult novels as well as film and tv. However, the dragons of Chinese culture is a completely separate entity from the dragons of European culture. In European culture, dragons are able to breathe fire or have magical abilities whereas Chinese dragons breathe clouds and have a slightly different anatomy. Ancient Chinese people did not view dragons as the cause of natural disasters or general catastrophes, as they are occasionally portrayed in western media, instead, they were seen as wise, benevolent and powerful beings.

No one knows when the legends about dragons began, but ancient symbols appear to date back to at least 3000 BC. Because of this, there are multiple theories on the evolution of dragons and their existence. One theory suggests the pre-dynastic emperor Yándì was born due to an encounter with a powerful dragon. This caused the emperor to be one of the most influential leaders who, with Emperor Huang Di, conquered enemies and united China pioneering Chinese civilisation. As time passed, through oral tradition and eventually written texts, people came to believe that Yandi was an ancestor of theirs, meaning, by extension, that they too were the descendants of dragons.

The myths of dragons remain important to Chinese culture as they symbolise business prosperity, agricultural life and nobleness. Traditionally, farmers would request flourishing harvests by making offerings to dragon Gods and when droughts took place, the same would be done for a downpour due to the belief that dragons could protect their lands from flood damage. Today, the Dragon Boat festival is celebrated throughout China in late spring or early summer featuring dragon-themed boat races. The origins of this celebration, in its earliest form, stem from the request for good health alongside a bountiful harvest from the dragon Gods.

Maori songs, prayers and myths are living collections of the community's memory which is a testament to the power of speech and who we can influence with our words. The Chinese myth of dragons, despite the uncertainty of their origins, continues to influence Chinese culture and festivals today, going as far as to lead people to believe they are descendants of dragons. For generations to come, Maori and Chinese traditions will continue and develop alongside its people, through oral tradition and modern forms of communication.



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THE COMING COLLAPSE OF PENSION SYSTEMS WORLDWIDE

Ishan Sharma

Globally, pension frameworks are under pressure from shifts, and the magnitude of this transformation is astonishing. In 2015, 12% of the population was above 60 years old, yet forecasts indicate that by 2050, this proportion will reach approximately 22%, leading societies into an unprecedented age distribution in human history. At the time, the ratio of retirees to working-age adults is expected to increase from approximately 0.15 currently to nearly 0.26, subtly undermining the traditional belief that younger generations can effortlessly sustain the older ones. Due to plummeting birth rates and rising life expectancy, nations are now facing diminishing labor forces alongside growing numbers of retirees. The demographic outlook in Europe starkly illustrates this, with the IMF forecasting its ratio of working-age individuals to those aged 65 and over to drop from around 3.4:1 today to 2:1 by 2050. This represents more than a formal change; it signifies a gradual constriction of a monetary noose encircling every employee remaining within the system.

The strain heightens when considering the number of individuals actually participating in pension contributions. Over half of the workforce is employed informally, and roughly two-thirds of workers across the globe never contribute to any pension scheme. Pension schemes are intended to serve as communal funds; however, they are currently supported by a diminishing minority. When authorities try to fix the system by increasing payroll taxes, employees frequently move to informality, reducing contributions and causing governments to increase rates even more. Essentially, pension systems are running in circles, falling behind. Governments are simultaneously facing growing liabilities while their fiscal capacity shrinks. OECD forecasts suggest that public pension spending will grow from about 8.8% of GDP to nearly 10% by 2050. By the end of 2023, global public pension funds controlled \$25.9 trillion in assets, yet economic disruptions like COVID-19, inflation surges, and volatile markets have diminished returns and revealed significant underfunding issues. The fundamental calculations are becoming unfavorable. Individuals retiring at 65 nowadays might survive for twenty years or longer, essentially doubling the expense tied to every pension commitment issued in the century. While increased lifespan is advantageous for individuals, it poses a challenge for almost every government's budget worldwide.

As these stresses accumulate, the system begins acting less like a social agreement and more like a gradual internal collapse. When authorities increase contribution rates to sustain funds, informality surges. When informality surges, contributions fall apart, forcing authorities to raise rates more. The cycle intensifies until the system no longer requires a shock to fail; it gradually deteriorates internally. Numerous nations are currently experiencing pension shortfalls. Accumulating large debts simply to continue paying existing retirees delays the inevitable on a path that becomes more constrained annually.

Younger cohorts are positioned in the way of this emerging crisis. Experts openly acknowledge that the traditional social contract is breaking down. Globally, the typical pension system rates 3.6 out of 7, a barely adequate score for something intended to safeguard the final years of an individual's life. Allianz's 2023 report presents the reality with stark honesty, asserting that Millennials and Gen Z need to labour longer and accumulate greater savings compared to their parents if they hope to have any retirement stability whatsoever. However, this is a perspective, as many people do not have the opportunity to save at all. Individuals with formal, steady jobs manage to gather some form of security, whereas gig and informal workers, who now represent a global majority, are essentially excluded. In Pakistan, 90% of the labour force is informal, which implies that very few contribute to or benefit from pensions. This trend is evident worldwide. Young employees nowadays are investing funds into programs they are increasingly convinced won't last long enough to return benefits.

Even suggested remedies are challenging. Economic analysis indicates that moving from pay-as-you-go schemes to funded systems can impose a severe strain on every generation present during the change. Research on Russia revealed that this transition would require individuals to reduce consumption, increase savings, and extend their working years simultaneously merely to sustain the system throughout the shift.



THE COMING COLLAPSE OF PENSION SYSTEMS WORLDWIDE

Ishan Sharma

Put simply, modern employees are expected to fund their parents' retirements while also putting aside money for a future that might lack any pension benefits. The remedies begin to appear indistinguishable from the dilemma itself.

When viewed from a global perspective, the outlook becomes more grim.

By 2050, 2.1 billion individuals will be 60 years old or older, which is twice as many as currently, and almost 80% of these seniors will reside in low- or middle-income nations where pension systems are already fragile. Worldwide assessments show the harsh disparity. The 2025 Mercer/CFA Index rates pension schemes from roughly 43.8 to 85.4, with just a few affluent countries ranking close to the highest scores. Governments across OECD nations are urgently working to raise retirement ages, reduce benefits, or adjust formulas to maintain their programs' solvency for a bit longer. In parts of Africa and Latin America, fewer than one in five senior adults receives any official pension. The majority of individuals depend solely on family aid or limited social support, offering a glimpse of what lies ahead if these systems keep deteriorating. The World Bank's blunt remark that the majority of workers worldwide lack pension contributions comes across as a statistic and more like an urgent alert.

All of this results in an outcome looming ahead. Each year, demographic challenges intensify, and financial burdens grow heavier. The willingness for substantial reform is virtually absent. Younger generations are increasingly confronted with the reality that the retirement stability they were assured may never materialize. As the typical pension system currently remains in average condition and governments worldwide are impeded by political resistance, the base is deteriorating silently yet persistently. Should these trends persist, individuals in their twenties and thirties today might face a future where retirement is not a standard phase of life but an exclusive privilege for a fortunate minority.

We are observing a disintegration of pension guarantees, a demographic ticking bomb growing more audible each year, and an intergenerational divide emerging gradually.

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THE PERSISTENT CRISIS OF CHILD MARRIAGE, A GLOBAL FAILURE TO PROTECT GIRLS

Teu-Khanh Phuong

Ending child marriage is not just a duty but an obligation to secure children's rights and provide a better future for all.

This is the story of thirteen-year-old Falmata from northeast Nigeria. She was one of the unfortunate 844 children previously abducted and harassed by Boko Haram - a designated terrorist organization located in Northeastern Nigeria, active since January 2013. These extremist men gave her "a choice": marry a fighter or go on a mission resulting in death. Falmata, being way too young, rejected the offer of marriage and was consequently transported to camps, where she and other girls were forced to adopt harmful ideologies. They were told that failure to complete the mission would inevitably result in death. According to BBC News, approximately 454 femicidal bombings were recorded to have been carried out by Boko Haram, devastating the lives of thousands of girls and women every day. Falmata herself was tied in a vest bomb and told to reach the nearest location to ask people to untie her, but things didn't proceed as planned. When she finally arrived at a farm, farmers refused to assist her simply because they were scared of her and the horrendous acts of Boko Haram.

For the entirety of Falmata's childhood, she had been forcefully taken against her will, had been pushed into early marriage, and lived in dreadful conditions with terrorists. Imagine: Falmata was a young girl separated from family members and strapped with explosives, only to come back to her community who offered inadequate assistance. Luckily, Falmata was finally rescued and is now living with her family in a displacement camp for victims of Boko Haram violence.

However, others weren't so fortunate, having to live a life full of criticism and a lack of compassion from their community. A short documentary from AJ+ demonstrated the hardship a 17-year-old teenager endured as a "Boko Haram wife", being outcast by society and respective women in her village. Despite being rescued by the Nigerian military and brought to Dalori displacement camp, she was still mistreated by other women who refused to give her any support, which severely impacted her mental health and daily life errands.

This is known as Boko Haram's mass abduction of schoolgirls, which spurred great controversy globally and raised thought-provoking questions regarding the most optimal way to reintegrate female victims into society. Although numerous projects such as the #BringBackOurGirls movement were carefully planned out and urged both regional and international partners to pledge protection for all victims alike, struggles persist among previously abducted victims of Boko Haram. Despite strong commitments towards gender-inclusive programs globally, little attention has been paid to victims of Boko Haram, making them unable to demobilize. Some girls remain married to fighters of Boko Haram due to a need for survival and economic stability. Other girls' lives turned out differently, they had slightly better experiences and have come to appreciate their husbands, which reflects on the nuances of the varied experiences of girls and women fleeing from Boko Haram.

These occurrences are the reality of young girls in many parts of the world, whose childhood and innocence are completely stolen so that they are able to support their family and potentially uphold the family's reputation and legacy. According to UNICEF, "Child marriage is an egregious violation of every child's right to reach her or his full potential. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) enshrine a target to eliminate this practice by 2030."



THE PERSISTENT CRISIS OF CHILD MARRIAGE, A GLOBAL FAILURE TO PROTECT GIRLS

Teu-Khanh Phuong

Admittedly, the practice of child marriage has been declining around the world, but at a relatively slow pace to ensure its complete elimination during the 21st century, with cases reduced from 23% to 19% in the last decade worldwide. Regrettably, this global data fails to represent the struggles of millions of other girls, as reduction rates mainly appear in regions such as South Asia, where child marriage cases have dropped by half, from 46% to around 26%. Conversely, UNICEF stated that by 2030, over 9 million girls will still be engaged, with a surge in early marriage for girls from disadvantaged households in sub-Saharan Africa. Claudia Cappa, lead reporter of UNICEF's latest data on child marriage, informed The Guardian: "This isn't fast enough to achieve the goal of eliminating child marriage by 2030. So, if things don't change, we'll need around 300 more years to eliminate child marriage completely."

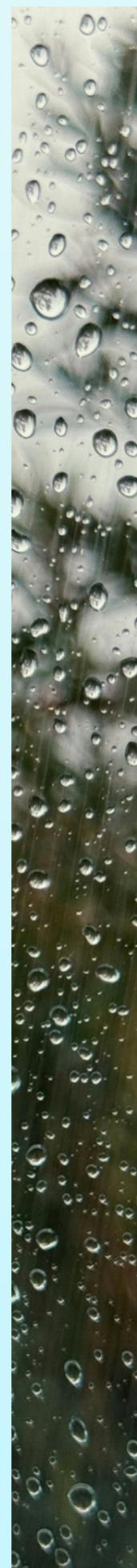
Challenges regarding lack of formal education, financial hardship, and insecurity all contribute to the prevalence of child marriage, especially in conflict settings. For low-income households or those from extremely disadvantaged backgrounds, pushing their children into early marriage is seen as the only viable option to potentially escape poverty and mitigate their economic burden. Girls Not Brides, a global partnership to end child marriage, revealed a shocking truth in one of their reports: "For each year of conflict, progress towards eliminating child marriage would be set back by four years." Despite child marriage being a clear violation of children's rights, numerous pieces of evidence have proved that families living in regions where child marriage is prevalent typically regard the practice as a safety measure for their daughters, ensuring them a better future with secured financial backing. In particular, the correlation between climate change and child marriage is deleterious, further exacerbating economic hardship and poverty. Extreme weather conditions generally result in crop failure, food insecurity, and social hardship, making it more likely for parents to consider marriage a secure way to ensure financial stability. Moreover, hazardous weather is the main culprit behind disruptive education and healthcare lines, preventing girls from receiving the resources and support needed to avoid child marriage. It is estimated that an 18% increase in child marriage lies in a year with extreme weather events, which in turn, translates to five years of progress being shattered.

Being forced to give up on their schooling, young girls find themselves in a state of vicious poverty, impacting their mental and physical well-being. They miss out on opportunities to gain valuable knowledge and insights needed to thrive and pursue their passion, thus risking putting themselves in extreme poverty, which consequently affects future generations.

Optimistically, ending child marriage is possible. UNICEF highlights, "In order to meet the target of elimination by 2030, global progress would need to be 12 times faster than the rate observed over the past decade." With a detailed action plan and partnership from international organizations and the government, adequate support and funding can be effectively distributed to deprived communities, ensuring the protection of girls from existential threats.

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THE AESTHETIC TRAP: WHEN IDENTITY BECOMES A TEMPLATE

Pooja Vaishnav

Your personality has a hashtag now. Whether you realize it or not, you've probably been sorted into a category. And if you haven't chosen your aesthetic, the algorithm has likely chosen one for you.



Aesthetic trends don't just influence youth. They sort youth into categories.

Across social media, many Gen Z individuals no longer build identity from introspection but instead adopt templates created online. Clean-girl, grunge, Y2K, dark academia, and streetwear—these labels are more than style. They are mood boards, playlists, habits, and unspoken social codes. The pressure to maintain these aesthetic identities becomes a form of social obligation rather than personal choice.

Each aesthetic creates unwritten rules about what content, brands, and caption styles are acceptable. Straying from these standards risks being ignored by the algorithm or rejected by the community. Self-expression becomes constant self-monitoring, where fitting in matters more than being authentic. Young users end up performing their chosen identity instead of discovering who they really are.

On TikTok and Instagram, aesthetics can explode almost overnight. For example, when #DarkAcademia surged, thousands of videos flooded feeds with moody libraries, vintage books, classical music, and brooding captions. In response, countless young users reshaped their wardrobes, social media presence, and even study habits to match. For many, this wasn't just about clothes; it was about identity. The speed of these trends creates pressure. When an aesthetic goes viral, users rush to participate before the moment passes. They scramble to buy the right items and learn the references, leaving little time to discover what actually resonates with them. Identity becomes something they can switch like a subscription service whenever something newer trends.



Money plays a big role too. Each aesthetic demands specific products, from clothing brands to home decor. Companies exploit this by selling "aesthetic starter packs." What starts as free self-expression now requires constant spending. Those without money get excluded, while others buy items they don't need just to fit the aesthetic. Such viral trends act as social scripts: pre-designed behavioral packages people follow to belong. The more faithfully someone follows the script, the more validation they receive online. This creates what psychologists described as curated self-presentation—the constant, exhausting effort to project a cohesive identity. A streetwear follower may feel compelled to radiate confidence. A dark-academia follower may pressure themselves to appear intellectual and brooding. A minimalist aesthetic might demand calm and order. When feelings stray, the aesthetic still demands consistency. Identity becomes performance.

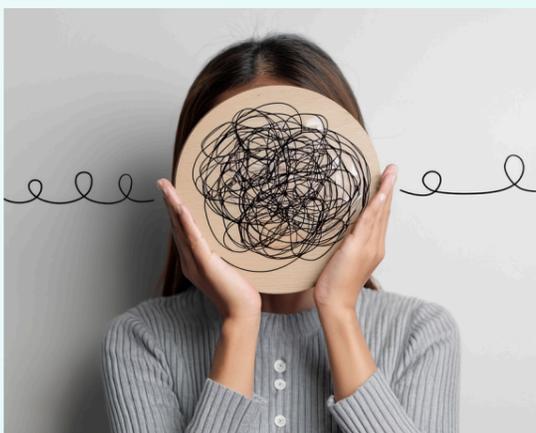
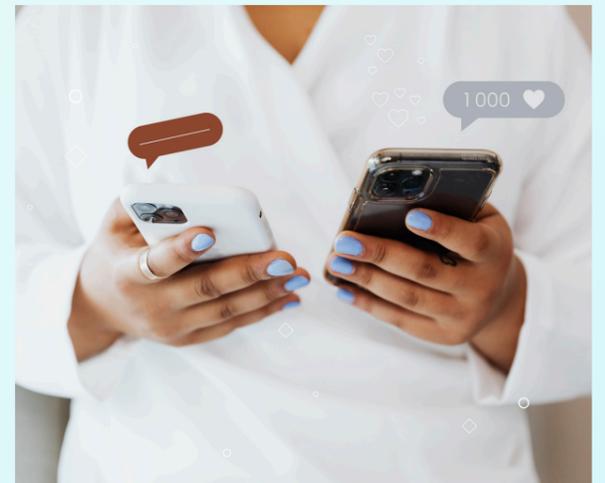
Young people keep changing their aesthetics quickly. One month they like dark academia, and the next month, something else. Every time they switch, they have to buy new things and act differently. They never stick with one long enough to know if they really like it. It's like constantly changing costumes without figuring out what actually suits them.

THE AESTHETIC TRAP: WHEN IDENTITY BECOMES A TEMPLATE

Pooja Vaishnav

As trends evolve, many drift from one aesthetic to another—a pattern known as aesthetic-hopping. On the surface, it looks experimental, but it closely resembles what psychologists call identity diffusion: a restless search for belonging in a world that values curated visibility over self-exploration.

Aesthetics shape how peers perceive one another through casual remarks that carry surprising weight. Comments like "He's streetwear-core," "She's totally academia," or "They don't fit any vibe" become social judgments that decide who belongs and who doesn't. A single remark can push someone to change their entire look or feel excluded from a group, leading young people to judge themselves and others based on how well they match an aesthetic rather than personality or interests. Friendships increasingly form around shared aesthetics rather than genuine connection, with the aesthetic becoming the entry ticket to social acceptance.



The pressure extends beyond purchasing items to deeply affect how people feel about themselves. When someone can't afford the right pieces or doesn't look perfect in photos, they experience genuine exclusion and begin thinking something is fundamentally wrong with them. The aesthetic rules create a belief that personal worth depends on matching current trends, causing real emotions like confusion or sadness to be suppressed because the aesthetic demands a constant appearance of perfection. Social psychology defines this phenomenon as in-group versus out-group formation—judgment based on superficial labels rather than depth or character. This tribalism reduces complex individuals to simple categories, fragmenting communities along visual lines and replacing meaningful connection with surface-level sorting mechanisms that prioritize appearance over authenticity.

Aligning one's life to an aesthetic carries a hidden cost. Mood, mental health, and emotional fluctuation are filtered through aesthetic demands. Minimalists may feel guilty for chaos. Streetwear followers may feel shame in vulnerability. Academia-inspired youth may pressure themselves to appear endlessly productive or deep. This pressure rarely shows up as open criticism. It builds slowly through social media feeds, peer comparison, and cultural trends that reward consistency over honesty. When productivity, depth, or even vulnerability turns into something to perform, people begin curating not just how they look but also how they think and feel. Over time this quiet performance blurs the line between real self-expression and constant self-monitoring.

A comment I came across summed it up well. Someone described how exhausting it feels when everyone around them changes aesthetics every few months and how wearing the same shoes as last summer suddenly becomes cringe. It isn't really about shoes. It is about acceptance, fear of judgment, and self-worth getting tied to aesthetic approval. When identity turns into a theme, real emotions like confusion, sadness, and doubt start feeling off-brand, and the line between the authentic self and the projected one begins to fade. This isn't about shoes. It's about acceptance, fear of judgment, and self-worth tied to aesthetic approval. When identity becomes a theme, real emotions—confusion, sadness, doubt—start to feel off-brand. The line between authentic self and projected self blurs. Aesthetics began as a way to express ourselves. Somewhere along the way, they started defining us.



THE AESTHETIC TRAP: WHEN IDENTITY BECOMES A TEMPLATE

Pooja Vaishnav

For many young people today, identity is no longer a personal journey—it's a curated package to be maintained, updated, and displayed. But identity should be messy. Imperfect. Evolving.

Real life doesn't follow a hashtag.

The most authentic version of yourself might not fit neatly into any aesthetic—and that's exactly the point. This pressure does not come from trends alone. It grows in spaces where being consistent is rewarded more than being honest. When people feel watched, even their thoughts start needing to make sense visually. Over time, identity becomes something to maintain rather than something to live.



Before asking, “Which aesthetic am I?” Maybe the better question is, “Who am I when no one's watching?” That question matters because it removes the audience. Without external validation, identity stops being performative and starts being honest. It asks whether our choices come from habit, expectation, or genuine desire. In that quiet space authenticity becomes less about how it looks and more about how it feels.

Because if identity becomes a theme, humanity becomes filtered—and that's too high a price to pay for a vibe.

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WHY CONSTANT EXPOSURE TO NEWS IS MAKING YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL POWERLESS

MD ALID BHUIYAN

The absence of information in such a globalized world is almost unimaginable. Wars, economic troubles, natural disasters, and political unrest flood television screens in a matter of moments when they break. While this constant stream of information can increase awareness and engagement, a new psychological study reveals another consequence: a growing loss of empowerment in this generation.

Traditionally, news consumption tended to be time and format-defined. Newspapers arrived once a day, and television programs followed fixed schedules. Today, digital news is presented to us all day and night through notifications on our phones, social media sites, and recommendations. In a way, this model of news consumption not only affects how news is consumed but also affects how news is emotionally processed.

Psychologists have termed this learned helplessness, where people come to conclude that their behavior will make no difference in the face of a series of negative events beyond their control. For a younger demographic with less access to political or economic agency, global crises can feel distant and overwhelming. News coverage frequently highlights problems without giving equal attention to solutions, reinforcing the perception that these issues are simply too big to solve.

The impact is further amplified by social media. Platforms tend to favor content that evokes a strong emotional response, particularly stories centered on conflict, anger, and fear. As a result, this can present young people with a misleading representation of reality where crises never end. Research has linked sustained exposure to negative news with higher levels of anxiety, stress, and emotional exhaustion, especially among the younger generation.

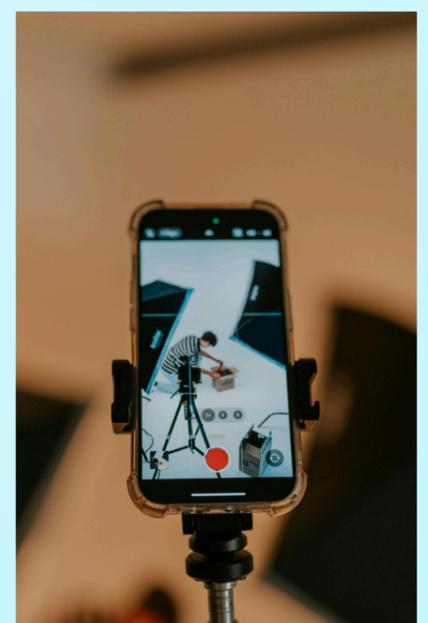
However, this sense of powerlessness does not affect everyone equally. Some will react with increased activism and awareness, but for many, the sheer volume of global suffering will be emotionally overwhelming. This creates a paradoxical generation of people: deeply informed, yet increasingly unsure if they can bring about a significant change.

This does not mean news consumption itself is harmful. Rather, the structure and framing that modern news environments invite closer scrutiny. Research on constructive journalism, which emphasizes context, progress, and possible solutions, suggests that it can minimize feelings of despair without sacrificing accuracy. When audiences are shown how problems are being addressed, even imperfectly, they're more likely to feel a sense of agency.

Educational institutions and media organizations also have a role to play. Teaching media literacy, encouraging intentional news consumption, and promoting critical evaluation of sources can help youth become informed about global issues without feeling hopeless or overwhelmed. Decreasing passive scrolling and opting for depth over volume may allow individuals to stay informed while protecting their psychological well-being.

In conclusion, global news exposure has increased awareness from an event-driven experience to a daily one. Although information access is critical in making a citizen well-informed, it is important not to overlook its effects on people. Societies with hopes of raising well-engaged and hopeful young generations must consider not only what information is delivered, but how it is delivered as well.

Awareness ought to empower— not immobilize.



WHY CONSTANT EXPOSURE TO NEWS IS MAKING YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL POWERLESS

MD ALID BHUIYAN

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THE BRAIN'S SECRET WEAPON: HOW NEUROSURGERY IS AWAKENING HIDDEN DEFENSES AGAINST CANCER

B. Mohan Krishna Reddy

For decades brain cancer has remained one of medicine's most insidious killers, attacking the most complex organ in our body, the human brain. Patients diagnosed with glioblastoma, medulloblastoma, and other aggressive tumors have been faced with horrific prognosis statistics, and the medical profession has felt a sense of powerlessness in the face of these tumors. But what if the very organ we are trying to save is actually able to help us eliminate the cancer that threatens it?

Recent studies by neuroscientists and neuro-oncologists suggests precisely that. The human brain is not simply a passive battleground; it is a participant in its defense. Scientists have found a connection between brain activity and immune system activity within tumor areas, a phenomenon known as neuro-immune crosstalk. In essence, the brain may contain previously unknown methods of fighting cancer, and neurosurgeons may be able to activate those methods.

Neurosurgeons have begun to use precise robotic surgery with real-time neuromapping to identify specific neural pathways involved in the immune response to tumor activity. Early studies suggest that patients receiving targeted neuromodulation experienced significantly reduced tumor growth rates and increased cognitive resilience. Survival, in this emerging framework, is not longer simply measured solely by extending our lives, but the preservation of a healthy, functioning brain.

The most significant impact of this new process extends beyond its technical innovation. It is allowing a critical shift in how we perceive the brain during cancer treatment. Instead of viewing the brain purely as a target to be protected during a procedure, researchers are now viewing the brain as an active participant in the therapeutic process. By combining advanced surgical practices with neuroengineering and immunology, researchers are developing individualized brain-tumor therapies based on the unique electrophysiological profile of each patient. Cancer therapy is therefore evolving into a coordinated collaboration between surgeon, brain, and immune system.

These findings are changing the way we think about cancer and the study of cancer biology. Tumors do not operate in isolation; they communicate with the nervous system, use patterns of activity within its structures, and respond to stimulation. Harnessing this interaction will likely lead to a new paradigm shift in oncology. Rather than relying exclusively on drug and radiation-based therapies, the future of treatment for cancer may be based on stimulating dormant mechanisms of neurologic defenses.

More than a medical breakthrough, this research a promise of hope.

Neurosurgery is now about much more than simply making precise incisions; it is about finding ways to combine the elements of biology, technology, and the creativity of the human mind. For the next generation of scientists, innovators, and leaders, there is an urgent need to explore the connection between mind and matter, to understand how the human brain functions at the most complex levels, and to change how society's perception of cancer from a narrative of despair into one of possibility and progress.

The brain may have remained silent for too long. Now, the time has come for it to be heard, and perhaps, even to help rescue itself.

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COMFORT OR COST? THE TRUE PRICE OF PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

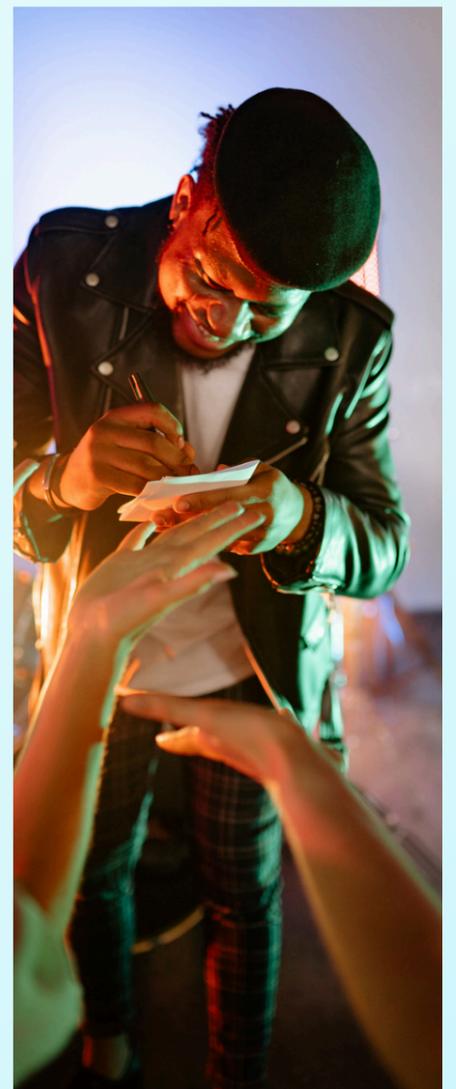
Minh Thư Nguyễn

Parasocial relationships represent a revolutionary departure from passive audiences to emotionally involved participants. For adolescents, parasocial relationships can offer emotional comfort and a feeling of being understood. However, the question remains: “Is it true that what begins as comfort may gradually come at a hidden emotional and financial cost?”

There are some persuasive rationales that support the claim that parasocial relationships offer undeniable benefits in contemporary society. For many young people, these one-sided emotional connections provide comfort and a feeling of being understood, especially in an increasingly digital and fast-paced society. Such connections can help reduce feelings of loneliness and foster a sense of belonging through shared fan communities. Through regular interaction with idols, content creators, public figures, or even virtual characters, individuals may experience a sense of companionship that helps reduce loneliness and emotional isolation. Additionally, parasocial relationships often foster a strong sense of belonging through fan communities, where shared interests and emotional attachment create meaningful social connections. Beyond emotional support, idols and online personalities can also serve as sources of motivation and inspiration, encouraging personal growth and positive self-expression. As a result, parasocial relationships function not only as a form of entertainment but also as an important source of emotional healing and social support for young audiences.

Notwithstanding their initial function as sources of emotional healing, parasocial relationships are gradually transforming contemporary fan communities. While they are often idealized as harmless emotional comfort, their nature can fundamentally change as emotional attachment deepens. This transformation is evident in the increasing commercialization of fan engagement, where emotional loyalty is measured through financial participation. For instance, fans are frequently encouraged to purchase concert tickets, attend fan meetings, buy limited-edition merchandise, or pay for exclusive online interactions in order to feel closer to their idols or virtual figures. In digital spaces, features such as paid live streams, virtual gifts, and subscription-based fan platforms further reinforce the idea that emotional connection requires continuous investment. Consequently, what initially offers emotional reassurance may gradually evolve into patterns of financial overcommitment, blurring the boundary between supportive engagement and emotional dependence.

Furthermore, the continuous financial investment of young fans in idol-related products—such as spending money on photo cards and merchandise, as well as repeatedly participating in fan meetings and concerts—raises a critical question: do these practices truly narrow the emotional distance between fans and their idols within parasocial relationships, or do they primarily function as tools of capitalist monetization? The sense of intimacy offered through paid interactions is inherently temporary, existing within the boundaries of consumption. A clear example can be seen in concerts: the higher the ticket tier, the greater the benefits audiences receive, and consequently, the higher the financial cost. As a result, emotional attachment is increasingly leveraged as a marketable resource, where the promise of intimacy serves to sustain continuous spending rather than genuine emotional reciprocity. This dynamic suggests that, for some fans, parasocial closeness may be less about authentic connection and more about participation in a profit-driven system.



COMFORT OR COST? THE TRUE PRICE OF PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Minh Thư Nguyễn

Beyond financial concerns, parasocial relationships can impose subtle yet significant emotional and social pressures on young fans. As emotional attachment deepens, individuals may feel an unspoken obligation to continuously support their idols through purchases, online engagement, or public displays of loyalty. In many fan communities, commitment is often measured by visible participation—such as owning exclusive merchandise, attending multiple events, or maintaining paid subscriptions—creating an environment where comparison and competition are normalized. This dynamic can lead to feelings of guilt, anxiety, or inadequacy among fans who are unable or unwilling to keep up.

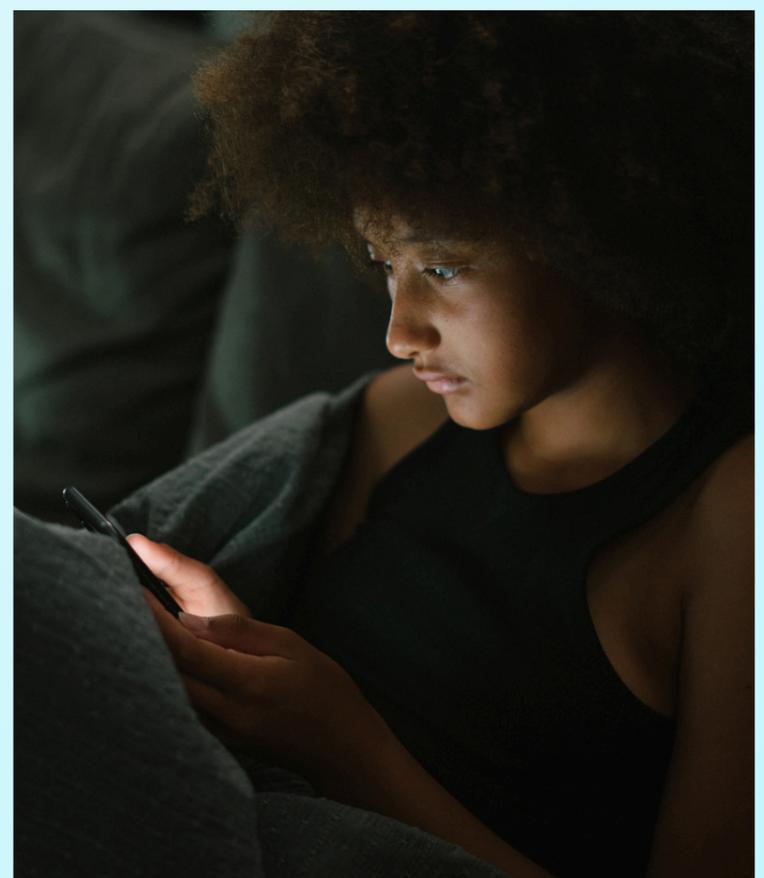
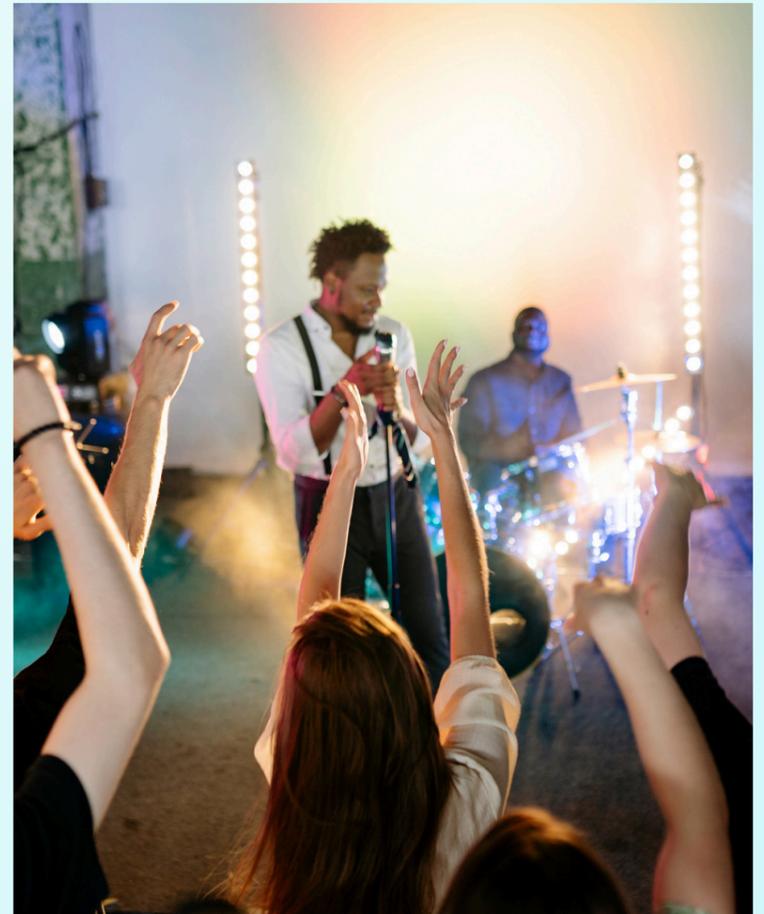
Moreover, the fear of missing out (FOMO) intensifies these pressures, as limited-edition releases and time-sensitive events encourage constant attention and spending. Over time, what was once a source of emotional comfort may become a persistent psychological burden, where young fans prioritize parasocial obligations over personal well-being, financial stability, or real-life relationships. In this sense, parasocial relationships risk shifting from a form of emotional healing to an invisible pressure that quietly shapes behavior and self-worth.

In conclusion, parasocial relationships represent a defining feature of contemporary media culture, offering emotional comfort, a sense of belonging, and meaningful connection for young audiences navigating an increasingly digital world.

At their best, these one-sided bonds can alleviate loneliness and provide motivation through shared admiration and community participation. However, as parasocial engagement becomes increasingly commercialized, the boundary between emotional support and economic exploitation grows blurred. What begins as a source of emotional healing may gradually evolve into an invisible emotional and financial burden, as market-driven systems monetize intimacy and loyalty. Without critical awareness, young individuals risk equating emotional closeness with consumption and mistaking spending for genuine connection. Therefore, rather than rejecting parasocial relationships entirely, it is essential to approach them with conscious boundaries and media literacy, ensuring they remain a healthy source of connection rather than a subtle form of pressure.

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THE RISE OF PRIVATE CREDIT IN SHADOW BANKING: IMPLICATIONS FOR FINANCIAL STABILITY

Greta Vosyliute

Private Credit as Shadow Banking: Definition, Scope and Economic Significance

Shadow banking refers to credit lending conducted by non-bank financial institutions that operate outside regulated bank balance sheets and lack access to public safety nets available to traditional banks. Prior to the 2007-08 financial crisis, shadow banking entities relied on short-term funding to finance risky investments in mortgages. This model remained viable as long as people trusted the value of these securities. However, when mortgage defaults rose, funding abruptly dried up, triggering a run on shadow banks and ultimately pushed big losses on to regular banks.

Since the crisis, the shadow banking sector has evolved significantly. As traditional banks face stricter rules particularly against lending to small and mid-sized companies, shadow bankers have stepped in to provide private credit in the form of long-term, direct loans to private companies. This private middle-market lending is an important source of financing for private firms that face stricter bank rules and cannot access public markets. Chart 1 illustrates the private credit investor base in the United States as of 2021, highlighting the sectors in which it was dominated by.

The private credit market has grown from \$300 billion in 2010 to \$800 billion in 2018. This expansion captures the supply-side growth driven by shadow banks, signalling financial market development.

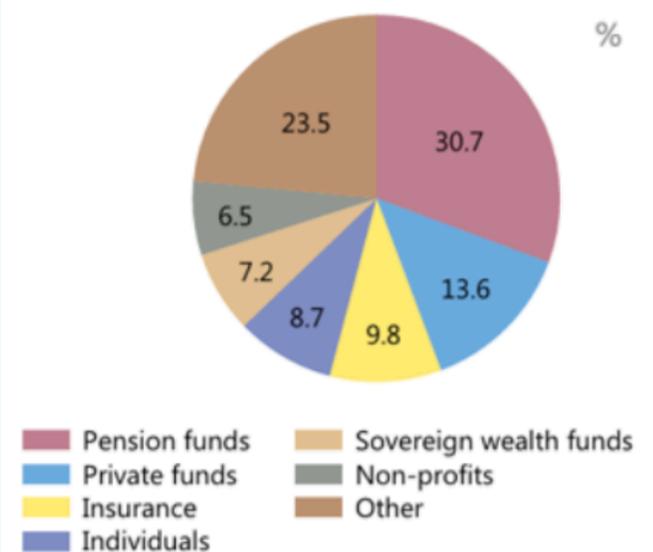
Financial Stability Risks of Private Credit

Considering that private credit funds operate outside the traditional banking system, they differ structurally from traditional banks in several important ways. Their assets are typically held as loans rather than originating for sale and they are financed through closed-end or semi-liquid investment vehicles rather than customer deposits. As a result, they face a significantly lower risk of sudden bank runs, in which depositors rapidly withdraw funds.

However, it is important to remember that those firms that utilise private credit from shadow banks are often smaller and riskier compared to those using public debt markets. In addition, this newly adapted private credit market which offers long-term loans directly to private companies has not yet been tested under major economic downturn at its current size.

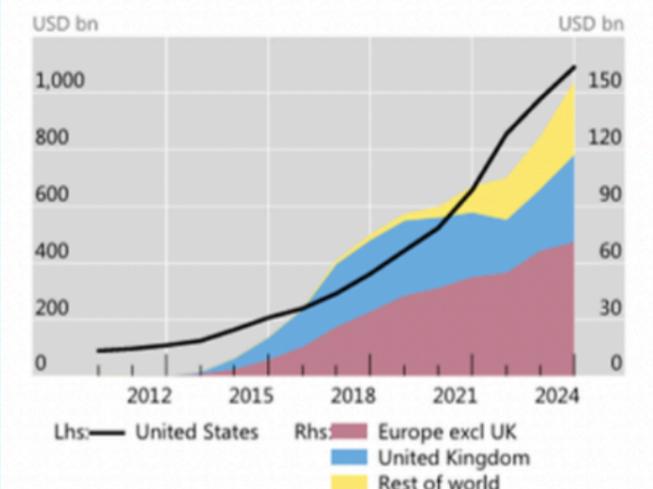
As presented in Chart 2, the scale of private credit outstanding provided by shadow banks has grown rapidly. During periods of economic distress, this expansion raises the risk of sharp declines in asset values as losses are often recognised with a delay, due to the large size of the funds and infrequent valuations. As discussed by Muminović (2024), although private credit returns appear less volatile than those of high-yield bonds or bank-originated leveraged loans (creating the perception of lower risk), this stability is partly attributable to valuation smoothing. Such smoothing makes potential losses harder to detect and may result in more disruptive adjustments when losses eventually materialize.

[Chart 1] Private Credit Investor Base



Q4 2021 US private credit funds. (BIS, 2025)

[Chart 2] Private credit outstanding over time



Growth in total volume of outstanding direct and asset-based loans by region of borrower. (BIS, 2025)



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In addition, financial stress arising from private credit in shadow banks may spread across the broader financial system through channels such as hidden leverage provided by banks to pension funds and insurers, as well as unclear interconnectedness among market participants. However, at present, these risks appear to be contained and limited data availability prevents further assessment of private credit-related financial stability risks.

Regulatory Gaps and Supervisory Challenges

As set out by the IMF (2024), the rapid growth of private credit lending within the shadow banking sector has created a regulatory lag as lending activity migrates away from traditional banks. This shift has enabled regulatory divergences, since private credit operates across borders and sectors with fragmented oversight. Political economy constraints further complicate stricter regulatory implementation given that shadow banks finance middle-market firms and institutional investors. Overall, the IMF (2024) warns that without improved reporting, data collection and stronger supervisory coordination, private credit vulnerabilities through shadow banks could become systemic.

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ARE INFLUENCERS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SURGE OF FOMO AMONG TODAY'S YOUTH?

Nam Phuong Vo & Thuy Quynh Duong

Many young people today struggle to feel content with what they have, since the lives of their idols— or even an old friend from kindergarten—seem far more “perfect” than their own ordinary days. Some point fingers at a generation that is easily led by trending online lifestyles, while others blame influencers who gain thousands of likes, fans, and income simply by sharing their lives online. As more and more people are pushed towards negative feelings because of this issue, the question arises: who should take the blame?

DEFINITION

Fear of Missing Out, or FOMO, is an anxious sensation that something interesting or important is happening elsewhere without one’s participation. It typically emerges when individuals view others’ lives on social media and feel inadequate, excluded, or pressured to live similarly. These feelings often lead to an urgent desire to join in or imitate, which further causes a lack of deep understanding and embrace of oneself.

HOW HAS THE WAVE OF INFLUENCERS AFFECTED YOUNG PEOPLE?

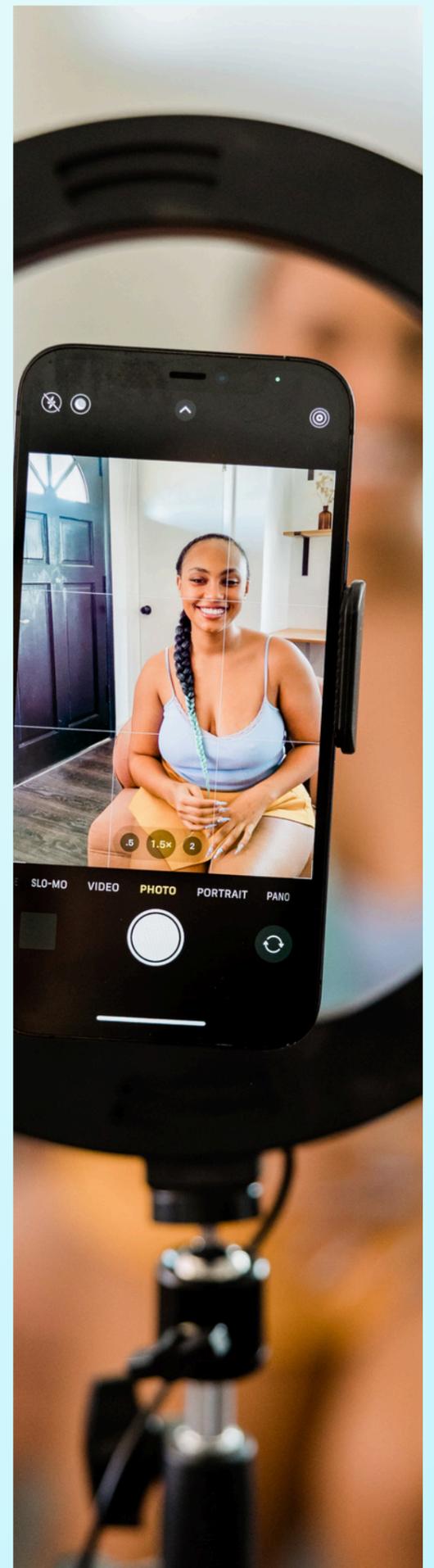
The “influencer wave”, as any other change in society, has both good and bad consequences. On one hand, many influencers share their professional knowledge, skills, and real-life experiences, or raise awareness of social issues. By doing so, they greatly inspire young people to pursue their passions and personal growth, step out of their comfort zones, start businesses or creative projects, and explore new ideas, cultures, and habits. Social media platforms have also created online communities where people can find connections and support—something that might be tough to access in real life.

On the other hand, this trend also has significant downsides, particularly in contributing to the widespread occurrence of FOMO. Some influencers tend to curate their online presence to appear flawless, only sharing polished and filtered moments such as luxury travel, exclusive events, or rapid success. Constant exposure to this content encourages comparison, making young viewers feel as though they are missing out on an elite lifestyle that seems unattainable. When influencers promote products, trends, or experiences, they often create a sense of urgency—a “must-have/must-try” mentality—to feel belonging.

As a result, teenagers and young adults may begin to measure their worth by the number of experiences or material possessions they have, leading them to pursue experiences that they can record and post online, rather than genuine enjoyment. Over time, FOMO can lead to anxiety, depression, and persistent self-doubt, and even spending extravagantly beyond their means in an attempt to keep up with others.

WHO IS TO BLAME?

It would be too simplistic to place the blame entirely on strangers online. While it is undeniable that influencers play a role in shaping trends and social media standards, individuals and their immediate environments also play a crucial role. Families, schools, and early education shape how young people interpret what they see online. Without critical thinking or a secure sense of self, young people become more vulnerable to social comparison and anxiety.



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Moreover, there is no single type of influencer, and people respond differently to the same content. What motivates one person may stress another. The tendency to compare and the need for validation are very natural human conditions, so placing all blame on content creators for how individuals internalize these messages is both unfair and unrealistic.

HOW TO OVERCOME FOMO WHEN LOOKING AT THE IDEALLY PORTRAYED LIFE OF INFLUENCERS?

It starts with simple acts. When seeing images and descriptions of other people's seemingly vibrant lives, we must remind ourselves of the difference between image and reality. Social media is often commercialized and curated — photos and videos are carefully planned and edited rather than reflective of everyday life.

We can implement practical actions to manage social media usage habits, such as setting time limits, unfollowing accounts that trigger negative emotions, and keeping accounts that genuinely inspire positivity. Additionally, building real-world experiences is equally important—participating in extracurricular activities, playing sports, spending time with loved ones, picking up new hobbies, and setting personal short-term and life-long goals.

It is necessary to redefine our self-worth. The success of others does not diminish one's own value. Everyone's measure of happiness is different, as are their experiences. Focusing on one's own path rather than constant comparison allows for greater fulfillment.

Above all, practice a positive mindset that focuses on what we have instead of what we lack.

By appreciating small achievements, practicing mindfulness, and meditation, individuals become less vulnerable to external validation. A meaningful life is shaped by personal values and actions, not by fitting into anybody else's mould.

Additionally, influencers and platforms must be mindful of the images they promote, while parents and educators should help children and teenagers build media literacy and support them in learning about their personal identity.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the rapid rise of influencers has had a profound effect on young people's sense of self and contributed to the prevalence of FOMO. Instead of blaming one group, we should accept shared responsibility and understand that social media is a tool, not a measure of life. Overcoming FOMO starts with building a healthy and personal mindset that will lead to embracing enduring authenticity. Different ways of life exist, thus practicing resiliency and taking responsibility for intentional living will allow young people to feel content in the present while still nurturing their dreams for the future.

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PARIS IN PROTEST: WHY SHEIN'S PARIS STORE HAS SPARKED CONTROVERSY

Nguyen Tran

December in Paris is usually associated with Christmas lights, people going holiday shopping, and festive markets filling the streets. Many people expect warmth, joy, celebration and a strong sense of tradition during this season. However, this year, the Christmas atmosphere had been disrupted by a controversy rather than festive celebration. The public attention has shifted away from decorations and festivals and toward protest and debate. The center of this controversy is the opening of Shein first permanent store in Paris. What was meant to be a major retail store has instead spared national and international attention

Shein is a global fast fashion brand known for producing trend clothing at extremely cheap prices. The brand has primarily operated online, often targeting younger consumers through social media. This company recently opened a physical store inside BHV Marais, its one of Paris's most historic department stores. BHV is located in a cultural and fashionable district which makes the location symbolic. The store is opened shortly before the Christmas shopping season, when public visibility is at its highest. The timing intensified both interest and criticism from consumers.

The public reaction

Almost immediately after the store opened to the public, backlash began to grow both locally and nationally. The opening attracted heavy attention because of its timing during the Christmas season. Media coverage has intensified public awareness within days. With that, protesters gathered outside the BHV Marais building to express their strong opposition to the store. Demonstrations have included signs, chants, and also organized activist groups. Police presence is also increased to manage crowds and to ensure the safety of the people. These protests were led by multiple groups with different concerns. Environmental activists were focusing on sustainability issues; they especially criticized fast fashion waste and pollution, highlighting the textile waste and overproduction. Fashion professionals have raised cultural and industry related concerns and also expressed their fear for local craftsmanship. Many have argued that fast fashion undermines skilled labor, and independent designers felt increasingly marginalized.

Parents and consumer advocates raised safety and moral concerns, the attention was drawn to the platform responsibility led to the call for stricter oversight. The protests have gained attention from both offline and online due to circulated videos and photos being shared widely on social media. Public debate has been intensified across these platforms, showing the concerns and worries from parents and consumers.

Ethical concerns

One major reason for the backlash is the sheer fast fashion business model. The brand prioritizes speed, low costs, and high output. The clothing is produced and discarded rapidly, just like fashion trends. The company has been criticized for mass production and short clothing life cycles. Clothing is often worn only a few times, and it encourages disposable fashion habits. Many critics argued that this model encourages overconsumption because consumers are pushed to buy more than necessary. The issue has become more visible during heavy sales seasons. The Christmas season shopping has intensified these concerns, because holiday shopping has already increased waste, the packaging and textile disposal is at its peak in December. Paris, widely known for fashion artistry and quality, sees this model as conflicting with its identity because craftsmanship and heritage are highly valued in the city of love. But fast fashion challenges these traditions. This creates a kind of cultural clash between tradition and fast fashion just like economic convenience contrasts with cultural preservation.

Product safety

The public concerns have been deepened after the French authorities discovered controversial items sold on the Shein's marketplace. The items were found through third-party sellers and this raised lots of questions about oversight. The platform accountability became the central attention, while responsibility remained a public concern.



PARIS IN PROTEST: WHY SHEIN'S PARIS STORE HAS SPARKED CONTROVERSY

Nguyen Tran

The discovery triggered many strong reactions; politicians demanded explanations, parents and advocacy expressed their outrage at the news. Further investigations were launched to examine Shein's platform responsibility, such as reviewing monitoring systems, also, regulatory action was also considered. This news shifted the conversation from fashion preferences to public safety and ethics in fashion. This issue has moved beyond personal choice or preferences, since it became a societal concern. As a result, criticism has become more serious and widespread. The public trust has declined further and pressure on the company itself has increased.

Impact on Christmas Celebrations

Due to all ongoing protests and security concerns, city authorities have taken action to conduct the risk assessments and crowd control has become a priority. Several outdoor Christmas events near the BHV Marais were cancelled, this also included festive installations and public gatherings were restricted. These cancellations of course affected the traditional holiday elements. Christmas trees and light displays were removed and seasonal decorations were scaled back. The absence of these decorations and mood affected the usual Christmas atmosphere, the streets appear less festive furthermore, foot traffic patterns have changed. For many residents and tourists, the Christmas season felt different. Expectations of celebrating this festive holiday were disrupted and disappointment was widely expressed on people's faces. A time which was meant for joy was suddenly filled with tension, public discussions have replaced festive gatherings.

Reaction from the Community

The French fashion industry has responded strongly and heatedly to the situation. Designers have voiced their concerns publicly, industry leaders have issued statements, and many designers and brands have chosen to distance themselves from BHV. Many products were withdrawn and partnerships were reconsidered. Fashion organizations defended ethical production and craftsmanship in which sustainability is emphasized, cultural preservation was prioritised. They argued that Paris should protect its own fashion values, the city's global reputation was cited and heritage was framed as irreplaceable. This ration has highlighted fears about fast fashion expansion and traditional spaces has felt increasingly vulnerable. The controversy spread rapidly across social media, the platform has amplified both support and criticism, hashtags and viral clips have emerged. Protest videos have since then gained large audiences and public sentiment has shifted quickly and international users have joined the discussion.

The Shein controversy has reshaped the Paris Christmas season completely. Festivity was replaced by tension and the time which should have been celebratory became divisive. Cities were forced to define their values and cultural identity was questioned. This story goes beyond one store, and it also reflects the future of fashion and responsibility.

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TERRORISM: A CULTURE OF INSENSITIVITY

Oshioke Imuekemhe

In recent years, the world has seen a rise in terrorist groups operating across different missions. Following the 9/11 attacks, global awareness of terrorism spiked, and the African continent, specifically the Sahel region, has experienced a massive surge in extremist activities since 2011. This prolonged crisis reveals that terrorism does not just thrive on an extremist ideology system, but on a systemic culture of insensitivity.

According to the 2025 Global Terrorism Index (GTI), the Sahel has become the global epicentre of terrorism, accounting for 51% of all terrorism deaths worldwide in 2024. Groups such as Boko Haram and ISWAP (Islamic State West Africa Province) have expanded from the original territory, often fracturing into smaller cells or partnering with global organisations like ISIS to launch wide-scale attacks. Countries such as Nigeria and Burkina Faso remain at the epicentre of this region's instability.

Nigeria has frequently been at the forefront of international news regarding this crisis. The 2025 GTI reports rank Nigeria as the 6th most impacted country in the world by terrorism, with a score of 7.658, indicating a high level of security deterioration. The situation has gotten worse over time; in 2024 alone, Nigeria recorded 565 terrorism related deaths, which reversed the nearly decade-long trend of declining fatalities. The country first drew significant attention with the 2014 abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok. As of late 2025, approximately 82- 91 of these girls are still missing or believed to still be in captivity. Since that event, insurgents have continued to gain ground in the northeast region of the country, which has led to partial or full conflict in those areas, halting educational activities and displacing the people. These terrorist groups have for a long time been launching attacks on security forces and public officials, one of such attacks happened on September 25th 2020, in the Baga area. Borno State where about 30 security personnel and civilians were killed in an attack on the Governor's convoy.

Escalations in Central and Northern Nigeria

In recent months, there have been attacks on various states and villages, by groups referred to as bandits and terrorists, that have spread across the country. Many point accusatory fingers at the Fulani tribe, a group known for being nomadic herdsman. Violence has been concentrated in states such as Plateau, Edo, Kogi, Niger, and Kwara.

Plateau State has witnessed a high volume of killings by suspected Fulani militants. Between July 2024 and June 2025 alone, over 762 people were killed in violent attacks across Nigeria, with many concentrated in the Middle Belt region.

Kwara State: A tragic incident occurred at a christ apostolic church (CAC) in Eruku, Kwara State. A routine Sunday service livestream captured the moment where terrorists stormed the church premises. Reports revealed that multiple worshippers were abducted, and three individuals were killed during the raid. Luckily the abducted worshippers have been rescued.

Sokoto State: In July 2025, a new militant group called Lakurawa launched an attack on Kwallajiya village, killing 15-17 people as they prepared for prayers. The group is heavily active in the Tangaza, Gudu, Illela, Binji and Silame local government areas.

Katsina State: Multiple ambushes occurred, including one in January 2025 that killed 21 members of the Katsina Community Watch Corps.

Kebbi State: In November 2025, armed assailants scaled the walls of the government girls' comprehensive secondary school in Maga, killing the assistant principal and abducting 25 school girls.



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Call to Action

One major individual who has continued to draw both national and international attention to these groups' activities is Rev. Ezekiel Dachomo, the Regional Chairman of the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) in Barkin Ladi. He has described it as a "Christian Genocide". He gained attention for conducting mass burials, at times presiding over more than 70 mass burials, with one instance involving over 500 people in a single night.

The security crisis is further driven by the fact that terrorism has become a lucrative business. Nigeria's Kidnap for Ransom economy has reached an unprecedented level in 2025, with citizens paying at least 2.56 billion (approximately \$1.66 million) in ransoms between July 2024 and June 2025. During this period, 4,722 people were abducted with kidnappers demanding total sums exceeding 48 billion. In some recent attacks, terrorists have demanded over 50 million per person. The Nigerian government, in a means to deter this, passed the Terrorism(Prevention and Prohibition) Act into law in 2022. Section 14 of that act prescribes a 15-year imprisonment sentence for anyone who colludes, transfers funds and makes payment with a terrorist, abductor or kidnapper. These actions are the beginning of a larger fight against terrorism.

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BOXED IN: HONG KONG'S ARCHITECTURE OF INEQUALITY

Charlotte Adelaide Lam

Coffin Homes

How much space does a life deserve? Mansions declare '10,000 square feet' from above. Subdivided flats clamor '80 square feet' from below.

In a city that embodies supreme wealth, space has become a currency of privilege in Hong Kong. While the elites float on glass skyscrapers and closed gates, thousands of Hong Kong people are boxed in subdivided flats. Flats crammed into pocket sizes have been coined the colloquial nickname "coffin homes" - and the reality of these units are as brutal as the moniker sounds. These spaces, often no larger than a parking spot, are a reflection of desperation from families, elderly citizens, and children who grow up without open air to breathe in, without rooms to extend their arms, without homes to call their own.

This is happening in Hong Kong, where people are living inches apart. This is not just a housing issue, but a moral one. Subdivided flats are inhumane, unsustainable and deepen the chasm between the rich and the poor.

The History of Subdivided Flats

Subdivided dwellings are created by carving up a single apartment into small partitioned units. Habitats to over 220,000 people, occupants live amid stale pipes, leaking sinks, and electric fans, overlooking grim back alleys. Some units house more than a dozen of these notorious 'cages', with a single bathroom and a shared kitchen area with 20 or more households, leading to squalid conditions.

Introduced in 1972, the Small House Policy in Hong Kong grants indigenous villagers rights to build houses on rural lands, limiting land available for urban development. By selling the houses they build, villagers can profit significantly - despite regulations that prevent this. This practice deepens economic inequality and indirectly fuels the subdivided flat crisis by limiting land supply and inflating property values.

Threats to Human Rights

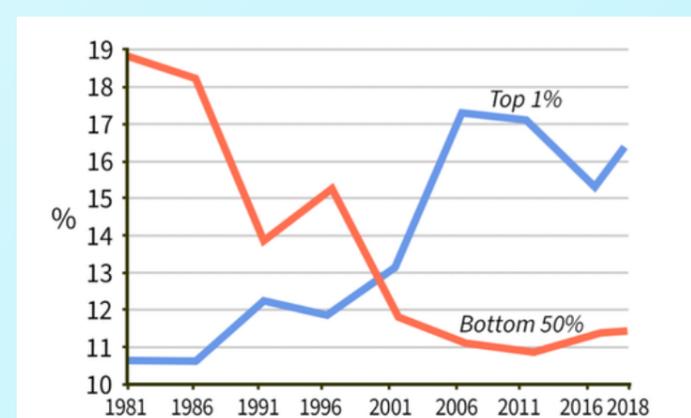
Hong Kong's wealth disparity, coupled with sky-rocketing private housing prices and the dearth of public housing supply, create an influx of overwhelming demand for residence. Private market landlords began converting flats in older buildings into multiple units to maximize rental income, with little regard for safety or living standards.

With an average waiting time of 6.1 years for public rental housing, many of Hong Kong's grassroots groups are resorted to subdivided units while they wait. About 20% of Hong Kong population lives under the poverty line without welfare, and 8% remain below with welfare. Nothing comes cheap in Hong Kong, yet it shouldn't take \$5,000 if not more (US\$642) to pay for a monthly rent.

Living Impacts

As complex as subdivided flats are, problems of shoebox flats affect families, neighborhoods and the social fabric of the city.

According to the Society for Community Organization, almost 50,000 children aged below 18 live in subdivided flats. Out of the 503 children surveyed, 94% of them have spinal issues, with 13 suspected to have developed scoliosis. About three quarters of the families surveyed said the children did not have their own desk, and 71% said they did not have their own bed. In this pivotal phase of physical growth where young children are more susceptible to harm, they are stripped of an equal chance at health and freedom.



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In terms of familial relationships, children living in subdivided flats often face strained relationships with their parents. Because of overcrowding and limited resources, parents tend to impose strict rules, especially around the use of electronic devices. However, they rarely provide constructive guidance or support. This mismatch creates frequent clashes at home. The lack of space and constant stress also heightens irritability and frustration among children, which further fuels family tensions and conflicts.

Additionally, adult and elderly residents suffer with deteriorating mental conditions. Results from a survey taken on ten residents living in subdivided flats in an industrial area showed the respondents living in subdivided flats are exposed to hidden risks - big and small - in fire safety, security and hygiene. As a result, their physical and mental wellbeing are constantly at stake. As far as mental health is concerned, 7 of them showed symptoms of anxiety, depression and stress; 9 experienced mental distress after moving into subdivided flats - 2 of whom were diagnosed with a mental disorder.

Current Solutions

Pressurized by the urge of Xia Baolong, China's top official overseeing Hong Kong affairs, Hong Kong has proposed registering subdivided flats to be redesignated as "Basic Housing Units" from March 2026, as it seeks to phase out all subdivided flats that do not satisfy the minimum housing requirements, thus ensuring windowed rooms and individual toilets.

However, Hong Kong citizens have split opinions on this new legislation, as it seems to have only spiralled further in this deep-rooted problem. While the phasing out of substandard flats can ensure protection of residents' human rights and fulfil an acceptable standard of living, critics have spoken that this would just exacerbate the housing crisis. Tenants of caged homes worry it will push up the rent of the remaining subdivided flats, leading to higher living costs for them. In the meantime, residents affected by the change can only queue up for public housing - which does not have a certain guarantee of success of claiming one.

In response to this, the government plans to build 30,000 temporary units. Ultimately, Hong Kong plans to cut all existing subdivided flats in the city by 2049. As sluggish as the process seems, the steps taken by the government are a sign of undwinding determination to demolish the city's persisting housing inequality.

Hope is still present in the spirit of the people of Hong Kong through growing social support and activism in the community.

Conclusion

Subdivided flats is a symptom of Hong Kong's architecture of inequality - where people are caged in underprivilege and deprivation of basic human rights. Inarguably, Hong Kong is the most expensive city to live in, where even full-time workers grapple with affording dignified housing.

As citizens, we should take on the moral duty to raise awareness of this neglected plight. We are all connected by the same dialect, the same heritage and the same collective destiny. If we truly believe in equality, then we must confront this architecture of inequality. Demand fair housing policies, create safe and nurturing spaces for children and be a human with empathy.

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THE WANG FUK COURT FIRE - AN ATROCIOUS AND AVOIDABLE DISASTER

Mercy Olanrewaju

On the 26th of November, a building caught fire in the Wang Fuk Court in Hong Kong between 2-3 PM. The fire was extremely deadly, with almost 200 casualties and dozens of injuries. However, the cause of the fire is still up for question. After the fire was extinguished, the public had many concerns and the Hong Kong government is working on bringing those at fault to justice. But to residents of Wang Fuk Court, many questions are still unanswered and the wounds left by this event are still deep.

Wang Fuk Court was a complex of apartments, built in 1983, and is situated in the Tai Po area. It was a public housing estate, and is partially subsidized by a government housing programme. It had eight buildings, each with 31 stories and had almost 2000 units in total. The complex had around 4600 residents, 40% of which were 65 or older. In 2016, the estate was inspected, and it was determined that large-scale repairs were needed. The owner's corporation of Wang Fuk Court presented three repair plans in 2024, with costs ranging from HK\$150 million to HK\$330 million. They ultimately went with the third plan, which included rebuilding the exterior wall and paving it with tessera tiles. The Prestige Construction and Engineering Company was the hired contractor, and have had previous issues with other projects, which resulted in the company being convicted of two safety offences and paying a fine.

Prior to the fire breaking out, all 8 buildings had bamboo scaffolding, which was covered with construction safety nets. It was widely circulated that the bamboo scaffolding was the cause of the fire, but that is not true, as it's common for bamboo to be used as scaffolding in HK.

It has been confirmed that the fire started in block F, and then spread to Block E, but it is still undetermined as to how the fire spread to other blocks. As early as 2 PM on 26th November, signs of a fire were noticed, in Block F. Out of the 8 blocks, 7 were completely burnt. Only Block H was unaffected by the fire, with residents being evacuated. It took 43 hours and 27 minutes to put out the fire (extinguished at 10:18 on 28 November), making this the most devastating fire Hong Kong has seen in decades. As of now, the cause of the fire is unknown, but there are some suspicions. The Hong Kong Security Chief Tang Ping-Keung says that the rapid spread of the fire is most likely due to the Styrofoam placed outside the windows of the apartment blocks. Also, he added that the building had improper netting, which could have further exacerbated the spread of the fire.

In total there were 161 deaths, most of which came from Block F and E. Block F had 70 deaths, Block E had 82 deaths, with the remaining blocks having a combined death toll of 7. There are still many people who are missing, and due to the intensity of the fire, those who were trapped inside were burnt completely, making it difficult to identify the victims. There were 79 non-fatal injuries. There were also over 500 animals that were trapped in the building, 294 of which have been rescued. However, 70 have been confirmed to be dead. Firefighter Ho Wai-ho, aged 37, also passed when he was fighting the fire. He was found collapsed, taken to the hospital and shortly after declared dead. Over 2,311 firefighters took part in rescue operations, 12 of which got injured. This was with the help of 391 fire engines and 188 ambulances.

There was a lot of public support and assistance, as over a 1000 residents had to be evacuated to a local mall - the Kwong Fuk Shopping centre. Several churches and businesses provided free food and shelter, and residents were later directed to various emergency shelters that had been set up. Members of the public, as public figures donated supplies to help those affected. Several large Asian companies (such as Xiaomi, Alibaba Group, SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment etc.) pledged to donate funds to help assist victims of this disaster.



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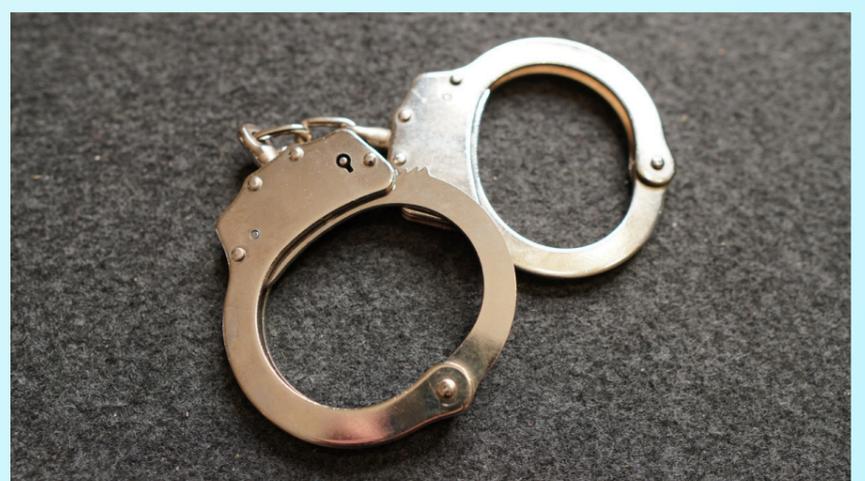
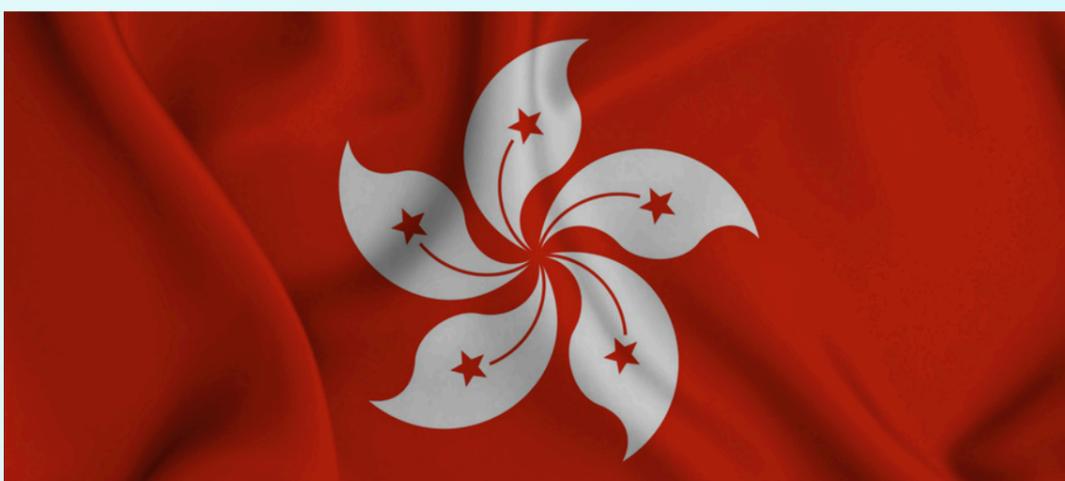
The Hong Kong government moved quickly, forming two groups to provide food and shelter for the residents. They also had another group working on investigations and regulations. 13 schools in the area had classes suspended, to reduce traffic in the area. Initial investigations revealed that there were several safety violations, which included the polystyrene boards which were confirmed to be highly flammable, the safety netting not being up to fire-proof standard and that in all 8 buildings, the fire alarms were faulty and the alarm did not sound. Currently, 15 people have been arrested on suspicion of manslaughter. Those arrested include bosses or staff of the construction firms. Another six people have been detained because they were fire equipment contractors. Also, the former and current Wang Fuk Court owners' committee chairs have been arrested.

A student of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Mikes Kwan (24 years old) launched a public petition, asking for an independent commission of inquiry into the fire, government accountability, support for affected residents and the review of the construction supervision. This resulted in Kwan being arrested on 29 November on suspicion of seditious intent. He is now out on bail. Many others were arrested by the National Security Department (NSD), under sedition offenses for commenting on the fire. The series of arrests concerning transparency of this situation has led to the public being increasingly outraged over the incident. This correlates to the difficult relations between China and Hong Kong, and concerns regarding free speech and government accountability.

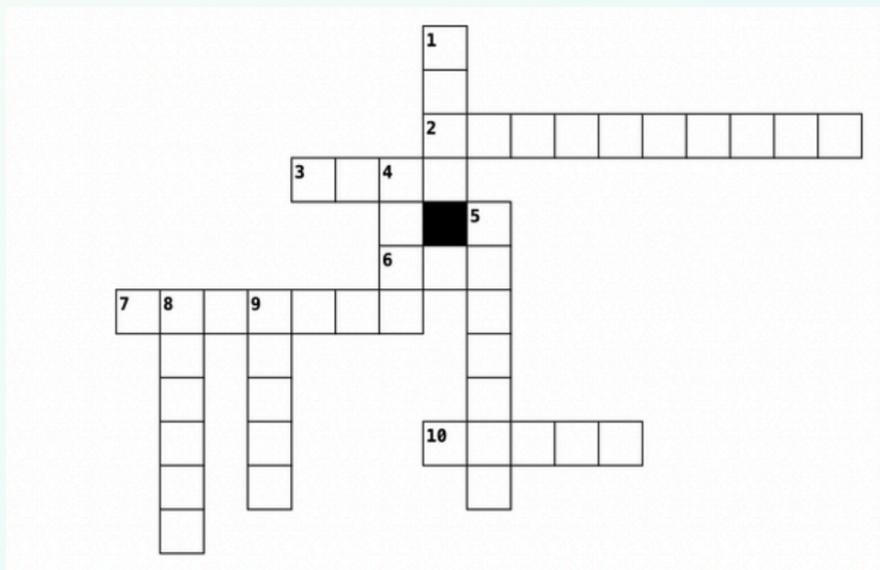
As of now, the Tai Po community is still left reeling from this calamity. There was an official 3-day period of mourning between 29 Nov to 1 Dec, where the national and Hong Kong regional flags on government buildings would be at half-mast, as well as domestic and international condolences to the victims of this tragedy. However there are still so many questions that are yet to be answered, and many are unsure that there will be total accountability from those involved.

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Crossword: Flying High



Across

- 2. A bird that drills into trees for insects
- 3. A waterfowl with webbed feet
- 6. A nocturnal bird associated with wisdom
- 7. A small brown bird common in cities and towns
- 10. A large bird of prey known for sharp vision

Down

- 1. A fast-flying predator with keen eyesight
- 4. A black bird known for high intelligence
- 5. A blue bird known for loud calls
- 8. A gray bird often found in urban squares
- 9. A red-breasted bird often seen in gardens

Word Search: Writers



Crypto-Quote: Keep Going

LI BRX JHQXLQHOB HQMRB
 GRLQJ LW, WKHQ GR LW. QR
 RQH VKRXOG VWRS BRX -
 PLOOLH EREEB EURZQ

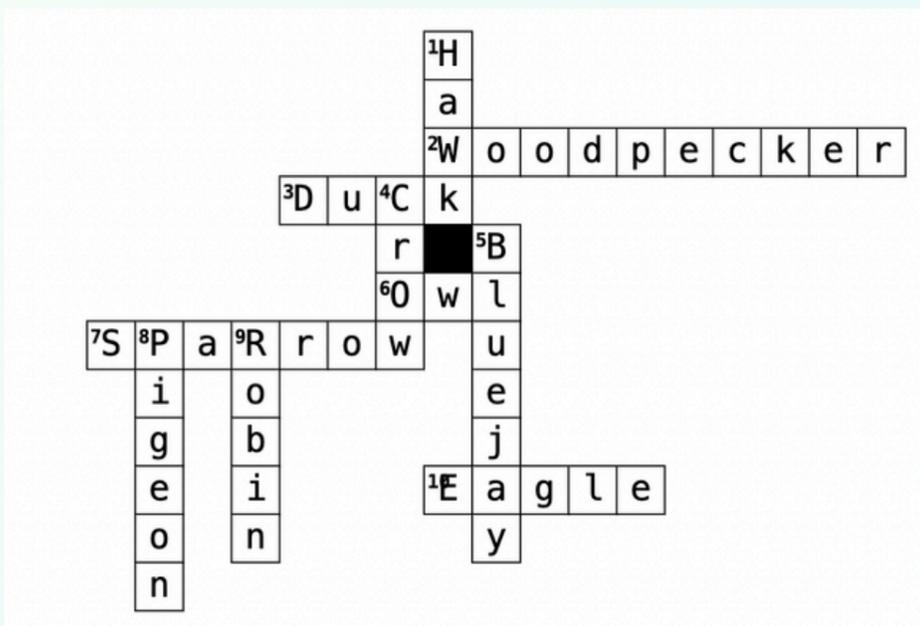
Word Bank:

- | | |
|-------------|------------|
| Shakespeare | Tolkien |
| Austen | Fitzgerald |
| Orwell | Poe |
| Hemingway | Homer |
| Dickens | Woolf |

Instructions:

Figure out the quote from one of these articles by figuring out a simple code. In this code one letter will replace another, (it will be the same letter throughout the puzzle). Example: KLFRLF = SYNONYM. Solution is found through trial and error.

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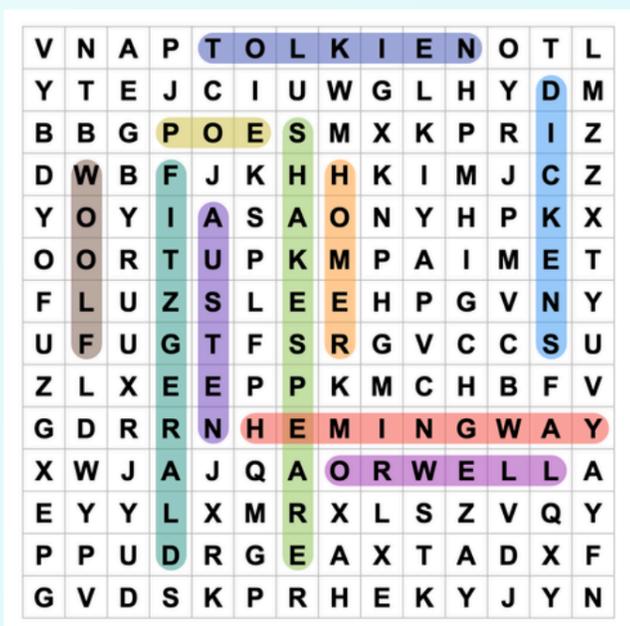
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IF YOU GENUINELY ENJOY
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