

YOUTH 4 DIGITAL SUSTAINABILITY



BACKGROUND PAPER

DIGITAL LITERACY &
DIGITAL EDUCATION



Digital Literacy & Digital Education

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Recommendations

INTERNET FOR SOCIAL COHESION



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Big Tech and other companies that produce Internet products and services should have more indigenous languages built into automated translation tools and technologies to help bridge the language barriers and Western cultural bias of the Internet.



Summary



The goal of making the Internet a useful digital tool for Literacy and Education continues to meet with many challenges. This is in part a consequence of barriers imposed by factors such as language limitations, which are occasioned by the absence / non-representation of many of the World Languages in popular products, services, and utilities that exist in the Internet today. In addition, there has been the challenge, posed by certain cultures and amplified by the Internet, which sometimes tend to exercise a pervasive influence over other smaller cultures, obscuring digital utilities of the Internet for teaching, nurturing and preserving these smaller cultures.

The United Nations has declared Internet Access as a basic human right[1] . But then, what use would there be for Access to the Internet if content that can be understood in the minority World Languages and representing the marginalised global cultures are gradually being diminished into extinction and obscured on the Internet?

In light of this, it becomes important that Internet Stakeholders (particularly Big Tech, and other companies that produce Internet products and services) integrate more indigenous / non-mainstream languages into the automated tools and technologies that feature in these products and services – particularly those that serve purposes of translation, digital curation, e-Learning, etc. This would help bridge the language barriers and the seeming Western cultural bias of the Internet.

Background

Language Limitations: There are about 7100 currently-existing World Languages, only 500 of which are used online[2]; and about 54% of Internet content is curated in English Language. It is therefore easy to see how language[3] limitations pose a barrier to the use of the Internet as an effective tool for Digital Literacy & Digital Education, especially as the top ten Internet languages have been reported to account for at least 82% of the content that is available on the Internet. [4]

Research has proven that making digital content available on the Internet in regional languages could, in certain jurisdictions, directly result in an increase in Internet adoption rate by up to 43%[5], with adoption geared towards several purposes that include digital literacy & digital education.

External Cultural Influences: The utility of the Internet as a tool for teaching and preserving unique cultural identities around the World continues to face the impact of external influence from other cultures that are more popular. It has been estimated that at least one indigenous language becomes extinct every 14 days[3]; and out of the about 7100 currently existing world languages, 1,519 are at risk of dying, while 915 are said to be already nearing extinction.[6]

The relationship between the popularisation of indigenous languages and the preservation of indigenous cultures is quite well understood, even beyond the digital realm. Thus, and to a large extent, the apparent bias of the Internet towards Western cultures continues to impose, with subtlety, an external influence that often dwarfs and intimidates the prospects of local (non-Western) cultures adopting the Internet as a useful digital tool for teaching and preserving cultural values[3].

ACTION POINT



András Kornai, in the Paper “*Digital Language Death*”, has predicted that up to 95% of the current World Languages in use today will not be able to gain traction online, citing certain well-known problems caused by the Digital Divid[7] . How can this ‘doomsday’ prediction be possibly averted? Here is one way.

There is the need for Big Tech Companies that produce popular Internet products and services to incorporate more indigenous languages into automated translation tools and technologies to help bridge the language barriers and seeming Western cultural bias of the Internet.

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**YOUTH
INTERNET
GOVERNANCE
FORUM**

German Informatics Society

**Office Berlin
Spreepalais am Dom
Anna-Louisa-Karsch-Str. 2
10178 Berlin**

**E-Mail: mail@yigf.de
 [/YouthIGFSummit](https://twitter.com/YouthIGFSummit)
Web: <https://yigf.de/>**

**Contributors:
Emmanuel C. OGU
João Pedro Martins**

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