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> Connected, competent and critical: Youth in the digital age

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Connected, competent and critical: Youth in the digital age

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An exclusive International Youth Day 2020 Op-Ed written by Hans Martin Høegh Henriksen

Today's youth have more opportunities than any generation before but are also facing some of humankind's biggest challenges. It is in all of our interest that they succeed.

On International Youth Day 12 August, we celebrate young people, youth-led organizations and all those who work to empower and uplift young people everywhere. The theme of International Youth Day 2020 is "Youth Engagement for Global Action". It is our youth who are inheriting massive challenges like climate change, increasing polarization and widening inequality. Their active engagement is crucial to help address all of them. More than at any point in history, youth need to be connected, competent and retain a healthy sense of critical thinking.

Telenor Youth Forum delegates from Telenor's eight markets in Scandinavia and Asia including Myanmar attending Nobel Peace Prize Ceremony in Oslo, Norway.

The rise of the digital natives

Understanding young people's relationship to technology can seem overwhelming. It may look like youths' lives revolve around their phones – living through the lens of social media, using apps for everything and anything, and hardly interacting with anyone IRL ("in real life"). Most young people today are digital natives who have known no other reality than constant connectivity.^[1]

More similar than different

According to Statista, more than 4.5 billion people worldwide were active internet users as of April 2020. In Myanmar, there were 22 million internet users in January 2020. That means 41% of the population in Myanmar are online. Young people adapt early and jump on international trends faster than ever – just observe how new 'born global' mobile apps are taken up almost simultaneously whether you're in Boston, Bangkok or Bago. The youth segment transcends borders and care about global issues, and that is why someone like Greta Thunberg can become a world celebrity with her 'school strike for climate'.

The democratization of entrepreneurship

Youth are essential to tackle global, social challenges like the UN Sustainable Development Goals. That's also why Telenor for several years ran a global platform called Telenor Youth Forum with young leaders from all its markets in the Nordics and Asia. The program, run in collaboration with the Nobel Peace Center, saw massive interest and engagement from

candidates across Telenor's footprint and gave rise to new ventures that continue to this day. Most importantly, it demonstrated that this global crowd of youth could productively come together in short time, due to them already being connected. Youth also use connectivity to create inventions that are purely commercial, much earlier than what we've seen before: [Robert Nay](#), who invented the Bubble Ball game that was downloaded more than 2 million times within 2 weeks, was only 14 when it launched.

Connecting responsibly

Constant connectivity is not without challenges. Being connected does not mean you know how to use it productively and properly. And connectivity is not equally accessible for all. While one benefits from technology, another might be threatened by it. According to recent [statistics](#), about 37% of young people between the ages of 12 and 17 have been bullied online. It is on us adults and professionals like telecom operators to make sure that youths are getting the best and safest experience from technology.

Be kind!

To support youth in becoming better digital citizens, and to properly and responsibly use the internet, Telenor Myanmar launched the "Be Kind Online!" campaign joining hands with Plan International in June. The campaign addresses issues of cyberbullying, hate speech, cyber grooming, sexting, fake news, and more through targeted digital resilience trainings. Aiming to help stop cyberbullying and increase digital resilience, the campaign concludes on August 12, the International Youth Day.

Lifelong learning

Transformative technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Virtual Reality (VR) are making it increasingly important for youth to be familiar with advanced concepts at an early stage. Being a digital native is not sufficient; you need to understand why and how these technologies impact you and your community. The continued learning that working adults need to adapt to, starts already now for young people. Lifelong learning is required as digitalization increases and infuses all parts of our lives, like transportation, manufacturing, education, healthcare and more.

Reducing inequalities

It is up to all of us – governments, organizations, schools and telecoms operators – to make our youth technology ready. And it is up to the youth themselves to seek those skills and that knowledge. This can start with something as simple as taking part in simple digital literacy trainings and teaching youth to take responsibility for their online behavior. Telenor Myanmar is committed to creating a safer digital space for Myanmar's youth, promoting positive online behaviors, and providing youth with the resources to address and cope with negative online experiences. Our goal is to make sure no one is left behind.

Striking the right balance

Saying connected can seem to be all about fun and games. As all good things, both youth and adults need it in moderation. As adults we need to help promote balance: physical exercise, offline learning, and other activities, to make sure they leave enough time in their week for face-to-face interaction with people. IRL ("in real life") is not overrated, and sometimes it is necessary to disconnect. Teens are never too old to go for a screen-free walk or dinner with their family!^[2]

About Author

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Hans Martin Høegh Henriksen is a Chief Corporate Affairs Officer (CCAO) at Telenor Myanmar.

Henrichsen joined Telenor in 2000 and has vast experience from different international positions in Telenor Group, including as Chief Representative Officer in Bangladesh and a member of Grameenphone's Board of Directors. He was part of the pioneering team of Telenor staff exploring mobile opportunities in Myanmar and was responsible for building up the sustainability function of Telenor Myanmar in its start-up phase 2013–2014.

[1] <https://parents.au.reachout.com/skills-to-build/wellbeing/technology-and-teenagers>

[2] <https://parents.au.reachout.com/skills-to-build/wellbeing/technology-and-teenagers>

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