



Literature Review on
AFRICAN YOUTH
and the impact of
Narrative

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Dear reader,

The world has been observing, prodding and analysing a new species called 'the youth in Africa'.

We know where to find them, how long they have been around and that there are far too many of them, but you probably don't know much more for sure. The world needs a plan to manage the youth in Africa - or distract them because unlike viral trends we think we know why they're trending.

Fear.

We are scared of what so many young people - young Africans - unleashed on the world can do.
Are they an asset or a liability?

So, we want to share what the 29 documents of literature including research reports, chapters and academic journal articles are saying about the youth in Africa. Although by no means comprehensive, the literature review does provide a snapshot into this ubiquitous group.

We've done the reading for you so you don't have to.

You're welcome.





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The literature on African youth narratives about Africa is sparse. Only one report in the literature review focussed on youth narratives, and it indicated that youth did not value their own stories, but relied on western tropes in storytelling. We came across nine recent reports based on attitudinal surveys (six of which were done by the British Council) but they did not explore youth narratives, and also mainly interviewed youth in higher education, even though the bulk of African youth are not in higher education. Nevertheless, we found 23 journal articles, book chapters and theses on African youth identity, which will be explored in more depth in this report.

Regarding their sense of identity, most youth firstly identified according to their nation state, followed by being African, and then by ethnicity or religion. However, Nigerians, Kenyans and Ethiopians were more likely to identify by their ethnicity, and Southern Africans, especially South Africans, were less likely to identify with being African. Nevertheless, youth overwhelmingly agreed that a shared African identity exists, based on a similar history and similar economic trajectories. Also, although youth wanted to maintain their national identity, they want to embrace diversity within the national identity. Technology also plays a large role in youth identity formation, as social media increasingly becomes a means to articulate social and political identities, with young women often strengthening their voice on these platforms.

The statistical reports show that youth are optimistic about the future, sometimes more optimistic about the future of the continent than they are about the future of their own countries (particularly pronounced with respect to Zimbabwe, but also in Kenya, Mali, Nigeria and Togo). Rwandan youth were most optimistic about the future of their country and the continent, with 92% expressing excitement about the future. Most African youth also believe that their lives will get better (82%), despite being pessimistic about their prospects of employment and pessimistic about their own governments' support for youth. Most youth (81%) also believed that technology would change African fortunes for the better. Most youth also reported that their lives had got better over the last few years, with only Zimbabweans reporting a decline in their standard of living.

About 75% youth are highly motivated to be entrepreneurs if they can access capital to put their ideas into practice, but many also felt their prospects would be better if they could secure stable employment. Poor education was cited as a key barrier to employment and successful entrepreneurship. Their entrepreneurial ideas mainly focussed on setting up their own retail businesses, followed by entrepreneurship in agriculture or technology. None of the statistical studies reported youth interest in the arts, but this might be because no questions were asked in this area.

Most African youth also felt that they wanted to carry on living in their existing countries and communities, especially working to improve the livelihoods of those living in their communities. However, many also thought that they had better prospects if they went to the US or Europe. About 10% of youth were involved in community youth projects, focussed on sport or education, especially vocational education, but as for employment and entrepreneurship, felt that they lacked support and were not respected in their communities due to their age.



INTRODUCTION

Although we set out to explore African youth narratives about themselves, their countries and the continent, only one workshop report from the Narrative and Adolescence Workshop (UKRI GCRF, 2020) in the literature review found that youth were not confident about telling their own stories, with many of them using tropes from the US or UK narratives rather than telling their own stories. We also found eight reports based on attitudinal surveys (Ali-Douglas Development Consultancy, 2018; British Council, 2016, 2018a, 2018b; De Schryver et al., 2019; Ichikowitz Family Foundation, 2020; Marock & Harrison-Train, 2018; Wyman, 2020). Most of these attitudinal survey focussed on youth beliefs about the future, entrepreneurship, employment, education, migration, and their source of identity, as well as political attitudes (e.g. voting and political participation, and democracy) and their identification of challenges. However, because these studies focussed on attitudes rather than narrative, a rich sense of narrative does not emerge.

We therefore decided to explore how African youth perceived their identity, and found 23 journal articles, book chapters and theses on this topic across a range of African countries. In the bulk of these studies, youth indicated they were strongly tied to their national identity but also specified the importance of diversity under the national umbrella (Adams & van de Vijver, 2017; Ichikowitz Family Foundation, 2020). Two studies also underscored the relevance of music in articulating the identity of young people (Park et al., 2019; Tivenga, 2018). Literature exploring how youth saw their identity as Africans was limited, but studies that did discuss this topic suggest that many youth believe their African identity is important and that they have a shared history and culture with many other African countries (British Council, 2018a; Ichikowitz Family Foundation, 2020). In addition, Chiumbu (2017, p. 64) argues that “youth have taken to digital technologies; especially social media, to articulate their social and political identities ... Historically marginalised by traditional media, young women specifically, have found ways to perform their gendered identities through digital technologies”.

The literature also revealed that although in many African countries youth did not vote, they were highly motivated to participate in political activity, outside of electoral politics, often mobilising on a range of issues, particularly through the use of digital technology (Adebayo, 2020; Awiti & Orwa, 2019; Benza, 2017; Chiumbu, 2017; Ezzat, 2020; Kgosidintsi, 2017; Malila & Oelofsen, 2016; Mukoma, 2017; Saoudi, 2019; Simamuna, 2017; Telo, 2017). While attitudinal surveys also looked at youth attitudes to gender, LGBTIQ+, and the environment, they found that most African youth did not feel these were of great importance, but other articles in the literature overwhelmingly underscored the engagement of young women on social media enabling them to find voice in many African countries.

Below I discuss the key topics emerging from the literature.

THE SOURCE OF IDENTITY FOR AFRICAN YOUTH

Many youth felt their collective identity within the nation state was strong, more than they associated their identity with their ethnicity or race (British Council, 2018a, 2018b; Chiumbu, 2017; Durrani & Crossouard, 2020; Ichikowitz Family Foundation, 2020; Roberts & Silwamba, 2017). According to the Ichikowitz Foundation (2020) Ethiopians, Malawians and Togolese youth were most likely to mix across cultures, religions and ethnicities, and Nigerians were least likely to do so. Roberts and Silwamba (2017) found that while Zambian youth did strongly identify with their 'tribe', they also strongly disagreed with tribalism and felt that their government was out of touch with the spirit of inclusivity with many politicians promoting tribal divisions. In Senegal, youth took pride in the fact that Muslims and Christians could live peacefully side-by-side, and this is an important component of their identity (Durrani & Crossouard, 2020). Awiti and Orwa's (2019) study of East African youth also found that Kenyans, Tanzanians, and Ugandans were most likely to identify on age and citizenship lines over their ethnicity. They also found that youth "largely showed themselves to be interested in a positive coexistence between tribes while still allowing one's own tribe to be an important aspect of one's identity without being a source of prejudice or discrimination" (p. 196). Like Zambia youth, East African youth also felt their governments were inappropriately stoking up ethnic divisions, and that this was not advantageous to anyone in the country (Awiti & Orwa, 2019; British Council, 2018b). Even in Ethiopia, which is strongly ethnically and religiously divided, young Ethiopians' identity was strongly tied to pride in the history and culture of the country, and felt that the mindset of Ethiopia should shift "from one of ethnicity to one of unity" (De Schryver et al., 2019, p. 7). In Ghana, Hiplife music played a strong role in youth expressing "rejection of political leaders who misuse their powers and attempt to divide citizens for political gain" (Park et al., 2019, p. 108).

Most young Africans (80%) wanted their governments to put in place more protection for ethnic minorities, but Rwandan and Nigerian youth were the least likely to have friends of different ethnicities (Ichikowitz Family Foundation, 2020). Many African youth, across a number of countries expressed that they were committed to supporting diversity, and would take part in political activities that cut across ethnic, religious and gender identities (Chiumbu, 2017; Durrani & Crossouard, 2020; Ichikowitz Family Foundation, 2020; Roberts & Silwamba, 2017).

They also felt they had a shared African identity. Regarding a pan-African identity, 63% felt that African countries should set their differences aside and "come together to reach common solutions" (Ichikowitz Family Foundation, 2020, p. 19). However, only 49% of Nigerians, 46% of Zimbabweans, 46% of South Africans, and 43% of Ethiopians shared this statement. Meanwhile, 92% of Ghanaians and Kenyan youth believed in a shared identity, and the belief in a shared identity was most common among West Africans. Ghanaians in particular emphasised that the growing reach of internet and mobile technologies, was helping to "spur a reinterpretation of the value of African locality ... in a fiercely positive light" (Flamenbaum, 2016, p. 117). Many young people also felt that the digital revolution (16%), increased freedom (15%), increased prosperity (15%), and increased equality (13%) were contributing to improved shared African identity (Ichikowitz Family Foundation, 2020). Youth appeared to have confidence in the ability of the AU to stabilise the continent, and this was especially true of Rwandans who have 93% confidence in the AU.

While most African youth considered it important to care for refugees and asylum seekers, 59% of South African youth felt it was not their responsibility and also felt it was not their responsibility to support neighbouring countries. Only 37% of South African youth said they have no problem with foreigners from Africa living in South Africa, although xenophobia was strongly linked to living in the most vulnerable communities where South African youth and foreign youths lived the most precarious lives (Marock & Harrison-Train, 2018).

Another key factor in identity is young people's religion, and 63% of young Africans, especially young women, believed that religion played a major part in their identity (Ichikowitz Family Foundation, 2020). For example, in Algeria, Salafi youth prioritised their religious identity over other forms of self-representation, and used "an armoury of diverse discursive



practices" (Saoudi, 2019, p. 218) to reinforce their Salafi identity over their "ethnicity, nationality, gender or other social factors" (p. 219). In Senegal, Muslim youth strongly identified with their religion, but also specifically mentioned that they "were equally concerned to celebrate their particular and distinctive forms of African Islam", as opposed to what they called 'jihadi Islam' (Durrani & Crossouard, 2020, p. 11). They also emphasised the importance of Christians and Muslims celebrating different religious traditions together. In Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, "identity among Muslim respondents was constructed around their tribe, being East African and a strong sense of being youth. Respondents of the Christian faith constructed their identity around family and citizenship" (Awiti & Orwa, 2019, p. 427). Ethiopians were proud of "religious traditions that make Ethiopia a unique place to live" (De Schryver et al., 2019, p. 4). Despite religion playing a key role in their identity, 85% of those sampled in the Ichikowitz Foundation study, felt that people should "have the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion" (p.41).

Youth identities were also strongly tied to their communities, with most believing they are well integrated into their communities, could draw on their communities for support, and could bring about positive change in their communities (Ichikowitz Family Foundation, 2020). However, youth also felt they were not respected or involved in community decision-making, and that their participation in communities was "largely limited to attending ceremonies or performing manual labour" (British Council, 2018a, p. 17). South African youth were least likely to form their identity around their community, and were most likely to migrate away from their communities: "one of the characteristics of young people in South Africa is that they are associated with high levels of migration" (Marock & Harrison-Train, 2018, p. 22).

The feeling of being excluded from community decision-making and lack of respect was mirrored in youth attitude towards political parties, which resulted in youth not identifying with party politics even though most indicated that they were interested in and participated in politics. This will be discussed in the next subsection.

POLITICAL IDENTITY AND GENDER

The British Council's (2018a) study found that young people "felt excluded from political decision-making because of their elders' lack of respect" (p. 17). Nevertheless many youth indicated that they would like to be more involved in politics. Although 80% agreed that it was important to vote in elections, more than half of South Africans believed their vote would change anything. Nevertheless, 42% of South African youth 'quite often' or 'often' discussed politics, unlike Kenya where only 16% reported being engaged or very engaged in politics, and Tanzanian where only 11% reported being engaged in politics. About 60% of young Zimbabweans said they would not vote due to political disillusionment (Ali-Douglas Development Consultancy, 2018). The Ichikowitz Foundation's (2020) study found that 70% of African youth said they would vote in the next election, but argued that they were unlikely to do so in practice, because they did not believe their governments' would try to address their needs. As Mukoma (2017, p. 147) explained "political participation in the form of voting and engaging in civic activities remains low among those aged between 18 35 years old". Youth participation in party politics is low because many youth want to distance themselves from partisan politics, and also did not trust elected representatives.

Nevertheless, in Zambia, youth, led by Young Women in Action (YWA), self-organised and mobilised to encourage other young people to vote, which resulted in high levels of youth registering and voting in the country (Simamuna, 2017). In many other African countries, youth participation in politics centred on self-organising and mobilising (both on the ground and on social media) against or in favour of particular government policies and practices, and not in voting and party politics. For example a Nigerian study (Adebayo, 2020) found youth were more likely to participate in politics if they had engaged in social media. In Angola, youth organised to pressure the president to resign, using social media and on-the-ground activity, which resulted arrests, followed by even stronger campaigning and growing feminist organisation (Telo, 2017). Social media has particularly enhanced mobilisation of young women, who found voice through online and social media campaigns around women's rights. For example, as Chiumbu (2017, p. 65) in Malawi, "young women in particular took to



Twitter to respond to women being stripped for wearing trousers and short skirts". Young women in Kenya also protested against oppressive practices with regard to women's clothing and gender based violence, with Twitter hashtags #MydressMychoice and #strippingshame. Similarly, young women in Botswana developed the #IWearWhatIWant campaign rose up in resistance to push back on male domination and promote self-determination (Kgosidintsi, 2017).

In South Africa, youth were also more likely to have engaged in politics online than in party politics; in Malila and Oelofson's (2016, p. 197) study "almost half of the respondents had posted their views to an online group or blog in the last twelve months, while more traditional engagement with media featured less". Emerging out of the #FeesMustFall campaign, young women spoke out against violence against women, e.g. the #RURreferenceList at Rhodes University. Indeed, among many young African women, "digital storytelling is a central tool not only to empower women, but also as a means of bringing about social justice" (Benza, 2017, p. 101). Other campaigns by South African women included the hashtags #NotInMyName and #MenAreTrash.

These engagements by young women in a number of African countries shows a positive trend in terms of women's empowerment, and their refusal to be silenced (Mukoma, 2017). Many youth across African countries felt that their governments should do more to deal with sexual harassment but only South African youth (64%) strongly felt that more should be done to protect LGBTIQ+ people, whereas across the continent 69% disagreed (Ichikowitz Family Foundation, 2020).

Despite their criticisms of government, and their push away from party politics and ethnic violence, youth have an optimistic vision of Africa, and are hopeful about their futures, as I will discuss in the next sub-section.

AFRICAN YOUTH'S BELIEFS ABOUT THE FUTURE

A report called *The Rise of Afro-Optimism – African Youth Survey 2020* (Ichikowitz Family Foundation, 2020), which was conducted in 14 African countries (Congo Brazzaville, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe) found that young Africans had an "overwhelming feeling of goodwill and optimism ... want to shape their own destiny ... [but] refuse to shy away from the very real challenges of Africa" (p. 4). In the study, 82% of young Africans believed their standard of living would improve in the next two years, with technology offering the most possibilities for future prosperity.

However, the data is also differentiated across regions and countries. For example, only 23% of Malian youth, 36% of Togo youth, and 32% of Congo Brazzaville youth were optimistic about the future. Rwandans, Kenyans, Nigerians and Ghanaians however are highly optimistic about the future. In terms of regions, East Africans were the most optimistic, West Africans had roughly equal portions who were optimistic vs pessimistic, and Southern Africans were the most pessimistic. Despite their Afro-optimism, Kenya, Mali, Togo, Zimbabwe, and Nigerian youth were less optimistic about the future of their country than they were about the future of Africa as a whole.

The most optimistic young Africans are those with a better standard of living, while those with the least access to the internet were more pessimistic. More politically engaged youth are also likely to be more optimistic.

Another study, *"New Ghana" in "Rising Africa"?* by Rachel Flamenbaum, also found optimism in her study among Ghanaian students, who sought to "erase negativity" (p. 116) and put Africa and Ghana in a positive light (p. 117). However, since their optimism was rooted in technology and social media, she points out that they are an elite, who ignore the digital divide on the ground. A study of South African youth (Lundgren & Scheckle, 2019, p. 8) found that they "positioned themselves as youth with hope for the future though they felt marginalized".





Nevertheless, the optimism among African youth about Africa was connected, in a range of studies, with the belief in entrepreneurialism, as I will discuss in the next section

AFRICAN YOUTH AS ENTREPRENEURS

The Ichikowitz Family Foundation study found that African youth had “a strong sense of individual responsibility, entrepreneurialism and confidence” (p. 10). They see themselves as self-starters and 75% would like to start their own business, if they could access capital. Afropreneurs were most likely based in Malawi, Senegal and Togo, while young South Africans were the least entrepreneurial, as only 47% of South African study respondents thought they would start a business in the next five years. Across a range of African countries, poor access to capital was the biggest inhibitor of entrepreneurship, while access to smart phones and the internet were seen as enabling (Ali-Douglas Development Consultancy, 2018; British Council, 2016, 2018a; De Schryver et al., 2019; Ichikowitz Family Foundation, 2020).

Another study, *Youth Employment in the African Private Sector* (Wyman, 2020), also found a high interest in entrepreneurship, with 91% of respondents reporting that they aspire to start a business and 1 in 5 youth “see self-employment as their sole job option for the future” (p. 19). Nyangulu (2017, p. 53) argued that “[i]n an economic climate where one needs to innovate and be creative to survive, young people across the African continent are turning to entrepreneurship as a critical source of employment”. Similarly, the British Council (2018a) found that 81% of their respondents would prefer to pursue their own business over employment if they could access the resources to do so. However, the Ichikowitz Family Foundation study and the British Council (British Council, 2018a; Marock & Harrison-Train, 2018) also found less interest in entrepreneurship among South African youth, because young South Africans did not feel they had enough capital, education or experience to start a business, and they wanted mentorship programmes to guide them. Also, “the work done by self-employed youth tends to be poorly paid and precarious ... seasonal and part-time work predominate” (British Council, 2018a, p. 16).

Some of the push towards entrepreneurship may arise due to the unavailability of jobs, as I will discuss in the next section.

AFRICAN YOUTH AND EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment was regarded as a key issue facing the continent by African youth, and beyond entrepreneurship, although Tracey-Temba (2017) reports that youth unemployment has declined in recent years, from 53.3% in 2000 to 45.8% in 2016. She also reports a large discrepancy between employment of young women and men, with more young men employed than young women, and young men receiving higher wages than young women. In some African countries women are locked out of employment, and for example, in North Africa 20.3% more young men are employed than young women.

Wyman’s (2020, p. 12) study also found that youth believe there was a “lack of desirable opportunities” for employment. Nepotism and lack of experience were the seen as the main drivers of youth unemployment, as well as their poor education and lack of skills. Youth feel discouraged about looking for jobs in the private sector due to a lack of job security, and “prevalence of preferential treatment to personal connections” (p. 30). Similarly, the British Council (British Council, 2018a, p. 8) study found that most young Africans viewed employment as “a very serious problem”. For example, “young Nigerians felt that the labour market was bedevilled by corruption and nepotism, while some thought employers deliberately discriminated against youth” (p. 8). At the same time, many young people admitted they did not know how to go about looking for a job, writing a CV, or filling out a job application. In addition, many African youth “appear to have an idea about what they want to do” (Ichikowitz Family Foundation, 2020, p. 52). For example 78% wanted to pursue a career in technology, 78% in education, and 60% in sustainability.



However, sometimes unemployment has galvanised youth to partake in political action; for example, in Botswana, youth organised the #UnemploymentMovement to push government to take a strong position on tackling youth unemployment (Kgosidintsi, 2017). Malawian youth also pushed back against the deteriorating economic circumstances, using social media to engineer a protest on the issue (Chiumbu, 2017). In Kenya, youth use Genge music to highlight issues around unemployment, and Ghanaian youth use Hiplife music in a similar way (Park et al., 2019). Urban grooves music in Zimbabwe is similarly used to highlight youth's economic plight (Tivenga, 2018).

Given that African youth often tied employment to education, it is important to understand how they perceive education, which will be discussed in the next subsection.

HOW AFRICAN YOUTH VALUE EDUCATION

Young Kenyans and Tanzanians are so frustrated by the lack of access to employment that they regard the education they have received as “a waste of time and money” (British Council, 2018a, p. 12). South Africans are rather more optimistic about higher education leading to employment, and felt that access to better education was needed (Lundgren & Scheckle, 2019; Marock & Harrison-Train, 2018). Young Ethiopians were also optimistic about education, as they said their access to education was improving (De Schryver et al., 2019). Zimbabwean youth were also positive about their education as it is internationally highly regarded and provides them with many job opportunities in other countries (Ali-Douglas Development Consultancy, 2018). The British Council (2016, 2018a, 2018b) also found that Nigerians viewed their education to be of weak quality, and many other young Africans thought education was of poor quality and lacked relevance. More than half of Tanzanians and Kenyans said their education did not match job requirements, but young Kenyans believed the quality of education was improving (British Council, 2018b). Wyman's (2020, p. 12) study similarly found that 93% of young Africans felt that “they need to update their current education and skills to adapt to the labour market”, while Nyangula (2017) emphasised the importance of improving STEM education in order to create a strong cohort of young African innovators. Across all the countries in the British Council study, young people recommended more investment in vocational training rather than university education.

However, many young Africans in the British Council report also felt they could access better education in the US or Europe, and alongside employment, this was a major driver of desire to migrate, as I will discuss in the next subsection.

AFRICAN YOUTH ATTITUDES TO MIGRATION

In this literature review, the most divergent findings from the different studies were those on the intention of young Africans to migrate. Whereas the British Council study found a strong urge to migrate among Africans in their study, the Ichikowitz Family Foundation's study found that most young Africans wanted to stay in their communities or in their country. According to the British Council, “more than two thirds of young Kenyans said they would like to emigrate” (p. 11), as did more than 60% of Tanzanians, with the US and UK as the most preferred destinations. In South Africa 41% of young respondents would like to live in the US, and 9% in the UK. However, the Ichikowitz Family Foundation's study found that “given a choice, 69% of youth would prefer to stay in their home community rather than move to a different location”; those preferring to stay were “most heavily concentrated in East Africa (75%), followed by West Africa (71%) and Southern Africa (62%). Young Zimbabweans were least likely to want to stay in their country, while young Senegalese were most likely to want to stay in their community.

Despite the discrepancy on the reported desire to migrate the British Council study, their findings did match the Ichikowitz Family Foundation's study in arguing that young Africans wanted to contribute to their countries' economies and were eager to address “wider social challenges” (p. 17). The Ichikowitz Family Foundation further found that 70% of young Africans experience community cohesion, and are “committed members of their communities”. Indeed, their membership in their communities is strongly tied to their identity, as I will discuss in the next subsection.

IDENTIFYING THE CHALLENGES

According to the Ichikowitz Family Foundation's (2020, p. 11) study, "youth see infectious diseases and terrorism as the most formative developments for Africa in the last five years and list unemployment and corruption as the key issues they are most concerned about going forward". The rising cost of living and education were also concerning. However, on 2% thought climate change was a key concern. By contrast the British Council study (2018a) indicates that the most pressing concern for young people is the lack of access to quality education, followed by unemployment.

Nevertheless, young Africans are "eager to contribute to addressing wider social challenges" (p. 17), but their participation was hindered by discrimination against the youth. In South Africa, 79% of youth felt they had a responsibility to address their problems themselves, whereas 75% of Tanzanians believe it is their own responsibility. However, only 12% of Kenyan's believed it was their own responsibility and 65% believe it is up to government to address youth challenges.

CONCLUSION

These studies show that young people are highly engaged in political matters, seeing the necessity for people to come together across national borders to build Africa. They felt that governments should not be stoking up ethnic tensions, and should instead focussing on addressing weak education, and tackling unemployment and gender based violence. They feel ignored and excluded from decision-making by their communities and political parties, and so mobilise both via social media and on the ground around specific issues. Young women especially found social media empowering in addressing gender based violence and patriarchy.

The optimism of youth about their own future and the future of Africa drives them to participate in addressing socio-political matters, and to seek opportunities for entrepreneurship.



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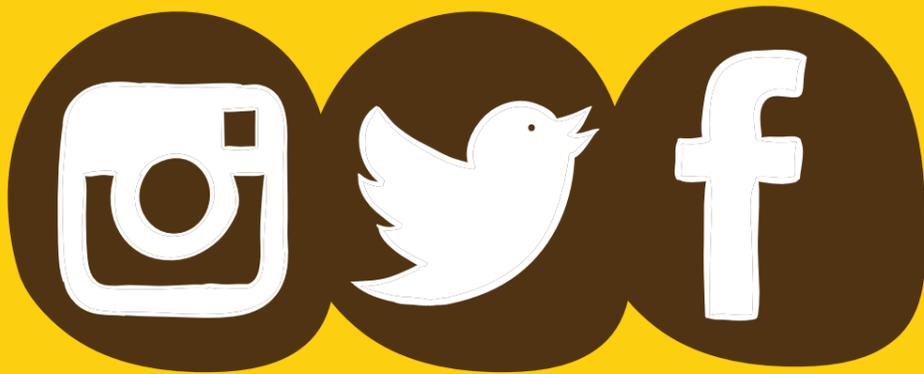
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