

# The Social Digest | NOVEMBER 2024

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## THE EDITORIAL

### **Editor-in-chief**

Vedant Bhrambhatt

*editor@thesocialdigest.com*

### **Editorial Director**

Souberi Chakrabarti

*souberi@thesocialdigest.com*

### **Editorial Director**

Surbhi Thanki

*surbhi@thesocialdigest.com*

*The Social Digest is a quarterly periodical, started by the Esteem Publication.*

## TEAM LEADS

Ansh Vachhani

*Head of Outreach*

*ansh@thesocialdigest.com*

Pratham Shah

*Head of Curation*

*pratham@thesocialdigest.com*

Vaidehi Nair

*Head of Content*

Pushti Shah

*Head of Graphics*

Meet Dave

*Head of Social Media*

## **ADVERTISING & CORPORATE**

*vedant@esteempublication.com*





# ABOUT *SEGMENTS*

Our mission is to provide trusted guidance about the ideas and people who shape and improve the world. This promise lives at the center of our editorial work, fast-growing new divisions, innovative new products, and partner solutions. The Social Digest seeks to be a trusted media company in this world. We are committed to producing journalism that meets the highest standards. No matter the subject or the intended audience, our journalism will reflect our commitment to quality and to integrity.

The Social Digest will cover six major domains, which we will divide into segments. Here is a brief introduction to our six main segments.

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## THE SOCIAL

Traverse through the simplified complexities of the world of psychology, where the mysteries of the human mind and behavior unfold before our eyes. In this segment, we delve into the intricacies of the human psyche, exploring the depths of consciousness, emotion, cognition, and

behavior. From groundbreaking research to practical applications, we examine the latest discoveries and insights in the field, shedding light on the factors that shape our thoughts, feelings, and actions. Through thought-provoking articles, expert interviews, and real-life case studies, we navigate the complexities of mental health, interpersonal relationships, and personal development, offering readers valuable insights and tools for understanding themselves and others. Whether you're a student, practitioner, or simply curious about the workings of the mind, join us on a journey of exploration and discovery as we unravel the mysteries of human psychology and unlock the secrets of the self.

## FOOD AND TRAVEL

Welcome to the tantalizing world of food and travel, where every bite is a journey and every destination is a feast for the senses. In this segment, we invite you to embark on a culinary adventure around the globe, exploring the diverse flavors, cultures, and traditions that make each destination unique. From bustling street markets to Michelin-starred restaurants, we'll take you on a gastronomic

tour of the world's most vibrant food scenes, uncovering hidden gems and iconic dishes along the way. Whether you're a seasoned foodie seeking new culinary experiences or a curious traveler eager to taste the flavors of distant lands, join us as we discover the culinary delights that await around every corner. Get ready to indulge your taste buds and ignite your wanderlust as we explore the intersection of food & travel like never before.



## **BUSINESS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

Navigate the dynamic landscape of business, entrepreneurship, and image building, where innovation meets strategy and visionaries shape the future. In this segment, we explore the ever-evolving landscape of global commerce, spotlighting the trailblazing entrepreneurs, visionary leaders, and innovative startups that are driving change and making an impact on the world stage. From Silicon Valley disruptors to emerging markets pioneers, we delve into the stories behind the success, uncovering the strategies, challenges, and triumphs that define the entrepreneurial journey. Through in-depth analysis, expert insights, and inspiring profiles, we provide readers with the knowledge and tools they need to navigate the complexities of corporate.

## **SUSTAINABILITY**

Range over the transformative domain of sustainability, where environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and economic prosperity converge to shape a brighter future for our planet and its inhabitants. In this segment, we embark on a journey of discovery and action, exploring the innovative solutions, grassroots movements, and cutting-edge initiatives that are driving positive change around the world. From renewable energy technologies to circular economy practices, we delve into the principles and practices that are reshaping industries, communities, and lifestyles for the better. Through inspiring stories, thought-provoking analysis, and actionable insights, we empower readers to become agents of change in their own lives and communities, offering practical tips and resources for living more sustainably and creating a more resilient and equitable world for generations to come. Whether you're a sustainability enthusiast, eco-conscious consumer, or curious observer of environmental issues, join us as we explore the pathways to a more sustainable future and celebrate the power of collective action to create positive impact on a global scale.

## **HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY**

Read through the captivating realm of history and archaeology, where the past comes alive and ancient mysteries are waiting to be uncovered. In this segment, we invite you to journey through the annals of time and explore the rich tapestry of human civilization, from the dawn of humanity to the modern era. Delve into the ruins of ancient civilizations, decipher the enigmatic symbols of lost languages, and unravel the secrets of

forgotten empires. Through groundbreaking research, compelling narratives, and stunning visuals, we'll take you on a voyage of discovery, shedding light on the triumphs and tribulations of our ancestors and illuminating the pathways that have shaped the world we inhabit today. Whether you're a seasoned historian or an amateur enthusiast, join us as we embark on a thrilling expedition into the depths of the past, where every artifact tells a story and every discovery unveils a new chapter in the epic saga of humanity.

## CINEMA AND THEATRE

Immerse yourself in the magic of the silver screen, the vibrant intersection, the captivating world of cinema and theatre, where storytelling transcends boundaries and the stage comes alive with the magic of performance. In this segment, we invite you to immerse yourself in the rich tapestry of cinematic and theatrical arts, exploring the diverse array of narratives, genres, and cultural expressions that define the entertainment landscape.

From blockbuster films to avant-garde productions, we celebrate the creativity, talent, and passion of artists who bring stories to life and captivate audiences around the globe. Through insightful reviews, behind-the-scenes features, and exclusive interviews with industry insiders, we offer readers a front-row seat to the latest trends, developments, and highlights in the world of cinema and theatre. Whether you're a cinephile, theatre buff, or simply love a good story, join us as we journey into the heart of entertainment, where imagination knows no bounds and the power of storytelling knows no limits.



## HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

At the Social Digest we believe in your voice! We make sure that your voice is heard by millions! If you have a story to share, feel free to get in touch with our team. We will be happy to accommodate your story if its suitable for one of our segment!

How to do that? Its simple, you can send a letter to the editor. Make sure to provide authentic and relevant information, acceptance is subject to authenticity of your information.

**LETTER TO THE EDITOR:** Letters to the Editor should include the writer's full name, address, and home telephone and, if published, may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. Please do not send attachments. To contact us, please email [editor@thesocialdigest.com](mailto:editor@thesocialdigest.com)



# HOW ANNEMARI MURU IS TRANSFORMING WORKSPACES FOR THE Modern Era

Interview by: Vedant Bhrambhatt

*Annemari Muru is a dedicated advocate for workplace wellness with a mission to create environments where balance and wellbeing are at the core of success. With over two decades of experience in organisational development and leading teams, she believes that the core of a genuinely fulfilling life and productivity comes from aligning mental and physical wellbeing with our professional ambition. Annemari's approach, which strongly emphasises the importance of consistent self-care and positive work relationships, enables individuals to become the best versions of themselves.*

**The Social Digest: Can you tell us about your journey so far, and how your extensive experience in managerial roles has shaped your views on workplace wellness?** My journey has spanned over two decades, during which I've held various leadership roles that have deeply influenced my

perspective on workplace wellness. The way I see it, people don't have separate lives: work life and personal life—they just have lives, and one aspect inevitably influences the other. Early on, I noticed that teams thrive when their well-being is prioritized, leading to higher productivity and innovation. My experience in organizational development and change management has shown me that mental health plays a critical role in both team dynamics and overall company success. Over the years, I've learned that a supportive, balanced work environment is not just a nice-to-have but a fundamental necessity for sustainable growth. This realization has driven me to advocate for wellness practices that integrate mental health into the core of organizational strategies. By focusing on creating environments where individuals can flourish holistically, I've been able to guide teams to achieve their goals in a way that

fosters long-term success and a healthier, more positive attitude both at work and beyond.

**The Social Digest: You advocate for balancing productivity with mental health in the workplace. What inspired you to focus on this aspect of organisational development?** My inspiration to focus on balancing productivity with mental health comes from observing the often-overlooked human side of business.



## A SUPPORTIVE, BALANCED WORK ENVIRONMENT IS NOT JUST A NICE-TO-HAVE BUT A FUNDAMENTAL NECESSITY FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

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In fast-paced environments, getting caught up in the hustle and overlooking its toll on our mental wellbeing is easy. I have experienced burnout myself. Despite being aware of how it may affect me and my family, saying that I should slow down, it is tough not to put 150% out daily. The difficulty of slowing down in a fast-paced environment is a challenge many can recognise. You are on the go, with all the excitement, adrenaline, and encouraging people around you. I've seen brilliant minds dim because they were burning the candle at both ends, and it struck me—

what's the point of success if it comes at the cost of our health? That realisation and my personal experiences have fuelled my passion for advocating a more balanced approach. It's not just about getting the job done; it's about doing it in a way that leaves us feeling good at the end of the day. When we prioritise mental health, I believe we unlock a level of productivity and creativity that's sustainable in the long run. It's like running a marathon—you need to choose the right pace to last. Just as it's impossible to sprint through all 42 kilometres in the workplace, maintaining a sustainable pace is essential.

**The Social Digest: In your opinion, what are the key elements of a healthy and productive work environment?** A healthy and productive work environment is built on several key elements. First, there must be a culture of trust and open communication, where everyone in the team feels safe to express their ideas and concerns. This fosters a sense of belonging and engagement. Second, mental health must be prioritized through regular wellness initiatives, such as mindfulness practices, flexible work arrangements, and access to mental health resources. Third, there needs to be a focus on work-life balance, ensuring that people have the time and space to recharge outside of work. Additionally, a supportive leadership team that models these values is crucial, as it sets the tone for the entire organization. Finally, inclusivity and diversity should be embraced, as various perspectives have proven to foster innovative solutions and a stronger, more cohesive team. When these elements are in sync, you get an environment where people

are not just productive—they're happy, engaged, and eager to contribute their best.

**The Social Digest:** Could you share some examples of strategies you've used to transform toxic work environments into harmonious and productive spaces?

Transforming a toxic work environment is like turning around a ship—it requires a steady hand and a clear vision. One strategy I've used is introducing regular wellness check-ins, focusing on mental health and well-being rather than just performance metrics. This simple shift in focus can do wonders for team morale. Another approach is fostering open communication. You build a culture of trust by creating safe spaces where people can voice their concerns and ideas without fear of judgment. I also emphasize the importance of recognizing and rewarding positive behaviour. It's not just about turning the tide, but also about making each team member feel valued and appreciated. Lastly, I've found that reestablishing clear boundaries and expectations can help realign everyone's efforts toward a common goal, making the workplace a more harmonious and productive space. It's about taking small, consistent steps that add to big changes.

**The Social Digest:** You've mentioned the importance of addressing team dynamics and career development. How do you approach these areas to promote well-being and growth within an organization?

As sports were already mentioned earlier, I would say that addressing team dynamics and career development is like coaching a



**YOU BUILD A CULTURE OF TRUST  
BY CREATING SAFE SPACES  
WHERE PEOPLE CAN VOICE  
THEIR CONCERNS AND IDEAS  
WITHOUT FEAR OF JUDGMENT.**

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sports team—each athlete has unique strengths and needs that must be nurtured individually, but the goal is for the entire team to perform at its best together. I start by getting to know each team member—their strengths, their goals, and what makes them tick. Then, I continue with assessing the current team dynamics, identifying strengths, and areas for improvement. This often involves facilitating open discussions where team members can share their perspectives and experiences. To promote career development, I advocate for creating personalized growth plans that align individual aspirations with organizational goals. This includes offering opportunities for continuous learning, mentorship, and skill development. I also emphasize the importance of creating a supportive environment where team members feel encouraged to take on new challenges and roles. By focusing on both personal and professional growth, I help teams build stronger relationships and a deeper sense of purpose, which in turn enhances overall well-being and productivity.



**The Social Digest: How do you adapt your strategies to accommodate diverse team dynamics and evolving career paths in today's rapidly changing work environment?**

In today's fast-paced world, adapting strategies to accommodate diverse team dynamics involves using practical tools that foster understanding and collaboration. For example, I often start with a **Team Canvas** exercise, which helps to clarify roles, values, and goals within the team. This exercise creates a shared foundation that respects individual differences while aligning everyone toward a common purpose. Regarding career development, I



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recognize that paths are no longer linear, so I advocate for flexible development plans that can evolve as the individual grows. I am a fan of **Patrick Lencione's** concepts, such as The Ideal Team Player or The Five Dysfunctions of a Team, which come with practical tools for teams and individual self-assessment. It is a matter of taste which model or concept to use as a frame. Those examples are just few I like and there are definitely a lot more to

choose from. What's crucial is that regular open discussions play a significant role in allowing team members to express their needs and perspectives, fostering a sense of belonging and respect, and ensuring everyone feels heard and valued.

**The Social Digest: Can you share some insights on how a focus on workspace wellness can directly impact an organization's performance and profitability? How can companies and leaders connect with you to learn more about transforming their workplaces into thriving, harmonious environments?** Focusing on workspace wellness is like laying the groundwork for a building—everything else stands firmer. Today's workforce, especially the growing Gen Z demographic, doesn't align with the traditional 9-to-5 model. They seek flexibility, wanting to work when their energy is at its peak, which often doesn't fall within standard hours. In intellectual roles that demand high mental presence, this flexibility is critical. It's crucial for companies to adapt to these changing needs. Prioritizing wellness and adapting to individual rhythms boosts productivity and creativity and attracts top talent, reducing turnover and enhancing overall organizational performance.

*For companies and leaders looking to evolve, I'm always open to connecting through LinkedIn, [annemari.muru@gmail.com](mailto:annemari.muru@gmail.com) or a direct conversation. We can create thriving, harmonious work environments where people and profits grow. After all, success is best when shared, and I'm passionate about helping organizations achieve this balance.*

Yasno



# How Serhii Adapts and Sustains Energy for Ukraine



Serhii Kovalenko - CEO, YASNO

## INTERVIEW BY: VEDANT BHRAMBHATT

*In the face of unprecedented challenges brought on by the war in Ukraine, YASNO, a leading energy supplier operating in the Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk, and Donetsk regions, has demonstrated remarkable resilience. As the conflict continues to impact infrastructure, customer behavior, and business operations, YASNO has implemented innovative strategies to ensure a reliable energy supply and maintain customer trust. In this interview, we speak with CEO of YASNO, Serhii Kovalenko, who sheds light on how the company has navigated the complexities of war, adapted its communication, and positioned itself to support Ukraine's long-term recovery and sustainability goals.*

**The Social Digest:** Yasno operates in a highly challenging environment due to the ongoing conflict. How has the war impacted your business operations, particularly in the regions you serve? YASNO is a brand supply companies of which operate in Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk regions. Hostilities was or is unfold in all regions. Therefore, the full-scale invasion affected the business directly. YASNO, as a supplier, does not own the infrastructure. We make invoices and do bills with clients. Therefore, our problems are related to the population and migration.

In the first months of the war, it was unclear how the power system would function. Likewise, we did not know how

many Ukrainians would remain in their places, whether they would pay for electricity, and if so, in which way. As a result, in the first month of the war in Kyiv, the indicator of payments decreased by 20%. The regularity of payments also declined – if earlier half of the capital’s residents paid their bills without significant delays, then with the beginning of the war, only 30% of residents did so.

Regularity and completeness of payments were and remain the main challenges for us. After all, the cost of the tariff includes funds for the operators of the distribution and transmission system, generation, etc. The worse people pay, the less resources the infrastructure has for recovery.

**The Social Digest: What are some of the key strategies Yasno has implemented to maintain energy supply and customer service during the war?** The main and most important strategic step we were lucky enough to take before the war: we moved all our servers and data to the cloud. This is how we made sure that the data of our customers will be intact, and we will be able to work with them under almost any conditions.

The second important thing is that within six months after the start of full-scale military operations, we began to introduce a new tone of voice for the brand. Thus we consider the psychological state of clients, and prepare new key messages. We also put the updated tone of voice in the scripts of the first line (specialists with whom clients have direct contact).



**WITHIN SIX MONTHS AFTER THE START OF FULL-SCALE MILITARY OPERATIONS, WE BEGAN TO INTRODUCE A NEW TONE OF VOICE FOR THE BRAND. THUS WE CONSIDER THE PSYCHOLOGICAL STATE OF CLIENTS, AND PREPARE NEW KEY MESSAGES.**



**The Social Digest: How has the war influenced your approach to energy efficiency and sustainability, especially considering the damaged infrastructure in certain areas?** The full-scale invasion became a catalyst for understanding the need to implement the principles of sustainable development. YASNO is a young brand that started its work almost in the COVID-19 pandemic, and now in the war, so we must optimize and make business processes as efficient as possible. This will be linked to sustainable development.

**The Social Digest: What challenges have you faced in maintaining brand trust and loyalty during this time of crisis, and how have you overcome them?** The biggest challenge that we “rewarded” ourselves with was communication with customers on behalf of the entire energy system.



Practically from the first days of shelling of the energy system, we chose the path of the most honest and open communication: we told Ukrainians what was happening, how Russia's attacks affect the infrastructure and what it could lead to. We are trying to do the same now.

This approach has borne fruit: YASNO's NPS among residential customers has grown. NPS is an index that shows user loyalty. Therefore, we see the willingness of customers to recommend YASNO as an indicator of trust, which is also growing.

**The Social Digest: What leadership qualities have been most crucial for you during these challenging times, and how have they shaped your approach to brand management?**

The key now is to stay focused. After all, when you know where you are going, decisions are made quickly, and there is no time to waver. Thanks to this mindset, processes and management have become very flexible. Now we are doing things that we might not have dared to do before. In our picture of the world, the most valuable are our clients and our team. We care about people, that's the most important thing.

**The Social Digest: Can you share an example of how Yasno has supported its employees and customers during the conflict?** Talking about the team. Since the beginning of the full-scale war, we have offered to change the place of residence of the workers and their families, we have taken care of their security. We have also organized workplaces for contact center employees in a shelter, so that our customers have constant access to information.

**The Social Digest: What are your long-term goals for Yasno's brand, particularly in a post-conflict Ukraine?** Since 2019, the electricity market in Ukraine has been operating in a somewhat hybrid format: business customers can freely choose and change their electricity supplier, while households use the services of a supplier appointed by the Government.

We decided for ourselves that we work as if the market is already free for all categories of customers. Therefore, our goal for the time when the market is really opened is to be the first choice of Ukrainians among companies that supply electricity.



# The **ATTENTION** Economy: How Short Videos Shape Our Focus

By: Edward Garcia

In today's fast-paced digital world, attention is a valuable commodity. The concept of the "attention economy," discussed in the Forbes article "The Attention Economy: Standing Out Among The Noise," sheds light on how businesses compete for our fragmented attention. This article explores how the constant influx of short videos impacts our attention spans and what it means for us as consumers.

Platforms like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts have popularized short, engaging video content. These snippets, often lasting less than a minute, are designed to capture our interest quickly. The rapid succession of entertaining content caters to our craving for instant gratification. Short videos offer quick bursts of entertainment, triggering the brain's

reward system. This constant stimulation leads to a preference for immediate rewards over delayed gratification, making it harder to focus on tasks that require sustained effort. The rapid shift from one video to another encourages a scattered thought process. We become accustomed to brief bursts of information, which can diminish our ability to concentrate on longer, more complex activities. The allure of short videos reduces our tolerance for slower-paced content. Activities such as reading, studying, or watching long-form videos require more patience and focus, which can be harder to maintain.

The attention economy doesn't just affect our media consumption; it has broader implications for various aspects of our lives. With a reduced attention span, staying focused on work or study tasks becomes challenging. The constant need for quick entertainment can disrupt productivity and hinder performance. The perpetual need for stimulation can lead to anxiety and stress. The brain finds it difficult to relax without the constant influx of engaging content, impacting mental well-being. Our interactions with others can suffer as we become more accustomed to superficial, rapid engagements. Meaningful conversations and deep connections require sustained attention, which is harder to maintain.

While the attention economy poses challenges, there are ways to mitigate its impact. Regular breaks from digital devices



**WITH A REDUCED ATTENTION SPAN, STAYING FOCUSED ON WORK OR STUDY TASKS BECOMES CHALLENGING. THE CONSTANT NEED FOR QUICK ENTERTAINMENT CAN DISRUPT PRODUCTIVITY AND HINDER PERFORMANCE.**



can help reset the brain and reduce dependency on constant stimulation. Activities such as meditation, yoga, and deep breathing exercises can improve focus and reduce stress, promoting better mental health. Setting specific times for engaging with short videos and balancing them with activities that require longer attention spans, such as reading or hobbies, can help maintain cognitive balance. Allocating dedicated time for deep, uninterrupted work or study sessions can help train the brain to focus for extended periods.

In an era where attention is a scarce resource, understanding the dynamics of the attention economy is crucial. As consumers, being mindful of our media consumption habits and taking steps to maintain our cognitive health can help us navigate the noise and retain our ability to focus deeply.

**Interview with  
freeCodeCamp's  
Quincy Larson**

# Revolutionizing Code Education

Interview by: Ansh Vachhani

*Quincy Larson is the visionary founder of freeCodeCamp.org, a thriving community that empowers millions to learn coding collaboratively. With a rich background in education, Quincy's journey began with graduate studies in China, where he not only mastered Mandarin but also served as an interpreter and teacher. His passion for teaching led him to direct several schools across the US and China. As he discovered the power of coding, he developed scripts to streamline school workflows, allowing educators to focus more on their students. After gaining experience as a software engineer and freelance developer, Quincy launched various technology education initiatives, culminating in the creation of freeCodeCamp in 2014. Under his leadership, the nonprofit has helped tens of*

*thousands of individuals secure their first jobs as software developers.*

**What inspired you to transition from teaching and school administration to software development and eventually founding freeCodeCamp?**

I was a teacher and a school director, running adult English schools in the US and China. I had staff who spent a lot of their time entering data into computers when they would have preferred to be hanging out with students and teaching them English. I didn't know much about computers other than how to use them as an office worker, but I started googling basic questions like "how to automate web forms" and queries like that. Little by little, I learned some basic scripting. I was

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gradually able to automate almost all of the repetitive computer work at the school. This was a huge win for the school. Students were ecstatic that they could spend more time with their teachers, and the reputation of our school grew. We became the fastest-growing school in the school system. This experience gave me the confidence to dive deeper into programming, which ultimately led to me teaching myself to code full time for 9 months, winning a few Hackathons in California, and getting my first developer job.

## **How did your experience living and teaching in China influence your approach to education and community-building at freeCodeCamp?**

I learned a lot from working in China. Chinese people are hard working, and they're extremely patient. Because Chinese culture is thousands of years old, and you can just pick up texts from thousands of years ago and read them – it gives life a sense of timelessness. Over the millennia, Chinese people have gone through all kinds of hardship – wars, famine, colonization. They are extremely tough. I met people living in villages who were much more advanced at math, science, and foreign languages than I was. Even with their limited resources, they were able to amass skills and knowledge. I attribute this to the seriousness with which they approach learning. And yet I realized this was not a uniquely Chinese phenomenon. There are

undoubtedly tons of people who are highly motivated in India, Brazil, Nigeria, and even in small towns across Middle America. They just didn't necessarily have access to resources. I started to imagine what these people would do if they had more ready access to free, high-quality learning resources. Especially on emerging technologies.

## **Impact of AI on Learning: How is freeCodeCamp adapting to the growing influence of AI in education and technology? Are there any plans to integrate AI into your platform?**

We already leverage LLMs extensively. We have a small team of enthusiastic teachers and developers, and we're always looking for new ways to be more effective. And if you search Google or YouTube for terms like "RAG course" or "Prompt Engineering course", or even "AI Safety", you'll find comprehensive free courses by the freeCodeCamp community. In terms of AI code-completion technology like Copilot, or AI chat interfaces wrapper around an LLM foundation models like ChatGPT or the many education chatbots companies are launching – I'm not sure how useful they are. I think they're great for language learning. I spend about an hour a day studying foreign languages, often with the help of LLMs. They are extremely useful for this.

As far as learning coding, I don't think an open-ended chat interface is as useful as a comprehensive interactive curriculum, built up over the years by thousands of open



source contributors. freeCodeCamp already has an active forum and Discord where learners can get help from real human developers. This said, we may experiment with creating an LLM chat interface in the future which people can use to get help with their coding. For now we're just using these tools behind the scenes to more productively build and expand freeCodeCamp's core learning platform.

**What are some of the most inspiring stories you've heard from freeCodeCamp's global community and how it motivates you?**

Each week I receive emails from people around the world who have used freeCodeCamp to expand their skills and get a developer job. Many of these people did not have the resources to attend university. They'd been working as truck drivers, farmers, or hospitality workers. I've had the pleasure of interviewing many of these people over the years on the weekly freeCodeCamp podcast. Seeing people benefit from the work we're doing as a community is a huge motivational boost. I'm always excited to celebrate these stories and share them with other people who are not yet where they want to be in their career.

**What are some of the key milestones or goals you have for freeCodeCamp in the coming years?**

We're working on a major upgrade to our



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core curriculum, which I'll announce before Christmas. We've also been hard at work on developing a free Bachelor's of Computer Science degree program. This will involve completion of 40 university-level math and engineering courses, each with its own projects and final exams. There are "tuition free" universities that still charge thousands in fees, and there are free university programs in some countries that are subsidized by governments. But to my knowledge this will be the first degree program where you can earn a verified degree without having to first go through an application process or enter your payment information.

The degree program is modeled after the top 20 computer science degree programs in the US, and includes 8 math courses and several general ed courses. It's a mirror image of the best programs, but built in a

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way that it's accessible to anyone, anywhere in the world, regardless of ability to pay. Anyone will be able to just navigate to freeCodeCamp.org and start doing university degree coursework at their own pace. And because it's rigorous, most people will not finish all the coursework. That is OK. The people who do finish it will get a comprehensive math and computer science education for free.

**As digital privacy concerns grow, what role should developers play in ensuring secure and ethical data practices in their projects?**

Developers need to continually up their security game through continuing education. Frankly, every dev should spend some time reading security case studies of other devs messing up. Learn what not to do. Once you have a basic understanding of information security and the history of the field, you have to stay up to date as the landscape shifts. LLMs for example introduce a lot of potential vulnerabilities that attackers can use to potentially steal data.

I listen to several security-focused podcasts during the week when I go to the gym, and I watch a lot of security-focused YouTube channels. I also strongly recommend everyone watch the show Mr. Robot, which is a dramatized portrayal of a security researcher and vigilante who fights against powerful hacker organizations and even state actors. It's from several years ago, but all the hacks portrayed in the

show are based off of real things that have happened, and they had security engineers consult on the show to ensure accuracy.

**As AI becomes more integrated into everyday life, what ethical considerations should developers and educators keep in mind to ensure responsible tech development?**

First, I think every single computer science degree program should include an ethics class. That currently isn't the case, but I hope it will change. One of our 40 required degree program courses is an ethics course. I personally don't fear an AI system becoming self aware and trying to end humanity like in the movies. I think it's much more likely that bad actors use AI systems to scam people, or manipulate them with false information. It will also be possible to use AI to harass people, surveil people, or otherwise make their lives miserable.

Preventing these kinds of uses of technology starts at the developers who are figuring out what the product should do, for whom, and how it should go about doing it. These devs also need to figure out what the product should NOT do, and what use cases it should not support. And they need to have a means of pushing back against software specifications that go against their ethics. Ethics ultimately vary from culture to culture, but there are many conventions that are universally observed. There is no country where it's legal to steal, for example. And the systems we build should reflect those conventions.



**I THINK EVERY SINGLE COMPUTER SCIENCE DEGREE PROGRAM SHOULD INCLUDE AN ETHICS CLASS. THAT CURRENTLY ISN'T THE CASE, BUT I HOPE IT WILL CHANGE.**

**What advice would you give to someone from a non-technical background who wants to start a career in tech?**

I would encourage them to start working their way from the top of freeCodeCamp's curriculum down to the bottom. This will take maybe 18 months depending on how much time you are able to budget. A lot of people get stuck in "tutorial hell" where they're just following along with a book or video, without necessarily going out and building their own projects. Don't let this happen to you. Try to spend at least 30 minutes a day with your hands on the keyboard building something with code. You'll build dozens of projects this way as you progress through the freeCodeCamp curriculum. Not just guided projects, but open ended projects where it's just you, your code editor, and a test suite. This said, I do think it's a good use of time to listen

to technology podcasts and watch YouTube video essays about programming and technology.

**The Role of Data Science in Future Careers: Data is becoming a vital part of decision making in every industry. How can developers build a strong foundation in data science, and what are key skills to focus on?**

Data Science is 3 things: math, programming, and domain expertise. Let's say you want to work in sports analytics. Could you do a good job if you didn't know anything about sports? Maybe, but by having domain expertise in a particular sport, you could understand patterns in the data much more easily. And you would come up with much better hypotheses to pose to the data. You don't need to get a PhD to work as a data scientist, but you do need to know a lot of math – mainly statistics. freeCodeCamp has some courses on this on our YouTube channel. Watching the course isn't enough – you need to actually practice stats a lot and apply it. If you're already working as a developer, you already have some experience building and maintaining codebases. If not, I'd start with the freeCodeCamp curriculum, then get involved in contributing to open source projects to get your coding skills up to snuff. At the end of the day, a developer doesn't have to be a data scientist, but a data scientist does have to be a developer. It's a good field if you're interested in doing research or helping optimize how organizations get things done.



GREEN GOOD FOR PLANET  
SUSTAINABLE & GREEN

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## Companies Are **Quieting** Their Sustainability **RHETORIC** but Not Abandoning Goals

By: Vedant Bhrambhatt

*In recent times, companies have noticeably reduced their mentions of sustainability in public-facing communications such as earnings calls and marketing materials. This shift is driven by growing political and legal pressures to avoid overemphasizing environmental, social, and governance (ESG) claims. Despite this, sustainability continues to play a significant role in corporate strategies, as evidenced by consistent mentions in financial reports and disclosures.*

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A recent analysis shows that while public discussions of ESG terms have dropped since 2021, companies are still prioritizing sustainability in their official documents. **Julie Gorte**, a senior vice president at *Impax Asset Management*, highlighted that while there is less public marketing around sustainability, the quality of internal sustainability reporting remains robust.

This trend, sometimes referred to as "**greenhushing**," reflects a cautious approach by businesses wary of becoming political targets amid backlash against ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) initiatives. As polarizing debates around ESG grow, many companies are pulling back from promoting their sustainability goals publicly to avoid attracting unwanted political or consumer attention. However, behind the scenes, these efforts often continue to drive strategic priorities, as sustainability remains crucial for long-term value creation and risk mitigation, particularly in a world facing mounting climate-related disruptions.

The challenge of sustaining these initiatives, however, remains significant. High costs and the need for investor support are major hurdles that cannot be ignored. A survey by Morgan Stanley revealed that **84% of companies believe investor backing is essential for advancing sustainability projects**. However, investor interest has been waning, with fewer new ESG-labeled funds emerging and notable exits from initiatives like Climate Action

100+, a coalition aimed at pushing major polluters toward net-zero emissions. The rise in **so-called "anti-ESG"** investing has also contributed to this trend, as some investors now prioritize financial returns over environmental or social considerations, pressuring companies to prioritize short-term gains over long-term sustainability goals.

Moreover, the global push for decarbonization, exemplified by international agreements like the Paris Climate Accord, adds another layer of pressure. Companies operating in multiple jurisdictions must reconcile differing regulatory environments and market expectations. In Europe, for example, the European Union's Green Deal and the **Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)** are pushing companies toward more transparent and stringent sustainability disclosures. This contrasts with the growing skepticism toward ESG frameworks in some parts of the U.S., creating a patchwork of rules that companies must carefully navigate.

While companies may be quieter about their sustainability efforts in the public eye, their commitment to these goals remains largely intact. The evolving global context requires a more nuanced approach, with businesses increasingly cautious about how they communicate their environmental and social initiatives. Rather than abandoning these efforts, many firms are refining their strategies, integrating sustainability more deeply into their core operations while maintaining a lower public profile.



Photo credit: Fairtrade / Christoph Köstlin

# Nestlé's Sustainable Cocoa Plan: Progress or Posturing?

By: Julia Guillaume

In the world of chocolate, the journey from cocoa farms in West Africa to supermarket shelves has been tainted by controversy. Nestlé, one of the largest food and beverage companies globally, has long stood at the center of this debate. Their claim to champion sustainability through their Nestlé Cocoa Plan is both ambitious and, some argue, carefully crafted to preserve their public image. As Nestlé touts its commitment to sourcing 100% of its cocoa sustainably by 2025, a deeper look into its practices and history raises the question: Are these efforts genuine steps toward change, or mere corporate greenwashing?

Nestlé proudly declares that 85.5% of its cocoa was sourced through the Nestlé Cocoa Plan (NCP) in 2023, a significant milestone on their path to 100% sustainable sourcing by 2025. The plan, which collaborates with Rainforest Alliance certification, is designed to tackle deep-rooted social and environmental issues in the cocoa supply chain. According to Nestlé, the NCP's framework emphasizes better livelihoods for farmers, enhanced environmental practices, and the eradication of child labor.

Yet, beneath these promises lies a more complicated narrative. Critics argue that

# SUSTAINABILITY

the NCP serves as a buffer, allowing Nestlé to present itself as proactive in the face of media scrutiny. The company's sustainability reports and announcements showcase a well-crafted image of progress, but industry insiders question how deep this commitment truly runs. "The companies have always done just enough so that if there were any media attention, they could say, 'Hey guys, this is what we're doing,'" said Antonie Fountain, managing director of the Voice Network, an organization advocating for ethical cocoa production.

Nestlé's involvement in tackling child labor stretches back to the early 2000s with the signing of the Harkin-Engel Protocol. Ratified in September 2001, this protocol was designed to eliminate the worst forms of child labor in the cocoa industry by 2005. While this goal seems noble, the reality has been marked by delays and setbacks. The protocol's deadlines were continually pushed back, and the industry, including Nestlé, was accused of stalling real progress.

By 2005, the situation remained dire, with little change in the cocoa supply chain. In fact, shortly after the protocol's initial deadline, Nestlé and other chocolate giants, including Cargill and Archer Daniels Midland, were taken to court by the International Labor Rights Fund (ILRF) for alleged involvement in forced child labor, child trafficking, and other human rights abuses in West Africa's cocoa farms.



**HARKIN-ENGEL PROTOCOL'S DEADLINES WERE CONTINUALLY PUSHED BACK, AND THE INDUSTRY, INCLUDING NESTLÉ, WAS ACCUSED OF STALLING REAL PROGRESS.**

Research conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago revealed that in 2018-2019, 1.56 million children were still working in cocoa production in regions like the Ivory Coast and Ghana. A staggering 95% of these children were involved in hazardous activities, including the use of dangerous tools and agrochemicals, and the carrying of heavy loads. While Nestlé has implemented measures such as the Child Labor Monitoring and Remediation System (CLMRS) and partnered with the Fair Labor Association, progress has been slow, leaving many wondering why a company of Nestlé's size and influence hasn't achieved more substantial results.

Nestlé's 2017 "Tackling Child Labour Report" further highlights the discrepancy between the company's narrative and the complex reality on the ground. The report acknowledges poverty, lack of education, and infrastructural issues as root causes of child labor but makes little mention of how

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the industry's own practices, including minimal wages for farmers, exacerbate these problems.

For many, the delayed progress on eliminating child labor boils down to a stark reality: **the cocoa industry prioritizes profit over people**. Natacha Thys of the ILRF captured this sentiment in a 2006 statement, saying, “What’s holding back progress on illegal child labour is nothing more than the industry’s unwillingness to support real solutions and exchange a small portion of its massive profits to ensure a sufficient return for farmers and workers.”

In addition to its struggles with human rights, Nestlé has also faced criticism for its environmental practices. Despite its claims of working toward sustainability, **the company was labeled one of the top environmental offenders by the Break Free from Plastic initiative**, ranking as the second-largest producer of plastic waste in 2024. Furthermore, Nestlé’s water extraction practices, particularly in drought-prone regions, have drawn ire from environmental groups who accuse the company of intensifying water shortages to fuel its massive bottled water business.

This dichotomy—of sustainability claims versus questionable practices—highlights the challenges in holding multinational corporations accountable. **The term “sustainable” is not legally defined, allowing companies to use it liberally**, often without substantial backing. Nestlé’s efforts, while laudable on paper, seem to fit

this pattern. Their Cocoa Plan, with its promises of ethical sourcing and child labor eradication, feels more like a **PR strategy** than a transformative initiative, particularly when weighed against the historical and ongoing exploitation in cocoa farming.

As the 2025 deadline for eliminating the worst forms of child labor looms, the world is watching to see whether Nestlé can meet its commitments or if it will continue a pattern of delays and deflection. The cocoa industry needs more than just certifications and monitoring systems—it requires a systemic overhaul where companies pay farmers fair wages and prioritize human rights over profit margins.

Nestlé’s journey highlights a broader issue within corporate sustainability initiatives: how do we distinguish between genuine progress and marketing strategies? While Nestlé’s sustainability efforts might create a more responsible image for the company, the cocoa farmers and children working in **hazardous conditions** in West Africa have yet to see transformative change.

The next few years will be crucial for Nestlé. If the company can follow through on its promises and genuinely contribute to a fairer, more sustainable cocoa industry, it could mark a turning point in corporate responsibility. If not, Nestlé may find itself increasingly criticized for putting profits before ethics, and its efforts branded as yet another example of corporate greenwashing.





Photo credit: Joan Marcus

## Josh Radnor's Artistic Evolution: From Jewish Roots to Center Stage in 'The Ally'

By: Souberi Chakrabarty

**In the realm of theater, the intersection of personal identity and artistic expression often yields powerful narratives that resonate deeply with audiences. For actor Josh Radnor, star of the acclaimed play "The Ally," this connection to his Jewish heritage has played a central role in shaping his journey as a performer and storyteller.**

In a recent interview, Radnor reflected on the profound influence of his Jewish upbringing and life experiences on his portrayal of the character in "The Ally."

He shared how his immersion in Jewish traditions, values, and community has provided him with a rich tapestry of cultural references and insights that infuse his performance with authenticity and depth.

Radnor's portrayal in "The Ally" is imbued with a sense of authenticity and vulnerability that reflects his own journey of self-discovery and growth. He spoke candidly about how his experiences as a Jewish individual navigating life's complexities have informed his

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interpretation of the character, allowing him to tap into universal themes of identity, belonging, and acceptance.

At its heart, “The Ally” delves deeply into the universal themes of identity and belonging, examining how individuals navigate the complex landscape of relationships in a world marked by division. These themes are central to the human condition, as everyone, at some point, searches for their place in society and yearns for meaningful connections. The film explores the intricacies of human relationships, showing how the bonds we form are often fraught with misunderstandings, emotional distance, and conflicting desires for both independence and acceptance. In this context, Radnor’s portrayal of the protagonist is key to capturing the emotional weight of these themes. His performance brings to life the internal struggles of the character—moments of self-doubt, the fear of rejection, and the deep desire to find understanding. Through his nuanced acting, Radnor invites the audience to connect with the universal human experience of feeling like an outsider, creating a powerful sense of empathy as the character seeks both self-acceptance and the affirmation of others. This resonance makes the story not just a personal one but a reflection of larger societal issues of isolation and the search for belonging in a fragmented world.

Radnor’s journey from his Jewish roots to center stage in “The Ally” underscores the importance of diverse representation in

theater. By showcasing the unique perspectives and voices of individuals from different cultural backgrounds, theater has the power to foster empathy, promote understanding, and bridge divides in society.

As audiences engage with “The Ally” and witness Radnor’s nuanced performance, they are prompted to reflect on their own identities, experiences, and relationships. The play serves as a catalyst for meaningful dialogue and introspection, inviting viewers to confront their biases, challenge stereotypes, and embrace the richness of diversity.

As Radnor continues to explore the intersection of personal identity and artistic expression in his career, his journey serves as a reminder of the transformative power of storytelling in theater. Through his performances, he invites audiences to embark on a journey of self-discovery, empathy, and connection, inspiring us all to embrace our cultural heritage and celebrate the diversity that enriches our lives.

“The Ally” stands as a testament to the profound impact of cultural identity in theater, inviting audiences to engage with stories that resonate on a deeply personal and universal level. Through Radnor’s authentic portrayal and heartfelt performance, the play serves as a poignant reminder of the power of art to transcend boundaries, unite communities, and illuminate the human experience.

# THE PLAYFUL SPIRIT OF THEATER



## PRANKS, CAMARADERIE, AND CREATIVE MISCHIEF

By: Surbhi Thanki

**In the theater world, the line between performance and reality often blurs, with actors and crew finding creative ways to infuse their work with fun and spontaneity. For many theater veterans, scenes from a play linger long after the final curtain, but sometimes this phenomenon takes on a more tangible—and unexpected—form.**

Susan Marie Rhea, the artistic director of Washington's Keegan Theatre, experienced this firsthand during the 2013 production of *The Woman in Black*. Returning home from the gym, Rhea was shocked to find a dark, ominous figure in her shower. After an initial moment of terror, she realized it

was a mannequin dressed as the ghost from the play, placed there by her mischievous colleagues. This prank, while terrifying in the moment, highlights the unique blend of creativity and playfulness that is a hallmark of the theater—a dynamic rarely found in more conventional workplaces.

These pranks aren't just about getting a laugh; they serve a deeper purpose in the theater, especially during long runs of a show where the repetition can dull the excitement. For instance, during the 2008 Broadway revival of *Boeing-Boeing*, actress Kathryn Hahn kept the routine fresh by surprising her co-star Mark Rylance with unexpected props during a scene, such as covering her privates with a different item

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each performance. These moments of spontaneity, though small, injected new life into the production and kept the cast engaged. Similarly, Jonathan Groff, in the recent Broadway revival of *Merrily We Roll Along*, used his character's typewriter scene as an opportunity to leave cheeky notes for co-star Daniel Radcliffe. **These interactions fostered a sense of connection and camaraderie**, essential for maintaining the energy and enthusiasm needed for a long-running show.

Kevin Del Aguila, during his time in *Some Like It Hot*, elevated backstage pranking to an art form. Noticing that his co-star Christian Borle always glanced offstage during a particular scene, Del Aguila began staging elaborate sight gags to make Borle laugh. From pretending to be a turtle to full-blown performances with props, these pranks became a highlight of the show, adding an element of surprise and joy to each performance.

It's not just actors who get in on the fun; theater crew members also find ways to add a bit of mischief to the mix. Chani Wereley, during Signature Theatre's production of *Into the Woods*, orchestrated an elaborate prank involving hundreds of rubber ducks hidden throughout the theater, targeting stage manager Kerry Epstein, who had a known fondness for the toys. The prank grew to include human-sized inflatable ducks placed in unexpected locations around the set, keeping the entire theater buzzing with laughter. Even years later, these hidden

ducks continue to be discovered, serving as a lasting reminder of the playful spirit that infused the production.

Music directors, too, aren't immune to the lure of a good prank. Christopher Youstra, working on *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* at Olney Theatre Center, recalls his playful intervention during a banquet scene in *Titanic* at Toby's Dinner Theatre. He inserted on-theme tunes like *My Heart Will Go On* and *Under the Sea* into the orchestra's score, much to the amusement of the audience and the cast trying to maintain their composure on stage. During a production of *The Producers*, Youstra slowly increased the pitch of a doorbell sound each night, leading the actor to unwittingly adapt to the change—a subtle but effective prank that brought both amusement and challenge to the performance.

These pranks, while often lighthearted and humorous, are more than just playful mischief. They are a vital part of the theater's culture, fostering creativity, camaraderie, and a sense of shared experience. In the demanding and repetitive world of theater, **these moments of levity help keep the spirit of the production alive**, ensuring that both cast and crew remain engaged and connected. So, the next time you attend a play, remember that the actors and crew may be engaging in more than just the performance you see on stage. Behind the scenes, a world of playful pranks and creative mischief is often at work, adding a layer of joy and spontaneity that helps keep the magic of theater alive.



# Impact of the WFTA The World Through Cuisine

By: Jamini Shah

**The World Food Travel Association (WFTA), founded in 2003 by Erik Wolf, celebrates and preserves culinary traditions worldwide. As the leading authority on food tourism, the WFTA highlights how food and drink enrich travel experiences. Their mission is to protect and promote culinary cultures through hospitality and tourism, supporting local communities in creating unique food and drink experiences that attract tourists and stimulate economic growth. Key initiatives include culinary certification programs, Food Trekking Awards, World Food Travel Day, and extensive research and advocacy. The WFTA's work promotes sustainability and cultural preservation, ensuring traditional foodways are respected for future generations.**

Food is a universal language that connects cultures, tells stories, and fosters connections. Understanding this, the World Food Travel Association (WFTA), founded in 2003 by Erik Wolf, is all about celebrating and preserving culinary traditions around the globe. As the top authority on food tourism, the WFTA shines a light on how food and drink make travel experiences richer and more memorable.

The WFTA is on a mission to protect and promote culinary cultures through hospitality and tourism. They envision a world where these traditions are not just respected but also cherished and protected. By helping local communities create unique food and drink experiences, the WFTA attracts tourists and stimulates economic .

# FOOD AND TRAVEL

growth, all while promoting sustainable tourism.

The World Food Travel Association (WFTA) offers several initiatives to support and promote food tourism. Culinary Certification Programs equip industry professionals with the skills to develop and market food tourism experiences, while also focusing on preserving food heritage. The FoodTrekking Awards celebrate excellence in the industry, recognizing achievements such as the Best Food or Beverage Tour Experience and the Best Food Tourism Campaign. Additionally, World Food Travel Day, held annually on April 18, raises awareness about the importance of preserving culinary cultures, providing an opportunity for individuals and communities to showcase their food heritage. The WFTA also engages in research and advocacy, studying trends and challenges in food tourism to inform policies that encourage sustainable and responsible tourism, while advocating for the protection of culinary traditions.

The WFTA's work has a huge impact on global tourism. By promoting food tourism, they help destinations create unique culinary experiences that draw visitors and boost local economies. Their focus on sustainability and cultural preservation encourages responsible tourism, ensuring that traditional foodways are respected and preserved for future generations.



**RAISES AWARENESS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING CULINARY CULTURES, PROVIDING AN OPPORTUNITY FOR INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES TO SHOWCASE THEIR FOOD HERITAGE**

As food tourism continues to grow, the WFTA is committed to supporting culinary cultures worldwide. They are always innovating, educating, and advocating to shape the future of food tourism. Their efforts ensure that food remains a central and cherished part of the travel experience, bringing people closer together and enriching our cultural landscape.

the WFTA plays a vital role in celebrating and preserving global culinary traditions. Whether you're a traveller looking for new culinary adventures or an industry professional working to develop food tourism in your area, the WFTA provides valuable resources and support for your journey.



# Is Weetabix as Healthy as You Think? Experts Weigh In!

By: Surbhi Thanki

For decades, Weetabix has been marketed as a wholesome and nutritious breakfast option, a staple in countless households. Its simple, whole grain composition, low sugar content, and high fiber make it seem like the perfect way to start the day. However, recent expert analyses suggest that while Weetabix has many merits, it's important to consider its nutritional profile more critically.

Weetabix is celebrated for its high fiber content, which promotes digestive health and helps maintain a feeling of fullness. This can be particularly beneficial for those managing weight, as it can reduce the temptation to snack between meals. Additionally, with just 1.7 grams of sugar

per serving, Weetabix stands out in a market where many cereals are loaded with sugars. The simplicity and convenience of Weetabix—just add milk and you're done—also contribute to its popularity among busy individuals.

Despite its many benefits, Weetabix is not without its downsides. One concern is its sodium content, which, although not excessive, can contribute to the daily intake, especially for those who consume more than one serving. Health experts often caution against excessive sodium intake due to its links to hypertension and cardiovascular issues.

Another point of contention is the reliance on fortified vitamins and minerals. While

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fortification can be beneficial, some nutritionists argue that it's better to obtain nutrients from natural food sources. Relying on fortified foods can create a false sense of nutritional adequacy and might encourage a less diverse diet.

Portion control plays a vital role in maintaining Weetabix as a healthy breakfast option. While the recommended serving size of two biscuits is low in calories and designed to support a balanced diet, it's easy to unintentionally consume more than necessary, especially if you add sugary toppings or eat additional servings. Overeating, even with a low-calorie food like Weetabix, can result in an increased calorie intake, potentially counteracting the cereal's health benefits.

To further boost the nutritional value of Weetabix, consider adding fresh fruits, nuts, or seeds. These natural additions introduce essential vitamins, minerals, and healthy fats, making your breakfast more nutritionally well-rounded without relying on processed or sugary ingredients. For example, fresh berries provide antioxidants and fiber, while nuts and seeds offer protein and healthy fats, enhancing the overall meal. Weetabix remains an excellent choice for those seeking a high-fiber, low-sugar start to their day, particularly when consumed in appropriate portions. However, as with any processed food, it's important to eat it in moderation and in conjunction with a balanced diet that includes a variety of nutrients.

Being mindful of portion sizes is essential to maintaining the health benefits of Weetabix and ensuring it aligns with your dietary goals. While Weetabix is low in calories and high in fiber, consuming too much—even of a healthy food—can lead to an excess in calorie intake. Staying conscious of the recommended serving size helps you manage calorie consumption and ensures you're getting the right balance of nutrients.

Incorporating whole, natural foods like fresh fruits, seeds, and nuts into your Weetabix can further elevate its nutritional value. By choosing these natural, unprocessed toppings over sugary or processed alternatives, you enhance the overall nutritional profile of your breakfast.

Understanding the full nutritional profile of what you're eating is equally important for making informed choices. Knowing how the foods you consume fit into your overall dietary needs helps you to achieve a more balanced and sustainable diet. For example, if Weetabix is part of a high-fiber, low-sugar meal plan, it's important to ensure that other meals also contribute to your required daily intake of proteins, healthy fats, and essential nutrients. This level of awareness allows you to tailor your diet to meet your long-term health goals, whether those goals are maintaining a healthy weight, managing blood sugar levels, or improving overall wellness.





By Sayamindu Dasgupta from Kolkata, India - Preparation, CC BY-SA 2.0,

## The **Vibrant World** of Jatra Pala: Exploring Bengali Theatre Culture

By: Souberī Chakrabarty

In the rich tapestry of Bengali culture, few art forms capture the essence of tradition, storytelling, and community spirit quite like Jatra Pala. Originating in rural Bengal centuries ago, Jatra Pala, often referred to simply as Jatra, is a vibrant and dynamic form of folk theatre that continues to captivate audiences with its colorful performances, melodious music, and compelling narratives. In this article, we delve into the fascinating world of Jatra Pala, exploring its history, evolution, and

enduring significance in Bengali theatre culture.

The origins of Jatra Pala can be traced back to the Bhakti movement of medieval India, which emphasized devotional singing and storytelling as a means of spiritual expression. Over time, this folk tradition evolved into what we now know as Jatra, blending elements of music, dance, drama, and religious themes. Initially performed as part of religious festivals and rituals, Jatra gradually

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became a popular form of entertainment in rural Bengal, drawing large crowds to makeshift stages set up in village squares and open fields.

At the heart of Jatra Pala are its larger-than-life performances, characterized by exaggerated gestures, colorful costumes, and lively music. Typically, Jatra productions feature a mix of mythological, historical, and contemporary themes, with stories drawn from Hindu epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, as well as local folklore and legends. These narratives are brought to life by a troupe of performers, including actors, singers, musicians, and dancers, who engage the audience with their energy and enthusiasm.

Central to the success of any Jatra production are its characters, each representing archetypal figures from Bengali culture and mythology. From noble heroes and virtuous heroines to cunning villains and comic sidekicks, the cast of a Jatra Pala reflects the diverse spectrum of human emotions and experiences. The performers themselves, known as Jatra artists, play a crucial role in bringing these characters to life, often undergoing rigorous training and rehearsal to perfect their craft.

Despite facing challenges from modern forms of entertainment, Jatra Pala remains a beloved and integral part of Bengali cultural heritage. Its enduring popularity can be attributed to its accessibility,



**IN THE PRE-COLONIAL TIMES,  
WOMEN IN AFRICA WERE  
CONSPICUOUS IN HIGH PLACES.  
THEY LED ARMIES AND OFTEN  
PLAYED IMPORTANT  
CONSULTATIVE ROLES IN  
POLITICS.**

Niara Sudarkasa



affordability, and ability to connect with audiences on a visceral level. For many rural communities, Jatra serves not only as a form of entertainment but also as a social and cultural event, bringing people together and fostering a sense of unity and belonging.

Over the years, numerous Jatra productions have left an indelible mark on Bengali theatre culture, becoming legendary in their own right. One such production is “Chitrangada,” based on the epic tale by Rabindranath Tagore, which tells the story of a warrior princess who struggles with her identity and desires. Another iconic Jatra is “Bon Bibi,” inspired by the folklore of the Sundarbans, depicting the mythical battle between the goddess Bon Bibi and the demon Dakhin Rai.

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Despite its enduring popularity, Jatra Pala faces challenges in the modern era, including competition from other forms of entertainment, changing audience preferences, and financial constraints. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has dealt a significant blow to Jatra performances, with restrictions on public gatherings and travel affecting the livelihoods of Jatra artists and troupes.

However, efforts are underway to preserve and promote Jatra Pala for future generations. Organizations like the Bangla Jatra Academy and government initiatives provide support and resources to Jatra artists, including training programs, financial assistance, and platforms for showcasing their work. Additionally, digital platforms and social media have opened up new avenues for reaching audiences beyond traditional Jatra venues, ensuring that this cherished art form continues to thrive in the digital age.

In conclusion, Jatra Pala stands as a testament to the resilience, creativity, and cultural heritage of the Bengali people. Through its vibrant performances, timeless stories, and communal spirit, Jatra continues to captivate audiences and inspire generations of artists and enthusiasts alike. As we look to the future, it is imperative that we cherish and preserve this invaluable part of our cultural identity, ensuring that the magic of Jatra Pala lives on for years to come.

Picture by: Soumya Sankar Bose

In frame: Tonu Dey, 73, posing for a portrait as a disabled person. He retired from acting following a heart surgery in 2005



# **CAPITALISM AND THE MERCHANTS OF DEATH**



**BY: VEDANT BHRAMBHATT**

When Hiram Maxim, an American-born British inventor, introduced the Maxim gun in 1884, he unknowingly set the stage for a new era in warfare—one that would lead to some of the deadliest conflicts in human history. The Maxim gun, the first fully automatic machine gun, was revolutionary in its ability to fire continuous rounds with unprecedented speed and efficiency. This invention, while a marvel of engineering, quickly became a symbol of how technological advancements in weaponry

could be leveraged to exert power on a global scale.

Maxim was not merely content with his invention; he was a shrewd businessman who understood the potential of his creation. He embarked on a global tour, demonstrating the lethal efficiency of the Maxim gun to governments across Europe and beyond. His efforts were remarkably successful—countries recognized that possessing this advanced weaponry could

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shift the balance of power in their favor. The Maxim gun was soon adopted by colonial powers, and it played a significant role in European imperial expansions, enabling relatively small armies to subdue much larger forces in Africa and Asia. The commercialization of such weaponry set a precedent for the future of the arms trade, where profit and power would become inextricably linked.

The proliferation of advanced weaponry, as exemplified by the Maxim gun, fundamentally altered the dynamics of international relations. Nations that possessed superior arms held a significant advantage over those that did not, and this imbalance often led to a militarized approach to diplomacy. The concept of “peace through strength” emerged, where nations believed that the possession of powerful weapons would deter adversaries from engaging in conflict. However, this also led to an arms race, where countries continuously sought to outdo each other in the development and acquisition of more sophisticated weapons.

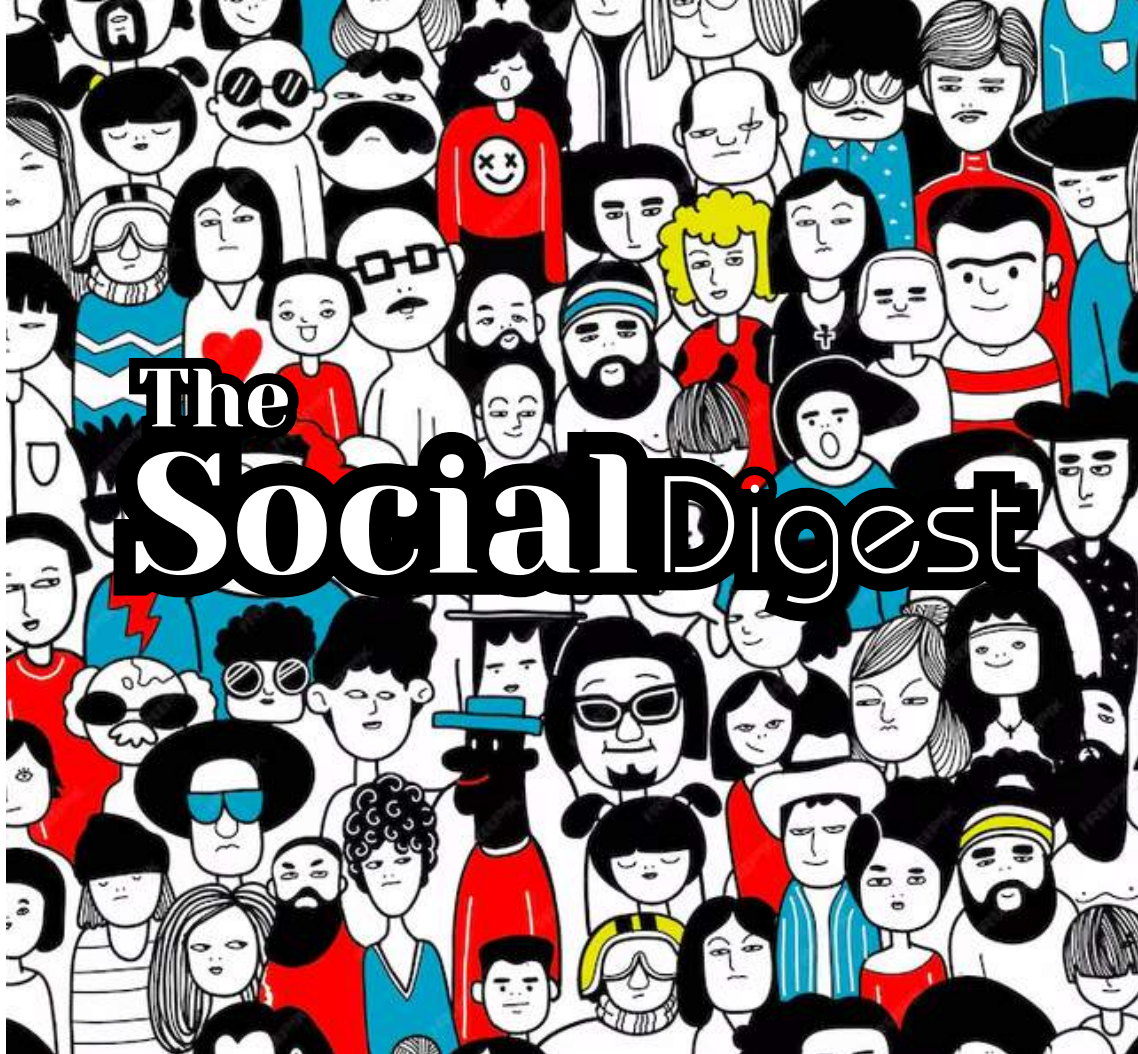
In international relations, the power derived from weapons extends beyond mere military capability. It influences alliances, shapes geopolitical strategies, and determines the outcomes of conflicts. The arms trade became a tool for both deterrence and dominance, as countries used their military might to enforce their will on others or protect their interests. The export of arms became a strategic asset,

allowing powerful nations to extend their influence across the globe by equipping allies and proxies with the means to wage war.

Today, the global arms trade is a multi-billion dollar industry, with the United States leading as the largest exporter of weapons. American arms are sold to over 100 countries, fueling conflicts and power struggles in various regions.

The global arms trade remains a powerful force in shaping international relations. Nations with advanced military industries, like the United States, Russia, and China, use their arms exports to secure strategic alliances and exert influence on the global stage. This trade is not just about selling weapons; it is about the transfer of power, the creation of dependencies, and the shaping of global order.

The commercialization of arms, which began with pioneers like Hiram Maxim, has had profound implications for global conflicts and international relations. The pursuit of profit in the arms industry has often outweighed concerns about the consequences of widespread weapon proliferation. As a result, the world continues to grapple with the deadly consequences of an arms race that shows no signs of abating. The lessons from the Maxim gun era remind us that the intersection of technology, commerce, and warfare can lead to devastating outcomes, a reality that is still very much relevant today.



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