

SUSTAINING LUNAR EXPLORATION THROUGH WORLDWIDE PUBLIC SUPPORT

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Our Moon, as imaged by the Galileo spacecraft flying past it on December 7, 1992. Credit: NASA

The last two decades mark the beginning of a true return to exploring our Moon, and globally so. The 2000s saw Europe, Japan, China and India launch their successful lunar orbiters SMART-1, SELENE, Chang'e 1, and Chandrayaan 1 respectively. The 2010s can be defined by roller-coaster Moon landing attempts, with China succeeding with Chang'e 3 & Chang'e 4 while Israel and India faced heartbreaking crashes of their Beresheet and Chandrayaan 2 landers respectively. In the meantime, the U.S. had various successful missions in the form of the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter, LCROSS, GRAIL, and LADEE, and most notably forged a national goal of returning humans to the Moon with Artemis.

Space agencies, companies, and enthusiasts around the world hope for the 2020s to be marked by a string of successful commercial lunar landers^[1], many first-of-its-kind orbiters in the vein of South Korea's KPLO^[2], a bevy of private as well as publicly funded lunar rovers^[3], humans exploring the surface again, and much more. But while our lunar ambitions may have risen, orchestrating hundreds to thousands of people and spacecraft parts for any Moon mission remains a complex and resource-intensive endeavor. Mission failures as well as delays will be common, which will have domino effects on programs relying on their successes. This includes national goals like Artemis where NASA has chosen commercial partnerships to be on critical paths. It's amid such challenges that public support could falter.

It's worth remembering that the continuous exploration of our Moon even by the agency that landed humans on it faced an excruciatingly long abandonment for over three decades. Continued public buy-in and funding is therefore crucial to sustain the new worldwide impetus for exploring our Moon, and thereby also for gaining the scientific and exploratory benefits unique to our cosmic companion^[4]. Even the new models of commercial and private lunar exploration hinge on national space agencies like NASA and ESA being

anchor customers. There simply is no alternative to gaining public support to sustain lunar exploration long-term.

And yet people of the world at large—the taxpayers—have little awareness of and insight into the breadth, depth as well as purpose of lunar exploration activities conducted by agencies, companies, institutes, and organizations worldwide. Unintuitively, the same is also seen within space communities, either due to people being naturally unable to individually wholly track the many moving pieces of our global lunar exploration efforts or because of our Moon not having been a space priority for long. Since public awareness is what ultimately influences, through policy, the scope and quantity of funding available for our future endeavors at Luna, orchestrated efforts in that direction will greatly improve our collective exploration and science output.

It's to that end that I write Moon Monday^[5], the world's only newsletter dedicated to covering lunar exploration, science, commercial, and policy developments from around the globe. Since its inception in November 2020, Moon Monday has been tracking the progress of all major pieces driving our worldwide return to exploring our cosmic neighbor, including plans to return humans this decade. The intention is to serve and connect diverse pockets of global lunar exploration communities. To that end, Moon Monday is featured as a resource on community websites of Lunar-L, NextGen, and the Moon Village Association. And, for people at large to learn about our Moon's fundamental scientific and technological value, I've created a curated resource page called "Explore our Moon!"^[6] featuring accessible articles.

Based on my experience as a globally published space exploration writer^[7], I wish to share how lunar organizations worldwide can communicate their work more effectively to taxpayers at large, including policy makers, and thus distinctly benefit from it. To that end, I will discuss several established mechanisms by which individual scientists can formally, responsibly help writers & journalists broaden the reach of their own work and its lunar themes at large, especially globally.

References: [1] NASA CLPS Moon landings: blog.jatan.space/nasa-clps-moon-missions [2] KPLO, South Korea's first Moon mission: blog.jatan.space/kplo [3] The bevy of rovers heading for the Moon this decade: blog.jatan.space/lunar-rovers-launching-in-2020s [4] Why explore our Moon: blog.jatan.space/why-explore-the-moon [5] Moon Monday: blog.jatan.space/s/moon-monday/archive [6] blog.jatan.space/our-moon [7] Jatan's space writings: blog.jatan.space/about