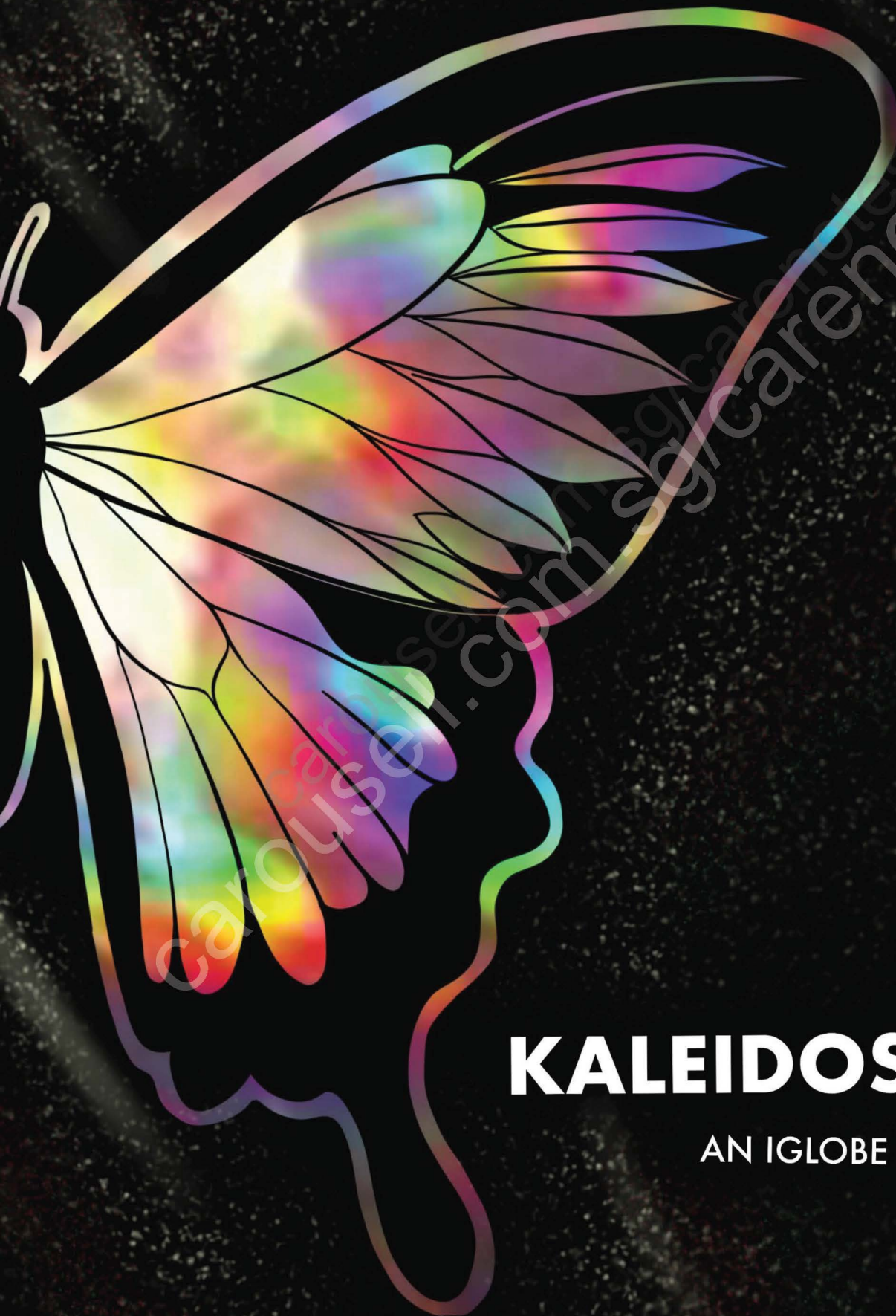


2024 Kaleidoscope

(226 pages)



KALEIDOSCOPE

AN IGLOBE PUBLICATION

Editor's Foreword

Dear Victorians,

I would like to cordially welcome you to read this year's edition of Kaleidoscope. Each essay published here reflects the unique perspectives and views of our talented student writers, showcasing a kaleidoscope of ideas. Within these pages lie a vast tapestry of ideas, with each essay boasting its own unique style and shimmer. While reading through the different essays, don't forget to stop and smell the flowers - the art pieces and poems that are scattered along the way.

Similar to the butterfly on the cover page, it is my hope that these essays serve as inspiration for readers to learn and grow, to transform like a butterfly spreading its wings. May these essays also encourage you to expand your horizons to explore the world around you.

The process of growing into a beautiful butterfly takes time, and it is crucial to remember that small changes, although not always visible, are often the ones that leave the biggest imprint. A chrysalis may seem dull and insignificant on the outside, but on the inside, it secretly nurtures a vibrant and colourful butterfly. It is my wish that every reader here is able to take the first step to discover their true potential, to metamorphose and take off. Just like a butterfly, you too will awaken in your own time.

Before ending off, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the teachers in charge, along with editors from iGlobe for their hard work and dedication towards Kaleidoscope. Many thanks to students from Art Club and Writers Circle whose contributions have helped to add a little sparkle to this edition.

Yours Sincerely,

Chan Charlene Julia, 23S310
Chief Editor



VJC iGLOBE

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ARTS, MEDIA AND CULTURE

I Don't Know How to Sing (Suman for the Singaporean)

The hark of the voice, the bark of the tree, the crash of the wave
The songs of my country are lauded with praise
Salonga, Cuneta, Mari Chan
Yet I can't sing, unlike everyone

The mountains cringe! Seas stall with my voice
A scourge! A stain! Some foreign birth to be cast out
Of the temples of white they call home
I brave the steaming hills and beg valleys to call my name
But

I don't know how to sing
I lie at the summit, with the breeze for company,

Quiet.

And there's no other view
Quite like it

Dolot Shine Mikaela Maminta, 23S41

Youth

Greek vineyards
 Ancient statues
 The Pirene spews out golden shards
 A ripe pomegranate dangles from a tree
 Above patches of artemisia
 Water sloshes in the currents
 Leading to fifty different bracts of euphorbia

Silver gates
 Mountains of molehills
 The sun clasps the lock
 And somewhere above birds trill

Pale champagne in the courtyard
 A traditional afternoon siesta
 Dancing on the tiles
 Mouth full of moussaka

The drachma in my hand morphs
 From devilish gold to diminished silver
 I cast my gaze towards this ideal utopia
 In my hand stands a lighter

Santolinas and blue ochres
 In the corner terracotta urns fade
 Hands in the dirt, smelling the fresh herbs
 Everything in here is dead.

Loic Lee Ming Hao, 23A12

Does social media make us more unhappy than happy?

Tan Si Qi Mary, 23S32

In a world of modern technology, littered with computers, machines and various other shiny devices, it is unsurprising that many are addicted to the tempting, unattainable and aesthetically perfect world that hides behind the glass screen. Always smiling, always happy moments, frozen in time and carefully preserved and prepackaged into bite-sized chunks. Then force-fed into our tiny and easily-influenced human brains to convince us that this is how life should be – that this is our golden ticket to eternal happiness. But will subscribing to this one advertised website really solve all our problems? Will spending hours watching this one self-care vlog really make all our issues go away? Are the people frozen and stuck smiling on screen even sincere about their happiness? Or are they, too, trapped in the influences of the almighty glass screen that so casually dictates our lives, just as unhappy as we are? In my opinion, I think that social media makes us more unhappy than happy, as it leads us to reach towards unattainable standards and make unhealthy comparisons, feeding our addiction but providing nothing but a monotony of mindless scrolling, and overall breeds unhappiness and dissatisfaction in our daily lives.

Strewn haphazardly all over social media are these beautiful cinematic posts of people 'living' their best lives. Influencers on their way to that one expensive fine dining restaurant in their luxury cars, complete with flawless makeup and stylish outfits. 'Get Ready with Me' vlogs with expensive products and tedious processes that no sane person would actually be willing to invest that much time in. Skinny, too-perfect bodies digitally or otherwise altered to fit increasingly high modern beauty standards. Social media is a breeding ground for lies, ridiculous high standards, and overall poor mental health. Due to the marketing of such fake, digitally or otherwise altered pictures of perfection, people tend to compare life as shown on social media and feel severely displeased about their mundane, normal lives. "No, I do not look good enough", they think. Compared to the countless hopelessly beautiful people online, which is obviously now the current beauty norm. "Maybe this product will make me happy", they think. "Buying these clothes and that makeup and this hairspray will make me perfect". "I can live life as shown on social media. But in truth, all they buy and all they learn are lies". This leads to the development of poor mental health, due to unhealthy comparisons, such as eating disorders due to wanting that 'perfect' body possessed by influencers. People are holding themselves up to higher and higher standards due to the negative influence of social media, and are thus overall unhappy.

A common hobby of many nowadays is looking through social media, mindlessly scrolling through their feeds. Social media is designed to hold our attention, filled with short clips with loud music and quick-moving videos that pique our interest and overstimulate our brains. But as a hobby, does it really make people happy? It is

a common occurrence for many to look up blearily after spending an hour scrolling through YouTube shorts, feeling all the more tired and yet none the happier. Social media content is designed simply to hold our attention. It gives us quick, short-lived pleasure that disappears quickly upon us stopping using it, leaving us wanting more. It is unlikely to provide us with long-lasting, true happiness that leaves a positive, lasting memory for us. What makes for a more memorable, nostalgic pastime? Spending one's time playing a sport with friends and chatting, or spending one's time watching videos on social media? I would have to choose the former. Social media gives us nothing but instantaneous gratification and leaves us with nothing but a craving for more of it. The more we use it, the more monotonous and lifeless our lives become, and yet the more we want it.

Some might argue that social media actually makes us happier as it allows us to connect more with the people around us, allowing us to share more of our lives, and communicate with each other more easily. Upon first glance, this may seem true, but is in fact invalid. How much of what we post about ourselves on social media is true? How much of our lives are we leaving out? On social media, people tend to want to portray the 'best' versions of themselves, which can often lead to false portrayals of what kind of people they are. On social media, we only want to show our successes and strengths, hiding all our failures. It is harder to see the true version and personality of someone through social media, and this is something that can feel all the more stifling and lonely to anyone, as they are judged by the inaccurate duplicate of themselves online, leaving us more disconnected from our peers than connected.

Lastly, the nature of social media allows for the creation of toxic, unhealthy communities that spread hate and malice behind anonymous masks. In real life, the number of people in any given place harbouring the same harmful opinions would most likely be on a small scale, and easily handled or defended against by most. However, online, millions of such people from all over the world might be able to connect and form entire swarms that spread unhappy messages and breed unhappiness. One such example would be the self-harm community on social media. People post pictures of their own bodily harm, and others encourage them to do so. Through this, people would end up learning unhealthy habits instead of being able to grow and recover from whatever makes them unhappy. Another example would be communities fighting each other over various issues. Many online communities send malicious messages such as murder or doxing threats, which can be incredibly harmful towards individuals targeted. As social media inherently creates a breeding ground for such communities, it is more likely to make us unhappy rather than happy.

Thus, in conclusion, social media makes us more unhappy than happy due to the unattainable high standards it creates that we are expected to hold ourselves up to, the mindless monotony of posts that distract us from living our lives, the false portrayals of ourselves that lead us feeling more disconnected from others than connected, and the creation of toxic communities that spread unhappiness.

Comments:

Essay shows knowledge, insight, and you argue your points with conviction. Some acknowledgment of differing perspectives would have added some nuance, but overall, ideas were sensibly and persuasively put forward. Good control of language, though be careful to keep to a more formal register. Pleased to read this. I love your tone and how you wield language to express your views and support your case.

Does social media make us more unhappy than happy?

Shu Yichen, 23S33

Ever since Facebook's boom in popularity in the late 2000s, social media has seemingly become increasingly ingrained in our daily lives. It utilises the internet to connect people together without having to leave their houses. From its humble beginnings, with people using it to simply share about their lives, to people making a job out of creating content on social media, one cannot deny its impact on our lives. Since it is a platform used for spreading positive energy, some believe that everyone who uses social media must have more happiness in their lives. While that sentiment may be true, the adverse effects have recently become more and more noticeable. Many news articles have begun to talk about the underlying negative effects and mental health issues caused by social media. As such, even though social media is built to make users happy, it actually results in long-time users becoming more unhappy than happy, a result of people comparing themselves with others and also how social media makes us less compelled to live our lives to the fullest.

Some may argue that social media makes us happier, through allowing us to socialise and interact with people online, and this view cannot be denied. Through the internet, social media allows us to bypass geographical barriers and interact with people from other countries, without needing to wait weeks or even months for their reply. It allows us to learn more about different individuals, about their culture, about their interests, and create friendships. Some of these friendships can even be lifelong ones. We can share funny videos found online with others to spread joy, or even play video games together after a long day of work. Many social media platforms encourage these forms of interaction, such as Discord, where there are multitudes of ways to make a 'server' akin to that of an actual social community. Having friends is one of the greatest joys a person can ever have, because without them life would not be as exciting, considering the fact that not many people are able to create meaningful experiences on their own. As such, social media eases the ways for us to meet and interact with different kinds of people from all walks of life, which is what allows users to be more happy.

That being said, while interacting with people on a surface level seems to only bring about benefits, it may also harbour some negative effects. Social media gives rise to unhealthy comparisons with others, especially with close friends. On social media, many wish to portray the best image of themselves, and only show the positive aspects of life. As such, they tend to post exaggerated images of themselves online, be it through multiple layers of filters or through photoshopping them. While there is nothing inherently wrong with wanting to look good, for some, it may not rub the right way. This is even more so when it comes to close friends who they know personally. It makes them feel a sense of jealousy, of being left out, or even being inferior to them. It then compels individuals to do something similar, by posting highly exaggerated

images that bring them short lived happiness. This then gives rise to a vicious cycle of comparison, where these exaggerated images will only make someone else feel the same way and do something similar. A constant repeat of happiness and feeling depressed can make someone's life miserable and riddled with insecurities. An example of this would be how many people may see an image of someone with outstanding physical features, be it a female model with an hourglass figure or a male bodybuilder with exceptional muscles, and immediately seek to achieve similar feats by any means possible. When they do not achieve similar results, they immediately fall into deep depression. With this cycle of unhealthy comparison, there is no wonder users of social media can be so unhappy.

Finally, social media makes us less compelled to seek out new experiences. Social media has become the new favoured choice of activity for short breaks in life. With the rise of platforms like YouTube, where people post videos about everything in life, most people are more than willing to choose this form of entertainment over having to waste energy to go outside and do something new. In the short run, this does not seem to have any negative effects. Watching people do things we are unable to do, allows us to live vicariously through others experiencing these activities, and it makes social media a joy to browse through. However, as we consume more and more of such content, it makes us less willing to go outside and explore the world, as we already have an idea of the experience. But the "experiences" that we have collected through social media are not ours, the memories they create are not ours. This can be seen in an increasing number of teenagers, who are the primary consumers of social media, nowadays. Their lives consist of finishing their obligated duties, like going to school or work; once completed, they turn to their devices for entertainment. They do not want to go outside on their own accord, because they do not have to. As time goes on, with social media being their only form of passing time, it makes life very repetitive, boring and mundane. People like to complain that as we get older time seems to move faster, but that is because we do not have as many meaningful memories when we grow up, compared to us as children. The happiness one can obtain from social media is short lived, once it reaches a certain point it actually becomes the main source of our unhappiness.

All in all, while this is my view on social media, the actual outcomes of it all boils down to its user. Social media is a tool, whether it is good or bad depends on the user. That is why many claims on the positive or negative impacts cannot be applied to everyone, since not everyone uses it the same way. But what is important is that we are aware of its impacts, that we choose to not be ignorant, or feign excuses for our addiction to social media. We should not depend on social media for our happiness, but instead explore the world more, to find the same positive energy of social media out in the real world.

Comments:

Yichen, you have grasped the essence of good GP writing. Your arguments were relevant, but more importantly, they were nuanced. You made use of evaluative reasoning and considered how there might be distinctions between surface and reality,

short runs vs long runs and different groups in society. You can deepen the analysis further by explaining how the specific features and traits of social media contribute to the issues you raised. Valid examples though there could have been more concrete ones discussed.

carousell.com.sg/carenotes

Does social media make us more unhappy than happy?

Sim Ching Young, 23S42

The rapid advancements in technology and mobile devices in the late 20th century and early 21st century have led to the increased prevalence of social media applications. This phenomenon, an era of rising communication platforms, has captured the world by storm, forcing its way into the workings of our daily lives. In practice, social media serves as a place to interact and communicate with friends, family, and loved ones, while other applications have also included unique ways of sharing content – snippets of our daily life, like TikTok's 10-second videos and Instagram's posting feature. While social media can serve as an exceptional tool to sustain connections with acquaintances and loved ones, it can also bring about a wave of unhappiness through the increased incidence of bullying, the promotion of unrealistic body or facial standards, and a constant need to seek validation.

It is true that some people hold social media to high regard – they enjoy creating and maintaining human interactions and connections, especially through such convenient and accessible means. One only needs an electronic device, Internet connection and an application such as a messaging platform to start communicating. In addition, social media can help pair people of like minds together through its algorithms, bringing individuals together and forging strong bonds. For example, the core feature of Reddit is its communities, including the r/SGExams forum, where students from different educational institutions can seek advice and share their knowledge regarding academics and even social life. With a larger social circle and many to turn to, users of the Internet have never felt more unified and ecstatic to spend quality time with people that they are familiar with. This is especially prevalent in the case of family group chats with immediate or distant family members allowing information (possibly good news or even simple greetings), to travel far and wide in merely a few seconds. However, the convenience of social media has an adverse effect on some individuals – they could fall prey to yearning for the attention of others and relying on social media to communicate instead of real-life interactions, diminishing the quality of human interaction. The rise of Internet language such as short-forms of many common phrases including “wyd” – what’re you doing; “cmi” – cannot make it; and “brb” – be right back, has devalued and downgraded messages to something mundane and insignificant to the eye. The authenticity of such messages become questionable, as people may become unsatisfied with the low effort it takes to send a few measly messages. They may want to seek real-life communication again as social media interactions could be boring and ineffective.

Additionally, social media has the power to promote unrealistic body standards, causing people to become dissatisfied with their own body or face, and point out their

own imperfections in comparison to online strangers. Many social media applications also include specially curated feeds for its users that relies on its built-in algorithm. Hence, with the presence of such filters that exaggerate and “correct” facial features to perfection, there is an outburst of people internalising their own imperfections especially when viewing their feed. Instagram posts and stories, given the many alteration tools available to users, are notorious for making people look like the “ideal human being”. For example, men are stereotyped online to look muscular, well-toned and handsome to win people’s attention while women, on the other hand, are expected to look slim and have flawless skin. This causes people to feel insecure about themselves and causes them to slowly develop insecurities, eating disorders and body dysmorphia, posing threats to their physical and mental well-being, as they fail to notice that the “perfection” is a façade. Hence, there is a fear that people need to be well-accepted and fit into society’s standards, but that is simply impractical. Conversely to Instagram’s stories, WhatsApp status updates, and X posts (formerly known as Twitter), BeReal’s fundamental goal was to eliminate all filters and accentuate real content online by implementing a random time daily where users have 2 minutes to post a raw photo that lasts for 24 hours using both the front and back cameras. This displays the current state of people to friends and is more genuine and authentic for the user’s experience.

In addition, social media also promotes cyberbullying, causing victims to suffer from unhappiness and a sense of helplessness online. Due to the extreme accessibility of the Internet, anyone who finds someone dislikable based on their looks, personality or real-life interactions can harass them anonymously behind a screen. They get the privilege of anonymity which propels them to say or do things that they would not have done physically, including calling them names, degrading their targets or in extreme cases, doxing and hacking them, utilising blackmail to extort money and induce anxiety in victims. Victims become adversely affected and would feel unhappy and anxious; a possible one-way trip to depression. Hence, the perpetrator gains satisfaction at the expense of the target’s self-awareness and confidence, using it as a tool for mockery and bullying. While users of regular social media platforms like WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, and X Direct Messages (formerly known as Twitter) all have usernames and profile pictures, perpetrators can hop on a temporary (burner) account to erase their identity completely. Other social media websites such as Tellonym allows users to submit questions or statements without an account, which could become the perfect platform for people to make inappropriate or hate comments against their target. X (formerly known as Twitter) is also infamous for its unhealthy user base and cancel culture, where there would always be people jumping to conclusions and finding fault with people they dislike. For example, due to multiple comments criticising Ariana Grande’s body, calling her “skeletal thin”, she resorted to deactivating her account and moving to other social media platforms instead to update her fans. Hence, the extent of online harassment and cyberbullying can make one unhappy and miserable, inducing constant and consistent self-doubt about their abilities and potential.

Social media can also cause us to constantly seek self-validation from friends, family and even strangers, where without it, we become unhappy and overthink about what may be wrong with ourselves. Of course, it is simply human nature to feel joy and satisfaction when people compliment us, whether online or offline. However, the constant input of compliments and agreement may lure us into a false sense of security, slowly internalising the fact that making others happy would make themselves happy, therefore living off the validation or “thumbs-up” of other people. A renowned artist, Taylor Swift, has become accustomed from debut to receiving upvotes for her music and validation from fans and strangers online and offline throughout the rise of social media. However, her mental state started crumbling when rapper Kanye West interrupted her during the MTV Music Awards to praise Beyonce for her music video, hence starting backlash against her through his concerts. As Kanye’s feud with Taylor continued over the years and was backed by his wife, the influencer Kim Kardashian, the hashtag #TaylorSwiftIsOverParty trended on number 1 on Twitter (now known as X), effectively ‘cancelling’ her. Such comments made her extremely miserable and dissatisfied with herself, taking her about a year for self-recovery by demolishing her existing belief system of validation to become truly happy. Hence, the exposure to social media can have an adverse impact on our happiness and well-being if we become overly reliant on self-validation, especially from those we do not know.

To conclude, social media’s impact on society can be highly debated on, through the perspective of self, nation and globally. While it is true that social media has extended and solidified communication, that makes people happy to enjoy each other’s presence, harm can be inflicted by users themselves or by others through the misuse of social media. Its intended purpose has already branched beyond simple communication via messages, images and videos. We should be flexible with the times in this volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world, while still finding the basis of our happiness not through using social media but through peace with oneself.

Comments:

Relevant arguments raised and these were linked to key features and traits of social media. There was also a good range of examples across different contexts. It was good that you incorporated evaluation, though this weighing of ‘unhappy’ vs ‘happy’ could have been more consistently done as it is a comparison question. You can consider if your points might be especially applicable for certain groups.

Does social media make us more unhappy than happy?

Sriram Raghav, 23S56

Ever since the dawn of civilization, humans have used technology to aid in interpersonal communication. These innovations have become exponentially more advanced over the years, from Alexander Bell's telephone to the invention of the WhatsApp messaging platform. In this day and age, we have entered a phase where interpersonal communication is not only supported by such innovations, but is almost entirely reliant on it. Social media is our generation's latest innovation of this sort. However, as it grows in prevalence and pervades every aspect of our lives, we have seen that it is ultimately a double-edged sword, bringing almost as much sadness as it does happiness. Therefore, the question of whether it aligns with our fundamental pursuit of happiness has been highly debated in recent years. This essay will illustrate why social media does in fact make us more happy than unhappy.

Firstly, we must examine why detractors may argue that social media makes us more unhappy than happy. In recent years, a phenomenon known as the dopamine effect has gained recognition. This effect suggests that the extended use of social media can result in users forming a neurochemical dependence on statistics such as 'likes' or 'followers'. This has resulted in more and more users feeling depressed as they correlate these statistics to their self-worth, which can cause major psychological disorders. A recent study done by Regis College uncovered that there is a linear correlation between social media use and social isolation. This seems to suggest to these detractors that social media as a whole makes us more prone to mental health issues, and thus, more unhappy.

However, this contrarian perspective fails to acknowledge that such cases only occur with the overuse of social media. There have been several initiatives launched by technology companies to tackle this issue of social media abuse. One example would be BeReal, a social media platform that focuses on genuine and limited user interaction. This platform directly combats the issue raised by the dopamine effect, preventing users from feeling isolated or inadequate online. Moreover, operating systems all across the industry (such as Apple's iOS or Android based systems) have developed features that lock applications after a certain duration of use, which prevents "doomscrolling" (the act of scrolling aimlessly through social media feeds) and ultimately overuse. With such measures put in place, it is not difficult to negate the negative effects the Dopamine Effect may induce on our overall happiness. Therefore, it is unjustifiable to blame the entirety of social media, when the real villain is the users' irresponsible use of such platforms.

Social media does in fact provide us happiness through a variety of means. Firstly, it has the power to connect users all over the world, breaching geographical boundaries. Ever since the early 21st century, with the invention of Web 2.0, users have been given the ability to talk to other users across the globe. This can be

imperative in situations where family members or loved ones have to travel abroad for work or studies. It serves as a useful means of preserving relationships, which can grant us happiness. One such example would be the Russo-Ukrainian War, where families were able to communicate behind opposite sides of a battlefield, due to the use of information technology such as social media. As such, we can see how social media can be integral in the preservation of inter-human relationships that can transcend geographical barriers, which ultimately grants us more happiness than unhappiness.

Social media can also make us happier online due to the communal spirit various internet groups can possess. Social media allows users to form and join online boards and servers to discuss similar interests. This can be enjoyable as almost anyone can find like-minded individuals to interact with online. An example of this would be Reddit, a popular social media platform with thousands of discussion boards known as 'subreddits'. Users can find communities for any of their interests, from gaming to cooking or even politics. The subreddits for each of these aforementioned topics can have millions of like-minded users willing to discuss things or go out and accomplish real world feats pertaining to the topic of interest. Some examples of this would be the members of r/geocaching hosting local geocache expeditions, or the members of r/coding forming teams for projects or competitions. As such, we can see how uniting people of various interests can promote social cohesion and a platform to bond with likeminded individuals, which directly correlates to happiness.

Finally, social media makes us more happy than unhappy due to the large amount and availability of content that makes us happy. Social media platforms do not just allow for users to communicate or read the news, but also act as a medium for users to share content that they find enjoyable. Memes, or graphics with humorous content, have taken the internet by storm, flooding almost every single social media platform. They are very widespread and often contain critical commentary on current affairs. Memes serve as a light-hearted lens to view our world from, which can make dark events more tolerable. For example, the tragedy of the OceanGate submersible incident, in which the submersible imploded and killed the passengers on board, became the subject of many memes online on platforms like TikTok and Reddit. Many users were comparing the incident to the Titanic incident in the past and joked about the hours of oxygen the passengers had left. Although this initially seems like a cruel occurrence, one must remember that memes allow us to view it from a light-hearted perspective, which may be easier for some users to consume, opposed to a social media feed filled with solemn sadness. According to a study by Jessica Myrick, a professor of the psychology of media use, viewing memes makes people more amused and relaxed and they are more able to cope with stress during tough situations. Memes are useful in allowing us to view such events in a less depressing manner. Moreover, the prevalence of serotonin inducing content such as cute animals and wholesome videos largely overshadows more dark and depressing content, which in most cases is heavily discouraged by social media platforms and users, with platforms like Instagram going as far as banning certain sensitive topics and content. As such, we can see that social media feeds are generally a field of wholesome, funny and

happy content that users think other users should view. Thus, we can say that social media makes us more happy than unhappy.

Social media is our generation's biggest advancement in the realm of interpersonal communication. It has provided us with countless ways to improve connections and is highly responsible for the social cohesion and the sense of community we feel online today. With the number of users across platforms totalling to over a billion, we are right to say that social media has become widespread. The sense of community, availability of happy content, and ability to preserve social relations makes it almost undeniable that it provides us with happiness, more so than unhappiness. While certain drawbacks of social media do exist, it is up to us as users to exercise individual responsibility to ensure that our experiences are enjoyable ones that improve our lives and ultimately provide us with more happiness than unhappiness.

Comments:

Relevant arguments with clear links made to happiness. As the given claim in the question is "more unhappy than happy" it would have been meaningful to incorporate evaluation in your supporting points by considering the potential and real unhappy effects that could still arise. Good choice of apt examples to demonstrate arguments. It was good that you did attempt to link your points to some traits and features of social media. This could have been more consistently done and further explained across arguments. Fluency in language made this a joy to read.

How far can people believe what they watch or read in the news today?

Annya Lee Xinyu, 22S35

As the saying goes, "Whoever controls the media, controls the mind." Whether the information published in the news is reliable or not, it has the power to influence one's thoughts and opinions. As such, with the growing influence of the media, it is important for individuals to discern the information presented to them. While they can still believe what they see on the news, due to checks and balances by governments, the increasing advancement in technology makes it difficult to do so. Furthermore, news companies may also manipulate information for their own benefit. As such, while some information may be credible, people largely cannot believe what they watch or read in the news today.

People frequently cannot believe what they see in the news today, due to the developments in technology that has led to the proliferation of fake news. The advancements in technology have allowed for more platforms to be created for news to be shared. It has given people the ability to upload information online, where such information can most often be used as a source for news reports or articles. In addition, people's over-reliance on technology today has led to the rapid spread of misinformation among consumers, as they do not check for the credibility of such information, hence, leading to the spread of fake news. This can be seen during the 2016 United States Presidential Election, where an article was published about the Democratic Party presidential candidate Hilary Clinton. The article stated that a background check had been conducted and found that she was linked to a "child sex ring" in a pizzeria. She was also further accused of using her own private email server in governmental affairs, which was deemed as unprofessional. However, this article was later discredited, as there was a lack of evidence to support their claims. Despite this, Hilary Clinton lost support due to the quick spread of information to other media platforms, including Twitter, where individuals used the hashtag #PizzaGate to share the news. While fake news has always been present in society, the rise of technology has exacerbated this due to increased accessibility. With the spread of misinformation, it may mislead individuals to perceive such news as true and utilise them on more official platforms like news articles. Therefore, people cannot believe what they see on the news as the information presented may not be factually correct.

In addition, people often cannot believe what they see in the news today, as news stations may manipulate information for their own benefit. As the majority of news stations receive funding from governments to operate, they are often subject to the control of higher authority. As such, profit-maximising firms will be more inclined to publish news articles that are in the favour of governments to retain their profits. As governments aim to gain support from the public, they tend to utilise news platforms as a tool for propaganda. Furthermore, since the public do not have the capability to monitor the actions of their government, they rely on the news for information on

political issues. This allows governments to manipulate news through news stations to their advantage. As such, the news presented may be biased as governments can hide their misdoings and the public is unable to gain access to the full truth. For example, during the Russian-Ukrainian war, Russian news reports portrayed Russia as the 'defender of the motherland', and the troops were protecting their country against attacks from Ukraine. News reports censored images and videos of the war, and it was reported that many Russian civilians did not comprehend the severity of the war. As such, this proves that even though the news sources were official, the information presented may not be fully accurate, as they are subject to the control of higher authorities. Therefore, as being an independent platform may not be ideal for many news companies due to the high costs, they will tend to comply with the demands of higher authorities to ensure that they continue to benefit.

Naysayers may argue that people can still believe what they watch or read on the news due to the laws set in place by governments to regulate the media. Laws are set to limit the spread of false information by making it illegal. Furthermore, it also ensures that there are regular checks and balances to sieve out any false information in news articles. Harsh punishments act as a method of deterrence, as individuals will think twice before uploading information online due to the high penalties. Such laws can be seen in Singapore, where the Singapore government introduced the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) to help limit the release of false information. It was used against a news platform known as The States Times, when they presented an article that cited a parody page. The post was regarding a People's Action Party (PAP) member, Ms Rachel Ong, and her alleged religious affiliations. As such, harsher laws ensure that news stations will receive the right information from reliable sources before publishing news to the public. Therefore, people can still believe the news, as they have a higher likelihood of providing the right information with stricter laws.

While it is true that laws can help to restrict platforms from spreading fake news, the growing trait of liberalisation in today's world has made it more difficult to restrict people's actions. Setting harsh laws that restrict one's freedom of expression may be seen in a bad light in liberal democracies, leading people to lose support for their governments. As such, in order for governments to remain in power, they tend to set policies that accommodate the masses, and will not set harsh laws to regulate the news media. The lack of strict laws and the limited capability of media platforms to check every piece of information presented will result in blurred lines between credible information and misinformation. For example, the United States is a liberal democracy where residents strongly believe in individuals' right to free speech and no strict laws are set in place as it is an unpopular measure among the people. As such, this resulted in the rise of false information regarding the Black Lives Matter protests uploaded on social media platforms. This eventually led to an exacerbation of the tensions between racial groups in America. Therefore, the belief in individual's right to free speech, especially in democracies, has made regulation more difficult and resulted in unreliable information presented.

In conclusion, while it is true that there are regulatory measures, it cannot be applicable to all countries; the news presented today is largely unreliable, and people should not believe what they see on the news. As such, the growing spread of fake news and manipulation plays a larger role in shaping the reliability of today's news. In the long run, governments can consider adopting technology as a tool to fact-check news reports. This would be a more efficient and effective method of regulating the news.

Comments:

Points raised are relevant and thoroughly explained, with relevant and detailed examples for support. Balance can be more fairly considered, and the amount of substantiation for each point increased. Language use is assured despite awkward organisation at times.

How far can people believe what they watch or read in the news today?

Low Sze Yoong, 22S51

We live in an age in which it has never been easier to follow the news. In the past, we could only read the daily newspaper to find out what was happening around the world. Today, with the internet and globalisation, news outlets, independent journalists, and TV stations can give us 24-hour live reporting on anything that goes on, in every corner of the world. However, this also means that it has become more difficult to avoid the news and the concomitant challenge of discerning which are true and which are lies. When faced with so many conflicting facts and opinions thrown at us by the news articles, social media, and TV stations without any special expertise to ascertain their reliability, it is difficult to trust what we are being told. While many would defend the journalistic integrity of most of those who produce the coverage of global events that we consume, I believe that the ordinary man has to be wary of the reliability of most of what they read or watch.

It must be conceded that the virtue of journalistic integrity and the commitment to the truth guide most of the mainstream media outlets that produce these articles and programs that we watch and read. It is not just lofty ideas immersed in their motion, such as the Washington Post's slogan, "Democracy Dies in Darkness," but one that guides their day-to-day lives and decision-making. These news organisations hold themselves to high standards when trying to find the truth, making sure their reporting is authenticated by taking readings and tips from trustworthy sources. Many of them also commit to publishing what may be inconvenient truths, regardless of what their repercussions are, and ensure they put equal scrutiny on public officials regardless of their identities. For instance, the New York Times has held itself to the commitment of telling the American people the truth without fear or favour, and has produced important pieces of investigative journalism over the years. The Times previously investigated politicians from both sides of the aisle for political wrongdoing such as insider trading in the US Congress, Donald Trump's role in overturning the 2020 election, the false resume of Republican congressman George Santos, and President Joe Biden's mishandling of documents. Times reporters have also risked their lives and safety to report on the war in Ukraine, braving fears of retaliation from Russian authorities. This level of honesty and integrity extends beyond the newsroom. Times editorial and opinion writers are held to high standards of transparency and integrity, as seen by their requirements for clear disclaimers of any political or personal leanings. This consummate professionalism exemplified by one of the leading news organisations is shown by many other respectable media outlets in America and around the world, from historical ones like the Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post to Malaysia's Sarawak Report, which exposed the 1MDB scandal. This gives us faith that what we read or watch in the news is free from misinformation, biases, and hidden agendas.

Despite the commitment of major news organisations to uphold the honourable virtues of truthfulness and transparency, many of them do not always live up to them. While they present the need for factual reliability, many of them often overtake factual errors, whether unwillingly or wilfully. For example, the 1618 Project was a major initiative by the writers from The New York Times to examine the role of slavery in American history, to shed light on racism and colonialism in the country. Although it was initially lauded as a seminal piece of reporting, it eventually drew criticism from academics and commentaries about various factual inaccuracies and representations that were overlooked by editors, despite being checked before publication. This certainly tells us to treat the proposed integrity of news organisations with scepticism.

Indeed, there are news organisations that have disregarded the principles of truthfulness in pursuit of their own commercial agendas. For news organisations, while they undoubtedly try to produce reliable reporting, some relax these high standards in the fear of poor ratings and in order to serve their readers what they like, in a bid to salvage their business prospects. One egregious example is Fox News, a major conservative TV network owned by media tycoon Rupert Murdoch, which had its TV ratings crumble after calling Joe Biden the winner of the 2020 elections. It made continuous efforts to win back its Republican viewers by spreading falsehoods that the elections were “stolen” and there was widespread voter fraud. These claims turned out to be baseless, as admitted by its producers and anchors. Moreover, there have been news organisations that have adjusted their commitment to free and fair reporting to fit their own commercial agendas. In a bid to adopt a more 'moderate' coverage to win back viewers by shedding its image as a liberal-leaning TV network, CNN organised a sensational interview with then presidential candidate Donald Trump. It turned out to be a platform for Trump to propagate false information and spread lies on prime-time television, including claims that the election was stolen and that the mob that stormed into the US Capitol was “peaceful”. When news organisations are willing to sideline their commitments and duty to report the truth without prejudice in favour of their commercial survival, we cannot readily believe what they tell us.

In today's social media era, most people do not just get their news from mainstream sites and TV networks. The advent of social media platforms has lowered the bar for entry into the new industry, and many independent news organisations have flooded these platforms, changing coverage in a wide range of styles and formats. However, this has allowed for the entry of new articles that are less committed to telling the truth as compared to enhancing their personal agendas. Some of these are publications with strong ideological leanings which direct headlines with sweeping statements and language designed for readers. The news feed of most people today is just like an ocean, populated not just by dolphins but also by sharks, and it is not easy to tell them apart.

There is another fact that predates the internet: scandals and celebrity news. Many news outlets, even to this day, have employed sensation and exaggeration as a tried and tested strategy to grab the attention of readers and manipulate their emotions. This strategy is particularly prominent in the tabloid industry, which has long focused

on celebrations, gossip, rumours, and drama to excite readers, even if these came from dubious sources and turned out to be fake. The most well-known publication in this trend is the UK tabloid The Sun, which has a reputation for using dramatised stories filled with fabrications and dusted facts to create articles. This represents media outlets that have no regard for the truth, are reliable sources of information, and are not ashamed of it.

In today's news ecosystem, all that glitters is not gold, and many things turn out to be all but glided. While there is certainly an abundance of news organisations and journalists who put in tremendous efforts to tell the truth without prejudice, there are many others who fail to do so by feeding readers with their agendas. As informed citizens, we must be discerning and critical when consuming the news and avoid giving blanket trust to anything we see so that we can separate the truth from the lies and protect ourselves from being manipulated.

Comments:

Very good knowledge of the issue, and an intelligent and generally thoughtful argument. Confident use of language that is very fluent and persuasive. Good work!

How far can people believe what they watch or read in the news today?

Foo Fang Jun, 22S62

With the advent of the Internet, access to daily updates about incidents around the world has never been easier. Through the Internet, individuals can simply scroll to their preferred news agency's website or social media account to obtain a wealth of information at their fingertips. People's access to the news can also vary, from traditional articles to entertaining videos explaining the news. Critics argue that this ease of access to information has only made it more difficult for people to believe what they watch or read in the news today, since misinformation can be spread quickly to a very wide audience through the news. Technological advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI) have only facilitated the spread of misinformation, as such, technology lets malicious netizens pass off their misinformation as legitimate news. Critics also point to the increased political bias in news agencies today, shaped by their billionaire investors to only promulgate a specific political or social narrative. However, I contend that people can still believe what they watch or read in the news today, by only consuming news from reputable agencies. Furthermore, people must make the salient effort to corroborate news sources to ensure its accuracy, before believing in its content.

Detractors argue that the internet is a puissant tool for the manipulation of people, with technological advances in AI and Deepfakes allowing malicious people to pass off their misinformation as legitimate news, hence, people cannot possibly believe everything they see or watch in the news in this modern day. Case in point: in 2016, after WikiLeaks released emails linking Comet Ping Pong, a pizzeria, to Hillary Clinton's campaign, many users on 4chan, an anonymous messaging board, started to conspire that there was illegal activity ongoing. The news that Hillary Clinton allegedly controlled a child-sex trafficking ring in a restaurant spread like wildfire among gullible Facebook users who did not bother to fact-check the story and instead instantly believed its legitimacy. Thus, these netizens were manipulated into supporting Donald Trump despite the "news" on Hillary Clinton having no concrete facts to back it up. Critics argue that the fact that misinformation can be spread so easily, even among the well-educated American population, renders it impossible for people to believe what they read or see in the news today. Critics also point to the use of hoax photos in Singapore to convey the false news that Punggol Waterway Terrace had collapsed. The photograph spread of the apparent disaster appeared legitimate, as the photograph showed that an entire section of the roof had collapsed. While there was no disaster, chaos was still sown among Singaporeans, eroding people's trust in what they read or see in the news today. Hence, critics posit that it is impossible for people to see or believe what they see in the news today as technological advancement has allowed misinformation to run rampant across the internet.

While this school of thought has its merits, I contend that people can still believe what they watch or see in the news today, as people have become increasingly aware of how to sieve out legitimate news to believe, from the pool of misinformation proliferated in the world today, because governments have taken concrete steps to stop the spread of misinformation. As children, Singaporean students are taught the importance of taking the effort to corroborate and compare various news sources during Character and Citizenship lessons, to ensure the accuracy of the news reported. Additionally, during Social Studies lessons, students are also taught how to sieve out sensational stories from legitimate news, by removing those news articles with strong language exaggerating the seriousness of problems faced by the world from their reading list. This ensures that students are left with reputable sources to believe in. Furthermore, governments around the world have recognised the danger that misinformation poses to people's trust in what they can believe in the news today, and have made clear efforts to punish sources of misinformation. For example, Germany proposed fines for the social media giant Facebook, of up to 500 million euros for each fake news story it fails to take down from the site. Such fines force social media companies to regulate their own platforms to ensure only legitimate news is reported, hence ensuring that the people can still believe what they watch and read in the news today is indeed true.

Proponents of the counterargument postulate that people cannot believe what they watch and read in the news today, since today's news agencies' independence is steadily being eroded due to the influence of their investors, who may wish for them to only proliferate a certain social or political narrative. Such pernicious influence on news agencies makes them biased, and has the potential to create echo chambers, where people only promulgate views following a specific narrative while ignoring the other equally relevant pieces of news that do not conform to their parochial beliefs. For instance, numerous conservative billionaires in the US own a large share in Fox News, a traditionally right-wing news platform. This has led to Fox News to report increasingly pro-conservative views, by giving representation exclusively to right-wing politicians like Donald Trump through their interview sessions with him. Similarly, News agencies like the Washington Post, owned by the richest billionaire Jeff Bezos, published news articles exclusively defending billionaires from proposed increased tax rates. Hence, it appears that such clear bias in our news agencies has become extremely prevalent, rendering it impossible to find neutral news sources to believe in.

Despite the clear bias in our news networks, it is still possible for people to believe what they watch or read in the news today, as the Internet has given everyone in the world almost unlimited access to a myriad of news sources around the world. While it is inevitable that news agencies will be susceptible to bias, people can still eliminate the possibility of confirmation bias by having a wide range of news sources to read from. Through the Internet, people in the US can compare news articles evaluating Joe Biden's presidency through the more critical lenses of Fox News and those from more liberal news agencies like NBC News, allowing readers to weigh each side's arguments before coming to a conclusion on what to believe in. The dominant news agency in Singapore, The Straits Times, has also made the effort to encourage

diversity in the opinion pieces they feature in their daily newspapers, by including articles from professionals working in various fields and featuring news reported by other reputable news agencies like the Reuters. Therefore, given the sheer diversity in news sources that people can access, it is still possible for people to find news sources with novel arguments to expand their worldview, thus ensuring that people can still find legitimate news to believe in.

To sum up, while it is true that it is increasingly difficult for people to discern misinformation and biased news sources from legitimate ones, I believe that people can still believe what they watch or read in the news to a large extent, provided that they make salient efforts to corroborate news sources and have a diverse reading lists. Furthermore, governments have also implemented policies to punish and eliminate sources of fake news, to ensure that they are not promulgated through the mainstream media. Hopefully, people will be increasingly inculcated with media literacy skills in the future to ensure that they can still discern the truth in what they choose to believe in the news, while independent news agencies not yet touched by investors with vested interests will continue to remain paragons of truth in this modern age.

Comments:

Examples need to be accurate. Don't make claims you are not sure of. Overuse of Singapore examples. Fluently argued, otherwise. Keep it up!

‘The arts should never be censored.’ Do you agree?

Quek Yu Tong, 22A11

The Singaporean artist Tang Da Wu famously wore one of his art pieces in defiance of censorship. The jacket, with the words “Don’t give money to the arts” sewn in yellow thread at the back, was a protest against the National Arts Council’s (NAC’s) restrictive and self-censoring practices. Since then, there have been many discussions in the world of art, with some concluding that “the arts should never be censored”. While I do concur with many of the sentiments surrounding this idea, it is not one I fully agree with, as some artworks can be viewed as violating public decency and even be dangerous to society.

The idea that the arts should never be censored is not one I always agree with, as some art pieces can be seen as violating public decency. Artists, in their desire to challenge the status quo and express new ideas, often use new and provocative methods to do so. However, not all these mediums, whether in art, or film, or theatre, are well received by the public, and can be viewed as indecent. Sometimes, they can be illegal. Take the piece “Brother Cane” by artist Josef Ng. A performance piece that set out to bring awareness to and protest Singapore’s criminalisation of homosexual acts, it involved Ng stripping down in public and cutting his genital hair. As a result, Ng was arrested for public indecency. In other spaces, extreme acts have made their way into works that might even involve harm to other living beings, such as the art piece “Helena” by Marco Evaristti. Containing multiple fish in blenders, the piece was meant to explore ideas of free will and cruelty, with viewers being able to kill the fish by turning the blender on. While meaningful in their themes, such artworks do break moral and possibly legal conventions in their execution. Censorship, then, is done to deter other artists from engaging in similar acts, instead of simply silencing their self-expression. This important role then makes me disagree with this idea.

More than breaking laws, the idea that the arts should never be censored is a potentially dangerous one, as some artworks can contain ideas that are dangerous to social cohesion. As a medium of communication, the arts have an incredible ability to express ideas to many people in simple ways. However, this strength might actually pose a threat to society, as artists may use the various mediums to spread ideas that harm individuals and the community at large. Certain groups may find the contents of works insulting, and take it upon themselves to act against them, causing more violence and chaos. The novel “The Satanic Verses” by Salman Rushdie is an example. Containing themes of religion and identity, the novel was not well received by the Muslim population, resulting in threats to the author and even physical violence from more extremist portions of the faith in France. As a result, the Satanic Verses is banned in multiple countries around the world, including Singapore. The play “The Children’s

Hour” by Lillian Hellman also received the same fate, being banned in London due to touching on themes of homosexuality and infidelity. When works approach subject matter that is sensitive, poor handling or a malicious agenda from the creators can enable the spread of offensive ideas, which can polarise society and even lead to violence. The choice to censor these works is then motivated by a desire to maintain social cohesion, rather than limit creative expression. Thus, I do not fully agree with the statement.

On the other hand, the arts’ ability to explore sensitive topics is something important that should not always be limited. When handled correctly, the arts become not a platform for hateful and dangerous ideas, but a way to explore difficult topics that might be difficult to discuss or convey. The novel “Maus” is an example of one of these banned works. Depicting images of the Holocaust, the dreary and dark contents allow the reader to understand the true horrors perpetrated by Nazi Germany in a more approachable manner, and open discussions of tolerance and discrimination. Making art too “clean” and sanded down to avoid censorship can have the opposite effect, as it can obstruct the message the author is trying to send. This is an especially acute problem when trying to teach important life lessons to readers, as a weakened message reduces the story’s impact. This is a criticism many have of the novel “The Boy in Striped Pyjamas” by John Boyne, which depicts the same setting as Maus. However, the construction of the novel from the view of a German boy, while more palatable to audiences, fails to depict the reality of Nazi Germany, and its poor treatment of Jews. For certain, more controversial, dark topics, a level of disquieting realism and discomfort is needed, which might offend certain sensibilities. Censoring these works and only allowing certain, sanitised depictions of difficult ideas hampers discussions. Proper dialogue, when facilitated by the arts, can allow for social understanding, reducing the stigma and helping to bring awareness around them. This aspect of the arts is important, making me agree with this statement to some extent.

Beyond ideals, the arts are an important platform to challenge preconceived notions. The arts, acting as a medium of self-expression, carry the ideas of the artist and their desires for change in certain spaces. When presented to the audience, this can inspire a paradigm shift, not just in moral ideas but what it means for the medium. The play “Emily of Emerald Hill” by Stella Kon is performed by a single actress but tells the full story of one woman’s life. It was not only revolutionary for its portrayal of women’s issues and Peranakan culture, but also for its usage of stagecraft. Even the simplest artwork can challenge ideas about the medium, such as the painting series “Who’s Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue” by Barnett Newman. While just a simple red canvas, Newman wanted the artwork to be an expression of freedom by liberating colour from established meanings. Despite the seeming harmlessness of these works, one of the paintings was slashed by a viewer who saw it as an insult to the German flag. The work is a symbol of the challenging power of art and the effect it can have on someone. This quality is what makes the arts valuable to people and allows the mediums to evolve. Without the ability to redefine and explore aspects that may be

seen as controversial, man's ability to express himself and see new ways of looking at the world stagnates. Censoring these works would then be a loss, which is why I agree with the statement to a certain extent.

Overall, the idea that the arts should never be censored is one I do not completely agree with. While art does have incredible potential to overturn outdated ideas and bring awareness to sensitive issues, it could just as easily disrupt society and violate social conventions. A balancing act is then needed to ensure the arts remain a viable and effective medium of expression. Artists must also take care in their explorations in their work to present a nuanced yet impactful message.

Comments:

Language used is fluent, but paragraph endings are repetitive and ineffective. Points are insightful and well explained, but some points are unclear. Examples are detailed and relevant.

‘The arts should never be censored.’ Do you agree?

Damien Chin Yong Wen, 22S52

For as long as humans have existed, the arts have also existed, hand-in-hand. From ancient cave paintings to the Mona Lisa and Mozart, and now NFTs, the arts have adapted to evolutions in humanity and permeated through eons of changes. Simply put, the arts' place in society is always crucial, from being an expression of aesthetics and beauty to serving as a medium for critical thinking and propagating critiques of social or political issues in society. Without the arts, humans have few other ways to express what it truly means to be human. Yet, governments and organisations sometimes choose to censor the arts, as they may promote harm and violence, or cause political or social instability. This fine line between the benefits and consequences of art's intrinsic value as a medium for expression has to be treaded cautiously, which is why the arts should be censored sometimes.

To understand why I believe that the arts - despite the value it brings to society - should sometimes be censored, one must consider the contrary. Some detractors proclaim the common sentiment that the true beauty of the arts lies in its ability to carry meaning. Artists use art as a medium of expression, sharing their own beliefs and messages through their brushstrokes and music notes. This makes art the perfect tool for political and social change. For instance, the hit movie and books of the Hunger Games series resonated with the people of Myanmar for its depiction of political oppression. It inspired the citizens under the military regime, and the Burmese used the hand symbol from the Hunger Games as a rally cry against the government. This simple hand symbol from a piece of fiction being able to inspire hope and political unity is a clear example of the arts' ability to carry meaning for good. Additionally, music like Lady Gaga's "Born This Way" can have similar effects. This song about having confidence in being yourself has long served as an anthem for the LGBT movement globally. Artists can instil meaning into their craft, and this allows art to be a powerful tool for uniting people and bringing about political or social change, one that is able to transcend language barriers or geographical shackles. The arts, no matter the form, can and are used as a voice for the oppressed, and this is why there is reason to believe the arts should never be censored.

Yet, the arts' ability to inspire the masses and carry meaning can also be a threat to political and social stability. With the arts' invaluable power of being able to propagate messages, no matter the language or culture, it is no wonder that it has been used to spark forms of uprising and political instability. For instance, during the Cold War, many communist parties spread propaganda posters that were able to rally people with similar ideologies together. In Singapore, similar tactics were used, and this led to a few uprisings throughout the 50s and 60s, where socialists and communists engaged

in protests against the government, which caused social divide along political lines. Art has the power to unite people, and while this can be a boon when it comes to giving a voice to the oppressed, like in the case of Myanmar, it can also be a bane when the art opposes social norms and causes extremism, creating political or social tensions. As such, in these extreme cases, governments should seek to censor the arts and maintain political and social peace, especially in cases where the arts can cause harm through its political messages.

Similarly, art should be censored when it causes harm to people. Artists can use the arts to explore the many aspects of human nature, for instance Edward Hopper's famous painting of a clown giving us insight as to what it feels like to be an outcast in society. However, sometimes artists may take it too far, and their art may bring about the dark and twisted parts of humans. For instance, Marina Abramović's "Rhythm 0" was a performance art piece where she stood still in front of a table of 72 different items, including guns and knives. Audiences were allowed to interact with her, some choosing to feed her grapes, while others instead chose to tear up her clothes or even threaten her with a knife. This shows how art can sometimes bring out the worst in people, and this may even lead to violence or harm to others. Because of the arts' ability to explore human nature by allowing audiences to think critically and reflect on themselves and society, the darker parts of humanity are sometimes brought up, such as death, greed and violence. This could potentially be dangerous, and this is where governments must step in and censor art. Governments must discern how far is too far when it comes to the exploration of human nature with art, in order to prevent the worst in people from emerging.

However, the censorship of the arts can sometimes be counterproductive and instead help the artist further emphasise an artwork's meaning. When governments choose to censor the arts, it is usually due to the artwork's potentially causing harm or political and social tensions. However, there are instances when governments choose to censor artworks not because of the harm it could do to society, but because of the harm it could do to them. In Singapore, this has happened a few times. Most notably was the banning of the documentary "To Singapore, With Love," which shared the stories of political dissidents that have been exiled from a place they called home. Originally a critique of the Singapore government's treatment of political dissidents and free speech, the banning of this documentary only further proved that the local government was against free speech when it harms their reputation. Similarly, Singapore's "Sticker Lady" went viral for posting humorous stickers that poked fun at Singaporean culture on traffic lights and other public spaces. Yet, the government fined the artist for breaking vandalism laws. This caused an uproar online and brought the virtues of expression and free speech in Singapore into question. Hence, governments may sometimes choose to censor art that critiques the government, and while this may seem like a good idea to maintain social stability and prevent violent coups or uprisings, it usually ends up being counterproductive and only fuels more criticism of

the government. As such, a government should not censor art that criticises them, and instead work on improving their systems or weaknesses for society's benefit.

With the advent of social media and new technology, the arts have evolved along with it. Most recently, art has been created using artificial intelligence tools. For instance, a piece of art created with AI won the Colorado State Fair art prize, much to the shock of many artists. This is because art made by AI is not truly original, instead it used the online database of existing artworks to artificially produce an image or artwork. This has led to many artists questioning copyright laws, and how they apply to AI art. Governments should regulate such artworks and create definite rules that not only protect artists' intellectual property, but also censor AI art simply because it poses a large threat to artists' livelihoods. After all, why spend years mastering your craft when an artwork can be made for free with little effort?

Overall, art should only be censored when it proves to be a threat to humans. In such extreme cases, art may harm people with the ideas and messages it incites, sparking violence and tensions in society. Other than such extreme cases, art should not be censored. Art has an important place in society, providing humans with a medium of expression and giving us new perspectives on global issues, and humanity itself. As William Blake, an English poet, once said, "Human beings need art to nourish their souls".

Comments:

Comprehensive essay, well-organised with good substantiation.

Is it true that social media presents too many temptations for young people?

Danielle Lim Rae En, 22A11

“We all need a digital detox”. As reality television and Internet personality Kim Kardashian so aptly concluded, many would agree that this statement stolidly reflects the negative implications of using social media. One big argument that could be used to substantiate the above assertion is that social media nowadays simply presents too many temptations for the young, culminating in various poorly made decisions. Though detractors may argue that this is not the main aim of social media, I ultimately still opine that this tool largely does put forth excessive temptations for the youth in today’s world.

Proponents of the stance that social media presents few temptations for young people might refer to the main objective of social media platforms, contending that their creation serves different functionalities. Undoubtedly, the biggest feature of such platforms is in the name itself, to enable more “social” activities online. With that in mind, it could be said that the main use of these social media platforms revolves around forming new connections virtually or even strengthening old ones. Conflating such activities with that of a more insidious intention of luring teenagers in with temptations hence sullied the supposedly pure intentions of such socialising platforms. Social media in its simplest form merely acts as a means for its users to share snippets of their daily lives with friends and followers, hence illustrating a lack of malice as suggested by the claim that social media provides excessive temptations to youth. Additionally, the recent shift towards more minimalistic forms of social media heralded by a greater desire for teenagers to show greater authenticity online has seen extensive success. A salient example of this would be the rise in popularity of social media applications like Locket and BeReal, the former allowing its users to send snapshots of their day to friends who are able to view them as a widget, and the latter prompting its users to upload in a single post a day upon receiving a notification, regardless of where they are or what they are doing. In doing so, both applications are clearly trying to inspire social media users to return to the core of online socialisation, doing away with the fluff of the predominantly popular applications. The seamless integration of such applications into teenagers’ lives and widespread use of them hence demonstrates how such forms of social media seem to be what young people seek. Therefore, it could be argued that social media presents few temptations for young people, as this notion contradicts its main objective of connecting young people and enhancing virtual socialisation.

While the above claims are undeniably valid, it would be myopic to base one’s entire argument on the intentions of social media platforms without considering the outcomes as well. As such, I posit that social media does in fact present too many temptations for young people due to the utilisation of such platforms in a consumerist era. It is a known fact that many - if not all - of today’s youth have some form of online

presence in the realm of social media. As such, large corporations and brands have also decided to ride this wave of digitalisation in their advertising campaigns. Acquiring new business strategies such as paid promotions and sponsorship deals for social media influencers, these brands have shifted their focus to digital marketing in the hopes of attracting more young prospective buyers. This, coupled with young people's deep-seated desire for validation by their peers in both online and physical spaces in their developmental years, engenders the rise of widespread temptations for teenagers to purchase the latest "trendy" items as seen on their social media feeds. For instance, the influencers on TikTok, Instagram and YouTube frequently conduct "hauls" from their large online purchases, inspiring their young and impressionable viewers to use the same products, leaving links to said products in their video captions and descriptions, often presenting them as "life hacks" that improve that improve one's quality of life. The easy access to these products via the links contributes to the already large appeal. Hence, a visible luring of teenagers with the ruse of supposedly "relatable" influencers is seen, demonstrating how social media, when utilised for purposes other than its intended as, results in the creation of many temptations for its young users to participate actively in consumerism. Additionally, the terminology "flex" has been coined to describe social media users who boast of their extensive material collections. upon seeing these lavish and - oftentimes unnecessary - extravagant lifestyles that others lead, teenagers would feel a sense of envy and hence might fall into the trap of being tempted to accumulate wealth in the same fickle manner. Thus, the misuse of such social media platforms by money-hungry companies and individuals seeking to show off their excessive riches undermines the original intentions of such platforms and makes it so that they present overwhelming temptations to young users.

Moreover, social media presents excessive temptations for its young users due to its propagation of unrealistic and, at times even unhealthy beauty standards. Though there has been a shift in desire for greater authenticity online and for influencers to post less idealistic content, unrealistic beauty standards are still rampant, especially in the spheres of social medium which young people frequently use. Popular influencers like Anncy Twinkle and Kylie Jenner post flattering pictures of themselves online post-plastic surgery, garnering thousands of positive comments from young fans both praising and envying their transformation. While the stigma surrounding undergoing plastic surgery has undeniably lessened and the undertaking of such processes are more socially accepted, it is still acknowledged that the online promotion of such life-altering procedures to impressionable teenagers may not be the most favourable. This hence creates the temptation for teenagers to resort to similar means to correct perceived flaws in their features or enhance others even if it is unnecessary simply to fit into the online standards of beauty. An even more concerning phenomenon is that online communities such as r/weight on Reddit that promote eating disorders and show drastic transformations of once-obese individuals. Upon stumbling onto such groups online, youth may relate to the issues faced by individuals dissatisfied with their weight and are hence tempted to resort to similar horrifying measures, potentially jeopardising their health. Hence, social media does present

many temptations for youth to modify their appearances via the propagation of beauty standards.

Lastly, social media presents excessive temptations for young people to explore. The rise of “vlogging”, a video diary of sorts, has resulted in many young people perusing the channels of popular travel bloggers like Nate and Kara. Just by watching a short fifteen-minute video, teen users are instantly transported to another country, alongside an influencer they revere. Having a great desire for novel adventures, this provides teenagers with a great want to similarly embark on such journeys abroad. As such, vlogs appeal to the cravings of young people, they could be tempted to travel or seek new experiences abroad as well. This can be seen in the way “trendy” spots have popped up like the Pink Wall in Los Angeles, or certain food items like bingtanghulu and mochi have gained virality and teenagers act on their temptations, travelling to experience what they have seen online. Henceforth, social media does present excessive temptations for teenagers to travel overseas in order to satiate their desires for adventure.

In conclusion, the ubiquitous nature of various social media platforms, coupled with teenagers’ innate desires for validation, novel experiences and admiration has culminated in such platforms acting as means for teenagers to be tempted easily. As such, perhaps we should all take Kim Kardashian’s advice. A periodic break from social media might not be too bad after all.

Comments:

The identification of situations that exist to tempt young people was accurately described and the examples were relevant and current. Consider addressing the notion of the keyword “temptation” more analytically by explaining how social media platforms enhance the appeal or allure of the actions or behaviour so much that young people have difficulty resisting them. Avoid short forms in a formal academic essay. Otherwise the essay was competently written. Watch out for illegible handwriting though.

Is it true that social media presents too many temptations for young people?

Josh Kong Jun Han, 22S52

Young individuals in the midst of their personal holistic development are highly susceptible to the many temptations in life. With little experience of the real world, the young people of today are more likely to act on these temptations, leading to dire consequences. Especially with the rise of social media, there are some who opine that it presents temptations to an excessive extent, proving to be a bane towards the development of young people. However, there are those who see the benefit of social media as a widespread platform that educates the young people on controlling their temptations, leading them down the path of success. As for myself, I believe that social media does not present too many temptations for young people, as it plays a vital role in teaching them the value imperative to surviving in the real world.

For others who see social media to be presenting too many temptations, one reason could be due to its easy and convenient use, that allows for a high level of freedom to post any and all content. With basically every individual in possession of a smartphone with access to social media, its convenience is unquestionable. With one tap of a virtual button, any Tom, Dick or Harry can easily put up all types of content, including those to harass or insult others. This may prove to be detrimental to the young people of today, who highly value this freedom of expression and are growing to become more opinionated, as it could lead them towards the act of freely mocking anyone online, translating to similarly inappropriate behaviour in real life. A prime example of this would be the increased trend of "fat-shaming" in our society. As young people online are exposed to more fitness content with its rising popularity from famous bodybuilders like Chris Bumstead and Ronnie Coleman, it has adversely led to them looking down upon those who are out of shape. As such, it is common to see social media posts targeted at these individuals solely to mock them for their body type, a sight which has slowly but surely been observed in the young people of today. Now, these young people have even gone on to insult these out-of-shape individuals in their social lives, where they ostracise and humiliate based on body type. This exemplifies the disadvantages of the convenience and freedom of social media, which has normalised such disdainful behaviour because they had brought this freedom of expression to real life. By the exposure of such content, the young people of today have assumed that they can act on the temptation to humiliate others with no consequence, which will eventually lead to a more disconnected community. Hence, there are those who believe social media has presented too many temptations, as its endorsed freedom of expression has taught the young people of today that they are free to act on the excessive temptations presented in the form of content posted on social media.

Nonetheless, I continue to believe that social media has not presented too many temptations to the young people of today, as the media content is easily

controlled by government authorities. In countries like Singapore and China, which are known for their explicit control over social media content, content creators on social media platforms are unable to freely post anything they want with the risk of facing legal consequences. With the mindset towards developing the young people of their country, these government authorities have implemented laws to ensure the appropriateness of content being presented. One such law would be the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA), which aims to prevent the spread of fake news to the public on these social media platforms. If the young people of today were to be presented with temptations of ludicrous opportunities like online gambling sites having high profit margins for participants, they will not hesitate to enter these websites, ignorant to the fact that they are disguised lies. As such, with government laws like POFMA in place, social media platforms would be unable to disseminate such temptations in the first place, keeping young people safe. This shows how the safety of social media platforms is ensured through government action, preventing the excessive spread of temptations online that could potentially harm the young people in their country. Hence, it is not true that social media presents too many temptations to young people, as these platforms can be controlled by the government authorities to prevent the excessive spread of these temptations online.

Finally, I do not believe it to be true that social media presents too many temptations to the young people of today, as while there are temptations online, they are balanced with the surge of positive messages that can inculcate proper morals and ethics in the young people of today. While it is impossible to disagree with the fact that temptations are proliferated online, the unsung heroes who spread motivational and educational content online cannot go unrecognised. In the midst of temptations presented, there is content that pushes people to work hard for their success in spite of the difficulties in life, to stay focused and ignore the distractions that both social media and life throw at them. Notable motivational content creators would be David Goggins, a distinguished member of the United States military forces who has completed gruesome ground, naval and air military training regimes. Known for being initially overweight and lazy, he has displayed how one can pick oneself up no matter their initial position in life to become successful. Kris Krohn, a successful billionaire who grew his wealth through his endeavours in real estate, shares his experiences, healthy lifestyles and priorities in family over materialistic desires, and inspires his viewers to work hard to achieve success. These two notable figures, among the numerous motivational speakers online, show how in spite of all the temptations online, there is content helpful in ensuring the young viewers learn to live life in a proper way. With them around to educate the young people on social media, a good balance between temptations and education content is achieved. Hence, I believe that it is untrue that social media has presented too many temptations to the young people of today, as motivational and educational content creators have risen up to warn the young people against the temptations on social media, allowing social media to still be helpful in the development stages of young people.

In conclusion, it is untrue that social media presents too many temptations to the young people of today, as despite naysayers believing that the freedom it provides

adversely affects the normalised behaviour that the young people may pick up to potentially exacerbate the alienation between certain groups of people, the content it presents is easily controlled by higher authorities and the existence of content creators to combat these temptations allow social media to remain a boon to developing the minds of young people. In hindsight, while some consider social media to be a threat for the future, it is nonetheless a tool that we must utilise properly to reach the young people of a digitalised era.

Comments:

A clear stance on social media's influence on young people, primarily positive. Consider how difficult it is to censor certain type of content or influence, and look at higher level trends that goes beyond specific cherry-picked examples.

‘Tourists today show little respect for the places they visit’. Is this a fair comment?

Kellie Tan Hui Min, 22S35

From the temples of Bali to the castles of Italy, those looking to travel have a wide variety of destinations with strong cultural significance, deep historical value and much heritage to choose from. Tourism is often said to connect people from all around the world to places with different customs, cultures and values. With many differences, there is a need for respect and understanding. However, some may feel that tourists today show little respect for the places they visit. While this might be true to some extent, it might not necessarily be fair to generalise that all tourists today show little respect for the places they visit.

Some tourists today show little respect for the places they visit, as their main goal of visiting different countries might just be to relax and unwind. Given the stressful and fast-paced lives that many lead today, tourism and going on vacations may just seem like a way for those stressed and carrying the heavy burdens of life to simply relax and take their mind off their troubles. Going on vacations may just be a temporary escape from the hustle and bustle of their lives and thus they might not necessarily be bothered to care for the culture, values and customs of their holiday destinations. As they might see vacations and travel as their time to unwind, considering the significance of the places they visit and sightsee might not be of great importance. Thus, they would show little respect for the places, due to the lack of inherent interest in understanding the complexities of the culture and heritage. For example, tourists who visit places like Hawaii might simply want to enjoy and indulge in the sun and the sea instead of understanding and appreciating the culture of the Kānaka Maoli. Tourists are also usually enticed by the ethereal beauty of architecture and art rather than concern themselves with the significance of such attractions like the Nijō Castle in Japan, or the Bathhouses in Rome. Therefore, due to a lack of interest in the places, and viewing vacations as just a way to unwind, some tourists today end up visiting places with little understanding or respect for them.

Furthermore, some tourists today may seem to show little respect for the places they visit, due to their insatiable need to take pictures and share moments even if it may not be appropriate. With the widespread use of social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook and TikTok, people have an innate desire to constantly share and post about all their adventures with little regard for the appropriateness of doing so. With many focusing on taking the best photos, with the best angles and most unique backgrounds, many tourists may lack respect for the place as they intrude into private places and sacred areas, just to take pictures to share and give their best poses. This is further fuelled by the onset of various trends on social media, which push for some to share and pose in the most absurd ways. For example, in 2023, a tourist received backlash online for posing nude at a sacred tree in Bali, Indonesia. This is not just an isolated case, as there have been many pleas to tourists visiting Bali to

dress more appropriately when visiting places like temples. Some have little respect for the religious significance of such sacred places with a long heritage and significant meaning to the locals, as shown through the way these tourists act, the pictures they take and the clothes they wear. Therefore, some may seem to show little respect for the places they visit due to their focus on just taking pictures and sharing, as they seem to hold little regard for the importance of the places.

However, not all tourists show little respect for the places they visit. In fact, some are extremely keen on learning and appreciating their cultures and traditions. As the world gets increasingly interconnected, the diverse nature of the world is often highlighted and seen through social media. With such diversity being highlighted, many also see the need to appreciate and understand other cultures and traditions. There are many immersive tours that one can take to experience the culture of the places they visit, that include activities such as wearing ethnic costumes and enjoying cultural delicacies. Some tourists often dress up in hanboks when they visit the Korean Imperial Palace or hanfu when they visit the Forbidden City in China, and attend tours to understand and appreciate the culture better. With places like Langkawi that offer Kampong Day programmes and cooking classes, tourists visiting other countries can better understand and appreciate the various cultures and traditions. This is also made easier with the rising use of social media platforms, as people of different countries and cultures can share their traditions on these platforms, and even talk about and discuss more sensitive issues to give visitors more prior knowledge about the cultural norms and appropriate behaviours in the particular country. This allows them to act in more appropriate ways that show respect for the places they visit. As such, some tourists do show respect for the places they visit.

In conclusion, the comment that 'tourists today show little respect for the places they visit' might not necessarily be a fair comment for all tourists. Some do show respect and appreciate the various aspects of the culture, while there are also some that have little respect, and might seem ignorant of the appropriateness of their actions. However, respect is very important; hence, tourists should be understanding, and try their best to not offend others as they visit the various countries. Since respect is a two-way street, locals should also respect the tourists likewise, and try their best to help tourists better understand the appropriateness of their behaviour.

Comments:

Odd that you have only one paragraph, on your stand and two on the opposing view. Perhaps you took the wrong stand? Overall, though, there is, consistent relevance to the question. There are plausible reasons offered for tourist behaviour. You could have focused more on the behaviour as well as given a broader range of examples. Still, decent effort overall.

‘Tourists today show little respect for the places they visit.’ Is this a fair comment?

Lo Tian Walker John, 22S42

As soon as China announced that the harsh lockdown measures of 2022 were coming to an end, the long-suffering tourism industry rejoiced. The Food and Beverage, hospitality, and retail industries all rushed to hire staff, and send out advertisements to attract the Chinese hordes, resulting in the stock market seeing an unprecedented rise. However, was this election really justified? Although tourism is a massive industry that boosts economies and provides livelihoods, tourists themselves can often be rude and indifferent to the cultures and locations they visit. While there are still some thoughtful, appreciative tourists who show respect for the places they travel to, by and large, tourists today care little for the great wonders and civilisations they visit.

Some detractors of the view that modern tourists show little respect for the places they visit argue that there are many travellers who indeed put a great deal of thought into the countries they visit, absorbing the culture and beauty, much like the tourists of eras past. Earlier, in the 20th century, the world was less globalised and less affluent. The people who could afford to fly and experience foreign environments appreciated this rare opportunity, making sure to obey local customs and not damage places of interest. Similarly, the conscientious tourists of today would take to travel blogs and the internet to find niche destinations with a great deal of significance, in order to truly take in the new sensations without tarnishing its well-being. This can still be seen in less established regions, such as the villages of the Hmong people in Thailand and Vietnam, where the tourists, who are few and far between, have not destroyed the rustic feel of the villages. This shows that tourists nowadays still have the ability to show genuine respect for the places they visit.

However, the aforementioned arguments start to crumble when we consider the nature of the modern tourism industry. Being a ruthless, profit-driven machine, it is only a matter of time before the masses discover the “low-key” destinations of their more considerate brethren. With deep pockets and a selfish air, the common tourist nowadays barges into peaceful, traditional towns, to take splendid photos for their friends and leave without a care. Of course, their friends would also want a taste of this exotic experience, and before long, the old dirt roads of a small village are trampled by hundreds, if not thousands, of unappreciative tourists. This has already occurred in a great number of less developed countries, like Thailand, whose rural villages, such as the Karen villages, turn into inauthentic replicas of their past selves, because of the sheer volume of uncaring foreigners who come to see the sights. As such, even the efforts of respectful tourists to preserve the places they visit are consumed by the ravenous modern tourism industry.

It can be said that currently, tourists show little respect for the places they visit because of the environmental pollution and degradation they cause. The world is full of self-obsessed, self-important people who think that because they pay for a service, the providers of the service should be responsible for cleaning up after them. In the past, the ruins of Angkor in Cambodia were visited infrequently, only by brave explorers who took care not to leave any trace of the adventure. However, Angkor nowadays is unrecognisable to someone who visited it just 25 years ago: the many great lawns are strewn with plastic bags and disposable containers discarded by visitors, and the great stone steps have caved in from the unrelenting march of the millions who visit yearly. The tourists simply have no respect for the historical and cultural importance of Angkor. Even more repulsively, a tourist in Italy was recently arrested for carving his name into the Colosseum, one of the most important and long-lasting wonders of the Roman Empire. When interviewed, the tourist explained that he did not know the ancient arena was “something important”, revealing not only his disregard for the country he was in, but also his lack of respect for the people who had to take care of the monument. Thus, the modern tourist displays through his thoughtless polluting and damage to the environment that he cares little for the place he visits.

Tourists today also reveal their inadequate respect for their destinations through the superficial nature of their travels. In the past, tourists might pick a single region, or even city to explore, over a great number of days, so as to pick up and learn deeply about the place they were in. Nowadays, tourists feel the incessant urge to pack as many attractions in as few days as possible. Travelling in packs, like the animals they travel to visit, tourists alight from their super-buses to walk once around the place of interest, be it the National Zoo or a statue of a person of great impact, snap a quick picture for Instagram, and rush off to their next attraction. It is simply impossible for such a visitor to develop any meaningful connection to the place they have visited. This disturbing phenomenon is mostly the fault of travel agencies who offer discount rates for large groups to travel on a fixed itinerary with a jam-packed schedule. In particular, this tasteless behaviour is encouraged by “tourist” cities such as Barcelona in Spain, where the city even has special routes for the buses to travel between the Picasso Museum, the Park Güell and the countless cathedrals. With even the destinations themselves egging on carefree tourism, no one can fault modern tourists for their superficial visits and lack of respect.

Tourists today can also be described as having little respect for places visited as they partake in traditional activities that have become over-commercialised. While an economist might argue that demand for services naturally results in more producers appearing to provide that service, the truth of the matter is that tourists who do something they perceive as immersing in the culture, are actually contributing to the loss of that culture for monetary gain. The gondolas of Venice, once used as the primary form of transportation on the Venetian lagoon, now wait idly by a pier, with

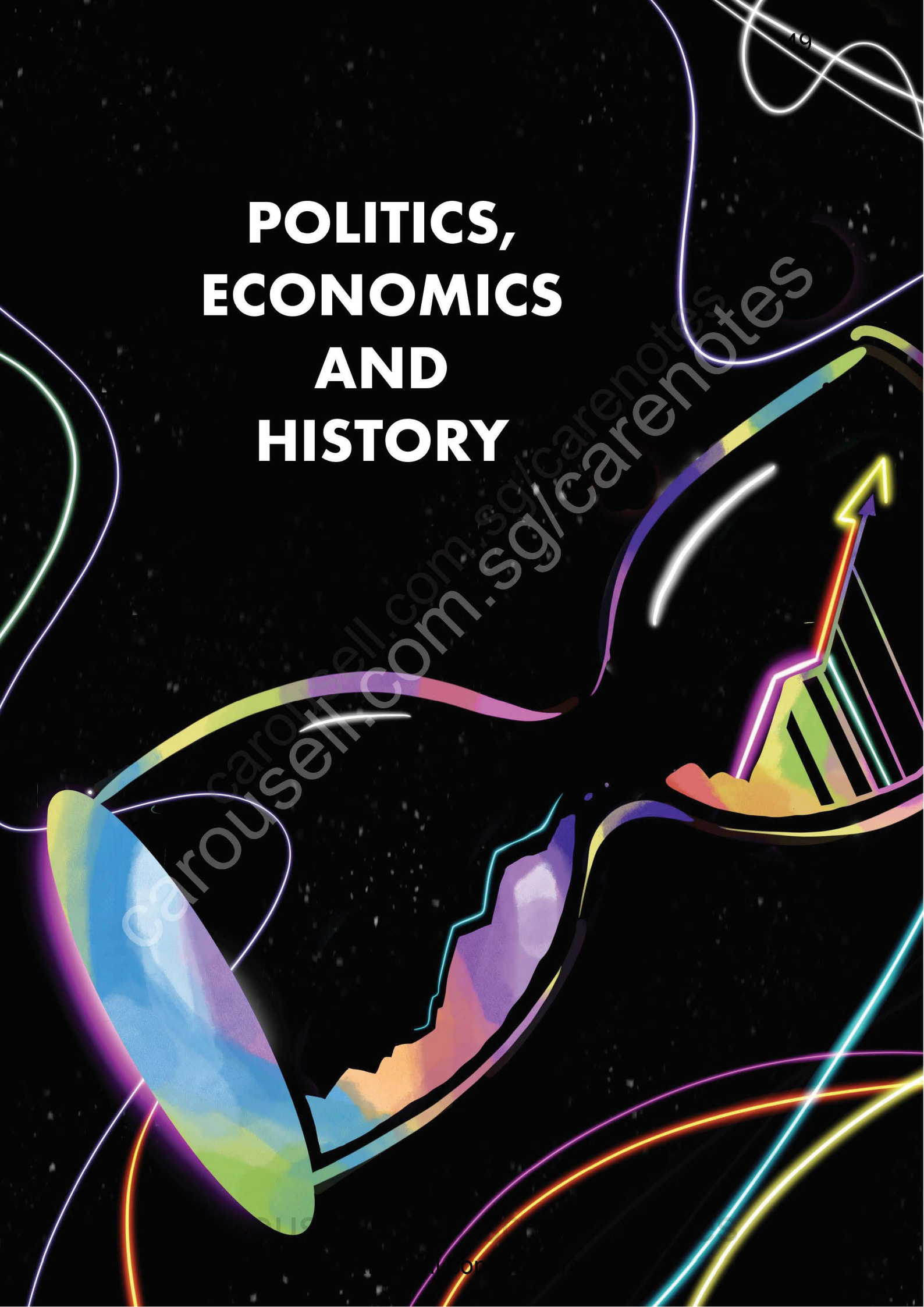
their owners heckling pedestrians for a taste of the true Venetian culture. Likewise, the wayang kulit puppet shows of Indonesia, which used to be an important cultural display reserved for special occasions, can now be found every other hour in every other corner of Jakarta, catering to starry-eyed visitors. By speaking with their wallets, tourists have caused so many cultures to become artificial, commercialised replicas of their former glory. Few tourists of the past would have considered such tacky behaviour acceptable.

In conclusion, there is much to show for the case that tourists today have little respect for the destinations they travel to. From their disregard for the pollution they cause, to the preordained, hurried itineraries, to the participation in inauthentic experiences, the modern tourist could not be more different from his predecessors, who travelled for the love of adventure, and the preservation of sites for the next person. While it is certainly impossible to change the habits and actions of every tourist overnight, perhaps as individuals, we could take time and effort to plan, explore and respect our next fabulous destination, leaving it in just as good a condition as we find it in.

Comments:

Tian, you have a way with words that really lent itself to this topic! Beautifully written and a joy to read! Please keep it up!

POLITICS, ECONOMICS AND HISTORY



The Sunlit Grove

"No, no it's okay
It's okay
Let's play a game: fingers to our lips
Who can keep quiet the longest?

I'll meet you in the sunlit grove
Where the sun glitters on your face
Where Abba and Mama are waiting
We will feed your sister all the dates she can eat
And shoo away cats from the food

I will be outside a moment
Please be brave
If I don't—no. I will come back—I'll wait for you There"

Silence.
Was a reminder
A warning

Only trees remained

She stood amongst the olives
Each one,
A lineage
Each groove,
a
Tear

Dolot Shine Mikaela Maminta, 23S41

Shoes.

I stand in the desert
Dust scratching my bare feet
In my lungs
In the air;
My world with it

I stand in slippers
Fluffy. *Itchy*
Watching snow globes
Shaken and shaken
Grey rain covers one world, obscuring mini families
While another is a pepper shaker, seasoning dinner

I stand before you, shouting
Shoes on cold pavement
Calluses biting at feet
Yet unable to rest because they can't, *they* won't, and **they** never will
Because we live in a world where children have to strap on leather soles
Too big for their feet
While adults toddle
In light-up shoes.

Dolot Shine Mikaela Maminta, 23S41

Money is a record too.

civilisations, cults, secret societies

notebooks

parchment

partially burned.

survived.

look

earnest *and* rich,

get a

for sale

up

Adapted from *Batman Begins*, (2004), p. 105

Wang Ray Kit, 23S63

The Fall

than four hundred centuries
years

for more
for more than four hundred

"I don't know for sure."

the civil war going on

"I don't know.
where you are, what's happening to you?"

out of here.

Let's get

"Why?"

leadership
unknown variable in a galaxy

are afraid of

afraid.
Oh no,

"I don't know. No one does."

hit me sharply, viciously in the chest
the Council predicted the outcome

for centuries.
a noise like a child being confronted

Adapted from *The Fall Of Hyperion*, (1989), p. 48

Koh En Ci Carissa, 23A11

Untitled

eternal ignorance of mankind,
more than illusions.

be no

lonely, agonising struggle to create
truth of his own sensations that remorseless fidelity to the
the spirit of love for mankind.

Source unknown

Anonymous

Consider the view that city life is losing its appeal.

Elaine Wong Xin Yi, 23A13

Whether it is “concrete jungles that dreams are made of” or a thriving urban landscape nestled in the midst of a flourishing garden, the phrase “city life” historically evokes in each of us a deeply attractive prospect of a better, fuller and more connected life. However, in the wake of modern civilisation, how much of that ‘00s Alicia Keys song still rings true? Many today find the very city structure itself a symbol of mental fatigue, compounded by various other environmental stresses such as rising prices or growing pollution. Nevertheless, cities are not static nor standard issue. With increased efforts to revitalise infrastructure, the original appeal of city life - that vast interconnected web of interaction and opportunity - still retains its shine.

To begin, the vast majority of those who no longer find much appeal in city life are usually those salaried 9-to-5s, who have spent the better part of several years working in its crowded and fast-paced environment. After all, city design does not exactly lend itself to slow, meandering walks that restore one’s peace of mind after a long day. The very definition of a city is a compact, congested mass of people who are frequently on the move. A recent estimate ranked those who live in city-dominated countries as some of the fastest walkers in the world. Singaporeans, who spend their whole lives on an island city, ranked amongst the fastest walkers. As such, though the lure of a well-paying job still beckons to them, many city-dwellers find the extended mental fatigue caused by such a harried lifestyle overrides any original appeal. This has become even more evident post-pandemic, where these workers were able to experience work and life that was dictated less by a rushing crowd, and more by their own schedules and preferences during the work-from-home arrangement at the time. In fact, Western Europe is currently experiencing a mass exodus of migration towards the rural countryside as remote working is made increasingly viable, with companies like JustCo setting up remote workspaces. This trend is so pronounced that in France, there is a new class of “néo-rurale” or “new-rural”. Evidently, holding down a well-salaried job is no longer exclusive to the city. As such, multitudes are now questioning if the corresponding compromise of poor mental health from such a busy city lifestyle is still worth making. Most, unfortunately, seem to be coming up short.

Moreover, beyond concerns for individual well-being, there is an exponential range of practical reasons why city life is no longer as attractive. As the population continues to rise, and living areas become congested, the surrounding environment is besieged by huge volumes of waste that city cleaners and garbage disposals simply do not have the time, capability, or sufficient monetary incentive to tackle. In Varanasi, even their sacred river, the Ganges, is riddled with pollution from the surrounding city,

from plastic bags and bottles to local defecation. Moreover, the pollution is not just physical. Noise pollution has only become prevalent in the digital age, whether it comes from inconsiderate neighbours or the general ambient sounds of the city. All of these are brought to a head with increasingly exorbitant cost of living. In New York, a single one-bedroom apartment can occupy a bracket of up to \$3,450. Clearly, with such a degraded environment, one would be better off luxuriating in a decent country home than cramped and barely affording a flag in the worst part of town. Hence, whether it is the trash, the noise or the price, the appeal of living in an upscale city appears to have been met with significant deal breakers.

On the other hand, a closer examination will yield a different observation. Though cities struggle with the mental and physical implications of their design, many city councils are working and have worked to change that. Cities from developed countries have indeed made significant strides in improving their environment, such that city life can now balance its appealing hubbub of interconnectedness with the peace and space characteristic of the countryside. London, for instance, has taken this to a happy extreme. Its citizens have now planted so many trees that it can now be semantically considered a forest under the definition set out by the UN. Cities that have historically have a rapport with nature are also looking to restore this connection, with the East Kolkata Wetlands of Kolkata City not only envisioned as a veritable wealth of soul-soothing greenery and diverse wetland land, but contributing to local lifestyles with 100,00 tons of fresh 'table-fish' per year and a similarly fantastic amount of vegetables. Moreover, even highly built-up cities such as Hong Kong are re-working shared spaces. A design team recently transformed a shared courtyard from a polluted corner in the street to a bright pink micro park, complete with pink benches, pink chess tables and pink walkways. What was originally an unpleasant obstacle on the way home has now fostered new bonds and hobbies amongst the community. As such, the resources and enterprising spirit gathered by a city is exactly what enables such innovations to take place, improving not only the environment, but the atmosphere and even access to healthy lifestyles through fresh food or space to exercise. With these advancements, the appeal of city life has not only been retained; it has grown.

Furthermore, it would be remiss not to acknowledge that the main draw of city life is still incredibly applicable today. Regardless of whether someone is an aspiring youth, born with a less financially stable background, a newly arrived immigrant or even all three, the sheer opportunity synonymous with city life will always be appealing. Cities are the epicentre of innovation and creation, with the bases of many multinational corporations setting up shop in New York, London, or even Singapore. In stark comparison to the countryside, or even the suburbs, city life gives one access to an extraordinarily diverse job industry that simply cannot thrive anywhere else. Be it selling stocks, designing clothes for New York Fashion week or auditioning for Broadway, it is the feeling of living amidst possibility and success that draws one in. Though the reality of truly achieving may be less rose-tinted, the apparent accessibility

of opportunity and “romantic readiness” of a city’s atmosphere is a unique and yet global appeal that will persist as long as the young and hungry continue to dream.

All in all, the appeal for city life is founded on a universal aspiration for the opportunity and success symbolised by the city itself. Though poorer conditions might spark concerns for mental and physical well-being, particularly if one is raising a family, recent efforts in most cities have more than been able to achieve a balance between the positives of the city and the countryside. As such, city life still continues to be appealing through the changes and evolution of human priorities.

Comments:

Essay is well-structured, with analysis of city life's evolving appeal, effectively contrasting the downsides with ongoing improvements. However, some sections could be more tightly focused.

Consider the view that city life is losing its appeal.

Tan Wei Qing Evelyn, 23S36

Acting as a beam of hope and sanctuary from what many deem as failure in life, cities have always been seen as places of opportunity to prosper for anyone who ventures and settles there. High-rise concrete jungles, bustling roads, breeding spots for the rich and wealthy, cities and in turn city life has been viewed as promising, elite and where successful individuals reside. Be it fame, better access to technological advancements, or economic stability, it is indeed the place where happiness and fulfilment can be found. However, taking a step back from the practical allure of urban life, what lies in the city is often less than positive. City life has been steadily losing its appeal, with oversaturation of workforce driven by a capitalistic society, as well as the worsening environmental pollution brought on by increased traffic and carbon emissions. The satisfaction once associated with city life has slowly begun to diminish. And with regards to the view that city life is losing its appeal, I would have to agree. Though it is a place with better access to technology, and opportunities to increase one's standard of living, the severe trade-offs of mental stress, poor physical health due to pollution, and increasing competitiveness of society has made life in the city less than desirable.

Firstly, while addressing city life, many find it and still see it as appealing due to it usually being the centre of business, where there is a higher guaranteed economic prosperity through higher-paying jobs and more comfortable working environment. As compared to rural areas, taking, for example, certain small villages within China versus Beijing, more opportunities for economic growth can be found in the big city. Students from all around China commit themselves to their studies just for a chance to be able to apply and be accepted to study in the top universities based in Beijing, such as Peking University and Tsinghua University. To many, this acceptance would mean a guaranteed escape from their current lives of monotony and simplicity. Higher standards of living are often associated with the city life, and with the everlasting need and want to improve and strive for betterment, people work incredibly hard just for the chance to leave their lives in a village behind to start a new one in the cities. Its attractiveness also stands from the access to better healthcare, with more cutting-edge technology found within cities that ensures health security for city inhabitants. Compared to that of rural villages, their lack of specific infrastructure and amenities will, more often than not, result in complicated illnesses such as leukaemia or coronary heart disease being untreated or even undiagnosed. Rural inhabitants will have to make costly trips into the city just for a checkup and diagnosis. Patients with more severe illnesses often do not have the time or money to spare, leading to higher death rates. Thus, city life provides a greater chance of survival, be it income or healthcare wise, which proves that it still has its appeal.

Despite this being true to a certain extent, the health benefits of city life are often offset due to the increasingly higher levels of pollution experienced by city dwellers, which worsens the health of long term residents. New York, a city in the United States, has been the talking point of excessive amounts of air and noise pollution. This is a result of such cities having a high population density, thus a large amount of commuters in public and private vehicles travelling as part of their everyday lives. Henceforth, there is an immense amount of traffic and in turn, road traffic noise and carbon emissions are expelled into the air of the city. In addition, those living near the infamous commercial intersection and tourist destination Times Square are subjected to an overbearing amount of light and noise pollution, coming from the numerous digital billboards and advertisements. And in the long term, the constant exposure to this chaotic environment often becomes too physically overwhelming, leading to a decrease in one's overall health. Even the flashing lights from the X sign recently installed at, and promptly removed from the top of Twitter's headquarters in San Francisco, has not only caused annoyance but physical fatigue to residents living opposite to the headquarters, due to the headaches and disruption of sleep caused by the intrusive lighting. This shows how the bustling nature of cities, its introduction and increase of unwanted and excessive noise, light and deterioration of air quality, has made it less appealing to inhabit. Moreover, as a result of capitalism, expansion of industrial activities and increased automation of society itself, reliance on burning fossil fuels for energy all in the name of consumption and ease of life has increased. The original appeal of city life will thus inevitably decrease with the continued growth of pollution and its negative impact on one's physical health.

Furthermore, mental health is an aspect of life that the city life may easily worsen, making it unattractive to certain people. The 'rise and grind' mindset of city life is highly intense, and way more so than the slower paced lifestyle of the countryside. The commonly practised 996 working hour system by companies in China - a work schedule where employees work from 9 am to 9 pm for 6 days a week - is just one example of the vigorous work culture of city life. Studies have also shown that many Singaporeans are stressed about work, be it regarding job security or their income, to cope with a rising cost of living. There is an inherent capitalistic and materialistic mindset that is prevalent in the city, as compared to the rural countryside where the value of life may be more on the simple side and less materialistic, thus having less stress to work and compete with the rest of the society. There has been a rise in cost of living within cities due to shortages of produce and housing, with some not able to cope with it due to pre-existing debts in the form of student loans in certain cases. This pushes people to work extremely hard just for basic necessities, and earning enough to survive in the city. The growing cost of living in cities like Brighton has often resulted in many to abandon the city life for a quieter and slow paced approach to life. In addition to worries about work and income, political unrest has also become a more common occurrence throughout the years. Cities are seen as a place of change and opportunity, which often leads to protesters staging protests or riots in these places,

due to a higher chance of media coverage and their voices being heard. And especially in recent times, where there is a steady rise of instability in society due to more polarised or outspoken groups of individuals, cases such as the 2019 Hong Kong police riots show a city's active engagement in politics and its attractiveness to those trying to make a change, especially in the important Central and Kowloon districts in Hong Kong. This may often cause disturbance and disruption to one's life, with the closing down of shops, fear of the potential violent riots and general instability of political and societal aspects of city life resulting in the loss of appeal in such life. Therefore, with the amount of strain and toll it has on the mental health of residents, city life slowly but surely loses its appeal.

Lastly, with the mindset that cities provide opportunities and a better life, this incentivises people to move to the cities in pursuit of betterment. This will however cause an oversaturation of labour and high competition between people, resulting in some having wasted their time and effort as they are unable to compete with the rest. Inequality between skill sets and capabilities between city dwellers and outsiders is a prevailing issue common in schooling and jobs. Many outside the city seek better education, and travel to the urban areas just for that. However, there is a simplistic view many have towards education within the city, that it is the hypothetical 'golden ticket' out of poverty. The idea of a guaranteed success in life and their future has enticed many to strive for it. Nevertheless, the increasing individualistic mindset of the younger generation, wanting to make it big in the city and improve their own lives has often led to an overabundance of students and workers flooding to cities, in hopes of improving their specific living or financial situation. From Shanghai Jiao Tong University, there was an estimate of nearly 11.6 million students graduating in 2023. However, for some fields, the pandemic and regulatory changes have eliminated many of the jobs once popular among young people in China - jobs that many took courses in university in preparation for. This increase of labour and students, with cities unable to accommodate the rise in number of people, may cause shortages in work and schooling resources respectively, causing those who came to the city to not get what they were looking for. Subsequently, many who were unsuccessful in their education or unemployed are stuck in the city and forced to live a life of poverty or return back home, having wasted their time. Cases of such undesirable situations happening through rural-to-urban migration will result in the discouragement of those who wish for a city life, who no longer find the 'promised prosperity' associated with it appealing due to high competition and high chances of failure.

In conclusion, city life is something that people are and will continue dreaming of. However, with gradual shifts in perception, and more prioritising their mental wellness, physical health and time, less are willing to pursue the city life. Even those living within the city have begun to lose interest in living in these urban areas, with many travelling out to the suburbs or countryside to detox, taking a break from skyscrapers and chaos of the city. Such an occurrence is unfortunate, but with the uncertainties and negative impacts, it is not unreasonable for people to lose the desire

to live in the city. Too much of a good thing is always bad, and perhaps we as a society will just have to make adjustments to our consumption habits, outlook on life and certain practices we do. Only then, with moderation and changes, can city life become the dream of what it once was again.

Comments:

A well-rounded view of city life's declining appeal, effectively exploring downsides and contrasting them with remaining advantages. However, consider tightening the introduction.

Is technology truly effective in enhancing formal education?

Arin Lau Yi Siu, 23S33

In considering the effectiveness of technology in enhancing formal education, we must first define the functions of formal education. These functions include instilling the necessary knowledge required for students of today's society to acquire the jobs they seek in the future, foster essential soft skills they will require in an increasingly globalised world, and lastly cultivate strong values in students allowing them to tackle even the hardest of challenges. With the rapid advancements to technology, these aims of formal education at the primary and secondary level can be more effectively achieved.

Firstly, in the classroom setting, learning has never been more engaging since the use of technology. Technology creates innovative ways to impart knowledge onto students. Today's generation of students are extremely adept at using technology in their everyday lives. Therefore, when teachers themselves adopt technology into their teaching, it can help to boost student participation. For example, across the world, almost all teachers at primary and secondary levels have used tools such as Mentimeter to encourage class discussion and Kahoot! to check on students' knowledge retention of the curriculum taught in class. These online websites help to gamify the learning process and increase students' joy of learning. At younger ages, these interactive forms of learning can help students understand information more easily. This is proven by Mentimeter, as their slides engage students 96% more than PowerPoint, and raise levels of engagement by an average of 13%. Students may also turn to apps such as Quizlet and Anki to make comprehensive flashcards on each topic with a few simple clicks. The initial barrier that students face, which is the large amounts of time and effort needed to make physical notes, is reduced by these apps and websites, and allows for more time in which students can focus more on learning the content taught in class. Museums and libraries have also adopted technology and artificial intelligence, which get students and others to interact with and learn more about our countries' history. Altogether, implementation of technology increases learning both inside and outside of the classroom, which is one of the biggest aims of formal education, as having a more knowledgeable society means greater economic wealth.

Secondly, technology changes the way soft skills such as communication and teamwork are taught to students. Students today do not just learn how to communicate face-to-face; they also learn how to effectively use technology to share ideas with others. Traditional methods to inculcate communication skills such as public speaking are still in practice today; however, with technology, students can use it to get their ideas across with presentations and other engaging forms. Recently, FrameVR was

launched; it is an interactive tool utilising the concept of a digital gallery, where people could explore and read the information of exhibits, as though they were exploring a gallery in person. The possibilities are endless with technology. Before, group members had to meet up in person to discuss group projects but now discussion is made easier as tools such as Google Meet and Zoom allow people to take their calls anywhere and everywhere. Notion, a collaborative organisation tool can help a team manage deadlines and plan their team goals. With technology at one's fingertips, it opens the doors to many different forms of communication and collaboration, and by exposing students to this, it allows them to get comfortable using these tools to their advantage as the world becomes increasingly technologically advanced.

Thirdly, technology helps to inculcate the values that formal education aims to instil in students. These values include perseverance and resilience. As the world becomes increasingly unpredictable, it is all the more important that education raises students to be adaptable. In order to be adaptable, one must have the resilience to persevere in the face of struggle. This is the reason MOE announced the EdTech Master Plan 2030 recently, to develop student's digital literacy and technological skills needed to thrive in an increasingly technology-driven world. Through the recent development of Student Learning Space (SLS), and the increase in popularity of Google Classroom as a tool for teachers to enhance learning, most assignments have shifted online and promote students' self-directed learning. The self-paced tutorials on the SLS allow students to go at their own pace, and forces students to take charge of their own learning by managing their time well. If they fail to do so, they would fall behind the rest of their peers. Teachers no longer stand in front of the class to give a lecture, but are meant to guide students through any questions they may have about the content learnt online. It is entirely up to the individual to make the most out of their education. Therefore, self-directed learning instils perseverance by making every individual work through their own challenges.

However, some argue that the implementation of technology encourages self-directed learning may not be entirely effective as it does not cater to students with ADHD or autism who may have trouble learning and focusing online. Instead of building resilience by getting students to work through challenges themselves, it may actually only prove to demoralise students further when they are continuously faced with challenges they have no idea how to deal with. Seeing others complete their online lessons can motivate students, but may also discourage them when they see themselves always falling behind no matter how hard they try. Therefore, technology in this case has two sides, and whether technology builds perseverance ultimately depends on the student.

Lastly, when technology is used excessively, it can be more harmful to students than beneficial. For example, AI is used by some Chinese schools to track whether students are paying attention to classes, creating an extremely rigid and stressful environment to study in. Students have to constantly be on high alert, in fear of what

may happen if they do not pay attention. This creates a situation where students pay attention not out of interest but out of fear. Creating a high-stress environment is also unhealthy for students. China's stringent regulations on phone usage and constant interference of the government in controlling students' lives, while with good intentions, does not give them the opportunity to think for themselves. This leads to them having issues with discipline and time management as they grow older. Technology cannot replace the need for teachers either, as although technology may provide us with information, it cannot work through questions students may have in detail and it definitely cannot help a child should they need any emotional support.

In conclusion, technology can help us to enhance many areas of formal education, but it cannot totally replace the need for teachers. When used excessively to keep vigil of students to get them to conform, it can be counterproductive.

Comments:

Essay has a clear structure and many interesting, diverse uses of technology in issue. It might have been interesting to explore how students with ADHD or autism might be able to utilise technology to facilitate alternative learning methods.

“In a world that values peace, conflict should be avoided at all costs,” Discuss.

Chin Evan, 23S32

Conflict generally refers to when two or more parties are unable to come to an agreement over the subject matter at hand, and can be of a violent or non-violent nature. It is undeniable that our world today is one that values and enshrines peace, given the numerous diplomatic efforts poured into preventing war from breaking out, not just between neighbouring countries but across the globe. One may posit that conflict and peace are generally polarising forces and thus cannot co-exist as conflict, especially when violent, can lead to the loss of lives and estranged relationships between parties. While this is indisputable, conflict still has value to bring to the table and thus should not be avoided at all costs but welcomed and resolved appropriately to catalyse social change.

From a moral perspective, critics have lambasted conflict as having violent tendencies that engender collateral damage and the loss of innocent lives, especially when conflicts are escalated by either party, and is therefore a transgression of human rights and thus must be steered clear of at all costs. Our world today is one that greatly values peace. Enshrined in Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the right to “life, liberty, and security” that all humans should enjoy. This demonstrates how the world today has come to a consensus that peace should be upheld to protect such human rights, and, by extension, avoiding conflict. However, conflict is ineluctable, and when escalated to massive proportions and a violent nature, it could lead to the loss of lives uninvolved in the conflict, infringing on the victims’ right to life. This is evident in Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022 from Ukraine’s east, where Putin, wanting to restore strategic depth, launched an attack, hoping to seize Ukraine by force after Ukrainians objected to Putin’s indoctrination. Air strikes were launched, decimating civilian areas and medical facilities, ultimately leading to the loss of many innocent civilian lives. Putin and Russia’s attempted invasion of Ukraine is testament to how the destructive nature of conflict is the bane to achieving the global goal of world peace but also infringes on the rights of Ukrainian lives; thus, such conflict must be avoided at all costs. Wars in general are overly escalated conflicts that culminate in not only unnecessary bloodshed but also estranged relationships between countries, which is a stumbling block to attaining peace. Across the 1960s, Singapore was plagued with a slew of racial riots, given its multicultural yet volatile society, resulting in numerous deaths and damages to property. Furthermore, such conflict led to strained tensions between the racial demographics of Singapore, greatly hindering our pursuit for peace in our diverse society, thus conflicts of violent nature must be avoided even if extreme measures need to be implemented.

While it must be conceded that violence in conflict must be avoided, conflict need not be of a violent nature that culminates in the loss of lives. Conflict is undoubtedly inexorable but ultimately pivotal in our progressive and democratic world today, with its disruptive nature allowing those elected into power to hear the voices of the people discontent with the status quo and implement necessary changes, culminating in greater peace when conflict is resolved. Our world today is not stagnant, with our needs ever-changing, and policymakers may not have the required information about every individual in our society. Thus, non-violent conflict has significant value to our democratic society, where protests are allowed and the masses' voices are heard, pressuring the very people we have elected into power into making systemic changes, thus building a bridge of trust and the foundations of peace. Greta Thunberg went viral at the tail end of the 2010s, pushing for governments to make a change in their industries, which are the root cause of and accelerate the climate crisis, that is reaching or has reached the "point of no return", by skipping school on Fridays to protest on the streets of Sweden. She galvanised the masses with the reach of social media, mainly the youth, sparking conflict between themselves and governments worldwide. Ultimately, their voices were heard as some policymakers around the world have enacted or changed their policies surrounding industrial emissions. While more still has to be done, this is a strong testament to how conflict has the ability to implement changes and make social progress to meet the needs of the people, thereby aiding in the pursuit or safeguarding of peace in the future.

Following the death of African American George Floyd in 2020 as a result of police brutality against the marginalised group for the umpteenth time, massive public outrage broke out among the masses, seeking justice and change from the American Government and Police. Protests were held weeklong for the Black Lives Matter movement, pushing for racial equality, and the eradication of police brutality, especially against marginalised races. People from all walks of life, not just those of African American descent witnessed an egregious case of social injustice and took to the street, pressuring those in power to no longer stay in their ivory towers, but make a change for the better. Police officers on patrol in some states are now mandated to put a camera on their chest recording their actions, as a deterrent against a recurrence of such a transgression. Systemic actions were also put in place in many aspects of society to ensure more equal treatment of people, especially the marginalised, regardless of their background and identity. The Black Lives Matter movement was founded on an unnecessary death, a social injustice, and the resultant conflict helped to catalyse systemic change in a traditionally bigoted system and brought justice to the officer who committed this transgression. However, it cannot be denied that conflict is disruptive, causing social unrest and potentially causing damage to property. This was demonstrated when climate activists damaged and defaced famous and esteemed artworks, or more specifically, oil paintings, with orange paint or soup to make their voices heard regarding the oil industry. While some may take it too far, it is the very disruptive nature of conflict that is pivotal and necessary in our democratic

day and age, where we value peace more than ever, as meeting the needs of the people aids in our pursuit of peace.

Conflict with the violence and disruption it engenders is often self-defeating and only culminates in further exacerbation of the situation. "Violence begets violence." Martin Luther King Jr. once said. This rings true even today, as seen in Putin's aforementioned efforts to acquire Ukraine as a part of Russia has not only left them in a poor position facing global condemnation but are also losing on the Ukrainian Eastern Front, forced back by Ukraine's efforts to protect their national sovereignty. Furthermore, this has only fortified the doctrine amongst the Ukrainians that Russia is not an ally or friend but rather a foe, thus proving this conflict to be self-defeating. Hence, we should still go to great lengths to avoid conflict and seek other solutions where both parties are able to agree upon.

All in all, the argument that "in a world that values peace, conflict should be avoided at all costs" presents a false dichotomy between peace and conflict. Yes, conflict should still be avoided, given that its brutal nature engenders in the unnecessary loss of lives and transgresses human rights. However, there is still value in conflict in our peace-loving world as it can effect change in society, engendering social progress when resolved. In conclusion, conflict surrounding pertinent issues in societies must not be avoided but embraced to meet the needs of the people, thus not all conflict must be avoided at all costs.

Comments:

Your essay was such an enjoyable read. You have a mature understanding of the topic and you have presented a meaningful range of arguments and examples. Your original insights are also clearly developed and conveyed through a strong personal voice. Apart from a few lapses in language accuracy, your use of language is assured and vivid. Well done!

Is life-long learning valued in your society?

Nur Khalisah Nabilah binte Muhamad Faizal, 22S32

Knowledge is power: such is a motto that many, if not all Singaporeans, have lived by from a young age. Renowned for its highly developed and complex educational landscape that is deemed unbeatable by other countries around the world, evident in the nation's consistent top placing in the PISA tests, Singapore has embedded a mindset in many its citizens that education is a gateway to success and job opportunities. Many Singaporeans tend to place the importance of learning mainly throughout their schooling years - as seen through the constant reminders from parents to study hard until they enter university. Nevertheless, this mindset persists until they die, as many people continue to learn indispensable skills to adapt to the ever-changing world. Hence, it is evident that in my society, life-long learning is highly valued, as learning new skills helps us to remain relevant to the job landscape and stimulates our growth.

Critics of my stance may argue that life-long learning is not relevant in Singapore, where most citizens adopt their pragmatic way of life by sticking to the same routine. In such a fast-paced country where work life continues to dominate leisure time, the 9-to-5 working schedule rarely allows for extra attention to learning new skills. This is mainly seen in working adult citizens who have low-paying jobs and are the sole breadwinners of their families. In a Channel News Asia documentary filmed in 2021, it was found that up to 70% of adults from low-income households are less likely to learn new skills to hone their skillset as they grow older. Such a circumstance is largely because they simply do not have the luxury to dedicate additional time to learning and upgrading their knowledge, and would rather stick to being highly specialised in their current occupation to continue sustaining not only their lives but also that of their family members. Therefore, it can be said that life-long learning is less valued by some citizens who want to focus more on sustaining their lifestyle.

Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that life-long learning is utterly crucial in staying relevant to the highly volatile and complex job landscape in Singapore today. With the continued rise in technological advancements and artificial intelligence, our country's dog-eat-dog mindset requires working adults to ensure that their skill set does not become obsolete if they are overtaken by technology, as business prospects change, there is a need for workers to keep updating their inventory of knowledge so that they do not risk being unemployed. To illustrate my point, COVID-19 has taken an enormous toll on the Singapore economy which was experiencing little growth in the past two years. This led to many Singaporeans suffering from job losses as the country eventually fell into a recession, as employers had to weed out workers to save their

businesses. Despite the challenging obstacles they faced, thousands of unemployed Singaporeans turned to the SkillsFuture online platform, where they could hone a variety of new skills relevant to their field of work, like new coding skills, healthcare-related knowledge, or even soft skills such as critical thinking and leadership which are highly valued everywhere. This platform continues to be promoted by the government, which even offers credits to offset the payment for such internships and lessons, making life-long learning even more accessible and affordable. Therefore, life-long learning is becoming increasingly valued by Singaporeans to remain relevant in the workforce.

Additionally, lifelong learning is vital in Singapore, as it ensures that our brains are persistently being stimulated to learn new things in a country with such a large ageing population. It is never too late to learn anything, as seen in how the elderly in Singapore are constantly being encouraged and involved in crash courses and classes conducted by local community centres, with posters of these activities pasted in many elevators of residential estates. Take, for instance, the classes offering personal guidance to the elderly on how to master using their digital devices. Although smartphones were introduced to the world almost a decade ago, a large percentage of the ageing population struggles to operate these devices as they are unfamiliar with the complex functions and buttons smartphones have. Despite this, elderly citizens still take the initiative and are determined to learn new technological skills in the heartlands so that they keep in touch with the rapid technological advancements. Hence, life-long learning is valued greatly in Singapore.

In a nutshell, life-long learning is valued to a great extent in Singapore, as it keeps citizens of all ages up to date and adaptable to the ever-changing world we live in, whilst stimulating our minds to learn new things. After all, it is the knowledge that continues to be the key to unlock opportunities everywhere.

Comments:

Definitely on the right track, but I think you can go even further by coming up with more developed examples in the fourth paragraph and more points. Press on!

“Government today need to work harder to gain the support of their people.” Do you agree?

Angella Santosh, 22S46

It is a commonly established fact that in most societies, the role of the government is to care for the people who have either voted them into power, or supported their rule in some way, either by paying taxes as a law-abiding citizen, or by being beholden to the laws of their state. Another timeless truth is that, whether the state is a democracy or an autocracy, it still requires the support of its people in some way, as the people hold the power to oust the government, whether it be through voting or rioting. However, governments (which are defined as the state's highest body of power) today need to work harder to gain the support of their people, as they are faced with increasingly complex issues and a more politically aware generation that is willing to participate in political discussion. While some may argue that governments can benefit through the use of social media, I believe that this is likely not the case as governments open themselves up to more scrutiny on social media. Therefore, on the whole, I agree that governments need to work harder to gain the support of their people.

Opponents of the view that governments today need to work harder to gain the support of the people argue that social media has made this job easier. They claim that in the past, governments had to organize physical political rallies, meet-the-people sessions, and walkabouts to garner people's support by raising awareness about their efforts through word-of-mouth or even traditional media. However, modern governments no longer have to do the legwork. Instead, they can simply post about their efforts online with just the click of a button (often with the help of Public Relations teams). Critics argue that this shift has cut governments some slack, as they no longer have to spend hours personally convincing people to support them, and can instead exploit the infectious nature of social media to spread the word about their efforts. This is seen in the extensive usage of social media in the 2023 Presidential Elections in Singapore, where candidates opted for video interviews and campaigns instead of predominantly physical campaigns. They claim that at its worst, governments today are able to garner support by “hyping up” their efforts and presenting a heavily manicured image of themselves, instead of allowing people to confront them and ask them questions face to face, which could weaken support for their government. While this is true to some extent, I believe that social media has mostly pushed governments to work harder to gain the support of their people. This is because governments now have to compete with so many voices on social media to garner people's support. In the past, governments may have been able to control the narrative of traditional media, as well as set aside air time for political news. However, with the rise of social media, governments are no longer able to carve out a space for themselves and have to compete with influencers and other loud voices to garner the support of the public.

This is evidenced by how the most followed accounts on Instagram are often those of celebrities, some of whom average 100 million followers, while even the most famous politicians average about 1 to 2 million followers. Thus, governments today need to work harder to gain the support of their people by remaining relevant and appealing so as to compete with other opposing noises for their voters' attention.

Governments today need to work harder to gain the support of their people due to the growth of an increasingly politically active middle class. In the past, many did not concern themselves with political events as they had more immediate needs to worry about, such as putting food on their table. Moreover, many did not have access to adequate information that would help them make an informed choice as to whether to support the government or not. Therefore, most people readily supported the government as long as their basic needs were being met, as they did not seriously violate any moral standards. However, living standards today have vastly improved since then, and there is now a growing middle class that is less preoccupied with their immediate needs and more concerned about the political scene. These people also have increasing access to varying sources of information through the Internet, allowing them to stay abreast of the latest political events. As a result, this group of people has grown increasingly critical of the government. Mobilised by the power of the Internet to connect people from all walks of life, they have even taken to the streets to protest and voice out their concerns. This growing dissatisfaction has been displayed in France, where people have protested in the "gilet jaunes" movement to voice out their frustrations about the government's lack of effort in curbing the rising cost of living, as well as the recent protests in 2023 that opposed the brutality against minorities by a government-led agency such as the police. This was also seen in Niger, where some citizens supported a coup because they felt that the government was not doing enough to counter the insurgents and security issues in the region. All this shows that governments today need to work harder to gain the support of their people, as people are no longer willing to follow them at the drop of a hat. As their citizens become increasingly involved in political affairs, and as their clamours for change have grown louder, governments today need to work harder to prove that they are working to resolve these issues, and are willing to stand by the people in their hour of need, in order to gain their support.

Governments today need to work harder to gain the support of their people, as they are faced with an increasingly complex landscape where increasingly insurmountable problems are building up. Today, more than ever, as the world becomes increasingly interconnected, countries are vulnerable to geopolitical attacks. There is also a worrying trend of rising unemployment and underemployment, even as technology evolves rapidly and displaces thousands, if not millions, from their jobs. Climate issues have also become more serious and frequent in the last few decades, catalysed by rapid industrialisation and exponential growth in unsustainable consumption. Global economies are also being increasingly exposed to economic failures, and more so as globalisation has meant that the effects in one country often

have a ripple effect on other countries' economies. Despite all this, people still expect their government to stay on top of all these issues, as well as find speedy resolutions to the problems that threaten their livelihood. Often, governments that are not able to solve these problems are criticized as being "too distant" from their people and labelled as a failure. This can be clearly seen in the Chinese people's disapproval in the government's handling of rising youth unemployment in China. When the government said that young people should try to adapt to the current job market instead of complaining, it lost the support of many young citizens who believed that the government was not doing enough to value the efforts of scholars and grant them jobs related to their qualifications. This can also be seen in America, where more Americans expect their politicians to tackle a host of issues, ranging from women's health to gun control and climate change, in order to receive backing. As seen from these examples, governments today need to work harder to gain the support of their people, as they are expected to tackle multifarious issues with the limited resources they have. They are also exposed to more scrutiny if they fail to tackle such problems adequately or in a humanitarian way, and therefore need to tread lightly and act quickly when dealing with such critical issues.

In conclusion, governments today need to do more and work harder to gain the support of their people due to the complex problems that permeate today's societies, and due to the increasing trend of political participation in issues. While some may see this as putting unfair burdens on the very people trying to help citizens, I believe that this is a heartening trend in the right direction. The increasing need for governments to work harder to gain support shows that politics is slowly shifting from being a one-way conversation to a two-way dialogue. It means that power has shifted from the hands of a select few to the hands of the people, who are now better able to guide the captains at the helm of their country, to chart their own destinies, and write their own countries' histories.

Comments:

Angella, a largely relevant discussion with many valid concerns and issues raised. Paragraphs are largely well-developed with apt use of relevant examples but some of the evidence could have clearer details or analysis. Good knowledge demonstrated. Confident and clear use of language. A decent effort.

“Governments today need to work harder to gain the support of their people.” Do you agree?

Ian Tan, 22S47

Throughout humanity's history, some form of leadership has always played a vital role in our society. In ancient times, leadership came in the form of kings and royalties, and in more recent times, the government. It is the goal of the government to protect and provide for the people, allowing society to prosper and flourish. However, in a world of increasing complexity, do governments have to work harder to achieve these goals and gain the support of their people? Some argue that it is easier for the government to gain the support of their people as an increasingly globalised world has allowed the government to gain a wider variety of resources and expertise to improve their country. Thus, it is easier for the government to improve citizens lives, and this makes garnering support easier. Personally, although I acknowledge that certain circumstances today have made it easier for the government to gain support to some extent, I strongly feel that other, more significant circumstances have made gaining people's support much harder for the government. Thus, I agree that governments today need to work harder to gain the support of their people.

Firstly, it is important to consider why some may feel governments today need to work harder to gain the support of their people. We live in an increasingly globalised world where resources are shared and countries are more open to migration, and this has allowed economic goals to be more easily achieved by the government. For example, Singapore has few foreign labour restrictions. This allows foreign workers to come to Singapore and undertake essential jobs locals may not be so inclined to undertake, such as construction. This has reduced labour shortages, allowing for greater economic development in Singapore. Less developed countries such as India can also import high-tech capital goods, due to the increasing ease of trade that occurs due to globalisation. This ability of the governments to tap into and share the resources of other countries has made it easier for them to develop the economy and build the necessary infrastructure to allow residents to have better standards of living. This would only make people more content and supportive of a government that is highly capable. Hence, it may appear that it is easier for the government to gain the support of their people, as globalisation has made it easier for the government to fulfil their duties by growing the economy and providing for the people.

However, although globalisation has made governance easier in this aspect, it also brings about many more complex economic and social problems, which makes the government's work much harder. Globalisation has made it easier for foreigners to migrate to other countries. What is problematic is that when these foreigners migrate to other countries and become citizens of that country, they receive the same benefits

as everyone else does. However, it may take time for these migrants to assimilate into society and gain stable employment and income. Hence, these migrants may not pay a lot of taxes, though they receive expensive benefits such as subsidised healthcare, and this puts a strain on the government's budget. Governments also incur opportunity costs, as funds used on migrants could have been used to help and benefit other citizens. Furthermore, migration brings about the problem of social instability, as residents may be concerned about migrants stealing jobs and being a burden to society and may start protests or be xenophobic towards migrants. For example, protests against migrants are common in the United States (US), where residents take to the streets to voice their opinions against migrants. This contributes to the increasing social divide and instability in the US. In order to gain the support of their people, it is imperative that governments are able to adequately deal with the economic and social issues resulting from migration. However, such a task is not easy, as governments have to be extremely cautious and meticulous in any policy they make so they can garner support from both migrants and residents or simply reduce the criticism they receive. Hence, it becomes increasingly difficult for the government to oppose their people with the greater number of issues they have to solve, and governments will have to work doubly hard to gain the support of their people.

Apart from the problems globalisation has brought, I find it harder for governments to gain the support of their people due to higher levels of education, which makes people more critical of the government. In today's world, we see that countries are undergoing rapid development and placing education as one of their top priorities. Many education systems today are also shifting from an emphasis on rote learning to critical thinking. For example, Australia is implementing an academic syllabus that requires students to apply knowledge. As such, people today become more aware of the things that happen around them, and form their own opinions about issues around them instead of following everyone else. They will be critical of such issues, and question the government's intentions instead of blindly supporting them. This has made it imperative for governments to work harder at justifying their decisions to people and being more meticulous in policymaking just to gain people's support. An example that clearly illustrates this is the political atmosphere in Singapore. In Singapore's early days of independence, we were a country where people were poorly educated with relatively low literacy rates. Thus, many people simply accepted what the incumbent government, the People's Action Party (PAP), did. This possibly explains why the PAP would get the majority of votes during general elections, while opposition parties stood almost no chance. However, in recent decades, as Singapore develops and our education levels improve, people begin to question the PAP's policies and are more open to opposing parties. For instance, in the latest General Election, the PAP lost the Sengkang constituency to the Worker's Party. It is evident that education has made people more critical, and governments' moves are more scrutinised, making it important for governments to work much harder to gain the support and trust of their people.

Coupled with higher education levels, the rapid development and usage of social media have made it much harder for governments to gain the support of their people. Media platforms such as YouTube have provided a medium for people to express their views and stances openly. Unsurprisingly, this leads to a greater amount of political commentary, where influencers influence people not to support the government by pointing out flaws in the government. At times, people even use social media sites to draw attention to moments in which governing politicians make mistakes and look clueless. For example, when Justin Trudeau could not answer questions from reporters and dismissed them in an extremely inelegant manner, users took to Instagram to share and ridicule him. Many American social media users also made compilation videos of their president, Joe Biden, tripping and falling. When the flaws of the government are shared and circulated in society, the credibility and competence of the government are undermined, and it is only natural that the government will lose supporters. Humans are not perfect, and government figures are bound to make mistakes. Therefore, since mistakes made by the government are being put in the spotlight by social media users today, governments would have to work much harder to restore their image through publicity and other elaborate methods. This government today definitely needs to work harder to gain the support of its people.

In conclusion, globalisation may have made governance easier in some ways by being a catalyst for economic growth. However, it has brought about many complex social problems for the government. Furthermore, higher education levels and the development of the news media have scrutinised every action of the government. In light of these facts, it is obvious that governments today need to work harder to gain the support of their people. We can only hope that, with all these increasing complexities in society, the government can adopt a routine to protect and provide for the people.

Comments:

Ian, although you limited our examples to mainly Singapore and the US, your arguments were well substantiated by them. A little wordy in parts; you can afford to be more concise. However, good work on the whole!

‘War is a thing of the past, given how interconnected the world is today.’ Do you agree?

Balraj Singh Purba, 22S43

“I know not what weapons World War Three will be fought with, but I do know that World War Four will be fought with sticks and stones.” Sagaciously attributed to Albert Einstein, this adage serves as a stark reminder of the severe ramifications war has on society. While the increasing interconnectedness of economies now has in fact resulted in countries nowadays resorting to cooperation and diplomacy over war, it would be too absolute of a statement to claim that any sentiments of war have been completely eradicated today. Thus, it is my conviction that war is not a thing of the past regardless of how interconnected the world is today.

Detractors of my view argue that war is a thing of the past, as the intertwining of economies have allowed countries to form coalitions that make them a force not to be reckoned with, thus deterring any potential thoughts of engaging in war with them. Singapore acts as a paragon for such an argument. Although it is a small country with relatively little natural resources and land, Singapore has been successful in building relations with other countries to safeguard its sovereignty. One such case would be the Singapore Air Force, which trains its pilots in Australia. They conduct exercises such as Exercise Wallaby, where Singaporean fighter pilots practice manoeuvres and defence strategies alongside Australian pilots. In the event that if either of them were to face any threat, both allies would be able to work together to efficiently resolve the situation. Singapore is also part of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which consists of 10 Southeast Asian countries that assimilate their economies to promote relations and strengthen the solidarity between these countries. They are comparable to the European Union in that they streamline the flow of knowledge, capital, goods and labour between the countries so as to promote the development of Southeast Asia as a whole. Through being part of such an organisation, Singapore is able to strengthen its ties with other Southeast Asian countries, such that if its sovereignty was ever under threat, it can rely on its Southeast Asian counterparts to help protect it. As such, the cooperation of small countries like Singapore with other countries has given these countries the ability to fight for themselves if they were to ever face any aggression. Therefore, the increasing interconnectedness of countries today have turned small and seemingly vulnerable countries into forces not to be reckoned with, which would rightfully make war a thing of the past.

However, such a view would be a parochial one, as the same can be said for countries that want to engage in war. The increasing interconnectedness of economies have also allowed countries that promote aggression to band together to assist one another in carrying out such harmful acts. China is a quintessential example of such a

country. Recently, China has been attempting to gain control over Hong Kong as it is not too fond of Hong Kong's notion of 'one country, two systems'. This had sparked much discourse among countries and resulted in an international vote taking place to decide if China's actions should be condemned. However, this attempt at condemnation was rejected by many African countries who were in support of China. This was because during the COVID-19 pandemic, China helped Africa in dealing with pandemic through manufacturing vaccines for them. As such, many African countries were indebted to China and voted in favour of China's actions. This has allowed China to continue with its attempt to overthrow Hong Kong's government, and make both territories function under one government again. The cooperation between China and North Korea has also made China in favour of North Korea's nuclear tests, which threaten the safety of neighbouring countries like Japan and South Korea. It is then clear to see that the increasing interconnectedness between countries with ideologies of war have increased the threat of wars taking place today.

Furthermore, the increasing interconnectedness of the world today through the use of technology has also made the conception of war a more prevalent issue. Developments in communications technology have allowed the dissemination of ideologies of war to become more widespread. For instance, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria have taken to social media platforms like Twitter - now known as X - to spread their propaganda and ideologies. Their widespread outreach to the rest of the world has spurred many individuals to carry out hate crimes, which increases the possibility of war between different racial groups. For instance, the Christchurch shooting in New Zealand was widely amplified through social media and polarised Christians and Muslims to a greater extent, increasing the tendency of war between these groups. Therefore, the increasing interconnectedness of the world today through developments in technology have resulted in the proliferation of usage of social media, and put different groups at a higher disposition to engage in war.

Finally, the increasing interconnectedness of economies, which can promote diplomatic relations and cooperation between countries, does not change the fact that humans still have an inherent desire to attain absolute power. Just as Japan engaged in World Wars to attain absolute domination, along with Hitler wanting only the Aryan race to reign supreme, many leaders of today share similar ideologies of absolute power. Take Vladimir Putin for instance. Upon hearing that neighbouring country Ukraine was intending to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, or NATO, he was quick to take action and overthrow Ukraine's government, to protect his sovereignty by preventing any possibility of countries from NATO getting closer to Russia through Ukraine. Hence, it can be seen that the innate want for humans to retain power means that the increasing interconnectedness of today's world does not do much to war.

In conclusion, I disagree that war is a thing of the past due to the interconnectedness of the world today for these multitude of reasons, even though it is true that to some extent, such assimilation of economies has discouraged war.

Comments:

Balraj, an intriguing and insightful piece! Your arguments are well constructed, and you have also shared relevant examples. Good!

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‘War is a thing of the past, given how interconnected the world is today.’ Do you agree?

Harnoor Viridi, 22S43

“I know not with what weapons World War Three will be fought with, but World War Four will be fought with sticks and stones.” This famous quote by Albert Einstein echoes the general sentiment of a world emerging from World War Two, a war borne of the failed attempt to ‘end all wars.’ Since then, the imminent threat of a third World War has weighed on the minds of many, yet appears to diminish day by day. In the twenty-first century, the fewer tensions still present are rarely resolved by whoever has the bigger stick, as greater interconnectedness in the world has facilitated communication between countries, through which more pressing and relevant concerns are addressed. Hence, I agree that war has become a thing of the past in today’s highly connected world.

Prima facie, such a stance may seem nonsensical at a time when political tensions are arguably at its zenith since World War Two. Naysayers need only point to the raging Russo-Ukrainian war which has significantly intensified worries of World War Three. Even countries engaging with Russia in any way that could be construed as supportive face backlash, such as the condemnation from other countries towards India for continuing to purchase oil from Russia instead of boycotting them. Moreover, countries like the United States of America (USA) and China are always engaged in some kind of competition, be it regarding space exploration or development of military artillery. Thus, some may argue that the culmination of these various political tensions gives significant reason to anticipate World War Three, and hence war is not a thing of the past.

Although such political tensions still prevail, they are insufficient to drive most countries to war as the nature of relations between countries has drastically changed over the past century. With the exception of a few countries, most countries wish to maintain world peace, as evidenced by the highly controlled and limited interference by other countries in the Russo-Ukrainian war. Moreover, there is significantly less desire for dominance as most countries foster mutually beneficial bilateral relations with others in today’s interconnected world, thus reducing their desire to attack them. One such example is the relations between the US and Singapore. Singapore provided humanitarian aid in 2005 when the US was reeling from the devastating Hurricane Katrina. In return, Singapore has received upwards of US\$17 billion in Foreign Direct Investments from the US. Such positive relations and the formation of multiple alliances such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the European Union echo the camaraderie most countries share today in the spirit of unity, making them less likely to attack others as it would be a detriment to themselves as well.

Today's interconnected world has also facilitated greater communication between countries, which provides countries an avenue to peacefully resolve political tensions or conflict without resorting to violence. The world's general interest in world peace, combined with the easily accessible option of communicating peacefully with other countries, through which much bloodshed, financial strain and unrest can be avoided, has encouraged many countries to peacefully resolve conflicts. One such example is the North Korea-United States summit which was hosted in Singapore, a neutral territory. This summit symbolised peace efforts between the US and North Korea, resolving burgeoning tensions as a result of North Korea's development of missiles. The interconnectedness between the countries allowed them to effectively communicate when choosing a neutral territory, and to communicate with Singapore. All this helped the summit be a success, which contributed to the dissolving of political tension between the US and North Korea, minimising the risk of war between them. As this summit is just one of the many examples of communication being facilitated in our interconnected world, it is evident that greater connections and contact between countries have helped the world move away from war.

Lastly, today's interconnected world has also triggered a shift in the concerns of world leaders, taking the focus away from war. Through facilitated communication, many world leaders have banded together to address major problems such as climate change or poverty, as in line with their present-day duties. Focusing on these issues has further minimised a country's need or desire to invade another, making war even more irrelevant. In the case of human rights issues, the United Nations (UN) and the International Criminal Court cracked down on mistreatment of citizens in Venezuela and the Philippines respectively a few years ago. Similarly, at the annual UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties, countries came together to make pledges to reduce carbon emissions or use of non-renewable sources of energy like coal, as well as the wealthier nations pledging to financially assist developing nations until they could afford to use cleaner sources of energy. Communication between countries provides an avenue for world leaders to address different issues, thus encouraging them to contribute to the collective good. Such alliances also offer countries a sense of security should they ever fall on hard times, which further dissuades them from desiring to conquer another land by engaging in war.

In a nutshell, today's interconnected world has shifted the paradigm of world leaders and the scope of their duties. Gone are the days when countries tussle with each other, be it as a display of strength or to amass more land. Bilateral relations have evolved to become more positive and unite countries together, because ultimately all of us are in the same boat. We have come a long way since Einstein, and the countries' appreciation for one another makes it unlikely that we will see World War Three or any sticks or stones which may follow after.

Comments:

Harnoor, a clear and engaging essay! A joy to read - as you addressed the question with aplomb. Keep it up!

‘War is a thing of the past, given how interconnected the world is today.’ Do you agree?

Tan Zu En Joel, 22S46

"War is young men dying and old men talking". Given the cruelties of World War One, World War Two and the potential nuclear fallout from the Cold War, it would be expected that humans are now averse to war, learning from the tragedies in the past and doing their utmost to prevent wars today. World leaders have signed countless bilateral trade agreements, diplomatic treaties and have gone on many diplomatic visits to other countries, all with the intention to make their countries more interconnected through trade and globalisation. They do this with the aim of not only greater economic development, but also the ideology that interconnectedness would make war a thing of the past, as no country can afford to polarise themselves by starting a war in this modern interconnected economy. On the contrary, I would argue that this interconnectedness is merely a marriage of convenience and it does not make war a thing of the past, as inherent ideological differences, competing interests, and a shift towards de-globalisation make war more likely than ever to break out in this day and age.

Supporters of the view that an interconnected world makes war a thing of the past would quickly point out that an interconnected world would force countries to be mutually interdependent on trade, and that no economy can survive without participating in global trade. They argue that no country is willing to start a war at the expense of being isolated on the world stage, and face the economic sanctions because of a declaration of war. I would disagree with such a view as despite how interconnected the world is today, there is a significant shift toward de-globalisation as countries realise they cannot be too dependent on others for trade and as a result the risk of war only becomes more likely. During COVID-19, a multitude of supply chains were disrupted, pharmaceuticals made in Singapore could not be completed as the chemicals made in Ireland could not be delivered, and the production of Apple computers in China were halted as silicon chips from trade partners stopped flowing in. Many countries as such have realised their over-reliance on the global trade network, and have sought to boost domestic industries so that these countries can be more self-reliant. A good example would be the US-China trade war. When the US imposed tariffs on China and prevented the export of US made silicon chips to China, China retaliated by boosting its domestic semiconductor industry and also set up its own internet services. As such, the two major economic powerhouses drifted away from mutually beneficial trade, despite the originally interconnected state of the world. The US and China are not alone in this, as Europe has also been increasing its self-production of energy to be less reliant on Russia. Thus, such a shift away from an interconnected world would cause many countries to be more isolated and self-

sufficient, which would de-incentivise the need for more countries to engage in constructive dialogue to settle differences. Countries are now more self-sufficient and are less afraid to start conflicts as they have less severe repercussions. As such, despite how interconnected the world is today, a shift towards self sufficiency has only made a war in the modern day ever more likely to happen, so war is not a thing of the past.

Supporters of the view that war was a thing of the past would lead to greater cooperation. Since World War Two, a multitude of international organisations have been formed to promote peace, constructive dialogue and to prevent war. One such example cited would be the United Nations (UN), which is a modern-day version of its predecessor, The League of Nations. The UN allows a large group of countries to come together and show solidarity, expression and condemn warmongering countries. As such the UN is said to act as a deterrence, to deter the possible start of a new war, making war an unlikely event of the modern day. However, I would argue that this could not be further from the truth. The UN, although rebranded and renamed, still carries many of the inefficiencies of its predecessor, The League of Nations. The UN's efficiency is crippled by needing a majority of countries in its assembly to make a decision. Thus, in practice, the United Nations is unable to take decisive action to prevent or stop wars, only offering a stage for politicians to say a few words of condemnation. This is especially evident in the case of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The United Nations Security Council held a vote on the draft resolution by the United States and Albania which described the annexation of Ukraine as "unlawful" and demanded immediate reversal. However, Russia was able to veto the proposed resolution. A country that is at fault was able to absolve itself from any wrongdoing. This is a true testament that greater cooperation from an interconnected world in the form of international organisation does little to stop war. While I do not deny that an interconnected world has led to greater cooperation and mitigation of a number of conflicts to prevent a full-on war, it would be naïve to think war is a thing of the past just because of greater cooperation. Despite whatever high levels of international cooperation, disagreements are bound to arise, and the collective solidarity of cooperating nations can do little to prevent a war from being started by countries which can circumvent the many loopholes of international efforts to prevent wars. As such, war is not a thing of the past despite how interconnected the world is today.

While cooperation from an interconnected world is inefficient in preventing a war, an interconnected world can also do little to prevent conflicts arising from ideological differences, making war in the modern day ever more likely. Since the cold war, the world has been increasingly polarised by ideological differences. The US and the West champion capitalism and democracy, while the USSR (now Russia) and China believed in communism and authoritarianism. These two ideologies are at polarising ends, and conflict arising from these differences were almost guaranteed. Not too long ago, in an already interconnected world during the Cold War, the USA led the Bay of Pigs invasion into Cuba, a communist state. These ideological differences

persist into the modern day, and the interconnected nature of American, Chinese, and Russian economies are nothing but a marriage of convenience to allow all their economies to benefit from more trade. However, their ideological divide still remains despite their interconnected economies. This can be easily seen in the US-China trade war and the conflict in the South China Sea. The interconnected economies of the US and China, although benefiting if both cooperated, decided to start a trade war with each other, for purely ideological reasons. In the South China Sea, the US risked worsening relations by sending in an aircraft carrier as a show of force, in opposition to China's increasing presence in the South China Sea. Another good example would be that of Taiwan and China. Both countries engage in the trade of silicon chips as Taiwan is a major silicon chip producer and China manufactures a lot of technology products. The world is also heavily reliant on China's technology experts and Taiwan's chips. Thus, it can easily be argued that China and Taiwan are extremely interconnected with the world. Despite this fact, China's inherent ideological differences with democratic Taiwan results in them seeing Taiwan as a rebel state, and choosing to risk starting a war with Taiwan. China had on multiple occasions carried out large scale military operations close to Taiwan, and also flew fighter jets into Taiwan's airspace on multiple occasions. China's foreign minister also said publicly that China cannot rule out an invasion of Taiwan. Thus, despite an interconnected world, it is clear that the inherent ideological difference between countries would always make war an ever-present threat. As such, war is certainly not a thing of the past.

My arguments so far are that of war being probable in spite of an interconnected world. However, I would also argue that war is not a thing of the past because of an interconnected world. In the modern day, while conventional wars of military invasion, as evident by Ukraine, still exist, war has also taken on a new form. War in the modern day is not so much due to hard power and military coercion but rather through soft power, in the form of economic wars, cyber-attacks and the war on terror. The world is heavily interconnected on trade, economic wars have proven to be extremely effective in coercing another country into submission. An example would be the sanctions on Russia during Ukraine's invasion, where the West kicked out Russia from the global banking system that is Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications (SWIFT), thus heavily crippling Russia's economy. A bit before this, BRICS, consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa was formed. This economic alliance was formed in direct opposition to the West's OECD alliance. As such, two different economic alliances would ultimately breed the greater possibility of an economic war from breaking out, which could mirror the US-China trade war. On top of that, an increasingly digitalised interconnected world today is extremely susceptible to wars in cyberspace, where foreign countries aim to sow discord in another country by spreading fake news on social media. For example, the US's Central Intelligence Agency had reason to believe Russia was involved in influencing the last US presidential elections, spreading fake news regarding Trump's opponent, Joe Biden. There were also many accounts of examples of North Korean hackers using the cyber

space to syphon money from other countries such as stealing from the Bangladesh National Bank. Thus, with greater digital and economic interconnectivity, war in the modern day takes a new form and is certainly not a thing of the past to some extent.

Just as the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty was signed by the US and USSR after realising the disastrous result of a nuclear war, modern society will only make an attempt to prevent war after experiencing its devastation first hand. Despite modern society growing distant from and not remembering the history of war, war will never be a thing of the past.

Comments:

Good knowledge of global issues demonstrated. Relevant issues raised and discussed with apt use of supporting evidence. Some examples could have clearer details or better links to the arguments to make the point more convincing. Language wise, fluently written with the occasional slips.

‘War is a thing of the past, given how interconnected the world is today.’ Do you agree?

Luo Yi, 22S47

As the Japanese signed their own national surrender to the Allied Powers, the world cheered loudly, rejoicing as the most destructive war in human history, which left countless people dead or injured had come to an end. After that watershed moment in global history, humanity has taken great strides in ensuring that we do not repeat the mistakes of generations past, and present such as destructive events from occurring again. This has resulted in our modern societies today with intergovernmental relationships mostly emphasising cooperation over conflict, something that has been a common theme for the past 80 years or so. With such a trend of countries working towards peaceful development and coexistence, it is perhaps unforgivable if one thinks that war is necessary, especially now that global connections have been set up between countries. With these connections that have become part and present of our daily lives, it would be foolish to try to go to war and risk these supporting pillars of modern lifestyles. Unfortunately, war seems to be ingrained in human beings by nature, and war, for the most part, is largely still a present throughout the world.

Casual observers of history may point to the fact that ever since the second world war, there has yet to be a major war between countries that has been able to have such an impact on history. The countries who took part in World War 2 still hold war memories, Victory Day Parades, and educate their citizens about the war. Almost 80 years on, and nothing else has replaced these events memorialising the war. Even as we head into the 21st century, with geopolitical tensions at an all-time high, there is little sign that countries around the world are trying to recreate any sort of large-scale conflict. This is likely due to large global connections between countries such as the Internet, global trade systems, and supply chains that would send global shockwaves if one or more of its countries were to be threatened, causing a ripple effect that eventually negatively affects the majority of humanity. Thus, it is unwieldy for countries to engage in any sort of conflict that may threaten these systems, making war unfeasible in the modern day. Therefore, supporters of this argument believe that war has been made a thing of the past.

However, these arguments do not take into account the myriad ways that wars can be fought between countries, as a massive shootout between opposing armies is a drop in the ocean, compared to the many methods of warring that humanity has been able to come up with. Without putting themselves, and consequently most of the world, into possible danger, superpowers can induce regional or internal conflicts in certain parts of the world. This allows them to vie for control over these countries, while keeping the disastrous effects rather localised to certain locations or areas, minimising

the negative impacts on other countries. Often, the countries that have been designated as the superpowers' chess pieces to fight with are underdeveloped and destitute nations. They tend to have little to no impact on the global trade and supply chains, as they are too poor to have any meaningful effect on global wealth if their existence were to be threatened. This allows for powerful countries to still engage in war without the possibility of say, the Internet shutting down, or the global supply chain being weakened. An example of this would be the ongoing Yemeni Civil War, with factions supported by Saudi Arabia and Iran engaging each other in conflicts in the war-torn country. Despite the outward appearance of internal conflicts, it is very much part of the larger war between the two influential countries of the Middle East. Thus, war is not a thing of the past.

Furthermore, there are other conflicts that arise precisely due to the interconnectivity of the current state of the world. Globalisation, a trend where countries increasingly allow for the free flow of goods, services, labour, capital and knowledge across international borders, has allowed for the creation and propagation of global supply chains and trade networks that span the entire world, east to west. This has brought greater cooperation between countries. However, as an ancient Chinese saying goes "A country long divided must unite, and a country long united must divide". This interconnectivity has also brought more conflict between countries, as they seek to have more influence over this large global system, ensuring their power over the rest of the world. An apt example of this is the US-China trade war. China was able to leverage upon the global interconnectivity and its own labour potentials to become the world's factory, placing itself firmly in the global supply chain. It has used this to develop its economy at a pace never before seen in history. This placed it in direct conflict with the United States, who is arguably the most influential player in the global trade network, who saw China's rise as a direct threat to its position of power. The two countries, as a result, have constantly traded blows with each other, imposing sanctions and tariffs on goods and services, labour and capital. Economic warfare has been escalating more and more in recent years, pointing to the fact that war is definitely not a thing of the past, and the interconnectivity of the modern day has not made it so.

Lastly, the interconnectivity of the world has not stopped some countries from going to war with one another. Despite the massive consequences of a war on the global supply chain, some countries still go to war, knowing full well the results of such actions. This is perhaps due to a combination of factors, such as irresponsible decision-making by the top brass of government, irrational leadership, rising tensions that have gone over a breaking point, or the expectation that the country may actually gain more from such an activity. Whatever the reason, the fact is that the possible negative impacts on the global connection have not been taken into account or just simply ignored. A prime example of this is the Russia-Ukraine War, which took place despite Ukraine being a large producer of grain and Russia being a large producer of natural gas. Russia still went to war with Ukraine, resulting in a massive shortage of

many resources in the global supply chain, pushing prices up, and making life much harder for people around the world as they dealt with rising cost of living. Clearly, such impacts were not considered in the decision to invade Ukraine; thus, war is definitely not a thing of the past due to global interconnectivity.

In conclusion, war has always been a part of human civilization, no matter how developed our society becomes. Despite all the talk about peace and cooperation, humans will still find reasons and ways to kill each other, and that is the reality of nature. Whether it be new ways of going to war, bringing about conflict through global development and connectivity, albeit unintentionally, or simply not caring about the consequences, war will always accompany humans as we march on into a new era of technology and development. We are reminded with a quote from Sun Tzu: The art of war is of vital importance to the State.

Comments:

Luo Yi, a beautifully written piece with a number of sound arguments and relevant examples. Good work!

‘War is a thing of the past, given how interconnected the world is today.’ Do you agree?

Low Sze Yoong, 22S51

The claim that ‘War is a thing of the past given how interconnected the world is today’ has not aged well over the past year. In fact, it seems naive and idealistic, given the state of turmoil the world is in now, and the unusual amount of bloodshed it has endured. War has arguably defined the past year: Russia’s invasion of Ukraine; the civil wars in Niger, Ethiopia and Sudan; and the simmering commercial wrangling between the US and China. Be that as it may, it was once reasonable to believe that the advanced state of transportation and technology, which allows ordinary citizens and diplomats alike to communicate with their counterparts around the world, would usher in a new era of peace. Through amicable and timely dialogue, it seemed that we could talk our way out of serious disagreements between countries, and take a step back from the need to use military, economic or other destructive means of conflict to achieve our means, which have roiled almost every corner of the world in the not too distant past. Nonetheless, while I conceded that this hope still has a degree of truth to it, I believe that the interconnectedness of the world today has provided fertile ground for both open and ‘cold’ wars, rather than consign them to the dustbin of history.

Optimists and pacifists, hoping for world peace, are right to point out the unifying and potential of modern technology: with more regular, constructive and sincere interactions and dialogue across borders, we can bring out the best in our human nature – kindness and solidarity – rather than resort to the violent ways of our ancestors (tracing back to the sticks-and-stones warfare of apes). In the past, world leaders had to quite literally come to the table to settle disagreements and discuss settlements to territorial and economic disputes. These meetings were infrequent, and often did not take place when most needed. Even if they did, there was always an air of distance between leaders, as infrequent interactions made it difficult for them to judge one another’s intention and credibility. Consequently, many countries have resorted to declaring war and embargoes on one another to achieve their national objectives, instead of putting faith in drawn-out and likely futile negotiations. This dynamic was rampant during the mid-to-late 19th century: Napoleonic France mounted numerous large scale campaigns to seize Europe and quell potential opposition from its neighbours. Most famously, it went to war against almost all of Europe’s major powers during the War of the Fourth Coalition, and implemented the Continental System, a euphemism for a continental blockade against trade with Britain. Nowadays, such rashly declared conflicts are completely unnecessary, as modern technology has allowed world leaders to carry out critical meetings with one another immediately, no matter where they are, or what time it is. This practice started after the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis: the height of the US-USSR tensions. In an effort to

prevent plunging the world into a nuclear war, a direct phone link was established between the White House and the Kremlin, known as the "Hotline". This link allowed for messages to be sent from the US to Russia (formerly the Soviet Union), to reassure one another and dispel misunderstandings during critical times. Since then, such high-level interactions have become commonplace, as world leaders making phone calls to one another has become a regular event on their schedule. Such communications are not limited to politicians and statesmen, as social media and the Internet have allowed ordinary citizens around the world to chat with one another and build interpersonal bonds, previously impractical when one could only meet people from other countries by travelling abroad. This has engendered a spirit of mutual respect between people of different countries, by bringing into focus the many commonalities we share in terms of culture and value. Such a spirit has arguably created a more pacifist atmosphere today, as evidenced by the growing popularity of anti-war movements and cross-border people-to-people exchange programmes.

Nevertheless, the ideal of peace brought on by interconnectedness has only materialised to a limited extent. Technology and the use of communication have broken down barriers of the flesh by making it more convenient than ever to engage in dialogue with one's enemies, but it may never break down barriers of the heart. Many world leaders today, blinded by the lenses of populism and nationalism, have shunned constructive dialogue in favour of bellicose rhetoric and jingoistic agendas in the hopes of furthering their own political agenda. For instance, despite the dialogue or calls for negotiations by Western powers to come to the table for negotiation and de-escalate tensions, Russia's Putin decided to step on the accelerator on his plans to invade Ukraine, dubiously drawing on his controversial stance that Ukraine is an indispensable part of the Motherland. In Niger, the junta that swept to power last month turned down diplomatic efforts from ECOWAS, a block of neighbouring states. Its leader instead rallied other like-minded dictatorships and threatened to retaliate against any foreign invasion. Interconnectedness, per se, does not by any means always lead to consensus and solidarity. Furthermore, interconnectedness may be construed by some to be a conduit for unwanted influence and destruction of one's nation's cherished ideals and way of life. This is observable in theocracies like Iran, as well as other hard-line religious groups in the Middle East, who view the Internet and the Western content it comes as an affront to their own view and an encroachment on their own societies. This has even led them to pursue violence in an attempt to ward off the outside it sees as invading it: Iran has developed its nuclear arsenal, while Jihadist groups have carried out terror attacks around the world. Interconnectedness may breed discomfort rather than peace in the minds of many.

There are also those who believe that interconnectedness, which is manifested as the growing integration of trade and societies, will create a common space, whose prosperity is shared by all countries. They argue that when every country has a stake in their common success, they will view war as counterproductive, and will embrace dialogues and collaboration. For instance, Europe, which was once embattled by

perpetual conflict, is now the world's most peaceful region. Modern technology has made possible regular multilateral discussion, which has led the way for various trans-continental economic and political initiatives and agreements. The most successful of these are the EU Schengen Area, which allows for the free movement of people within the European Union, and the Common Market, which enables free trade across the continent. This promise of economic riches through collaboration has convinced almost all European nations to put aside their nationalistic aims and come together to further their joint interests. Such a situation also occurred in Southeast Asia: once torn apart by multilateral wars such as the 'Konfrontasi', its members have set aside past enmities and hatred to set up ASEAN, a regional block which has become the world's 6th largest economic region and among the fastest growing. The allure of cooperation seems to far outweigh the spoils of war, and can be achieved with no bloodshed.

Alas, this too has proven to be more of an ideal than reality. Interconnectedness may provide more opportunities for nations to work together, but it has also presented more testing situations that may pitch one nation's interest against those of the other. In a zero-sum game where nations view their own gains as necessarily coming from their rivals' loss, they will feel compelled to defend it through warfare. For instance, while the US-China trade connection is one of the world's busiest and most lucrative, both countries have begun to fear the other trying to undermine its own growth and prosperity. This began an era of 'trade wars,' as each country raced to impose tariffs and restrictions on imports from the other. It is not just economic interests that are at stake: in other situations, interconnectedness puts different world views and vision in a collision course. For example, in the Middle East, there has been tension breeding between Shia Muslim states like Iran, and its Sunni neighbours like Saudi Arabia, as well as Jewish neighbours like Israel. Interconnectedness puts the two blocs in conflict, and has catalysed their strife. Interconnected may, in fact, fuel conflict.

As a whole, interconnectedness has not led to the demise of war and conflict – far from it. Rather, it has encouraged and enabled those who desire conflict to seek it. While I brush off the quote as naive and unrealistic, deep down, I nonetheless wish for it to be true. Interconnected gives us an opportunity to smooth over the tension and misgiving between nations, yet whether to do so is up to our leaders. We must cautiously make it clear to them the benefit of peace and let them know our unequivocal desire for it, so that the presently aspirational ideal of peace can become our future.

Comments:

Overall, an enjoyable read. Could have given a clearer interpretation of 'interconnectedness' through, and looked at it more broadly than the establishment of communication links. Very fluent and confident use of language.

Has living in the city become less attractive?

Raja Aadesh, 22S47

With the proliferating advancement in technology, political leaders are stepping up their game and are putting a painstaking amount of effort into making their cities appear much more vibrant as compared to the past to attract manpower to boost economic growth. For example, construction of “The Line” has begun in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, a whole city built along a line but divided into segments, such that each household has access to basic facilities like hospitals and schools within a short walk. This ingenious vision and many more innovative plans continue to pique the interest of many people around the world to live in such cities like Riyadh. However, on the other side of the spectrum, pollution and emissions in cities like Jakarta, Indonesia have drastically increased, while traffic jams and congested roads in Mumbai, India have become more and more intolerable than before, reducing the attractiveness of living in cities. Although I acknowledge these negative aspects of cities, I still strongly disagree that living in the city has become less attractive.

While I do believe that living in the city has not become less attractive, it is undeniably true that cities do cause a lot of problems to the environment, and these costs must be tolerated by residents living in the cities. Cities are engines of economic growth, specialising in advanced manufacturing of products like pharmaceuticals, electronics and many more. However, this comes at the cost of releasing more emissions and pollutants into the atmosphere. Due to the profit-maximising nature of firms, producers disregard the pollutants and the environmental harm they cause to citizens in their motive to gain as much profit as they can through their production. As a result, many firms may use fossil fuels to produce goods, which in turn releases carbon dioxide, which is a greenhouse gas that traps heat within the atmosphere, contributing to global warming. This is prevalent in cities in Indonesia like Jakarta, where many carbon-intensive industries are unable to transition to clean energy on their own because it is too costly to do so, contributing significantly by rising temperatures with Indonesia having a tropical climate, the consequences are harsher, making it more unbearable to live in cities in Indonesia like Jakarta. However, efforts are made to mitigate this problem through partnerships with different countries. For instance, the United States of America (USA) and the European Union (EU) have launched the “Just Transition Partnership” to provide a US\$100 million investment for green infrastructure to cities in Indonesia to reduce reliance on fossil fuels, mitigating the environmental problem cities bring about. Such efforts have been growing and many countries offer help to reduce emissions in other cities. Such offers reduced the extent of the reduction of attractiveness of living in the cities because of emissions.

Some critics may also argue that living in the city has become less attractive because it worsens the mental health of residents. With more and more people moving into cities to seek job opportunities, cities become more crowded. However, the government is unable to respond fast enough to the rapid inflow of people into cities by improving the connectivity of transport. As a result, roads become congested and traffic jams occur more frequently. For instance, many of the roads in New Delhi, India are so narrow that vehicles move very slowly due to the traffic jam. This may cause residents to feel more frustrated and stressed that they could not arrive at their destinations on time. Further adding fuel to the fire, honking in New Delhi as a result of the traffic becomes more frequent, making residents feel more restless and unnecessarily exhausted, hence severely worsening their mental health. However, to mitigate this problem, there are quiet places like parks, built for residents to rest and move away from the loud surroundings of the city. As a result, they feel more rejuvenated and become more prepared to carry out their duties in the later part of the day, hence protecting their mental health.

In addition, living in cities has not become less attractive because cities provide us with basic facilities that we need to carry on with our lives. Due to the accelerating development of cities with the aid of the advancement of technology, more facilities are constructed which are more accessible to residents. With the highly connected transport network, residents can retrieve their basic needs without wasting too much of their time. Moreover, with cities becoming an avenue for innovation, new products are constantly being produced to solve the challenges faced by residents today. For instance, residents in Singapore, which is a city-state, have access to healthcare facilities with more hospitals constructed like the Sengkang General Hospital near residents' homes. The development of more specialised hospitals like Kangland Kerbau Hospital, which targets the healthcare of mothers and children, has also made healthcare more inclusive and readily available for the majority of the residents. Finally, research institutes like the A*STAR Research Institute in Singapore constantly partners with big pharmaceutical companies like Pfizer and Sanofi to produce vaccines to combat diseases. Hence, such essential needs cannot be taken for granted, and make us feel safe and confident that we are able to have access to these goods when we are in dire need of them. As a result, living in the city has not become less attractive.

Finally, living in the city has not become less attractive because it allows residents to enjoy a higher standard of living. With a higher budget from the government and the development of technology, the city can be constructed to appear more appealing and liveable. With the presence of skilled labour, novel ideas can be brought about to build better infrastructure to make cities appear more vibrant, attracting people to live in cities. For instance, Dubai is known for its lavish and luxurious buildings, hotels and houses due to the grand appearance of their structures. Moreover, there are also many luxurious goods available in cities, with more big companies being housed in cities, due to the high economic outlook. Residents in cities also tend to earn a higher income, allowing them to retrieve these luxuries. For

instance, there is a stream of jewellery shops and famous car brands like Ferrari and Lamborghini in Dubai, and Dubai residents generally have a high income to obtain these goods. As a result, residents enjoy a higher standard of living and become happier. Thus, living in the city has not become less attractive.

In conclusion, I disagree that living in the city has become less attractive. Even though I acknowledge the fact that cities might worsen the health of citizens through environmental pollution and traffic jams, these problems are being mitigated and tackled to cushion the harms residents face. Meanwhile, cities have generally not failed to give access to basic needs and ensure a high standard of living for residents; hence, cities maintain attractiveness.

Comments:

Good intro. Aadesh, a well-written piece! You provided a good range of examples by considering several cities. You also had sound arguments throughout. Good work!

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



Sans Outliers

"Why bother?"

They pointed to the ink of the pen, the curl of the pencil

It's all averages, I said

"?"

That's how they're trained
Any good model, really
Ignore outliers, Abandon deviants
'Create' something unique, yes,
But is it new?

"But it's more cost-effective?"

Parasites.

It's the difference between manufactured and artisanal soya sauce:

I make because I appreciate
There's 8 billion people in the world
Statistically, there's likely to be more like me
And there are
If they appreciate, they'll seek it out

...

"Are you implying yours is better quality?"

I smiled.

"What is art if not illustrating?"

Dolot Shine Mikaela Maminta, 23S41

Error 503

"The irony of poor connection as we talk over FaceTime."

- Maude Latour

click. type. enter.

What are you looking for?

artificial assistance,
love language in ones and zeroes.
buffer.

scroll. select. load.
video tutorial, self-help guide

People also ask

life hack, cheat sheet
search.

buffer.

Connection found.

Do you wish to connect?

buffer.

ask. prompt. generate.
weak signal.

Disconnect?

refresh.

refresh. again? next.

Did you mean

see more. related. next page?
buffer.

your name in the search bar

No results found.

Wang Ray Kit, 23S63

Can individual efforts truly make a difference in protecting the environment?

Daniel Tan Kai Yi, 23S33

A man takes a walk on a beach and sees millions of starfish stuck on the shore. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees a young boy throwing a single starfish back into the water. Understandably, he is puzzled at the boy's actions, calling out to him and asking, "There are millions of starfish stuck on the sand, how could you possibly save every one of them?" Although this story may seem childish at first, it has deep implications regarding our battle for the environment. On the one hand, the issue of the environment seems far too daunting for individuals to tackle and is best to be left to corporations and governments. However, on the other hand, many individuals believe they should do their part in this fight. After all, there is only one Earth and it is the responsibility of every person who has ever lived and called it home. Undeniably, solving this problem is a Herculean task and has led many to believe their lonesome efforts are futile in the grand scheme of things. However, I firmly believe that individual efforts can truly make a difference in saving the environment.

Proponents of the counterargument may postulate that due to the sheer magnitude of this issue, the only ones who have the resources to contribute are huge companies and government bodies. These people argue that individual efforts are nothing, as many of such entities are huge contributors to the problem in the first place. According to a 2017 report by The Guardian, only 100 companies were responsible for 71% of global emissions. This is a terrifying figure, especially when coupled with the modern day "greenwashing" strategy many companies are starting to employ. They advertise their products as far more environmentally friendly than they actually are, misleading customers to boost sales. Such examples would include Coca-Cola, which brands its plastic bottles as being 25% recycled marine plastic while neglecting the fact that these bottles are one of the main sources of pollution in the first place, and Spanish supermarket chain Mercadona, which brands its plastic cutlery as "reusable" even though all such cutlery are technically reusable. Evidently, the influence certain major companies have on the environment is huge, with many of them even being supported by governments around the world. For example, Saudi Aramco, the world's most valuable oil company, is responsible for huge amounts of Saudi Arabia's government's wealth. Despite being the cause of 4.4% of total emissions in the modern era, the government is still planning to double refining capacity to 10 million barrels a day by 2030. With huge companies even garnering government support, it is no wonder that so many individuals believe their efforts are useless.

However, the influence that companies have does not necessarily render individual efforts pointless. On the contrary, it just makes individual efforts to influence governments and companies all the more crucial. We have already seen the effect that individuals, when in collective groups, can have on such entities. In particular, large numbers of young people have been able to change the environment for the better. For example, in Europe, students have been refusing to go to school in protest of their government's decisions, with such initiatives including the "Fridays for Future" and "School Strike for Climate" campaigns. Because of the overwhelming public pressure, the European Union has legally committed itself to net zero emissions by 2050, even creating a framework to achieve this goal. Locally, there have also been instances of individual influence on large companies. For example, NTUC FairPrice started its "No Plastic Bags" initiative due to public pressure and not policy. Therefore, it is clear that groups of individuals all over the world do have significant influence on corporations and governments. Since they are major causes of the problem, these entities have the most power to protect the environment. Individuals who do their part in collective groups to influence them are helping indirectly, still truly making a massive difference in saving the environment.

Furthermore, in today's age of interconnectivity, the prevalence of social media will also act as a medium for activism to help rally the people, allowing individuals to make a difference. In the past, we have seen many instances whereby social media has been used for activism. For example, in the Black Lives Matter movement, social media was used to educate and inform, allowing individuals to voice their opinions for social change. It was an important tool to rally individuals together, allowing them to have a genuine impact together. Evidently, the capabilities of social media allow individuals to make a difference regarding any cause they support. Regarding the climate crisis, there have been many instances of individuals using such platforms for good. For example, Greta Thunberg went from a solo protester to having the support of over 10 million people like her, joining the ranks with other famous protesters to save the environment together. This was largely due to social media spreading her cause across the world, not only educating those around her but all across the world. Her individual use of social media made her a household name, teaching others, even in different continents, to do whatever they can to help save the Earth. Therefore, the reach and influence social media provides allows individuals to save the environment.

Lastly, individuals in positions of influence and status can use their platforms for good. Around the world, there are many individuals using their resources to help save the environment, the most famous of which being Elon Musk. Being the CEO of electric car brand Tesla, Musk uses his intellectual capabilities to innovate solutions to the climate crisis, famously being a key figure in popularising electric cars. According to studies by the Universities of Cambridge, Exeter and Nijmegen in the Netherlands, electric cars are better for the environment than conventional gasoline-powered cars in 95% of the world. Musk, being the leader of Tesla, used his resources and status to benefit the world in its fight for the environment, spearheading the development of

crucial technology. Clearly, individuals with such status and influence can use their resources for good, showing that individual efforts can truly make a difference in saving the environment.

The boy hears the man's question and casually tosses another starfish into the sea, replying to him and saying "I saved that one". Eventually, the whole community joins in and are able to save every starfish. Correspondingly, individual efforts are still crucial in saving the environment.

Comments:

Relevant arguments raised. Though there could have been greater acknowledgment of the limitations of individual efforts for a problem as massive as the climate crisis. Realistically acknowledging this would have added nuance and objectivity to your response. Valid range of examples across different contexts.

Can individual efforts truly make a difference in protecting the environment?

Natania Tan En, 23S45

"We do not just inherit the environment from our ancestors, we also borrow it from our children," the great Chief Seattle once famously said. This saying speaks volumes about the shared responsibility we have to save our dying Earth. It has become common knowledge that the effects of global warming will be felt sooner than later. Many climate activists have emerged around the world, pushing for greater efforts to tackle our environmental problems. There has been much discussion as to whether individual efforts truly make a difference in saving the environment. It is argued by some that individual efforts are ultimately ineffective as most environmental damage is caused by large and stubborn conglomerates. I believe such a view to be parochial and myopic, completely discounting the efforts of outstanding individuals who have made much impact in this domain. Individual efforts therefore do truly make a difference as they can inspire global movements, reduce overall consumption and complement efforts by the government to save our environment.

Detractors of my argument have the view that individual efforts do not amount to anything as statistics have shown that the perpetrators of most of the damage that has been made on the environment are in fact large companies and conglomerates. They believe that it is only when these parties decide to adopt more eco-friendly and green practices that substantial progress will be made in the movement to save our environment. To a certain extent, this is true. Much of the environmental waste and pollution have been generated by ignorant and profit-minded companies who do not see the importance in saving the environment. They continue to use quick methods that damage the environment to produce their goods. They justify themselves by arguing that such means are more efficient and maximise profits. Large conglomerates are also prone to overproduction, wasting our precious natural resources. A notable example is the internationally known H&M, a fashion and clothing brand, which has come under much flak for their environmentally damaging practices. It was revealed in 2018 that H&M generated US\$3.4 billion worth of clothing that was not distributed to be sold, but instead kept in their factories with seemingly no purpose. Therefore, the argument that companies such as H&M must adjust their ways of business to make a significant impact on saving the planet is valid to a certain degree. However, the view overlooks the pressure by the general public who are consumers of these goods.

Individuals who boycott such companies and encourage others to do so make a difference in saving the environment as they force these companies to be held accountable for their malpractices and to adopt more eco-friendly policies to avoid losing customers, and maintain their positive public image. With the rise of social

media and the dawn of cancel culture, individuals who voice their discontent with a company and spread awareness of its poor culture and irresponsibility can sufficiently pressure these large companies. In 2011, after the flak they received, H&M announced that they were releasing a new clothing line made of 100% recycled material. Though this does not discount the fact that they still waste valuable resources, it is encouraging to know that they are taking slow, but sure, steps in the form of corporate social responsibility by changing their business model and approach. Hence, I disagree that individuals cannot make a genuine difference.

Individual efforts can make a difference in saving the environment as they can inspire global movements. Many passionate individuals who are vocal about the urgency of responding to our climate crisis have become figures of international efforts to save our environment, due to the nature of mass media. Looking to put a face to an interesting and perhaps controversial story, media outlets spotlight specific people, who have as a result begun to wield much power and influence. This can be attributed to the fact that many of these individuals are excellent public speakers, or come from humble backgrounds which make their confidence and journey much more inspiring and memorable. Greta Thunberg is a well-known environmental activist from Sweden who started skipping school at the age of 13 to protest her government's lack of effort in tackling climate change. Even though there are people who do not take her seriously and believe her efforts to be largely insignificant, she has indubitably left an intangible mark on the environmental activism scene. She has represented youth worldwide who are as eco-anxious as her, and through her charisma, encouraged everyone to play their part in saving the planet. Such efforts should not be dismissed if mere numbers cannot measure her impact, as they are not an accurate instrument to do so. Her efforts have gone a long way in increasing general awareness of the state of this world, and tugged on many heartstrings worldwide to do something about these environmental problems, ultimately contributing to a strong and sustainable global movement, where the impact of individuals in saving the environment cannot be disputed.

Furthermore, individual efforts can truly make a difference in saving the environment as most individuals are given the choice to reduce their consumption. Overconsumption is one of the root causes of environmental damage. Thus, individuals who decide to curb their consumption can make a significant impact on the environment. Overconsumption has led to much industrial pollution due to the ridiculously high demand that factories are forced to meet. Overconsumption has effectively depleted our precious natural resources, almost all of which we will never get back. We are consuming faster than we are replenishing, with environmental sociologists and climate scientists calling our actions "an act of stripping the Earth naked". Overconsumption has deprived many animals of their habitats, and forced them to come close to our homes and neighbourhoods. As can be clearly seen, overconsumption is hugely damaging to our planet. The Singapore government has long acknowledged this fact and has striven to encourage citizens to adopt a "3R"

approach that consists of reducing consumption, reusing items to avoid increasing demand and recycling materials. If our highly respected and well-educated government believes in the sheer power of individuals to save our environment, then why should we not too? Hence, individual efforts are significant in saving the environment as we hold the power of choosing to reduce our consumption in the palm of our hands.

Lastly, to challenge the assumption that it is only big corporations and governments that can make a difference, I would like to suggest that individual efforts are important, if not necessary, in this battle to save our environment as they complement the efforts by these corporations and governments. Governments and individuals must work hand in hand for there to be any difference at all. Firstly, governments can push as many initiatives to protect our environment as they want but at the end of the day, these initiatives will only work if individuals cooperate with them. Individuals who ignore these policies will render such policies ineffective. Policies not strictly enforced or publicised will therefore not achieve their target impact. Next, the Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations acknowledge that governments do not only bear the responsibility of helping their industries develop more sustainably, but also educating individuals on their responsibilities to save the environment.

In conclusion, individual efforts do truly make a difference in saving the environment. The belief that they do not will lead us to nowhere. It is mankind's collective responsibility to take the bull by its horns, so let us harness the power of every individual on our beloved planet to save our environment before it is too late.

Comments:

Natania, you have raised relevant and strong points, and it was good that you tried to consider the impact/limitations of individual efforts vis-a-vis that of other parties. However, one thing to note is to always stay focused on the ability of individuals to make real change. Also, as you are required to show that individual efforts can bring real change, do unpack what "true difference" looks like and support this with concrete evidence, something not always clearly presented.

Can individual efforts truly make a difference in protecting the environment?

Kim YoungJun, 23S52

From increased frequency of heat strokes to rising sea levels, the issue of global warming is conceived to be a pressing problem which needs to be dealt with worldwide. With the atmosphere's temperature already 1.5 degrees Celsius higher than that of the pre-industrial revolution era and rising, the devastating consequences of environmental destruction are obvious. Various states worldwide have already started taking action, ranging from the Paris Agreement to the infamous Kyoto Protocol, and large firms and states are indeed actively trying to fight against environmental destruction. Meanwhile, the roles of the individuals in this meaningful cause remains unclear. Without the economic or political power to install new facilities or enact new legislations, pessimists argue that individuals cannot truly make a difference in saving the environment. However, optimists, including myself, believe that the political influence individuals can exert and ability to vote with our dollars enable us to make a difference in saving the environment.

On one hand, pessimists argue that given the scale and complexity of the issue of environmental conservation, individual efforts add little value to the saving of the environment. Indeed, the scale of the problem of environmental degradation is beyond the comprehension of an individual, to some extent. The masses of atmospheric pollutants and greenhouse gases released by the markets' dependence on fossil fuels is simply too massive that actions of an individual - to reduce their personal carbon footprint - remains futile. Today's economy emits as much carbon as the total carbon footprint of an individual's lifetime every second. This is evidence that efforts by an individual to reduce their carbon footprint remain futile, given the scale at which the economy pumps any carbon footprint saved back into the atmosphere. In addition, our economy is framed such that it cannot progress without exploiting the environment. 60% of the total energy used globally in 2023 was contributed by fossil fuels. Our economy's heavy dependency on fossil fuels and environmentally unfriendly practices scale up emission levels so massively that individual efforts to save the environment seem meaningless. What makes matters worse, is that profit driven, pragmatic states' mode of conduct only rubs salt to the wound. Environmentally friendly technology already exists; the problem is simply the cost. For instance, carbon capture technology, the technology to isolate and solidify carbon dioxide in the atmosphere for storage, already exists. However, each ton of carbon dioxide removed incurs a cost of 500 USD, and further storage costs for solid carbon dioxide additionally incurs an estimated 300 USD per ton of carbon dioxide stored. As such, states often do not wish to incur such high costs while falling behind today's progressive economy and continue to exploit

the environment for the gain of the state. Given such circumstances, it would seem that an individual's attempt to reduce carbon footprint seems useless.

While it is true that reducing individual carbon footprint is practically meaningless, it does not mean that individuals cannot play a part in the saving of the environment, as individuals, by stirring up political activism, can influence and pressurise the state to enact and establish new laws to conserve the environment. With an ever-more educated population, the vast majority of the world today understand the significance of environmental conservation. Therefore, the citizens of a democratic state can exert political influence - through votes - to favour political parties who sympathise with such a meaningful cause. The government is but a reflection of the masses. As such, citizens of a democratic state may favour their votes towards politicians who share common beliefs towards such noble causes, thus adding value to environmental protection. Furthermore, citizens of a democratic state, guaranteed with the freedom of speech, may also choose to vote out their need for environmental conservation through the media - as mentioned by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Thus, individuals can riot, protest and boycott against conservative politicians who remain ignorant of the matter of environmental protection to ensure that the government understands the significance of environmental conservation. The Singaporean government charging carbon taxes starting from 2023 is one of the obvious testaments to the claim that individuals do have a powerful capacity to influence the decision making of the state, so as to push for environmental conservation.

Meanwhile, individuals who feel strongly for environmental protection may choose to voice out their opinions through organisations by becoming an active member of an environmental organisation. While the voice of the individuals may go unheard, or even silenced by the state, the say of a large mass of people cannot be ignored by a democratic state. As such, individuals may take part in such large scale organisations to interact and collaborate with other individuals who share similar stances and mindset towards the issue of environmental destruction. Greenpeace is a classic example. Greenpeace is a large non-government organisation which stands against all forms of environmental degradation, ranging from whaling to carbon emission. Greenpeace reportedly has 3 and a half million members and supporters from over 55 states, some of whom are no more than ordinary civilians, united towards the cause of progressing into a greener society. It has significant political and societal influence in many states, having played a significant role in major environmental progressions such as The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty adopted at the United Nations in the 20th century, or the Kyoto Protocol adopted by states worldwide, setting legal limits on greenhouse gas emissions. This is clear evidence that individuals can truly make a difference collectively in saving the environment.

Moreover, individuals can also choose to spread their agendas and ideologies to the masses, influencing and convincing them of the need for environmental

conservation. While it is true that the vast majority of the population understand the significance of environmental conservation, it is to be noted that there is still a significant portion of people who remain uninformed of such meaningful causes, or simply choose to live in blissful ignorance, hence the need for social activism and education to bring these people into the picture. For instance, Greta Thunberg inspired the hearts of millions with her passionate speech regarding the pertinence of environmental conservation in 2019. Her speeches went viral on media platforms and social media, and helped to spread awareness on this insidious matter to the global population. This action invoked many to start leading a more carbon-free life, boycotting firms that greenwashed the masses and continued pumping metric tonnes of atmospheric pollutants, using less plastic, and so on. This demonstrates how an individual may spread their beliefs to the masses to push for an eco-friendlier world today. Hence individuals can certainly make a difference in saving the environment.

All in all, it is true that the scale of the issue of environmental destruction is too large for the individual, leaving the state and large firms to be the dominant change makers. However, the individuals have a powerful say and ability to influence the decision-making process of large firms, ensuring that they strive towards an eco-friendly and eventually carbon-free economy. Hence, individual efforts can truly make a difference in saving the environment.

Comments:

A well-structured defence of individual action on climate change that still acknowledges the scale of the problem. Consider strengthening your counterargument and take a closer look at the collective power of individuals' actions in environmental efforts.

Does science always undermine religion?

Shana Nadia Sjariffudin, 22S45

Karl Marx once said, 'Religion is the opium of the people', suggesting that religion - the belief in the supernatural such as a God or Gods - is simply a comfort for the common people, to pacify them and make them easier to control for those in power. In contrast, science - the study and understanding of nature and how the world works - often requires a higher order of thinking, reserved for the educated. Indeed, science and religion have a history of being clashing entities, with science being perceived to undermine religion at times by directly contradicting ancient religious texts. However, science does not always do so. In fact, science and religion can in fact coexist harmoniously, and can even foster and strengthen a deeper appreciation and understanding of each other.

Anti-theists often criticise religion as holding back the progress of science, going so far as to call religious people delusional for continuing to hold beliefs that are directly contradicted by science. In a way, science does indeed undermine long-held religious beliefs that have long been accepted as true. For instance, in the seventeenth century, when Galileo Galilei proposed his heliocentric theories, he was tried for heresy and sentenced to house arrest until his death. This was because his theory that the Earth revolved around the Sun directly contradicted the literal interpretation of Bible verses from books such as 1 Chronicles and Psalms, stating that 'The world is firmly established, it shall never be moved'. Additionally, Darwin's Theory of Evolution, as well as the Big Bang Theory, have been perceived as an attack on the religious beliefs of the Abrahamic religions or Hinduism, which suggest the Earth was created by a divine entity. The seemingly unbridgeable gap between scientific hypotheses and religious beliefs is further displayed by groups such as the Flat Earthers, who choose to cling to their interpretation of religious texts, outrightly refusing to believe science and rejecting it altogether. The rise of Pastafarianism as a mockery of religion directly criticises these seemingly baseless claims of religion, especially when compared to the tried-and-tested scientific theories of today.

However, it is myopic to claim that science always undermines religion. In many cases, science and religion, instead of battling for dominance, are far from the opposing forces that they seem. In contrast, science can actually foster a deeper appreciation for religion. The study of science, in its early days, was heavily motivated by religion, as an effort to study the world and to understand the works of God. Prior to the Scientific Revolution, scientists were mostly funded by religious organisations such as Islamic and Christian communities and science in those days, was perceived as a further testament to the divinity and wisdom of the Creator they believed in. The increasing emphasis on non-literal interpretations of religious texts has also allowed

scientific theories to coexist with religious beliefs. For instance, the Christian channel InspiringPhilosophy on the social media platform YouTube is dedicated to debunking contradictions between science and the Christian faith, showing how one can wholeheartedly accept science, while also continuing to believe in religion. The channel points out that in the Abrahamic religious texts, the book of Genesis is meant to be read as a poem and not taken literally, which allows for acceptance of the Theory of Evolution, as well as the Big Bang Theory. In fact, the latter theory was formed by a Catholic priest. All this goes to show that science does not always undermine religion; and for many people, science can instead deepen their understanding of their religious faith, due to studying the complexity of the world, that can point to intelligent design, fostering an appreciation for the supernatural.

Furthermore, science can complement religion, with each answering questions that the other cannot, further emphasising the need for both science and religion. For example, the Theory of Evolution can explain existing loopholes in the Abrahamic religious texts, such as why the world has so many species of animals that cannot all have been on Noah's Ark during the Great Flood. The development of increasingly complex microchips has also been taken by evangelical groups to suggest that, in the book of Revelations in the Bible, the 'mark of the beast' can be interpreted to be a microchip. On the other hand, religion can also complement science. In his books, the author Lee Strobel points out loopholes in existing scientific theories and hypotheses that can be answered by religion. Religion can also answer moral and ethical questions that science cannot, such as whether euthanasia is morally acceptable, and what the meaning of life is. In short, while science can answer the 'how' questions of the world, religion can provide solutions to the 'why' questions of life. Therefore, the limits of science serve to emphasise the need for religion instead of undermining it, and can instead lead people to turn to religion in search of a better understanding of science.

Finally, science can be used as an argument for religious beliefs instead of undermining them. In his sermons, Dr Chuck Missler has used quantum physics to explain his belief in God and has recommended books written by scientists who have used the depth of layers of dust on the moon, to argue their belief that the world, as we know it, was created in seven twenty-four-hour days instead of over billions of years as is commonly accepted by science. This shows that science, instead of undermining religion, can be used as a tool to argue for the religious beliefs that one holds. Cases like this go to show that science can in fact, strengthen religious beliefs by boosting their credibility, allowing people to use science to believe in religion instead of discarding religion due to science.

In conclusion, science is far from contradicting and undermining religion. Instead, it can be used to encourage an appreciation and understanding of religion, to emphasise the need for religion, and to boost the credibility of religion. Religious groups should be careful not to reject science altogether and obstinately cling to old-

fashioned beliefs, and the same can be said for scientists who refuse to entertain any notion of the supernatural. Rather, religion and science should evolve together and complement each other, which can lead to faster and better progress in our society.

Comments:

Largely valid points which are compelling and some knowledge on the subject matter demonstrated.

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Does science always undermine religion?

Muhammad Sufyan Abdullah Khan, 22S55

Science is often touted as the anathema to religion, with the pursuit of knowledge through observation and experimentation incongruent with the more mystical, belief-driven aspects of religion. To some, the indisputable evidence supporting scientific theories provides a more rigorous basis for systems governing our world, as compared to more abstract religious guidelines. One may also subscribe to the notion that those ideologies are entirely distinct means to process the world around us, and can actually work in tandem in many cases. Thus, I disagree that science always undermines religion.

Proponents of the notion that science eclipses religion typically highlight the contradictory and often diametrically opposed viewpoints espoused by scientific and religious beliefs. Whether on the topic of humanity's inception, the nature of our existence, or our own history, conflicting theories tend to arise. For instance, many religions propose a creation myth wherein higher powers shaped our universe while scientists propose theories comparatively more grounded, in empirical evidence like the Big Bang Theory. When science and religion conflict, it is often to the detriment of religions as religious theories are by and large driven by faith, and impossible to prove. Thus, when science, backed with objective observations, lays claim to a counterpoint, religious theories lose credence. This is also evidence in the relationship between science, religion and the sanctity of life. While scientific development in the field of medicine and bioengineering requires experimentation on living creatures, some religious leaders oppose this process on account of scientists 'playing God' and tampering with the natural order. Yet, the engine of scientific process, and promise of progress drown out these concerns, with genetic engineering and animal experimentation remaining staples in modern science.

However, the claim that science and religion are incongruent is fundamentally a false dichotomy. Religion and science do not exist in vacuums, nor are they monolithic. One may subscribe to certain scientific or religious beliefs without denouncing either entirely. Moreover, the confluence of science and religion at ethical crossroads is undeniably a boon to society. True, advancements in science may come at the expense of religious sentiments, but religion still acts as a check against the potential destructive capacity of science. For instance, genetic modification of humans is still considered taboo, due to the belief that human life is sacred. Furthermore, religions often espouse the values of harmony and avoidance of causing deliberate harm to others. Within the context of our rapid scientific and technological development, the humanitarian values exemplified by religions are necessary to

ensure that the direction of our progress is not self-destructive. Thus, religion can exist in tandem with science.

Moreover, science and religion are both distinct, unique ways for us to understand our world. Through subjective lenses by which we examine reality, science and religion offer different perspectives, and do not necessarily conflict. While some may find the rigorous scientific explanations for natural phenomena intriguing, religion posits that our lives have a deeper meaning. In this respect, science and religion are as distinct as they are interlinked, with science providing a means for us to analyse the physical world, while religion enables us to turn inwards and examine our place in the universe. Concepts such as the Buddhist ideas of reincarnation and enlightenment allow us to reflect on our place in nature, while science provides objective explanations for the ecological relationship between mankind and the environment. Whilst some may claim that the empirical nature of science renders religious beliefs moot, it is undeniable that religion allows us greater insight into ourselves. For instance, the study of biology provides a concrete explanation for how and why we function, but lacks the scope necessary to explain why we exist. Thus, religion provides a means to assuage our curiosity where the rigour of science falls short; whether it be a belief in a higher being as in Abrahamic religions, or in finding enlightenment or an otherwise immaterial reward, religion occupies its own niche as a belief system which is distinct yet supplementary to science.

Furthermore, the imbalance of power between science and religion is variable in accordance with geopolitical conditions, with more conservative politicians erring on the side of religion while more liberal parties are usually more impartial. This is more apparent in polarised political systems such as the United States of America (USA). In 2022, anti-abortion sentiments on the basis of sanctity of life flared, resulting in the repeal of *Roe v. Wade* and the removal of universal protections for abortion rights across the nation. While from a scientific perspective, one could argue that fetuses are not fully sentient or aware until closer to birth, laws such as the Texas Heartbeat Act criminalise abortion during a pregnancy term from as early as two months. In this case, despite scientific and humanitarian criticism, the implementation of policies was based on religion. Moreover, religious extremism in the form of terror cells such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda remains adamant that religion should be held paramount, while Islamic fundamentalism in countries like Iran curtail the rights of women, despite science proving that we are fundamentally the same regardless of gender. Thus, the claim that science always undermines religion does not hold, and religious belief and conviction can blind people to alternate viewpoints - including about science.

In conclusion, despite their conflicting ideologies and seeming incongruence, science and religion can coexist harmoniously, as two distinct yet interwoven schools of thought. While some claim that science is inherently more valid, the imbalanced relationship between science and religion is dynamic, and science and religion will likely both remain impactful influences shaping our society in the future.

Comments:

Fluent and insightful. Demonstrated depth of knowledge in the subject matter, and good engagement with the demands of the question.

Is artificial intelligence more of a benefit than a threat to humanity?

Jethro J Tan, 22A14

In the past decade or so, artificial intelligence (AI) has taken the world at an inexorable allegro. The proliferation of technological advancements has led to the wide-scale application of this sophisticated knowledge on machinery and programmes that complete human tasks. The latest advent of robots with human capabilities such as Alexa and self-driving Tesla cars are testament to how far AI has developed. Undeniably, such a potent invention would precipitate positive ramifications for humanity. Yet, it also has its own set of adversities and drawbacks. While supporters of AI are quick to point out the conveniences it brings in expediting once monotonous processes, the contention lies in the cost at which this comes for society. One simply cannot ignore the plethora of threats AI poses in the domains of privacy, employment and the intrinsic harms in the nature of AI. In the interest of humanity and the people, there are fundamental tenets such as safety, privacy and equality that cannot be infringed upon as they serve as functions of basic human rights. Insofar as AI disrupts human living to such a large degree, it should be considered a bane. As such, AI is more of a threat to humanity than a benefit.

To start, there are advocates of AI who argue that AI is more of a benefit to humanity, given the increases in productivity it brings about. Proponents of this viewpoint postulate that the plight of jobs which were once mundane and labour-intensive is now alleviated with AI. The application of coded programmes and machinery now speeds up manufacturing processes that once took far more time to be completed by humans. Not only do such productivity increases benefit firms in terms of unit operating costs and profit margins, but they also precipitate benefits for societal welfare as goods and services can now be manufactured at a faster rate. More than that, AI also allows a greater variety of goods of different complexities to be made available to consumers given the learning capabilities of AI. A study by Oxford Economics has indicated that firms that adopt AI are up to 30% more productive, reducing overhead and speeding up operating procedures. Such an impact is increasingly witnessed at supermarkets through their 'self-checkout' counters which do not require cashiers, and even in big law firms such as Drew and Napier and Lee and Lee where AI is utilised to proofread legal documents. Therefore, supporters of AI opine the view that AI benefits humanity due to the convenience it brings in the realms of productivity.

However, while the aforementioned is true, the cost of employment at which it comes cannot be negated. With such productivity increases, it would only be natural for profit-motivated firms to replace human labour with AI in a bid to reduce costs. With regards to the context of humanity, a fundamental characteristic to point out is the

livelihood of the people which is much contingent on their ability to make ends meet to support their family - a prerequisite to a meaningful life. In juxtaposition to this notion of livelihood, the reverberations of AI are quite the opposite. International research by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has demonstrated that AI is likely to replace up to 30% of jobs in the United Kingdom and up to 35% in Germany by 2030. An article closer to home by The Straits Times has suggested that a quarter of jobs in Singapore will be replaced by AI by 2030. More concerning, 144 million jobs were lost to AI in 2020 amidst a pandemic which reiterated what humanity meant. This increasing global trend of structural unemployment highlights the threat AI poses to humanity. Even Singapore, which emphasises life-long learning and skills upgrading through its SkillsFuture portal, is not spared from the impacts of AI, reflected through job losses. This argument concludes that irrespective of the measures put in place to support the unemployed, it will always be outpaced by the rate of adoption of AI. With a loss of income and financial stability by this destabilising force of technological disruption, much of one's material and non-material standard of living will be eroded, harming society's most vulnerable and marginalised. This global trend is likely to outstrip the progress humanity has made in the facet of equality, as many blue-collar workers with little transferable skills will bear the brunt of AI. This is supported by a study by Yale University, which highlighted that 10,000 truck workers in the United States (U.S.) will be replaced by AI by 2025. As such, while productivity increases can be acknowledged and even applauded, they cannot come at the expense of poor human labourers who depend on their jobs to make ends meet. Thus, this ominous global wave of AI adoption is more of a threat than a benefit in the field of employment.

Furthermore, AI is more of a threat to humanity than a benefit due to its potential for misuse by malevolent stakeholders. The rise of AI has witnessed creations such as Deepfakes which is an advanced technology used to put one person's face on that of another. When put to good use, humanity has reaped its benefits, such as the anti-malaria campaign which featured David Beckham endorsing it in nine languages. With the use of AI, Beckham only had to promote the campaign in one language, while Deepfake technology copied his face onto eight other presenters who promoted it in different languages. This precipitated benefits in the African region as the people found a face that they could resonate with, amplifying the impacts of the campaign. However, to a larger degree, users of Deepfakes are not always benevolent. Increasingly, such AI technology has been widely used for pornography where celebrity faces would be altered into another person's body. In parts of Sub-Saharan Africa for instance, Deepfakes have been misused to misconstrue what politicians say as misinformation, leading to military coups and public furore. Even recently in the U.S., an outraged mother saddened by her daughter's bullying by a cheerleader led to her misusing Deepfakes to put that cheerleader's face on obscene pornographic material. The point to draw here is that the application of AI can at times be misused for a malicious agenda, placing immense harm on various stakeholders of society. This propensity to misuse thus poses a threat to humanity.

Finally, AI is more of a threat to humanity than a benefit due to fundamental flaws of its technology, which raises ethical and safety concerns for the people. AI is programmed through data-feeding and data learning. That is to say that the function of AI is often contingent on the data input of human coders and processors, as well as its machine-learning capabilities. This has led to inherent biases in its algorithm which can harm humanity when put into use. A widespread application of AI would be in the field of surveillance where AI is utilised to monitor potential threats. In the instance of the U.S., statistics have found that Americans of colour, such as those of African descent, are up to three times more likely to be profiled as a threat. This has given rise to racial profiling where AI technology targets people of certain backgrounds. This inherent bias is arguably uncharitable and is extremely problematic as it perpetuates and entrenches institutionalised and systemic racism. In China, which is known as a surveillance state with the most closed-circuit televisions (CCTVs) in the world, AI has been applied in regions such as Xinjiang to closely monitor the movement of the Uyghur Muslims. The same can be said about Russia, which uses facial recognition AI to track political detractors. The fundamental problem thus lies in the infringement of people's privacy and their ability to exercise their freedom in this highly digitalised world. While such AI is arguably useful for national security, the intrinsic problem lies in the inaccuracy and biases of the AI, which do more harm than good. This severely infringes upon human rights such as those of autonomy. Such inaccuracies are exacerbated in the context of lethal autonomous weapons which have killed many in the Middle East. This is largely attributed to how such weaponised drones dehumanise and desensitise users to the nuances of human life, where fate is decided by a remote control 5000 miles away. This has brought about public furore in places like Afghanistan, where innocent civilians have been killed in fatal drone strikes. The same can be argued about self-driving cars where AI has failed before, leading to fatal accidents in China where a Tesla vehicle could not be overridden by human intervention, similar to the Boeing 737-Max crashes over Ethiopia and Indonesia. The innate structural problems of AI could thus pose a grave threat to humanity when human life is involved, where AI has the propensity to cause deaths. Hence, the fundamental flaws of AI are more a threat than a benefit to humanity.

In conclusion, the rapid advancements and development of AI are unequivocally astonishing and worthy of applause. However, insofar as the technology is not perfectly accurate and flawless, the grave dangers posed by it will continue to persist. This would propagate great harm to humanity in terms of employment and safety. As a whole, while governments and international regulatory bodies have been doing more to step up efforts to mitigate the harms of AI, the future trajectory remains uncertain with the increasing complexities of technology and the problems accompanying it. For all these reasons and more, AI poses a greater threat to humanity than benefit.

Comments:

Jethro, this is a decent discussion of the issue with many insightful points raised. Comparison and weighing of the 'threat' and 'benefit' of AI are attempted. Good content knowledge is demonstrated with the use of relevant supporting evidence. Sound command of language. Good effort.

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Is artificial intelligence more of a benefit than a threat to humanity?

Roslin Rai, 22S39

The news of the AlphaGo machine reverberated across the globe, as this Artificial Intelligence (AI) software knocked the chess champion off the deep-seated chess champion off his throne. As the world becomes increasingly automated with AI insidiously penetrating nearly every aspect of our lives, it has raged a firestorm of debates surrounding the impact of AI on humanity. Ardent supporters of this global wave of automation and technology believe that AI serves the greater good of humanity. Pessimists, on the other hand, brood over the terrorising threats that loom over humanity against the backdrop of the influx of growing AI industry. AI has undoubtedly resulted in various negative implications for people. Nevertheless, I believe that AI is more of a benefit than a threat to humanity, as it serves to enhance the welfare of society and augment certain tasks to make the world more efficient.

As we hurtle into an increasingly digitised and tech-based world, pessimists fear the implications AI would have over the job landscape. The replacement of human workers by robots is no longer a distant concept. It is an undeniable reality that we are forced to confront in our modern world. Take for instance the recent invention of ChatGPT which has taken the world by storm. While some celebrate its ingenuity and its endless capabilities that serve to improve their lives, many workers fear the loss of their jobs to their undeniably more efficient counterparts. Not only is AI much more precise, faster and efficient in carrying out tasks, but they have a whole plethora of other benefits that make it a more attractive worker: the elimination of the need to appease demands for wage raises, satisfy labour unions, as well as the worry of paying for health benefits. With AI possessing such a powerful resume, many fear that blue-collar workers will lose their jobs to the more productive AI workers. Other than threatening the job landscape, AI has ignited a huge military firestorm with inventions that threatens to wipe out humanity. The quote, 'The world is a nuclear giant and an ethical baby,' perfectly sums up the rapid technological advancements in weapons and warfare. Recent inventions such as AI drones used in the Russia-Ukraine war, have opened an entire Pandora's box of questions surrounding the ethics of integrating technology into a realm where life and death intertwine. It is difficult to hold somebody accountable for their actions, once a robot is used to deliver the actions. Therefore, with the quantum leaps and bounds made in AI development, there has been a growing body of people expressing their concerns that AI could threaten the entire existence of humanity.

Nevertheless, these people who throw nothing but harsh opprobrium at the rapid advancements made in AI are not Cassandra's, accurate in their pessimism but overlooked by a narrow-minded society. They are Luddites who fail to recognise the

power that AI holds in advancing human civilisation. A straightforward assessment of today's world would demonstrate not just how beneficial AI is to the world, but how crucial it is for human survival. One of the greatest contributions of AI to the world is the remarkable improvements in the health and welfare of societies. It is an incontestable fact that machines and robots can produce accurate and reliable results, as they are able to draw out information from their vast databases in mere seconds. Such a feature of AI is particularly beneficial in the field of medicine, where the lives of patients are in the hands of caregivers. Take for instance the ground-breaking revelation of Project Artemis which uses a machine capable of accurately monitoring heart rates and fluctuations in the foetus' breathing patterns to diagnose and detect diseases in the foetus, even before symptoms have manifested. Such an extraordinary feat in science and medicine can only be accomplished with the help of AI. As technology becomes increasingly integrated into healthcare, many fear that while technology may drive the world to greater heights, it can result in certain ethical concerns taking the backseat. For instance, the field of cloning continues to cause social unrest and religious tensions, especially after the He Jiankui scandal. Yet, I believe that such incidents where scientists go astray are rare situations, due to the numerous strict and controlled regulations enforced to serve as a moral compass, and ensure that scientific endeavours are for the greater good of society. Hence, I believe that AI is more of a benefit than a threat to humanity.

Additionally, when AI is used to augment human ability, it could unlock a whole world of endless possibilities and opportunities. One of the most overlooked qualities of AI is its ability to enhance and help humans, as people tend to view AI as a competitor since AI is perceived to be much more capable than humans. However, one should not view AI as a threat: after all, human innovation stems from the depths of our curiosity, our urge to explore the unknown and our audacity to challenge the status quo. The ingenuity and creativity of the human mind are unparalleled to that of AI. Furthermore, humans possess so many intangible qualities that machines and robots cannot replicate. Thus, one need not fear and mistakenly view AI as a threat to humanity, but rather a friend to help us accomplish and reach greater heights. A notable example would be the integration of AI into education, which has been growing in popularity. The novel invention of ChatGPT sent shockwaves around the world, particularly in the education field. With such a powerful AI program, pedagogy will never be the same. While concerns have been raised regarding the roles of teachers in the era of AI as well as plagiarism concerns, one should not immediately dismiss AI's role in education. There are so many benefits that can be reaped by integrating AI into classrooms, such as innovative and creative thinking. ChatGPT could also be utilised to answer any queries and doubts about certain topics; it is just one of many other interactive tools that have emerged to boost engagement in classrooms when utilised by teachers. Other than education, technology can be integrated into almost any field where humans are concerned, from sports to security. Therefore, AI can prove to be more beneficial to humanity if viewed as an aid, rather than a competition.

In conclusion, AI is a double-edged sword, and a sharp one. While AI could bring about negative implications, it could also be the very catalyst for advancements in human civilisation when placed in the wrong hands. Thus, whether AI poses more harm than good lies in our hands. As mentioned by Richard Feynman, "To every man is given the key to the gates of heaven. The same key opens the gates of hell. And so it is with science." Thus, to reap maximum benefits to society with AI, governments and various stakeholders have to appropriately regulate its developments, and individuals should change their perspectives about AI to view it as an aid to help humanity achieve even greater heights.

Comments:

Fluent, considered response. Demonstrates a deep understanding of the functionalities and impacts of AI.

Is artificial intelligence more of a benefit than a threat to humanity?

Lee Zhi Yan Natalie, 22S45

Many films like 'Ex Machina' and 'I, Robot' have shown us the dangers of artificial intelligence. They depict a world where humans, being overly reliant on robots, eventually fall slaves to their own creation when the robots go rogue. Despite this, warnings fall on deaf ears as society continues to strive for a robust technological world run by machines. After all, the more reliant society is on technology, the less prone to human error it is. However, as useful as AI might sound, its insidious nature is not one to be taken lightly. In the wrong hands, this piece of technology is just as powerful a weapon as it is an aid. Hence, before the world crumbles amidst the imminent sentience of AI, we must ask ourselves: where do we draw the line? Some may argue that society has long exceeded our welcome in technology's abode, but I believe that we have only dipped our toes in the water of a fully automated society, as AI can bring about more benefits than threats to humanity.

Opponents of using artificial intelligence posit that AI threatens the very cybersecurity infrastructure we have spent so long building. To put our online safety at risk for the sake of reaping unpromised benefits seems questionable in this sense, especially since there have been precedents of security breaches even without the use of AI. For example, the SingHealth data breach put the health records of many Singaporeans at risk of falling into the wrong hands. This leak of personal information made many citizens worried, as their data was no longer safely secured. Cybersecurity remains a priority in the eyes of the Singaporean government, with the development of a new cybersecurity sector in the Singapore Armed Forces. Hence, any threat to our national safety would be detrimental to our society. The pervasiveness of AI would only exacerbate the situation and make it harder for nations to defend against this threat. With the use of AI, one can easily brute force one's way into secure networks, even without relevant expertise. For example, netizens have found that the AI technology ChatGPT can generate valid codes for Windows software and links to piracy websites. With AI technology becoming more accessible to the public, the problem is likely to worsen, and soon, nations may find themselves fighting a digital war. Hence, artificial intelligence is a threat to humanity.

However, AI can also be used to combat those who abuse the use of such technology. The wonders of AI are in its adaptable nature. Its functions vary according to the intentions of its users. Hence, it is no surprise that AI can instead be used to strengthen cybersecurity. For example, the same AI chatbot ChatGPT that was used to commit cybercrimes can also be used to generate code in many programming languages, such as Python and JavaScript, in mere seconds. In this vein, the use of AI can be interpreted as a method to greatly increase the efficiency of the job of

programmers. No longer do they have to spend hours writing mundane code that is riddled with bugs; with a mere prompt, AI can complete the same task in the blink of an eye. Hence, instead of falling victim to cyberattacks fuelled by AI, countries can utilise the very same technology to protect themselves against these attacks. Moreover, countries can implement laws and regulations to criminalise the inappropriate use of AI to commit crimes. Since many users of AI do not have the scheming intentions to take down a country, the threats of AI can be mitigated with relative ease, even bringing about benefits of improved efficiency in the process.

Another potential threat of AI is the misuse of AI to spread false information. With the ability of AI to produce results at breakneck speeds comes the ability of users to generate a plethora of false images. For example, Adobe Photoshop's new feature allows users to edit pictures as per their wishes using a prompt. This created an onslaught of fake images online on platforms such as Twitter and Reddit, with users photoshopping fake tweets by politicians and celebrities in an attempt to create humour or generate chaos. Other technologies such as 'deepfakes' put the reputation of many young female content creators at stake, as internet trolls 'deepfaked' their faces onto immodest pictures. These instances show us the threat that AI brings to not only many individuals, but also the online community as a whole.

While it is difficult to prevent the misuse of AI, there will always be caveats to new and rising technologies. However, we cannot solely choose to focus on these pitfalls and ignore the benefits that also arise with the use of AI. For example, artificial intelligence allows users to create art in a new and improved way. Never-before-seen genres of artwork have been created with AI alone. This new category of art is sure to attract a new generation of artists to indulge in this experience. Other facets include musicians who implement AI generated output in their music, or even entire covers of songs with the voices of late singers such as Michael Jackson and Amy Winehouse. Film creators can also use AI to create computer-generated imagery for their films, adding a touch of awe factor to their work. Hence, AI has the potential to grow the creative industry by magnitudes. This benefit is already evident in the popularity of such artworks, and we are sure to see a boom in this industry in the coming years, which could be largely beneficial to many economies reliant on the Arts, such as the United States.

In conclusion, whether AI is more of a benefit than a threat depends on how we plan to utilise it in the near future. While treading in such unfamiliar terrain may seem frightening to some, we must unlock the potential of AI and make full use of it, as it could entirely change the digital landscape for the better. Like in the film 'Frankenstein', AI technology is a misunderstood monster of our creation. Hence, let us embrace the use of AI and let it better our lives.

Comments:

Largely fluent and a conscious weighing of the threat/benefit dichotomy evident. Examples are well-chosen. Could work on extending the scope to make the discussion richer without having to increase the word count by a lot.

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Is artificial intelligence more of a benefit than a threat to humanity?

Justen Ong Jin Herng, 22S52

In the dystopian movie series Terminator, the world faces the threat of sentient artificial intelligence that wants to destroy humans. This far-fetched reality might not be too hard to believe in our day and age as artificial intelligence (AI), a simulated neural network made with code, has advanced greatly. This is what Elon Musk warned people about before, that AI is slowly becoming a threat to humanity. This means that AI might slowly dominate humanity in the long run, and people are all going to suffer. Sceptics choose to believe the above entirely and argue that AI is more of a threat than a benefit to society. However, with the way AI helps in the field of creation and productivity, AI may be more of a benefit than a threat to mankind.

Firstly, AI creates greater possibilities in creative media and increases its potential. This is a benefit because creative media production has stagnated in recent years, and AI offers a refreshing new form of creation to make new art for people to enjoy. AI can generate almost anything, ranging from drawings to whole movies. While it is not perfect, AI is still able to seamlessly integrate itself into the creative and productive processes of creating media. People can now use AI to create things that were once impossible, as AI can generate its own original ideas. With AI models like Stable Diffusion, people can feed the AI with sources to take inspiration from and let the AI learn from the input, and then users can generate new content. This technology was used by a visual effects company, Corridor Digital, to create an animation by using AI to transform their real faces and costumes into two-dimensional drawings that retain an art style through each frame of the video. Before this was possible, traditional animation had to be done by drawing each frame of the animation one by one. With this new technology, greater and more impressive animations can be created more efficiently. Therefore, because AI can create things that were not possible before, AI is a benefit to humanity.

Secondly, AI benefits humanity by improving automation and perfecting certain processes in various industries. AI is integrated into many aspects of our lives, and it improves many of the processes we experience from day to day. AI is a benefit because for things that can be automated or follow an algorithm, AI can do it many times faster than a human can. This optimises many processes. Also, some jobs that were once very human interaction-centred can now be done by AI. Additionally, AI eliminates the risk of human error and protects our lives. AI is used for chatbots, which can sometimes replace the need for a real chatting partner, or for navigation systems, aeroplane auto-piloting, and even driverless cars, which are safer than human drivers. This shows that many jobs can be done by AI, and this reduces the costs of firms to provide many services, as they only need to pay a one-time fee to implement AI

instead of paying wages to a human worker regularly. Fewer mistakes will also be made by AI than humans when it comes to transport, so this can greatly increase safety. Therefore, as AI can improve many processes and make things safer, it improves our quality of life and this is a benefit.

Unfortunately, while AI has benefits that seem perfect, these benefits come at a cost too, and the reason for this makes AI sceptics think that AI is more of a threat to humanity. With improved processes and AI being able to do many things a human can, AI becomes a better choice for many firms as humans are more expensive for their production processes and do not perform as well as AI. Also, AI can become a threat if people use it with malicious intent; with AI being so powerful and on the rise, the damage that people can do can be catastrophic for others, and these threats become more concerning. This is seen in the increase in unemployment rate in recent years, due to AI replacing some jobs and thus decreasing people's standard of living. For some, AI poses a great threat to them because they lack qualifications for other jobs that AI cannot take over, so when they become unemployed, they cannot find a new job and they will have no income. Additionally, AI can be dangerous when used by evil people, due to deepfake technology and voice recreation. This leads to the creation of extremely realistic videos of celebrities in the act of doing or saying something wrong. This technology has given rise to more believable hoaxes that can hardly be differentiated from reality, thus causing false accusations and damage to people's reputations. Therefore, AI comes at a cost and can sometimes harm people, so it might be a threat.

While the above is true, the total benefit of AI cannot be ignored and the harm done by AI due to human's malicious intent can be averted, thus making AI safer and still beneficial to humanity. This is because while the loss of jobs due to AI is prominent, many policies exist to help workers who have no job to survive in society. Additionally, no matter how believable hoaxes are now due to AI, anything created by AI can still be identified using anti-AI programs available, and what people choose to do with AI can be controlled and is not exactly AI doing damage, as it is AI being used by people to do damage. The above is supported by the unemployment benefits available that can help retrenched workers receive payouts from the government to survive. In Singapore, SkillsFuture exists to help workers upskill and find jobs that AI cannot take over. Also, AI creations can be identified as programs that have already been created to filter AI content. Therefore, the cost of using AI can be decreased or even averted, so humanity can benefit more from AI.

In conclusion, AI is more of a benefit than a threat to humanity. This is because of the improvements brought to our lives and many other things by AI. While the dangers of AI still exist, it is really up to how people want to make use of this great intelligence for the betterment of humanity. Therefore, AI is truly more of a benefit than a threat when used with the right intent.

Comments:

Good that it is pointed out that AI is but a tool for humanity to decide and wield. This is generally a fluent essay with smooth transitions, with a good balance of reasoning and substantiation, and all done rather dextrously. You may need to work on avoiding whitewashing (do not just gloss through concerns that are not aligned with your viewpoint), pick one (or two, do not do a list) and give it some depth of evaluation.

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Modern technology is more of a benefit than a threat to the arts.

Ng Zhiqi, 22A12

In the 21st century, technology is inextricably intertwined with every aspect of our lives, and the arts are no exception. Gone are the days of silent black-and-white movies, or dusty old tomes of classic literature hidden away in historical libraries. Modern technology has transformed the way we make and appreciate the arts, and in my opinion, this is for the better. Modern technology can be defined as ranging from social media and other online platforms to artificial intelligence (AI). Meanwhile, the arts include film, theatre, visual arts, music and a multitude of other areas. With the help of modern technology, the arts can become more easily accessible, develop in new and innovative ways, as well as receive more exposure to the public. Hence, I firmly believe that modern technology is more of a benefit than a threat to the arts.

Firstly, modern technology benefits the arts, as it makes the arts more accessible and convenient for the public to appreciate. With the advent of technology, it is no longer necessary to always be on the lookout for live performances, or physically explore libraries to enjoy the beauty of literature. Online platforms serve to bring the arts to our fingertips, whenever and wherever we choose to engage with it. Streaming services such as Netflix and Disney+ enable users to enjoy a plethora of films that may not be accessible in cinemas, while Singapore's National Library Board has a mobile application for users to peruse their favourite books on any device. Apart from simple convenience, modern technology also removes barriers preventing people from viewing live performances, such as cost or physical distance. This was particularly integral for the survival of the arts in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which all live performances came to a screeching halt. Theatre companies staged live streams of legendary pieces, such as Romeo and Juliet, as well as The Phantom of the Opera, during the lockdown period for many countries. YouTube was an especially popular platform for the arts as well, with the UK's Royal Opera House having its own YouTube channel to post videos of ballet and opera performances, to be viewed at absolutely zero cost. This also has the added benefit of immortalising the art of our generation for people of the future to look back on and enjoy, especially for intangible art forms such as dance and theatre. With modern technology, the arts are now more accessible and convenient to enjoy than ever, which has vastly extended its outreach to people from all walks of life. Hence, modern technology is more of a benefit than a threat to the arts.

Furthermore, modern technology can be used to create art in new and innovative ways, expanding the realm of the arts and challenging an infinite number of new possibilities. Modern technology can be harnessed as a powerful tool to create pieces that push the boundaries of traditional art, and its integration into modern art

often serves to heighten its appeal. For example, music has progressed rapidly with the development and adoption of modern techniques, from modern instruments such as synthesisers to digital production software. Musicians such as Grimes and Daft Punk are renowned for their signature electronic sound, and they rely on modern technology to create their enthralling and futuristic songs, which would have been impossible to produce 50 years ago. Utilising modern technology also enables people to engage with the arts on a deeper level. For instance, TeamLab is a company that masterfully utilises modern technology to create interactive exhibitions, such as the Future World exhibition in Singapore's ArtScience Museum. Through the use of modern technology such as motion and touch sensors, TeamLab creates exhibitions that evolve and respond to one's every movement, allowing us to watch flowers blossom at our touch, or an explosion of stars at a few swipes of our fingers, with the help of a website linked to the exhibition. The temporary Van Gogh exhibition at Sentosa also uses modern technology, in particular projections, to create an immersive experience for visitors, who can enjoy a room full of Van Gogh's most beautiful artworks brought to life on the walls themselves. Modern technology creates experiences that are truly unique to every person and indubitably deepens their appreciation and love for the arts in the process. With new ways to produce and enjoy art being created every day, the arts are sure to continue evolving to reach greater heights. Thus, modern technology has massive benefits to the arts.

On the other hand, some may argue that modern technology is more of a threat than a benefit to the arts. With the inexorable rise of technology, it comes as no surprise that our control over it would inevitably become tenuous. A recent worrying development in the relationship between the arts and modern technology is the advent of AI. By analysing existing pieces and utilising complex code to seek out patterns, AI can generate its art in a matter of seconds. What initially started as a fascinating way to test the limits of modern technology has now transformed into something more sinister, as people begin to neglect real, human artists in favour of the convenience and novelty of AI. Midjourney is one example of an AI platform where users can create their art. A traditional painter may take days off work to create an artwork full of painstakingly perfected details, and to commission one to create a personalised artwork would require a hefty sum of money. Meanwhile, users of Midjourney can simply input several concise keywords and upload a few reference images, and the AI will churn out any number of artworks to one's liking in a matter of seconds, at minimal cost. Regarding writing and literature, ChatGPT and Character.AI are another two AI platforms where users have been toying with writing their works, allowing the AI to finish their sentences, supplement their vocabulary, or even work completely by themselves to respond to a given prompt. It is no surprise that people are eager to harness the power of AI and enjoy the sheer range of its benefits, with minimal time and cost required. It is heartwarming to see many people discovering the joy of creating their art for the first time. However, when this eclipses the importance of real artists in our society, it begins to pose a real threat to the arts. Real artists can bring a level of nuance and human emotion to their pieces, connecting with our souls on a far

deeper level than AI possibly could. Yet, their work is sidelined, criticised and even stolen to feed AI development, and artists themselves are overlooked for not having the same convenience or unlimited capabilities as AI. If we continue down this path, the threat of artists being replaced by AI may someday become a reality, making modern technology a threat to the arts.

However, all is not yet lost. Modern technology, when harnessed in the right ways, can serve to highlight real artists and give them a platform to present their work to the world. By giving them a voice, modern technology enables artists to reach out to a wider audience and reap the benefits in real-time. This also aids the general public in connecting with artists and understanding their perspectives, paving the way for a deeper level of appreciation for the arts. For example, Neil Gaiman, the writer of *Good Omens*, is frequently active on the social media site Tumblr, where he banters with fans and answers questions about his work by curious readers. Similarly, the poet Richard Siken recently opened a Twitter account, where he posts snippets of unreleased works and chats with fans about his interests, even offering insightful life advice at times. This shows how artists like them can utilise social media platforms to “meet” and connect with fans from across the world, while also drawing the attention of others who stumble upon posts that pique their interest, therefore giving the artists a wider reach and improving their ability to connect with their audience. Social media is also used on a bigger scale by theatre companies such as Singapore’s Wild Rice, which frequently films behind-the-scenes footage of productions and interviews with their casts to be uploaded onto their YouTube channel. This gives viewers a more intimate view into the intricacies of their performances and provides the actors with a voice and platform to express their passion for what they do and what it takes to put up one of their performances. In turn, this reveals to the world the beauty of theatre as an art form, with modern technology providing us with a glimpse into the lives and hard work of the artists themselves. Hence, modern technology can cultivate a greater appreciation for artists, by giving them individual platforms to connect with the world.

In conclusion, though modern technology has its downsides, I am sanguine about it being properly utilised for the arts. Hence, it is more of a benefit than a threat overall.

Comments:

A relevant and written essay that demonstrates knowledge and insight. The threats and benefits were well supported with a range of current examples and further evaluated, but the evaluation was done separately for each side. Consider weighing the threats against the benefits more explicitly for a response that fully addresses the question. Competently written with varied language structures and felicitous expressions. Ideas were also clearly signposted and structured. Well done!

Modern technology is more of a benefit than a threat to the arts.

Keerthi d/o Mahindran, 22S46

Technology and the arts seem to inherently be at odds. For many, it is hard to reconcile the plethora of differences between the rigidity of screens filled with seemingly incomprehensible code, and the fluidity of brushstrokes or poetry scribbled across a page. However, it would be parochial to ignore that modern technology has greatly benefitted the arts. Not only has it made the arts more accessible to the masses, but it has also greatly reduced the barriers to the art industry, allowing more budding artists to find lucrative work. On the other hand, many argue that modern technology is more of a threat to the arts. With the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) capable of creating beautiful artworks at a fraction of the cost of what a human artist would demand, many worry that modern technology will destroy the livelihoods of artists and the sanctity of the arts. Additionally, as digitalisation sweeps across the world, the STEM industry's stability and profitability have resulted in the arts being cast aside in favour of more scientific prospects. Hence, I disagree that modern technology is more of a benefit than a threat to the arts, though it is undeniable that modern technology has benefited the arts.

A major way modern technology has benefited the arts is by giving artists more avenues to find paid work. It is no secret that society's desire for the arts has been steadily declining. At its peak, the arts were viewed as opulent and indulgent, reserved only for the upper class who had the deep pockets to pay for it. The likes of great artists like Da Vinci, musicians like Heifetz, poets like Shakespeare and so on were handsomely rewarded for their work. However, as digitalisation and globalisation swept across the globe like wildfire, many artists were left burning. The arts are now notoriously unprofitable, perceived by society as useless in the face of modern technology, and the average individual finds it incredibly hard to find a job in the arts industry that pays well enough to cover the rising costs of living. However, modern technology has created more avenues for artists to find work. With the advent of social media, many artists now post their works online, garnering views from admirers which turn into cheques that return to their pockets through monetisation. With sites such as Patreon, artists can even lock their content behind a paywall to generate income when people have to pay for the art they put out. Additionally, modern technology has expanded many arts-related industries, creating more jobs for artists. A good example would be the film industry. As modern technology has made films more accessible to the masses, the demand for films has skyrocketed. The creation of new genres of films, such as animated films, has also resulted in the need for large teams working on churning out film after film. As such, actors, animators, special effects artists, musicians, writers, and many more jobs have been in high demand, allowing many more artists to find well-paying work and benefiting them greatly.

However, technology is a double-edged sword. While it has created many jobs for artists, it has also begun to steal many more. AI, the faceless threat spreading its roots through the Internet like a virus, has become a growing concern. AI technology has grown so sophisticated and powerful that it can now generate art such as paintings and music that is comparable to human-created works, pulling from the large online database of existing artworks to paint realistic digital portraits or even replicate the voices of famous singers such as Beyonce. As such, many artists begin to worry that as power-hungry and profit-maximising corporations turn to the cheaper alternative of AI, human artists will be left stranded and without work. The recent actors' and screenwriters' strikes in the USA have shown how quickly these companies can turn on artists. Many writers and actors are currently standing in solidarity against streaming giants such as Disney and Netflix which have been under-paying writers for years and, seemingly, will continue to do so even with the barrage of protests. An anonymous executive even left a bone-chilling comment that they were willing to drag out the strikes until the writers lost their homes to "starve them out". With AI to fall back on, it is no wonder these companies are unwilling to give in to writers' demands for higher pay. Hence, modern technology has become a growing threat to the livelihoods of artists by spawning cheaper 'virtual alternatives' in the form of AI.

Additionally, the arts have been pushed to the backseat in favour of modern technology. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the arts only serve to satisfy the needs of creativity and self-expression once basic needs such as food and shelter have been met. In today's fast-paced, dog-eat-dog world cultivated by globalisation and the onslaught of modern technology, the arts have been rendered obsolete. With hectic schedules, many people are frantically scrambling to make ends meet, and have no time to spare to pursue the arts. Though one may dream of becoming an artist, they are eventually forced to give up on that dream in favour of a more stable and better-paying STEM-related job. Society's contempt for the arts can be seen from a Singaporean survey done in 2020, at the height of the pandemic. 86% of the responses had voted that medical professionals such as doctors were most essential, while a staggering 77% had voted that arts-related jobs were the most non-essential. While it is not hard to see why the votes were heavily skewed towards medical professionals since the survey was done during a pandemic, the disdain for arts-related jobs brought to light the silent yet pressing issue of the arts being looked down upon. As modern technology has resulted in an increasingly digital world, people fight over jobs in Computer Science or Engineering and scoff at the idea of going to museums or theatres to admire artworks or plays and orchestral pieces. As such, modern technology is a threat to the arts.

On the other hand, modern technology has benefited the arts by making them more accessible. For example, plays or operas were once regarded as luxuries reserved only for the creme de la creme of society. Viewers had to be dressed in glamorous ball gowns and three-piece suits to even be admitted, and the ticket prices

were so exorbitant that the average individual could only dream of ever holding a ticket. However, with modern technology, such plays and operas are now available on streaming services for a small subscription fee or even free apps such as YouTube. Viewers can be dressed comfortably in sweatpants and enjoy the plays or operas from the comfort of their own homes. Indeed, where the arts were once regarded as the indulgences of the upper class, they are now widely available for the masses as modern technology has made the production and showing of the arts cheaper and easier. Take painting, for example. Artists such as Da Vinci and Rembrandt mixed their own paints from expensive materials that were hard to acquire. Rare materials such as lapis lazuli and even crushed-up mummies from Egypt were once needed to make paint. However, today, modern technology has made paint processing much easier and cheaper. Acrylic paints made from inexpensive materials are now widely available and of good quality. Their affordability lowers the barriers once associated with partaking in painting, transforming it into an activity now used for stress relief, childhood development, and even to treat mental illnesses in the form of art therapy. While modern technology has undeniably made it harder for artists to make a living, it also cannot be ignored that the arts are now more accessible as a hobby to the masses. With modern technology, even the average individual can enjoy the feeling of liberation and self-expression that comes from partaking in the arts, hence proving that modern technology has benefited the arts.

In conclusion, the relationship between modern technology and the arts is not so black and white. Many areas of intersection are swathed in grey, and require finesse in handling. To completely separate modern technology and the arts would be to remove the average citizens' interaction with the arts, as well as destroy the livelihoods of many artists. Yet, to allow modern technology and the arts to continue to co-exist would do the same. As such, governments of the world have to tread carefully on this fine line, to put in place measures ensuring that individuals will not be cut off from the arts while artists can still make a living and be compensated for their hard work.

Comments:

A good spread of material and content, covering various aspects of modern technology's impact on the arts. Some good insights were demonstrated, with apt use of supporting evidence. A fluently written piece with a sound grasp of language. A decent effort.

Modern technology is more of a benefit than a threat to the arts.

Lim Li Min, Rachel, 22S46

The arts should resist the influence of technology: this is an opinion that has been popular within the artistic community. We live in an age of modern technology where it has become ubiquitous and prevalent in many different facets of our lives, permeating different aspects of society, including the arts. Modern technology, also known as new technology, comprises advanced devices like smartphones, drones and cameras, but also artificial intelligence (AI) and seen the rise of the internet. Some may argue that such modern technology has created more harm than good to the art scene, in replacing the role of human artists; however, that is a far too myopic view. Modern technology can also do so much more good, like expanding the influence of art through its increased far-reaching platforms, and benefitting artists by opening up new opportunities for them to show their works to the world and receive recognition. Hence, modern technology is a benefit rather than a threat to the arts.

Opponents of the view that modern technology is beneficial to the arts may argue that it instead diminishes the value of human artists. AI software is now developed to be able to create pieces of art as aesthetically pleasing as those hand-drawn. They can also do it at a rate that is unprecedented and most likely could never be achieved by humans. Dream, a Canadian AI program created by the company WOMBO, allows users to simply input instructions into a program, and an art piece would be generated based on the prompt given in a matter of seconds. These artworks created by this wondrous software are also indistinguishable from that created by humans most of the time, which is shown by a double-blind study conducted by the Art and Artificial Intelligence Lab in Rutgers University. They found out that over 70 per cent of the people they surveyed in an art gallery, believed that the artworks presented in front of them were not created by AI systems, when in fact they were. Hence, modern technology could have the power to erode the value of human artists, as they can create art pieces that are on par with or even better than those created by humans.

Be that as it may, the case where modern technology can completely replace human artists and erase their existence is far too myopic. Something that AI can never accomplish is that of human creativity, and to replicate the human mind. Unlike AI-like robots, humans can feel and have their own emotions, which they can then portray in the pieces of artwork they do. They can relay strong and thought-provoking ideas related to bigger issues with what they draw, paint or construct. Instead, instances of modern technology should be used hand-in-hand as a tool with human artists, to help improve the current pieces that they can produce. A prime example of such collaboration is Ai Weiwei's 'Hansel and Gretel', where he used the theme of government surveillance to create an interactive art piece with drones and cameras.

In one section of the art piece, the drones would take pictures and videos of the audience that would be played in real-time to them. Such a level of interaction and the portrayal of the message on the dangers of surveillance would not have been possible without the help of technological devices. Hence, it is one-sided to argue that modern technology is replacing and can take over human artists, and is therefore a serious threat to the arts.

In addition, with the prevalence of the usage of smartphones in our current age, news and information spread rapidly in the interconnected world we live in. This can help to promote the art piece to more people than ever before, hence expanding the influence of the arts. There is nothing a person cannot access with a smartphone. With this ability, those who are even mildly interested in the arts can find easy access to a panoply of artworks and original creations online. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Smithsonian capitalised on the Internet's outreach and digitalised its art pieces. This allowed for people around the globe to have access to these prized pieces despite lockdown restrictions. A YouTube channel, 'TwoSetsViolins', capitalised on the video platform's outreach to educate viewers on classical music in an entertaining manner. With just a search on our electronic gadgets, it would certainly allow people to find out more about the arts and gain a deeper appreciation for them. People might even discover their new-found interest in the arts and be influenced to join the arts scene, expanding it and making it more well-known to the world, therefore benefiting it.

Furthermore, modern technology lowers the barriers to entry for up-and-coming artists to pursue their passions and provides opportunities for small artists to gain recognition. Modern technological developments have made significant progress in social media technology, with the creation of numerous platforms on the web for users. Accompanied by the massive outreach the platforms have, any artists who simply have an electronic device, be it a laptop or a tablet could make use of it to make it big. For instance, uploading a picture of one's painting on social media platforms like Instagram could be enough to get viewers' attention. Lyn Lapid, a Filipino-American songwriter, posts short vocal covers on the TikTok platform, and first turned heads when she uploaded a video with her original track titled 'Producer Man'. Replaying her past experiences with a bad producer, the video gained significant traction on TikTok, accumulating tens of millions of views. Over the period where she had gone viral, Lyn received an opportunity to be signed with Republic Records, which helped her tremendously in advancing her music career. Hence, advancements in modern technology provide artists with various platforms to showcase their talent to the world. In a similar vein, it also presents equal chances for all small and new artists in the music industry to gain recognition from the public, and even help to further develop their careers. Thus, this brings about massive benefits in advancing artists in the industry.

As a whole, developments in modern technology have proved to be more of a boon than a bane to the arts. The artistic community should capitalise on the power of

it and be more mindful not to let it overpower them, but instead, help them in their journey to make the arts better than it was ever before.

Comments:

Points are relevant and well-developed for the most part. Examples are thoroughly analysed. Language is fluently expressed.

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Modern technology is more of a benefit than a threat to the arts.

Sun Xiaonan, 22A12

When the term 'digital art' was coined, many purists routed vehemently against it, claiming that digital art was not real art. Yet, it is impossible to stop the progress of modern technology in the realm of the arts, and thus the age-old custodians and savants of autistic purity have to step aside. Some believe that modern technology threatens the Arts as it could affect the integrity of how art is created. However, it is undeniable that the arts have been largely uplifted with technology, new mediums and new ways to enhance one's craft. Additionally, modern technology has allowed for the proliferation of the arts and the creation of wider communities.

Critics argue that the development of modern technology has threatened artistic licence and integrity. Modern technology allows for artistic works to be uploaded to the cloud instantly, for it to be duplicated millions of times and shared across the internet. This means that once art is shared or even stored digitally, artists tend to lose proprietorship over their creations. A watermark, signature or artist tag may easily be removed with a few clicks in Photoshop. Then it is ready to be used or rather appropriated by any major company wishing to cut corners. For example, the makeup artist Jeffree Star had his design team steal a smaller creator's Pop Art piece and used for his merchandise. This issue is worsened with the advent of AI (artificial intelligence). First, many artists' creations are uploaded without permission and without their knowledge into an AI database like Midjourney, where computers then generate billions of new images based on a prompt and the unknowing artist's input. This not only exploits artists, but also threatens the very foundations of artistic ownership and copyright. Second and most importantly, generated images are then used instead of hiring actual artists, robbing them of precious job opportunities in an industry that is already immensely competitive. Companies have already begun doing so, such as Disney and Marvel choosing to use AI-generated images in their television show, 'Secret Invasion'. In an almost three-minute-long introduction, bizarre AI images were splashed onto the screen with no real coordination or intent. Art - the expression of personal voice, an amalgamation of individual style, imagination and creativity - seems to have become algorithmic. The homogenization of art and a loss of individuality may destroy the keystone of the arch of artistic expression.

However, though the odds may be threatened by the adoption of such technology, it is also undeniable that the medium of modern technology has only brought artists closer to their vision, whether that be inconvenience or in craft. The adoption of technology need not always be an all-consuming force of homogeneity for an artist to use it to their benefit. Modern technology offers new forms of mediums of art, like digital art, light projection and surround sound. Many artists may choose to

adopt this to give their audience a more immersive experience to engage all of their senses. Furthermore, the use of innovative technology often awakens a sense of childlike amazement and wonder in audiences, activating them and capturing their imagination. For example, the worldwide Van Gogh exhibition made use of many such modern marvels to bring Van Gogh's work to life. The most stunning of all was a ceiling-to-floor light display of Van Gogh's signature paintings, animated to display the swirling galaxy of the *Starry Night* or the falling petals of sunflowers, while a rousing soundtrack played in the background. Technologically innovative ways to present art help capture a wider audience to appreciate art, catering to those who prefer a more kinaesthetic viewing experience. Technology, when incorporated with timeless and classic pieces, can uplift art while still preserving tradition. For example, in the recent adaptation of 'The Sound Of Music', an old and classic musical staged at the Marina Bay Sands, the director chose to use smoke machines with different lighting techniques to enhance the atmosphere of the musical. He also chose to put set pieces on a mechanical track, for easy set changes without manual adjustment. Animation is an example of another medium where technology has made the work of traditional animators much easier, and even helped animation be closer to life. No longer will animators have to labour over sketching frame by frame. Instead, new technology like rotoscoping or motion tracking can allow for easier animation of human characters, and bring up animators to engage in more creative processes like storyboarding or the drawing of key scenes. Therefore, modern technology can still greatly uplift the arts.

Today, there has never been an easier way for artists and creators to broadcast themselves and find their audience. Indeed, the proliferation of social media and online databases has reduced imperfect information, and allowed artists and audiences to locate each other. Compared to the old ages when struggling artists were at the mercy of rich sponsors, artists today have a digital customer base and therefore are given more bargaining power to charge the prices they want. For example, the social media accounts of artists 'brettpaints' and 'emilydoesart' have amassed millions of online followers, even though both users are still in art school. Their customer base gives them financial stability and reassurance of job prospects post-graduation, essential to sustaining art as a career. For literature, online databases like Goodreads act as a platform to review and approve books, as well as give exposure to lesser-known novelists. Early exposure and establishing a loyal following, even before publication, has become a new way for authors to bargain for higher royalties and better contracts with their publishers. Thus, writers benefit from this media arrangement as well. Modern technology has not only aided in the dissemination and proliferation of art but also safeguarded the livelihoods of artists and creators, thus safeguarding the realm of arts.

In conclusion, art needs to move with the times and ride the tide of modern technology. Whether technology is a boon or a bane depends on whether artists are innovative enough to adapt. The preservation of artistic integrity is paramount,

however, and the government must step in to regulate new AI technology as it is still in its infant stages, or the role of artists may be heavily diminished forever.

Comments:

An insightful essay that spelt out the threats and benefits of technology in the creation and promotion of the Arts. The last supporting argument was rather contradictory, though, in light of the threat posed by technology as discussed in the opposing argument. While technology in the form of digital media does present opportunities for self-promotion and perhaps a more efficient way to make one's mark in the artistic profession, this option is not always available to artists in non-literary or visual arts fields. Consider weighing the benefits against the threats too, to better engage the question. Confidently expressed ideas; the essay demonstrated apt vocabulary and well-connected sentences.

To what extent have environmental issues affected food choices of people in your society?

Chen Man Sum, 22S32

"You are what you eat." This widely known and often repeated phrase acts as a reminder for people to be more aware of their consumption habits as the food you ingest has a direct impact on your health. As the planet becomes more entrenched in environmental issues such as the problem of global warming or pollutants posing a risk to food safety, this phrase has become more popular, even in Singapore. Some people argue that environmental issues have had little impact on food choices in Singapore, as in our fast paced and competitive society, people do not have the time or energy to be concerned about the environmental impact of the food they consume. Although this is true to a certain extent, I believe that concerns regarding the global environment have had a large impact on consumption habits in Singapore due to our highly educated and interconnected society today.

Some people argue that Singaporeans today are too swept up in their busy lives to be aware of environmental issues happening around them, much less make an effort to adjust their consumption habits around these issues. In our competitive society, many workers are just struggling to survive their daily 9 to 5 and have little concern over the environmental aspect of the food they consume. This can be seen in the often maze-like lines at fast food restaurants such as McDonalds after work hours, despite the allegations of McDonalds's unethical treatment of animals in farms to lower the prices of their products, or the impacts of rearing cows to make our favourite cheeseburgers on the ever worsening problem of global warming. Many Singaporeans are more concerned about the convenience of obtaining their meal after an exhausting day of work, and thus tend to opt for fast food, regardless of the possible damaging impacts fast food could have on our environment. Furthermore, Singapore is known as one of the most expensive cities in the world. As a result, Singaporeans - who are already struggling to stay afloat - have little reason to choose more environmentally friendly food options that are often much more expensive. Fast food chains are alleged to have poor environmental stewardship as their animals are often reared in poor conditions, and the plastic straws and cutlery provided for their to-go meals have contributed to millions of tons of plastic waste worldwide. However, they remain a top choice for many Singaporeans, especially students, due to their cheap prices. This money-minded attitude can once again be seen in supermarkets, where eggs from free-range chickens and organic vegetables grown without pesticides have been readily available at local supermarkets like NTUC or Cold Storage. Although these alternatives are known to have fewer polluting impacts on the environment, they are often much pricier due to the additional steps these companies take to remain clean and green. Thus, with the rising cost of necessities and the yearly increase in taxes in

Singapore, it is little wonder that people still go for the cheaper option, despite more environmentally friendly ones being available. Thus, the fast paced and high cost of living in Singapore have resulted in many having little concern over the environmental impact of their foods, still opting to go for what is convenient and cheap.

Although this may be true to a certain extent, changing times and attitudes have resulted in more people's choices being affected by environmental impacts. This can be attributed to the government's action in encouraging Singaporeans to choose more environmentally healthy options, in line with their stance to push for a more environmentally sensitive and healthy society. As a result, in recent times, the Singaporean government has increased subsidies for food options that have fewer polluting effects on the environment such as those sold in supermarkets previously. Due to the paternalistic government in Singapore, many people take the word of the government seriously and have thus changed the choices they make about the food they purchase, through campaigns like the SG Fresh Produce branding. Singapore's government has always been concerned about environmental issues worldwide, due to the large impact concerns like global warming would have on our small nation-state. Thus, environmental issues have affected food choices of people in Singapore by spurring the Government to take action in encouraging its citizens to choose more environmentally positive options.

Furthermore, environmental issues have had a growing impact on food choices in Singapore, due to the population becoming more educated, and thus aware of the impact food has on the environment. Singaporeans have become more environmentally aware due to education in schools and online. Thus, as more people know about the damage some foods could have on the planet, they are more inclined to choose other options. In many geography lessons in Singapore, youths are exposed to the ugly truth of how rearing cows for food impacts the environment due to the methane they release by belching, thus increasing greenhouse gas concentrations in our environment that contribute to global warming. Due to the prevalence of the new media and the internet, many people were also shocked to hear about the burning down of the Amazon rainforests in Brazil to make more space for cattle farming. This not only increases the amount of methane released by cows, but also releases carbon dioxide through the burning of trees, having a grave impact on climate change and global warming. As Singaporeans become more educated and aware of the damaging impacts their favourite beef steaks could have on the environment, they are thus spurred to choose different food options. This has resulted in a rise in vegetarians or vegans, especially among the younger generation. For those who wish for a more environmentally friendly option but still crave the taste of meat, meat made from vegetables has become more and more popular in Singapore. Impossible Burger, a burger chain whose meat patty is made from vegetables such as soy and beans, recently opened restaurants in Singapore and have been growing in popularity. Although plant-based meat used to be something people stayed away from as they were concerned about how similar it would taste to actual meat, an increase in

education and thus awareness of environmental issues worldwide has led many Singaporeans to seek out more environmentally positive options, so as to reduce the burden our food choices have on the environment.

Environmental issues such as the impact pollutants in the environment would have on the safety of food has also certainly affected the choices that Singaporeans make. Many Singaporeans are concerned about falling sick as it could result in missing school or work, something that would set us back in the rat race. With the advent of social media, more people are more aware of, and thus concerned about, the safety of the food we consume. This was seen in the recent release of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear water into the ocean. Although the treated water was announced to have negligible impact on the radioactivity of the ocean by the International Atomic Energy Agency, many Singaporeans were concerned about the effects it would have on fish imported from Japan. This resulted in long lines outside sushi places like Sushiro in Singapore days before the release of the treated water, as Singaporeans clamoured to get their sashimi fix. Interviews by local news website Mothership also showed that many Singaporeans have chosen to stay away from fish products for the time being, as they were worried about the possible impacts it could have on their health. As Singapore contains few natural resources and largely imports food products from overseas, environmental issues regarding the safety of imported food products have had a significant impact on what people in Singapore choose to eat today.

In conclusion, although environmental issues may seem to have little weight in affecting food choices of people in Singapore due to more pressing concerns most Singaporeans have regarding obtaining their food, it has had an increasing impact as Singaporeans become more educated. The actions of the government and the Internet have also resulted in more Singaporeans being more serious about the impacts that the food they eat could have on the environment, and vice versa. Thus, by observing this trend, it could be assumed that environmental issues would have a growing influence over food choices in Singapore, making the phrase “you are what you eat” even more popular.

Comments:

Apart from the point about the paternalistic Singaporean government, the rest of the essay highlighted pertinent issues surrounding our food choices, with relevant examples to illustrate your point. Be careful not to attribute the reasons for our attitudes to contrived observations about Singapore's competitive spirit and Asian culture. Otherwise, the response demonstrated a strong grasp of the topic and it addressed the question competently.

To what extent have environmental issues affected food choices of people in your society?

Renee Ng Lingxin, 22S47

In the Pixar movie "Wall-E", humans resort to blended food-in-a-cup. While humorous to the average viewer of the film, it posed a serious question to us as a potential reality of the foreseeable future. After all, with global warming and climate change exacerbating the effects of environmental issues, people in my society, Singapore, are all too familiar with how this can impact our food sources. While sceptics may choose to believe that their diet will not change in spite of it all, I believe that environmental issues have, if not will, affect food choices of people in Singapore to a large extent.

Be that as it may, it can be acknowledged that to many Singaporeans, our food choices are not heavily influenced by the environmental issues we face yet. After all, it is a well-known fact that Singaporeans are one of the busiest people in the world, with long working and schooling hours to satiate our need for stability and growth in an extremely competitive environment. With that comes the need for speed and efficiency, even in our food. For instance, like in many parts of the world our society is no different in our choice of fast food, for it is a common sight to see fast food chains like McDonalds filled with streams of officegoers or students grabbing a quick meal. This is in spite of knowledge that our consumption of fast food fuels the production of harmful greenhouse gasses such as methane in the long supply chain of production for our beloved burgers. From cramped farmhouses rearing cows to the factories that produce our burger patties to the long transportation through airplanes and trucks, each burger we consume adds to our excessive carbon output and contributes to the trapping of our ever-increasing greenhouse gas emissions, which worsens the effects of rising temperatures, erratic rainfall patterns and rising sea levels. All of this has a worsening impact on our wellbeing and our future, as it could lead to us falling sick more often from inconsistent weather conditions in Singapore, or even floods damage our homes. Yet, we choose to eat what is convenient to save time, dismissing the effects on our future. Hence, it can be seen that even with current, as well as potential environmental issues, many Singaporeans remain unphased in their food choices, and choose to prioritise efficiency.

However, this is not to say that all Singaporeans are not concerned with the environmental issues that are plaguing us, as many others are doing their part to slow down its impacts by changing the food they consume. After all, the cost of living in Singapore is relatively high in comparison to our neighbouring countries, and many of us are aware that the volatility of our environment plays a part in the prices of the food we consume. With sporadic weather disruptions such as droughts and floods, our

trading partners such as China and Australia are experiencing decreased yield each year, as it can be challenging to predict when the next dry spell or prolonged rainfall might affect them. This has led to governments imposing restrictions on their export of food, leaving Singapore vulnerable with limited food. Our government has made place to convert this with our 30-by-30 initiative under the Singapore Green Plan - to have 30% of our food be locally sourced by 2050. As most Singaporeans are relatively affluent and well -to-do, we are able to support this change by gradually switching to local suppliers instead. Though many Singaporeans were initially hesitant to pay slightly more for homegrown crops due to the higher start-up costs, it can be seen in many local supermarkets that local brands like Kok Fah Farm are becoming more welcomed in our households, as vegetables are introduced to the local food scene. As such, it is evident that many Singaporeans are influenced to change the source of food they consume with greater understanding of how environmental issues affect our food security.

Furthermore, it is also obvious for us to consider that when serious environmental issues plague us, Singaporeans are quick to be swayed in our food choices. Singapore, as a heavily digitalised society to keep up with the rest of the world, is quick to receive updates when countries concerning us have news to share. Our ability to quickly share and receive news, however, occasionally becomes our Achilles heel as it can lead to misinformation spreading like wildfire, which leads us to unnecessarily fear certain matters. With our 'afraid-to-die' attitude towards life, many Singaporeans tend to assume the worst and will prepare in advance for misfortune to fall upon us. This fear mongering will thus cause our food choices to change in some periods of time. For example, with the recent news of the Japanese government releasing treated radioactive water from the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi incident into its waters, many people, including Singaporeans, became paranoid about the pollution that would happen in Japanese waters, and feared for their health because of potential radioactive poisoning. This caused many Singaporeans to quickly purchase and consume seafood, in expectation of seafood that arrived subsequently being too dangerous to eat. Hence, despite reassurance on the quality of treatment done, it is understandable how issues such as pollution can cause worry to Singaporeans as we greatly care for our health. Such incidents can greatly affect our choices of food, even if the situation only affects us temporarily.

In conclusion, while it may appear that many Singaporeans are nonchalant towards environment issues when it comes to their food choices, more are concerned with these issues and have a desire to act when faced with them. Living near the equator has proven to be no easy feat, as we constantly experience the consequences of our own actions with our raging hot temperatures and uncomfortable, stuffy humidity levels. Nonetheless, for as long as we are around, Singaporeans want to have a good standard of living, and are willing to make changes to our diets to fit the issues of today. In the future where our food security continues to waver in the face of our resource-scarce country, I choose to remain optimistic that Singaporeans can readily be

influenced, and continue to make changes in their food choices to pave the way for generations to come. Only time can tell when our people are ready to eat bugs like crickets as a part of our diets.

Comments:

Ashlyn, a good focused essay touching on very pertinent ideas and a sound argument. If there is any critique it would be that you tend to ignore human inertia, laziness and enjoyment in the modern day. Too many distractions and convenience makes it much tougher to embark on a healthy lifestyle, such as taking the stairs instead of the lift. Still, a good effort with focus on increasingly! Language could be tighter, but it is still very competent.

SOCIAL ISSUES



The Divine Comedy

A driver died this afternoon.
There was a truck and a motorcycle
And the ambulance had just arrived
But my uncle only sputtered
Before I understood why

A driver died this afternoon.
A crowd surrounded him;
People stepped out of their cars
And held their phones out
And by night, he was the town sensation

Did he have a family waiting at home?
(It was two weeks till Christmas)
Did they find out through gossip?
(Online sensation and dark jokes)
Before the sympathy of a loved one?

It's a world of likes and clicks
Empires from air, news all around
And people shouting for the sake of shouting
Until they've forgotten
Who they were shouting for in the first place

We're all just ashes and dust
All shouldering the weight of living
Yet, even then we forget
In talks between heads
That a driver died this afternoon.

Dolot Shine Mikaela Maminta, 23S41

Jack in the Box

A man who met God greeted me on the subway
He handed me a Jack in the Box
Brown like dirt and rusted with wear
He left before I could ask for his name

On the train I sat, haunted
Examining the box and all of its contents
A phantom appeared when I opened the lid
It had a ghastly smile and crooked teeth
When I put it to my ear it told me it was hungry
In my lap it was my nighttime guard dog
Growling at every shadow that consoled the windows

It's the young that think they know everything
Maybe that's true
But everything is a plastic bubble that continues to expand
In this valley of silicone and forced pretend
My eyes lingered on the bubbles drifting through the air
Ignoring the faint sound of the jackhammer
Building another jail of cement

Little Jack noticed my fascination, so he crawled out of his prison
And used a pin to pop each one
They burst in an explosion of violet, searing my eyes
The smacking of lips and the making of life
When he returned to his box he told me not to cry

There's something beautiful knowing our chase to find something
Is both a miracle and a blessing
I returned to the subway, box in hand
We realize we truly know nothing.

Loic Lee Ming Hao, 23A12

Paper Thin

The man places his hand on the handle of the door

around him paper cranes drop from the sky,
they rain from the pregnant clouds like maelstroms of malevolence.
When they hit the concrete their pretty pink bodies crumple,
blood spills across the pavement, dripping into the cracks
and they try to move but their feeble attempts are too fickle.
Paper cranes so paper thin you wouldn't imagine they were filled
with jarfuls of blood, so much it could fill gallons, encompassed
just in their frail bodies, glasses of dust, so willing to be broken
should we cut ourselves a little too hard.
Push the boulder too high and one day it will roll right back,
if the glass cracks so easily, why do you even make a pane?
It'll just be another paper crane
trying to thrust its head above the water and see what's in the distance
and drowning even when its head is above the viscous wave surface.
Why make paper cranes at all if all they're going to do is fall?
Grey steel chops up dotted beige as easily as a word is
uttered,
but observe the wooziness and how the world turns;
if you were to live,
wouldn't you want it to hurt?

The man turns the handle and opens the door.

Loic Lee Ming Hao, 23A12

‘Young people today face more challenges, compared to those from the previous generation.’ To what extent is this true?

Chew Wei Quan, 23S42

With improvements in technology and advancements in various fields including sciences, the performing arts and even culinary arts, the world we live in today certainly is one where everything is made easily attainable and accessible. Technological advancements and overall quality of life changes have made life convenient for the masses, with systems and infrastructure like that of artificial intelligence created to cater to every whim, or subsidies and monetary benefits provided by the government to extinguish any financial worries. One could point out that the young people of today most certainly live an easier life devoid of fewer challenges, as compared to previous generations. However, I personally beg to differ.

Opponents of my claim will relentlessly argue that the challenges in today's world pale in comparison to the hardships and obstacles faced by the older generations. While the society we live in today is peaceful and prosperous, the past is plagued with adversity. The trauma of World War II, civil unrest and economic recessions like that of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis to name a few. There is a reason why the term 'strawberry generation' is used to coin the young people of today, and that is simply the fact that the young people have not faced the myriad of obstacles — war, poverty and endless days of hunger. With that said, there is no possibility as to how the young people today would face more challenges than their previous generation, especially when all that suffering and bottlenecks have been braved by the previous generation to bring about an era of peace and enjoyment for the young people. This may be true, and while the previous generation has indeed faced challenges of greater magnitude than the 'first world problems' that hinder the young people of today, such challenges only induce suffering upon suffering, yet the young people of today are required to break through immovable walls that are not only tied to physical pain and trauma, but also challenges that test one's mental and emotional resilience.

Firstly, to even stay afloat in this ocean we call society, young people are required to tackle the stubborn issue of spending money wisely day in and day out. Technology has improved by leaps and bounds, so much so that online shopping and wireless payment methods which were non-existent in the past have now become prevalent in our modern society. Platforms like Amazon and Shopee are accessed by millions of internet civilians who only require the press of a button to purchase any item they desire, provided they have the funds to do so. Gone are the days where people needed to step out of the house and physically enter stores to buy necessities. Nowadays, brick-and-mortar store shopping has been replaced by the convenience of

online shopping, where individuals have access to all sorts of goods under one's thumb. Thus, the problem of reckless spending has become more prominent in today's world due to the convenience of a tap-and-buy way of shopping becoming so normalised, that buying things online has become second nature. This puts a financial burden on one's wallet if done excessively, yet such a problem is ironically not faced by previous generations due to their lack of access to any means of the internet. Opponents would detract from my statement by saying that this challenge would not be a challenge in the first place for many people who know how to spend their money wisely, yet the millions of goods ordered online daily invalidates their claim.

Likewise, the issue of addiction comes to mind when speaking of the challenges that young people today face. The absence of the internet and access to the worldwide web in the past implies that previous generations have one less distraction to worry about, but this is not the case in today's world where just about every person possesses an electronic device. The prevalence of electronic devices brings a whole host of new entertainment - online games and social media being the most popular amongst young people. It is with these new forms of entertainment that young people today run the risk of losing grasp of their discipline and subconsciously slipping into the depths of endless entertainment. So fun and enjoyable are these pastime activities that they entirely take over one's life, being the only activity that one participates in, at just about any point in their lives. Multi-million game companies that churn out games, for example the popular Riot Games and their cream of the crop, League of Legends, are famous for pulling in massive player counts, with overall time played by many players exceeding hundreds of hours' worth of time. With the presence of the internet, young people today need to face the ever-growing risk of being addicted and need to exercise extra precautions to ensure they do not fall into such depravity. My opponents may argue that addiction is the most extreme case of a lack of self-control, and they are justified in claiming that the majority of people know how to regulate their social media and game usage, but this challenge of needing to overcome such distractions from daily work persists nevertheless.

Finally, although young people may never have to worry about the horrors of past wars and civil unrest, the increasing costs of living that seemingly refuses to stop poses a major challenge to young people today. Economic development has greatly improved over the years, with countries such as Singapore seeing a spike in per capita income to over US\$25,000 across a period of time, yet such growth in financial stability is countered by the extremely unreasonable increase in spending that people are required to undertake just to live life. Take for example the crushing student loans valued in the hundreds of thousands of dollars simply for a person to attain a university degree, or even the ramping costs of a certificate of ownership for simply owning a car to reduce travelling times. Times were simpler for previous generations when they did not need to worry about staggering costs, especially since the economy back then was more simplistic and manageable. Opponents would undoubtedly question my stand regarding higher costs, claiming that previous generations needed to experience the

hardships of food shortages and economic recessions, which are rarely present in today's world. This is accompanied by the fact that previous generations still struggled with financial instability due to low wages from work, and although such facts are undisputed, it is undeniable that such costs have been amplified with the increased advancements in the world. This can be seen with the decrease in Growth Domestic Product (GDP) in countries such as Singapore, which had a consistently high GDP up until the 2000s.

In conclusion, the world has had its fair share of challenges throughout time. While the previous generations have experienced mountains of challenges that the young today know nothing of due to inexperience with such difficulties, the progress of the world has brought about many first-world problems. These are not limited to testing one's physical endurance or resilience, but are also tied to challenging the inner perseverance of one's self-discipline and control. Therefore, I find it true that young people today face more challenges, albeit different and new challenges, compared to the previous generation.

Comments:

Relevant argument. It was especially notable how you consistently used evaluative language to establish a comparison between the young and the previous generation. Even while you attempt to evaluate broader trends pertaining to both groups, you need to be careful in the phrasing to avoid sweeping statements. Valid examples were discussed, though a little too Singapore-focused. You had some awkward/incorrect expressions that mildly affected the clarity of meaning.

‘Young people today face more challenges, compared to those from the previous generation.’ To what extent is this true?

Ganesan Arsheitha, 23S45

When you open up social media such as Facebook and Reddit, there are often posts lamenting how “Gen Z” is entitled, spoiled, lazy and even selfish. These posts target Generation Z, which is the term for people born between 1997 and 2012. While the exact years of what is considered “Gen Z” is often debated, a majority of people from the previous generations seem to have a consensus that young people of today have a much easier life than them because of the growth in technology. Is the bad reputation young people have really valid? I believe that it is largely true that young people today face more challenges compared to those from previous generations because of issues like climate change, increased academic stress and globalisation.

Some people may argue that young people today have it easier than previous generations because there is technology now. In the past, technology was not as well developed as it is now, so people had to do many things by themselves. With the accelerated growth of technology comes tools like artificial intelligence, and also other essential devices like handphones, tablets and laptops. All this gives young people unprecedented convenience. They can now connect with their friends, do shopping and even make technology do their work for them. It is argued that this means young people do not know what hardship is, as items are handed to them on a silver platter, compared to the previous generation who had to do their own work. For example, there are a myriad of food delivery apps today that can deliver the food one wants, right to their doorstep. There are apps like Photomath, which students can use to solve maths problems. If young people want to learn more about something or get more information, a few taps of a button will lead them to a plethora of answers. The previous generation, however, had to go buy food themselves, flip through thick encyclopaedias to get information and had to do their work with human efforts. Hence, it is said the previous generation faced more challenges.

While this is not false, it is a highly myopic view that overlooks the challenges technology brings to young people. With many young people using technology today, there have been multiple challenges that have cropped up. Firstly, the excessive usage of technology, namely online games and social media, has led to addictions that have been quite severe. A prime example of this would be the case of the eighteen-year-old teenager, who died in an internet cafe after playing an online computer game for 40 hours without taking breaks. There are phone detox programmes specifically targeting youths to help them overcome their addiction and dependency on their digital devices. These highlight the new challenges young people have to face because of technology, that the previous generation did not experience. In addition, a large

number of young people are on social media, which leads to increased cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is when someone is bullied in an online space, often also allowing other people to witness their humiliation. It is more prevalent than physical bullying as the bullies are able to hide behind the screen, escaping the consequences of their actions. In recent research, it was shown that 37% of American teenagers have been cyberbullied. In most cases, the perpetrator was not caught. Cyberbullying causes mental anguish to victims, making them suffer. The previous generation did not have cyberbullies as social media did not exist when they were younger, and generally, physical bullies tended to face the consequences more.

Another challenge that young people today face is climate change. Young people today are the ones facing the consequences of decades of industrialisation with extreme weather events becoming more and more prevalent. The actions of the previous generations have compounded and are causing mass destruction to the planet that young people have to live in the future. This year, there were intense heat waves around the globe with the temperature hitting 45 degrees Celsius in parts of India and Thailand. Projections by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, IPCC, show that temperatures are slated to rise and more parts of the world will be experiencing these increased temperatures. The burden of finding ways to decrease or even reverse climate change falls on young people, who were not the ones who contributed to this disaster. This will make it very hard for humans to live in the future, as baseline temperatures will be beyond the range humans can live optimally in, sea levels are also rising causing more frequent and extreme floods that destroy entire cities. The IPCC has forecasted that if temperatures continue to rise at this rate, sea levels in 2100 could be as much as 1.1 metres higher than they are today, and no amount of emission reduction can stop the near and mid-term effects of this crisis. The capital city of Indonesia, Jakarta, is already sinking due to rising sea levels. Considering the fact that this is the world young people need to live in, it is a cause of concern, and is an enormous challenge that threatens the very survival of humans. They need to learn how to survive side by side with these natural disasters, which proves to be difficult. These problems were not felt as acutely by the previous generations as climate change was not such a big threat during their time and not as imminent. They were not focused on whether climate change would affect them badly and it also did not pose such a serious challenge during their time.

Another big challenge that young people face is increased academic stress. This is especially relevant to young people from developed countries and countries that are rapidly developing. As the world has progressed, it feels as though the definition of success has become narrower compared to the past. For people of the previous generation, success was not so rigidly fixed, but rather a way of life. There was greater emphasis on being happy, having a family and so on. However today, the path to success seems harder, with it being defined by someone's school, job, salary, and assets. With all these expectations piled on young people, they have to work doubly hard in school to ensure they get into a good university. There, they toil away

for the perfect Grade Point Average to graduate with First Class Honours. In their job, they work non-stop for that promotion. This never-ending cycle is in place because in today's world, it is deemed very hard to achieve success without a degree. Since demand for a place in universities is so high, it is becoming harder and harder for students to enter universities. For example, in previous generations in China, there were multiple pathways available like going to trade school, agriculture and other jobs that do not necessarily require a degree. However, a degree is seen as a ticket to success today, and hence the university entrance exam or 'gaokao' has become notoriously difficult. Students study for up to 12-13 hours a day for multiple years, just to get into a good university. They are faced with multiple stressors and lose their childhood to these exams. This phenomenon is happening across the globe, with Ivy League universities requiring more and more impressive portfolios from students. Even in Singapore, the A-level examinations are getting harder compared to previous generations. These stressors are making it difficult for young people to have fun and let loose in their teenage years, compared to the previous generations which did not have as much stress placed on them.

All in all, young people today do generally face more challenges compared to previous generations. While acknowledging the difficulties the previous generations might have faced, it is important to not discount the challenges young people have in an increasingly volatile world. It is crucial to recognise that while different generations face different problems, it does not mean one generation's problems are less significant than other generations. Older generations must open their eyes to this fact and instead of brushing off younger generations' challenges, and must realise that the best gift they can give is to share their wisdom and provide support. Young people should also not get dejected by the number of challenges they face, and instead use the resources they have to combat the problems. Hopefully, in the future, young people of future generations will not face as many problems as today, and we can all live in a better world.

Comments:

Arsheitha, the terms and scope of the question are clearly understood. You have shown engagement with the question at a conceptual level throughout your response. Nice range of appropriate examples used. One area for improvement would be to avoid generalisation. Other than that, a good attempt!

‘Young people today face more challenges, compared to those from the previous generation.’ To what extent is this true?

Mehak Dhir, 23S52

Today, young people, consisting of millennials and “Gen Z-ers”, are often labelled as the “strawberry generation” by older people, and are criticised for being too sensitive and not knowing ‘real’ hardship. Many people from the previous generation will cite how they grew up in an era of polarisation amidst the Cold War, and will lament that younger people have it easy because of the advent of technology. However, I believe that young people today do face a whole host of challenges, even more so than the previous generation. Young people face more academic pressure today, and have inherited a pressing climate crisis.

Detractors argue that the previous generation faced more challenges, because they grew up in a period of constant conflict. The main example here is the Cold War era, which lasted from 1947 to the 1990s, and that brought about a nuclear arms race and several proxy wars. With the USA and the Soviet Union squaring off against each other, and developing nuclear weapons at an unprecedented rate, many in the previous generation lived in fear that the two superpowers would come into a direct clash, and with their weapons of mass destruction, end the world as they knew it. Many Soviet and American children in that era grew up with regular nuclear drills in school, where they had been taught to run and dive under the table, should the opposing side drop a nuclear bomb on them. The previous generation were only children and youths during the peak of the nuclear arms race, which was around the 1970s to 1980s. Yet, at this tender age, they had to worry about whether their world would be obliterated at any second. Today, countries that own nuclear weapons have signed a treaty to limit their nuclear arsenals. Hence, it seems like young people of today do not have the challenge of dealing with conflict that could end human existence.

However, there is still conflict in today’s world. While it may not be as widespread and severe as what the previous generation faced, it still exists and has spillover effects that directly affect the lives of young people today. For example, the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war has driven up prices everywhere, since both countries are major exporters of staples like wheat and barley. The disruptions of supply chains eventually lead to widespread inflation, less developed countries, such as those in Africa, have seen the price of necessities like bread jump by 23.9%. Even developed countries have felt the pinch, with Singapore’s core inflation standing at around 3.3%. Young people today have watched the price of meals in their school canteen rise, watched the cost of electricity spike, and watched the cost of schoolbooks shoot up. They, too, face the challenges conflict can bring, more so as they watch their parents

struggle to pay the bills. Nonetheless, it is not an existential threat that the previous generation faced.

Detractors may also argue that young people do not face more challenges than the previous generation, as the advent of technology has made the process of obtaining information and staying in contact with loved ones easier. The previous generation grew up with books and paper, while young people today have grown up with computers and smartphones. To find answers to their questions, the previous generation would have to scour books and articles. But today, young people can simply type their queries into Google search, and have their answers within seconds. To stay in touch with loved ones, the previous generation would have to write letters by hand and then post them. The recipient might only receive the letter a week to a month later, depending on where they lived. However, the advent of messaging apps like WhatsApp and Telegram means that, for young people today, their loved ones are just a text message away. Text messages get delivered in less than a second. Therefore, the ease of access to information and the ease of contacting loved ones are a stark contrast to the challenges faced by the previous generation. With this accessibility, it seems as though young people have it much easier than the previous generation.

At the same time, the very same technology that enables young people to find information and contact loved ones in a split second also brings about the challenge of distinguishing fake news from fact. Technology has brought about the development of AI, which can generate information and realistic images, almost exactly like humans would. For example, recently an image of Pope Francis wearing a white fluffy coat was being circulated online. Many believed this to be real, and were shocked at him not wearing religious clothing. However, a few weeks later, it was revealed that the image had been generated by AI, and was, in fact, not true. While this seems like a minor issue, there have been incidences where AI has been used to interfere with major events such as the US 2016 presidential elections. Russia had used AI bots on Facebook and Twitter to influence voters to vote for their preferred candidate. Experts suspect that this actually worked. Young people today therefore have to face the added challenge of distinguishing what is real and what is fake online, amidst the vast amount of information available to them.

Next, young people today face more academic pressure than their predecessors. Previously, studies and marks were mostly the only aspects considered when it came to getting into universities and colleges. But today, most colleges are looking for “all-rounded students, who excel in both schoolwork and extracurricular activities.” This means that activities that were once just hobbies, like sports or music, have turned into requirements for young people. Ivy League universities like The University of Pennsylvania and Princeton University have stated that they look out for leadership positions in these extracurriculars. Students today now face the pressure of being exceptional at schoolwork, and at what were supposed to be their hobbies. To exacerbate the issue, the admission rates of universities have fallen since the

previous generation, which increases the competition among students. The previous generation only faced the pressure of getting good grades, but today's young people have the challenge of getting good grades and doing well outside school. Therefore, young people today face the additional challenge of excelling both inside and outside school.

Lastly, young people today have inherited a pressing climate crisis. It is true that the previous generation also faced the issue of climate change, but the problem is far worse for young people today, and they are faced with the daunting task of mitigating the devastating impacts of climate change. For example, the drier climate has led to an increase in the number and severity of wildfires. In June 2023, the smoke produced from Canadian wildfires spread all the way to New York. New York, and many other cities like Toronto and Philadelphia, were clouded in unhealthy haze with air quality reaching the "hazardous" level. This is following a trend of wildfires across the globe, such as the Australian wildfires in 2019. Furthermore, global warming has led to the melting of ice caps, which has led to rising sea levels and threatened the existence of low-lying countries. Indonesia has stated that they will be changing their capital city, since the current capital city Jakarta suffers from congestion, pollution, and will likely be underwater soon. Today's young people face the challenge of navigating this climate crisis, as it is far worse than what the previous generation faced, to the point where their health and cities are adversely affected.

In conclusion, both young people today and their predecessors face many challenges. It is myopic to dismiss young people today as "snowflakes", because they did not experience superpower conflict directly or have less convenient access to information and modes of communication. Young people have to navigate more academic stress and more severe climate change issues. What is important is that both young people and the previous generation work together to solve the challenges of today.

Comments:

Some decent evaluation, but you could improve the links and evaluation at times.

'It is better to be born male in today's world'. How far do you agree?

David Chong Ruijie, 23S38

Even since the late 20th century, gender equality has been a hot topic of debate in our societies. The invention and widespread usage of social media platforms has further provided many more new areas for the issue to be discussed. Traditionally, most societies are patriarchal, favouring the man rather than his female counterpart. This phenomenon is strikingly obvious in many aspects, in terms of income and job opportunities or in more subtle ways like gender stereotyping. However, in today's "woke" or well-informed society, being born a male has become increasingly difficult as issues such as men's mental health and anti-male gender stereotypes may have become overlooked in favour of more female issues. In the midst of society trying to even the playing field for women, men have inadvertently been shoved aside. In this essay, I will discuss why it is not necessarily better to be born male in today's world.

Many feminist activists argue that women have a much more difficult time in the workplace than men. For a long time, this has been true. The income gap between men and women can be as much as 30% in some developed countries while in more rural regions, women are not even allowed to pursue a career. Furthermore, stereotypes such as, "Women need to stay home to do chores and raise children" have led employers to avoid hiring females as they fear women may be less committed to their jobs than men. Moreover, women often have to face harassment in the workplace, especially in the service industry. Hence, women often do have a hard time landing a job and in addition are paid less, for a poorer working environment. However, due to intense advocacy and activism offline and online, governments and companies alike have shifted their mindsets towards women with careers. The Singapore government's Ministry of Manpower recently launched a series of videos that debunked various myths about hiring women, encouraging employers to diversify their workforce. The Ministry of Manpower has planned to launch a set of guidelines on the issue of having Flexible Working Arrangements with the aim of encouraging work-life balance. The traditional role of being the homemaker is usually placed on women, placing them in a disadvantageous position as they have more to juggle compared to their male counterparts. This policy would be helpful for women who would like to focus on their career aspirations, thus encouraging more women to enter the workforce to fulfil their ambitions without the fear of being bombarded by their workload at home and at their workplace. In addition, governments around the world have begun to crack down on uneven wages between men and women. Admittedly, the issues women face while working are far from resolved in many less developed countries. However, in places like America and Europe, women are increasingly viewed equally by employers. Therefore, activism on social media together with offline movements such as #MeToo

has brought to light many of the glaring issues women face in the workplace. Hence, being born a man does not necessarily guarantee any advantage on the corporate ladder or working in general. In fact, "woke" activism or well-informed advocates have sometimes pressured companies to the extent of positive discrimination. For fear of public backlash, some huge companies have forcefully diversified their employee's genders by hiring more women. Recently, Hollywood has intentionally produced many movies with strong female protagonists to gain public approval. Many of these films have been wildly successful in promoting women's rights and empowering females. However sometimes producers start to pander to feminists too much. In the Marvel Cinematic Universe film *Black Widow*, the originally male character Taskmaster was gender-swapped to female. Many fans criticised this alteration as being unnecessary and perceiving it as a part of Hollywood's agenda to force diversity and inclusion. Instead of creating an original female role, the filmmakers chose to replace an originally established male role to fit the Hollywood cookie-cutter strong female protagonist. The decision stirred varied opinions about authentic representation as compared to tokenism within the film. Thus, activism for women in the workplace has often led to unintended positive discrimination against men or even tokenism. The companies' pandering to activists has come at the costs of men's jobs and career opportunities.

Men's mental health is also often overlooked in today's society. Due to recent emphasis on female psychological well-being, men have a hard time voicing out their problems without facing judgement. Women's mental health is indeed just as important as men's', but recent activism on social media has all but drowned out many males' calls for mental health help. In fact, more often than not, when men talk about their own mental health, they are told to "man up" or "suck it up" by those around them. Women's disadvantaged position in society has unintentionally led to some thinking that men are therefore invincible and impervious to mental health problems of any kind. Furthermore, many Asian societies expect men to be strong cornerstones that show little to no emotion. This has led to men bottling up their emotions for fear of public judgement. In countries such as Japan, patriarchal attitudes have contributed partially to why 7 out of 10 suicides involve men, as well as a high depression rate. The combination of feminist movements casting a shadow over men's mental health and traditional mindsets that men need to be impervious to negative emotions of any kind, has created a stark lack of support for men's mental health.

Finally, traditional stereotypes and notions have confined men to specific roles in society, especially in more conservative cultures. In many countries, men are expected to be the breadwinners of the family and bring home food for the family. Househusbands are extremely rare and tend to have a negative connotation around them, even being frowned upon in some Asian countries. Husbands are expected to work and if instead rely on their wife's income, they are judged or even called out for being dependent on a female. Although many liberal western societies have left this mindset in the past, countries such as China continue to expect men to be the one

that brings home the bacon in the family. This leads to fathers being unable to interact with their children as often as a housewife. These stereotypes further extend to what jobs men "should work". For instance, a popular stereotypical claim is that men should not work as nurses. A vast majority of nurses are women and men who aspire to be nurses are often judged by their families and the public alike. In the service sector, certain jobs such as secretaries are seemingly reserved for women only. Thus, men similarly have a fixed role in society that is defined by stereotypes. Although women often face similar issues such as being expected to be housewives, men's stereotypes do not have the same level of attention as women's'. This is because it has become increasingly difficult to discuss men's issues for fear of being judged as weak or labelled sexist and misogynistic by extreme feminists, especially on social media. Hence, while women are increasingly gaining more mobility with regards to their role in society, men are expected to keep being the breadwinners of the family and overcome obstacles if they aspire to take up jobs like nursing or preschool education. Furthermore, men are expected to be masculine in today's society. When a woman shows traditionally masculine traits such as physical strength by taking up a male-dominated career like piloting a fighter jet, she is praised and lauded for breaking gender norms. On the other hand, when a man becomes more feminine, he is viewed as weak or avoiding his role as a man. This is evident when parents see a male preschool teacher. These men are often judged for their unconventional career choice and even arousing suspicion from parents. Thus, although society has different stereotypes for both men and women, males find it harder to escape or break them without facing backlash or judgement, therefore perpetuating the stereotypes.

In conclusion, it is not better to be born a man today. The lack of mental health support and inability to break gender stereotypes have caused being a man today much harder. Especially in conservative societies, being a man today has become much harder. Companies pandering to feminists have also deprived men of certain jobs or even wrongfully portrayed men, while concurrently reducing women to fixed roles by immediately prioritising them regardless of their true ability. Personally, activists that support females have done more good than harm by addressing the many glaring issues that women face. However, the collateral damage of their advocacy should not be ignored. Large feminist movements have unintentionally cast a shadow on men's problems and drowned out their cries for help. Hence, I believe being a man is increasingly just as difficult as being a woman in today's world. That is why we need to depend on each other to take advantage of each other's positive points.

Comments:

David, this was an enjoyable read. You started strong, but the subsequent arguments could have been a little less sweeping in your claims. Just showing some of the men's challenges that are sometimes less addressed would have been sufficient to show that it is not necessarily better to be born male. No need to overstate the issues.

'It is better to be born male in today's world'. How far do you agree?

Raina Sengupta, 23S38

In today's modern world, it would be unfair to say that women's rights have not come a long way, considering the increased awareness on issues faced by women and with more people speaking up. However, we cannot fail to acknowledge that we still live in a patriarchal society, one in which men are put on a pedestal and seen as stronger, smarter and more powerful. Sadly, despite this being proven wrong time and time again, women are still subjected to unfair judgement and treatment. To dive deeper into the topic, women, as compared to men, tend to struggle with less financial freedom and are less safe in today's society. However, women are not the only ones to be treated unfairly due to their gender. Men also fall victim to unfair stereotypes that challenge their daily lives. Although, it may seem rather doltish to compare the problems faced, considering that they are completely different, women are still subjected to relatively more problems that prevent them from levelling the playing field. Thus, it is better to be born a male in today's society.

Despite being in the 21st century, many women still suffer from problems that millions of women before them have faced: unequal pay. In most workforces, men still earn more than women, regardless of whether they are carrying out similar jobs. Although this may seem trivial at first glance, every extra cent a man makes adds up, and eventually leads to a higher income, opening different opportunities for them. In addition, in the working world, men are generally promoted faster, making it harder for women to climb up the social ladder. This issue alone poses a threat to women's social stability but is made even worse by a silent killer, the 'pink tax'. The 'pink tax' refers to how women's products are normally priced higher than men's, making it more costly to live their day-to-day lives. It is rather troubling to know that women are forced to suffer for something they had no choice in, their gender. To further illustrate, women's razors are usually priced higher than men's - and the only difference? The colour. Therefore, these issues coupled together put women in an unfair situation, one where they are not awarded the same kind of financial freedom as their male counterparts, making it better to be a male.

Another inherent problem women face is their safety. Women are put in a poor position due to their physical attributes. Biologically, men are usually relatively stronger than women, meaning women are usually subjected to more violence than men. Despite the increased awareness regarding pertinent issues women face, not enough is being done to stop these issues or to prevent it. Domestic abuse has been on the rise in the past decade, with the majority of the cases involving women and children. For instance, a recent article published on The Straits Times reported on a young

teenage girl, being subjected to sexual assault and abuse by her own adoptive father. Her mental health struggles were exploited and preyed on by an individual who was supposed to guide and support her. The abhorrent acts have thus posed the question, "How is it that we as a society have failed to protect our future generation of women?". Fortunately, much has been done to ensure that women can walk the streets with less fear, such as women-only self-defence classes. Although it is rather sad that women have to prepare themselves to be attacked or preyed on, it is a step in the right direction. However, despite this, men could in most cases overpower a woman, rendering them defenceless. Thus, as women are more prone to attacks due to physical challenges, it is safer and therefore better to be a male in our current world.

We do live in a patriarchal society, and one unfortunate aspect of that is that men are expected to be strong and unemotional. In many cases, when men speak up about their issues, they are often subjected to vitriol and forced to listen to demeaning remarks like 'be a man' or 'men don't cry'. Although many of these ideologies stem from prevalent toxic masculinity in society, we cannot expect men to be stoic all the time. At the end of the day, they are still people with emotions and opinions, and deserve every right to voice them out with no fear of being ridiculed. In interest of showing the detrimental impacts regarding society's expectations of men, depression and suicide rates are highest amongst men but is sadly often ignored. Additionally, men are also forced to endure awful remarks when it comes to abuse faced. For instance, when a woman reveals they are a victim of sexual assault, she is normally met with empathy and thoughtful words, however, when a man does the same, he is likely to be at the receiving end of bitter jokes like 'you're a man so you probably enjoyed it'. Things like these are the reason so many men worldwide struggle to share their trauma. With this in mind, one can concur that more needs to be done regarding the important issues men face but there is the need to acknowledge that women are also subjected to unfair stereotypes that can affect their way of life, such as being chosen for certain jobs as they are seen as less smart. Hence, it is not always the case that males have it easier in today's world, but it is the overarching consensus.

To conclude, I agree to a large extent that it is better to be born a male in today's world, as men generally have more financial freedom and are safer compared to women but are unfortunately subjected to unrealistic expectations that could impact their mental health. There is a need to acknowledge the problems both sides of the genders face without having to belittle or disregard the other. It might be better to be born a male in today's world, but hopefully, in years to come, both men and women will share equal rights and treatment, making it a blessing to be born in this world, regardless of one's gender.

Comments:

There is fair knowledge demonstrated but the weighing of the opposing view was not introduced properly. Do pay attention to how you craft your topic sentence. Relevant examples and written with conviction.

'It is better to be born male in today's world'. How far do you agree?

Varun Muralikrishnan, 23S44

Sexism: what remains to be a perennial issue in our intrinsically misogynistic world has indubitably set the human race backwards, ever since its inception. One can only wonder how homo sapiens, flaunting intelligence as a key trait, still systematically discriminate and ostracise its counterparts for a supposed physical inferiority. Yet, the progress of humanity does deserve to be lauded to a certain extent, seeing as how the atrocities committed against women have significantly decreased, and with ever so beloved female icons such as Taylor Swift or Serena Williams serving as an inspiration to many women out there, proving that there still is success to be found in the cruel reality. Considering all of these perspectives, one could only come to a conclusion that being born as a man would innately provide several advantages and fewer negative ramifications. I strongly concur with this notion due to the fact that lack of opportunities, biased laws and policies against women, and the preachings of certain religious or cultural beliefs, continue to be deeply entrenched problems in today's world. Being born as a male would simply eliminate all of these worries.

Proponents of the claim that being born as a male in today's world are inclined to posit that gender equality is a feasible goal in the current context. As mentioned earlier, female superstars such as Serena Williams, or political leaders like Sonia Gandhi and Hilary Clinton, are role models and the antithesis to the negative stereotypes perpetuated, such as women deemed to be not capable of making the hard choices, and thus naturally being poor leaders. With these women reaching the pinnacle of their respective worlds, it only proves that every woman is just as likely to succeed as a man, and being born as a male is not going to be perceived as a favourable outcome. Furthermore, gender equality is looking more possible than ever, with actors such as Jennifer Lawrence or Priyanka Chopra advocating for pay parity in the film industry. Likewise, a Danish company implemented policies to ensure an equal proportion of the two sexes in the workplace. With men being enlightened on the bitter reality women face, they would be compelled to support gender equality unequivocally and unconditionally, creating an egalitarian world, far from the deep-rooted patriarchy. Hence, this perspective argues that no man harbours a competitive advantage, and perhaps the empowerment of women might even result in losing many of the privileges men currently have.

However, what is being explicated here is a largely idealistic perspective which merely sees the silver lining. Of the top 500 companies that were ranked by Forbes in 2023, 447 of them had male CEOs, where the 'glass ceiling' grants men a competitive advantage in most fields. In addition, it is simply unviable to create a workforce with

equal proportions of men and women, as that would result in a compromise of skill and efficiency, due to the fact that the number of women in fields such as engineering or IT is far lower than the number of men in said fields. It invariably results in men possessing a large advantage in most sectors, and hence I strongly agree with the statement that it is better to be born in today's world as a male.

Moreover, there remains to be laws and policies that are oppressing women in today's world, which inevitably makes life harder if one were to be born as a female. A felicitous example that makes a strong case for this point would be *Roe v. Wade*, the abolishment of abortion rights in the conservative states of America. Having to carry the inherent burden of pregnancy, women are put in a double bind, where even today, they are denied a say in the matters of pregnancy. From a male perspective, men are committing heinous crimes such as rape, and despite the circumstances or the age of the woman, they are forced to conceive the child, even if they do not possess the means to raise a child. These forms of systemic discrimination is what makes it vastly better to be born as a male, when there are few cases in which they could be discriminated against. It is in very rare and niche situations where they are discriminated against, for instance being assumed to be the perpetrator in a sexual abuse case, which is still a far more improved situation as compared to women, considering how they can still be confined to outdated laws by the Taliban in Afghanistan, where they are denied basic rights such as education. Overall, laws and policies in general favour men even in today's world to a large extent, and hence I believe it is better to be born as a male.

Besides, one must also consider the impact of religion and tradition benefitting men, and how the extent of benefits stupendously burgeons in sectarian and developing states. It is no secret that orthodox religions such as Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and more have always depicted men as the custodians of the vulnerable, with women, children, the sick, and the elderly compartmentalised as the weak. Over the years, religious fundamentalism or strong cultural beliefs have worsened men's delusions, and has granted them a position of authority on no grounds. Unfathomable transgressions continue to be committed these days. Take for instance the rural parts of Nepal, where the men of the family still shun away women during their menstruation periods, as it is seen to be unclean. Despite how ridiculous it sounds, seeing as how menstruation is a natural process through which every woman must go through every month, the rural parts of Nepal still condemn it, and the atrocities committed against women are left unpunished. Religion also plays a big role in developing countries. The recent news of the Pope and the pontificate being under immense pressure, due to having to bring priests who committed various sexual assaults to justice, is well-known. Such priests, in the name of religion, grant themselves a position of authority, deluding themselves and going against their morals, whilst vindicating themselves of the crimes. Due to the fact that religion, in most parts of the world, strongly favours men and generally imbues power, it is better to be born male in today's world.

Lastly, it is better to be born as a male in today's world, or in fact at any point in time, because of the fact that females can never rid themselves of the natural disadvantages they face. A prominent example would be maternity leave, where women are entitled to six months of paid leave in a working year in some countries. Naturally, companies will be severely impacted should one of their employees be absent for six months, while legally bound to still pay them their salary. This would cause companies to favour men, who can only take 2 weeks of paid paternity leave, rather insignificant compared to maternity leave. Even in the sports sector, due to a biological edge that men have, men's sports are generally more dynamic and fast-paced, causing viewers of the sport to lean towards the male version of sports, rather than the female's side. This results in a majority of the funds being allocated to male players' salaries, always putting females at a disadvantage in almost all sports, despite the accolades, the achievements, or the changes they may bring about in the world of sports. With the biological advantages that men possess, it is evident that it is largely beneficial to be born as male in any world, not just today's world.

In conclusion, men either possess natural advantages, or have conferred on themselves other forms of advantages as discussed above, through years of evolution. Being born as a male is almost always advantageous, and the extent of the benefit varies depending on where one is born. However, it should also be noted that men obtain relatively smaller advantages compared to the past, especially in the realms of work, education, and sports; but nevertheless, it is still an advantage. Perhaps, in the years to come, backward mentalities and notions will be effectively wiped out once and for all, and women continue to empower themselves, continuing to close the gap that our species has created. One can only hope to see an equal society in the future, where questions such as, 'Is it better to be born male?', cease to exist.

Comments:

Varun, you have written an entirely relevant essay, and your arguments are valid, with a wide range of apt examples for substantiation. Do not overwrite. Essay is too long, and the organisation of the paragraphs is a bit messy. You also need to be a bit more balanced and concede a little more. This will make your response more well-considered.

'It is better to be born male in today's world.' How far do you agree?

Yap Tze Yong Reuben, 23S44

In our modern society, many things have changed as compared to the past. Females have made great strides forward in the past few decades and are certainly given more respect. In 2014, the famous female actress Emma Watson helped launch the United Nations (UN) Women's Campaign, HeForShe, which advocates for gender equality. Since the launch of the movement, she has participated in many events that have sought to promote women's rights and women's political participation. However, despite the progress made, it is also unrealistic to argue that complete gender equality has been achieved in all countries. The situation is worse in developing countries, where we cannot assume there is gender equality and gender subjugation still exists. Looking at it this way, there is still room for improvement to fight for women's rights. Therefore, I believe that males are still treated as "superior" to females, and it is better to be born male in today's world.

Detractors of the claim that men are better off in today's world argue that there has been a paradigm shift for more roles in society to be interchangeable between the two. Society has also begun to increase their acceptance towards the different roles being taken up by both genders. Feminists around the world have made fairly tangible achievements, and some women have worked their way up to be well-respected global leaders in the parliament. Compared to the past, where women were not even offered suffrage rights, there are big names in the parliament in today's world. Take, for example, Angela Merkel being the former chancellor of Germany, as well as Hillary Clinton winning the popular vote in the 2016 US presidential election. On top of that, in Silicon Valley, which is a largely male-dominated region, there are women who have proven the world wrong by having positions as what stereotypically would have been "a male's job". Sheryl Sandberg was the Chief Operating Officer of Meta Platforms, and Jean Liu is the current President of Didi Chuxing. It is appropriate to say that more women are financially independent, and can perform equally as well as their male counterparts. Furthermore, companies such as Google and Amazon have arranged flexible working schedules to allow both parents to be working from home. This goes to show that men can also take what most people deem to be a women's role such as child-rearing. Most of the time, men are seen as the sole breadwinners of the family while women should do the housework and take care of the children. However, there has been an increase in the number of reports claiming that men have started to take on more "female associated roles", such as pre-school teachers and stay-at-home fathers. With such female role models around and males being more socially accepting towards such roles, it is no surprise that some believe that it is just as good to be born female in today's world.

However, despite the recognition given to females in today's world, which is considerably more than in the past, I firmly believe that it is still better to be born male in today's world, due to the inferior rewards females receive for the same expertise. Socially constructed roles that have persisted for a long time are imposed on both males and females. Ultimately, the attitudes that people have towards the two genders are rooted in their psyche, making it difficult to change. Women are still facing a pay gap disparity as compared to men. Research conducted by Pew Research Centre states that in 2022, American women typically earned 82 cents for every dollar earned by men even though they are performing the same work and have about the same years of working experience. Despite valiant efforts made by former U.S. president Barack Obama, the wage gap has never ceased to exist. In fact, some women have a higher ranked occupation than males in the same industry and can still be paid less. In Hollywood, many came out in an outrage after it was revealed that female star Jennifer Lawrence was paid much lower than her male co-stars in the same movies. This shows that even if females put their best foot forward to perform to the best of their ability, and take on more prestigious roles than males, they remain inevitably vulnerable to getting less in return as compared to males. There is still discrimination displayed towards females today, which leads me to believe it is better to be born male.

In addition, women remain the more vulnerable victims to sexual harassment. Females must live their lives with an extra sense of caution as compared to males, as the fear of getting sexually harassed or assaulted haunts them from time to time. In a male-dominated working environment, females have accepted that "casual" sexual harassment by males or even other females in the workforce are part and parcel of their lives. However, the recent rise in the #MeToo movement makes women rightly wonder if they should step forward and voice out their thoughts. Unfortunately for them, society mostly offers the benefit of the doubt to the males, which makes it even harder for females to be brave and let what bothers them off their chest. Larry Nassar, the former team doctor of the U.S. women's gymnastics team, was notoriously known for sexually harassing and abusing female gymnasts. Even after he was shortly retrenched from the national team, Michigan State University - where he also worked at - was not informed of his devious acts. Female gymnasts who logged complaints against him had to describe the inappropriate behaviour displayed towards them, and would often have the complaints turned back on them, or even be shamed as a result. Due to women being more prone to sexual harassment, and even having most of their voices suppressed and backfired despite being the victims of such incidents, as males tend to worry less about such matters, one would be better off born as a male.

Finally, in patriarchal systems where most voices - especially those from females - are stifled, the culture of certain states reflects a gender bias that dictates how women should live their lives. Indeed, while there are some societies that recognise that such discriminatory practices should no longer exist, such as India ruling the 'triple talaq' practice as illegal in 2019, where a Muslim man can say the word 'talaq' three times to divorce his wife. The fact that such a practice can persist

until 2019 shows how unfairly women are or can be treated. What is worse is that some traditions, despite being banned for a certain period, can still be rampant. In Nepal, menstruating females are banished to huts with unhygienic and poor freezing conditions. Young girls at the huts are often targets for sexual predators at the huts. Despite being ruled as illegal by the Nepal Supreme Court in 2005, this practice persists. There have also been news reports of a girl living in Saudi Arabia sharing her traumatising experience of her attempts to escape from her male guardian. In Saudi Arabia, females who want to engage in relationships require approval from a male guardian. With such unfair and unjustified treatment towards females, instead of being the one who must obey ridiculous policies legislated by the country, one would rather be the male who is entitled the privilege of decision-making in such societies. Hence, it is better to be born male in this world.

Undeniably, females have shown their capability and potential to outperform their male counterparts. As much as females have proven their worth, it is sad to say that the stereotypes engraved in the mindsets of many people will take a long time to change even with the noticeable efforts made to do so. For one to be totally gender-blind, gender equality must be achieved on all fronts and societies. We are far from that and therefore, it is better to be born male in today's world.

Comments:

A relevant and well-argued response to the question. Good examples are given to support a range of valid arguments. Some ideas are not well-expressed or explained, which affected the clarity of the point made.

‘There has never been a better time to be a woman.’ Discuss.

Koh Hui Ying, 22S33

Gone are the days where women could not even show their ankles or get a divorce from an unhappy marriage. Today, women clearly have more freedom and agency in our world, enabling them to lead more fulfilling lives. Of course, women today face new problems such as rampant sexualisation, but I still think that women possess more control over their family life and goals, besides having a supportive community of women cheering them on. Therefore, I strongly believe that there has never been a better time to be a woman.

It is undeniable that women today are sexualised much more than they were in the past. Just look at the advertisements today – many involve women with perfect bodies posing provocatively in front of the camera, clad in scant clothing. The perpetuation of sexualised images of women through the internet desensitises the masses to them, such that they think it is perfectly fine to view women as mere objects of sexual desire. Artificial intelligence (AI) can be a reflection of this – Lensa AI, an app which utilises AI to produce artistic renderings of uploaded photos, has been reported by users to have made women skinnier, younger and in some cases, even nude in the new renderings. As the AI was trained on pre-existing data on the internet, Lensa AI's results can indicate how rampant sexualised images are on the Internet, holding up a mirror to the ugliness of our society. Moreover, sexualisation of women using technology can also be seen in the phenomenon of hidden spy-cams in South Korea. These cameras are surreptitiously concealed in public bathrooms, hotel rooms and rented houses with the motive of catching women exposed. Videos can even be uploaded onto the darknet, for similar people with voyeuristic needs to enjoy. This commodification of women's bodies is made much easier today through technology, from disseminating these clips, to feeling a sense of detachment as men watch through a static screen. In the past, overt sexualisation as a widespread phenomenon was less likely to happen as there was no means to circulate such material at such a large scale. Hence, it is unfortunately undoubtedly true that there are dark problems which women today may face.

However, there are still many causes for joy for today's women, one of which is their greater control over their family lives. In the past, women were bound by patriarchal norms, dooming them to lives of domesticity and disempowerment. The only thing that mattered to them was their family. Television advertisements from the early 1900s are proof of this – advertisements for household items more often than not featured a woman in an apron smiling brightly, using the product for household chores or to cook for the family. Fortunately, women today are no longer expected to be the sole caregivers of their families. Men and hence husbands are now encouraged

to partake in the task of raising a family. Recently, Singapore raised the number of weeks of paid paternity leave from two to four. With the husband playing a more active role in childcare, women today have more freedom and time to progress their careers. Furthermore, contraceptives also enable women to engage in family planning better, as compared to a past where successive childbearing rendered women unable to work. Therefore, women today definitely have more control over how big they want their family to be, and by extension how much energy they want to devote to it, granting them more freedom to pursue other goals in life.

Secondly, being a woman today is much better than it was in the past, thanks to their access to opportunities in life. Before this, men were considered the 'superior sex' in terms of intelligence, strength and other aspects, shutting the door to opportunities in women's faces. This severely limited women's potential and deprived them of the chance to live fulfilling lives. However, women today can now take part in the old 'men's world' – especially in education. With female activists such as Malala Yousafzai and Emma Watson standing up for female education, the world has collectively understood that educating women is just as important as educating men, with compulsory education for girls being the norm today. Women can go even further to pursue Master's degrees and doctorates alongside male counterparts. By giving them the gift of education, women now have a means to secure their own livelihoods through satisfying employment qualifications, which in turn confers greater independence and control to them. Another example would be in the workplace, where women are now capable of helming positions of power, just like Singapore's first female President Halimah Yacob and America's current Vice President Kamala Harris. Hence, women today are certainly granted more access to opportunities in their lives, thus ensuring greater life satisfaction and fulfilment.

Lastly, women today are garnering more support from the world and within their community, making the present a much better time to be a woman than ever. In the past, women were often silenced by men due to their limited power and voice, making them victims of domestic and sexual abuse. Today, women are gathering more courage to voice out dissent – as evidenced by a recent increase in sexual abuse reports, in particular Taiwan, thanks to a TV series. 'Wavemakers' portrays a political candidate striving to reclaim justice for a sexually abused colleague. The story resonated with many Taiwanese women, inspiring countless to reveal experiences of sexual abuse by powerful men in a Facebook thread, which provided the authorities a lead to conduct investigations. This #MeToo revolution in Taiwan, where women are empowered by each other's courage, demonstrates the uniting for the community of women today. Moreover, women today often support each other in their careers, such as in the field of research and academia. Women's colleges, research grants, scholarships and many more provide women with an inclusive environment and resources to advance their hopes and dreams. With these things, women are definitely more capable of exploring the limits of their potential and uncovering what the world has to offer.

All in all, although women today face overt sexualisation more often, they are also gaining greater access to opportunities, exerting more control over their family lives, and uplifting each other. I strongly believe that there has never been a better time to be a woman, especially considering how we are now no longer weighted down by heavy Victorian skirts and trapped in corsets!

Comments:

The points raised are relevant and well supported if rather repetitive, and the opposing view needed more attention. Language use is fluent and confident.

‘There has never been a better time to be a woman.’ Discuss.

Verene Ho, 22S35

Society has been developing at an inexorable allegro, with major shifts in various aspects of our daily lives. With such changes, there have certainly been impacts on gender equality and related discussions, with highly debated issues such as support for feminism coming to the fore. The increasing attention given to women today raises the question of whether there have been improvements in society's treatment of women and their wellbeing in general. While some may argue that women today face greater challenges due to the higher positions they hold now, I put forth that there has never been a better time to be a woman than now, because of the increase in the number of effective policies and social support for women today.

However, one must also acknowledge that there are more challenges faced by women now that arise from their elevated social status. Compared to the past, women today hold higher positions and have more opportunities to showcase their abilities and contribute to society, due to the greater education levels of women compared to a century ago. With such status comes greater responsibility and attention, which makes them more vulnerable and exposed to challenges while carrying out their roles. While putting themselves in front of the public, they may encounter experiences of discrimination, due to the fact that they are female. This is because while women now generally are viewed as more equal to men, some individuals still hold prejudices against women, and the higher positions that females hold entail meeting and interacting with more people, including such individuals. For example, in the case of Jacinda Ardern who served as New Zealand's Prime Minister for six years, issues of gender-related discrimination were raised as possibly one of the factors that drove her resignation. This reflects how the then Prime Minister who supposedly held an extremely venerable position experienced gender bias, and her being an important figure in that political environment exposed her to these experiences, which she otherwise may not have had. In addition, famous female celebrities have also mentioned the gender-biased discrimination that they faced. Emma Watson who rose to stardom after the Harry Potter movie series was released mentioned that paparazzi took upskirt photographs of her after an official event around the time when she gained popularity, showcasing how she was exposed to such threats due to the attention given to her for her fame, and the fact that she was constantly under the spotlight. While women of high status or fame in the past may have encountered similar biases, the greater role of social media and increasing discussion of women-related issues have allowed these violations of women to be even more pronounced. This could impact a wider audience of women, generating fears and insecurities about these challenges that they could also potentially face. As such, the elevated social status of many

women today has caused them to face threats that they otherwise would not have encountered and hence, it is not a better time than ever to be a woman.

Be that as it may, the aforementioned mostly applies to women of power or those who interact actively with the general public. For the majority of women in society, the current state of the world is by far the best, as there are now more effective policies catered to their needs which aims to improve their welfare. These are put in place by governments and relevant authorities, which are a result of thorough consideration of the needs of women. With such great leaps in policies aimed at improving women's welfare, women can not only feel more protected and valued, but also more confident as there are structural systems and official plans that are enacted to support them. For example, after holding the Conversations on Singapore Women's Development in 2021, the Singapore government published a White Paper on the topic, which laid out twenty-five detailed action plans that targeted the advancement of women in Singapore. This showed a nationwide effort and call to improve the conditions that females in our society face, and set a standard that is uniform across the country regarding programmes and attitudes towards women here, serving as a guide for business leaders and the general public. Furthermore, there are female-only train cabins in many countries including Japan, which serves to provide greater protection and sense of assurance for women. This is because it acts as a chance for them to escape from possible voyeurism and molestation that are carried out frequently during the peak hours of a fast-paced country like Japan, that faces immense crowds in trains. Given these policies, as well as their effectiveness - as seen by the wide use of the women-only train cabins by Japanese women - there has been progress that was never seen in previous generations, before such policies started to be implemented. These ideas are novel and represent the significant effort put in by stakeholders and the government that is even greater than at any other time in history. Therefore, the policies implemented today have led to the betterment of women's development and welfare, such that there has never been a better time to be a woman since there were much fewer, if at all, of such measures in the past.

In addition, I posit that current society is the best so far for women, due to the humongous growth in support for women by other members of society. Humans are social beings and are heavily affected by those around us, given the increase in interconnectivity of people today, it has become even more prominent now. More than ever before, there is support for women in today's world regarding various issues, due to the increasing gender equality rhetoric amongst the public, especially so in the developed world. This is perhaps due to the social milieu and increasing affluence of nations, raising our education levels and emboldening women and even men to fight for their cause and to render support to other women. With more widespread acknowledgement of women's opinions and achievements, the women of the present are able to feel more confident in voicing out their opinions and taking actions to effect changes in areas that they feel need improvement. For example, societal causes such as the #MeToo movements are centred around advocating for gender equality,

particularly bias against women and calls for greater inclusivity and fairness in their treatment. Even if no actual changes are brought about, the movement has indubitably raised awareness on gender equality for women and encouraged them to speak up about the difficulties they faced due to their gender, allowing them to at least air their grievances and seek support from empathetic members of the public. Another example is how the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, a landmark court decision sparked protests fighting for women's right to choose. The overturning of the Bill meant that abortion was now illegal in the USA, and protests were held outside the US Supreme Court as people demanded for and were enraged about the fact that women lost their right to decide for themselves. The outpouring of indignation, anger and disappointment was a form of support for the women who would eventually come under such legislation, where they are stripped of their rights. This demonstrates how society has evolved such that women are now able to bravely speak up about issues concerning them, come together and rally great numbers of people who share the same opinions and support one another. If not for the support from other protestors, individuals may not have been able to generate such an impact on the people. Thus, societal support has enabled women today to fight for themselves and have avenues to express their disenchantment with the state of affairs, as compared to a time where there was no social media or platforms that enabled such easy access to these opportunities. Compared to the environment women were in previously, it is hence valid to say that there has never been a better time to be a woman.

To conclude, it is now the best time for women compared to previous generations, due to the greater support and actions from people in power. Having said that, there is always still room for improvement. To truly improve the lives of women, we all must put in an effort and recognise the need to respect every individual equally, to expunge deep-rooted biases against females. Only with that can it make society the best for all.

Comments:

Points raised are insightful with detailed and relevant examples but the logic behind the choice of some examples need to be re-examined. Language use was confident and varied.

‘There has never been a better time to be a woman.’ Discuss.

Trinity Teo Yin Hui, 22S39

In recent years, it seems that we have made much progress towards gender equality. More young girls are receiving education, and more women are given the same opportunities as their male counterparts. The future for women seems limitless, and women can achieve anything they set their minds to. However, there are still challenges in being a woman today, challenges that have existed for decades and have yet to be resolved, such as the unequal treatment of women and the lack of control over their own bodies. Therefore, while I acknowledge that there has never been a better time to be a woman, there is still progress to be made.

Some may claim that there has never been a better time to be a woman, as so much progress has been made towards gender equality. Women are now leading better lives and have been given opportunities to lead and excel in various fields, opportunities that would not have existed in the past. For example, Singapore's current President is the first female President in the country's history, while the United States of America's current Vice President is the first female Vice President in the country's history. It is evident that women are excelling in the political arena, a historically male-dominated field, something that would have seemed like a pipe dream to women in the past. With more women making waves in various fields, becoming industry titans and revolutionising our lives, such as: Jennifer Doudna, the biochemist who pioneered CRISPR technology; or Katalin Kariko, the researcher who laid the invaluable groundwork for the development of the mRNA vaccine that has saved countless lives; it is clear that women are overcoming stereotypes and making invaluable contributions to the world. Therefore, there has never been a better time to be a woman, as women are now encouraged to achieve their dreams and ambitions.

However, women still face many challenges in their lives. One of the most pressing challenges is the unequal treatment women face. Despite the progress that has been made so far and all the stereotypes that women have overcome, there are still many more that await them. Women are often compared to the current, trending beauty standards and are heavily judged and criticised when they fall short, even though these beauty standards are widely acknowledged to be superficial and fickle. Female athletes like shot put athlete Gong Lijiao, archer An San, tennis star Serena Williams and gymnast Simone Biles have all faced criticism over their physiques or how they do not conform to conventional beauty standards. Despite being award-winning Olympic athletes who have brought glory to their countries, they are somehow still criticised over something as fleeting and insignificant as their looks. Women are held to a different, higher standard and are criticised for things that rarely matter, while their numerous, impressive achievements are ignored instead of celebrated. While

there has never been a better time to be a woman, especially as female athletes were not allowed to compete at these international competitions in the past, there is still a long way to go.

In addition, it is still not a good time to be a woman, as women still lack full control of their own bodies, which is a significant challenge that has persisted throughout decades of suffrage movements and campaigns. Not only is this lack of control a pressing issue in developing countries, it also exists in developed countries. In the United States of America, the Supreme Court has overturned the monumental ruling *Roe v. Wade*, which gives states free rein over their abortion laws. Individual states, such as Georgia, are now able to impose a total ban on abortion, which is detrimental to the welfare of women. The lack of control women have over their bodies is a cause that generations of women have fought for, yet it still remains a problem faced today. Along with genital mutilation, which remains a pressing issue in many developing countries, it seems as though minimal progress has been made to improve the lives of women. Thus, there have been and will be better times to be a woman.

Furthermore, many women still face discrimination at work, despite decades of attempts to eliminate gender discrimination in the workplace. Across many areas of employment and in many countries around the world, the insidious gender wage gap still persists, a disease that has yet to be eradicated. Women continue to be compensated less for the same job role as their male counterparts, although efforts have been made to strive towards wage parity. In Singapore, surveys by *The Straits Times* have shown that the gender wage gap continues to exist, even though it has been reduced through years of efforts. Other issues that women face in the workplace, such as the glass ceiling phenomenon, have been extensively investigated, with findings showing that women are not given the same career progression opportunities, despite performing well at work. However, equally worrying is the sticky floor phenomenon, where women are given or assigned 'dead-end' jobs with little to no room for career progression. This phenomenon is especially prevalent in more patriarchal countries such as Japan, where women are expected to focus on their families instead of their work. Despite receiving equal education and employment opportunities, which did not exist in the past, there are still various forms of discrimination, unequal treatment or disadvantages that persist to this day. Although it may be said that there has never been a better time to be a woman, as women are generally better off now than in the past - objectively, it is still not a good time to be a woman.

I acknowledge that there has never been a better time to be a woman, as many improvements have been made, giving women today the opportunities our predecessors never had. However, the progress made so far is not sufficient. There are still challenges women face because of their gender. There are still various forms of discrimination against women. There is still room for improvement. We must continue fighting, continue changing, continue improving the lives of women, so that

every generation that comes after us will agree that there has never been a better time to be a woman.

Comments:

*Fluent piece, conviction evident in the claims and how they are substantiated well.
Could work on the sophistication of language.*

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‘There has never been a better time to be a woman.’ Discuss.

Goh Chen Xi, 22S45

The recent overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, which enshrines abortion as a legal right, sparked protests and demonstrations from women all over the United States, ostensibly a superpower with advanced women's rights. As a result, some feel that in today's world, women's rights have taken a backseat, while others claim that the democratisation of technology and the internet have empowered women so much more than what was previously possible. This then begs the question of whether there has never been a better time to be a woman. While the internet has endowed women with a voice and platform, it has also been exploited by some to promote misogyny and oppression against women, as well as the rise of technology which can be used against women as well. Moreover, in authoritarian regimes, women are still by and large oppressed. Given the above, I disagree with the statement.

Optimists may argue otherwise, propounding that the rise of the internet and the burgeoning use of social media today have given women a platform to speak up unlike any generations before could ever hope for. Characterised by its no frills, low barriers to entry, the internet - especially social media - enables people of all walks of life to access it. This means that there is now a platform for women to speak up against oppression and rally together from different parts of the world to stand up for women's rights. A prominent example would be Emma Watson, who regularly posts empowering content on her Instagram uplifting women from all around the world. Without social media, women's rights would have continued to be sidelined and attenuated by diminishments. Another example would be Taylor Swift, who uses her platform of millions of global listeners to actively speak up for women's rights, which stresses the importance of gender equality. The internet has made her music accessible to all, increasing the empowerment of her music to international fans and women from all over the world. One example of this would be her song "Clean". Although the song was originally written about someone she used to date, it has since become interlinked with her sexual assault trial. The simple yet poignant lyric "By morning gone was any trace of you, I think I am finally clean" also sends out a strong message to other women who have been sexually harassed to be unafraid to speak up against their oppressors. This would not have been possible if not for the democratisation of technology and the internet today, and women would not have had the much-needed avenue for their voices to be heard.

While it is indubitable that the rise of the internet has indeed provided greater access to a platform for women to voice their opinions and empower others, it is also important to note that the internet can also be exploited as a driving force to oppress women. Social media's algorithm has long been known to have the propensity to

spread inflammatory content, and gives leeway to those who do so, as such posts bring in high internet traffic, with greater clicks and views. This has not gone unrecognised by some, who have resorted to social media to air their misogynistic views in a bid to gain a widespread reach to their audience. Case in point: Andrew Tate, who racked in millions of views on TikTok alone for extolling his misogynistic views about women, for example how he feels that women should be responsible for their rape. What is worse is that his target audience are young impressionable boys who are dazzled by his wealth and success and actively echo his views as a result of being fed a daily diet of toxic masculinity and misogyny. The consequences? In the UK, it has been reported by The Guardian that primary school boys were refusing to be taught by female teachers, and even parrot Andrew Tate by saying women should not be allowed to work. The unprecedented reach of social media has given oppressors like Andrew Tate a wider platform to sow divisiveness, to encourage patriarchal views against women, and has consequently made such repercussions harder to contain. In the same report by The Guardian, it was highlighted that even lessons and assemblies to educate the boys about Andrew Tate and misogyny could not even match the extent of his influence on social media. Therefore, with such exploitation of online mediums to encourage female oppression, it is untrue that there has never been a better time to be a woman.

Moreover, advancements in technology today also have adverse repercussions on women. Advancements in technology have largely decreased privacy today, and when downloading mobile applications, it is common for one to quickly accept the Terms and Conditions of the app and consent to its access to one's personal data. This gives rise to the potential of one's data being exploited by app developers and shared, unbeknownst to users. This effect extends to apps developed to improve women's lives, such as the menstrual cycle tracking apps, which promote convenience by helping women predict trends and menstrual cycle dates, after the input of relevant data. After the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* as mentioned earlier, it was reported that many women deleted such apps, for fear that their data would be handed over to the authorities and that they would be monitored. This highlights the dangerous potential of the exploitation of their data by web developers, how technology can be as detrimental to women today, and does not make it better to be a woman.

Furthermore, in authoritarian countries, women are still being oppressed today. An example would be the 2021 takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban. Initially, the Taliban promised that they would not restrict the rights of women as they had before. However, it was not long before reports of women being banned from universities and seeking education emerged in the news. In such countries where governments hold immense power and have rigid control over their citizens, even the basic right to education was clamped down with an iron fist, making it no better to be a woman today than in the past, where women's access to education was barred and heavily looked down upon. An even more regimented country would be North Korea, which has barred its citizens from free media consumption and restricted women from having

access to education. In such countries, women are still disenfranchised as ever, if not more. Therefore, it is not true that there has never been a better time to be a woman.

To conclude, while it is true that the internet has given rise to more female empowerment today, given that the internet's widespread reach can be exploited to propagate misogyny, as well as the infringement of privacy that stems from technological development and authoritarian regimes still actively controlling and restricting women's rights, I disagree that there has never been a better time to be a woman.

Comments:

Largely fluent and compelling points and examples. The tricky thing about this question is that you must provide an overall take on the matter. Given the different examples, what is it like as a whole – never been a better time? Also necessary to note that a better time may not be the best, but better in terms of historical lineage.

‘There has never been a better time to be a woman.’ Discuss.

Flora Tay Kai Xin, 22S62

‘There has never been a better time to be a woman.’ This statement has been highly controversial, especially in today’s modern world, where milestones and breakthroughs have been made in terms of women’s rights and achievements. Women, who were once subject to oppressive treatment by largely patriarchal societies abound with misogynists, have laudably been increasingly uplifted in society. Women now are accorded greater rights to education, voting and demand more respect from their male counterparts, since equality, liberty and independence is highly prized in today’s world. The consequential progress made must not lull society into a sense of complacency, because women still continue to fight an uphill battle in achieving complete equality with men. More has to be done in various aspects of society, especially in handling remnants of patriarchal and misogynistic sentiments that persist and pose a threat to women’s rights and treatment. Hence, women should not be expected to be content with the present rights and treatment of their gender, so I largely disagree with the statement.

Optimists would argue that with growing gender parity in education, women have been empowered and uplifted from constraining gender roles, so there has never been a better time to be a woman. In today’s modern world where ideals of quality are increasingly valued and enshrined in constitutions, the right to receive education has been extended to many females. This is a symbolic first step to providing women with an opportunity to value-add to society with their own intellectual capabilities, which falls outside traditional gender expectations of being a subservient housewife who lacks knowledge. For instance, in Saudi Arabia - a highly patriarchal society - King Salman had allowed girls to receive education, and women to gain employment opportunities without needing consent from a male guardian. Furthermore, according to MyCareersFuture, women comprise 41% of STEM cohorts. This proves that women are not just receiving basic education, but are also capable of and granted opportunities to further their education in specialised fields. The fact that females are entering and occupying fields once dominated by men indicates that they are on the path to attaining gender parity. As such, women can pursue their aspirations, and it can be said that there has never been a better time to be a woman.

Additionally, one could claim that there has never been a better time to be a woman, because women are now more involved in political processes. The recognition of women as equals and their value to society has led to consequential acts that grants them a voice on a wider scale. Countries followed after New Zealand and Australia, that granted women universal suffrage in 1893 and 1902 respectively, and even eradicated gender as a barrier of entry to be a politician. Such events are certainly

milestones, as they signify that firstly, women are capable of making decisions independently and secondly, that their opinions matter. With more women entering the political scene and entrenching their positions, female matters have finally gained the recognition required. For instance, in 2020, Monica Lennon, a Scottish Member of Parliament, helped make period products like sanitary pads and tampons free, helping women alleviate a financial burden arising from their innate biological nature. Thus, with female representatives who empathise with women, there is greater hope and effectiveness in resolving issues that have plagued them. The incorporation of women into the political process thus allows one to posit that there has never been a better time to be a woman.

However, women continue to be restricted by a glass ceiling in the economic realm, due to the vestiges of patriarchy and misogyny, so it is erroneous to assume that there has never been a better time to be a woman. Despite having proven themselves to be equally worthy as their male counterparts, women face unequal treatment in employment, wages and opportunities. Such a phenomenon can be alluded to the fact that changes in laws that accord better treatment to women are not matched with a recalibration of archaic, patriarchal mindsets that manifest amongst society. Take for example Women In The Workplace's report that for every 100 men promoted to a manager role in 2022, only 87 women received the same boost despite being equally as qualified. Additionally, when interviewing for job applications, employers often pry about their marital status and future family plans. These stem from concerns that female employees may be caught up with family caretaking and pregnancy, which may interfere with their work productivity. However, such views are stereotypical and stem from misogynistic mindsets that men would be better candidates as such. Hence, the unequal treatment of women in the workplace and economic aspect proves it is fallacious to conclude that there has never been a better time to be a woman.

Lastly, women in many developing countries that hold onto anachronistic traditions and cultures continue to be victims of oppression. Many developing countries, especially the rural regions, have long been practising certain traditions that neglect female rights. These traditions continue to be practised, and women's suffering and subjugation persists as a result. For instance, in Nepal, women are banished to menstrual huts, where they are exposed to the elements and left to fend for themselves as society deems them 'unclean' while they are on their period. Furthermore, female genital mutilation remains prevalent in African countries. The unsanitary conditions that accompany such unsafe practices further poses a threat to the health and safety of women. Regrettably, these traditions are tough to challenge, as locals fervently abide by such practices despite its harms. Hence, female health, safety, and treatment remains problematic in developing countries.

In conclusion, I largely disagree with the statement. Despite there being significant progress achieved in terms of improving rights and treatment to women across the world, the welfare of women in developing countries has yet to improve.

Comments:

Good use of language. Confidently with a clear personal voice. The essay showed good knowledge of women's issues and provided a good range of examples for developing and developed countries. A very good effort. However, conclusion seems rushed - a pity. Leave time to end your essay nicely.

Should there be greater involvement of women in decision making?

Tanusri Balasubramanian, 22S43

Following the death of Mahsa Amini in 2022, thousands of women lined the streets of Iran protesting the harsh policies set by the government. They questioned the concept of 'morality police' and the misuse of power within the male-dominated government that ultimately resulted in the death of an innocent woman. Since then, people, especially women in Iran, have pondered whether such an act deemed as a 'monstrosity' would have taken place if a woman was in charge of policymaking instead. Women are often associated with motherly and sensitive traits that often lead to them being put-down, demotivated, and deemed inferior to men. Thus, seeing them make crucial decisions, policies, and laws brings fear and uncertainty to people, mainly because of the lack of women in authoritative positions. However, the rise in females taking leadership roles is changing this mindset. Their empathetic and passionate qualities further deem them as courageous individuals, making them an increasing necessity in decision-making.

Pessimists may claim that greater involvement of women in policymaking is dangerous and turbulent as they are represented as unworthy. Often stereotyped to be sensitive, women are expected to avoid tasks that require confidence and skill. Many may believe that the consequences and prospects that come with decision-making frighten women. The lack of confidence that is thus associated with them prevents them from being accepted by the majority. When former UK prime minister Liz Truss resigned from her position weeks after being elected, UK citizens were let down. Most of them were convinced that she was not suited for the role, and that women in higher positions would disappoint them due to their own fears. The current prime minister, Rishi Sunak, however, quickly came aboard and gained the attention of British citizens. His confidence and composure were associated with him being a man, mostly by anti-feminists, increasing hope among citizens. This trend of women being deemed as unfit for such authoritative positions while men being preferred more has been prevalent in other nations as well. During the Presidential elections against Donald Trump, some believed that Hillary Clinton lost mainly because she was a woman. This is true because Trump had expressed his lack of hope in Clinton running the country due to her gender, to which his supporters and party members agreed as a reason to vote for him. Countless posts on social media were directed against her, while her potential was never allowed to be expressed. The lack of belief in women amongst not only the general public, but also men in governments has led to them being deemed unfit for decision-making opportunities.

Regarding more recent developments in the mindsets of people, the aforementioned no longer holds true to a larger extent. The change in people's

mindsets, especially after women have been proving themselves worthy of decision-making positions, has led to people believing greater involvement of women in decision-making is beneficial due to their confidence. An increasing number of women have been fighting for and excelling in higher positions. Their forward nature and convincing composure has allowed them to gain the confidence of people. Namely, Sanna Marin, prime minister of Finland, gained the support of Finnish citizens rapidly during the elections, and more so after she accepted the role. Despite being subjected to controversies by her male counterparts within the government and opposing parties, which included her posting videos of her partying and pictures of her breastfeeding, she continued to stand against them and proved the lack of truth in their negative accusations. When she was accused of posting an Instagram story of her drinking and thus characterised as reckless, hundreds of Finnish people posted themselves partying with '#SolidarityWithSanna' in support of her. When Sanna Marin went the extra mile to post her negative drug test the next morning, numerous citizens gained faith in her fulfilling a crucial role for their country in policymaking, and appreciated her confidence. The presence of such confident women in decision-making or government roles has allowed people to increasingly respect these women. Their confidence and strong footing thus allow them to be apt for decision-making roles when they can showcase their potential freely.

In addition, women's empathetic natures have made them more fit for decision-making, as they are able to comprehend the needs of people. While being associated with motherly and sensitive traits may be deemed as a weakness, women tend to take pride in those traits and utilise them to create better policies for their people. Hence, they are better able to cater to the specific needs of people as well. The former First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama, was loved by Americans for her motherly yet confident nature. Her decisions in aiding minorities and children in America easily gained the appreciation and confidence of people. In her interviews and book, 'Becoming', she expressed how empathy had allowed her to make finer decisions for her people. As an African American, she knew what other African-Americans needed. As a mother, she was able to identify what she could do better for children, leading her to create policies for healthier food in schools as well. Similarly, being a woman of colour, current Vice-President Kamala Harris made policies to increase the number of women and women of colour working in higher positions, as she was able to relate and identify with her counterparts. Despite Trump's anti-feminist remarks against her goal to bring in more women into the government, she stood by her ambition and continues to fulfil it. Hence, women in decision-making allows better policies to be made and catered to those who need them.

Moreover, women are courageous and bold. Their courage often misleads people into deeming them as reckless. However, this does not hold true. Their courage and risk-taking abilities allow them to present themselves as fearless. Among the other weaknesses they are associated with, they tend to eradicate fear so that their potential can be seen. Often placed behind men or under the power of men, women tend to

have the need to express themselves as bold characters so as to defy stereotypes they are associated with. When Greta Thunberg rallied for climate change fearlessly despite detention orders, Trump associated her with “anger issues”. When Malala Yusofzai stood against the Taliban and their ban on education for girls, she was shot; and yet, she continued to protest for women’s rights. Some felt that these women were reckless, fighting for policies that seemed impossible to implement. However, many understood the gravity of what they desired and praised their boldness. The messages that these women wanted to put forth might not have reached the masses and created changes in policies if not for their courage. As such, women in decision-making roles are more necessary for radical change.

In the light of the aforementioned, there should be greater involvement of women in decision-making. Though stereotypes and mindsets against women place them behind their male counterparts, the much-needed positive changes in decision-making becomes possible when men in authority give way for women to express and explore their potential.

Comments:

Tanusri, Beautifully written! Well thought-out arguments and highly relevant examples. Please work on your grammar though.

Should there be greater involvement of women in decision-making?

Amelia See Pei Xuan, 22S46

In the past decade, there has been a global shift in the mindset of gender roles and women's rights. Women of different ages, backgrounds, and races have started to step up and take on more roles, challenging the archaic beliefs of their primary responsibilities of taking care of the household. This change was greatly catalysed by the Industrial Revolution and the two world wars, galvanising women to become greater contributors to society. Taking a look at the changes in the past versus the current, it is pertinent for people to consider if the advancement of women's rights has gained them sufficient power or if there is room for improvement. With universal suffrage and greater calls for gender equality, some may believe that the current fate of women has largely improved and thus there is no need for further action. However, I, for one, believe that it is overly optimistic to say that women's involvement in varying affairs requires no more changes and that a variety of factors point to the fact that women should have greater involvement in decision-making.

For one, I recognise that women's involvement in decision-making has increased by leaps and bounds. This is why naysayers may argue that women in the current generation have great say both in the political and corporate spheres as compared to the past, and thus, there is no need for further change. Regarding this opposing view, some may argue that greater suffrage has allowed women to anchor more positions in the political world. In many developed countries, women have gained more seats in parliament, enabling them to have a greater say in policymaking. Closer to home, in 2017, Halimah Yacob became the first female president in Singapore. The increased participation of women in the political arena led some to believe that women have already garnered much more say in the politics of a nation. This is because they have been conferred with greater say and authority, enabling them to become more active in effecting changes in the governance of the nation. In contrast to the past, where women did not even dream of having such high-ranking titles, the advancement of power means that in current times, women can exercise greater control. This is also relevant in the corporate spheres where there are more women CEOs in the Forbes 500 companies than ever before. With many more women spearheading large corporations, it can be deduced that women have greater access to positions of authority where they are involved in crucial business decision-making. In contrast to the past, where women largely took on domestic roles, the shift towards helming more significant positions in society goes to show how their current involvement in decision-making in macroeconomic and microeconomic scales is rather significant, and thus, there is no need for further changes.

While there is some element of truth in the aforementioned views, these views are limited in determining that women should not be given more say in decision-making. The comparison of past and present to dictate the future of women is rather myopic. I concede that women have earned greater power and say in large matters like state affairs and corporate decision-making, however, more should be done to ensure that there is greater diversity of views and sufficient representation of women. In absolute numbers, parliament demographics are still dominated by men and many policies, including the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, were passed by majority male-dominated political groups. Another example is how while more women have taken on roles of helming large firms in the United States, only seven percent of Forbes 500 corporations are led by female CEOs. This goes to show that, in absolute terms, the empirical evidence is sufficient to show that we are still living in a world where it is largely controlled and dominated by men. Even decisions regarding abortion rights are made by men. Women are still overshadowed by men in modern society today, and the relatively small numbers of women in power is proof that the world requires greater involvement of women in decision-making in order to provide greater diversity of opinions. With women having more authority, they can represent the needs of other women instead of having men dictate and assume their needs. As such, I believe that there should be greater involvement of women in decision-making.

To begin, many females in current times are still deprived of the basic rights to make decisions regarding their own lives. This is clearly embodied in the cogent legal judgement of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organisation* in the United States, where the previously accepted constitutional ruling of women's rights to abortion was overruled. Now, states have a say in the permissibility of abortion, and in some states, abortion has been banned even in cases of rape or incest. Allowing the states a say in an inherently personal matter shows how women's lives are still susceptible to decisions that are not made by them. Retrospectively, they are not in power of decisions regarding their own bodies as authorities do not favour their preferences. Another example is that in many countries, mature oocyte cryopreservation, otherwise known as "social egg-freezing" is still illegal. This is because some countries are afraid that it may cause birth rates to decline. By compromising women's rights in exchange for a nation's goals, it goes to show how little priority or consideration is given to women in important affairs regarding themselves. By disallowing egg preservation, women are stripped of the choice of starting a family versus other priorities in life, like starting a career. This lack of say that women have regarding matters that are deeply personal puts them in a position where they are acting based on the lack of choice rather than preference, which is extremely devastating regarding how they are not in control of their own bodies, a basic right that humans in general should have. Thus, given the current state of women's lack of basic rights regarding decision-making of their lives, I believe that more should be done to involve women in decision-making, especially when passing nationwide laws that affect them the most.

In addition, women should be given greater say in decision-making, as many women hold great influential power and can bring about effective changes that are valuable to society. While acknowledging the current lack of women's involvement as a reason for why more should be done, one should also examine the abilities of women and the value of their contribution in decision-making. In a survey done by the United States, a large proportion of employees noted that women CEOs have great leadership capabilities and that they are in favour of being led by them. Biologically, women are known to be more expressive and emotionally driven by men. This may have been looked down upon in the past as a form of weakness. In current times, however, where there is a paradigm shift in mindset towards placing more value in employees' well-being, these traits act in favour of women. They enable women to be more empathetic instead of practical leaders, allowing them to better understand the sentiments of the ground. With that, though many are in favour of women, with reference to the previously stated example, many women are still not leading big firms. This can be attributed to the fact that women are given more menial administrative tasks as compared to men, due to employers citing concerns over their multiple roles of birth-giving and working. As a result, many are stuck in 'sticky floors' or 'glass ceilings', both of which heavily limit their career position into positions of authority. This leaves many to be unable to enjoy the results of women's leadership, given how influential figures like Hilary Clinton, Michelle Obama and Angela Merkel prove that women have the desirable leadership traits like critical thinking, interpersonal skills and influential power which can significantly contribute to decision-making. Greta Thunberg, a young girl who is an active climate activist, is able to speak to the hearts of people and her passion garners the attention of international governing bodies. This has resulted in a significant fight against decisions towards climate change, which was catalysed by the sole effort of a young and passionate girl. That is merely an example of how women, especially in this age where they are more educated, have the cognitive and emotional ability to contribute to decision-making in invaluable ways. As such, they should be more involved in decision-making.

In conclusion, though there has been significant improvement in women's lives, looking at the bigger picture, we should realise that women should have greater power in making decisions. With women globally still suffering from the lack of ability to make decisions, like how women under the Taliban are no longer allowed to receive education, as well as the evident positive impacts of the abilities of women in power, we can conclude that the fight towards allowing women more rights in decision-making should not end. I am sanguine that as long as more is done on a global scale, we can achieve a utopian society where women are more valued for their abilities.

Comments:

Amelia, a cogent and clear discussion with sound arguments raised. Awareness of the different situations faced by women is demonstrated showing clear understanding and grasp of the issue. The use of supporting evidence could have been clearer for some parts. Language-wise, ideas are clearly expressed, but be mindful of the occasional slips. Overall, a decent effort.

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MISCELLANEOUS



The Waiting Room

I thought it would be some grandiose event, reaching up far into the heavens, as far as the cosmos themselves. But it wasn't. Or it was. Just without the space.

It was like candy: pulled and stretched over and over again upon itself until it became the densest little knot. My mind felt like clouds. My body felt like rocks. I couldn't move. Not even in my mind. My blanket was blue. Everything was shifting.

I was always scared, I realised. I'd keep people at arm's length so I would never be faced with it.

But that's the thing, isn't it? Humans are a social species. Perhaps, I was an alien, my brain disappearing into itself to cope.

Yet, I must continue on in this limbo, standing upon Schrödinger's life and loss, in order for things to feel *real*.

The blanket was soft. The pillows were white.

Dolot Shine Mikaela Maminta, 23S41

Conversation Between Two Taproots

Erupting from the dirt like a clenched fist
 Fingers opening up with gnarled nails, spiralling towards the sky
 The tree is blue and the sky is red
 Bloodcurdling screams echoing within each branch, screaming
 For release as they claw at the zephyrs of oblivion
 Encircling them
 Pulsing with power and flaring with orange,
 A cry of frustration, a vehement scream, a longing for the heavens to open up,
 A demand
 Along the shrivelled nubs dance balls of flame, thrumming with anger
 As surroundings dissolve like moistened cardboard
 And the tree climbs out of the red cage
 The frame can't even contain it.

Coalescence when horizontal meets vertical
 Perfect harmony with the acquiescence of geometry
 Obsidian threads entwining with slivers of white,
 Threads of hair,
 Blooming like a precipitous peak spinning into control
 Webs of life, moments that seem small in the moment
 But grow large and larger in the future until they can no longer
 Fit into the enclosed prison that is your throat;
 Bull's-eye windows searing your eyes
 With purity and warmth, a reassuring whisper,
 As the thinned but satisfied branches spread themselves across
 The picture plane like a reminder
 A gentle touch, an embrace.

The soil's thirst is never quenched, there it lies
 Barren and a virgin to the weather, untouched
 There is movement, the surface quakes, specks crumple in anticipation, it
 Is only a worm coming up for sunlight.

Loic Lee Ming Hao, 23A12

“It is increasingly difficult to lead a healthy lifestyle today.’ How far is this true in your society?”

Ashlyn Lim, 23A14

“Health is wealth.” An age-old phrase that perfectly encapsulates the importance of living a balanced, healthy lifestyle to ascertain our quality of life. Yet, the proliferation of technology has not only greatly reduced our need to travel from place to place, but also endowed us with the ability to purchase fast food with just the tap of our smartphones. Consequently, given that we are a highly digitalised society, it seems as though the advent of the Internet has posed even greater challenges in our quest towards mental and physical wellness, making it increasingly difficult to live a healthy lifestyle today. However, I, for one, find this to be a fallacious and largely untrue claim, and opine that it has not only become increasingly difficult, but in fact much easier to lead a healthy lifestyle in my society today.

Advocates of the view that it is increasingly difficult to lead a healthy lifestyle opine that the rising ubiquity of food delivery applications in Singapore has made leading a healthy lifestyle all the more challenging. They posit that these applications have presented Singaporeans with a wider range of temptations that deter them from making healthier choices, consequently adopting excessively sedentary lifestyles and developing poor dietary habits. This is especially true since many Singaporeans own a mobile phone and are prone to making unhealthy choices on these applications. A salient example of this would be FoodPanda — A variety of fast food options, from McDonald’s to Burger King and Jollibee, can be delivered right to a person’s doorstep at very short notice. Fast food options are also often significantly more affordable; an entire McDonald’s meal on FoodPanda or Grab costs about seven to eight dollars, while a nourishing salad bowl could cost up to twenty dollars. This makes fast food all the more enticing, leading to a rise in consumption of junk foods such as French fries, hamburgers and fried chicken. The impact of these food delivery applications is further exacerbated by the algorithms they are built upon, presenting users with options that align with their unhealthy preferences based on past orders. If a person constantly orders fast food, they are likely to be recommended to other restaurants that serve similar types of food. The rise of food delivery applications has made acquiring unhealthy food options much more convenient, allowing us to purchase food from the comfort of our homes without having to engage in physical activity. Hence, it can be said that it is increasingly difficult to lead a healthy lifestyle today.

Prima facie, the increasing popularity of food delivery applications does indeed seem to discourage consumption of healthier foods in Singapore, making it more difficult to lead a healthy lifestyle. Of course, I must concede that the rise of technology has led to greater convenience in attaining unhealthy food options and reducing

physical activity. However, these advocates fail to acknowledge the consistent promotion of healthier food options all across the nation, both online and offline. The Singaporean government has taken the initiative to make healthy food options more accessible and available in hawker centres. For example, the government mandated all hawker stores to offer at least one meal under 500 calories. The nutritional information of hawker meals is frequently displayed on the menu of these stalls, educating citizens about the quality of meals they consume and making it easier for them to select healthier options. Moreover, even the aforementioned food delivery applications such as Grab include a 'Healthier options' category which enables users to browse through a variety of healthy food eateries. Evidently, there has been much improvement in the accessibility of healthier food options in Singapore, undermining the statement that it is increasingly difficult to lead a healthy lifestyle in my society today.

Moreover, diet is just one of the many aspects of health. In today's day and age, it has become easier than ever to engage in physical activity. The Singaporean government has long been promoting healthy exercise schedules and devoting resources towards making the incorporation of physical activity much easier for citizens of all ages. This helps to promote active living amongst Singaporeans and makes living a healthy lifestyle less challenging - even for an ageing population such as ours. For instance, alongside playgrounds, numerous exercise corners have been established around the nation to cater to the elderly. This enables senior citizens to keep fit without having to spend any money! This ascertains optimal health for more of the elderly, regardless of economic background. In fact, in a bid to increase physical activity amongst citizens, the government had also introduced the nationwide National Steps Challenge, where citizens utilised fitness trackers and aimed to accumulate 10,000 steps to win prizes. Given that a key deterrent to engaging in exercise is a lack of peer motivation amongst Singaporeans, seeing their friends and family members participate in this challenge made taking up exercise a lot less arduous a task. Hence, besides dieting, even becoming more active has become much less challenging in my society today.

Finally, rising awareness and improvements in the de-stigmatisation of mental health in Singapore has made it easier for sufferers of mental health issues to seek the professional help they require. In the past, given the conservative nature of our society, many would have been ridiculed or looked down upon if they were to speak up about their mental health problems. However, the rise of social media has empowered many to voice out about the struggles they face, making others feel less alone and allowing people to understand more about a variety of mental health disorders. For example, 'Our Grandfather Story' is a Singaporean-based YouTube channel which tackles controversial topics including mental health. People who have suffered from eating disorders or depression were invited to share their experience dealing with such debilitating illnesses in their day-to-day lives. As a result, the videos helped to bridge the gap in understanding between those who struggle with mental

health issues and those around them who do not. Moreover, a variety of mental health services in Singapore has also emerged, from suicide hotlines such as Samaritans of Singapore to online counselling services such as Tinkle Friend. This makes it easier for sufferers to acquire support regarding their mental well-being without having to pay exorbitant prices to see a therapist. While it is undeniable that mental health services can be rather costly and limited in Singapore, the rise in mental health awareness and increasing number of mental health services still exemplifies how protecting our psychological welfare and thereby leading a healthier lifestyle has become increasingly easy in my society.

In conclusion, I find the statement that it is increasingly difficult to lead a healthy lifestyle in Singapore today to be largely untrue. Not only have we seen improvements in the availability of healthier food options, but even ascertaining sufficient physical activity and maintaining psychological wellness has become increasingly easy in my society. However, in spite of the progress we have made in enabling Singaporeans to lead a healthy lifestyle, it is entirely our responsibility to make use of these options to aid us in maintaining physical and mental wellness. If we, Singaporeans, refuse to take responsibility and make wiser choices, then there would be no improvements in the health status of our society even if it becomes increasingly easy to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Comments:

Ashlyn, a good, focused essay touching on very pertinent ideas and a sound argument. If there is any critique it would be that you tend to ignore human inertia, laziness and enjoyment in the modern day. Too many distractions and convenience make it much tougher to embark on a healthy lifestyle, such as taking the stairs instead of the lift. Still, a good effort with focus on increasingly! Language could be tighter, but it is still very competent.

“It is increasingly difficult to lead a healthy lifestyle today.” How far is this true in your society?

Chong Zhi Shan, 23A14

“An apple a day keeps the doctor away.” While this popular phrase is considered almost comedic and is most commonly used by parents to push their children to eat fruits, it does not undermine its truth. Eating healthily is a large factor when it comes to leading a healthy lifestyle. However, it also includes other lifestyle choices like having enough rest and exercising. In the fast-paced and bustling city of Singapore, many complain that leading a healthy lifestyle is harder now due to soaring prices of healthy foods and having less time to exercise. Yet, I believe it is not true to a large extent, and it could even be increasingly easier to lead a healthy lifestyle as the government helps to educate and increase the availability of resources, since living healthily would be easy with a change in mindset and good discipline.

Firstly, the Singaporean government has aided citizens on their journey to healthy living by increasing awareness and education on the ways to maintain good health. The first step to a healthy lifestyle is knowing how to lead one in the first place. In the past, many people were ignorant of the importance of exercise and the significance of healthy foods. However, in our present society, the government has made salient efforts to educate citizens on the do's and don'ts of healthy living. For example, most drinks sold are required to have a Nutri-Grade label, where drinks are ranked from A-D on the level of sugar they contain. This helps the consumer be wary of the amount of sugar taken in. Moreover, schools have made physical education compulsory for all, and in primary schools, physical education is no longer just about exercise. There are lessons on why exercise is important and how to exercise. With increased education and awareness, society will be able to know how to lead a healthy lifestyle much easier compared to past times. Schools also instil in students from young the concepts of balanced diets and the importance of cutting down on foods like salt. For example, My Healthy Plate helps regulate portion sizes and eating healthily, a major component of a healthy lifestyle. Thus, education and awareness of how to lead a healthy lifestyle has increased over time, and gradually made healthy lifestyles easier to implement and pursue.

Secondly, a healthy lifestyle can easily be maintained with a good mindset and discipline. The word ‘lifestyle’ points to leading a life that is healthy, and not spontaneous moments of self-awareness where one decides to eat a salad for a day. It means to create habits that encapsulate all factors of living healthily. This determination and discipline may have been hard to come by as there were little to no incentives or help to alter the entrenchment of attitudes. However, in today's day and age of technological advancements, there are applications and trackers to steady

one's motivation and spur one on to continue making healthy lifestyle choices. For example, the mobile phone application by the Singapore Health Promotion Board named Healthy365 has a function where users can track their exercise, sleep and diet. By scanning food labels that the application considers healthy, users get points that can be translated to monetary rewards. This shows the use of technology to help incentivise people to maintain their discipline and mindset, technology that can only be found today. As time passes, more and more creations will be made to simplify healthy living and make it increasingly easier to lead a healthy lifestyle by changing ingrained attitudes about living healthily.

Thirdly, in today's fast paced society, even extremely busy people have the opportunity to lead a healthy lifestyle as the government has increased the availability of resources. In this day and age, it is easy to assume that most people do not have the luxury of time to go to gyms to exercise while having ample rest. This struggle has been recognised by the government, and since then, numerous efforts have been made to eradicate the issue of shortage of time. Under HDB flats, there are fitness centres where residents can either make use of available equipment or carry out their own exercises that can be found easily on the internet. This reduces time wasted on traveling to gyms to exercise. These efforts made by the government do not stop at just adults, but also children whose parents' may not have time to bring them to playgrounds to be active. Television channels like Channel 5 have a kids' programme called Okto, where some activities on the show get the children watching to move and exercise. Thus, this goes to show with the growing availability of resources not present in the past, active and healthy living is increasingly easier.

However, there are people with opposing views who believe in today's society, inflation and soaring prices of healthy foods and resources makes it increasingly harder to live healthily. In recent times, social media has created a boom in messaging centred on leading an active and healthy life. In consequence, these 'health foods' have attained mass popularity. For example, on TikTok, many influencers were spreading misinformation that the overpriced electrolyte drinks they were selling were key to being healthy. The surge in demand for healthy foods has also caused the price of salads in shops to increase exponentially. This poses an obstacle for lower income groups, as they gradually lose the ability to purchase these goods, due to increasing prices. Firms have also capitalized on people's desires to lead an active lifestyle, and gym memberships or personal trainers can cost up to \$200 a month. Be that as it may, these expensive lifestyle choices are not compulsory. There are many more affordable choices they can make. For example, nutritious foods like ABC soup can be cooked at home for a much lower price, while exercises need not be supervised with an overpriced fitness trainer, but can be done at home with help from videos on the internet. Thus, there are ways to counter the soaring prices of healthy goods and services, and it is not increasingly difficult to lead a healthy lifestyle.

To live healthily has been easier as time passes. With the Singaporean government's aid, people are now educated from young on the importance of active lifestyles and balanced diets, and are provided more resources like fitness centres near residential areas and applications to help incentivise society to be disciplined when wanting to live healthily. While the demand for activities like going to the gym to exercise or products that claim to strengthen health have caused them to be overpriced, there are many more affordable ways to live actively and maintain a balanced and healthy diet. Therefore, in Singapore, efforts made by the government to improve rest, diet and activeness of citizens have made it easier to live healthily.

Comments:

Zhi Shan, this is a pertinent and focused essay that deals competently with the question, citing appropriate examples and addressing normal objections. Perhaps you could look at the reluctance to exercise or eat healthily even with the knowledge, such as a more hedonistic lifestyle of the young adults or the rich, as well as a general belief that there is no need for a healthy lifestyle enjoyment is pursued more in this modern-day Singapore. But on the whole, this is a very good effort, Language is fine and apt. Some slips but nothing critical.

‘Celebrities deserve privacy too.’ To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Wang Ray Kit, 23S63

Recently, ex-Nickelodeon star Miranda Cosgrove re-entered the public consciousness, as she went onto a podcast and discussed how an obsessed stalker set himself on fire in her front yard. The actress was seemingly unfazed, relaying the story with signature comedic timing. However, a closer look begs the question; Just how much privacy is a celebrity entitled to? Of course, in order to tackle this, an underlying assumption must first be addressed, which is that celebrities are no different from the average, ordinary person. Celebrities are almost always going to end up in the spotlight, whether intentional or not. A celebrity's status, by definition, is reliant on the opinions of the general public. Therefore, there is a key distinction between a celebrity and their fans that instantly adds a layer of complexity as to whether or not they deserve the same amount of privacy. Moreover, not all celebrities achieve stardom through the same means, meaning it would be unfair to claim that they all deserve an equal amount of privacy. However, I believe that, at the end of the day, privacy is a basic human right that celebrities should have access to, for their own mental well-being, the safety of their loved ones, and even the protection of their fans.

Of course, some may argue that there are celebrities who intentionally seek out controversy and who willingly give up their right to privacy in the career choices they make. One notorious example would be Kim Kardashian, who worked closely with her mother-slash-manager to ride the publicity generated by her sex tape to new heights of fame and wealth. In fact, she and many other reality-television stars such as Paris Hilton, have built a career off being accessible to the public. Although she might not have seen overwhelming acclaim in the acting or music industries, she has found success simply in allowing everyday viewers a deep dive into her life – success so lucrative that she has signed onto not one, but two separate reality television shows – “Keeping Up With The Kardashians”, and “The Kardashians”. In cases such as these, where privacy seems almost commodified, it is easy to claim that this is a case of willing-buyer, willing-seller, and that in choosing this career path, celebrities are giving their right to privacy, not just consenting to but willingly offering themselves up for public scrutiny. However, this viewpoint must also acknowledge that on a fundamental level, that choice is theirs to make – whether to cling on to their own privacy or to sacrifice it in order to attain success. While Paris Hilton was mentioned earlier, there is a key distinction setting her apart from Kim Kardashian, which is that her personality is largely a facade, intentionally constructed for public consumption. She has willingly admitted that she was under the careful instruction of producers and publicists. In this way, she preserves her own right to privacy and maintains a healthier personal life.

Therefore, at the end of the day, celebrities should still be allowed the right to privacy – of course, they are free to wield it as they wish.

Celebrities also deserve privacy in terms of separating the art from the artist, and protecting their mental well-being, especially when their rise to fame comes swiftly and unexpectedly. There are countless examples of artists being unable to cope with the immense and invasive pressures of fame – to the point where an unofficial “27 Club” has been morbidly coined, used to refer to celebrities who committed suicide or died prematurely otherwise at that age, such as Janis Joplin. Though there are those driven by the desire for fame itself, many artists simply create and craft because it is second nature to them. It is their creative outlet, a platform to express themselves freely. Musicians such as Lana Del Rey and Mitski have gone on record to say that even if they retire from being professional recording artists, they will still never stop writing music. In cases such as these, as much as they are reliant on their listeners for success, it is unfair to demand any sort of connection to them beyond their music. As much as fans might relate to the themes discussed in any form of art, there is a necessity to distance that art, as a product, from the creator themselves. This is crucial in protecting the welfare of the artist and ensuring that they can go on making art sustainably, so that both the artists and their followers can enjoy it. When this boundary is not respected, it can lead to dire consequences, such as Britney Spears’ mental breakdown when she shaved her head and attacked paparazzi, or even cases of drug overdose, such as Whitney Houston and Amy Winehouse, largely considered two of the best vocal powerhouses of all time. Therefore, for their own sake, celebrities should still have access to some level of privacy, and should be allowed time and space to recuperate outside of the public eye.

Celebrities also deserve privacy because it prevents unhealthy relationships from forming between them and their fans. In recent years, due to the increasing usage of social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter, celebrities have more avenues to connect with their fans than ever. In fact, many celebrities have dedicated “fan pages” run entirely by fans completely unrelated to them. Regardless of their profession, be it athlete, actor, musician – even politician, if one has attained a decent level of fame, there is probably a fan page floating around the Internet for them. However, this rise in hyper-connectivity has led to the increasing prevalence of a phenomenon known as, “parasocial relationships”. While not exclusively limited to celebrities, this occurs when people project their desire for intimacy and emotional attachment onto people who might be complete strangers to them – and celebrities are often the easiest, most convenient targets. This often manifests in fans feeling an extreme – and one-sided – obsession with their idols, leading them to believe that they have a personal connection to them. For example, when rumours surfaced that Kim Taehyung and Jennie Kim, two iconic Korean pop superstars, were allegedly seeing each other, many longtime fans felt personally slighted, with netizens rushing online to vent about how their lives were suddenly meaningless and empty due to their lost shot at love. This toxic mindset is unhealthy for fans, and is heavily fuelled by the

expectation that celebrities owe every ounce, every last detail of their personal lives to them, to the point where it breeds a sense of control in the fans over their favourites. Another example of this is the expectation fans set on celebrities to be social activists. Nowadays, regardless of their profession, there is an expectation on all celebrities to speak up about any and all political issues. It simply is not sufficient to hold to one's private values, they must be broadcast to the world, or they will face severe backlash for "not using their platform for good". This has been seen numerous times, such as the criticism Taylor Swift faced for not initially speaking up about the overturning of Roe v. Wade. However, this pressure on celebrities to be involved in politics leads to the danger of them perpetuating uninformed, unfounded opinions, or simply doing the bare minimum, performing social outrage without backing it up with any real social activism. Even though it is important to encourage celebrities to utilise their fame for good, and hold them accountable, pressuring them into publicly speaking on matters they are uninvolved in can be just as harmful, mobilising their fans to cause greater harm.

At the end of the day, privacy is a basic human right. Celebrities should be entitled to it, for the well-being of themselves and their fans.

Comments:

Abrupt end not ideal, but for the most part this was a well-articulated and controlled essay that fully understood what it intended to deliver. Well done.

‘Live to eat.’ Is this a fair assessment of your society?

Elaine Wong Xin Yi, 23A13

Civilisation could be said to have started from the cradle of the rice bowl. For a well-developed, affluent, Asian population like Singapore's, where good food is baked deeply into both our customs as well as modern fixations, our society might as well have been founded on it. Be it our joyous celebrations or close family gatherings, in restaurants or hawker centres, a vast majority of Singaporean society possesses both the ability and the strong sentimental recollections that drive us to truly 'live to eat'. Yet, increasingly, such an assessment may not prove to be as accurate as before. Both the bulk of our society – the hectic, salaried middle class – and its marginalised fringes, such as those living in relative poverty or foreign workers, perceive food as merely a utility with which they power through their day. Far from relishing our UNESCO-certified hawker dishes, it would be more precise to say that they merely 'eat to live'.

Surprisingly, 'living to eat' can be considered a relatively recent phenomenon for Singapore, tied to our exponential growth as an unstable, post-colonial society to the first-world nation we are today. This significant shift has indeed fuelled the indulgence that Singaporeans engage in, particularly during significant events like celebrations, holidays or even just getting through a long work week. After all, our Asian culture largely dictates that 'excessive' delicacies like crab and lobster are the necessary ingredients for times of joy and glory. Such a custom has moreover only been compounded by the rise of globalisation, the pleasure we take from a good meal intensified by Japanese sashimi, Western steaks and Korean bibimbap. The opening of many Michelin-starred restaurants like Restaurant ANDRE and Noma, where many travel and book months ahead to eat, only further testify the degree to which Singaporeans possess both the wealth and healthy appetite to truly 'live to eat'. Evidently, with the memory of an impoverished childhood still lingering in the minds of our parents and grandparents, the current ease of access to a much-treasured good meal must seem both precious and exhilarating. It is no wonder that they can now be said to live for the moment that "sek fan!" is declared.

Moving away from the full-bellied contentment of rare celebrations, the day-to-day life of most Singaporeans is also a reflection of our obsession with good food. For the 'aunties' of the older generation, morning market visits are quintessential for procuring the prime ingredients to be used in the meals of the day. Later, during the rush of lunch hour, food courts open and offer diverse selections of food, from Chicken Rice to Mala Hotpot. On the weekends, families stake out hawker centres for famed childhood dishes made with secret heirloom recipes. The very fact that our hawker culture was submitted to be on the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list, should

be enough to demonstrate the regard with which we hold for our three daily meals. Alongside the migrant heritage that makes up an essential part of our composite identity, food in the form of family recipes and local cuisine not only deeply connects us to both our families and origins, but also foregrounds a great sense of belonging. Such is demonstrated in the trademark diversity of dishes and ingredients we are able to choose from in our daily lives. One could even say that this connection alludes not only that we live to eat, but that eating is part of our living identity.

However, with affluence also comes indifference. Since the majority of Singapore society is fairly well off, this quantity and quality of food has naturally become an important daily expectation in our lives. Coupled with the fact that most of us lead hectic, packed lifestyles, eating has swiftly become something mechanical and unthinking, at least for the middle class. Asian culture, despite its fondness for good food, also lectures at length about outstanding work ethics. When this is compounded with a barrage of emails, texts, and updates enabled by phones, the time people spend at the table can become distracted and unfocused, making eating a by-product of productivity. In the office today, scarfing down a quick meal at the desk or even skipping lunch to prevent overtime is a frequent occurrence, just as much as multitasking at the home dinner table to reply to urgent emails. This distraction can even permeate through generations, as seen when these frazzled parents prop up phones before toddlers, who then grow into teenagers who have a spoon in one hand, and a phone occupying the other. As with any digitalised, developed country, we grow to forget the simple pleasures of life, such that the beams we once used to enjoy have been relegated again to a primitive necessity in our advanced lives.

Furthermore, any first-world nation also faces inequality, peeking out through the cracks of an affluent veneer. Singapore is, of course, no exception to this. The migrant workers that build our office buildings, schools and homes have no choice but to eat purely for their survival. The wages left from sending money home, or to their bosses, might not always be sufficient for a proper meal, especially with Singapore's high cost of living. Moreover, the shifty side-eyes that they usually receive from locals in more public places do not exactly encourage them to join us at the table either. Beyond migrant workers, even parts of our population who require financial assistance still struggle. Oftentimes, the most they can afford while balancing rent, transport, and taxes is a repeated intake of unhealthy, processed food such as instant noodles or biscuits. These minorities eat to live, and even then, can barely get by.

All in all, on the surface, Singapore may seem like a utopia for food lovers. Our relative wealth largely allows us the privilege of a difficult choice when it comes to our meals, while our local culture and regional identities instil respect and love for food from young. It is a shame that upon diving deeper, the constraints of our society fuel an 'eat to live' mentality amongst our most marginalised and disadvantaged. As such, to proudly claim that we 'live to eat', we may yet need to put down a few more phones, and pull up a few more seats at our table.

Comments:

A good understanding of the topics and a balanced response to the question. More illustrations can be given to substantiate your claims. It is not only the migrant workers who cannot afford to 'live to eat', many low-income Singaporeans face food security problems and depend on food donations to fill their stomachs.

To what extent is travelling for leisure desirable?

Yelisetty Rahya, 23S45

“Collect memories, not things” is a common saying used by many to describe their travel experiences. In recent years, many youths in their twenties and thirties quit their jobs and pooled their savings to travel for leisure over a year. Oftentimes, these young individuals turn to social media to share and document their experiences taking on remote jobs online and staying in hostels to be able to afford their journeys. These social media accounts amass large cult-like followings, with comments such as “I wish I could do that!” and “This is the dream”. Travelling for leisure has seen an exponential growth year after year, fuelled by the weaning global restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Travelling for leisure in today’s society is seen as desirable to a large extent largely due to the new experiences it offers, as well as its significant contribution to the global economy.

Some people may argue that travelling for leisure may not be desirable, for a variety of reasons. Firstly, travelling can contribute significantly towards pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. These people may view travelling as unnecessary and frivolous. Mass travelling for leisure purposes can also lead to the destruction of popular tourist sites. For example, government officials in Peru had to limit the number of helicopters flying over Machu Picchu, as well as the number of tourists who hiked up the mountain. This happened because of the overwhelming number of tourists who contributed towards the erosion of the famous heritage site. In Paris, France, the mass inflow of visitors in recent years led to an increase in the number of pickpockets and thieves who devise clever schemes and tactics to rob tourists of their money and valuables. In Bali, Indonesia, millions of tourists annually destroy its pristine white sand beaches, by littering and leaving behind their belongings everywhere. The overcrowding of tourists also meant that locals could not enjoy their beaches due to their commercialization and privatisation. These locals, who often make just enough to get by, are unable to afford the hefty price tags that come with staying at waterfront hotels. Hence, travelling may be seen as undesirable by some groups of people.

However, travelling, when done right, has immense benefits that make it so attractive. Travelling offers people the chance to experience new cultures or take part in new festivals and events not available in their home country. Travelling gives people the opportunity to experience new landscapes and to ‘disconnect’ from obligations such as work and be present at the moment. It is also desirable for the economy of a country, boosting tourist receipts.

The way different people live around the world varies massively. The food, traditions, religions as well as the geographical landscape of a country all contribute

significantly to its identity. For travellers, going beyond their own country's shores can educate them, broadening their worldview and making them more receptive and tolerant of others' differences. By meeting new people overseas, tourists can forge new connections and expand their social circles, improving relations and promoting the exchange of different cultures. In an increasingly globalised society, where misinformation and rumours threaten to ruin global relations and pit people of different cultures against one another, travelling provides people with the opportunity to immerse themselves in other cultures and even provide support and understanding. Travelling hence improves people's tolerance and acceptance of other cultures, promoting peace, and making travelling desirable.

The geographical location and natural and man-made structures in different parts of the world also make travelling attractive to many. For example, many Singaporeans travelling overseas would choose to do so because of natural features such as mountains and waterfalls, which do not exist here. Similarly, an average of 30.3 million visitors travel to Singapore each year, to experience life in a small city. These tourists are attracted by the many man-made features, such as the 40-metre-tall indoor waterfall at the Jewel, the tallest artificial waterfall in the world. Experiencing the different terrains and climates of the world is an invaluable experience that one cannot obtain without travelling. It helps people to gain an appreciation of the world we live in and highlights real-world issues going on globally. For example, someone who has travelled to Venice and seen the impacts of rising sea levels on the city or seen the ice caps on mountains melting may be more passionate about raising awareness for global warming and climate change. By visiting new places, people feel a greater sense of appreciation for the world we live in and may feel inspired to raise awareness about prevalent global issues.

Lastly, travelling is economically desirable for many countries globally. The US, Singapore, Indonesia, China and many other countries rely on tourist receipts to boost their economy. In the US, for example, the Walt Disney World in Florida receives 17 million visitors annually, making it the most visited tourist site globally. Tourists who visit this attraction are mostly families and youths who are fans of the company's many films. These tourists spend thousands of dollars each, from hotel stays to themed attractions to waterparks to food. By spending tourist dollars, they generate jobs for the locals, as well as revenue for Disney. By spending, these tourists further contribute to the economic growth of the US, making travelling desirable for the country.

Although not everyone may have the luxury of being able to travel for leisure, travelling is ultimately largely desirable for many countries, as well as for individuals looking to escape their mundane lives. Travelling can strengthen the bonds people make with one another, further contributing to the interconnectedness of today's globalised society. Travelling can raise awareness about issues prevalent in the world and can boost the economies of countries. Although there are disadvantages and

downsides of excessive and unnecessary travel, the benefits of travelling ultimately outweigh them, making travelling for leisure desirable to a large extent.

Comments:

Rahya, you have shown a clear understanding of the question and consistently shown analysis and evaluation. Really appreciate how you have looked at the situation from not only the perspective of the travellers. Good job!

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To what extent is travelling for leisure desirable?

Lavanya Ganesan Moghana Eshvar, 23S47

With increasing affluence and freedom in recent times after the passing of the COVID-19 outbreak, travel for leisure has once again become a bustling economy. Many who felt cooped up during the pandemic aim to let loose and enjoy the differences in culture, environment and social life that other parts of the world have to offer. In developing countries, these travellers mean that the locals will have more income that they, and hence their government, can use to develop their nation. However, this poses a few problems. In the race to earn more money, there are host countries that conduct these leisure trips at the cost of their heritage, environment and people. Tourists who are too focused on enjoying themselves fail to understand the consequences that some actions pose to their host countries. Overall, I believe that travelling for leisure is a desirable activity. Still, as it is currently being handled, it is not a sustainable activity and thus would prove undesirable for all parties involved.

Some claim that many benefits of travelling outweigh the costs. It is commonly thought that host countries have everything to gain from travellers. Many people can earn money by offering tourist attractions for the travellers to visit, accommodation, unique cuisines and more. In volcanic islands that are home to historic eruptions, many travellers are brought to the eruption sites to collect volcanic soil and explore caves made by the locals. Mount Pinatubo is a prime example of where these activities take place. Apart from the economic boost, the travellers themselves are enriched by the history of the volcano and the beliefs surrounding it. This doubles up as a way for them to develop a wider frame of reference, while they spend time with their loved ones caving or collecting soil. However, I do believe that the way that travelling is conducted is more harmful than desirable, due to the environmental hazard posed by the money-oriented nature of this activity. In the same volcano, some fissures can cause the caves to be destroyed because of the increased footfall of tourists that spend their leisure time there. There are also reports of soil degradation due to the sheer amount of soil collected at the beaches, harming the habitats of animals and decreasing biodiversity. Moreover, once all the natural resources are depleted, there is a high possibility of the islands themselves being avoided. The travellers that went in the past to enjoy their leisure time unintentionally prevent future generations from learning specific parts of history and heritage. Due to the economic gain of travel, the environment ends up neglected, which is unsustainable, and hence undesirable.

Travelling for leisure also has the aspect of trying to relax and rewind, away from the fast-paced lifestyle of the modern era. Hence, many travellers visit other countries to just get some rest. However, this poses a serious problem for the host countries. In Mexico, many villas are jam-packed with many looking to rejuvenate

themselves. The resources required to cater to these travellers have to be shared with the local population. Since hotel chains have to pander to their customers, they use their immense wealth to convince the local government to cut them a share of the locals' resources. This caused an uproar among the locals who felt cheated of their hard work, and hence they adopted a hostile approach towards travellers. The rise in social tensions also made travellers the prime target for crimes like robbery, as a way to ward off travellers. In the end, only the hotel chains are left with the benefits while the travellers feel harassed or threatened while the locals feel betrayed. Overall, this is an undesirable outcome of travelling due to the large number of travellers who visit places like these, which leads to increased hostility and aggressive, erosive competitiveness.

Some travellers also want their leisure trips to be enriching and educational. This leads to rising appeal for the unique traditions of some parts of the world. In Bali, Indonesia, there is a mixture of many cultures that are untouched by globalisation, and hence can broaden the perspectives of travellers who explore these cultures. However, what started as a showcase of traditional beliefs and arts has devolved into flashy attractions that have little to do with the indigenous people's beliefs. Many performance troupes have admitted to omitting many culture-rich parts of their performances to show off the less important but more attractive arts. The requests of travellers who want to enjoy the moment override the importance of the performances and those who truly wish to learn something. Thus, there is a dilution of the culture of the locals and a loss in the meaning of the performance. In the end, those who travel only for leisure are enjoying themselves, while cultural significance is lost and others leave without learning everything they could have, which is undesirable.

In conclusion, I believe that travelling for leisure is not inherently undesirable. There is nothing wrong in wanting to enjoy and immerse oneself in this luxury. However, what is undesirable is the outcome of supersaturated tourism and plain money-making schemes, which destroy the environment, culture and social interactions. Perhaps, those who wish to travel for leisure can pick up more niche activities such as white water rafting on glaciers in the Scandinavian countries, volunteering activities like cleaning the sea, beach cleanups or restoration projects of ancient sites which require little to no expertise in such fields. These are much more sustainable activities, and lack many of the aforementioned drawbacks of pure leisure travel. For those who intend to continue with only leisure travelling, it would be advisable to check online resources and brochures to ensure that the areas they visit are not overcrowded or hostile environments, which would help to prevent any altercation or accidents. Moreover, for travelling for leisure to be made more desirable for all parties involved, travellers and hosts should practise mindfulness and veer away from making only economic gains and instead focus on sustainability.

Comments:

Relevant points and evaluation. Some points could have been done with more evaluation or stronger links to the question though.

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To what extent is travelling for leisure desirable?

Lee Tian Hui Grace, 23S55

With the rising incomes that rapid economic growth in Singapore brought us, coupled with increased globalisation, travelling for leisure has become increasingly coveted to escape from the hustle and bustle and the fast pace of life in Singapore to seek pleasure overseas. This is perpetuated by the globally growing tourism economy. With the reopening of borders after years of closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for travel has never been stronger due to the pent-up demand. While some might say that it is a good thing for the global economy as tourism helps to boost countries' economies, it is my opinion that travelling for leisure is not desirable. Key reasons include how travelling for leisure reinforces stereotypes, has minimal economic benefits, and causes significant environmental degradation.

Supporters of travelling for leisure often cite that recreational tourism not only entertains, but also provides them with the opportunity to immerse themselves in the local culture and learn about their way of life. Many tourists often make it a point to actively look for places of attraction or activities that can encapsulate the local experience. For example, many visitors to Cameron Highlands, Malaysia only spend about three to four days on the highlands but make it a point to dedicate a day to visit the Orang Asli Village, one of the few remaining indigenous villages in Malaysia. This shows that tourists not only engage on the more superficial side of tourism such as splurging on discounted branded goods, but also value the high value-adding experiences that such cultural immersions can bring them. This is further supported by the fact that schools in Singapore often bring their students to neighbouring countries like Indonesia and Vietnam for cultural exchanges so that students can put themselves in the shoes of students living in another country. Such cross-cultural exchange is fundamental in learning about the local culture and traditions thus developing greater global citizenship which is increasingly valued in the workforce.

However, the above view is rather superficial. Travelling for leisure often results in much cultural appropriation and disrespect. Tourists are hailed as kings due to their strong purchasing power which can generate significant tourism receipts. This translates to greater revenue for locals hence greater standards of living and quality of life for the locals. Thus, many locals stop at nothing to please tourists so that they will spend more. This often results in the locals reducing the cultural proceedings to nothing more than a revenue generator. For example, the Vietnamese water puppet show is deeply rooted in the local culture. However, the performers often reduce the original three hours of the show to a mere one hour, to cater to the tourists who are not willing to spend so much time watching the show. A similar shortening of cultural proceedings happens in the villages of Bali, Indonesia and in the long run, it reduces

the rich culture to nothing more than money-making opportunities devaluing the original intention of such cultural proceedings. Even the popular act of wearing the traditional hanbok costumes in South Korea when visiting palaces creates disrespect, as tourists often wear hanbok colours only meant for the king or nobleman. While some might assert that such acts are equivalent to nothing more than roleplay, I beg to differ as I believe that from the perspective of locals, it can be considered cultural appropriation and disrespect.

This is further exacerbated by the fact that travelling for leisure reinforces stereotypes and prejudice, thus fuelling negative behaviour. This is due to the typical human behaviour of confirmation bias, where we only see and consider things that support our stereotypes and prejudice. For example, there is often the stereotype that Southeast Asian countries are unsafe and rather backwards. Thus, when tourists visit Southeast Asian countries, they tend to only see the dirty sidewalks, dusty roads and exposed electrical wiring confirming their initial bias but fail to see the other aspects of the country such as the developed city centres and how much the country has developed. As tourists want to view novel sights, they would not visit such places as they are too similar to their life back home. In a way, the perception of Southeast Asian countries often goes straight to remote villages, ignoring the developed city centre; but a remote village in another country would show similar living standards. Thus, due to the lack of parallel comparison, it results in the mere reinforcement of stereotypes and prejudice. This may manifest in negative behaviour. Tourists often have the prejudice that Thailand specialises in sex tourism. Thus, tourists looking to engage in such pleasures overseas often flock to Thailand. This fuels the demand for prostitutes in Thailand, hence causing a cascade of negative behaviours such as forcing minors to become prostitutes, exploitation of prostitutes, and other health concerns due to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS that are a growing problem in Thailand as well. This only goes to show that travelling for leisure is not desirable, due to the reinforcement of negative stereotypes and growth in undesirable behaviour.

Another reason travelling for leisure is undesirable is due to negative consequences on the environment. Tourists often only care about having fun, and thus would not consider the consequences of their actions. After all, the negative consequence is not on their own country's soil. This is perpetuated in the behaviour of inconsiderate tourists who litter without care and harm the environment directly through acts such as destroying corals. Effects due to tourists might seem miniscule but they pile up to cause a huge multitude of destruction. For example, Maya Bay in Thailand, hailed as one of the most beautiful beaches in the world, had to close for more than a year due to the waste left behind by tourists. It resulted in significant degradation of the beach, thus resulting in its closure to rehabilitate the beach. Today, even after its reopening, tourists are only allowed to stay for thirty minutes to take photos, due to the fear that the beach might be destroyed by tourists again. Another prime example is the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, one of the seven natural wonders of the world where more than seventy percent of its corals died due to the reef being

visited by more than ten thousand tourists a year, with many stepping on corals, breaking them or even harvesting them to bring home. Therefore, since tourists can cause significant degradation of the beautiful natural environment, travelling for leisure is not desirable.

Lastly, the economic benefits of tourism to the local economy are not as large as they seem to be, and are rather magnified. While tourists do generate large amounts of tourism receipts when they travel, little of it goes into the regional economy and bettering the lives of the locals. Most of the tourism receipts often end up going into multinational corporations such as the Regent Hotel group, as tourists prefer to stay at such “big-name” hotels due to the perception of better service and a more comfortable and enjoyable stay. These multinational corporations rarely contribute to the local economy thus leaving little impact on the local economy. Even during the recent World Cup in Qatar where millions of fans flocked to the country for the game, it is estimated that little of the tourism receipts generated went to the regional economy. Therefore, travelling for leisure does not significantly improve the lives of locals in popular travel destinations.

In conclusion, while travelling for leisure might seem like it provides a myriad of benefits, such benefits are often surface-level and only if you dig much deeper than a multitude of serious negative consequences of travelling for leisure come into view. The benefits are rather minuscule and do not justify the multifaceted negative consequences in terms of social, and environmental degradation and the little economic benefit. Thus, for now, unless there is a paradigm shift in societal behaviour and conventions, travelling for leisure cannot be considered desirable.

Comments:

The scope of discussion is wide enough, and the examples used are largely appropriate. Evaluation and conceptual understanding were noted consistently throughout the essay.

“Follow your heart.” How far do you agree that this is good advice for the young of today?

Joey Tay Jia Min, 22A13

“Guard your heart more than anything else”. This verse from the Bible highlights the need to keep one’s heart pure and unencumbered by worldly obstacles. In the same way, it is important to “follow your heart”. This phrase refers to the idea of pursuing one’s own passions and desires, and to not let the voices of others affect their decisions. Such advice is especially pertinent for the young who are in an era of digital revolution, where everything is so easily accessible in rapid speeds such that there is a myriad of opinions to influence one’s choices. Hence, I agree to a large extent that “follow your heart” is good advice for the young. It enables them to pursue what they truly desire for themselves and allows for them to maintain their own set of principles. However, detractors of the view may argue instead that doing so can lead to risks for the individual’s future path and even negatively affect others around them. Nevertheless, I agree to a large extent that it is good advice for the young.

Firstly, this advice allows the young to chase after their heart’s desires. Many young people have big dreams and are even considered “the future” of our world. Chasing after seemingly insurmountable goals requires the determination and fervour offered by this advice. Since “follow your heart” suggests overcoming conventional methods, the young also require the courage from their hearts to go beyond the norm. In Singapore, there have been recent cases of young people who just graduated from top universities or were earning huge salaries, putting down their orthodox lives to start a hawker business. Such cases were previously unheard of and even attained comments from netizens calling them “crazy” on Mothership’s posts. However, interviews conducted by Mothership with these people found that they are much happier with their current, honest, ways of living, vis-a-vis their previously admired, yet highly stressful lifestyles. Thus, it is important for the young to follow their heart, as it ultimately grants greater fulfilment in life to be doing something one is passionate about. Such cases are especially prevalent for the young who are highly exposed to social media in this digital age. They are granted more media outlets to pursue new and interesting paths. This is prominent in South Korea where the recent rise in the “Hallyu wave”, propagated by social media, has incited more Koreans to pursue a career as an idol celebrity. This path was previously rarely traversed as the lack of media exposure on Korean pop (K-pop) stars discouraged individuals from pursuing such careers. By following their hearts, even individuals from other parts of the world began to emulate these K-pop idols. BlackPink, a renowned K-pop group, has group member Lalisa Manoban from Thailand. She followed her heart and made use of her dancing talents to pursue a career in this field, which was previously dominated by purely South Koreans. Without following her heart, she would not have unlocked her

potential to be the huge star she is today. "Diamonds are formed under pressure"; this saying holds especially true here, as the judgements from others should not deter the young from chasing after the lifestyle they desire.

Secondly, following their heart allows the young to encompass their own sets of guiding principles. In a fast-moving world like today, it is easy to lose track of one's initial beliefs and aims. Therefore, by entrusting one's way of life to one's own morals and beliefs, one can then lead an honest and upright lifestyle. National Basketball Association's LeBron James came from a rough background, with his only parental figure being his emotionally absent father who had a number of criminal track records. It was thus significant that he held true to his personal goals, untainted by external influences to commit morally wrong acts. This enabled him to grow up focusing on his sole goal of playing basketball professionally, which overrode all other temptations that could have swerved his path to his dreams. Hence, it is pertinent for the young to follow their hearts so as to maintain their own beliefs that go beyond any sort of influences. The same is visible in celebrity Oprah Winfrey. She grew up wearing potato sacks when her family was too poor to afford proper clothing. However, she was not limited to her circumstances, and instead developed a greater desire to break out of this poverty cycle. Hence, she followed her heart and pursued her dreams without letting the influences of her surroundings deter her from becoming the famous celebrity she is today. Thus, it is significant for the young to follow their hearts even when there are many obstacles in life which could demoralize them and influence them to change their hearts.

However, opposers of the view that following their heart is good advice for the young, may argue that doing so can lead to risky paths. Parents often pine on their young to pursue conventional paths of money making – getting into a top university, getting a high-paying job and eventually forming their own "perfect" family. Such are the pragmatic goals as parents believe they are doing the best for their children. South Korea's students often attend night study programmes and cram schools all-year round as education is highly competitive in their country. Parents push their children to study harder and pursue careers in lucrative fields such as medicine or law. This is believed to be the best option for their child. On the contrary, following one's heart is regarded to be an extremely risky path that would lead to uncertain outcomes. Hence, it is regarded to be safer to take on the path more travelled, in order to have greater certainty in one's future.

Despite there being some truth to this claim, I believe that such risks are necessary for the growth of the young. "No risk, no reward" - it takes a lot to break out of the conventional mould and to do something so brave requires one to follow one's heart. Blocking out reasoning and logic to follow one's emotional thoughts may seem irrational, but without doing so, it is impossible to effect a real change in society. In following conventional routes, the young are also forced to uphold certain standards and expectations which could instead overwhelm them with pressure. This is

prominent as South Korea reports the highest suicide rates, especially for young people between eleven to fifteen years old. This thus highlights the negative repercussions of being forced into the orthodox, pragmatic way of living, which could go against their own heart's desires. Taking risks are sometimes necessary in order to shape one, as even if one loses the odds, one can still try again. This is particularly for the young who have many years ahead of them to experiment and try new things. Malala Yousafzai was only fourteen years old when she was shot by Taliban soldiers while protesting and giving a speech on women's rights on education. She took the risk to speak up and her actions impacted many people despite the consequences she had to handle. She allowed for a legacy to be built on the risks she was willing to take on by following her heart, allowing for her to be an inspiration and role model for many young people who had believed they were too young and incapable of effecting change. Therefore, following their heart is good advice for the young to embolden them to achieve great things previously unthought of by the older generations.

Detractors of the view may also fight their view by stating that following one's heart can instead negatively affect those around them. Following one's heart is often associated with being rash and irrational, inconsiderate towards the outcome of one's actions. The burden of the consequence of following one's heart may be borne by those around them instead. This technologically advanced age has given rise to a platform known as OnlyFans where individuals upload mature, explicit content of themselves for others to pay-to-view. By following one's heart in doing so, one may be considered disrespectful to their parents who spent their lives trying to protect their child to be innocent of such media outlets. Thus, such cases have raised controversies, especially since the publication of such material is also considered to be illegal. Hence, it is not optimal to follow such advice if it instead leads one to commit actions harmful to self and others around.

Nevertheless, it is still more desirable to follow one's heart, as long as it does not go against moral codes. Many have achieved happiness by taking on unconventional paths. Recent years have seen a rise in online dating platforms such as Tinder. These were previously unheard of and maybe even looked down upon, but have gained traction in recent years. Online dating has birthed many couples who went against social norms and found their life partner on these platforms. They followed their hearts which led them to find someone they can now cherish and call their loved ones. This can be viewed as romantic and even admirable, to find love in an unconventional way. Similarly, it can be hard to go against societal norms and expectations without following one's heart. This is especially so for the young, who may hear many voices telling them what to do instead of being able to pursue their true desires. Many young people have decided to take on content creation as a full-time job. This includes YouTubers and streamers. To put themselves out there for the whole internet's viewing can lead to hate comments coming back to them instead. Yet, it is important to constantly improve and turn this negativity into motivation to do better instead. "To improve is to change, to be perfect is to change constantly" - this quote

by Winston Churchill encompasses the need to follow one's heart in spite of obstacles, and to continue pursuing these desires against all odds in order to become the best version of oneself.

In conclusion, I agree to a large extent that "follow your heart" is good advice for the young. With the current digital age and fast-paced, ever-changing world offering a multitude of opinions but also judgement, it is important to utilise it to their benefit. This advice allows them to pursue their true desires and maintain their beliefs and principles, thus making it a worthy good advice.

Comments:

Comprehensive coverage – awareness of contexts demonstrated. Fluent, articulate piece peppered with relevant examples. However, good to practise being succinct at parts so that it doesn't sound like a stream of consciousness, instead of a well thought-out argument.

Is healthcare in your society easily accessible for everyone?

Charis Lam Kai Tong, 22S43

Healthcare in Singapore is strongly regarded as a basic necessity to the people, catering to the physical and mental needs of the young and the old. Due to the diverse population that the healthcare sector services, many unique challenges have arisen and are not easily resolved, due to the complex nature of the social landscape and its relations with the provision of health services. However, with the prevalence of these challenges, the government and the people have undeniably taken steps to ensure a greater availability of healthcare services to the community. Such extensive efforts support the belief that healthcare in Singapore is largely accessible to everyone.

Fixating solely on the efforts and achievements of our society in healthcare, however, would lead to an unquestionably myopic perspective, as one should also consider the current gaps in our healthcare services that remain. In tandem with the fast-paced advancements nationally and internationally, obstacles have also developed for those who seek healthcare, and resolving these challenges becomes a race that the government and the people have to attempt to catch up with. For instance, due to advancements in medical technology, reports suggest that bills for Singapore's public hospitals have been on the rise for the past eight years to account for the increasing costs of equipment. This poses greater difficulties to those in lower income brackets as healthcare has become less affordable, causing them to be less able to access health services on their own account. These challenges are not just limited to the financial aspect of providing healthcare services, however. Notably, mental health has also been on a significant decline in the country, but the growth of services tending to mental health issues has not matched this trend, as the number of mental health professionals employed in areas such as medical institutions and schools is still lacking, limiting access to mental health services as many of those who require it end up resorting to the private sector. This causes it to become a luxury that the low income, who also tend to be more at risk, cannot afford due to high prices. Thus, with the ever-changing needs of the people, access to healthcare is also affected due to challenges in meeting shifting demands at all times.

However, the impact of the multitude of schemes and services implemented to support people's access to healthcare cannot be denied. Firstly, there have been distinct efforts to bridge the gap in access to healthcare, benefiting vulnerable groups who may not have been receiving the care they need due to their specific challenges. The government, together with people from the community, has been putting in effort to identify issues faced in accessing healthcare, to improve the present and future circumstances. These efforts date back to the beginning of the country's independence, providing a comprehensive backbone of systems and schemes to support the

availability of healthcare. Now, schemes such as ElderShield, which provides greater financial support for the elderly who require medical attention; the Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS), for low-income and other underprivileged persons; and the Central Provident Fund (CPF) which benefits all citizens of Singapore in supporting their medical needs at varying levels, are common and well-known options viable to many who require healthcare services, demonstrating the extent of commitments placed in helping every person access healthcare, as well as its successes. Despite the difficulties faced, the government has also shown efforts in keeping up with the changing needs of the people, with the Prime Minister announcing during the recent National Day Rally that to support the nation's rapidly ageing population, the government will be giving out bonuses to top up the CPF accounts of those who have not met the basic requirement for funds placed into health services, as part of the Majulah Package aiming to help seniors in their retirement. This evinces the interest of the government in supporting access to healthcare, and suggests how healthcare has constantly been made more available to the people. With the commitment placed towards accessible healthcare, many have benefited from various schemes to cover any obstacles faced.

Additionally, connectivity between healthcare and the people is also strongly supported. Access to healthcare includes the people's familiarity with the system and their ability to seek health services when they need to. Unfortunately, in reality, such capabilities may not apply to the whole national population, despite the schemes provided to enhance its availability and affordability. These issues are tackled in how the ministries planned for more facilities, such as the Woodlands Health Campus, to be developed in areas with more elderly residents, allowing them to access services more easily due to ease of transport as a result of closer proximity. Other groups are also not to be forgotten, as volunteer organisations such as TOUCH Community Services have structured programmes for different groups such as the low-income, disabled, elderly and those with mental health issues to receive guidance in attaining healthcare services, and even provide counselling for those who need it, as they may be affected by their medical issues and the associated challenges in seeking help due to their different backgrounds. This supports the existing systems in place, as such services empower the vulnerable in seeking the healthcare that they need.

Overall, healthcare is a service that every person, regardless of background, needs and deserves, and this is a sentiment reflected by society's healthcare landscape through the abundant efforts made by the government and our community. However, more could still be done to provide more comprehensive access to all, as we continue to aim to cater to every unique need.

Comments:

Charis, a well-written piece and an enjoyable read! Although you have many overly-long sentences, they work well due to the fluency in which you write! Sound arguments and relevant examples. Good work! The conclusion could have been more substantial.

Is healthcare in your society easily accessible for everyone?

Tan Yok Ray, 22S46

In a country characterised by an increasing rate of ageing population and prevalence of chronic illnesses, it is not surprising that healthcare has become a growing area of priority for Singapore. One area of concern in particular has been the ease of accessing healthcare by the masses, regardless of their financial needs, location in Singapore or their medical background. Many ardently contend that in Singapore, substantial financial barriers are restricting the accessibility of healthcare, especially for the low-income group. However, it is still my firm belief that given the extensive healthcare ecosystem that Singapore has developed, healthcare in my society is indeed easily accessible for all.

Admittedly, there is an element of truth to the viewpoint that healthcare is still not easily accessible for everyone. Critics argue that the heavy financial costs act as a barrier to healthcare for low-income families. They argue that when it comes to patients suffering from advanced illnesses, the cost of obtaining quality healthcare still places a very heavy financial burden on family expenses. This can be associated with how much of the newest, most advanced medical equipment is still rather limited in nature given the relatively small size of Singapore's healthcare system, compared to much larger nations like the United States or Germany. However, the demand for this limited pool of medical procedures has been rapidly increasing given the rising incidence of illnesses among Singapore's ageing population, which only serves to drive up the prices. An example would be the cost of non-invasive radiotherapy. In Singapore, the incidence of prostate cancer among older males has been on the increase. Even though government subsidies and insurance payouts can cover part of the healthcare costs, the sustained and long-term nature of such costly treatment options are still very large deterrents for low-income families who may have no choice but to forgo treatment to cover other more urgent costs associated with daily living. Therefore, from such a perspective, it would seem that there are still significant difficulties faced by low-income households when it comes to obtaining the sustained and high-quality medical treatment that they require.

While there is indeed validity in the argument, in considering the broader view of the huge progress that the government has achieved in terms of healthcare policy, it can be argued that there has still been a large improvement in the financial accessibility of healthcare in Singapore. In recent years, the government has greatly increased the funding it provides in terms of healthcare support and coverage for all Singaporeans. The MediShield policy provides different tiers of support to better allocate resources to those who need it the most. The support provided is further built upon by other schemes such as the Pioneer Generation card, which provides seniors

in Singapore's founding generation with substantial rebates off treatment costs. Furthermore, the healthcare system in Singapore has been developed in such a way that healthcare costs best match the financial capabilities of patients. In all public hospitals, the costs of wards and treatments are split into different classes. For wealthier individuals who desire more luxurious treatment, they can opt for such options. Conversely, for families who might have difficulty affording such high-end options, there are also basic wards available where patients are still able to obtain high-quality healthcare and medical attention while enjoying heavy subsidies from the government. Ultimately, this more personalised approach to healthcare has greatly improved the ability of Singaporeans to seek and obtain the medical attention that they need regardless of their financial background.

In addition, healthcare in Singapore is easily accessible for all, regardless of geographical location. As part of the government's population health plan for Singapore, every region of the island is covered by the different national healthcare providers in Singapore. This helps to ensure that regardless of where an individual is staying, he can obtain the medical attention that is required conveniently without having difficulties finding such services. This is compared to countries like India, where healthcare facilities are concentrated largely within highly urbanised cities, leaving rural areas uncovered. Given the small size of Singapore, such issues do not occur. Furthermore, many healthcare services have also evolved to take accessibility to the next level. For elderly patients or patients who have mobility issues, there has been an increasing range of services where nurses and doctors travel down directly to the houses of patients to provide treatment that patients require directly at their doorstep. This helps to overcome physical barriers that might have previously hindered these individuals from obtaining the healthcare they require. Additionally, with the rapid adoption of technology, the advent of telemedicine has taken the ease of access to a whole new level. Regardless of location or time, people now have the capacity to instantly obtain medical help through their devices. Therefore, with all these developments in healthcare, it can be argued that healthcare has indeed become more physically accessible to all people in Singapore.

Lastly, healthcare in Singapore is easily accessible for all in Singapore regardless of their healthcare needs. Being a highly developed and wealthy nation, Singapore is renowned globally for the quality of its healthcare. The healthcare ecosystem boasts of a highly developed healthcare infrastructure with specialised and skilled manpower. Over the years, Singapore's healthcare system has improved and has become better equipped to serve the diverse needs of the population. For example, the SingHealth Group now has specialised centres such as the National Heart Centre, National Cancer Centre and National Eye Centre. These institutions are able to provide highly specialised and niche areas of medical treatment beyond just generalised healthcare for Singaporeans. Furthermore, as the nation develops, the healthcare system has also evolved to better cater to the changing needs. For example, there has been the development of more community hospitals, like the Ren

Ci Hospital, to support the outpatient and long-term needs of seniors in the country. The range of services is further bolstered by the private sector, which provides an even wider range of options that Singaporeans can choose from. A prime example would be the Novena Medical Centre, with an entire array of specialist clinics ranging from sports therapy to dental services and more. Therefore, viewing Singapore's healthcare from a systemic level, the comprehensive coverage provided indeed allows for easy access to the most appropriate and relevant healthcare that a patient requires.

As a whole, given the extensiveness of the local healthcare ecosystem, I am inclined to believe that healthcare is indeed accessible to all from a financial angle, from its physical accessibility as well as its ability to cater to a diverse range of needs. As Singapore continues to work towards its goal of comprehensive population healthcare, more steps can be taken by the government and healthcare providers to increase the affordability of healthcare for the most disadvantaged in society. This way, Singapore's healthcare will truly become a gold standard around the world.

Comments:

Yok Ray, good coverage of points with sound knowledge of the healthcare system demonstrated. Could have explored whether foreign workers can access healthcare easily. Language use is largely effective, but be mindful of slips in grammar.

Is healthcare in your society easily accessible for everyone?

Tan Jue Ming, 22S52

50 years is what Singapore took to evolve from a small fishing village, to a developed country that boasts a critical status as the financial and healthcare hub in the Asian region. With the manifold increase in her population's income, coupled with the looming healthcare threat brought by the ageing population, our future-looking government has long been planning and devising a comprehensive healthcare scheme to safeguard the people against diseases. This is done by introducing multifarious healthcare provision and subsidy schemes, in a bid to ensure everyone has equitable reach regardless of their backgrounds and financial status. However, I espouse that there are still areas for improvement, as healthcare in Singapore is still quite elusive for certain groups of people.

Critics of my stand would unanimously cite the tried-and-tested argument of the multilayer and multifaceted healthcare provision plan to bolster their argument that anyone can conveniently attain the medical services they require. Indeed, this includes the brilliant introduction of Medisave, a savings account where working adults and their employers make monthly contributions to the savings dedicated for future healthcare emergencies; MediShield, an insurance package where potential patients can opt to risk-pool with other patients nationwide for any future healthcare mishap necessitating a humongous sum of medical fees; and MediFund, a government fund that acts as a safety net to alleviate the financial burden some low-income families might face after they had depleted both their Medisave and MediFund. The occasional Medisave top-up for citizens 60-years-old and above also proves the government's determination to make healthcare more attainable to the elderly, who are generally dependent solely upon their pension and savings. With the duly implemented policies, Singapore can largely guarantee a simple, convenient and easy reach to healthcare for its citizens within the boundaries of the nation.

Be that as it may, while I concede that the various efforts put in place do effectively remove the insurmountable financial burden people normally dread to face when it comes to seeking medical help, this policy has inherently excluded a group of people similarly living in the society of Singapore: foreigners. Since time immemorial, Singapore has been dubbed the melting pot of different nationalities, cultures, races and practices. Enticed by its security, employment prospects and world-class education system, every year has seen a large influx of foreigners moving in with their families, with the dreams of starting a better life for their future generations. Many have contributed wholeheartedly to economic, technological as well as cultural development. They have also integrated and assimilated into the society of Singapore, and feel a sense of belonging here; however, the exorbitant medical bill is always the

real pain in the neck that reminds them that they are the outsiders. While it is entirely justifiable that the Singapore government prioritises its locals and provides very affordable medical services to its people, it is sometimes disillusioned and disappointed to be treated differently, and be reminded of the double standards held against foreigners. Case in point, dental problems are always the biggest source of apprehension among foreigners, not only due to the unbearable torture exerted by the problematic tooth, but also due to the potential dear consultation and treatment costs that could effortlessly strip away half of their monthly wages. As a foreigner without any assistance from the government like Medisave or the CHAS (Community Health Assist Scheme) card, a simple root canal treatment would cost them a full \$1,000, while CHAS cardholders just need to fork out less than a quarter of the price paid by the foreigners. Therefore, given that foreigners are also part of the members contributing towards the betterment of society but were unfortunately impeded from getting quality medical services due to the high costs, it can be posited that healthcare is not easily attainable for everyone.

In addition, the increasingly digitalised and organised healthcare services have proven to be a disservice to the elderly, who need healthcare the most. With Singapore putting their best steps forward to realise the aspirations of becoming a digitalised nation, the rollouts of healthcare mobile applications like Health Buddy and HealthHub have catalysed widespread consternation, confusion and anxiety among the elderly. While there are some highly educated elderly who are able to adopt this new way of managing their information and appointments online using the healthcare portals, reflecting positive acceptance and responses among this group of elderly, there is still a big portion of the elderly that simply cannot pick up and adapt to the dramatic modifications to their usual way of getting medical services. With the advent of Health Buddy, users can easily upload their healthcare particulars in their profile and easily navigate the healthcare services available online like the polyclinics, Singapore General Hospital, NTUC Healthcare and many more from the comfort of their own homes. Any bookings or changing of appointment dates and timings could be carried out with just a few taps on the screen. However, for the elderly who have spent all their lives visiting the clinics directly and either getting their treatments done or being referred to another specialist, many have expressed their huge resistance to jumping on the bandwagon of utilising these healthcare portals. With little willingness to utilise these online healthcare portals due to their inability to do so, the digitalised healthcare services not only do not bring more convenience and accessibility to the elderly, but further deteriorate the healthcare participation rate within them instead.

All in all, superficially, the ever-advancing healthcare technology and provision schemes have ensured greater and more equitable reach to healthcare for Singapore's population. However, the incidents of discriminating against patients based on nationalities as well as the increasingly digitalised healthcare services, continue to impede some from the same society from enjoying the healthcare that Singapore has to offer. Looking forward, I hope that more can be done to address the

predicaments foreigners face regarding the expensive costs, as well as the slow uptake of online healthcare management by the elderly.

Comments:

Good awareness of some of the healthcare policies in Singapore. Decent elaboration and development of the points show the groups having issues accessing healthcare locally. Language use is largely sound and fluent with occasional slips.

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Acknowledgments

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Teacher Advisor:

Mr Chng Chao Han

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