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Given its environmental impact, is global tourism still desirable today?

In today's age of global interconnectedness, global tourism has become an increasingly prevalent phenomenon. While global tourism has served as a means to help tourists understand and appreciate other cultures, as well as bring economic prosperity to nations, it has come at the expense of the environment. Now, more than ever, the environment is suffering at the hands of unsustainable and irresponsible tourism. However, this essay will seek to explain why global tourism can still in fact be beneficial to the environment.

Proponents of the argument that global tourism is now undesirable given the environmental impacts argue that global tourism has led to consumption at unsustainable levels as well as environmental degradation by irresponsible tourists. The accessibility of travel has meant that many environmental wonders are now only a plane ride away for most tourists. This has imbued a cavalier attitude in tourists about the marvel of these sights, and hence a sense of carelessness when visiting them. A prominent example would be damage to Costa Rican coral reefs caused by tourist activities. These reefs are known for their beauty, and are hence a popular tourist attraction. However, inexperienced tourists have swum too close to the reefs, or accidentally touched or broken off parts of the reef during their visit. This has caused parts of the reef to bleach and hence no longer contribute to the biodiversity of the Costa Rican coast. Given the reefs' significance in preserving biodiversity in the oceans, careless and copious tourist activity can have far reaching impacts on the world's oceans and ecosystems. Proponents of such an argument have also raised the point that global tourism has also meant that countries' resources are often overwhelmed by the arrival of large numbers of travellers. In order to accommodate these tourists, governments resort to unsustainable sources for energy and water. For example, Venice has 271,000 permanent residents, but has been receiving a steadily rising number of tourists each year, with 5.5 million tourists visiting in 2019. This has naturally put a strain on the city's resources, forcing a rise in demand for energy from non-renewable sources. From these examples, we can see that global tourism exposes environments to unnecessary stress and harm from ignorant and irresponsible tourists. It also places stress on local resources, which leads to further environmental damage as countries resort to unsustainable means to accommodate tourist activity. Even though global tourism has undeniable economic benefits for a country, it often comes at the expense of the environment. Thus opponents of global tourism argue that the environment cannot be an afterthought of tourism and that it is no longer desirable given the extent of degradation of the environment.

While it is true that global tourism causes stress on local environments, it must not be ignored that global tourism allows travellers to gain a greater understanding of the magnificence of the environment, and hence greater motivation to adopt more sustainable habits, as well as to fund and support conservation and protection efforts of the sites they visit. When travellers visit environmental tourist sites, they often leave with a deeper understanding of the significance of these places and the type of human activity that may be threatening the existence of such sites, as well as ways to do their part to help. Such visits to environmental sites can imbue visitors with a greater sense of responsibility to care for the environment, as well as to encourage those around them to do the same. It is much easier to encourage the adoption of eco-friendly habits if people have a tangible sense of what they are seeking to protect and the impact that their choices and decisions have on the environment. This is especially prominent in today's world, where overconsumption and wastefulness are normalised. The takeaways from such visits can have far reaching and unimaginable effects on people's mindsets and choices. For example, there are many organised tours to the Tanzanian Serengeti, which is a popular tourist spot thanks to its large nature reserve that protects the rich biodiversity of the Serengeti. Tourism has provided a valuable source of revenue for the Tanzanian government to support conservation efforts and wildlife research, as well as furthering anti-poaching measures. Many of these tours also seek to educate visitors on how the ecosystem works, as well as how wildlife is being threatened by erratic weather conditions brought about by climate change. These tours also seek to raise awareness about the killing of animals for use in fashion and traditional medicine, and advocate against the consumption of such products. Clearly, not all tourism is bad, and global tourism can in fact teach travellers about the wider environmental community, and encourage them to care about the environment beyond their immediate surroundings. Thus, global tourism can be instrumental in raising awareness and galvanising efforts towards environmental conservation

Beyond the immediate impact of education and awareness raising, global tourism also has the more practical effect of providing local governments with the incentive and motivation to protect and conserve their environment. Environmental sights can be a good source of tourist revenue, being unique to the countries to which they belong. This makes certain countries more attractive as tourist destinations. As a result, in order to protect this source of tourist dollars, governments then gain the incentive to enact policies that protect biodiversity and the environment. Take for example Tanzania and Kenya, countries that are well renowned for their biodiversity as well as for being the setting for The Great Migration. In order to protect the tourist revenue as well as jobs created by tourist visits to safaris, the governments of Tanzania and Kenya maintain a number of protected areas, including national parks, conservation areas and game reserves that give legal protection to over 80 percent of the Serengeti. To protect the dwindling rhinoceros population, the South African government has not only stationed soldiers in the Kruger National Park but also utilised surveillance technology like drones to help spot poachers. From the aforementioned examples, it can be seen that global tourism is important in providing governments with the impetus to be more proactive in

protecting the environment, and in doing so, protect their citizens' livelihoods and their countries' economic interests. The long-term benefits that come from tourist visits are much more economically beneficial than the one-time and depletable source of income that comes from poaching or plundering the environment for its raw materials.

Last but not least, global tourism provides developing countries with the means to become more sustainable as a country through the development of better waste management and waste disposal facilities. Many developing countries, while rich in natural resources, are lacking in basic infrastructure. This translates to unsustainable and inefficient energy distribution methods and waste disposal systems. With better waste management systems, countries can avoid dumping waste into water bodies or landfills, and, in doing so, minimise the impact that its population has on the environment. The Maldives has dramatically progressed as a country: aided by its prominence as a tourist attraction, its poverty levels have progressively diminished and the welfare of the Maldivian people has been uplifted. Now, tourism is the largest industry in the Maldivian economy, uplifting the average national income of its citizens to raise standards of living, thereby increasing governmental tax revenue. To accommodate the influx of tourists as well as to improve basic infrastructure for its citizens, the Maldivian government invested in proper systems for waste disposal systems as well as energy and water distribution. The Maldivian government also spends on efforts to ensure the cleanliness of their beaches. Global tourism drives economic activity in a country, and hence improves the ability of these countries to spend more on eco-friendly technology and sustainable research and efforts.

Ultimately, global tourism can play an instrumental role in broadening the perspective on the importance and significance of the environment in not just personal lives but also to all other living creatures on the planet. Global tourism is imperative in fostering a greater sense of admiration, respect and hence responsibility towards our surroundings. Global tourism also serves as a reason and means for countries to treat their environment with care, and regard the environment and all its inhabitants as something to be treated with respect, rather than as a source of raw materials to be plundered for economic gain. Thus, global tourism is still desirable today, but measures can be undertaken to minimise its environmental impact, while furthering its impact on conservation and environmental protection.

Comments

Your main points are thoughtfully framed and logically developed, and examples are used effectively to drive home the arguments. Balance is provided – convincingly as well, rather than perfunctorily. There are a number of expression errors, but they are more than amply balanced out by numerous instances of strong, felicitous phrasing. Paragraph structure is cogent.

‘Governments are failing the people they are supposed to serve.’ Discuss.

“Politics has no relation to morals.” These were the words of the Italian philosopher Machiavelli, whose eponymous political theory of Machiavellianism – the ends justify the means – echoes this belief of his. Yet in today’s world, where democracies are the norm and the government has a responsibility and duty to protect its people, one wonders if this is really the case, or is the government’s lack of morality hindering its ability to serve its people instead? Critics argue that today’s governments are not failing their citizens as there are effective and efficient governments around the world who listen to the grievances of the people and take appropriate measures to fix issues in society. However, I believe that governments are largely failing the people they are supposed to serve as they often pursue their own self-interests at the expense of the populace, which may not only inhibit progress of the country but may also directly harm the well-being of the citizens, leading to failure on the part of the government to serve the people.

Detractors postulate that governments are able to listen to the murmurings on the ground and take action to resolve social issues its people are facing, allowing for greater satisfaction amongst the people and the protection of national interests. Governments that are both moral and pragmatic are hence able to not only meet the immediate material needs of their people, allowing for an adequate standard of living, but are also able to resonate with the people and make them feel as if their voices are heard, making support for such governments more free flowing. For instance, Singapore’s ruling party, the People’s Action Party (PAP) used to be much more pragmatic and inflexible as compared to today. In the past, the government had only allocated 16% of its budget to social welfare, which was well below the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average. The electorate made their dissatisfaction known in the 2011 General Elections, in which the PAP received their lowest share of votes of 60% since independence. To combat this, the government immediately started to gather the opinions of the public and rolled out various welfare packages, such as the Pioneer Generation Package that provided subsidies to the elderly in Singapore. The citizens were thus satisfied with the government’s attempts at improving society and making it a more inclusive place for everyone, despite the low economic returns on these packages, culminating in a resurgence of support for the PAP in the 2015 General Elections where they won 69% of the votes. Hence, governments which display the ability to resolve constructive criticisms from their people and enact and enforce changes in society to further the well-being of their citizens cannot be said to be failing the people, as they are fulfilling the duty of a government, which is to protect the people and work in their best interests. Aside from providing social safety nets, governments which allow for continued economic growth help to increase the material wealth and tangible benefits that its people receive, resulting in a rise in their standard of living as well. One such example would be how then-US president Obama entered his first term of office in the midst of a recession,

with unemployment rates soaring past 10% and high national debt, yet with the interests of the citizens in mind, he launched an aggressive 787 billion stimulus package which succeeded, allowing him to preside over record figures in employment and net household wealth at the end of his second term. Thus, from these examples, it can be seen that governments that are able to keep the needs and wants of their citizens in mind are able to enact useful and progressive policies which serve to promote the well-being of their citizens, and therefore cannot be said to be failing the people they are supposed to serve.

While this may be true of some countries, other governments may choose to prioritise the needs of outsiders over the needs of their own people, in order to improve their own image, resulting in the needs of the local population being neglected. In today's world, where democracies are the norm, governments have a duty to protect the interests of their people first and foremost, as it is their citizens who elected them believing that they would preserve national interests, and it is the citizens who rely on the government to protect them when no other country will. With the government taking an oath to use the powers of their office to further the well-being of its people when elected to office, it is thus the responsibility of each government to look inward before looking outward, and failing to do so would mean failing the people they are supposed to serve. One such example would be how former German chancellor Angela Merkel's open-door policy allowed thousands of refugees to enter the country in the 2010s. However, she failed to take into account the real-world considerations of accepting such a large number of refugees and failed to consider that the social fabric of Germany would not remain untouched with the numerous refugees entering the country with their linguistic, moral and cultural luggage in tow. Her policy resulted in housing shortages and an increase in crimes committed both by and against the immigrant population. Tensions eventually culminated in the 2018 Chemnitz riots, in which thousands of neo-Nazis took to the streets to protest the refugee situation. This resulted in a death and serious injuries to several others. The apparent lack of ability to protect the native population and their needs led to widespread backlash against Merkel and her party, the Christian Democratic Union, which suffered losses in popularity. At the same time, the opposition party, Alternative for Germany, an anti-Islam, anti-immigrant, Eurosceptic party rose in popularity, winning 94 seats in the 2018 General Elections to become one of the country's main opposition parties. Merkel had hoped to portray the image of a benevolent leader with her policy, but this had backfired due to the immense impacts it had on the well-being of the native population, who instead viewed the policy as a self-destructive form of charity which involved selling out the local population. This was further exacerbated by the fact that Germany was still recovering from an economic downturn at the time that the policy had been implemented, meaning that the needs of the locals had yet to be met before the focus of the government shifted to that of outsiders. Hence, if a government is unable to be laser-focused on the needs of the people and strive to solve whatever is depriving them of an adequate standard of living, especially in times of economic hardship, it can be said that they have failed to protect their people by neglecting to prioritise and protect their needs over that of outsiders.

Furthermore, governments may also abuse their political power to regulate various sectors within society and impose their own beliefs on the rest of the country, resulting in a decrease in the standard of living of the citizens, who may get the short end of the stick in the policies implemented by such governments. Governments may misuse their authority to further the development of certain innovations or technologies which they wish to use to further their political agenda, often at the expense of minority groups living in the country. For instance, the scientific research community has often been exploited by the government to further their research based on the needs of those in power, rather than for their own sake of pushing the envelope of human knowledge, resulting in the potential of the research community being largely limited by the government. China has spent US\$546 billion on investments into the research of facial recognition technology in order to further its own vested interests and extend its power and influence. They have been accused of using facial recognition and biometric technologies to monitor and control the Uyghur Muslims, a minority group in Xinjiang. They have been accused of using the data obtained from these technologies to capture the Uyghur people and send them to re-education camps, where they are subjected to political indoctrination and forced labour. Such instances highlight the ability of governments to discriminate against groups in society and abuse the power they have to justify crackdowns on these groups, in order to further their own political agenda, leading to systemic discrimination that leaves some of its citizens even worse off than before. Another example of bigoted governments abusing their positions of influence would be how the former US president Donald Trump had spread fake news during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic in the US, saying that injecting disinfectants such as bleach would cure the virus and imposing his beliefs on society, all to convince citizens that the situation was not as bad as it actually was and to try to ensure that his administration was able to retain its legitimacy despite their poor efforts at reducing cases of Covid-19 in the US. This resulted in a drastic increase of 121% in accidental poisonings being reported in April 2020, just a few weeks after Trump had made his comments. This hence highlights the inordinate ability of governments to abuse the influence they have to further their own political agendas, even if it is at the expense of their own citizens, resulting in a failure of governments to take care of their people and failing them instead.

Lastly, governments, in the pursuit of economic growth and development, may fail to consider various environmental issues that harm the well-being of those in their country. Poverty reduction and economic growth are listed as United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals that all governments should strive to achieve. What this means is that, while governments do have a duty to their citizens to fulfil these goals, they must not do so at the expense of other goals such as environmental sustainability. However, governments often neglect such environmental concerns in pursuit of economic growth, which is arguably a more tangible benefit that the people can directly experience, as compared to the preservation of the environment, which has more long-term impacts. As governments are mostly concerned about retaining their legitimacy and winning the next election, such goals with benefits only experienced in the long term are also pushed to the back, while more immediate and responsive goals take priority. Thus, despite climate change being a huge issue in today's world, many governments are still reluctant to

acknowledge it. They are loathe to disrupt the churn of capitalism and argue that we can both have our cake and eat it if we allow the competitive pressures of the capitalist market to spark innovations in green technology. This has resulted in inaction on the part of governments to try and resolve the pressing issue of climate change and environmental degradation in the here and now. The Brazilian government has been criticised for allowing the Amazon rainforest to go to ruin, with the share of forested land decreasing over the years as it is increasingly threatened by agricultural activity such as cattle herding and rampant illegal logging, which is a lucrative 100 billion dollar industry that contributes greatly to the Brazilian economy. In 2019, Amazon saw its worst slash-and-burn session yet, which lasted for over three months but went unaddressed by government officials. This has not only impacted the tourism industry of Brazil but also polluted the air there. Governments have also actively hindered the progress of environmental protection, such as former US president Donald Trump who pulled out from the Paris Agreement in 2017. The Paris Agreement was an agreement for signatories to adjust domestic activities to reduce carbon emissions by 45% by 2030, to keep the global increase in temperature to just below the tipping point of 1.5°C. However, the withdrawal of the US – one of the world's largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions – from the agreement, severely limited the ability of the agreement to achieve its goal, resulting in increased emissions and lowered non-material standards of living. Clearly, such decisions by the government to push certain issues such as environmental degradation under the rug have not only allowed for greater pollution and direct negative health impacts on current citizens in the country, but also affect the ability of the future generation to enjoy the economic growth and standard of living experienced by the previous generations, due to the degree of environmental degradation, hence resulting in the failure of the government to serve its people and protect the interests of future generations.

In conclusion, governments should strive to make changes in their organisations and priorities such that they are able to effectively serve their people. While what Machiavelli said might have been true in the past, where a pragmatic government was required to meet the immediate bread-and-butter needs of the citizens, times have changed, with many countries doing better than they were years ago. Governments today should therefore strive to achieve a combination of both pragmatism and morality, so as to allow their citizens to reap the benefits of their governance and improve their well-being. This would allow governments to serve the people adequately and meet both their tangible and intangible needs, successfully fulfilling the main role of the government – to work for its people and improve the human condition.

Comments

Reasonably well-informed response that does make an effort to argue a case. Good range of support and analysis. Example-driven at times, with too much information. More nuance needed – after all, governments have a very delicate balancing act to perform, often having to reconcile many conflicting demands.

It is harder than ever to keep children safe in today's world. Comment.

From paedophilia to child exploitation, children in today's world face an increasingly diverse range of threats, their innocence making them a prime target for exploitation by malefactors. In response, custodians with the responsibility of safeguarding children have tried to come up with novel ways to build a "solid fortress" shielding them from any harm. In today's rather unpredictable and treacherous world, one cannot deny the rise of new threats that may intentionally or inadvertently place children in both developed and less developed countries at risk of danger. While I concede that guardians of our vulnerable children today have attempted to adapt to global trends, the reality is that the increasing diversity of threats at hand, coupled with the shocking abilities or predators to stay one step ahead, makes it more difficult to protect children today as compared to the past.

In the discussion of how we can best protect our children given developments in our modern world, there are those who may argue that parents – the primary custodians of children – are now more aware of the types of dangers children face online and offline, and are better equipped with more resources to safeguard their children. Thus, it has arguably become easier for them to shield their children today. Compared to the past, democratisation of information through the internet and social media has allowed parents and experts to share their experiences (both positive and negative) online, as well as offer insights into what strategies, applications or resources in general are most apt to keep the more pressing dangers at bay. By having access to a broader range of tools and views, parents can expand their worldview and educate themselves on how to become "better parents" to best protect their children. Today, parents have greater access to the internet, which has given them a range of screen monitoring or site restriction apps to choose from. These online tools aid parents in preventing their children from gaining access to dangerous sites which could accidentally lead to problems like self-radicalisation or addiction to pornography. Evidently, as much as technology in the modern world has given rise to new threats such as new sources of addiction or increased exposure to brainwashing by extremist political groups, it has also offered forms of support for parents who have their children's safety in their best interests. Additionally, the past experiences of unfortunate parents can be shared for the greater good such that new parents do not make the same mistakes. The challenges of parenthood and the risks children face are familiar, perennial issues, but what is different now is the fact that parents have an elevated sense of awareness of threats, and know ways to better protect their children today. This has undoubtedly allowed parents to adapt better and possibly have it easier in keeping their children safe from the evils of today's world.

While there is definitely merit in the above argument, I opine that while parents have become smarter in safeguarding their children through greater cognisance and access

to tools to help them, malefactors who seek to prey on children are equally capable of adapting to modern trends and staying one step ahead, ultimately making it harder than ever for parents to protect their children. Those with ill intentions planning to hurt children or deceive them can exploit the same technological wave of the modern world, devising novel strategies that result in both children and parents being blindsided by their attacks. In fact, predators are also cognisant of how educated parents are nowadays, and can be flexible enough to bypass any protection measures, tweaking their strategies such that their actions fly under the radar. This has clearly been illustrated in China, where a child pornography website was discovered only after a full three years of operation on the internet. Adult men were able to deceive both children and parents on a child's game by presenting themselves as fellow 8- to 9-year-olds trying to make friends. Their seemingly innocuous appearance tricked children on the game to send nude pictures of themselves via in-game private messaging. Clearly, child predators are equally capable of utilising the internet's veil of anonymity to mask their actual identity, making it especially difficult for parents to identify which individuals are genuine and which are potential dangers to the safety of their children online. Compared to the past, where 'traditional' attacks on children were limited to physical traps like "ice-cream scams" to kidnap children, parents now have to deal with anonymous, faceless predators with much more insidious ways of approaching their children that make them infinitely harder to detect. In the long run, this results in parents implementing reactionary measures instead of pre-emptive ones that stop the attack from happening in the first place. The fact that child predators are constantly a step ahead makes it such that parents risk their child getting harmed before they can respond and stop the damage. Thus, proficiency of malefactors in adapting and overcoming parents' protective mechanisms makes it so much harder to keep children safe in today's world.

Apart from intentional attacks on children, the modern world also presents a rise in unintentional threats that are more asymptomatic and unpredictable, making it tougher for the relevant stakeholders like parents and teachers to keep children away from harm. In the past, instances of kidnapping and child rape – physical threats – were among the more common threats that children faced. Nowadays, children face dangers on an ideological or emotional level, where there are harmful changes to their thinking – as seen in self-radicalisation – or adverse developments in the way they feel. Traits of the modern world, such as digitalisation, have served as an impetus for the rise of such 'invisible' yet harmful changes, as children do not act out immediately when they see stimulating or polarising content online. As there are no obvious signs displayed, adults are unable to pick up on whether a child is troubled and hence cannot intervene appropriately. If they do so when nothing is wrong, adults would only appear overly 'pushy' and that they are overstepping their boundaries. For instance, in the modern world, while the double-edged sword of social media encourages socialisation and interaction among children, it can also result in mental health issues like depression and anxiety. According to a 2020 report by the Singapore Ministry of Education, 60% of secondary school respondents face feelings of worthlessness after being on social media platforms. This could possibly be due to the unintentional act of comparison between themselves and their peers, who may post and 'flex' on social media. Prolonged comparison can eventually lead to a loss of self-worth and self-confidence. There is little

that parents can do because their child may not display signs of distress, and it is honestly unfair to expect parents to accurately guess how their children are feeling. As children are easily influenced and have malleable minds, they are often victims of various elements of the modern world, from social media to even contemporary music and art, that can unexpectedly have adverse impacts on an impressionable child's psyche and sentiments. What is worse is that many adults do not have the trained eye to pick up physical symptoms of psychological changes in children. This renders adults helpless as custodians of children against such unpredictable, unintentional threats presented by the modern world.

Finally, children in less developed countries are not spared from the evils of the modern world. Globalisation, coupled with the incompetence of some governments in poorer countries, causes children to be more vulnerable to exploitation, and makes it so much harder to protect them against such evils. In today's world, globalisation has allowed transnational corporations to expand outside of their home country's geographical borders, and set up factories or manufacturing plants in less developed countries to exploit the cheaper operations there – a comparative advantage that poorer countries offer. However, an unfortunate ramification of this is that while it promotes economic growth of the country, more often than not the lax laws of the country concerning child labour result in children working under unsafe conditions and not even being awarded fair remuneration due to the profit-driven nature of companies. An archetypal example of this would be the sweatshops in Turkey, where fast fashion brands like Zara and H&M set up shop and use children as workers, who end up working in poorly-ventilated, stuffy conditions almost for free. The onus is on the government to put in place and enforce legislation that protects children from such blatant exploitation, which violates the UN Declaration of Human Rights. However, because such transnational companies bring profit, and governments of poor nations would trade off most things for prosperity, they see child labour as a necessary evil, when it clearly should not be the case. Alternatively, the state may simply be too corrupt to enforce the necessary human rights laws, including those that protect children. The lack of capital in poor countries, their dependence on large companies, along with the corrupt, incompetent nature of governments, all cause children to be unsafe and unprotected from exploitative corporations, such that it is harder than ever to protect this vulnerable group in our globalised, modern world.

In the grand scheme of things, it is undoubtedly so much harder to keep out children safe in today's world. Modern worldwide trends like the rise of technology, digitalisation and globalisation have increased the vulnerability of children on multiple fronts, from planned online threats to unintentional dangers, to unjust physical labour. Clearly, more has to be done to protect the children of today, but the many obstacles we face make that very challenging.

Comments

Effort is made to examine modern trends that affect safety of children. There is a lot of emphasis on the impact of the digital world, and greater attention could be given to other physical threats that children face today.

‘The presence of moral disagreements shows us that morality is completely subjective.’ Discuss.

For centuries, fundamental moral problems have remained unresolved in moral discourse, despite our best attempts to answer them. The questions of whether or not to pull the lever (as per the Trolley Problem) or whether abortion is morally wrong have clear proponents and arguments on both sides, but no clear resolution is in sight. Given this, it is understandable that some people would use such moral disagreements to show that morality is completely subjective, with moral truths determined by the individual themselves. However, I disagree with this position, since we are able to find objective moral axioms despite our moral disagreements, and since moral disagreements can and should coexist alongside an objective system of morality.

First, let us understand why some might believe that moral disagreements reveal that morality is completely subjective. Within moral discourse, some forms of moral disagreement highlight the incommensurability of various ethical systems. For example, the Trolley Problem makes clear the fundamental differences between Utilitarianism and Deontology; where most utilitarians would pull the lever to kill one person and save five others, a deontologist would not pull the lever since this entails committing the act of killing a person. Clearly, the difference between pulling the lever lies not in an understanding of circumstance (as is the case in most ordinary forms of disagreement), but in a difference of the metrics used to assess the situation. Yet, it is difficult (if not impossible) to compare these conflicting systems with one another — there is no clear metric available to serve as a tiebreaker between the two. As a result, there is no objective, universal answer to these forms of moral dilemmas, and any side that one takes is a matter of personal preference, thereby being subjective.

Moreover, an analysis of some forms of moral disagreement can also highlight the role that individual experiences and cultures affect our moral compass. For instance, Jehovah’s Witnesses view the transfusion of blood as immoral, even when most of us agree that if it results in the saving of a life, it should be morally acceptable. The reason they hold such a belief is precisely their culture, for many of them grow up in households that revere blood as holy and to only be used in certain religious functions. This reveals the socially constructed nature of our moral systems, being defined by our own subjective experiences and our subjective interpretation/views of those experiences. There is no clear right and

wrong, and the freedom accorded to individuals to make their own choices seems to suggest therefore that what is moral and what is not is determined by the individual.

Nonetheless, I argue that the existence of moral disagreements does not mean that morality is inherently subjective. In fact, that we have moral agreement on many things seem to suggest that we are able to derive objective moral knowledge. After all, maxims such as “murder is immoral” seem to be universally agreed upon, no matter the person’s individual dispositions or his cultural background. The reason why we can obtain such claims is precisely because a diversity of ways of reasoning can be used to support this position, thus forming some truth from intersubjectivity. Both utilitarians and virtue theorists would argue that murder is immoral, even though they have different rationales for such a decision; rationalists who use Kant’s Categorical Imperative would claim that murder is non-universalisable, and cannot be a moral principle; intuitionists would claim that “murder is wrong” is a self-evident truth. Hence, the use of various forms of reasoning to argue in support of a moral claim strengthens the moral claim in question, since it appears to be true regardless of one’s ethical position and one’s metaethical understanding of how we can derive moral knowledge. To claim that “moral disagreements exist, therefore morality is completely subjective” is insufficient — one needs to also account for elements of moral agreement, which seems to show that morality is objective.

Furthermore, moral disagreements are not necessarily incompatible with a notion of objective morality, hence breaking the implicit conditional in the question prompt. This is because some form of moral disagreement is actually necessary for even an objective study of morality to progress. The truth is that Man is a flawed creature, only being able to think from his own perspective. Moral disagreements in ethics serve as a means for individuals to question their own understanding of morality, and for the discipline of ethics to refine its own theories and reject poorly constructed ones. One such example of this is the ethical dilemma of whether one should lie to protect a friend from a crazed murderer who is in search of said friend, posed to deontologists in order to challenge their understanding of duty. Such moral disagreements led to discourse and subsequent refinement of ethical theories, resulting in the development of the concept of tiered duties and obligations, instead of all of them being equal to one another. Therefore, disagreements do not have to prove that morality is subjective, instead being a necessary tool for philosophical (and moral) progress. Crucially, therefore, the fact that moral disagreements exist is not a strike against objective morality; disagreements can and should be present even if our morality is said to be objective.

As a final note, even if the above argument is untrue and morality is subjective, it would seem unreasonable for us to treat it as such, and such a treatment is not consistent with how reality operates. In the status quo, even if we give individuals the autonomy to make

certain choices on their own as a subjective interpretation of their morality (e.g. we give people the choice to bear children, depending on whether they feel that it is moral or not), we still codify laws and treaties of basic human rights that punish people for committing certain acts. If we were to embrace complete subjectivity, the world would become unpalatable, where we have to tolerate acts of terrorism since the moral system of these terrorists deem it as good. Perhaps the perspective of every unique individual is important, but not all of them should be valued equally, otherwise we fall into a lawless world where our lives are nasty, brutish and short. Our intuitions of such a world show us that there should, minimally, be some limits on the subjectivity of moral knowledge.

To conclude, moral disagreements do not necessarily point to a subjective morality. Instead, given our understanding of the world and the presence of moral agreement, morality cannot be completely subjective, even if disagreements are fundamentally caused by individual subjectivity. Disagreements are necessary for philosophical progress, and do not necessarily apply only to a subjective moral system.

Comments

Excellent piece here, Ethan! The argument is clear, concise, and fully relevant. You consider the nature of morality amidst different types of moral disagreements and argue for why morality is not necessarily subjective. There are a few bits to tidy up here and there, though. Also consider the idea of a fundamental plane for consensus to be reached / to argue on – could this indicate objective morality?

‘The presence of moral disagreements shows us that morality is completely subjective.’ Discuss.

In an increasingly polarised global landscape, it appears that moral disagreements are everywhere – we seem to lack a universal consensus on a whole host of thorny ethical dilemmas, from abortion to gene editing. While relativists might argue that the existence of pervasive moral debate points to the wholly subjective nature of moral judgements, they often fail to consider the limited extent of disagreement, as well as the implicitly universalist conception of morality that fuels moral debate in the first place. Ultimately, the existence of ethical disagreements suggests not that morality is subjective, but rather that it is incomplete – an unfortunate reality necessitated by the extremely high justificatory threshold that moral claims need to meet to constitute moral knowledge.

For the moral relativist, moral disagreements ostensibly point to the inevitable subjectivity that percolates into morality. The first kind of moral disagreement they point to is moral disagreement over time – indeed, it appears that our moral knowledge evolves with the ages, making our systems of morality at different times hopelessly contradictory. For instance, for much of human history, it was considered morally acceptable to marry one’s relatives – incestuous intermarriages were commonplace in European royal families, leading to genetic abnormalities like the Habsburg jaw appearing. However, such incestuous relations would be considered sinful and immoral by modern standards of morality, revealing that moral systems can evolve over time and create disagreements. Similarly, homosexual conduct was considered immoral across much of Western Europe up to the 20th century, but many in those countries today consider it a morally acceptable lifestyle to lead. As such, it appears that we do not have a fixed, unchanging conception of morality – moral codes and standards appear to change depending on the era, making them ostensibly subjective to the specific age of history.

Relativists also highlight the existence of moral disagreement across societies and cultures – indeed, some practices could be regarded as perfectly acceptable in some cultures and deeply immoral in others. Consider the example of honour killings – while many Western cultures consider the individual’s right to life to be a fundamental one, some cultures in the Middle East believe that such a right is overridden by the duty to protect the honour and dignity of one’s family, making it morally acceptable or even necessary to kill those who have brought shame and disgrace into their families. As such, our cultural upbringing

appears to heavily influence our moral judgements, rendering morality relative to each society and ultimately a subjective concept.

However, such a position perhaps overstates the extent of moral disagreements in society – there are a whole host of issues on which we manage to achieve moral consensus across time and space. For instance, many of the rights articulated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights are affirmed by nearly every culture and society – it would be difficult to find a community where individuals have no right to life or no freedom from torture. Subjectivity and moral disagreements appear to surface only when these principles come into conflict: for instance, the afore-discussed debate over honour killings results from Western Cultures according more weight to the right to life, and Middle Eastern ones according more weight to the right to dignity. We cannot infer, however, that moral principles are *totally* subjective on this basis: killing is still considered a moral wrong in the Middle East, pointing to the universal rather than relative nature of such moral principles. Similarly, the existence of moral disagreement over what to do with Philippa Foot’s Trolley Problem does not render morality hopelessly subjective – one cannot unilaterally decide to abandon all deontological and utilitarian principles and devise a plan to kill all six individuals on the track, and can only subjectively choose between the duty not to kill and the utilitarian calculus of maximising happiness. In light of this, moral disagreements are only present and subjectivity is introduced only when universal ethical principles issue contradictory imperatives and force individuals and cultures to choose between them – morality cannot be said to entirely succumb to subjective whims and fancies.

In fact, the very existence of moral debate belies the fact that we cling to a universalist conception of morality. If moral judgement were merely expressions of subjective preferences, we would not debate over them in the same way that we would not debate over someone’s claim that “strawberry is the nicest ice cream flavour” – attempting to change someone’s subjective preferences would be a fruitless endeavour. However, the fact that we continue to debate over issues like abortion, physician-assisted suicide and gene editing rather than ‘agreeing to disagree’ suggests that we do believe in the existence of moral facts that universally apply to everyone. Similarly, the fact that we see continued advocacy efforts in the West to stop female genital mutilation (FGM) in parts of North Africa suggests that we do not believe morality to be relative to individual cultures – if that were so, feminists in the West would simply accept that in the cultures in which FGM take place, it is a morally acceptable practice. As such, a universalist conception of morality is necessary for debates over moral disagreements to take place at all, making moral disagreements a sign that morality cannot be completely subjective.

Perhaps the greatest flaw with the relativist position lies in its failure to consider an alternative explanation of the presence of moral disagreements – while they would

perhaps indicate that morality is subjective, they could also be a sign that our moral knowledge is incomplete. Indeed, it is possible that we disagree over moral issues because we have not found the perfect, all-encompassing moral standard that reconciles the conflicting prescriptions of various moral principles. For instance, it is conceivable that disagreements over the Trolley Problem will disappear when we determine when we should apply deontological considerations and when utilitarian ones should be used, a problem that philosophers like Thomas Nagel are currently investigating. Therefore, it would be hasty to make inferences about the ontology of moral facts based on the existence of a few disagreements, when it could simply be the case that we have not learnt everything there is to know about morality.

This is the more likely situation, because the uniquely high justificatory threshold that moral claims have to meet before they are considered knowledge limits the amount of moral knowledge we might have. For a moral claim to be justified, it must be mutually corroborated by reason, experience, *and* intuition – the absence of any one renders the justification insufficient. For example, while Utilitarianism might be rationally justifiable and coheres with many societal conceptions of morality, the fact that it delivers some unintuitive verdicts already makes it insufficiently justified – we already have reservations about Utilitarianism based on its prescription to kill one hospital visitor and use his organs to save five lives. The reason why moral claims must meet an extraordinarily high justificatory bar to be considered knowledge stems from its special epistemic status – we allow moral knowledge to override all amoral, pragmatic considerations. For instance, while there may be many pragmatic reasons to kill civilians in war, such as to demoralise the enemy or reduce the effectiveness of conscription, the singular, countervailing moral fact that these civilians have a right to life triumphs all these practical reasons for doing so. Hence, given that we accord moral knowledge with such unique importance, it is equally necessary that moral knowledge be justified to a uniquely large extent before it can be placed on that epistemic pedestal. With such stringent requirements for the justification of moral knowledge, it is likely that we do not have such moral knowledge at all, making that the more probable explanation for moral disagreements compared to the intractable subjectivity of moral facts.

Ultimately, while it might be initially intuitive to conclude that morality is subjective because of the existence of moral disagreements, this could be a naïve view. The limited scope of moral disagreements, coupled with the very presence of extended moral debate, suggests that we believe in the existence of some universally applicable moral facts. We disagree over moral issues not because we fight over subjective preferences, but rather because we might not know much about what is moral at all – debates are a sign of a society trying to find out what morality truly is.

Comments

Raphael, this is an excellent piece! The argument is well thought through, and takes into account the nature of moral disagreements, nature of morality, and the justificatory standards required for us to consider moral knowledge justified. While the last point is relevant, the delivery and links to the main conclusion can be clearer (especially when referring to moral facts). Doubling back to the introduction to tweak it would make your argument much more coherent as well. You made the argument about how high the justificatory bar is for morality and hence it makes more sense to believe in an objective morality. But the onus is on you to prove that this justificatory bar is that high – involving reason, experience and intuition. Why can't the subjectivist account for these?

PASSAGE

Morals are not objective. What you think is right may not line up with what someone else thinks is right. But morals do not appear to be subjective either – we clearly generally agree that it is wrong for me to burn down your house, kill your loved ones, and give you a horrible disease, for no reason. Understanding these two positions is key: we treat “don’t burn houses down” as more or less an objective moral principle, even while many of us actively claim not to have objective moral principles. And this is the great tension of the 21st Century: we don’t want to give our morals any sort of objective nature for fear of ethnocentrism, but we can’t help noticing that there might just be something objective about them.

There are three main ways of thinking about whether moral knowledge is subjective or objective. Examining the consequences of both positions is one way. If an immoral act is happening, and we do not speak up because we are afraid of being ethnocentric (in other words, we fear that we incorrectly evaluate other cultures based on our own values and beliefs), then we have no interpersonal morals at all and we fall into mere subjectivism. But if we do not speak about morality, then this element of morality ceases to exist in the practical world, and morals disconnected from a practical world do no good at all.

If the consequentialist argument cannot give us an answer to whether moral knowledge is subjective or objective, then we should perhaps appeal to scientific authority. Some philosophers argue that moral facts are analogous to scientific facts and can be discovered through empirical investigation. For example, they may point to evolutionary psychology as evidence that certain moral beliefs are universal and grounded in human nature. However, this argument is fallacious because it assumes that science has a monopoly on truth and that scientists are impartial observers of the world. In reality, scientific research is influenced by social and political factors, and scientific consensus can change over time as new evidence emerges.

If appealing to scientific authority doesn’t work, maybe the appeal to religious authority will. Many religious traditions claim that their moral beliefs are based on divine revelation and therefore objective. For example, the Ten Commandments in Judaism and Christianity are often cited as evidence of objective moral truths. However, this argument is also fallacious because it assumes that religious authorities have access to a unique source of moral knowledge that is inaccessible to non-believers. In reality, religious beliefs are

shaped by cultural and historical factors, and the moral teachings of different religions often conflict with each other. Moreover, the idea of divine revelation is itself controversial and depends on one's metaphysical beliefs about the nature of the universe.

So, since the consequentialist argument and the appeals to scientific and religious authorities cannot conclusively prove that morality is objective, morality must be subjective. The idea of objective morality has also led to ethnocentrism, which has led to discriminatory practices that we now vilify. Clearly, morality is not objective, but subjective. Let's be our own moral boss.

Adapted from "Morality is neither objective nor subjective"
by Anthony Draper

Critically evaluate the above argument with reference to the nature and construction of ethical knowledge. Respond with your own critical comments to support or challenge the author's position.

The author's main conclusion is that morality is subjective. He first establishes a dichotomy: morality is either objective or subjective. Upon this basis, he considers three possible ways of showing that morality is objective before refuting each of them: (1) examining the consequences of both positions, (2) appealing to scientific authority, and (3) appealing to religious authority. From this, the author concludes that since all of these ways of proving that morality is objective fail, morality cannot be objective and must therefore be subjective. Overall, while the author offers some compelling reasons why appealing to science or religion does not adequately show that morality is objective, his argument relies on a flawed inductive leap from not being able to show morality is objective to morality necessarily being subjective, rendering his eventual conclusion unpersuasive.

The author first examines if consequentialist arguments can show the objectivity of morality, and concludes that this is not possible. He argues that if morality is objective, this would lead to harmful ethnocentrism that creates discriminatory practices, but if morality is subjective, then morality would end up disconnected from the real world and, by extension, useless. This particular line of reasoning does not lead to the conclusion he intends; by examining the undesirable consequences of both objective and subjective conceptions of morality, he has shown not that consequentialist arguments are untenable, but that the positions on morality themselves (as objective or subjective) are untenable. In fact, the argument appears to be internally contradictory: if it is true that consequentialist arguments cannot justify claims on the ontological status of moral facts, then his consequentialist line of reasoning would not be able to demonstrate anything about these two metaethical positions. However, a charitable reading of his argument could be that examining consequences leads to an impasse, since both objective and subjective conceptions of morality are seemingly untenable, making consequentialist arguments not helpful in our attempts to determine which conception is preferred. I would accept this line of reasoning, but it would still not justify his eventual conclusion that morality is subjective, because of the very consequentialist problems with the position he identifies. As such, this particular reason – while it may show that morality might not be objective based on a charitable reading – does not – justify his overall argument about the subjectivity of morality.

His second reason why morality cannot be shown to be objective is more compelling – he argues that scientific appeals fail because scientific consensus can change over time as new evidence emerges. This is true, since we have seen numerous paradigm shifts in science that ostensibly cast doubt on the certainty of findings – Newtonian mechanics, which had been accepted for over three centuries, was revealed to be flawed as Einstein’s theories of relativity surfaced in the 20th century. Comparatively, ethical knowledge requires an extremely high degree of justification that is much more extensive than science – while scientific findings only need to be justified experimentally from experience and observation, ethical knowledge needs reason, experience and intuition to cohere and corroboratively justify knowledge. For instance, even though Utilitarianism might cohere with societal conceptions of morality and there exist rational arguments in support of it, the fact that it leads to unintuitive outcomes (e.g., that we should kill one person to harvest his organs and save five people) renders it inadequately justified. Hence, science – with its much lower justificatory threshold – would not be able to justify ethical knowledge on its own. Additionally, the author correctly identifies the fundamental assumption undergirding such scientific attempts to justify morality, that is, “moral facts are analogous to scientific facts”. However, Hume observes that these facts are fundamentally distinct: we cannot make claims about what ought to be based on claims about what is, in the same way that it would be foolish to say I ought to wear the school uniform because I am currently wearing one. Hence, scientific examinations of what morality has been and where it came from cannot justify moral judgements alone.

Finally, the author’s critique of appeals to religion is also compelling – he argues that these arguments presuppose the existence of God and that various religious teachings conflict with one another. Of course, this is true – while Muslims are commanded not to eat pork, it is morally acceptable to do so in other religions. Additionally, appeals to God depend on one’s ability to conclusively and indubitably show the existence of one, something which no religion is able to do. Hence, divine appeals cannot justify the existence of an objective moral framework.

At this point, the author has shown that science and religion cannot show that morality is objective, and to some degree, consequentialist arguments reveal that this position is untenable. The argument fails, however, to justify that morality is ultimately subjective for two reasons.

First, it does not follow that just because three ways of showing that morality is not objective fail, that morality is really not objective. For instance, it could be that morality is objective, but we have not found the perfect, all-encompassing ethical framework that allows us to show that morality is indeed objective and universal. For instance, subjective disagreements are presently created when individuals prioritise different scales of value: in the Trolley Problem, since deontological and utilitarian considerations contradict, a

utilitarian might subjectively prioritise maximising happiness and pull the lever while a deontologist might choose to preserve life and not do so. However, these sources of subjectivity – and fears of ethnocentrism – might be eliminated when we identify which theories apply under which domains and in which situations, a problem that philosophers like Thomas Nagel are working to solve. Hence, even though the three ways the author considers fail to demonstrate the objectivity of morality, there may very well be other ways of demonstrating the objectivity of morality (such as finding the perfect moral framework) that the author fails to consider.

Second, even if we grant that morality is really not objective, it does not follow that morality is fully subjective to the extent that we can be “our own moral boss” – it could be that morality is largely intersubjectively determined as well. As the author himself acknowledges in the first paragraph, we agree virtually universally on most moral issues, such as the immorality of killing the loved ones of others or burning down their homes. Hence, we might still be bound by these intersubjective moral codes, with subjectivity conferred only on the instances where there are greatly conflicting ethical positions or when different ethical scales of value disagree – for instance, we might be allowed to subjectively prioritise utilitarianism over deontological considerations only in cases like the Trolley Problem above when they issue contradictory imperatives. Hence, just because morality is not totally objective, it does not mean that morality is necessarily subjective to the individual – we could be bound by intersubjective moral judgements as well.

This false dichotomy and his failure to demonstrate that not being able to show morality is objective entails morality is not objective constitute the critical flaws of the author’s argument. Hence, even though the author successfully rejects the possibility of justifying moral knowledge with science or religion, his eventual conclusion that morality is subjective is fairly weak.

Comments

Excellent reconstruction of the author’s argument; clear understanding of what he is trying to do in this passage! Evaluation is spot on – good engagement with the main premises and the reasoning employed. There are also considerations for the bigger picture. Insightful analysis of the justificatory requirements for morality (and science) although less so for religion. All things considered, an excellent response!

PASSAGE

A recent parliamentary debate featured a suggestion to give young local entrepreneurs a leg-up in the e-commerce space, prompted by the changes in which consumers – including Singaporeans – buy things in the post-covid era. Many praised the move, claiming that the government’s proposal to set up a subsidized platform for small, local creative businesses to advertise and market their products will help entrepreneurs hone their business acumen. But as with every government policy – even very good ones – there will always be losers. Just because entrepreneurs can succeed in an artificial environment doesn’t mean that they will survive in the real world, having been blinded to the harsh realities of the e-commerce world. Today’s winners might become tomorrow’s losers. And boosting their ego only to have it come crashing down later will result in more fragile youngsters who will then be too afraid to do any kind of business in the future. Not to mention the fact that the years spent investing in the artificial environment will be wasted. Who will the winners be then?

Even the best intentions behind state policies cannot compensate for the fact that the government can never truly understand young people – who account for a large majority of local entrepreneurs. Think about it: your family member and best friend do not even precisely understand everything about you, so how can the government understand you when they don’t even live in the same house? Those in government live in an ivory tower and are completely detached from the lives of ordinary people. In any case, the nature of a government policy is that it is for the general populace, not the specific individual. There will always be some who lose out on the benefits that the policy is meant to provide – it’s the young this time, but next time, it could be the elderly.

Critically assess the reasoning in this argument, explaining why you do or do not accept its conclusion(s).

The author concludes that the government should not give young local entrepreneurs a leg-up in the e-commerce space. The author proves this through arguing that such an advantage will lead to the failure of young entrepreneurs in the real-world, and that the government cannot truly understand young people. I cannot accept his conclusion as his argument is weak.

First, the author intends to prove that the winners in the business world supported by the government might become failures in the real-world, unprotected e-commerce market. While this might be true, he seems to miss the intent of the government, which is that creating this protected space ends up allowing young entrepreneurs to experiment and learn from their mistakes, without facing severe consequences. With all this additional knowledge, they are then more prepared to tackle the harsher real world. Crucially, the chance that these entrepreneurs fail in the real-world is not absolute zero, but it is significantly reduced insofar as they are not going into the harsh world with no experience and no prior understanding of what to do in order to survive. In fact, precisely because these young entrepreneurs learn and fail in the artificial space provided by the government will they know better how to rebound from failure and learn from their mistakes. Directly throwing them into the deep end will only make them feel out of their depth and all the more clueless and helpless; without the government's artificial space, more youngsters will be afraid to do business in the real-world.

Next, the author claims that governments cannot truly understand young people. The implicit argument is that because the government cannot do this, the policy will lead to harms or be ineffectual. On the most fundamental level, this is simply untrue; governments are able to understand the youth through things like dialogue sessions and regular interactions with them. Apart from this, the analogy used by the author is not apt to the situation, since the government does not need to know every single thing and intricacy about young people, but (in this specific instance) only their thoughts regarding youth entrepreneurship and/or this particular policy they are considering. Given further that this is something that one is able to easily express and provide substantiation for, it is unclear as to why governments cannot understand the wants and needs of the youth. Finally, the author claims that those in the government live completely detached lives from the rest of the population, but even if this were true, it does not follow that they cannot make

policy decisions that reflect an understanding of young people — just because they have not experienced certain things does not mean that they cannot empathise with or see things from their perspective.

Hence, because the premises in his argument do not hold, I do not accept the author's conclusion.

Comments

Good job! Short but concise reconstruction and evaluation of the author's argument, with clear and strong reasoning of each main point. A few more comments on the nature and purpose of government policy in general as well as the author's claims about "winners and losers" would have made the evaluation more comprehensive.

Critically assess the reasoning in this argument, explaining why you do or do not accept its conclusion(s).

The author concludes that young entrepreneurs will lose out on the benefits which the leg-up policy aims to provide. He claims that despite its benefits, young entrepreneurs will end up losing out because this policy creates an artificial platform which blinds them to reality – a problem which is attributed to the government’s inability to understand young people, as well as the policy’s focus on benefitting the general populace instead of the individual. I think that while the author’s premises can be true in some cases, the argument is weak as we cannot derive the conclusion from the premises.

The author first posits that the creation of an artificial environment will blind them from the harsh reality of the e-commerce world, which in turn leads to them having their ego boosted before plummeting, leading to fragile youngsters who have wasted time in the artificial environment and be afraid to do business in the future. This reasoning is quite flawed, and is reminiscent of a slippery slope. It is not true that just because the policy creates a more conducive environment for entrepreneurs that it shields them from the realities of the e-commerce world. Not only is the policy aimed at honing business acumen, an accumulative skill which builds with experience, but also aims at also creating a subsidised platform, which still necessitates the skill and ability of the entrepreneur to navigate. This means that the policy could actually give entrepreneurs an edge in the future, helping them survive in the real world. Even if we concede that there are some entrepreneurs who end up not surviving in the real world, we cannot conclude that this government policy is a waste of their time and irreparably crushes their ego. Business experience is accumulated during the process, and it is completely natural to expect setbacks in this sphere, so it is unreasonable to claim that all these young entrepreneurs will thus be too afraid to do business in the future. The author seems to overstate the effects of such a policy on the eventual success of young entrepreneurs.

A separate reason the author’s gives is the inability of the government to understand young people (they are completely detached from the young); the author seems to suggest that this is a cause for the inefficacy of this policy. While it is true that no one, including friends and family, and much less the government (which has fewer contact points), will precisely and fully understand young entrepreneurs, it is not true that they are thus completely detached. If they were, it seems unlikely that they would be able to formulate a policy that garnered much praise from the public. Even if we assume that government officials live in an ivory tower, it does not thus follow that this policy will have

nett negative effects, as the government's limited understanding does not necessitate ineffective policies.

In all, the author's argument is weak as its premises are flawed and its links to the conclusion are weak, leading me to reject his conclusion.

Comments

Decent reconstruction of the author's argument. Some good points were made with some support, although explanation and substantiation was not consistent throughout the response.

Critically assess the reasoning in this argument, explaining why you do or do not accept its conclusion(s).

The author's main conclusion is that young people will lose out on the benefits of the government policy on e-commerce. He used two main premises to support his case. The author first disputed the benefits the government policy purports to provide, arguing that helping entrepreneurs win in an artificial environment does not lead to future success and that potential failure is especially harmful for these entrepreneurs. The author then claims that because the government does not understand local young entrepreneurs, it will not devise a suitable policy that benefits this specific group of people. I think the argument is flawed, as some sub-premises are unjustified, so the conclusion cannot be granted.

Firstly, the author argued that helping local businesses through this government policy will result in disadvantages since they might fail. However, most of the drawbacks the author mentioned are not unique to this government policy, so it is unwarranted to say that the policy will lead to these outcomes. The author's logic is that today's artificial winners 'might become' tomorrow's losers, which will cause youngsters' ego to plunge along with a wastage of time. There are two reasons why this argument is weak. Firstly, just because there's no direct correlation between current success and future ones does not make the policy the cause for failure; in fact, the government may never have intended to 'ensure' 100% success rate, but simply hope for the policy to help build new businesses and make them stronger so that it is less likely for them to fail. Secondly, just because some businesses fail does not mean that the years spent in investment is wasted, since, overall, more businesses might withstand the challenges present in the competitive real-world market due to the policy's support than those that might fail, which results in a more resilient domestic market. Hence, it is unreasonable to argue that simply because of the possibility of failure or negative consequences that this government policy will not be good for young entrepreneurs.

Secondly, the author argued that the government can never truly understand young people, and that the policy is not good for any specific individual, so there are always people who lose out. This premise, however, is also weakly supported, and provides little support for the conclusion. Firstly, the author may have mixed up different aspects of "understanding" of the target group - he claimed that since the government does not live together with young people like families do, and family members do not precisely understand everything about young entrepreneurs, so the government must have done an even worse job of understanding young entrepreneurs. It is probably too stringent a

condition to require the government to "precisely" understand everything about its target audience to devise a policy, because as long as the policy is effective in catering to specific needs as intended by the policy, the purpose of such schemes is fulfilled. Moreover, the government being distant from the daily lives of ordinary people does not provide support for the conclusion that their policy will not benefit local entrepreneurs. This is because the ordinary details of individual lives are unrelated to the content and objective of the policy - to help local entrepreneurs; the government may not understand young people personally, but it understands the market structure as well as entrepreneurs' difficulties in setting up a business. This kind of understanding, instead of youngsters' personal preferences, is sufficient for devising an effective policy that benefits entrepreneurs. Lastly, just because there are always people who lose out from policy in general does not necessarily mean that the young will lose out from this policy.

Therefore, since both main premises do not show strong links to the conclusion, the conclusion is not granted.

Comments

Clear reconstruction of the author's argument. Relevant and intelligent points challenging the author's support for his conclusion are given, with sufficient reasons provided.

PASSAGE

The recent case of a 10-year-old boy who punched a primary school senior sparked an online debate on who was at fault. Some argued that because he threw the first punch, he should be classified as the bully. Others argued that because he was merely responding to his classmate's verbal taunts, it is the classmate who should be labelled the bully.

Something is considered bullying only if it involves some aggressive behaviour that is intentional, repeated, and intended to harm another individual. If the boy was provoked, and there was no intention to harm the classmate prior to the provocation, then that action of punching should be seen as an act of self-defence. But where do we draw the line when it comes to intentions? Surely the act of punching signals an intention to harm another person – even if for a split second before the act.

Something is considered bullying if it is motivated by an exertion of power over the other person, so, it is the older boy who clearly is the bully. But did not the younger boy, in defending himself by throwing the first punch, exhibit the motivation to exert his power? It is precisely because, being younger, he knew he would not have won the verbal match that he used physical force to assert control over the situation. A pre-emptive strike can be seen as an act of self-preservation but also an act of bullying, for the goal of the strike is to exert power and control. What, then, is the difference between self-defence and bullying?

Critically assess the reasoning in this argument, explaining why you do or do not accept its conclusion(s).

The author's conclusion is that there is no difference between self-defence and bullying. The author considers the criteria for bullying – namely the intention to harm another individual, and the motivation to exert one's power – before using a case of a 10-year-old punching his senior to demonstrate how ostensible acts of self-defence also fulfil both of these criteria jointly justifying his conclusion. Overall, I do not accept his conclusion.

First, the author argues that acts of self-defence also exhibit the intention to harm another, making them acts of bullying as well. This argument, however, fallaciously assumes that individuals intend every outcome of their actions – while it is true that the direct outcome of a punch might be that the other individual is hurt, it does not mean that the individual who punched the other intended to cause that harm. Often, someone acting in a position of self-defence might not intend to cause that harm – they might be motivated by an extreme sense of fear that clouded their rationality, or they might let out that punch because of an instinctive “fight” response in response to perceived danger. As such, it is not true that acts of self-defence are necessarily intended by those who commit them to cause harm to others, since they might be involuntary emotional or instinctive reactions.

Second, the author argues that self-defence is also motivated by the same desire to exert power over another as acts of bullying others does. This is also not necessarily true: there is a difference between asserting power and control and preventing others from asserting power and control over you. For instance, while a child might kick and punch at his kidnapper in order to free himself and stop himself from getting abducted, it would be unreasonable to say he intends to “assert control” over the kidnapper – once he is free, he would most likely not choose to continue kick and punching the kidnapper to assert power over him. Hence, this criterion for bullying is also not necessarily fulfilled by acts of self-defence.

At this point, it is clear that the author's conclusion cannot be justified, since neither of the two premises that jointly justify his conclusion are true. However, the implicit premise – that there are only two criteria for bullying – is also not necessarily true: for instance, self-defence might be distinguished from bullying by the fact that it is done in a desperate situation of last resort. We would intuitively say, for instance, that someone kicking a stranger on the street would be a bully, but a woman kicking someone attempting to

sexually assault her could not be called a bully, since her action is done as a last resort. As such, the author's two criteria may not be exhaustive – we might need to specify that an act of bullying is a needless one, a criterion that the author fails to consider.

In all, the author's argument is weak.

Comments

Good reconstruction and evaluation that considers and weighs the different intentions of the parties involved. Clear reasoning given for why the author's argument fails to justify his conclusion. Well done!

PASSAGE

The many benefits to digital technology give us good reasons for why should continue using it. It has promoted seamless communication and collaboration across the world, performs tasks faster and more efficiently than manual methods, and increased productivity and reduced the amount of time and resources needed to complete tasks. Automation, for example, can do the work of three to five people – and be better at it – and also improve worker safety in dangerous environments.

But these benefits alone are insufficient to justify the continued expansion of digital technology. Firstly, the negative consequences of such usage outweigh the benefits. Technology like social media and computer games perpetuates addictions because that's what drives profit. Such addictions result in a vast wastage of time that we could otherwise use to do more productive and meaningful things, like spending quality time with our families and friends. The growing problem of social alienation will then worsen, as human contact gradually reduces to nothing, and loneliness becomes the norm. Moreover, digital technology impedes basic living skills – someone who has always relied on GPS to find his way around town would be in deep trouble when his mobile phone is out of battery!

Secondly, an overreliance on digital technology will inevitably compromise individuality, as plagiarism and copyright laws are increasingly harder to enforce. People will soon no longer value creativity as a culture of “sharing” will reduce the value of the original creator’s work.

Thirdly, and more significantly, life will become something that is experienced through the prism of digital media rather than first-hand. Many people no longer experience real-life events directly, since music concerts or live shows are recorded on mobile devices and uploaded onto social sites. If we say that there is a difference in the way we live our lives now versus when we are hooked up to an experience machine, then surely, we cannot allow digital technology to erode everything we understand about how to fully live life!

I would much rather have a world with lower productivity and less efficiency if that means that humans get to keep being human.

Critically assess the reasoning in this argument, explaining why you do or do not accept its conclusion(s).

The author's main conclusion is that the benefits of digital technology are insufficient to justify its continued expansion. He argues that, firstly, the negative consequences of such usage outweigh the benefits; secondly, an overreliance on digital technology will inevitably compromise individuality; thirdly, life will be something that is experienced through the prism of digital media rather than first-hand. These three premises jointly lead to the main conclusion. While the author made reasonable points, his argument is problematic as it lacks inductive strength and his premises lack cogency.

With regard to the first premise, the author argues that technology, like social media and computer games, perpetuate addictions, resulting in wastage of time. This argument seems very implausible given that addictions have been present even before the presence of digital technology. In the Roman Empire, many people were addicted to wine and pleasure; in the 18th century, people in England were addicted to poker; in the 20th century, people were addicted to television. Addiction is a perennial issue and digital technology is simply a new medium for it to manifest. The author is hence unjustified in claiming that technology should be to blame for the addictions that are present in society. The author also argues that technology impedes basic living skills. While this might be true for some, it would be an over-generalisation to assert that digital technology hinders the cultivation of living skills, given that it, more often than not, helps people learn new skills via online tutorials, social media posts, and information available on search engines. It would not be helpful and actually fallacious to conclude that digital technology is not beneficial just based on what is happening to a small proportion of the population.

With regard to the second premise, I would argue for the opposite case. Instead of reducing the value of a creator's work through sharing, the widespread recognition and acknowledgement with the help of social media can significantly increase the value of works of art, compared to the past when an artwork would only be recognised if it was recognised by an art critic, gallery or institution. Instead of compromising individuality, the freedom to express oneself online has resulted in unprecedented diversity and individuality, as shown by the countless online communities and social media groups of the like-minded.

With regard to the third premise, it would be a fallacy to assume that life will become something that is solely or mostly experienced through the prism of digital media, just because many people consume digital media. Instead, digital media is able to introduce different cultures, landscapes, and events to people who are unable to experience them first-hand, especially to those who are not so well-off or the physically disabled. Digital technology, instead of “eroding” everything we understand, enriches our life experiences for the most part, apart from the small group of people who refuse to see the real world and would rather live their lives alone – “hikikomoris”.

As the three premises, though of some merit, are not cogent, the author’s main conclusion does not stand. Moreover, the logical link between the premises and the main conclusion is rather weak - even if these three premises are cogent, we still cannot conclusively say that the benefits are insufficient to justify the continued expansion of digital technology given that the author took an example-driven approach to argue his case.

Comments

Well done! Systematic evaluation of the author’s main premises, with clear reasoning given for why the author’s conclusion cannot stand.

Critically assess the reasoning in this argument, explaining why you do or do not accept its conclusion(s).

The author concludes that the continued expansion of digital technology is unjustified. He offers three reasons that independently justify this conclusion: (1) that technology has negative consequences that outweigh the benefits, (2) that an over-reliance on digital technology compromises individuality, and (3) that life will become something experienced through the prism of digital media. Overall, the argument is weak because none of these reasons pertain to digital technology itself – rather, they concern the overreliance on digital technology, a problem that can be mitigated even as digital technology expands.

First, the author argues that the negative outcomes of digital technology (e.g. addiction, loneliness and diminished living skills) outweigh the positive benefits of increased productivity and improved worker safety. He asserts this as if the trade-off was *prima facie* evident from the harms alone; I suspect it is not so clear. For instance, I might justifiably prioritise the benefits of digital technology since they might fulfil the far more basic needs of many individuals – improved productivity has allowed for cheaper goods that enables the global poor to afford basic necessities and raise their standard of living. Improved worker safety has prevented countless workplace deaths, saving lives. These are intuitively far greater benefits, even if it comes at the cost of some individuals getting hooked on digital technology: this is because saving a life or enabling the poor to access necessities creates far more happiness than addicting might take away. As such, the author needs to justify why he has made the counterintuitive judgement that the harms outweigh the benefits – in the absence of this justification, his premise does not hold water.

The author next argues that individuality will be eroded when plagiarism and copyright are harder to enforce – this is not necessarily true, since technology has also enabled the creation of plagiarism detector tools like Turnitin that help us identify plagiarism and copyright violations. Hence, even though plagiarism might become easier with the internet, detecting it has also become easier – the author needs to show why the former effect is greater in scope than the latter.

Finally, the author argues that life will be experienced through digital media rather than first-hand, since we view digital content online. While it might be true that being too focused on recording an event might diminish the satisfaction of an experience, it is

equally true that digital content has allowed us to experience many events we would otherwise have no access to: billions can now view a recording of a concert that they were not able to afford tickets to. Hence, the counterfactual is a world where experiences are limited to far fewer people, particularly the poor – this would be, intuitively, a much worse outcome.

Ultimately, the author's argument is one-sided – he fails to explain why the alternative world without technology would be better. Additionally, he raises extreme impacts that pertain to the overuse of technology rather than the technology itself – the overuse of devices during concerts could be resolved with a simple ban by the event organiser, and the increase in plagiarism can be dealt with by stricter enforcement and warnings by schools. Hence, it is not clear why stopping the expansion of all digital technology is the necessary solution. As such, the author's argument is weak overall.

Comments

Excellent piece that systematically addresses each of the author's main premise, and challenges the underlying warrant of the overall argument with insight, clarity, and concision. Well done!

To what extent are different genders valued equally in today's society?

The #MeToo movement marked a landmark shift in people's mindsets on the gender divide – a newfound realisation was made regarding social media's potency in demanding for justice and fighting for change. Hashtag activism has served as an effective tool for victims of sexual harassment to call out their perpetrators, such that proportionate punishment will be meted out to them. Notably, the suspension of Nicholas Lim by the National University of Singapore after fellow student Monica Baey posted about his misdemeanour signalled the end of a time where men could get away with such severe offences with just a slap on the wrist – the day-to-day issues face by women that were previously shoved under the carpet are not in the limelight. However, before assuming that different genders are now being valued equally all around the world, one should take a glance at the oppression of women by the Taliban taking place in Afghanistan, and consider the number of lives and opportunities lost, simply because of a biological difference – gender. In the light of this, despite recent positive trends in achieving gender equality, the bleak reality even in today's society remains that women are still valued less than men.

However, some may posit that the rise in female representation in various sectors of society correlates to our equal appreciation of both genders. Former prime ministers of New Zealand and Finland, Jacinda Arden and Sanna Marin, have become household names across the world. The support of female figures holding positions of power exemplifies the belief that their leadership was not perceived to be inferior just because they were female. Various women hold the highest position in major companies, such as the Chief Executive Officer of Meta, Sheryl Sandberg. They challenge the perception that the field of STEM is reserved for men, and empower an entire generation of young girls to reach prestigious positions that they themselves have achieved. In today's society, a woman can have as high an aspiration as a man, and achieve it through her own merit. Furthermore, issues that particularly affect women are being highlighted due to a rise in political representation. For example, Scotland's member of parliament Monica Lennon raised the issue of 'period poverty' and issued free sanitary pads to women from low-income families. As women hold high-ranking positions use their platforms to raise awareness of the gender divide and effect change, it seems hopeful that women will one day be regarded as equals to men in society.

While this is true to a certain extent, one should note that female representation continues to be the exception rather than the norm. Apart from several Nordic countries, most of the world is still far from a cabinet consisting of 50% female politicians or companies which are not exclusively managed by men. In fact, the patriarchal system remains entrenched, as conservative societies still believe that women should be submissive to men. Take the

example of male guardianship in Saudi Arabia. Women are not allowed to make any decision, regardless of how trivial these decisions may be, without the consent of a male family member. Women who breach this system are subject to various forms of torture, authorised by the Saudi government. From generation to generation, it has been instilled in women in Saudi Arabia that they should be obedient caregivers and that they have to remain cooperative. This blatantly unfair treatment of women has become so normalised that women themselves do not even question the system they have become a part of, and continue being subject to unequal treatment. One might think that this is just the situation in the Middle East; however, closer to home, developed countries like Japan maintain a culture of silence on rape – women are not offered the legal platform to fight for justice. Furthermore, in 2018, one of the most prestigious universities in Japan, Tokyo Medical University, admitted to changing admission test scores in order to admit more male students. The vast number of opportunities lost by women to ossified patriarchal mindsets and normalised practices that are overwhelmingly controlled by men signals that across the world, whether the country in question is authoritarian or democratic, the different genders are valued very differently, and some countries are a long way from establishing even a semblance of equality.

Moreover, media representation continues to perpetuate harmful and insidious gender stereotypes, which are roadblocks to achieving equal appreciation of different genders. Advertisers portray women as a ‘reward’ for men if they purchase and use the product or service being showcased, even in today’s society. As viewers become increasingly inundated by such videos of the same vein, it is likely that they form a flawed perception than this is the reality in everyday life: that women are merely a prized possession that men should try to earn. This increase in objectification of women is a sinister one for both genders. Influencers like Andrew Tate are overly glorified for their misogynistic comments, especially by boys in their teens. If boys think so little of women and do not even consider them as equal humans, think of the discriminatory actions they will start exhibiting when they grow up, without the fundamental knowledge that their perception of gender differences is extremely warped. Circulation of social media challenges – such as a challenge where girls attempt to show that their waist is smaller than the width of an A4-size sheet of paper – reinforces the view in young girls that women are valued more for their bodies rather than their skill and abilities. When such superficial misconceptions are instilled in the minds of young people, we enter a sinister situation where the men of tomorrow assert their dominance over women who exhibit little resistance, setting us years back in attempts to achieve gender parity, rendering so many feminist movements pointless. Hence, negative media influence is a significant roadblock to genders considering each other as equals.

Perhaps the most stark evidence that genders are still not valued equally would be the wage gap. Despite efforts in countries like Norway, Finland and Sweden to mandate pay transparency, and the passing of the Paycheck Fairness Act by Joe Biden in the US, the wage gap has not been eradicated. Across more than 50 countries where more women receive more education than men, the wage gap stands at a staggering 36%. Why is it that

despite so many legislative changes in the world, a woman earns less than a man despite working in the same profession? Analysing this difference more deeply, it appears that the root cause would be an ideological one: a large proportion of companies around the world still value the work done by a female employee to be inferior to the work done by a man. Once a female employee decides to start a family and become pregnant, managers regard her to be less productive and often attempt to relegate her to a lower position or prevent her from getting promotions even when she deserves it. There should be more flexibility for women when they are pregnant, instead of just evicting them from their roles. At home, women are still expected to shoulder most of the domestic work. In this modern era, the stress of juggling most of the household chores and work is an unfair burden on women, and this enables men to achieve career progression far more easily. Men need to acknowledge this stark divide and be willing to shoulder more responsibilities for their families. The fact that men do not value women's contribution as much is exemplified by the wage gap as it remains to be resolved despite widespread structural changes.

It should be acknowledged that there are positive trends in representation of women. For instance, films like *Hidden Figures* recognise the pivotal contributions of three African American women in NASA's first ever rocket launch. However, there remains an overwhelming trend where women are pictured as demure, submissive objects, both in fiction and in reality. Until this disturbing trend is put to an end, we cannot maintain that the genders are valued equally in our society today.

Comments

- *Content: Despite a wobbly start, this response grows in confidence and relevance. There is sustained effort to address the key term, "valued equally", and the response was generally supported by wide-ranging illustration which captured apt details (though some would benefit from greater detail – e.g. specifying some advertisers/videos in the first example of paragraph 4). Evaluation is also offered with some consistency, being particular incisive in paragraphs 3 and 4. Response also shows evidence of conceptual understanding.*
- *Language: Very good linguistic ability, with a variety/range of sentence structures, including some complex constructions. Vocabulary, too, is varied, though just short of the sophistication warranting the highest band.*

To what extent are different genders valued equally in today's society?

According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2018, it will take 200 years for the gender gap to disappear. The world is leaving \$12 trillion on the table because of this gap, according to McKinsey & Company. Yet, modern society has seen a rise in empowerment of females and awareness of male struggles in terms of expectations of men, in steps to ensure these two different genders are valued equally. From outdated sexist beliefs to the more liberal state we are in today, the improvements society has made to value each gender equally in areas like domestic roles, work and politics, cannot be ignored. However, there still exist various forms of gender discrimination and unfair practices that constrain me from declaring that genders are truly valued equally in today's society. Hence, I believe that despite steps undertaken to value each gender equally, the exhausting pressures faced by various genders suggest that different genders are still far from being valued equally in today's society.

It may be argued that different genders are valued equally in today's society because of the joint effort of many stakeholders in realising the potential in females. According to research by McKinsey & Company, companies with more women in leadership have also shown higher correlation to profitability and good financial performance, as well as fewer instances of fraud, corruption and financial reporting mistakes. This tells us that women play a valuable role in providing strong leadership, and this can be corroborated by the fact that more and more countries are having increasingly gender-balanced national cabinets. Rwanda's national cabinet is 60% female. In 2019, Sweden achieved gender balance in its national cabinet, with 12 men and 12 women holding ministerial positions. Also in 2019, France president Emmanuel Macron formed a gender-balanced cabinet, with 17 men and 17 women. This was seen as a significant step towards achieving gender parity in politics. Such examples of women and men being able to share equal value in political leadership has shown that men and women hold similar importance in leading their countries. The stepping up of female country leaders, for instance, Angela Merkel as Chancellor of Germany and Jacinda Ardern as prime minister of New Zealand, has shown that men and women play equally significant roles in political leadership and that people are willing to support both female and historically male leaders.

However, though gender parity has been achieved in political leadership in some countries, displaying the value of both men and women in leading in service to their countries, it is undeniable that women are less appreciated in professional areas than men. In the 2012 London Olympics, a news agency did a word cloud on the words most frequently used by TV commentators when describing athletes. It turned out that they used words that highlighted mental fortitude, for example "perseverance", "confident"

and “determined”, to describe men. In contrast, they preferred using words that focused on physical characteristics, for example “toned”, “sexy” and “skinny”, when describing women. Evidently, there is a stark contrast in the type of focus on males and females in the sports scene. The fact that women athletes are given pay as much as 10 times less than that of their male counterparts highlights the lack of spotlight and brand endorsement they are able to obtain for their professional sports attainment. Women in politics are similarly sidelined. Canadian journalist Jenn Goddu observed that journalists had a high tendency to focus on the domestic aspect of a politically active woman, such as her fashion style and daily habits, instead of her position on issues. Therefore, it can be seen that women are hardly getting the proper and deserved attention for the professional work they do. Another example to illustrate this is the findings by Quebec analyst Denis Monière, who analysed late evening newscasts on three national networks, and found that women’s views were solicited mainly in the framework of “average citizens”, rarely as experts. Political and economic success stories were also overwhelmingly masculine, and the number of female politicians was disproportionate to their number in parliament. As seen from the above, women’s views in the professional sphere lack appreciation from the media and public when compared to men’s. The deeply embedded implicit biases many hold with regard to women continue to undervalue women for the work they do, holding back society in our quest to recognise equal value in different genders.

In addition, the value of males in the domestic and social sphere is also undermined. In societies that are more patriarchal, men are confined to a narrow definition of what male success entails. To many, it still seems like the role of the father is less important than that of the mother, which may deprive fathers of the ability to form deep bonds with their children and family due to societal expectations that necessitate that they focus on work instead. For example, in court disputes for child custody, the mother is often favoured over the father, which suggests that males are stripped of respect in the domestic sphere. As these biases against males are further reinforced in the media, where males are often represented to be more concerned with work rather than their family, young males who grow up consuming such media may feel pressured to conform to societal expectations of toughness and strength, throwing themselves into work rather than focusing on being a present and loving father. The lack of emphasis on the importance of the father domestically can also be reflected in policies in countries like Japan and Korea, where less paternal leave is given than maternal leave, amongst other sexist policies. Even though research has shown that the presence of fathers in the early childhood years of their children has made a lasting positive impact on father-child relationships even after up to 20 years, there are still many in society who undermine the value of males as fathers, resulting in the continued disproportionate domestic value of men and women in today’s society.

Furthermore, it has been shown that women are unable to realise their full potential at work as their value at work is undermined. A 2020 survey of women in the industry showed that nearly half the respondents reported facing gender bias at work, including discrimination in hiring, promotion and pay. Women continue to face barriers due to

gender biases, which oftentimes manifest in the form of lower pay. An AWARE report on Singapore indicated that women earn a staggering \$640,000 less than their male counterparts in a span of 40 years. This is largely attributed to the deeply rooted gender stereotypes like that of mothers only being able to produce work of lower quality due to them having to juggle their work and their personal life. This, however, lacks evidence and hence is an unfair evaluation of working mothers who have to endure such gender stereotypes that undervalue the work they do. In fact, the motherhood penalty has been quantified by numerous studies to be a wage gap of thousands of dollars between women and working mothers in a lifetime. In contrast, having children does not affect males, according to a study on careers of men and women in Denmark, and hardly affects the types of jobs they gravitate towards. Females do, however, have proven value, such as producing meticulous work, creativity, and greater empathy in their leadership, amongst many others. Hence, the value of females at work is underappreciated, having prominent effects such as the wide wage gap between men and women that has lasted for decades. Although society has seen cutting back on explicit gender biases, as more are moving towards and acknowledging the need for a gender-balanced environment where men and women are equally valued, there exist many implicit biases deeply ingrained, stemming from things that surround people from a young age like traditions, norms and culture. They result in biases such as that of the assumed gender roles of women; that women focus mainly on their family and hence are less productive at work. These implicit biases can have the most detrimental impacts as they are invisible to the eye, yet dangerously etched in the minds of many, affecting the way people view women and the credit given to them. I thus believe that as long as such gender biases, both implicit and explicit, continue to exist, we will not see a society where both genders are truly equally valued.

In a nutshell, today's society is still far from being able to see equal value in different genders. Though the inherent nature of different genders, both physically and mentally, may cause the implicit association of gender roles, it is still essential to raise awareness of the importance of valuing different genders equally such that fairness and equality are enshrined in our society. Crucially, different stakeholders, such as the government, citizens and organisations, all play pivotal roles in ensuring society makes progress toward gender equality.

Comments

- *Content: Response shows good grasp of the question's terms, consistently making effort to engage with "value" and not just discussing treatment or discrimination. There is also effort to examine the causes (though not evenly discussed) and the impact of such disparity on value. Illustration is consistently provided and overall with apt detail. Effort at evaluation is also present at many points.*
- *Language: Very good, with apt and varied vocabulary as well as sentence structure variation. Expression is clear and generally confident. (Greater sophistication would have likely placed this in the top band.) Ideas flow clearly and logically.*

‘We should not be afraid of social media.’ Do you agree?

In 2019, an Australian teenager, Brenton Tarrant, carried out a lone-wolf terror attack, in what is now known as the Christchurch shootings. Upon investigation, the New Zealand Police Commission found that the teenager had been inspired by extremist views on the social media platform YouTube. This incident prompted many to think about whether we should be afraid of the influence and effect social media has on our lives. Idealists posit that, with the rapid advancement of our technology and greater government oversight, social media has become a safer platform for all of us to use and, as such, there is no need to be afraid of it. However, I am of the opinion that it is precisely because of these factors that we should fear social media even more and use it with precaution.

Idealists posit that with the rapid advancement of technology and with governments around the world implementing laws to combat harmful content on social media, social media has been made a safer place for everyone. Generally, there has been an increasing demand from the public to curb harmful content on social media platforms. As a result, social media companies have been investing large sums of money in more advanced technology in a bid to retain users. Such technology includes algorithms which can detect bots artificially amplifying certain viewpoints or “liking” certain comments. These forms of technology have also been improved in terms of their efficiency at cracking down on harmful content and limiting its spread. A recent example was how Meta was able to track ‘influence operations’ by China and Russia and take down such content in time, preventing thousands of users from being manipulated into accepting certain truths about the US elections and Russo-Ukrainian war. Apart from corporations playing a greater role, governments have also been capitalising on their legislative power to clamp down on harmful and dangerous content on social media. A local example would be the Protection of Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA), which aims to remove fake news on social media platforms. Such laws not only seek to remove harmful content, but also serve as a deterrence and prevents ill-intentioned actors from spreading harmful content for fear of repercussions. Therefore, online users are protected from harmful content as the frequency and likelihood of them coming into contact with such content is lower. As a result, people today may have less of a reason to be afraid of social media.

However, I would argue that it is precisely because of greater technological advancements and government intervention that we should be more afraid of social media. With the democratisation of media and with greater government oversight, users now have a greater burden to discern between objective news and highly biased news, which has the potential to skew our thoughts and our ideologies. It must be recognised that we now live in a post-truth era, where real news lies alongside fake news. In the past, we largely

obtained our news from mainstream news outlets and were relinquished to a role as passive consumers. Now, we play a more active role, having the ability to also publish our own news. As such, the information we obtain and process on social media can be false, as they are not subject to thorough fact-checking. This is exacerbated by the fact that governments also have more control over social media and play a greater role in filtering the content on the Internet, having a free rein in deciding what they permit users to see. One need not look further than to the example of TikTok, owned by Chinese company ByteDance. The government plays a heavy role in deciding what is shown on the feeds, skewing people's perception in a pro-Communist way in order to invoke patriotic sentiments, like how they prohibited reports on the Tiananmen incident on these platforms. As can be seen, even with greater government regulation, there still exists the threat of misuse of power to skew the viewpoints of Internet users, and therefore users have the reason to be afraid. Even in more democratic countries like Singapore, the laws enacted also grant the government the right to remove content that is seen as a threat to the ruling party. An example would be how POFMA was used to issue five warnings to content producers so that they would take down content criticising the People's Action Party. In the light of these events, users on social media should be more wary and cautious about the content they receive on these platforms, as they can be curated by governments and information can thus be misleading. It is also important to note how hard it can be for users to discern between the truth and false news on social media, given the abundance of content on these platforms. A survey done by the Nanyang Technological University in 2019 found that 7 in 10 users had spread misinformation, even though 5 in 10 claimed to be able to identify fake news. Therefore, there is more reason to fear social media nowadays given how it can be created in a way that is so realistic. The fact that our nation, which prides itself as a technologically advanced country, still has users that fall prey to fake news highlights how people around the world should be equally, or even more, afraid of the harms social media can bring to us.

Next, in our globalised world and increasingly diverse communities, we should be afraid of social media due to its immense potential in tearing apart the social fabric, which can result in social unrest. Generally, our world has become more globalised, with previously insular countries willing to form economic, military and political unions. This increasing cooperation between countries also mean that more people are moving away from countries they were born in, giving rise to increasingly diverse and different communities. While social media can be a vehicle to spread beneficial socio-political ideologies and ideals due to its virtual nature and its ability to spread information to all parts of the world within seconds. It can also be used as a tool to spread vitriol and divisive content quickly. Therefore, social media should be feared as some communities and minority groups could be victims of these harmful acts online and suffer as a result. A prominent example would be how then US President Donald Trump posted content labelling the coronavirus as "Kung Flu", targeting the Chinese as perpetrators of the pandemic. This incited xenophobic sentiments and instigated acts of violence against the Chinese such as the many hate crimes committed in many parts of America. Even if physical acts of violence do not occur as a result of divisive content, it could bring about feelings of animosity against

other groups, disabling one from feeling truly connected to the country. An example was how in 2020 a Singaporean Polytechnic student posted content about wanting to kill Muslims. Another example on social media showed a local lecturer confronting an interracial couple along Orchard road. All of these examples are testament to how social media can be misused by those with an intention to spread hate. This is exacerbated by the fact that social media has a large reach and its ability to propagate information in matter of seconds is astounding. Thus, even with laws such as Section 298 of the Penal Code charging those who spread content that harms the religious feelings of other parties, these laws are still ineffective in clamping down on such content. It is also important to recognise the ability of social media to cause societies and groups to turn on one another especially in a multiracial society like Singapore, with examples of how Preeti and Subhas released rap videos to criticise Chinese privilege in Singapore. While this may be good in the long run, in the short run, it can stir up feelings of hate, with the possible result of fragmenting our society. Hence, we should be afraid of social media.

Our reliance on social media also means that a large portion of our data is stored on the platform and thus we should be afraid of it as our data can be exploited and used against us. Generally, social media giants have collected our personal data so as to curate content for us, considering how it is also a profit-generating corporation which earns money through advertising. As a result, a large portion of our data can be exploited. An example would be the 2014 Cambridge Analytica scandal, exemplifying how Facebook sold profiles of up to hundreds of thousands of users to the Trump campaign, which allowed them to target possible swing voters and influence them to vote for Trump. Therefore, our data can be exploited, and we have a reason to be afraid.

In conclusion, while there are many reasons to be afraid of social media, it does not mean we should completely avoid it, especially in our technological age. Instead, we should use it with caution, keeping the downsides of it in mind.

Comments

Do give yourself time to conclude the essay well. Nonetheless, your response shows good awareness of the issue and there was concerted effort in linking the problems to fear, though the quality of these links were uneven. There was also a good range of examples employed, and certain features of social media were brought up to explain the dangers of the platform.

‘We should not be afraid of social media.’ Do you agree?

A few months ago, the US congressional hearing of TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew took the internet by storm. From expressing genuine concerns of the social media platform promoting dangerous acts to young people, to making wild accusations that the app can spy on its users from their mobile phone’s cameras, many Congressmen seemed in favour of completely banning TikTok in the United States. This sparked much dissent amongst hordes of TikTok users and creators, who felt entirely safe using the platform. Such users of social media platforms opine that the dystopian warnings about social media are but lofty assumptions, and believe that social media is working fine as it stands today. However, I posit that ignorance of the potential harms of social media is dangerous, and that we have to be vigilant and stay wary of social media.

Proponents of the argument claim that social media is at its core a means for one to socialise with friends and for entertainment, harmless activities that warrant no cause for worry. Over the past two decades or so, we have seen numerous social media platforms spring up almost out of nowhere, and which have since proliferated throughout the globe. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter have easily over a billion active users worldwide, and have become the most downloaded category of applications on mobile phones around the globe. Some social media users view these platforms as a way to communicate not just with friends, but also strangers. In a way, social media is viewed as the new medium to communicate for millennials and especially Gen-Zs. Indeed, many people have become very comfortable using social media platforms – sometimes, a little too comfortable. A case in point would be the social media platform Snapchat, which allows users to view their friends’ location in real time. There are features in this platform to view strangers’ locations, but that comes at the revelation of one’s own position in real time. With hundreds of millions of users worldwide, it is evident that some users feel no fear in sharing private details like their “live” location with complete strangers online, adopting the attitude of “What’s the worst that could happen?”. Hence with a perceived sense of security on social media platforms, some do not see a reason to be afraid when using it.

However, I opine that this is a false sense of security common among many social media users, especially of younger ages, simply because they are lucky enough not to experience the horrors of what social media can bring. Firstly, social media’s widespread adoption and guise of anonymity allows anyone to penetrate your life, psychologically or physically. Many social media platforms do not discriminate, that is, they allow anyone with an internet connection to sign up for an account. This opens the floodgates to all types of people, from criminal organisations to serial killers and terrorists, as well as child

predators. Furthermore, the veil of anonymity that social media platforms promise to their users encourages such malicious actors to carry out their intended activities, since the risk-to-reward ratio is so favourable. “What’s the worst that could happen?” One can simply delete their account and try again if exposed, without consequence for vile actions. While a lone stalker may be bearable, a congregation of keyboard warriors against could be too much to bear psychologically. An example would be a blogger who wrote about his experience as a keyboard warrior – until the hoards turned on him. He described a seemingly fun and light-hearted time criticising others for their controversial views and feeling morally superior about it after, but when he was on the receiving end, it was a harrowing experience, leading him to take a digital detox to rid himself of the hate speech and negativity directed towards him. This dual perspective of how anyone can become a target for social justice warriors online gives testament to the dangers of social media to one’s mental health and wellbeing. The torment, unfortunately, does not stop there. A case in point would be an American teenage girl’s horrifying experience a few years back, where she was stalked to her home by a follower on her social media page. The interaction ended in the young influencer’s father stepping in and fatally shooting the stalker. This obviously came as a horrifying shock to the girl and her family, who took a break off social media for a few years. Hence, the dangers of malicious actors on social media are a real and persistent threat, so it is wise to be wary of social media.

Next, we need not look further to social media companies who may exploit our personal data for profits. Hidden in the lengthy and unreasonable terms and conditions clause which social media users must accept to enter the platform probably lies a clause allowing social media companies to collect and use people’s private data. A decade ago, many people were ignorant of such a clause, and therefore the Cambridge Analytica scandal in 2016 shocked the community and led to a deep probe by authorities into Facebook (now Meta). A decade and millions of dollars in fines later, we still cannot be sure if or how much of our data social media companies are providing to third-party websites. For example, Meta’s 1-billion-dollar deal to acquire chat messaging platform WhatsApp surprised the business community, since WhatsApp seemed to provide no economic value as a free-to-download app without advertisements. However, in recent years, explicit links have been made between results on users’ Facebook and Instagram (child companies of Meta) “For You” pages, and what users chatted with friends on WhatsApp. This link between Meta monitoring users’ private conversations on WhatsApp and providing data to third-party companies as an indication of user profile was refuted by Meta numerous times, but somehow the observations are not matching the claims. While users should not panic and form conspiracy theories of social media platforms like Meta tracking our every word, or the Orwellian “spy camera” theories that US congressmen propose about TikTok, users must be aware of such data-compromising actions that social media companies have participated in, and may be conducting in the present. Hence, it still stands that users should be concerned about social media platforms inappropriately using their personal data, and take action to prompt changes in malpractice.

Finally, social media algorithms are dangerous as they can strengthen users' false perceptions or misguided ideologies, and so users have to constantly reflect and make sure they do not fall into such traps. To say that there is a ton of content on social media is an understatement. Weaved between the harmless videos of children's cartoons and self-helps advice lies the category of illegal and violent content, such as acts of terrorism, underground criminal activities, and more. While there are professional social media screeners whose jobs are to filter out such explicit content, some still slip through the cracks. While acts of violence or sexually explicit content is harmful especially for young eyes, arguably the most dangerous is content with a purpose to radicalise. A young user may view such content, and because of social media algorithms promoting more violent content to the adolescent, it could create an artificial echo chamber for the user, now with their worldview shaped by radical behaviour. This is further exacerbated with the prominence of "friends" on social media serving as social affirmation to such users, encouraging them to turn ideas into action. A very real case happened right here in Singapore in February 2021, where two teenage boys were detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA). They were participating in terrorist activities online, simulating real-life shootouts and suicide bombing on social gaming platform Roblox. Furthermore, one of the teenage boys was planning to carry out a suicide bombing in a mosque in Singapore, posing a real threat to society. The teenagers were apparently radicalised by a member of the terrorist organisation ISIS, who communicated with and indoctrinated them via social messaging platform Discord. This case study aptly points out how social media may not just be a source of danger but also a tool to radicalise users and turn them into dangers to society, posing a large threat to national security. Thus, users should be especially mindful of the content loop that social media algorithms trap users in, and that we as friends should look out for peers if they seem to be absorbed in the perilous universe of social media.

In a nutshell, I feel that social media brings many conveniences and technological improvements to the lives of its users. However, like all things are, this comes at a cost, whether it is the threat posed by malicious actors on social media platforms, misuse of our personal data by companies, or the danger of being caught up in our own echo chamber and becoming a menace to society. Avoiding such pitfalls is possible. With a broader perspective of the ills of social media, and a little healthy scepticism, maybe one day, we need not be afraid of social media anymore.

Comments

Clear argumentation and good awareness of issues, with a focus on the question's key terms. Your first paragraph can be better developed: instead of simply stating how young people trust social media platforms, explain how and why some features of the platforms or some features of the media landscape today produce his view. Your last two body paragraphs were much stronger – well done!

‘We should not be afraid of social media.’ Do you agree?

“73.9% of statistics found on social media are inaccurate.” (Source: Instagram). As much as this tongue-in-cheek statement may seem facetious, it does illustrate a pressing concern: social media has been a promoter of fake news and misinformation, among other things. Yet, even while this may be the case, social media has also been leveraged as a driving force for good. It is therefore my opinion that while we certainly should not be ecstatic about social media, fear may not always be appropriate either.

Detractors will no doubt point to the potential social media has in promoting misinformation, often with tragic consequences. We should, they will argue, therefore be afraid of social media because of the danger that this poses. Certainly, overseas, social media is at risk of degenerating into a cesspool of virulent lies, so much so that comedian John Oliver even quipped that “toilets have a purity and integrity that Facebook lacks”. Common examples are many: we might recall how Trump leveraged Facebook as a platform to spread rumours and unsubstantiated pseudo-solutions to COVID-19, even advising readers to drink bleach at one stage. Or we might point to conspiracy theories spread daily through social media: the anti-vaxxer movement claiming that vaccines cause autism (or more recently that the COVID-19 vaccine is unsafe) provides yet another example. All of these examples illustrate that social media is threatening for a very simple reason: people trust social media influencers. Yet, because the selling point of social media is that it gives everyone – regardless of qualifications, regardless even of conviction – the ability to disseminate their views, everyone can become an influencer; anyone can gain trust. This poses danger, for when people trust influencers over credible sources, they make poor decisions that threaten themselves, their community, and the world at large. Those who trusted Trump might drink bleach, a toxic substance, in a potentially fatal act. Those who trusted anti-vaxxers might refuse vaccinations for themselves or their children, putting their closest relatives at risk of potentially fatal or crippling diseases like measles, mumps and rubella (MMR), or COVID-19 – not to mention weakening our herd immunity and therefore increasing the chance that those unable to be vaccinated because of immune deficiencies, our most vulnerable groups, will contract these too. Social media, promoting misinformation, threatens our health and safety, and especially at times of crisis (a global pandemic) when this very trust is most essential; when, to paraphrase Roosevelt, the very thing we have to fear is fear itself, fear that undermines trust in advice aiding both ourselves and our community, it is especially threatening. Perhaps we should fear social media for the threat it poses.

But the threat does not even stop there. Detractors would further allege that we should fear social media because social media poses a threat to our societies and communities. Notably, Facebook played a role in fracturing Burmese society between Rohingya Muslims and the majority Buddhist population. As the UNHRC (United Nations Human Rights

Council) noted, it was a preferred “instrument for those seeking to spread hate”, and by doing so may have inflamed tensions culminating in massacre and genocide. We hear of figures like Wirathu, the “Buddhist Bin Laden”, whose Facebook posts alleging (falsely) that Muslims had raped Burmese women or wished to take over the country sparked protests and riots in major cities like Mandalay. This threat of fracturing our society or promoting partisan violence is not restricted to areas with deep ethnic or religious divides either. Even in America, the eponymous “melting pot” of cultural diversity, whose motto, “E Pluribus Unum” is a testament to respect for difference and tolerance, social media was able to stir up hatred. Take the case of the January 6 riot and assault on the US Capitol, endangering the lives of its leaders and lawmakers, which was inflamed by social media posts by Trump ordering supporters to “stop the steal”. This is not even the only case where social media threatened societies. Others can be found in the echo chambers found on sites like Reddit, 4chan, and 8chan. By polarising opinion, and reinforcing such opinions with similar, repeated posts, they contribute to the climate of political tensions found in America, a land where “lethal partisanship” is overtly announced – the practice of killing (or being willing to kill) political opponents. Given that social media companies are for-profit bodies, driven by the profit incentive alone, we cannot even blame them for this. Extreme feelings attract and retain attention, after all, and algorithms are designed to appeal to what readers want – their political and cultural biases and identities – instead of what they need. This self-reinforcing cycle is vicious. In short, because social media promotes extreme positions and because it is incentivised to polarise opinions for user engagement, it can lead to groups willing and able to commit violence against their opponents, threatening their safety and security. Especially in a climate of hyper-polarisation, where moderatism is increasingly falling out of favour and mainstream parties move towards either the right or left, the threat that social media plays in nurturing faction and hatred cannot simply be dismissed. We should fear these aspects of social media.

For all of this, however, there have been signs of positive change online. For one, social media is starting to take misinformation seriously; for another, the audience is increasingly more critical of such positions, which (while there remain significant challenges to be met) may be a positive sign that we do not need to fear social media as much. As regards the first point, the fact that so many examples of social media’s harms and threats are high-profile incidents means that they generate significant backlash and pressure for change. Take the Christchurch Call to Action: a self-radicalised Islamic terrorist’s actions catalysed global leaders (from the presidents of New Zealand and France to industry leaders) to take action and to elucidate a firm position on the need to take misinformation – whether it be the kind that directly hurts oneself, or the kind which radicalises and threatens society – seriously. Or take Myanmar’s case again. Although Facebook previously had insufficient Burmese-speakers to vet content, Zuckerberg publicly admitted at a hearing before the US Congress that more needed to be done, committing to hiring 60 more to remove inappropriate content, and increasing this by a factor of 15 from its previous count of 4. The fact that companies are implementing more fail-safes is praiseworthy and will go some way towards mitigating the significant threat which social media poses. Perhaps more praiseworthily, the people and users are becoming more aware of the need to stamp out

misinformation, aided by corporate bodies and governmental systems. Education systems increasingly prioritise skills like critical thinking, actively encouraging readers to consider and evaluate what they read online. For instance, Finland has started young, rolling out such skills to children as early as primary school; in Singapore, such skills form a critical component of the A-level General Paper course. In short, because action is being taken at all levels of the information food chain, from producer to consumer, the effectiveness of misinformation is likely to decrease as people evaluate whether it is reliable and decide against sharing it: to quote a WhatsApp advertisement, to “share joy, not rumours” (or even more preferably, do not even see it in the first place as it is filtered out!). With this threat mitigated, social media can be less scary.

Certainly, detractors will note that this is weakened by lacunae and loopholes in monitoring systems. Critically, the use of foreign languages is an aspect which may be neglected because misinformation and hate speech is so language-specific. To return to Myanmar, the Facebook AI meant to sort through posts and remove those deemed unacceptable was defeated by the Burmese language. Even where tools to eliminate and filter out inappropriate content are present, some would query whether they are even usable or implementable at all. With the democratisation of the Internet and social media (Web 3.0) prioritising users’ control over their own data, and direct interaction between computers without passing through the middleman of corporations, we would also lose the oversight which such companies can provide. For an example of this phenomenon, look to messaging apps like WhatsApp, where user data is encrypted and visible only to the recipient. If social media develops along similar lines (as the advent of Blockchain technology suggests), even the best regulatory platform will be futile if it cannot be applied. It seems at first sight that social media will remain threatening. Nevertheless, solutions can and will be found to such issues. For one, this only attacks regulation, while education continues to remain a feasible and implementable solution in countering the threat social media poses and the fear it inspires. For another, regulatory mechanisms already exist over direct device-to-device communication in China’s Golden Shield Project, which has filtered and removed Weibo messages. If democratised, made transparent, and responsible only for removing messages and posts that are misinformation or which incite hatred, it might be a feasible solution. That there is pressure for countering this threat, and that feasible solutions like Singapore’s POFMA have emerged (to authorise correction of misinformation) from this political capital is undeniable, and while there remains a balance to be struck between liberty of speech and misinformation, we are trending upwards. There is therefore cause to view social media with hope and not completely with fear.

Indeed, social media could even be embraced for the positive good it has made in the world. Take causes from #HeForShe, #MeToo, and #NeverAgain, to #BlackLivesMatter and #TheShowMustBePaused. All of these are examples of hashtags in which social media has played a role in highlighting misbehaviour, exerting pressure, and even demanding justice and change. After all, social media has an enormous audience of up to 3.8B users, a number rapidly rising as users from all over the world – including industrialising, less economically-developed countries – gain access to a phone and an internet connection. Combined with agreements that make it free to use – apps like Facebook do not use up mobile data in

some regions – its scope and reach is unprecedented and rising daily, providing a means by which users can engage a global community. Mobilising mass opinion, moreover, can be an essential way of applying pressure with public shaming of unrepentant figures. Consider Tucker Carlson, for instance: following comments likening women to dogs, numerous hashtags like #FireTuckerCarlson emerged to fight for women’s rights. It is no doubt true that detractors have challenged such movements as something to be feared because of the lack of due process, with the appearance of impropriety being enough to reject those shamed online from jobs and services. Take the case of the “Auntie-Christ”, or the “Aunt from Hell”, whose suing of her nephew for \$127000 was used to shame her – despite this being her only recourse to obtain insurance money to cover treatment and her nephew even consenting – and even to impact her career options. Yet even this counterargument does not stand when we recall that as few as 2% of allegations are false. While, therefore, it may be feared by the rich, powerful, and privileged because it is society’s challenge to their misbehaviour, as part of society, we must remember that the reason that cases of false accusation are so notable is because they are rare, and that for the most part, we have nothing to fear and everything to gain if we welcome social media advocacy. As the majority, our views are more significant.

In conclusion, there are demerits of social media: misinformation, radicalisation, and in some rare cases, unjust convictions in the court of public opinion. These may be enough to provoke fear, but we (if we are reasonable) must also remember that there are reasons not to fear too, like improvements in systems to tackle misinformation, improvement in the quality of readers and audiences who are more capable of rejecting misinformation, and social media being even a weapon against fear – the fear privileged classes and groups bring to bear with their misbehaviour and unfettered injustice. Things are improving, and while a guarded attitude that recognises the threat may be appropriate, one that is simply terrified will deny us both the positives of social media and any possibility of improving upon its weaknesses. Perhaps, then, it falls to us to reject fear, and advance towards the brighter future which social media can usher in with us, tackling problems and risks, and leveraging strengths. Only then can we demand that no more than 0% of statistics on social media be false.

Comments

- *Content: Kheng Hshin, your essay demonstrates clear understanding of the terms and scope of the question, with some subtlety. There are fully appropriate and wide-ranging illustrations developed to support your points. There is also some demonstration of conceptual understanding. It is a well-balanced discussion that considers differing perspectives. Conclusion is summative with an attempt at being nuanced, you can try supporting it more.*
- *Language: Few serious errors and meaning is not impeded. There is a good variety of sentence structures, but not all attempts are accurate. Choice of vocabulary is consistently appropriate and varied. Paragraphing decisions make the argument difficult to follow, so you might want to consider a more effective way to paragraph and sequence your points.*

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