

KALEIDOSCOPE



AN iGLOBE PUBLICATION

Editor's Foreword

Kaleidoscope has always been a treasure trove of essays, an invaluable resource for students wishing to improve their essay writing skills. It is a collection of student-written essays, compiled and edited by our very own student-led editorial team for your perusal. As you browse through this selection of thoughtful essays, I hope they provide some inspiration on how to further hone your essay-writing skills. No essay in this collection is perfect, but every piece contains learning points which are valuable.

This year's issue of Kaleidoscope includes relevant events that occurred in 2021, helping you to keep up to date on the latest developments, in order to craft a well-rounded essay which comports with recent events. It is critical that, along with improving your essay-writing skills, you understand how these happenings help shape the ideas and arguments for your essay.

However, perhaps most importantly, Kaleidoscope contains a vast spectrum of ideas and opinions. By looking through all the viewpoints, you will be able to gain new insights into the current landscape of the world, and thus develop a more nuanced understanding of all that is happening in the world right now. It is my hope that this will be greatly informative and helpful for you in developing a strong personal voice.

Life is a continuous journey of learning and growth; may this compilation aid you in your quest of navigating the pathways ahead!

Yours Sincerely,

Joy Shammah Chua, 21S33
Chief Editor



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Culture & the Arts

“

**Art should comfort the disturbed
and disturb the comfortable.**

”

Cesar A. Cruz

Dean of Secondary Schools Program
at Harvard University

2021 Events in Culture & the Arts

11 March: Beeple's US\$69 million NFT sale

Artist Mike Winkelmann, better known as Beeple, made history by selling a virtual artwork titled 'The First 5,000 Days' as a non-fungible token (NFT). This used blockchain technology to verify ownership of digital assets. The 40-year-old American digital artist sold the art piece for over US\$69 million at a British auction house named Christie's, generating excitement about how this heralded a more promising, prosperous future for artists.

Source: <https://www.theverge.com/2021/3/11/22325054/beeple-christies-nft-sale-cost-everydays-69-million>

23 March: Banksy's artwork sold for charity

An artwork painted by Banksy sold for £16.7 million at the auction house Christie's. The amount raised was reported to be donated to various charities and health organisations under the National Health Service in England that struggled with providing healthcare during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/mar/23/banksys-nhs-covid-gift-superhero-nurse-sold-for-record-167m>

25 April: Chloé Zhao made Oscar history

Chinese-born filmmaker Chloé Zhao was the first woman of colour to win Best Director, and just the second woman to win the award at the Oscars 2021. She won for her film 'Nomadland', a drama about American retirees who follow seasonal employment while living out of their vans.

Source: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/chloe-zhao-makes-history-with-best-director-oscar-win-for-nomadland>

22 May: Conclusion of the 2021 Eurovision Song Contest

The 2020 Eurovision Song Contest was postponed to 2021 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and was held in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. It was won by a band from Italy called Måneskin. Italy was only the second member of the 'Big Five', a group of five countries that provided the most funding to Eurovision, to win. The Big Five's ability to auto-qualify for the contest's Finals has long drawn flak from critics, who have pointed at the group's historically abysmal showings at Eurovision.

Source: <https://eurovision.tv/event/rotterdam-2021>

23 July: Delayed start of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics

At the opening ceremony of the summer Games, after a year of delays and uncertainty, Japanese singer Misa performed her country's national anthem, 'Kimigayo' in Tokyo-based fashion designer Tomo Koizumi's ruched rainbow gown, made from dozens of layers of recycled organza fabric. However, there were many who protested the idea of having the Olympics during the Covid-19 pandemic, and were worried about a potential superspreader event occurring. After the Tokyo Olympics ended, reports found that organisers threw away \$45,500 worth of medical equipment, including surgical masks and sanitiser, causing a public uproar. Citing no place to store the equipment, officials were reportedly not given any clear instructions on what to do with the excess equipment. While the spectacle was enjoyed by many around the world, the considerations of holding a sporting event while the pandemic was still raging was called into question.

Source: <https://www.reuters.com/article/olympics-2020-waste-idCNL4N2Q22YI>

18 September: The Arc de Triomphe was wrapped in fabric

The Arc de Triomphe landmark in Paris, France was wrapped in its entirety silver-blue fabric and bound by red ropes for two weeks in 2021, with the featured colours matching France's iconic tricolour flag. The intent of the artwork remained ambiguous, but some interpreted it as a commentary of liberation from propagandised state symbols and art. Understandably, this piece of conceptual art drew a mixed response from the French public.

Source: <https://www.frieze.com/article/christo-and-jeanne-claude-larc-de-triomphe-wrapped>

15 November: Kaws exhibition at Marina Bay floating platform resumed after brief legal tussle

American artist Kaws, known for his colourful and cartoonish signature figurines that have become popular sensations, was slated to have an exhibition in Singapore run for two weeks featuring a giant inflatable version of his signature mascot 'Companion'. This ran into a temporary roadblock due to disputes over the right to exhibit the figure – hinting at the sometimes-thorny commercial interests which make the display of art possible in the first place. The suit was eventually dismissed, allowing the Singaporean public to experience and enjoy this artwork.

Source: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/kawsholiday-exhibition-to-resume-after-court-lifts-earlier-injunction>

16 November: Netflix show 'Squid Game' became Netflix's most streamed show

'Squid Game', a Korean show which was exclusively streamed on Netflix, garnered 1.65 billion hours of viewing after 28 days following its premiere, becoming the most streamed Netflix

show of all time. It featured a group of 456 desperate participants and children's games with deadly stakes, showcasing many aspects of Korean culture, from nursery rhymes to local games. The enticing show has helped spread Korean culture worldwide, promoting the prominence of Asian cultures in a world previously dominated by western styles of living.

Source: <https://variety.com/2021/digital/news/squid-game-all-time-most-popular-show-netflix-1235113196/>

19 November: Adele released first new album in six years, titled '30'

After an absence from the music scene of over six years, popular British singer-songwriter Adele has returned with another album of songs featuring heartbreak and anguish, titled '30'. The album, which was preceded by her chart-topping ballad 'Easy on Me', quickly became the best-selling record of 2021; however, in a sign of how music consumption have shifted towards streaming, it was the only record of the year to sell over one million copies, and was also her album with the most lacklustre sales.

Source: <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/pop-star-ranking/2022-january/adele-s-worst-selling-album-is-still-the-year-s-biggest-record.html>

20 December: 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' broke records with the second highest opening at the US domestic box office

The movie 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' sold US\$260 million worth of tickets in the domestic box office. This movie, centred around the development of Peter Parker's psyche, also featured call-backs to previous Spider-Man movies that pleased franchise fans. Such a sentiment evidently struck a chord with the general public as despite the Omicron variant's emergence, its domestic box office numbers were second only to arguably the most anticipated movie of the 2010s, 'Avengers: Endgame'.

Source: <https://deadline.com/2021/12/spider-man-no-way-home-50m-preview-easily-pandemic-record-all-time-for-sony-100m-friday-likely-1234898486/>

'There is little value to the arts.' How far do you agree?

Poon Zheng Lei Ryan 21A11

In the twenty-first century, the conceptualisation of the term 'arts' has certainly come a long way. The arts can be seen as the hallmark of civilizations across the globe, with historical artefacts dating as far back as recorded human existence. With the seemingly perennial existence of arts, it has gone through many shifts throughout humanity's existence – with more modern forms of art including books, cartoons and songs. The existence of arts has polarised many, with some propagating the idea that arts serve little value to humanity. While I agree that arts may not be an immediate recourse in times of crisis, and that there are certain instances where art has gone too far, to make a reductive statement that arts have little or no value is simply parochial. People need to realise that the very intrinsic nature of the arts is one which serves as a medium for expression, which brings about numerous benefits – be it as a unifying factor in times of crisis, advocacy on pressing societal issues or even as a political medium for propagating dissent. Despite the many different forms arts can take, the commonality amongst all mediums is its facilitation of what makes mankind truly mankind, and thus I opine that the value of arts far outweighs its irrelevance or detriments, and it serves great value to mankind.

Despite my argument for the intrinsic value of arts, I agree that arts do not serve as an immediate recourse in times of crisis. In times of crisis, what most people desperately try and seek is an immediate, tangible solution to alleviate the predicament they find themselves in – and not poetry to help them express their feelings. This is exemplified in the 2012 earthquakes that shook Japan and the world. With the earthquake resulting in many fatalities, casualties, damaged infrastructure and collapsed buildings, Japan desperately sought tangible aid, which other countries so altruistically provided. Many countries, such as Singapore, offered Japan humanitarian aid in the form of volunteers to help extract casualties from the rubble and resources for the homeless. A more recent example would be the coronavirus pandemic which saw scientists from around the world frantically scurry to find a vaccine which would help eradicate the spread of such a contagious disease. Thus, I acknowledge that other platforms like science and humanitarian aid may serve more value in the short run. However, it definitely does not serve as an ultimate panacea for the crisis. Arts are what unifies people in times of crisis, ensuring that people's hopes do not falter, and serving as a morale booster, which I will expound on later in my essay. Without the arts, a humanity being saved is no longer worth saving – it is what allows us to maintain hope even in the darkest of times.

Secondly, the value that art provides can be mitigated and undermined when the lines between artistry and civility are blurred. In the process of self-expression and advocacy, there are certain artists who can be deemed as crossing the lines, obfuscating the demarcation between self-expression and the heretical, or even the sacrilegious. Many of these perceived socially unacceptable acts stem from performative artistry, where artists utilise their own body as a form of self-expression. An example of this is in 1984, where contemporary artist Marina Abramovic attempted to illuminate the dark and morbid nature of humanity and interpersonal connections through performative art. She then proceeded to place a total of seventy-two objects in front of her, including a gun and a knife, and allowed her audience to do whatever they wanted to her with the weapons and objects provided.

What started as a timid experiment quickly transcended the boundaries of safety. Accorded with this prerogative, some of the audience began ripping and tearing off her clothes with the knife provided, with a few even threatening to take her life. Thus, in my opinion, the value of art is undermined if the magnum opus of an artist involves sadomasochism of the infliction of harm upon themselves or others. Arts should purely serve as a medium for self-expression, and not bring about any harm. However, such instances are rarely documented, and should not take away the value that arts still serve to us.

Despite my belief that arts do not serve as an immediate recourse, or that there are some instances of artistry where the harm outweighs the values, arts as a whole still bring about much value to humankind, and these values serve as the hallmark of civilisation. As aforementioned, the arts firstly serve as a unifying source of hope and expression, especially during times of crisis. One example with currency and close to home would be the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, one which still impacts our lives till this very day. During the circuit breaker phase last year, where Singaporeans were prohibited from leaving their homes for social gatherings or reasons deemed as gratuitous, many Singaporeans experienced extreme boredom, loneliness, solitude and bleakness. Thus, a group of students from Hwa Chong Junior College's English Literature Club published a list of poems pertaining to the solitary nature of life amidst the coronavirus pandemic. This collection of student-written poems had an extensive outreach to the community, allowing Singaporeans from all over the country to tap into their emotions and acknowledge their negative emotions. However, such instances of solidarity are not limited to our country alone. In Scotland, a video of a man playing a rendition of John Lennon's 'Imagine' in his backyard has gone viral around the internet. Despite their country being under lockdown, with physical face-to-face interactions prohibited, his neighbours could be seen in the video cheering from their various backyards and singing along to his rendition. It is these little anecdotal moments that serve as affirmation of the forged camaraderie amongst all of humankind in times of crisis, facilitated and exemplified by the arts.

Secondly, the arts can be utilised by the public to advocate for pressing societal issues that society would otherwise have the proclivity to gloss over and ignore. The arts serve as a way of ensuring that everyone's opinion can be heard – thus its inherent value in facilitating self-expression – and that more pertinent issues can be lifted from obscurity and brought into the light. In 2020, amidst the backdrop of the coronavirus pandemic, it came as no secret that there have been rampant and serious issues of mental health across the globe being on a steady decline. In light of this, artistes Marshmello and Halsey published a song titled 'It's ok not to be ok'. Such an evocative and emotive song served to underscore a very clear message as explicitly stated in the title. Halsey mentioned that she wanted the public to acknowledge how they were feeling. As stated in the title, it was okay not to be okay. Whatever onslaught of emotions the public were facing, be it sadness, sorrow, anxiety, happiness or grieving: the song served as an enduring affirmation that emotional vulnerability is the hallmark of civilisation; why we as humans depend so much on others. Furthermore, the song was published on World Suicide Prevention Day, sending a message that there was no shame in reaching out for help when needed, and to further illuminate how pressing and pertinent the issue of suicide has become in recent times. Apart from mental health issues, another felicitous example is the book 'Pride and Prejudice' by Jane Austen, which brought to light the dangers of a patriarchal society, serving as a social commentary on how our society is dangerously on course to such an outcome. Thus, the arts serve as a cathartic medium for discussion of societal issues which would otherwise be often obfuscated, ignored or glossed over. These artworks are what allow expression of what would

otherwise be deemed as issues many were uncomfortable talking about. Thus, it is in this that the intrinsic value of the arts is once again illuminated, in that it allows for expression of what would not be normally expressed, leading to greater societal awareness and cognisance.

Lastly, the arts can also serve as a political medium, propagating resistance to the political injustices deemed prevalent and pressing. In the recent 2021 coup in Myanmar, when the military launched a coup against the incumbent Aung San Suu Kyi and took power, many in the domestic and international community were shocked and indignant at such blatant procedural disregard and ethical breach. Thus, in response, a group of political activists started using art as a medium to express their discontent and resistance to the military junta through the form of paintings. These paintings received much recognition from across the globe. Another example of arts as a political statement was when George Orwell published his book '1984'. This moral and political allegory served as a warning to the societal detriments brought about by the complete evisceration of civil liberties in a totalitarian dictatorship. Thus, it is these instances which demonstrate the value of arts as a check and balance to the incumbent. It serves as a recourse for citizens pushed to the brink by the incumbent's ineptitude, and as a means for expression of dissent.

In conclusion, the intrinsic value of the arts is one that many people appreciate, with the perennial existence of art testament to this statement. It is what conjoins humanity in allowing us to tap into our viscerality, and into our emotions through a cathartic medium of self-expression. Regardless of what form the arts can take, its intrinsic value of expression is one too great to be ignored. Without arts, the world would not be one worth living in.

Comments:

Thoughtful and insightful points that are backed by a good knowledge of the issue at hand. Keep up the good work! Argument can be stronger in your consideration of Opposing View – better examples needed there.

‘There is little value to the arts.’ How far do you agree?

Lin Jing Yang 21S44

Throughout history, art has woven itself into our lives and culture, from hieroglyphics such as cave and wall paintings to opera and theatrical performances, from Tang Dynasty poetry to classical and modern music. The arts come in many forms and styles - whether visual, audio, or literary - and have been present where mankind was present, and is part of our livelihood and culture. Its value as a part of humanity and our humanness cannot be understated. However, as the world goes through a scientific awakening and industrial revolution, it is now driven by scientific development and economic growth. There are people who believe that the arts - being a form of emotional expression - is a hindrance to modern growth, due to it being seemingly valueless materially, and thus unable to contribute to the cold pursuit of capitalist expansion. Seemingly true as that may seem, because of the modern and fast-paced way of life we have, it is all the more important to embrace the value of the arts. They are a necessity for long-term survival, inspiration for the next generation of innovators, and a platform for political commentary to make the world a better place.

Some believe that the arts are valueless because they are a bother to scientific advancement and economic growth. It seemingly does not directly contribute to our modern economies. Take for instance Singapore half a century ago. Singapore was an island nation riddled with poverty and disease. The government had to take a utilitarian approach to build the nation as fast as possible. Forms of art rarely made people rich as people were caught up with surviving. China too, in 1978, opened up due to its economic reforms. Deng Xiaoping's 'growth at all costs' ideology ushered in a boom in China's economy through pursuit of industry, trade, investment and scientific development. Hence, it is easy to see why the arts can be neglected as a source of development and growth for many countries and their peoples, as it does not really align with the forces of today's global economy in prioritising trade, industry and finance. Thus, it can be seen as being of little value.

Moreover, people believe that the fast-paced life of today makes art of little value as it is a waste of time that is so precious in the rapidly evolving global landscape, of quickly evolving jobs scopes, areas of education, and revolutionary digitalisation of almost every facet of our lives. Because of this time factor, people find it hard to stop for a moment to appreciate the arts. Poor work-life balance in countries such as Japan and Singapore causes some people to bring their work home, leading to overstress and burnout. Students around the world seemingly have no time to read; appreciation of the arts and literature takes time and people feel that they can be more productive at work. Therefore, people believe that the arts have very little value as they have no place in our modern society.

However unnecessary and of little value the arts may seem to have, they are essential and in fact of extremely high value when we look beyond development and economic growth. Firstly, the arts are necessary for us to survive. Since evolution began, art has taken an uncanny form as a survival tool – beauty. Animals and early humans alike are trained to recognise beauty versus ugliness, and thus are able to pick out ripe from rotten food, or choose the 'right' mate. Art, in the form of cave paintings and carvings, served as tools to pass on information for generations. The applications of art

in the form of survival are countless, even in the modern world. The matchbox housing common to urban cities have rather boring edifices, which have proven to heighten boredom and increase heart rates, leading to higher rates of anxiety, stress and depression. Moreover, it has been found that patients who were placed in hospital wards with furnishings and decorations recovered on average three days faster than patients whose wards were unfurnished with little to no decoration. Art and the beauty of it is no doubt the reason why Singapore is building more and more green spaces, to improve overall mood and productivity. This intrinsic value in art is a connection that we have in nature, and cannot be overlooked.

The arts are also not of little value because they directly contribute to growth in the form of innovation. The arts, in the form of science fiction, share a never-ending loop of inspiration with scientific development. Science fiction writers were inspired by the technological advancements of their time. In the 1800s, Jules Verne was fascinated by the light bulb, electricity, submarines and space travel. His dreams of travelling 'to the moon and around the moon' was eventually fulfilled by the Apollo programme two generations later. Science fiction and awe-inspiring art, movies and literature alike such as 'The Martian' are here to inspire the next generation of scientists and spur humankind to the next level. Children get inspired, build the actual thing they watched in the movies or read in the books, and voilà, it becomes a reality. Hence, the arts are of extremely high value as they contribute to growth through innovation and inspiration.

Lastly, perhaps the arts' highest value is its avenue for political commentary, to make the world a better place. Many writers and artists silently protest against governments whom they think are mistreating their people, or against groups of people, or simply to raise awareness about an issue. They do so by writing and creating stories that might mirror or expose what really happens in real life. George Orwell's 'Animal Farm' and '1984' denounce governments' lies and hypocrisies. Anti-apartheid and anti-colonialist works such as 'Cry, the Beloved Country' by Alan Paton and 'The River Between' by Ngugi Wa Thiong'O expose atrocities and corruption of mankind in that era. Ai Weiwei, a Chinese artist, is an activist for democracy and human rights, and used many artistic elements to criticise China and its violations. Art has one of the highest values here in the form of raising awareness, and with the aim of making the world a better place for everyone. If art is able to directly change society for the better, it is thus of extremely high value.

In conclusion, although art on the surface seems to have no value in its contributions to modern day pursuit of scientific development and economic growth, it has a greater value beyond what initially meets the eye: survival, innovation and political commentary.

Comments:

Persuasively argued and well supported with examples. Some nuance in considering "how far" the arts has value would have added depth to the discussion. For example, is the value universal? Are certain groups in certain situations more likely to resonate with the arts? Nevertheless, a good effort.

'There is little value to the arts.' How far do you agree?

Chu Xuan Xuan 21546

From age-old cavemen drawings to the traditional songs of the Yoruba tribes, the arts come in diverse forms. Today, the most common art forms we engage with are literature, sculptures, plays, paintings and films. With the advent of science and technology, more are beginning to lose their touch with the arts, as they seem to offer little value in today's rat race. Sceptics argue that the arts are of little or negligible value, as one is unable to glean any meaningful lesson from them, since they are far too removed from the realities of life. However, there is value in immersing ourselves in the arts, in how they offer us a much-needed respite from the stresses of modern living. The arts also play a significant role in instilling in us a stronger sense of shared identity, and act as social commentary, galvanising us to push for positive social change. Therefore, to say that there is 'little' value in the arts simply does no justice to the plethora of art forms in our world today, as I strongly believe that the arts do hold significant value.

Firstly, sceptics would argue that the arts have little value as the experiences and messages conveyed through art are far too removed from our lives. Phantasmagorical fantasies, from flying witches on broomsticks in J.K. Rowling's fictional world of Hogwarts, to talking animals and portals that transport us to another world in C.S. Lewis's 'Narnia', only faintly resemble the real world we live in. In Shakespeare's famous play 'Romeo and Juliet', audiences experience an emotional rollercoaster as they witness the couple's tragic love story. These forms of arts are merely mental popcorn, as we do not live in the magical world of Hogwarts, nor do we want to go through a tragic romance set in the 16th century. Thus, it is easy to see why sceptics might feel that the arts have little value, as they fail to convey meaningful messages and exaggerate the world we live in, making the enjoyment of the arts a waste of time.

However, such a view toward the arts is far too simplistic. It is the very fact that the arts are distanced from reality, that gives them immense value. They serve as a much-needed escapade from mundane reality, away from the hustle-and-bustle of modern life. They allow us to revel in the artist's imaginary world, as they excite and amaze us, immersing us in a world we long to live in, albeit temporarily. They are an effective antidote for boredom, entertaining individuals bored out of their minds. For example, the futuristic world of 'Inception' where gadgets defy gravity, leaves us gawking in amazement at our screens. The bioluminescent flora and fauna of the fictive world Pandora in 'Avatar' captivates us, and even streaming the West End play *Les Misérables* on YouTube acts as a benign distraction from the sombre and pessimistic atmosphere in a pandemic-ridden year. Taylor Swift's new music album, 'Folklore', has generated much enthusiasm amongst her fans, as they stream the singer's music to fight boredom from the endless lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the primary function of the arts in entertainment gives them significant value.

The arts are also integral in forging a sense of shared identity amongst different cultural and social groups. The arts promote greater social cohesion, and instill in us a sense of pride and belonging. For instance, the National Gallery in Singapore houses a collection of pioneer artworks depicting Singapore in its formative years, including paintings from local artists, such as Liu Kang, Georgette Chen, and Chua Ek Kay. Liu Kang's 'Life by the River' encapsulates the essence of kampong living in the

1950s and 60s, complete with attap houses on stilts, and families gathering by the riverbank. Additionally, 'National Day 1967', by the same artist is a pictorial documentation of Singapore's key milestones, allowing Singaporeans to recall their collective memories of celebrating the nation's first National Day, igniting in us a sense of nostalgia. Chong Fah Cheong's playful sculpture 'First Generation' depicts children playing by the Singapore River, allowing both the young and old alike to celebrate shared memories of the early years, giving us a stronger sense of pride as Singaporeans and promoting a stronger social fabric in the Singaporean society. Beyond cultural groups, the arts may also promote a sense of belonging in social groups. 'Born This Way', sung by Lady Gaga, is the anthem of Pride Month, where members of the LGBTQ+ community come together to celebrate each year regardless of whether they are "gay, straight, or bi". Art is also a way for different age groups to identify themselves as being of a particular generation. Take music for example: those born in the 1920s are brought together by jazz and blues, while the 'rock and roll' of the 1980s bring together Generation X, who come together to relive youthful memories. Thus, it is undeniable that the arts have significant value in binding people together as a collective community, with a strengthened sense of cohesion.

The arts may also provide a perceptive look at issues beleaguering mankind, heightening our awareness of social issues, and galvanising the masses to advocate for social change. For instance, Haifa Subay is a Yemeni artist known for her street murals, particularly 'The Boy of Bones'. It depicts a skinny, malnourished boy, as Subay wished to utilise art as a medium to communicate to the global community the damaging effects of the civil war in bringing famine, putting the lives of children at risk. 'The Age of Iron', written by J.M. Coetzee, evinces the deeply damaging ramifications of a racially-segregated society. Set during the era of apartheid in South Africa, it took readers on an introspective journey through the eyes of Mrs Curren, a sheltered white lady who was initially apathetic toward apartheid. However, her worldview changed after witnessing the racial violence and injustice during that period. These messages gleaned from art are especially relevant in today's world, where many countries are experiencing turbulent racial tensions. 'Tango', a play by local theatre group Pandemonium, explores the issue of same-sex parenting and the sense of entrapment felt by the LGBT community in Singapore, serving to correct our misguided notions on these groups. Thus, the arts are a driving force for social change, shedding light on issues plaguing society.

To conclude, I strongly believe that there is much value to the arts. While some may see them as mere entertainment and a waste of time, open-minded individuals would see value in meaningless entertainment, as they provide us with a much-needed distraction for the soul. The arts also bind together individuals as collective social groups and, on a larger scale, a nation. Beyond these functions, the arts are of paramount importance in inciting social change through bringing forth social ills, allowing us to create a peaceful world for all. The arts offer a cornucopia of meaning, if only we look beyond their façade as frivolous entertainment that serves no purpose to our lives.

Comments:

You've presented a strong case for the arts, and your writing is sophisticated and fluent. Perhaps what I would have liked to see more of is 'how far' you feel this value applies to all. A little more evaluation of the opposing view would have added nuance and depth to your discussion.

‘There is little value to the arts.’ How far do you agree?

Chai Gien Kay 21555

The arts are often described as a many-armed creature, as they branch into different areas and aspects, from physical artworks to performance showcases like dance or plays. Indeed, the arts play an important role in enriching society, in terms of culture and entertainment. Some say the arts have little value as they are not a lucrative form of living, especially in a technologically advanced society like today. However, there is more to the arts than meets the eye, as they are crucial in raising awareness of social issues, as well as boosting the economic growth of a country. Therefore, the arts do have significant value to a large extent.

Realists living in modern society claim that the arts are not sustainable in a technologically driven world as they have no value in contributing to any of the STEM aspects in today’s society. They claim that the pursuit of the arts is a futile journey as the increased emphasis on science and technology has made the arts redundant and not appealing, resulting in the arts having no true standing or lucrative value in the modern world. For example, when the Covid-19 pandemic first hit and the world plunged into an economic recession, people working in the arts sector were the first to become unemployed. Research studies have also proven that out of all the students that graduate with full qualifications from Singapore’s top arts school, the School of the Arts, only about 10% of them manage to find successful jobs in arts-related sectors and continue their lives pursuing the arts. This shows that the arts are seen as a novelty at most in today’s society, but since they are not a sustainable way of living, the arts are not held in high regard and are seen as having little value.

However, the arts do indeed have high value and are beneficial to today’s world. Art is an effective platform to spread important and current social issues to the world in a way that is impactful and entertaining. With a rise in more awareness in social issues on all platforms like the mass media and social media, the arts scene too stays updated and current, incorporating these important themes and issues into their work to do their part in spreading awareness to their viewers in ways specific to the art form. Local theatre company Pandemonium is one of the many companies that educate the public through their plays. For example, the play ‘Tango’ revolves around the life of a same-sex couple living together in Singapore, and highlights to the audience the struggles faced by the marginalised LGBTQ community. The play ‘Falling’ showcases the life of a family with a child with autism, with the aim of raising awareness on autism in Singapore. Such plays serve as a way to meaningfully and impactfully raise awareness on little talked-about issues in Singapore through the art medium. Another example of how the arts are valuable because they raise awareness for social causes is the popular anonymous graffiti artist Banksy. One of his most famous artworks in Jerusalem advocates for peace by depicting a man throwing a bouquet of flowers instead of a weapon, representing the need for harmony amidst the ongoing crisis between Israel and Palestine. These are just some examples that show how the arts are used as platforms to not just entertain, but also to highlight the importance of certain social issues in the world, which is valuable in order for the world to achieve equality and peace.

The arts also play a key role in maintaining a community's cultural heritage and tradition. The arts have long been mediums of self-expression, and in many cases, different cultural groups make use of varied artistic mediums to showcase and display different concepts unique and important to their culture. Since such cultural traditions are kept and passed on, future generations are able to learn these art forms and embrace their cultural heritage. Being able to conserve and continue cultural heritage through such art mediums is valuable in ensuring a society has a rich and diverse culture, thus making communities much more multicultural and harmonious. In Japan, geishas - traditional female servers and performers - perform dances as part of centuries-old rituals, which play a big part in showcasing the country's cultural heritage. In China, terracotta warrior sculptures are conserved and displayed to showcase the rich culture unique to its history. Therefore, art pieces like these are crucial in conserving heritage and ensuring the richness and cultural diversity of a society. Therefore, the arts have significant value.

Lastly, the arts also play a role as effective and sustainable sources of tourist revenue to a country. There is no doubt that there are art enthusiasts all around the world, willing to fork out large sums of money just to see pieces of art that they are interested in. Since there are many famous artworks around the world, these art enthusiasts would travel to various countries to see these artworks, hence contributing tourist revenue. For example, famous artworks like the Michelangelo painting on the Sistine Chapel's ceiling or the world-famous Mona Lisa by Leonardo Da Vinci displayed in the Louvre receive millions of foreign visitors a year, and this influx of tourists contribute to a significant proportion of income for the governments of these European nations. In some cases, art tourism can be a country's main source of revenue, thus enhancing the value of the arts in their society. Bhutan is a country that prides itself in its culturally unique art forms like festivals, traditional performances and dances, which are effective in attracting tourists from all around the globe to travel there, specifically to witness these showcases. Without these unique art mediums, Bhutan would receive close to no tourists. Therefore, the arts have a large significance in boosting a country's economic growth through tourist revenue, and hence have much value.

In conclusion, there is in fact lots of value to the arts. Despite some belief that the arts are not a sustainable way of living in today's technologically driven world, the arts have proven to be valuable as they help spread important social messages for the betterment of society, possess significant rich cultural value, and are forms of tourist revenue for the government.

Comments:

For a more balanced discussion, are there any more points on why the arts are not deemed to be of value? Generally well written; organised with well-chosen examples. You can try elaborating less and listing countries in a row to exemplify your points. For example, for art tourism, you can list London, New York, Shanghai, and Venice as cultural capitals of the world, where there are world class performances being showcased almost daily and are major cultural attractions. So be precise and concise and pack more information in.

Examine the view that the arts must always be useful to society.

Melody Faith Ng Qi Ning 21A15

When the term 'arts' is mentioned, many may immediately think of illustrative paintings by Vincent Van Gogh, or perhaps expressive movements on stage with wild face paint. In many societies, the arts are not important because they are irrelevant to many people. On the contrary, there are still people whose lives revolve around the arts and their livelihoods depend on them. From society's view, the arts are not useful other than for entertainment; if it does not benefit society, there is no point in producing it. However, in the case of an individual producing a form of the arts for oneself, if it is not useful to society, does this mean he or she should stop pursuing one's passion?

Some may argue that if the arts are not used to benefit society, they are not productive and are therefore pointless in producing. In the first place, the arts are a form of self-expression, regardless of whether their intention is to entertain, raise awareness or just to express one's creativity. There are forms of the arts that are critiqued as vandalism, such as Samantha Lo pasting stickers with texts like "Press until shiok" or "Press for Nirvana" onto traffic light buttons. In her eyes, however, this was her way of expressing herself. This shows that although a form of the arts may not be useful to society, it benefits individuals - thus the arts must not necessarily be useful to society.

The arts must not always be useful to society: but in most cases, they are. They are useful in many areas such as raising awareness on issues society may be facing. Banksy, an anonymous England-based graffiti artist and political activist, spray paints on walls with the intention of expressing his views on issues in society and hence, educating the public on different viewpoints of the issues. An example of Banksy articulating a societal issue is when he depicted Steve Jobs as a migrant. This artwork, named 'The Son of a Migrant from Syria' was made to provoke thought from those who saw accepting migrants as a drain on a country's resources. This helped society understand the situation better and reduced further discord and discrimination amongst its people, proving arts to be useful to society.

The arts may not seem crucial in general, as a society would appear to be able to survive without entertainment or silly ways of raising awareness. However, the truth of the matter is that the arts scene has helped generate revenue for many countries such as South Korea. Recently, Hallyu or the Korean Wave took the world by storm, and South Korea has been exporting K-pop merchandise to millions of fans all over the world. The sales made from K-pop has helped the country's economy blossom, and it has also created more jobs for its people. This proves that the arts are prominent to society. Even with the arts generating income for a society, producing such song and dance may not add value to society as they may end up being a distraction instead, affecting the productivity of a country. However, a YouGov survey reported that 80% of students were stressed because of schoolwork, and 93% of these students voiced out that listening to music and learning dance choreographies have helped them relieve stress, and have allowed them to become more productive instead. This reiterates the stand that although the arts may not necessarily be always useful to society, it is still useful for the most part.

It is often unnoticed, but singing songs with family and friends can also bring people together, allowing them to bond and instill a sense of belonging. During Singapore's National Day on August 9th, songs such as 'Home' and 'Count on Me, Singapore' bring citizens together and establish a sense of identity, as the lyrics hold meaning. Singing the lyrics of these national songs make Singaporeans feel patriotic and more welcomed in their society, as everyone puts their arms around one another lovingly and sway to the music together. Even when a Singaporean celebrity, Aloysius Pang, passed away while serving National Service overseas, the nation mourned together when they read a moving poem 'Singaporean Son' by Low Kian Seh, paying tribute to Aloysius Pang. A society can be easily broken and divided because of each individual's differences, and an inability to agree on certain matters due to different beliefs. With that said, this is where the arts come in to ease tension and bring people together to see eye to eye, proving that the arts, although not necessary, will always be useful to society.

The importance of the arts is rather subjective as society has different goals, such as having a productive and healthy workforce. People who do not think the arts are important may argue that arts must always be useful to society; if not, it does not serve a purpose, and should not be mandatory to have. However, the arts will always be useful to society in one way or another. Although a form of art may not impact a society immediately, it will always come around and indirectly benefit the society. Thus, although the arts must not forever be useful to society because they may solely exist to allow an individual to express oneself, it is still always going to be an advantage to society, no matter what.

Comments:

The stand that you took is pretty interesting - that even if it is deemed as not useful, it still is, and you have managed to support that stand. A fluent piece.

Examine the view that the arts must always be useful to society.

Foo Yan Ning 21S43

The arts - a collection of different mediums and platforms to express creativity, are often viewed as unimportant and dispensable to society. For those who fail to appreciate the arts, the same old argument that "the arts are not useful" is repeated time and again, especially when compared to fields like science and technology, the economy and many others which seem to bring greater tangible benefits to our ever-developing society. However, I personally believe that the arts do not necessarily have to be useful to society all the time. While the power of the arts can be harnessed to be useful to society, bringing about social change and economic benefits, art is ultimately an escape: a different realm that need not serve substantial purpose to the world. That is the purity and the beauty of the arts that society should learn to appreciate, rather than overly critiquing its lack of usefulness.

Before we dive deeper into the argument, it is important to understand where proponents of the opposing stand may be coming from. Indeed, one of the greatest questions about life in general is: if something is not useful, what is the point of having it? As such, it is necessary and important that the arts contribute to the betterment of society to be valuable, bringing tangible change to the world the same way science and technology does. For instance, the power of the arts can be harnessed to bring about social change. The arts act as a powerful medium to evoke emotions and bring to light the underlying issues of society that are necessary to address. Prominent artists such as Banksy and Ai Wei Wei use the power of art to convey controversial messages that spark debates and result in greater social change. Ai Wei Wei's 'Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn' shocked the world as he destroyed cultural pieces worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, bringing about insights to the value of culture to society. Banksy himself also created several pieces such as his 'Dismaland' exhibition, which questions the capitalistic and consumerist modern world we have grown to become. All these art pieces have left a deep impact on viewers, enabling society to question our values and morals, therefore sparking social change. If the arts do not continue to remain useful to society, there may truly be no point to having arts in our lives at all. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the arts industry was surveyed to be the most 'non-essential' job to Singaporean society. If the arts do not play its part to be useful to society, it would forever remain in the backseat. As such, it is perhaps true that the arts must always be useful to society. Society must harness their ability to be useful to society, in order for the arts to remain relevant.

However, to hold such a stand would be to have an extremely myopic view of the issue at hand. The arts does not always have to be useful to society or bring about any tangible change, as the arts are more so of an escape from society, rather than a medium to be of use to society. In a world that continues to grow and develop day by day, it is easy to be caught up in this rat race, this cyclical nature of overworking and proving oneself to be useful to society, that simply takes away the enjoyment of life. However, the arts provide that escape. The arts do not need to be another avenue that gets caught up and spirals within this cyclical nature as well. Rather, it should be an avenue where reality no longer comes to play, and instead, becomes a form of relaxation, a transient space that provides an escape from the harsh cruelty of the world. Several pertinent forms of art are not really useful to society, and yet, they still remain integral to the world. The musical 'Cats' by Andrew Lloyd

Webber is a fun and mindless musical that lacks a concrete storyline. Rather, it focuses on the musicality and theatrical aspects of the show, creating a spell-binding experience that is pleasing to both the eyes and ears. Some may argue that musicals like 'Cats' are still mainly created to be useful to society by reaping in economic benefits from the Broadway tours; nonetheless, the main purpose of such arts was to still provide an escape from modern life. If the main purpose of the arts was perhaps for economic gain, why was 'Cats' then broadcasted on YouTube, free for all to enjoy? Indeed, the arts need not always be useful to society, in the sense that tangible benefits are brought about. Rather, it can act as this avenue of life that provides an escape from reality, a place where work is forgotten, a place for relaxation and joy. Thus, I strongly believe that the arts need not always be useful to society.

Furthermore, the arts need not always be useful to society, as the arts can serve the simple nature of providing aesthetics and pleasure for the world. The arts' most distinctive feature is to be beautiful, and while this is not extremely useful to society - after all, painting a beautiful picture cannot solve global hunger or create a vaccine to stop a global pandemic - it does serve a purpose. There are many forms of the arts that play the simple role of beautifying the world. The gorgeous paintings that don the walls of the Sistine Chapel, the exceptional sculpture of 'David' by Michelangelo, the poise and grace of the ballet 'Swan Lake', even the melodious symphonies of 'Four Seasons' by Vivaldi: all these art forms are not useful to society. They do not spark social change, they do not bring across powerful messages, but they are ultimately still loved and adored by humanity for decades and longer. And why is that? Well, it all boils down to the simple answer of the fact that they are beautiful. In the darkness and tumultuous times the world is experiencing today, beauty stands out. It is what moved people for centuries, and it is what it continues to do today. The timeless nature of aesthetics and pleasure provided by the arts, while not necessarily useful to society, nonetheless serves a beautiful purpose. The arts manage to colour the dull, grey canvas of the world, beautifying the world one stroke at a time. Thus, I assert that the arts do not always have to be useful to society through bringing tangible benefits. Rather, it should fulfil its main purpose of beautifying the world.

Finally, the arts need not always be useful, as creating art for the purpose of having to be of some use to society taints the purity and freedom of the arts. The world of the arts has no boundaries. It provides people a limitless end of possibilities to unleash their creativity, and construct something they can be proud of. When society attaches the value of the arts based on their usefulness to society, this destroys the purity of the arts and what it truly stands for - freedom and creativity. If art was only made to be useful, art would feel forced, and therefore lose that sense of escapism and beauty that makes the arts significant in society. If art was only made to be useful, we would no longer be able to admire the exquisite works of Van Gogh, or listen to the calming symphonies of Beethoven. In a more modern context, our favourite films like 'Mamma Mia!', or even spectacular animations like 'Coraline' would no longer exist. Art would only be created in attempts to bring about tangible change such as economic benefits and social change. And if all art ever does is attempt to reiterate reality back to us, art no longer becomes an escape. It loses its value. In that manner, the issue at hand becomes a paradox. In society's attempt to ensure that the arts is always useful, it no longer serves its original purpose and therefore, no longer holds a truly valuable place in society. This will only encourage society's consumerist and capitalistic behaviour, making our future seem a lot bleaker than it already is.

In conclusion, I believe that the arts need not always be useful to society. While being useful to society may seem to ensure art remains valuable, the arts are essentially an avenue for an escape from reality, a medium to beautify society, and a world of purity and creativity. One must take off the lens that consumerism and capitalism have clouded our vision with, to truly see the value of the arts that may not necessarily have to be useful.

Comments:

This essay was so enjoyable to read! You have demonstrated a good grasp of the question and the subject matter. Even though you disagreed with the given claim, you still made sure to consistently relate your discussion back to why that perception might exist. Highly nuanced writing with effective evaluation, as well as valid examples and effective illustration.

Examine the view that the arts must always be useful to society.

Wong Wei Ting 21S44

English poet William Blake remarked that “human beings need the arts to nourish our souls”. The role of the arts is becoming significantly important in the modern context, and the arts then undoubtedly have their uses and purposes to society, such as acting as a galvanising force to promote unity, and being an avenue for political commentary. However, to say that the arts must always be useful to society is a far too myopic view, as the arts can also act as a mere source of recreation to people, allowing one to express their inner thoughts through a creative medium and providing comfort to them when necessary. Thus, I believe that although the arts can bring about improvements to society, rendering it as useful, it must not always be useful to society as it serves other purposes as well.

The arts are indeed useful, as they act as a powerful galvanising force to enhance the unity and identity of a particular community. The arts allow for the expression of each community’s distinct character and values, and hence are an important avenue that can be utilised to bring together a community, to rally for the same cause and spark changes to society. For example, anti-coup protesters in Myanmar look up to books and films like ‘The Hunger Games’ as a source of inspiration for the protests, aspiring to gain greater liberty and political autonomy. Traditionally, music genres like dancehall have allowed Jamaicans to pass down generations of heritage to their predecessors, preserving their culture while at the same time spreading it to other parts of the world. This allows for greater recognition and knowledge about Jamaican culture, promoting cultural diversity in societies today. Hence, in this way, the arts then seem to be useful to society, so as to promote social unity and cohesion to prevent fault lines from appearing in today’s society.

Furthermore, some people hold the view that the arts must be useful to society as they provide an avenue for political commentary. Political commentary is undoubtedly essential in society today, as it allows for greater improvement of governments and officials. The arts are useful in this regard, allowing individuals to express their political thoughts with more freedom, both implicitly and explicitly. A classic example would be ‘The Boy in Striped Pyjamas’, a novel highlighting the atrocities that happened during The Second World War, hence promoting peace amongst countries and political leaders. Locally, plays like ‘Cooling Off Day’ by Alfian Sa’at touch on the frequent redrawing of electoral boundaries between the General Elections, critiquing these measures as a way to give the ruling party an edge in elections. Political commentary through mediums like the arts is especially prevalent in today’s world, where politics especially seem to be a sensitive topic. Thus, some believe that the arts must be useful to society, due to such benefits of the arts.

However, the usefulness of the arts in making political commentary is also limited, hence bringing into question the necessity for the arts to be useful. As mentioned, especially due to the sensitive nature of politics, and the ability for an individual to freely express his or her thoughts through the arts, it then comes as no shock that the arts are a target of censorship from the government, especially in fields like politics. For example, Ai Weiwei is an artist known for the political nature of his works, with his most famous pieces mostly criticising China’s government for the lack of

transparency in its rule, as well as the draconian nature of the authoritarian regime. As such, he is barred from holding exhibitions in mainland China, and is also seen by the Chinese government in a negative light. In Singapore, novels like 'The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye' have been censored over fears of threatening the government's legitimacy, and films about political exiles like 'To Singapore, With Love' have also had their screenings barred in Singapore. Hence, with censorship, the usefulness of the arts is limited and hence, the arts can be seen as not having to be useful to society.

However, the arts do not necessarily have to be useful to society, as another purpose of the arts is for entertainment. Especially with today's rapidly changing society, many turn to the arts as a mere source of recreation, instead of any other tangible and 'real' purpose like promoting change in society. 'The Lion King' and 'Phantom of the Opera' are widely known films, and people turn to these as a source of pleasure and recreation, which can be seen from its wide audience ranging from young children to even the elderly. The Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO) has also launched the #SSOPlayOn initiative, where they upload pre-recorded videos and archived videos of previous performances online, to provide entertainment to Singaporeans during the strict lockdown measures imposed by our government during the Covid-19 pandemic. Hence, it can be seen that the arts can also provide mere entertainment to people, and must not always be useful to society.

On a more individual level, the arts also provide a medium for one to express their inner thoughts. The innate nature of the arts allow us to express our emotions and thoughts without having to do so in words, and hence they are widely used as a platform for various individuals to validate their own feelings, and to act as a source of comfort for themselves or others. For example, art pieces in The Black Museum in Shanghai feature artworks and sculptures by various people suffering from mental illnesses, providing an avenue for them to express their inner thoughts and set free the inner demon of mental illnesses living inside their heads instead of keeping everything to themselves. A migrant worker, MD Sherif, has also written a book titled 'Voices of Myself: The Journey of a Bangladeshi in Singapore' in order to recount his experiences and encounters in Singapore. In light of the pandemic, students in Lasalle College of the Arts have also showcased their individual experience and thoughts about Covid-19 through art pieces. Hence, it can be seen that art does not necessarily have to be useful to society, as it can be used on more individual levels to express the different emotions and feelings.

Lastly, the arts need not always be useful to society, as they can be used as a tool and platform for individuals to explore and showcase their creativity. The creativity shown through the arts is not necessarily useful for society as it may not be broadly impactful, but for individuals, it provides an avenue for them to practice creativity and innovation without having to be afraid of making mistakes. For example, along with the government's Smart Nation initiative, local contemporary dance group Raw Moves are experimenting with technology to discover how technology can be used in dance choreography and how technology influences choreography. Local tech artist Eugene Soh has also experimented with virtual reality (VR) technology to create a VR experience that detailed documents Chinatown, allowing for new insights and experiences to be gained. Hence, it can be seen that the arts need not always be useful to society, as they can have other purposes as well.

In conclusion, it would be fallacious to think that the arts must be useful to society. Although it is indisputable that the arts are useful to society, such as promoting social cohesion and allowing for

political commentary, the arts go beyond just being useful to society. The arts are a medium for entertainment, for one to express their inner thoughts, and for people to exhibit creativity and innovation, without the fear of failing. The purpose of the arts is not solely for evoking change and being useful to society, but instead the arts have a lot more to offer. Therefore, I disagree with the view that the arts must always be useful to society, and think that this is a view that is too superficial.

Comments:

A bit example-driven at times. You need to unpack some of your examples a bit more and analyse a bit more.

Examine the view that the arts must always be useful to society.

Nathan Sivali Sudikarman 21S54

Imagine a vase that was given to a person by their loved one who has passed on. Would it be fair to judge its value solely by the way one utilises it? Say that they leave it for display in memory of their loved one, rendering it unused and maybe even 'useless'. Does this mean that this vase is now devoid of its value? Of course not. There are so many aspects of an object that gives it its value, and looking at it from a solely utilitarian standpoint completely disregards these other important aspects. Similarly, for the arts, regardless of whether it is 'high art', art enjoyed by elites, or 'low art', art enjoyed by the masses, there are many aspects other than its use for society as a whole. Although I agree that there are benefits society can attain from having a thriving arts culture, this standpoint disregards the ultimate purpose of art: its power in bringing about catharsis, and its limitless capability in allowing for the exploration of self and the mind.

Of course, there are uses that the arts can bring to society. One use of the arts is providing vital political commentary through a medium that evokes the strongest emotions. The type of art that is associated with this function in society is political art. Take, for example, the works of Ai Weiwei. He rose to prominence through the photographic piece 'Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn' where he smashes historical artefacts that in the eyes of many hold both high monetary and historical value. As expected, many were enraged by this act; who would blatantly disregard a piece of human history like this? However, his message to society was large and clear. It was a strong criticism of the Chinese government's blatant neglect for the preservation of culture in Chinese society as it experienced accelerating growth. It is no coincidence that the reaction and criticism against this act was an extremely strong one. The arts are a medium that is inherently human; they deal with subject matters that are very personal and relate to society at large, playing into our senses and our emotions. When we see paintings like 'Guernica' by Pablo Picasso, or listen to the shriek-like timbre of violins in Penderecki's 'Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima', we are instantaneously brought into the worlds of the artists and how they view issues that, at the end of the day, are inherently human. This brings out the strongest emotions in us that can generate public debate about issues which will impact us for many generations to come, allowing society to work toward a state that is more empathetic, more tolerant and more peaceful - heralding a new era of progress. Therefore, the arts have a use in providing political commentary that enables us to think more humanely, allowing society to progress to higher levels in our endless pursuit of peace and happiness.

Secondly, the arts have a use in providing tangible records of our human history. From a scientific standpoint, our history is marked with new discoveries from different periods in time. These discoveries are subconsciously portrayed in the development of art. The Baroque period, for example, was influenced by Galileo's experiments with motion, who kickstarted a period known as the Age of Enlightenment. The obsession with movement and time is reflected in the artworks of the Baroque contemporaries. The likes of Handel and Bach created music that would include many voices moving together in polyphony, and ornate melodies that give the sense of perpetual motion, evoking images of a ball rolling down a hill. In visual art, works like Rembrandt's 'The Night Watch' portrayed busy lifescapes that are filled with movement and to a certain extent, chaos. These works freeze in time

the notions and mindsets of the Baroque and Rococo eras, showing in full form their obsession with perpetuity and movement. However, most importantly, the arts also show changes in these mindsets. Isaac Newton's 'Principia Mathematica' toward the end of the Baroque era led to a countermovement that viewed the universe as inherently axiomatic and orderly in nature. The rise of neoclassicism saw an increased interest in more quiet scenes from Ancient Greece, like 'The Death of Socrates' by Jacques-Louis David. Music from composers like Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Joseph Haydn was also much cleaner and more graceful than their baroque counterparts. Through artworks like these, the essence of human history is captured in one painting, one piece of music, one dramatic play. Through no other medium can we see the pendulum of humanity swing to and fro from simplicity to complexity, and back again. By displaying their thoughts, opinions, beliefs and emotions into simmering strings, coloured oil canvasses and scribbles on paper, these artists give to society an archive of human thought, allowing society at large to utilise them to learn more about the human race as a whole, and understand our rocky journey to reach where we are today. Without the arts, society would be unable to see humanity as nothing more than specks of dust on a blue marble in an obscure corner of the universe. Thus, the arts are useful to society as it provides a tangible record of our past that future generations can use to understand more about themselves and how far we have come as a race. Hence, the arts are useful to society.

Despite its uses, however, viewing art from a utilitarian standpoint takes away many fundamental aspects that make art what it truly is. Firstly, it is a medium for exploration. This is especially true following the modernist movement of the early twentieth century. Past this point, artists relied on abstract figures, plots and meanings rather than realist ones. Take for example, 'Einstein on the Beach' by Philip Glass and Robert Wilson, with libretto by Christopher Knowles; or Wassily Kandinsky's paintings that depict synaesthesia after listening to Arnold Schoenberg's music. From a materialist standpoint, there are no uses to these works; 'Einstein on the Beach' is plotless and meaningless, and Kandinsky's are abstract figures on canvases. However, does this mean that they are not pieces of art? Of course not. They are art because they have value in the artist's use of the medium to explore their inner selves, using new techniques and themes to highlight the complicated web that is the human mind. Judging art merely by its use to society robs the significance of its value as a medium to experiment and explore; to utilise an expansive medium in ways never done before; and to further understand the human condition, albeit in a way that is useless to society. Therefore, the view that the arts must always be useful to society is a flawed one, as art can be used as a medium to explore one's inner self, and to disregard this aspect is to dismiss one of the most important pillars of artistic creation.

The biggest bone I must pick with this statement is that it completely defeats the purpose of creating art in the first place. Above all, the ultimate purpose of art is to relieve the emotion of the creator. When African slaves in America started to sing the Blues, creating an entirely new genre of music now known as Jazz, were they thinking about its use to society at large? No, they were not. Singing 'work-hollers', as they were called, was the only way to express the pains and sorrows of everyday life. Many slaves were kidnapped in their native lands and treated sub-humanely in the fields, being subject to harsh working conditions and frequent abuse by slaveowners. The arts, simply put, is a natural escape from the realities of everyday life. As encapsulated in Maya Angelou's 'I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings', it is a way for one to think about a parallel reality where they are freer and happier. The creation of art is the desire for humanity to be free, to seek a better life. When an artist

leaves behind an impression of his life experiences - his periods of euphoria, grief, anger and confusion - he is not thinking about the uses his works bring to society. He is merely turning to the innately human medium of arts to make sense of the confusing world around him, to distil his emotions into pieces that set him free of the confines of reality. This is the true purpose of the arts. In fact, it is its very definition. Regardless of whether it is Pablo Picasso's self-portraits, or The Beach Boys' 'God Only Knows', the arts exist to bring about catharsis to oneself, to express one's emotions to the world. To state that art must always be useful to society would be to completely rob it of its intent and purposes, to take away the foundations of art that cause it to crumble, leaving behind the debris of utility and monetary value. Art, from this standpoint, would not be art as we know it, it would be tasteless, bland and ironically, dead. Therefore, I disagree with the statement that the arts must always be useful to society.

As we tread on further into the uncertain future, it is only natural that we characterise objects by their uses, to see things from a frame of mind that fails to see past an object's utility. The arts, in the coming years, will become a vase that was given to us by our predecessors wanting to leave their mark in the slow marching of time. We need to remember that although it has its uses, there are also other aspects of art that must not be looked over, especially its ability for exploring the self and its ability to bring about catharsis. We need to remember that just like the base, even though we leave it to display, the arts still have inherent meaning and value hidden beneath the surface. We should not toss them aside just because they have no use to society, but rather, let their hidden value echo within the chambers of humanity, ringing in the ears of every sentient being for many generations to come.

Comments:

Generally well written with many insights (consider Oscar Wilde's 'Art for Art's Sake' as well).

Has technology been more of a boon than a bane for the arts?

Katherine Mia Delacruz Fontanilla 21S39

Following rapid technological developments in the past century or two, people's interests seem to have shifted remarkably. Gone are the days when people would queue up after school to catch a movie, or go with their friends to watch plays or concerts. Instead, technology has created the ultimate source of entertainment: the Internet, where platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and TikTok vie for users' attention. It may appear that people's interest in the arts has plummeted, with only pointless trends and content stuck in their minds. However, I believe that this may not entirely be the case these days, as technology has instead opened a multitude of possibilities for the arts, and additionally boosted the popularity of the arts in mainstream society. Thus, I strongly concur that technology has been more of a boon than a bane for the arts.

Firstly, one may argue that technology has paved the way for new forms of entertainment to replace the arts. For example, social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram have brought about attention-grabbing, narcissistic and meaningless short-form content. Trends such as 'outfit of the day' posts on Instagram or popular dances such as the 'Renegade' on TikTok have changed the way people choose to entertain themselves. Just viewing one video or post can pull someone down the rabbit hole of addictive content consumption. This is evident in the fact that the average person spends about six hours daily on their smartphones; one can only imagine that the time spent on social media platforms make up a large chunk of these hours. Additionally, technology has also spurred the advancement of other entertainment formats such as video games and online multiplayer games. Games like Fortnite and Halo have taken over youths' lives, with adolescents spending substantial amounts of their time holed up in their rooms playing these games. With excessive interest and time invested in playing games, their appreciation for the arts seems to have all but vanished. Hence, technology may be seen as a bane to the arts.

However, it would be quite myopic to assume that technology has not benefited the arts in any way. Even with the rise of social media and online content, there have been individuals utilising these platforms to generate interest in the arts. Take for example the musical duo 'TwoSetViolin', whose YouTube channel's content focuses solely on making classical music that is relatable to today's general public. Their videos have encouraged many to take up or relearn musical instruments, and with over three million subscribers spanning across all age groups, it is not difficult to see the positive impact they have on the arts, through the interest they have generated. Furthermore, their livestream concert garnered more than 80,000 listeners tuning in to enjoy the classical music, which is a significant audience compared with regular in-person concerts. This shows that technology supports online arts channels, which even have the potential to outcompete more traditional artistic showcases. Another example sees accounts on Instagram like 'dinosandcomics' harnessing social media to spread interest in the arts. Having amassed more than a million followers, their original and relatable comics have reached millions of people worldwide, with their viral posts even receiving more than 200,000 likes. Similarly, it is easy to observe that this massive feat would not have been possible without social media and technology. Therefore, technology has actually benefited the arts greatly.

Moreover, technology has actually made the arts more accessible to the general public. While tickets for musicals and plays can cost over a hundred dollars each, they can be viewed online for about one-tenth the cost, or even for free. One prominent example would be the Andrew Lloyd Webber musicals streamed online during the Covid-19 pandemic for anyone and everyone to watch. During worldwide lockdowns, artists took advantage of the fact that virtually everyone was at home to stream these popular musicals online, at little to no cost to the viewers. This allowed these musicals - previously too pricey or inaccessible to the average person - to gather a large audience, multitudes larger than previous in-person audiences. Thus, while watching musicals and plays may have seemed like a symbol of wealth and luxury in the past, this no longer has to be the case because of technology. Appreciation of these art forms no longer highlight gaps in socioeconomic status; rather, since they are now readily available for anyone to enjoy, everyone now has equal opportunity to appreciate the arts. Thus, technology is a boon as it has allowed for greater accessibility to the arts, attracting larger audiences for it.

Lastly, technology has improved the artistic viewing experience for audiences. Mainstream movies, which may be classified as art in itself, have made use of developments in computer-generated imagery and other visual and sound effects to enhance the audience's experience. For example, popular action movies such as 'Wonder Woman' and 'Black Panther' involve heavy use of visual effects to make for more immersive and entertaining experiences. Although they may be criticised for being simply 'popcorn flicks' these movies are able to reach large audiences, most of whom actually see and appreciate the value visual effects have added to the movies. One key example might be 'Avengers: Endgame', which raked in billions of dollars during its box office run, becoming the highest grossing movie of all time. This shows the massive appeal that movies with visual effects have to mainstream audiences. Examples of movies more commonly perceived as classic art also include West Side Story and Les Misérables, where artists have also harnessed the powers of visual effects and movie magic to turn these musicals into movies for mainstream audiences to enjoy. While some may have previously argued that musicals were not immersive due to their lack of realistic visual effects, technology has allowed musicals to evolve technically without losing their classic status, retaining their original storylines and songs while enhancing the overall visual experience for audiences. These film adaptations of musicals can hence appeal to larger audiences, and lead to wider outreach of the arts. Therefore, technology has enhanced the experience of the arts and has been a boon.

In conclusion, technology has brought about many benefits to the arts. It has allowed greater outreach of the arts to society by generating more interest, increasing its accessibility and improving the viewing experience. As long as technology is used to supplement and enhance the arts, and not to replace or make it redundant, I firmly believe that technology has been more of a boon to the arts.

Comments:

Given that the question asks if it has been more of a boon than a bane, some weighing of each point to consider both the pros and cons, before deciding whether it has been more of one or the other, would add depth and nuance. For example, the reliance on technology to enhance movies might seem positive, but would this replace the need for technical mastery in some other art forms like painting? Dive a little deeper.

Has technology been more of a boon than a bane for the arts?

Kow Ming Yuan 21S47

Technology and the arts seemingly lie on two opposite ends of the spectrum. Technology deals with logical thinking and physical concepts, and is often seen as emotionless. The arts, on the other hand, are abstract, full of emotion, and not something everyone can appreciate. However, what if I told you that these two concepts can actually come together? It may seem paradoxical at first, but with the digital age, this is exactly what has been happening. The implementation of technology has brought the arts to new heights, enabling them to reach every corner of the world and touch every heart unlike before. However, every benefit comes at a cost, and there are certainly negative implications on the arts with the proliferation of technology. Nevertheless, technology has been more beneficial than detrimental for the arts than a bane.

Firstly, let us address the elephant in the room: piracy. The proliferation of technology has definitely enabled piracy to flourish, which can be detrimental to the arts. Piracy simply means to use the intellectual property of others, such as movies and songs, and give it away for free or at a lower cost. Originally, it came in the form of pirated CDs, where pirate shops in run-down areas engage in said illegal trade to earn a living, selling pirated movies and games. However, in recent years, digital technology has enabled piracy to grow even more. These days, with the rise of streaming, piracy does not take the form of now-obsolete pirate shops anymore. Instead, they are now pirated streaming sites and whatnot, where users are allowed to stream movies, TV shows, songs and download games previously locked by a paywall for free. One of the most popular pirate sites is 123movies.com, where one can find any movie or TV show they want to watch at no cost, even newly released ones that are still theatrical exclusives (albeit at a lower quality). One can only imagine the implications of such technology on the arts. Most evidently, it results in a loss of revenue for those who have worked hard in producing such forms of artwork. It is estimated that TV shows and movie producers lose billions of dollars a year, as people take to such sites to watch blockbusters such as *Spider-Man: No Way Home*. Artists definitely do not get the due credit they deserve as people get to consume their work for free. Moreover, it is simply illegal, and such technology has enabled people to commit illegal activities detrimental to the arts.

However, what if we looked at this issue from another perspective? Instead of looking at things so pessimistically, look at the benefits it brings to the arts instead and one will realise it has numerous benefits. I believe that piracy can be in fact beneficial for the arts in certain ways. Since piracy allows people to stream their movies and shows for free, it effectively makes the art more accessible to everyone. Many of those who pirate do it not because they want to, but simply because they do not have the means to watch it legally. One of the most prominent examples is the anime industry, where piracy is the most rampant. Many piracy sites exist to stream anime, such as kissanime.com and animixplay.com. It may seem detrimental to the anime industry, where animators are overworked and are paid meagre wages, but the problem lies within the industry itself, and not piracy. While there are streaming platforms such as Crunchyroll and Funimation that provide paid legal anime streaming, they are not available in every region. This means that those living in regions with no access to such sites effectively have no access to the anime they want. Even with Netflix

streaming anime, the choices are limited in many regions and people cannot watch the anime of their choice. Hence, piracy actually provides access to anime for these fans, allowing the anime community to grow even further and can actually generate revenue for the industry too, as these fans will spend on related merchandise. In a sense, it is not a loss to the industry at all as in the first place, they are collecting zero revenue from such regions, yet piracy enables access to anime in these regions that can eventually contribute back to the industry. Hence, in certain contexts, technology-enabled piracy can actually be beneficial instead of detrimental to the arts.

Furthermore, the proliferation of technology has created digital platforms that enable content creators to showcase and sell their art online, with a reach unbeknownst to mankind previously. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter have enabled creators to expand their reach like never before. Many photographers, videographers, and filmmakers build much of their business based on such platforms, as it allows for millions more to see their work compared with conventional channels. One of Singapore's most successful photographers, @yk, started his photography journey on Instagram and has since garnered more than a million followers, enabling him to work with brands like Canon and Samsung, and he has even photographed for singer Lauv's world tour. His success can be mainly attributed to Instagram, which enabled millions to view his work. In turn, brands noticed his talent and hence hired him for photoshoots and even sponsorships due to his influence. It essentially allows creators to build a portfolio that can be viewed anywhere and anytime, as compared to conventional means such as photo exhibitions with a limited reach due to physical constraints, something digital platforms do not face a problem with. It is not only beneficial to creators but to consumers as well, as it greatly increases their access to the arts as compared to the past. The arts were seen to be a high-class activity, as only the rich would have the money and time to visit photo exhibitions, attend plays, and watch movies. However, it is now a common activity by everyone since technology has exponentially increased people's access to the arts, especially during the pandemic. This allows all to view breathtaking photos, watch meaningful short films online and enjoy live performances, all with a click of a button. Blockchain and web3 technology has only further paved the road ahead for the arts, allowing artists to release Non-Fungible Token or NFT collections such as the Bored Ape collection, that not only generate massive amounts of revenue through cryptocurrency but also allows consumers to buy digital art, something unprecedented even in recent times. Hence, technology has enabled the arts to flourish by increasing their access to all, benefitting both the creator and the consumer.

Technology has not only enabled people's access to consuming the arts, it has also enabled people's access to learn how to create arts. "In the 21st century, one does not need a college degree anymore, as everything can be learned online." These are the words of Tesla and SpaceX founder Elon Musk. This holds true for the arts as well. With platforms such as Skillshare, Coursera and even YouTube, there are tutorials for any form of art one would like to learn. YouTubers such as Peter McKinnon teach photography online, including tutorials on how to operate Adobe Lightroom and Adobe Photoshop, and how to utilise such software to achieve various effects such as film-like editing and preset creation for optimising the editing workflow. Piano tutorials for the theme songs for famous movies and shows, such as Attack on Titan, Lord of the Rings and Avengers are all available online, with piano sheets available, albeit some locked behind a paywall. For amateurs looking to learn an instrument from scratch, applications such as Simply Guitar are available, holding your hand every step of the way as you learn the ways of playing a guitar. Hence, there is no doubt that technology has

increased people's exposure to the arts, enabling them to not only consume and appreciate but also to engage in it. This creates a growing community of artists and creators, and makes learning the arts even more accessible to everyone, compared to conventional physical classes which can be more expensive and hence inaccessible.

In conclusion, technology has definitely been more beneficial than detrimental to the arts. It enables much greater access to the arts for the common man, to not only consume and appreciate, but also to learn them. It has allowed artists newfound exposure for their work, increasing the potential for them to grow as a brand exponentially and earn more revenue. Like it or not, technology will pave the way for art in the future, with NFTs and the metaverse.

Comments:

Good knowledge and a range of apt examples from various art forms were found. The 'boon' aspects were well developed but for the bane, consider if it is just piracy that is the problem of technology for the arts.

Has technology been more of a boon than a bane for the arts?

Jerad Chong Shao Hong 21S52

The Arts should resist the influence of technology. This is the opinion that has been heard among the artistic community. Many believe that technology does more harm than good for art; some of the many reasons that make many believe that technology has been a bane for the Arts range from limiting creative freedoms to diminishing the value of authentic pieces of art. On the other hand, technology can also be used hand-in-hand with art to enhance art pieces, or give art the opportunity to reach a wide range of audiences. Thus, with the pros and cons of technology, has technology been more of a boon than a bane for the arts? In my opinion, in the case of technology influencing art, the pros far outweigh the cons.

Many detractors of art being influenced by technology argue that technology often diminishes the value of human artists. Nowadays, technology has developed to a point where machines are able to create pieces of art that are not only as aesthetically pleasing as hand drawn art, but they are also able to create works of art at a pace that humans simply are not able to match. For example, Dream, a Canadian artificial intelligence program created by WOMBO, allows users to simply put a prompt into the program and a piece of art according to the prompt would be created in a matter of seconds. This shows the incredible speed at which art can be created by AI programs. Furthermore, art pieces created by AI are often indistinguishable from human-created art pieces. This was shown in a double blind study conducted by the Art and Artificial Intelligence Lab by Rutgers University which found out that over 70 percent of the people they surveyed in an art gallery believe that the artwork created by artificial intelligence systems were created by humans. With technology being able to virtually replace the role of artists, is there truly a need for human artists in today's world?

Although technology may be able to create pieces of art that look similar to human-created ones, the case that technology is able to completely devalue the importance of human artists is far too myopic. Despite being able to create art that looks visually appealing, artificial intelligence will always be unable to replace human creativity. Art created by AI is unable to replicate the human mind, and is unable to create art with deeper, thought-provoking ideas. Furthermore, I would argue one step further that the influence of technology improves existing art pieces as it can be used hand-in-hand with artists to create work, and can also be used as a tool for artists to improve their work. Nowhere is this use of technology better exemplified than in artist Ai Weiwei's 'Hansel & Gretel'. Using the theme of government surveillance, the artist utilised newer technology such as drones and cameras to interact with his audience. In one section of this interactive art piece, the drones were used to capture videos and pictures of the audience that would be played in real time to them. This level of interaction of the art piece with the audience could only be done through the use of technology. Thus, I believe that technology enabled Ai Weiwei's message on the dangers of surveillance to be passed down more effectively.

Furthermore, the massive outreach that today's technology - particularly social media - gives to artists can help promote art to more people than ever before. With easier access to art, more and more people can gain a deeper appreciation of the Arts. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic,

the Smithsonian capitalised on the use of technology to digitalise their art pieces. This way, despite lockdown restrictions, people all around the world were still able to gain access to these prized pieces of art. It also further enabled more people to appreciate the arts, expanding art's influence. Artists have also utilised social media platforms like YouTube or TikTok to educate others to appreciate art. One example of this is the YouTube channel 'TwoSetViolin', which capitalised on YouTube's outreach to educate viewers on classical music in an entertaining manner. With more people being exposed to the arts because of the use of technology, how could technology be nothing but a boon for the arts?

On top of that, technology also lowers the entry barriers for artists to pursue their passion and gives more opportunities for smaller artists to gain recognition for their works. Nowadays, there are many platforms available for artists to show their work to the public. Gone are the days when a painter had to go through countless people to get their work into an art gallery. Now, with a photo and an Instagram account, their art can be easily shown to the world. Artists like Rupi Kaur have transformed from being amateur poets to a New York Times best-selling author of books like 'milk and honey', solely because of the attention they gained through social media. Musicians like DJ Alan Walker and rapper Juice WRLD have gained international fame by initially releasing their music through free music sites like SoundCloud or YouTube. Without the use of technology, I would argue that artists like these would not have been recognised for their talents, and they would not have been able to pursue their passions for a living.

Overall, there are both positive and negative impacts that the influence of technology has on the arts. Even though on rare occasions, technology can diminish the value of an artist, I strongly believe that the benefits of increased outreach and creative opportunities created for artists, because of technology's influence in art far outweigh the negative impacts. Thus, with the benefits created, how can technology be nothing but more of a boon than a bane for the arts?

Comments:

Thoughtful response that's consistently argued. Apt use of illustration: wide range of examples that all clearly support the argument. Some evaluation demonstrated in paragraph 3. Do consider further opportunities in your essay for evaluation. Language is good, with a good variety of sentence structures and good use of rhetorical questions. Minor errors of various types.



Politics, Economics & History

“

**Blind belief in authority is the
greatest enemy of truth.**

”

Albert Einstein

Famous physicist

2021 Events in Politics, Economics & History

6 January: Insurrection at the United States Capitol

A mob of supporters of now-former US President Donald Trump attacked the United States Capitol in Washington D.C. with his encouragement. They sought to overturn his defeat in the 2020 presidential election, by disrupting the joint session of Congress assembled to count electoral votes that would formalise then President-elect Joe Biden's victory. The Capitol riot was the violent culmination of Trump and his Republican allies' war on the legitimacy of American elections. These divisions over the fairness of American elections are rooted in an extreme level of political polarisation that has divided American society into mutually distrustful 'us versus them' camps. Five people died and 138 police officers were injured, including 15 hospitalised. The images from the incident shook the world, damaging America's reputation as a stable democracy, even as the Republican Party continues to embrace political candidates supporting Trump's 'Big Lie' and who were even present at the insurrection.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-56004916>

31 January: The United Kingdom officially left the European Union (EU)

The 47-year-long British membership in the EU finally came to an end. In the EU, citizens can move freely around fellow member states, and have the right to live in those other countries if they fulfil certain conditions. This means they are not to be treated differently in terms of access to employment, taxation, housing, education and many other policies. Moreover, all member states are in the European Single Market, a unified trading territory that functions without the border regulations and tariffs which typically apply to trade between countries. This allows the unrestricted movement of capital, people, goods and services. Released from the EU's rules on trading and free movement, the UK has been introducing its own policies on trade and immigration, causing significant disruption to trade, particularly UK exports to the EU. In the UK, an exodus of European workers and tighter immigration rules have contributed to a shortage of people to fill jobs. EU-UK relations continue to be strained, as London and Brussels have clashed over several issues including diplomatic representation, coronavirus vaccine exports and new border arrangements for Northern Ireland.

Source: <https://www.euronews.com/2021/06/23/brexit-draft-deal-first-of-many-hurdles-to-a-smooth-exit>

1 February: Coup d'état in Myanmar

Myanmar's democratic government, led by Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), was deposed by the Myanmar Army, also known as Tatmadaw. The coup was likely driven by the military's goal to preserve its central role in Burmese politics. Leader Aung San was detained and faced about a dozen charges, all of which she denied. The junta has arrested more than 10,600 since February, and with over 1,300 people killed in

demonstrations. The UN, ASEAN, and the EU expressed concern and called for dialogue on both sides, and to ensure access to humanitarian aid for all in Myanmar. The coup marked the end of Myanmar's most recent flirtation with democracy, after decades under a military dictatorship since independence.

Source: <https://www.vox.com/22260076/myanmar-coup-military-suu-kyi-explain>
<https://www.france24.com/en/asia-pacific/20210201-min-aung-hlaing-the-heir-to-myanmar-s-military-junta>

3 March: Latest stage of Russo-Ukrainian crisis began

Russian troop build-up near the two nations' borders spurred fears that Moscow could launch an invasion in the coming weeks or months - a prophecy that indeed came true on 24 February in 2022. Ukraine warned that Russia was trying to destabilise the country ahead of any planned military invasion, and Western powers repeatedly warned Russia against further aggressive moves against Ukraine. The Kremlin denied it was planning to attack and argued that NATO support for Ukraine -- including increased weapons supplies and military training - constituted a growing threat on Russia's western flank. Russia has long resisted Ukraine's move towards European institutions, and had demanded it never join, a demand that was roundly rejected. The US had made clear its commitment to helping Ukraine defend its "sovereign territory".

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56720589>
<https://edition.cnn.com/2021/12/03/europe/ukraine-russia-2021-tensions-explainer-cmd-intl/index.html>

20 April: Police officer Derek Chauvin found guilty of the death of George Floyd

Former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin was found guilty of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter in the death of George Floyd, which sparked protests against systemic racism and police violence in more than 2,000 US cities and 60 countries around the globe in 2020.

Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/20/us/george-floyd-chauvin-verdict.html>

19 June: Juneteenth became a federal holiday in the US

US President Joe Biden signed legislation officially establishing June 19 as Juneteenth National Independence Day, a federal holiday commemorating the end of slavery in the US. Juneteenth has often been overlooked by non-Black Americans and omitted from history books. However, momentum to recognise the occasion was generated by the Black Lives Matter movement last year.

Source: <https://edition.cnn.com/politics/live-news/biden-signs-juneteenth-bill/index.html>

15 August: Taliban occupation of the Afghan capital Kabul

As US withdrawal from Afghanistan proceeded after two decades of occupation (and the longest war the US has fought in its history), the Afghanistan National Army collapsed, and the Taliban overran the country. Kabul fell on August 15, trapping thousands of foreigners in the capital city. Afghans were equally as desperate, with images of people clinging onto US military planes in a bid to flee the country quickly going viral. On 10 December, donors agreed to release US\$280 million to the United Nations (UN) children agency UN's Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme to directly deliver essential health services and food assistance to more than ten million people in the country. Time will tell if the new Taliban government will be just like the one that horrified the world 20 years ago, although women's freedoms have already been steadily rolled back in the short time since the Taliban's return.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-58564837>

31 August: China's Evergrande warned of default risk if it failed to sell its assets

China property developer giant Evergrande Group warned for the first time that it may fail to repay its debts. The world's most indebted property developer said its total liabilities reached US\$304.45 billion as of 30 June. The group borrowed more than US\$300 billion to expand aggressively, but struggled to meet the interest payments on its debts. As a result, there were two main effects: firstly, the loss of money for people (paid deposits) and firms (construction and design); secondly, the impact on China's financial system - if Evergrande defaults, banks and other lenders might be forced to lend less, leading to a credit crunch and possibly reduced foreign investment into the country. This saga illustrated the vulnerabilities of China's economy, and how dependent it was on continued, unsustainable infrastructural investments.

Source: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Markets/China-debt-crunch/China-Evergrande-warns-of-default-risk-if-it-fails-to-sell-assets>
<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-58579833>

15 September: Trilateral security pact between Australia, UK and US (AUKUS) announced

The United States, United Kingdom and Australia announced a historic security pact to strengthen military capabilities in the Pacific. Under the pact, the US and UK would help Australia build at least eight nuclear-powered submarines and equip Australian forces with the know-how to build nuclear-powered submarines. The agreement was largely seen by analysts as a US-led effort to counter the rising influence of China in the region. Australia ditched a multibillion-dollar contract to buy diesel submarines from France in favour of acquiring nuclear-powered submarines under AUKUS – a decision the French described as a 'stab in the back'.

Source: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3151700/aukus-alliance-what-it-what-does-it-have-do-china-and-why>

30 November: Former Workers Party (WP) Member of Parliament (MP) Raeesah Khan resigned from WP and as an MP

MP for Sengkang GRC Ms Raeesah Khan resigned nearly four months after her original speech that sparked questions about her claims on a sexual assault case. She claimed she accompanied a victim of sexual assault to a police station, and alleged that the police mishandled the case. On 1 November, she admitted she lied. Hence, a formal complaint was raised against Ms Khan for breaching her parliamentary privilege. A discrepancy between Ms Khan's and other WP leaders' accounts have raised questions about the party's credibility. According to Ms Khan, no one in WP told her she should clarify and state the truth in Parliament. In contradiction, WP leaders said that they did not tell her to continue to lie. The results of a subsequent Committee of Inquiry recommended an investigation into the actions of Worker's Party leaders Pritam Singh and Muhamad Faisal Manap.

Source: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/wp-pritam-singh-raeesah-khan-lie-parliament-cop-privileges-2374636>

19 December: 2021 Hong Kong (HK) Legislative Council (LegCo) Elections held

Pro-Beijing candidates claimed a victory in Hong Kong's LegCo election, as the city saw its lowest-ever voter turnout of only 30.2% in the wake of a controversial, mainland-endorsed 'National Security Law' passing. It was the first LegCo election since China made sweeping and controversial changes to the city's electoral system, marking the beginning of 'new politics'. Officials argue the changes were needed to ensure stability, but critics argued that they weakened democracy. 82 of the 90 seats were won by members from the pro-establishment and pro-Beijing camp. Some activists were arrested after they had urged people to boycott the election, or to leave their ballots blank as a protest.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-59717343>

Examine the view that governing a country today is much more challenging than in the past.

Maheshwaran Mridhula 21539

Joe Biden, Lee Hsien Loong, Angela Merkel, Kim Jong-un, Aung San Suu Kyi, Narendra Modi – they are all well-known leaders of various countries who have very different styles of leadership and governance. Despite their differences, all these leaders have undoubtedly been both highly praised and harshly criticised for their various government policies and decisions. With increasing attention on government policies, every decision of government leaders is being highly scrutinised and evaluated. Despite a few seemingly controversial policies, we need to acknowledge that governing a country today is much more challenging than in the past. Although some may argue that the rise of technology has eased the job of governing the country, they fail to realise that the very same technology has created a whole new myriad of problems. Coupled with increasing environmental problems and vocalisation among the public, it has made governing a country much more challenging than in the past.

Some may argue that the advancements in technology have made it easier for leaders to govern a country. In the past, there were several issues that seemed impossible to tackle, such as dire medical problems for which scientists and doctors did not have the appropriate technology and medical equipment to treat. For example, because of advancements in technology, vaccines are even being developed for cancers which were viewed as incurable in the past. An example is the development of the Human Papillomavirus vaccine that is predicted to possibly even eradicate cervical cancer in three decades. Such vast advancements in medical technology have improved the welfare of the people, and hence made it easier to govern a country as there is a higher quality of life and greater satisfaction of the people, which means a lesser chance of social unrest. Another major problem that seemed impossible to solve in the past was the lack of access to food aid and basic healthcare in war-torn countries, geographically remote countries and impoverished countries. For instance, advancements of technology in the transport sectors enabled countries like Rwanda to utilise drones and supply blood-for-blood transfusion services to remote areas. Moreover, in 2019, 35% of Rwanda's blood transfusion services were carried out using drones. Hence, countries can employ technology to solve dire situations that were previously deemed impossible to address, and hence be able to govern the country and ensure the people's welfare better.

However, these people fail to realise that advancements in technology have in fact brought on a whole new array of problems and threats, which outweigh the benefits and make it more challenging to govern a country today compared to the past. The increased digitalisation of today's world has brought about a new set of crimes and threats in the cyber world that threaten people's safety. In today's world, governments not only have to deal with threats and dangers from the real world, but also threats from the virtual world that threatens the lives of those in the real world. One major example is the weaponisation of technological advancements resulting in the rise of terrorist activities. For example, the 2008 Mumbai bomb attack was planned by terrorists who made use of Google images to plan their attack, and even more recently, in 2018, the US police arrested a man accused of planning on using robotics aircrafts to cause explosions in the US Pentagon and Capitol

Building. Hence, governments have a much harder job of governing their countries today as they need to closely monitor threats to national security from the cyberworld, and be on higher alert as terrorists are becoming increasingly tech-savvy to create more destruction.

Moreover, another major threat is the huge rise in cyber crimes such as credit card frauds and cyber bullying that resulted in the death of Amanda Todd in 2012, and a rise in cyber-crimes like hacking. A famous example is the SingHealth data breach in 2018 where the medical information of about 1.5 million Singaporeans was hacked and stolen, including the Prime Minister's. This evidently shows the exponential rise in threats and dangers the governments have to handle in the cyberworld. In order to effectively govern a country, the leaders have to be able to ensure the safety of its people and protect them from security threats, which is becoming increasingly difficult when considering the advancements in technology, as governments have to take greater measures.

Furthermore, governing a country today is much more challenging than in the past because people are becoming a lot more vocal about social issues and increasingly hitting the streets to protest social injustice and fight for their cause. Compared to the past, people today are a lot more liberal, and are being taught from a young age to stand up for themselves and raise their voice over social issues that they feel strongly for. The effect of this can be seen in the increasing number of protests around the world, criticising the government of the country. A major example is the recent protest in Hong Kong where people were protesting the Hong Kong government's decision to pass the Extradition Bill. This resulted in unimaginable amounts of police brutality, violence and loss of lives. This causes huge disruptions in the lives of people by amping up the level of social unrest, making it increasingly harder for the government to maintain peace in society. Another example is the Indian farmer 4iots that took place in late 2020 and early 2021, where farmers across several states in India marched and protested the new agriculture laws that were implemented by the government with the intention of improving farmers' welfare. However, the farmers instead felt vulnerable and exploited. These protests, along with several other movements such as Black Lives Matter and the March For Our Lives led by high schooler Emma Gonzalez for increased gun laws, are all creating more chaos in societies. The rise of such activities makes it more challenging to govern as it tears up the social fabric and makes it more difficult to maintain peace and order.

Lastly, governing a country today is much more challenging than in the past, due to the worsening environmental problems in today's world. Compared to the past, global warming and climate change have become an even bigger issue as global warming is on the rise, resulting in environmental degradation. Climate change has become a bigger issue especially after the Industrial Revolution in the 1780s, leading to the global average atmospheric carbon dioxide in 2020 being at a record high of 412.5 ppm. Governments of today must carefully consider the environmental impact, while implementing any decision to not worsen the economy. This has made it more challenging to govern as with environmental degradation, governments will have to carefully weigh the economic benefits and environmental harm when making decisions. These include allowing more multinational corporations to set up factories or considering the pros and cons of building a new MRT line in Singapore that runs through a nature reserve. Hence, governments have to juggle these additional environmental considerations while ensuring the people's economic and social wellbeing. Furthermore, many governments are now also being criticised for their lack of concern for

environmental sustainability, and inaction to tackle climate change, by even young activists like Greta Thunberg.

To sum up, I strongly believe that despite the technology used to solve problems by governments, governing a country today has become much more challenging than in the past due to increased threats in the cyberworld, increasingly vocal social movements and the deteriorating environment. Hence, given the tough job that leaders currently have governing a country, it is crucial for us to vote for capable leaders, and exercise our vote wisely to ensure that our future is in good hands.

Comments:

Persuasively argued and well supported by a wide range of appropriate examples. You have consistently tried to weigh the challenges, and observations demonstrated insight and understanding of world issues & expectations of governments. A pleasure to read.

Examine the view that authoritarian styles of governance have no place in the world today.

Loh Shau Jet 21S37

Throughout the ages, our world has stood witness to the rise and fall of numerous empires, civilisations and governments. The reasons for their collapses vary wildly: Mesopotamia was an up-and-coming agricultural society ultimately abandoned due to environmental reasons, the Aztecs could see the stars with their advanced machinery yet fell victim to dastardly tricks by Spanish conquerors, and the Soviet Union fell as its oppressive government could not resolve the economic stagnation and account to its people, leading to mass disillusionment with the idea of one Soviet identity. Naturally, there will be discussion on the types of government present in these societies, and by extension, the controversial topic of authoritarian governance. They have been present throughout history, but are they truly relevant in this day and age? Some detractors may argue that authoritarian styles of government can succeed by having very tough policies and doing well in today's world. However, I firmly believe that a large proportion of authoritarian governance is no longer needed today due to their suppression of freedom and rights, the violence these regimes inflict on the common folk as well as their disconnect with international affairs in a globalised community through isolation; all of which do not have a place in today's society.

Pertaining to the view that authoritarian governments can have tough policies to do well, this is an idealistic mindset. In reality, only a select few are able to see growth such as China. Despite its authoritarian government, it has seen massive economic growth in recent years and is challenging the United States of America (USA) on international affairs. Although China's government can do so, it is largely due to their territorial and population size that they can have such robust economic growth. While other authoritarian systems have the idealistic aims of following suit, they are highly unlikely to succeed, as further expounded on below.

First, authoritarian governments suppress the freedom and rights of their people in a world where they are deemed necessities. The reason for labelling authoritarian styles of governance as unjust and outdated is the precedent set by these governments. For example, when the Russian Revolution occurred, a Marxist-driven party led by Vladimir Lenin took office and established the first ever communist state, which became known as the Soviet Union. During his rule and Stalin's subsequent rule, the people were heavily restricted on what they could say and do, where anyone deemed as a dissident was put on trial and forced into making false confessions and prosecuted, or even 'disappear' as the party called it. According to the United Nations, all human beings have the right of freedom of speech, to purchase property and many more, which were not present in Soviet society. Another example is Nazi Germany. Under Hitler, women were heavily stigmatised and had their rights trampled on. Such violations can be seen through Hitler's misguided ideology that women should be homemakers and not workers, women not being able to drink or even wear certain attire. These are in stark contrast to today's world, where change is the only constant and denial is futile. Generation Z is the most progressive generation in decades, never fearful to advocate for change and fight for what they believe in. If an authoritarian government were to waltz into power and suppress rights, it likely leads to them feeling vulnerable and taking action. This is best shown in the Hong Kong

protests during 2019-2020. Historically, Hong Kong was meant to return to governance under China, but many youths knew that if this happened, they would be under oppressive authoritarian rule, losing their freedom and rights. As such, initiatives like the prominent Umbrella Movement were started by the youth. They utilised social media as a call for help and solidarity to let the world know of their predicament, as well as to rally Hong Kong citizens en masse and confront the police in the streets. Although the movement dissolved in 2021, it showed the might of the people when defending their rights from an authoritarian system. This world is no longer one where people cower and are willing to be pushed around by the policies of an authoritarian government. Therefore, they have no place in our global community today.

Next, authoritarian styles of governance often use violence to achieve their aims. Violence and instability are common hallmarks of an authoritarian regime, as shown by the internationally shocking collapse of Afghanistan this year. Following the ousting of the democratic government put in place by the USA, the extremist Taliban who previously controlled the nation from 1996-2001 resumed power. Despite controlling a large amount of Afghanistan, they lacked absolute control. Why? This is attributable to the northern alliance. As they did in the Afghan war of 2001, the northern alliance had bunkered in its historically Taliban-free base of the Panjshir valley, refusing to give in unless the Taliban held peace talks. To demonstrate their willingness to use force, the Taliban's social media pages posted videos of hundreds of armed Taliban riding in armoured vehicles into Panjshir. The resultant fighting led to many resistance casualties and pushed them further back as the Taliban advanced. Fear is not an effective way of governing in this world, as shown by the northern alliance. It only causes social unrest and stirs up anger from the masses. Society has advanced and become more civilised in recent years, and violence aimed towards commonfolk is frowned upon. Another instance of resistance to violence by oppressive governments is the coup d'état in Myanmar, where democratic leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi was overthrown and held under house arrest by the junta. When protests happened, the military was unafraid of using live firearms, resulting in the deaths of more than 12 people. As a result, armed resistance took root and started to engage them. This demonstrates that the use of force has no benefits, as the people are likely to form resistance instead of fearfully following. In today's world, countries rely on stability and peace to trade, do business and attract foreign investors. How could a violent climate ever survive in a world where stability is a key goal of most governments? Due to the violence and unrest most oppressive governments pursue, they have no place in our world today.

Lastly, authoritarian styles of governance seek to isolate their affairs, which is unfeasible for the globalised world today. This is very different to the 1900s, where most leaders were content with isolationism and only trading with countries they made alliances with. However, the shifting political climate meant that globalisation led to greater interconnectivity than we could have ever foreseen. Not only our people but our economies too are affected, as shown by the 2008 financial crisis where one of the largest banks in the USA, Lehman Brothers, filed for bankruptcy and resulted in global recessions. This affected many countries outside of the USA. Authoritarian governments tend to keep their policies quiet and disconnect themselves from the expanding international community. For example, North Korea has been under more scrutiny of late as it continues to dabble with the cataclysmic force of nuclear weapons. It has refused to cooperate with international bodies like the UN, and when it does, it never settles on any clear-cut resolution, as shown by the 2018 Trump-Kim summit in Singapore where both leaders failed to come to a clear agreement. In contrast, heavily

involved countries like the USA have never had major financial issues outside of a few recessions and even authoritarian China, as one of Singapore's key trading partners, has invested a lot into us. The point is that these authoritarian styles of governance are severely disconnected from international affairs, which are vital for a nation's success in the 21st century. Refusing cooperation, aid or discussion makes it difficult for international policies to deal with exigent global issues like climate change. Such issues are not and should not be under the jurisdiction of one nation, and all countries have the obligation to contribute their fair share, proportionate to their carbon footprint. This was attempted through the Paris agreement; countries had to submit emissions targets in order to achieve a net zero carbon footprint. Therefore, the imperativeness of global unity to address severe issues, and interconnectivity brought by globalisation, assert the idea that isolated authoritarian regimes are no longer relevant in today's world.

In summation, although there are some exceptions, my view that authoritarian styles of governance are no longer relevant in today's world still stands. This is due to a multitude of reasons, namely that they suppress rights and freedoms, pursue violence that hurts the people, as well as promote a disconnect from global affairs via isolationism. It is said that democracy and communism are two sides of a coin, both of which in theory are rosy but are in actuality much harsher. If executed wrongly, the authoritarian government will collapse. So what would Lenin or Stalin do in this age to establish their communist regime? Well, I firmly believe that the time for those regimes has already passed us by. It truly is the dawn of a new age, one with rampant digital improvements, constant economic interconnectedness as well as a 'make love, not war' mindset. In this day and age, authoritarian styles of governance should be retired, restricted to musty historical records of an eon past. Never should an authoritarian form of governance set foot in office in this day and age forevermore.

Comments:

Bold and assertive writing that displays a wide range of contextual knowledge alongside a confident personal voice. Some claims could be further examined.

‘Foreign intervention in a nation’s affairs has only ever been harmful.’ How far do you agree?

Lau Yong De, Lucas 20A11

Article 2 of the United Nations (UN) Charter outlines the Principle of Sovereign Equality, which places a premium on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of nation states worldwide; countries themselves are to have the ultimate power and authority over internal affairs that fall within their territorial or sovereign jurisdiction. Such a principle, enshrined within the multilateral organisation, serves to guard against illegal or unlawful foreign intervention, with proponents of this principle often citing that foreign intervention in a nation’s affairs has only ever been harmful. However, the narrow assertion posited within the question is too much of an extreme and narrow one, as it fails to take into consideration and account for instances where foreign intervention has proven to be beneficial for the parties and countries involved.

Proponents of the assertion that foreign intervention in a nation’s affairs has only ever been harmful revert to the tried and tested argument that foreign intervention undermines the host nation’s established systems and institutions. In a world where countries are founded on the system of democracy for governance and the functioning of society, this can be attributed to ideas and principles such as rule of law and checks and balances; hallmarks of democracy that ensure fairness and impartiality in all systems and institutions of governance. However, foreign intervention, especially in the pursuit of the naked self-interests of gaining control and influence, serves to undermine the democratic ideals and systems, in turn undermining the purity and sanctity of such institutions and processes. Case in point: Russian interference during the 2016 United States (US) presidential elections where hackers were able to gain access into the emails of presidential candidate Hillary Clinton’s campaigning team before leaking private and confidential information and messages. While such foreign interference could be attributed to rival candidate Donald Trump’s alleged soliciting of foreign interference to boost his electoral prospects, such an episode has made many Americans question the sanctity of their power to vote, and the credibility of ‘free and fair’ elections - a supposed hallmark of democracy which has been appealing to masses not just in America, but all around the world in influencing political proceedings and outcomes. Given the fact that America is widely regarded as the champion and leading proponent of liberal democracy, even being susceptible to foreign interference - which has undermined the sacred ideals and principles - adds credence to the assertion that foreign intervention in a nation’s affairs has only ever been harmful.

In addition, ardent believers of the claim that foreign intervention in a nation’s affairs has only ever been harmful also cite the fact that foreign intervention, even if well-intentioned, harbours the propensity to perpetuate problems and issues within host nations. Given the increasingly globalised and interconnected world that we live in, the issues and problems that occur within another country have the potential to spread and impact another nation, even if they were not directly involved. Hence, this creates the necessity and impetus for foreign intervention in order to resolve the root causes within these host nations. However, foreign intervention often lacks the necessary understanding and insight into the local realities of host nations, thereby harbouring the propensity for such interventions - while well-intentioned - to perpetuate and exacerbate these local issues within host nations. This

can be seen from the sobering reality of America's War on Terror and subsequently her invasion of Afghanistan in order to oust the Taliban, which was suspected of sheltering Osama Bin Laden, mastermind of the 9/11 attacks. However, US operations in Afghanistan, which primarily relied on the use of state-of-the-art weapons and brute force to eliminate terrorist strongholds and bases, failed to take into consideration the fact that such terrorist hideouts were often interspersed among densely populated areas, meaning their bombs and missiles often inadvertently incurred innocent civilian casualties. This heightens the perception amongst the local population of the US as an aggressive and war-mongering invader, spurring them to have sympathies towards the Taliban or even becoming radicalised terrorists to carry out similar attacks and hinder US attempts to decisively rid Afghanistan of its terrorist hotspots. As such, the fact that foreign intervention, even when well-intentioned, harbours the propensity to exacerbate local issues only serves to add credence to the assertion that foreign intervention has only ever been harmful.

While such arguments are valid and are even credible to a certain extent, such an assertion is too narrow and extreme. It fails to take into consideration the fact that foreign intervention, in the form of assistance, has proven to be extremely crucial for the many developing nations within our international community. While the advent of globalisation and modernisation has certainly yielded economic success and prosperity around the globe, the veneer of such an economic boom often masks the fact that various nations have not been able to keep up with the rapid and often unforgiving pace of globalisation. Economically-stricken and war-torn countries lack the necessary resources to be able to meet the basic humanitarian needs of the population, such as in the form of education, housing and healthcare. This results in these countries to be afflicted by persistent and nagging socioeconomic issues. As such, foreign intervention in the form of developmental assistance from more well-developed nations and multilateral frameworks have served to provide the necessary funding, resources and expertise that these nations are in dire need of. This prevents the socio-economic issues from festering and deteriorating into endemic issues that would permanently stunt the growth and development of nations worldwide. In the countries encompassing the Sub-Saharan region of Africa, where disparate local communities lack access to necessities such as food, healthcare and education, Overseas Developmental Assistance from well-developed countries such as the US and the UN's humanitarian arm have disseminated crucial assistance. Oftentimes, experts are deployed to set foot within these countries to build the necessary infrastructure for housing and healthcare, as well as train doctors and teachers to address the void of equitable and readily accessible healthcare and education. Such assistance has proven to be extremely beneficial, with various Organisation for Economic and Cooperation Development reports citing how the literacy rates of such communities have risen while the mortality rate and prospect of AIDS have decreased dramatically. As such, this serves to refute the claim that foreign intervention in a nation's affairs has only been harmful.

In addition, foreign intervention has proven to aid host nations in resolving many of the issues that they lack the necessary capabilities to. Far from the developed economy and democracy that us Singaporeans live in, many citizens around the globe live in countries that lack the necessary political apparatus, established institutions and frameworks to ensure sound socio-economic and political governance. This results in these nations suffering from widespread economic dislocation and political instability, providing the perfect breeding ground for terrorist organisations and extremist groups to emerge from the ashes, plunging these countries into total anarchy and chaos. In addition, the power and pervasiveness of the Internet has enabled the rapid proliferation of extremist ideals

notwithstanding one's borders, resulting in the radicalisation of individuals to conduct acts of terrorism under the orders and directives of a terrorist organisation that is not location specific. This can be seen in the rise of ISIS amidst the political upheaval and instability of the Middle East, claiming large swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria while sparking a wave of global terrorist attacks in countries from France to Indonesia, and the rise of various associated terrorist organisations such as the Boko Haram in Nigeria. Given the transnational nature of an issue like terrorism, which harbours the propensity to spread and proliferate, the necessity for foreign intervention into the territorial jurisdiction of countries to eliminate the endemic root problem of such terrorism and provide them the necessary resources and capabilities to resolve this issue on their own is heightened. The multilateral intervention of a joint international coalition within Iraq and Syria has yielded tangible success in reclaiming territories under ISIS's reign of terror, while restoring the incumbent governments to power. UN peacekeeping operations continue to be the lifeblood of the fight against Boko Haram, given the inefficiencies and inadequacies of a Nigerian government hampered by political infighting and chaos. As such, this seems to refute the claim that foreign intervention has only been harmful, exposing it for its narrow-minded and short-sighted purview as foreign intervention has proven to be extremely beneficial in aiding host nations in resolving many of the issues they lack the necessary capabilities for.

As outlined in Article 2 of the UN Charter, sovereignty and territorial integrity remain the foremost priority of nation states worldwide, given the fact that their very independence and existence hinges on the preservation of it against any unlawful foreign intervention. While foreign intervention has proven to only be harmful and detrimental in certain instances, such occurrences cannot be used to come to the conclusion that foreign intervention is purely harmful. Oftentimes, such instances serve as anomalies rather than the norm, given the fact that foreign intervention has seemed to provide the necessary assistance to various developing nations within our international community, fill the void in nations that lack the necessary capabilities to resolve issues within their jurisdiction, and given the propensity for these issues to proliferate and spread in an increasingly globalised and interconnected world we live in today.

Comments:

Lucas, this is a largely sound discussion of the issue with relevant points made, aptly supported by concrete evidence. Good knowledge demonstrated on the various geopolitical situations around the world. Language use is largely functional, although there is a tendency for repetition of certain words such as 'propensity'.

**‘Foreign intervention in a nation’s affairs has
only ever been harmful.’ How far do you agree?**

Uppalapati Shreyas 20537

In our modern world riddled with tumult and uncertainty, good governance has emerged as a global imperative. While some schools of thought postulate that good governance should come from within, with states responsible to provide the solutions for their own domestic issues, others argue that in such situations, international actors have the obligation to step in and assist in restoring order. This, after all, has been the crux of the controversy behind the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) Act, an act initiated by the United Nations allowing foreign actors to step in when a nation allows continued human rights abuses to take place within its borders. Thus, the issue of whether or not to allow for foreign intervention in a state’s domestic affairs has been an age-old one, with many differing opinions on the issue, from amused disbelief to blatant outrage. However, before we begin to address this, it is imperative that we understand what foreign intervention even entails. Foreign intervention is not merely limited to military intervention; it can also include economic aid and sanctions, to name a few. While some may posit that foreign intervention has only ever been harmful, I disagree with this claim, and instead contend that foreign intervention in a country’s domestic affairs has largely been beneficial.

It is vital to acknowledge that in some situations, foreign intervention is likely to be largely harmful due to the misalignment of goals between the country that intervenes and the needs of the country that the foreign intervention is ‘taking place’ in. While foreign intervention is ideally supposed to be conducted with an altruistic purpose, to provide aid against issues that are plaguing the country, this is often not the case as the country that is intervening is grounded - either partially or wholly - in self-interest. For example, in 2017, China provided a large financial grant to Sri Lanka for the construction of the Hambantota port. While it initially seemed that China’s main motive for doing so was to provide economic aid to Sri Lanka, historically a Chinese ally, it soon became clear that this was not the case. When Sri Lanka could not repay its debt to China, China acquired the port with a 100-year lease, both robbing Sri Lanka of the economic opportunities that the port stood to offer and increasing its geopolitical presence in South Asia. This had wider global implications as it weakened the influence of other countries, such as India, in the region. This shows that while foreign intervention in a country’s domestic affairs could have ostensible motives that suggest altruism and goodwill, the ulterior motives could be a stark contrast from this. Hence, foreign intervention in a country’s domestic affairs could be harmful in some cases rather than beneficial for the beneficiary of the aid alongside other countries, as exemplified by the Hambantota port example, due to pseudo-altruism on the part of the intervening country.

Nevertheless, I believe that foreign aid is largely beneficial because it can help to avert wider global catastrophes that start off as domestic issues. In the globalised world we live in today, most issues are much more complex and intricate than ever before. It would be folly to assume that we still live in silos, and that one nation’s problems will not have any bearing on other states’ social and political stability. A prime example of this would be the 2015 Amazon rainforest fires as well as the 2019 Australian bushfires. While these seem like domestic issues with disastrous environmental

consequences for Brazil and Australia respectively, they could in fact have had much more far-reaching global consequences if not resolved. In fact, if not for the foreign aid from countries such as Singapore and the United States to fight the forest fires in these nations, it was estimated that the global percentage of carbon dioxide on Earth would have risen by almost 0.01%. This disaster, thankfully, was averted due to concerted global efforts to douse the fires, but it certainly serves as a grim reminder that no country's issues are purely domestic. Foreign intervention and aid is thus vital to ameliorate the wider disastrous consequences of what may start off as local issues. In the case of the Amazon rainforest fires and the Australian bushfires, to further emphasise the global interconnectedness of these issues, the benefits of foreign intervention are apparent as they saved the Earth from what could have resulted in a 0.1°C rise in global temperatures. This would have greatly disrupted global ecosystems and adversely affected us as humans through disruptions to global food and regional water supply. Hence, this clearly depicts how foreign intervention is beneficial in helping to avert the global consequences of problems that start off on a domestic scale.

Furthermore, foreign intervention is largely beneficial in strengthening and protecting the sovereignty of a state. While some may argue that foreign intervention clearly and directly threatens a nation's sovereignty by meddling in its internal affairs, this is indeed not the case as a sovereign state's basic responsibility is to promote the welfare of its citizens, and on a fundamental level to protect them from human rights abuses. Thus, when a state is not able to fulfil these basic responsibilities, foreign actors have every right - and in fact obligation - to aid the fulfilment of these duties. A classic case in point would be the 2012 Libyan civil war, a part of the wider Arab Spring movement. This is a pertinent illustration of the benefits of foreign intervention, as it was the first time the R2P Act was invoked by the United Nations, resulting in the imposition of economic sanctions against Muammar Gaddafi's cabinet, and later even airstrikes in conflict zones by North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) planes. While there are many who criticise the military intervention by NATO as it was carried out to drive regime change, the benefits of foreign intervention in this situation clearly outweigh the harm as it helped to prevent the merciless killing of many citizens by military forces authorised by Gaddafi's government. This thus helped to increase social stability in Libya by overthrowing Gaddafi's government and causing regime change. Hence, in such instances where the local government is not fulfilling its basic responsibility of promoting the welfare of its citizens and thus undermines its legitimacy as a sovereign state, I believe that foreign intervention is beneficial in strengthening the sovereignty of a state and restoring social order.

Thus, in conclusion, I believe that foreign intervention in a country's domestic affairs has not only been harmful and has in fact been largely beneficial. While it is disheartening to see the ever-growing list of issues plaguing today's world, there does exist a silver lining in the form of increased global cooperation and commitment to tackle, or at least reduce, the impact of these problems. Considering these positive trends, we could perhaps look forward to a future in which foreign intervention and aid receives a much warmer reception and popular support, a departure from the polarising issue it remains as today.

Comments:

Examples are relevant, clearly linked to the point and detailed. However, paragraphs are overly focused on one example only, instead of an argument. Language use is fluent and there is felicitous expression, but this can be better controlled at times.

'Foreign intervention in a nation's affairs has only ever been harmful.' How far do you agree?

Ryan Aidan Baretto 20538

As the dust of the devastating Second World War was still settling, it was quickly becoming apparent that the stage for a new conflict was already being set. Two superpowers, the United States (US) and the Soviet Union, had risen while the rest of the world had been brought to its knees, and they were already ready for another war. This was to be, however, a 'cold war', fought not with large scale conflict but with the power of foreign intervention and exerting influence. These superpowers had come to the realisation that as the most powerful countries in the world, they could no longer afford to let threats to their sovereignty bubble over to other parts of the globe. As such, they had to intervene. Many decades on, they are far from the only countries with this belief. Foreign intervention in another nation's affairs refers to the act of exerting one's influence abroad, be it through policy, trade or sheer military might, without any regard for the notion of jurisdiction, so as to achieve a certain outcome. This can sometimes prove to be beneficial, while at other times can be incredibly harmful to the nations involved. While some believe that it is not harmful as it stabilises heated situations abroad and thereby protects the people there, others are of the opinion that foreign intervention often destabilises situations and harms foreign civilians, leading to completely avoidable damage to the intervening country and threatening the concept of democracy. As such, I agree to a large extent that foreign intervention in a nation's affairs has usually been harmful.

Proponents of foreign intervention posit that it can bring benefits to the country being intervened, by stabilising situations and helping the civilians there. One of the main causes for intervention historically has been to stabilise fraught situations which, if left unchecked, could lead to catastrophic consequences on the locals or grim implications for inhabitants of neighbouring nations. A well-known example of this is the US involvement in the invasion of Germany that ended the Second World War. At the time, the US could have chosen to continue protecting their own naval bases in the Pacific and fighting Japan, who posed a threat to these bases. They had no direct stake in the war in Europe, but a combination of the fact that allowing Germany to grow in strength could allow them to overpower neighbours Britain and Russia, as well as emerging news of the atrocities the Germans committed against their own people, forced America to intervene and eventually defeat the Germans. In this case, American intervention likely saved hundreds of thousands of civilian casualties, a clear case of intervention being beneficial. Aside from this, when apartheid was growing in a young South Africa, prompt economic sanctions from members of the United Nations seemed to be effective in limiting the government's ability to purchase weapons. This crippled the government, once again stalling the possibility of violent backlash against the mistreated black Africans, hence proving to be beneficial. Hence, some believe that foreign intervention can help stabilise tensions in the region and prevent civilian deaths.

However, this belief may not hold true when examining the long-term consequences and unintended outcomes of foreign intervention; it may instead end up destabilising the situation inside. For example, after the intervention in Germany ended the war, foreign governments - particularly the Soviet Union and US - were unwilling to come up with a proper unified solution allowing Germany to

recover, instead carving up the nation into their own regions of influence. This led to a great disparity in the country's recovery, with places under Soviet control such as East Berlin racked with astonishing levels of poverty which diminished citizens' standard of living in these areas. Hence, while the short-term impact of intervention may be temporary stabilisation, continued intervention eventually led to destabilisation of the situation again, thereby harming the people there. Aside from this, the economic sanctions that were slapped on South Africa had a domino effect on the cost of living for ordinary citizens as well. This disproportionately affected the impoverished, which ironically often happened to be the black Africans who were already being discriminated against. This, along with the belief that the foreign powers were hardly helping their cause, only served to increase strife and conflict between the black and white South Africans, causing tensions to worsen. Hence, this belief of foreign intervention stabilising tensions may not be true, as foreign intervention can often destabilise situations instead.

Additionally, another key negative impact of foreign intervention is the harm it can cause to democracies across the globe. The main principle of democracy is that a nation's power lies with its people, and not with anyone else. According to this, in a democratic nation, foreign intervention has the potential to cause great harm in the system of democracy as many decisions made that can influence the country are not done by the locals or their elected officials, but by the generals and politicians of other intervening nations. A prime example of this is China's intervention in Hong Kong in a direct attempt to undermine democracy. China has thus far flexed their political might by helping to pass an extradition bill in Hong Kong, one that was heavily opposed by the populace, allowing them to extradite anyone they see fit to China to be charged. Not only does this directly harm Hong Kong's democracy by ignoring the will of the populace, but it gives China the power to damage another key pillar of democracy, the freedom of speech, by removing any opponents they desire. Aside from this, a more insidious instance of foreign intervention occurred in the leadup to the 2016 US presidential elections when Russian state-sponsored hackers were accused of leaking incriminating emails of Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton, who went on to lose the election. This cyberattack once again harmed the democratic process in America by illegally introducing new information to sway voters away from voting for her, instead of letting free and fair elections play out. Thus, foreign intervention in national affairs can often prove harmful to the concept of democracy.

It may seem that the harm of foreign intervention is isolated to the country that the intervention is targeting, yet this is often not true, as it can also harm the people of the country that is intervening as well. A good example of this would be the case of the Vietnam War. The impact of said intervention to prevent the rise of communism is often said to be a grave mistake for America, as not only did they fail to achieve their goal, but they incurred grave harm to their soldiers and nation's morale. Soldiers came back suffering from severe PTSD, the mutagenic effects of chemical weapons like Agent Orange, and were missing limbs as well. This sight, as well as the carnage from the streets of Saigon being broadcast to American homes, meant that not only had Americans been directly harmed, but morale and faith in the government also tanked as a result of foreign intervention. Aside from this, another key example is that of growing of Islamic extremism and related terror attacks in European countries. The infamous Paris bombings and Brussels attacks are just a few of an ever-increasing number of terror attacks, and one of the reasons for this spike in incidents is anger amongst radicals towards European governments for fighting in the war against terror in the Middle East. Had there been no intervention on the part of these governments, these radical individuals would have

less reason to target residents of these countries to make a statement. Hence, foreign intervention can bring harm to the people of the intervening country as well.

Ultimately, while some believe that foreign intervention in another nation's affairs is helpful as it helps stabilise situations abroad, the reality is that it often destabilises said situation, threatens democracies and harms the people of the country intervening instead. While it is a utopian dream to live a world where each country is perfectly capable of handling its own affairs and is secure enough to ignore the issues of others, it is definitely not too much to ask our leaders for more accountability and transparency when making decisions that not only affect us, but also people living halfway across the globe.

Comments:

The points raised are insightful and well supported by a wide range of detailed examples. Explanation of logic could still be improved at times. Language use is varied and fluent, though there are occasional slips, but paragraphs are very well linked.

‘Small countries are always disadvantaged compared to large countries.’ Comment.

Lau Yong De, Lucas 20A11

Within the multilateral organisation of the United Nations (UN), the General Assembly accords all member-states a vote, thereby ensuring fair representation for all countries notwithstanding their size or political clout. While such a measure has been enshrined within the charter and inner workings of the organisation, detractors have often labelled it as a mere stop-gap measure, pointing out how there are certain disadvantages of small countries that prove difficult to bridge in relation to their larger and more illustrious counterparts. However, the assertion that small countries are always disadvantaged compared to large countries is a rather narrow and limited one, as it fails to consider the fact that sound governance can help to alleviate such disadvantages, even elevating these smaller nation-states above their larger counterparts. In addition, the smaller size can and has proven to be a blessing in disguise for these countries. Therefore, I disagree to a large extent with the view that small countries are always disadvantaged compared to large countries.

Proponents of the belief that small countries are always disadvantaged compared to large countries revert to the tried and tested argument of these smaller nations lacking natural resources compared to their larger counterparts. The geographical landscape of countries around the world invariably dictates the quantity of natural resources that they have access to. With such resources proving to be the lifeblood of many countries by driving their economic growth and fuelling their population, countries with a larger geographical landscape are able to harness these readily available resources and channel them towards development and progress. Such proponents often cite the rapid growth trajectory of China since 1978, owing much to its inherent abundance of natural resources and large labour force, which enables it to power its rapid industrialisation and development. In contrast, smaller nation-states with an inherent lack of resources have little choice but to depend on their larger neighbours for these crucial resources, as without them, the long-term development of these countries is stunted. Such over-reliance harbours certain ramifications and disadvantages for these smaller nation-states as the continued provision and availability of such resources is often subjected to the whims and fancies of these larger nations. For instance, although Singapore has often concluded various agreements with Malaysia in order to overcome its inherent shortage of water, Malaysia has often played the ‘water card’ and threatened to cut off the water supply in times of bilateral disagreements, most notably during the Chaim Herzog incident in the 1980s. Such overdependence harbours severe consequences for these smaller nations, especially in the sudden withdrawal of such crucial resources. The Trump administration’s decision to sever economic assistance to Haiti in 2018 exposed the country’s long overreliance on the US, with constant tsunamis and earthquakes worsening a country already blighted by political instability and chaos. As such, this adds credence to the assertion that small countries are always disadvantaged compared to large countries.

In addition, small countries lack the necessary political clout and stature as compared to their larger counterparts to adequately champion their interests and demands on the international stage. Although multilateral organisations such as the UN have attempted to narrow and equalise such disparities through the aforementioned granting of a vote to every member state, the geopolitical

inner workings of the international community has often favoured larger countries, with smaller nations often marginalised and left on the periphery. This has meant that the national interests and concerns of larger countries often take precedence, with larger countries utilising their greater political stature and clout to bully smaller nations lacking the necessary stature and reputation to represent and fulfil their interests. Despite being on the receiving end of a blatant violation of its sovereignty, the small Central American state of Nicaragua was unable to hold the US accountable for its transgression of international law in 1984. The US utilised its political stature as one of the permanent 5 (P5) members within the UN Security Council and vetoed Nicaraguan attempts to bring the matter to the UN, resulting in the country being denied the reparations and compensation it rightfully deserves. Looking at current events, Taiwan's desire to appear on the World Health Organisation General Assembly to share its measures on controlling the Covid-19 pandemic was blocked by China - another member of the P5 - as it considers Taiwan as a renegade province that violates its sovereignty. With small countries' ability to champion and fulfil their interests often subjected to the overriding potential stature and clout of larger countries, this further supports the assertion that small countries are always disadvantaged compared to large countries.

While such views are credible to a certain extent, they fail to consider the fact that sound governance can help to alleviate such disadvantages, even elevating these smaller countries above their larger counterparts. Notwithstanding the inherent disadvantages such as the lack of available resources, firm government direction can and has enabled these smaller nations to overcome such disadvantages, thereby yielding remarkable growth and progress that even larger countries can only watch in envy. One can look no further to the success story of Singapore. Against the backdrop of separation and the economic uncertainty stemming from the loss of the Malaysian hinterland and readily available resources, its founding father Mr Lee Kuan Yew adopted a pragmatic and no-nonsense style of governance to ensure the nascent state's viability and future. Cognisant of its inherent disadvantage, its lack of natural resources, Lee turned the country towards an export-led model of growth while devoting substantial funds and resources towards developing the country's tertiary and financial sectors. From becoming the world's largest exporter of electronics such as semiconductors and disk drives, such flexibility and pragmatism has transformed the country into one of the world's leading financial hubs while its standard of living and socioeconomic landscape rivals or even surpasses other larger countries. With many small African states such as Rwanda following Singapore's footsteps, Singapore serves as a beacon of hope for small nations around the world, as firm government direction and pragmatism can and has the ability to overcome any pre-existing disadvantages and narrow the gap with larger countries.

Furthermore, the small size can prove to be a blessing in disguise for these countries. While it cannot be denied that the smaller geographical size of certain countries would result in decreased availability of resources and manpower, there is a silver lining to such a preconceived disadvantage as the smaller geographical size would allow these countries to disseminate resources in a more quick and efficient manner, while government policies and measures would have an extensive reach and impact on wider society. Such seeming disadvantages can turn into advantages during crises or emergencies which necessitate government policies and resources to reach even the most far-flung communities, so as to alleviate such crises. This is evident in the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Coupled with decisive government policies and direction, the small island-state of Taiwan was able to quickly and efficiently mobilise the population to comply with its strict regulations and movement

controls. With high-risk individuals suspected of carrying the virus quickly identified and isolated, the Taiwanese population was largely able to continue to live a functioning society without the need for drastic and draconian measures such as lockdowns. This serves as a stark contrast to larger nations such as the United Kingdom and US, whereby its geographical landscape has proven to be more of a bane than boon in these countries' attempts to control the pandemic's spread. Oftentimes, government policies and resources require a long time before reaching the most disparate and far-flung communities, resulting in an inadequate and haphazard policy that allows the virus to continue to fester and plague these countries. As such, this serves to refute the fact that small countries are always disadvantaged compared to large countries.

Considering such arguments, it is undeniable that small nations face several disadvantages, such as the inherent lack of resources or political clout on the international stage. However, to conclude that they are always disadvantaged compared to large countries is a rather narrow and limited perspective, as sound governance has been able to narrow such disadvantages, while the small geographical size of these nations has proven to be a blessing in disguise during times of crises.

Comments:

Do check the source of some of your examples such as Nicaragua; nevertheless, it was a pleasure reading your engaging response to the question. Well done! Linguistic control evident, such as felicitous expressions using the comparative form - although your definition of 'smaller' and 'larger' is not in alignment with the intention of the question.



Science & Technology

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**Science is a way of thinking as
much as it is a body of knowledge.**

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Carl Sagan

Astronomer and planetary scientist

2021 Events in Science & Technology

4 February: First successful face and double hand transplant

A team of more than 140 professionals performed a 23-hour transplant surgery on Joe Dimeo, who suffered from third-degree burns on 80% of his body. It included transplanting both hands and the full face of a single donor, and set the world record for the first successful face and double hand transplant which has only ever been attempted twice. This allowed Dimeo a new chance in life, as he regained the ability to carry out daily activities.

Source: <https://apnews.com/article/face-hand-transplant-joe-dimeo-1e11f620bd84c817e99b00bdf874625a>

19 March: China and Russia agreed to build a research station on or around the Moon and collaborate on lunar missions

The Russian space agency Roscosmos signed an agreement with China's National Space Administration to develop the International Scientific Lunar Station. They issued a joint statement stating it would be available for use by other nations. A wide range of scientific research, including exploration and utilisation of the moon would be carried out on it.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-56342311>

14 April: Human cells grown in monkey embryos for 20 days sparked ethical debate

Monkey embryos containing human cells were made in a laboratory by a US-Chinese research team, sparking fresh debate into the ethics of such experiments. Scientists injected human stem cells into macaque embryos, and then studied the developing embryos for up to 20 days. Some scientists have raised concerns about the experiment, arguing that while the embryos were destroyed at 20 days, others could try to take the work further. Public debate over the implications of creating part human and part nonhuman chimaeras ensued.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-56767517>

19 April: NASA successfully flew its drone helicopter Ingenuity on Mars, the first powered aircraft to fly on another world

The drone Ingenuity was airborne for less than a minute, but the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) still celebrated the first powered, controlled flight by an aircraft on another world. NASA promised more adventurous flights in days ahead, hoping it could pave the way for future flyers revolutionising the exploration of celestial bodies, since they could reach areas that rovers are unable to go and travel much faster.

Source: <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/united-states/ingenuity-helicopter-successfully-flew-on-mars-nasa>

5 May: Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats (CRISPR) edited genes delivered directly inside the body for the first time

A person with an untreatable genetic condition that caused blindness in childhood became the first to receive a CRISPR–Cas9 gene therapy administered directly into their body. The treatment tested the ability of CRISPR–Cas9 gene-editing techniques to remove mutations that caused a rare condition, LCA10, as the mutation in CEP290 gene was deleted. These findings opened the door to using the same approach to treat other genetic diseases.

Source: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00655-8/>

7 June: Multicellular organisms frozen for 24,000 years in Siberia returned to life after Russian scientists thawed them

Bdelloid rotifers are multicellular animals that are tough, capable of surviving through drying, freezing, starvation, and low oxygen. Previously thought to have been able to only survive up to ten years when frozen, new research discovered that they had persisted for over 24,000 years in the Siberian permafrost. This revelation was a dream come true for fiction writers, with scientific evidence that multicellular organisms can be frozen for thousands of years and be brought back to life, in line with common speculative sci-fi tropes on cryonics.

Source: <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2021/06/210607161159.htm>

26 July: DeepMind Artificial Intelligence (AI) tool predicted all of the protein structures and uploaded it online for free

DeepMind's AI program, AlphaFold, predicted the structure of nearly all 20,000 protein structures expressed by humans. Protein structures, the building blocks of life, explain protein function, from enzymes crucial to metabolism and antibodies that fight infectious attacks. Researchers now had free access to these building blocks of life, thanks to this breakthrough. This meant mankind was better equipped to unravel the molecular mechanisms of how life was formed, and accelerate their pursuits to protect and treat human health.

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2021/jul/22/ai-firm-deepmind-puts-database-building-blocks-life-human-protein-structure-free-online>

9 August: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report was “code red for humanity”

The IPCC reported "it is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, oceans and land". The landmark study warned of increasingly extreme heatwaves, droughts and flooding, and a key temperature limit being broken in just over a decade. The report "is a code red for humanity", said the UN Secretary-General António Guterres. Scientists noted

that a catastrophe could only be avoided if the world acted fast, with deep cuts in emissions of greenhouse gases that could stabilise rising temperatures.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-58130705>

30 August: China restricted online gaming for under 18s to one hour on Fridays, weekends and holidays, ordering companies to enforce this

The Chinese games market will generate an estimated \$45.6 billion of revenue in 2021, ahead of the United States, according to analytics firm Newzoo. About 62.5% of Chinese minors often play games online, and 13.2% of underage mobile game users play mobile games for more than two hours a day on working days, according to state media. China has thus barred under 18s from playing video games for more than three hours a week in a move to curb gaming addiction, which some describe as “spiritual opium.” These restrictions apply to all devices, including phones, delivering a massive blow to the booming industry, which catered to tens of millions of young players.

Source: <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-rolls-out-new-rules-minors-online-gaming-xinhua-2021-08-30/>

7 September: El Salvador became the first country to adopt Bitcoin as legal tender

In El Salvador, bitcoin became legal tender alongside the US dollar. Supporters argued the move would make it cheaper and easier for migrants to send money home to El Salvador, but there were fears that the adoption of such a historically volatile currency would harm Salvadorans and risk economic stability. Bitcoin hit a historic high of over \$60,000 in April, before losing nearly half its value in a crash later in the summer. Bitcoin now possesses a market capitalisation of S\$1.1 trillion, compared to the S\$742 million market cap of the Singapore dollar. It is worth noting that as of May 2022, cryptocurrencies have plummeted in value due to increasingly shaky buyer confidence, with its gains from 2021 being essentially wiped out.

Source: <https://www.theverge.com/2021/9/7/22660457/el-salvador-bitcoin-legal-tender-currency-cryptocurrency-chivo-wallet>

31 October: 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26)

COP26 was the moment countries revisited climate pledges made under the 2015 Paris Climate Conference. The 2021 COP26 agreement set the global agenda on climate change for the next decade; for the first time at a COP conference, there was an explicit plan to reduce the use of coal, which is responsible for 40% of annual CO₂ emissions. However, countries only agreed to a weaker commitment to ‘phase down’ rather than ‘phase out’ coal after a late intervention by China and India, who vehemently opposed the idea. They did so because developing nations might find it difficult to grow their economies while removing coal, a relatively cheap source of fuel, from the picture. The agreement pledged to significantly

increase money to help poor countries cope with the effects of climate change and make the switch to clean energy - after a previous pledge for richer countries to provide \$100 billion a year by 2020 was missed. The world's biggest carbon dioxide emitters, the US and China, pledged to cooperate more over the next decade in areas such as methane emissions and the switch to clean energy. A scheme to cut 30% of methane emissions by 2030 was agreed on by more than 100 countries. Financial organisations controlling \$130 trillion agreed to back 'clean' technology such as renewable energy and direct finance away from fossil fuel-burning industries.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-56901261>

23 November: NASA launched its Double Asteroid Redirection Test (DART) Mission

DART aimed to test technology to prevent future impact on Earth by hazardous asteroids, by deliberately crashing a spacecraft into the asteroid. This test involved smashing a 19m wide spacecraft going at a speed of 6.6km/s into a 163m wide asteroid, Dimorphos, which was of no threat to Earth. This was hypothesised to change Dimorphos's orbit by 1%, a small shift that could be enough to, should it become necessary, knock an object off a collision course with Earth.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-59327293>

23 December: FDA authorised two pills to treat Covid-19, a potential game-changer in the fight against the disease by reducing hospitalisation

The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorised Merck & Co's antiviral pill for Covid-19 for certain high-risk adult patients, a day after giving the go-ahead to a similar treatment from Pfizer Inc for high-risk patients above the age of 12. However, questions were raised on its efficacy after data showed it cut the risk of hospitalisation or death by 30% among high-risk adults, much lower than an earlier analysis suggesting that number could be about 50%. Nevertheless, such pills were a critical step towards 'living with Covid' which most countries were working towards, given concerns over 'long Covid' (or chronic post-infection conditions) as well as the increasing efficacy of new Covid variants like Delta and Omicron.

Source: <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/12/22/health/pfizer-antiviral-pill-authorized/index.html>

‘Technology has given us control over our lives.’ To what extent is this true?

Ng Hui Shi, Natasha 21537

In the modern world, technology is **pertinent in our daily lives**, whether it be in work aspects or just for leisure. Technology has aided us as a society to come together as a whole and connect in unimaginable ways that traditional methods may fail to do. It brings together like-minded individuals with a common goal, and additionally plays a part in many societal advancements of today. Technology, hand in hand with scientific research, has opened many doors to many different opportunities, pushing us to the limits of the seemingly limitless possibilities that can arise. Needless to say, technology has given us control over our lives, enabling us to change the way we conduct our daily routines to our preference. Thus, we have a myriad of choices to suit our ever-changing communities, giving us the power to rectify things that we would not like to experience and bear larger burdens on our shoulders. However, while **technology is a good servant, it is also a bad master**. It is needless to say that technology may have taken control over our lives due to heavy reliance on it. Hence, I agree that technology has given us control over our lives.

Firstly, technology has given us control over our lives by allowing us to correct and erase certain traits, bestowing onto the masses a power they never had before. Cutting-edge technology in the scientific field has advanced rapidly, and developments have allowed scientists to come up with various methods for the early detection of diseases and the correction of the human genome before birth. Technology has enabled scientists to figure out cures and preventative methods, to lengthen the lifespan of humans and enhance the lives of many. Undoubtedly, this research gives us a stepping stone to gain control over our lives, as we as humans can finally fulfil our innate desires. The usage of such biotechnology presents us with a chance to assert dominance over what we previously could not and either use it on ourselves or on other people. Back when such biotechnology was still unknown to society, people often felt that living a longer life by cheating life-long diseases, death and the way we are when we were born was all up to nature’s fancy. Having no control over that aspect of life, all they could do was to **fervently hope** that they would be fine. However, due to today’s technology, we have the ability to take control over this aspect, granting us a choice to change. For example, there are more AI machines in recent years that can detect diseases and illnesses such as cancer and diabetes during medical health checkups. Thus, we can be notified if we have any unknown symptoms, and that treatment can be administered immediately and effectively. The viruses and diseases that were once so potent and fatal can be countered by vaccines and chemotherapy with high success rates. There are also gene-editing technologies such as **CRISPR and karyomapping**. New in vitro fertilisation technology and karyomapping enables the embryo to be screened for any abnormalities before inserting it into the womb. This decreases the chances of the offspring developing dangerous mutations or defects that could be inherited from their parents. Such technology has vastly removed regrets that we once used to have, ones we could not control. Hence, technology has given us control over our lives, as we are presently able to manipulate our lifespan and the future of our descendants.

Secondly, technology has given us control over our lives in terms of sustainable food sources, and the ability to produce a plethora of meats, grains and plants that are available even in the face of changing seasons. Technology has aided in researchers’ attempts to find sustainable food options,

increasing the supply of food and controlling death rates due to insufficient food. In view of a growing world population, many communities around the world are consuming proteins from meats and wheat from grains as a staple. Although some have taken up the route of going vegan to reduce the heavy toll on the production of agriculture and poultry, they are only a minority as consumers' habits largely do not change easily. With the ever-volatile global warming and landscape changes, the earth's environment is gradually becoming increasingly unsuitable for growing crops, as the seasons are being irregular. This hence results in a landslide for food production. At least 10% of children lack the food and nutrients they require daily, signalling to us that world hunger is a **pronounced real-world problem**. Technology is useful here as it manages to cultivate alternative meat sources and nutritionally enhanced produce, some even being grown from scratch. We can consume less of a product and yet still gain the same amount of nutrients as before. For example, **genetically modified foods** like **pest resistant Bt corn**, **Roundup Ready Soybeans** and **nutritionally enhanced golden rice** prevent the **wastage of crops** due to **relentless pests** and **provide more nutrients for us**. In 2013, 93% of corn and 88% of soybeans in the United States were genetically modified, with residents living there consuming it like normal products. In recent years, China has also started growing lab-cultivated meat from cells, bringing the world a step closer to solving world hunger. Technology in this aspect helps us to produce a more sustainable and constant supply of food, giving us control over our lives to make sure that we do our best to alleviate food shortage. Therefore, we have a chance to fight world hunger and its death rate. Hence, technology gives us control over our lives to not go hungry in the future.

Lastly, technology has given us control over our lives to fight for what we believe in. In the many different uses of technology, the most prominent and obvious use would be that technology is able to gather people possessing common interests and connecting everyone together. Technology acts as the thread that weaves the fabric of society together, linking communities together and forming close-knitted bonds between people. Therefore, it provides a platform for many to share their views on pertinent social issues or the problems the world faces in general. Hence, people come together, and as the Chinese saying goes, "a single pair of wooden chopsticks can break easily, but ten pairs of chopsticks are unbreakable". We gain strength in numbers and this propels us to fight for what we think is right, whether it be about human rights or racial discrimination. For example, in 2020, the unjustified murder of George Floyd due to ignorant and racist White American policemen has sparked an intense debate between white and black Americans. This issue blew up quickly as the news spread like wildfire. Many took to online interactive platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter to voice out their opinion on the matter and to show support. Korean idol group BTS, with their vast influence, as well as other popular singers and celebrities, also shared their support via the Internet as they could not be present in the protest. There was an outburst of tweets or posts hashtagging #BlackLivesMatter, spreading awareness to societies in other parts of the world. The hashtag surged to the top and remained there for weeks. Even though some people were unable to join the protests due to various reasons, they showed their support and concern over the internet. This gave more people the courage to step out of their comfort zones and to fight for the rights that have been forcefully taken from them, taking control of their lives as change began from their actions. Thus, technology has given us control over our lives by connecting us to regain what we have lost as a community, and to not be wrongfully mistreated like puppets by higher authorities.

However, technology has taken away the control over our lives in certain aspects, due to our overreliance on it. It is not surprising to see people of different ages and generations being connected

to a multitude of different mobile devices at one go, be it for work or for entertainment. Technology has made the Internet of Things and artificial intelligence so convenient for us, especially since we live in a fast-paced world where we are often on the chase. The user-friendly and simplistic traits of technology is precisely why it is so convenient and easy to use. A Google search can go through millions of possible answers in a second, and it takes less than a second to filter and find an answer that is most suited for the user. In the same sense, due to constant overuse of technology, the roles between us and technology have been switched, and we have become servants of technology, unable to function and constantly having to refer to technological devices for advice or help with daily activities. Society becomes shackled to technology as a result of our human-instilled laziness. For example, a Straits Times article found that the average screen time on mobile devices has increased to over six hours a day, and most interview respondents were unable to stay still or feel at ease without being on their phones or having a mobile device for more than an hour. This shows that what is meant to help to control our lives has slowly overtaken the role of being the 'master', if we are not careful and do not limit our dependency on technology. Hence, technology has taken away control over our lives in certain aspects.

In conclusion, I feel that technology has given us control over our lives to do whatever was deemed as impossible, unattainable or 'crazy' before. Technology is a great and powerful tool to guide us and regain authority and control of our lives. However, technology can take away control over our lives if we misuse it, but the control it gives us outweighs the control it takes away from us. Now, the underlying question would hence be how we should maintain a healthy relationship between technology and our lives, and balance the two undetachable facets of today's world.

Comments:

Insightful and thoughtful essay that looks at the issue from multiple perspectives. Keep up the good work!

‘Technology has given us control over our lives.’ To what extent is this true?

Chan Ken Wei, Kenneth 21S51

200: that is the number of years it has taken mankind to surpass the past 2,000 years of evolution. Ever since the Industrial Revolution, mankind has used technology to advance in leaps and bounds. In fact, technology has advanced so fast that it is said that by 2050, we will not be able to recognise the technology we use today. Some believe that technology is unable to give us control of our lives as it has been used to invade our privacy and restrict our freedom. However, technology has allowed us to challenge our genetics, as well as decide how long we want to live and the kind of food we want to consume. Hence, I agree with the statement that technology has given us control over our lives to a large extent.

Some people believe that technology has not given us control of our lives due to the infringement of our privacy it brings. In the past, it was simple to protect our privacy; lock your door and you will be safe. However, protecting our privacy is no longer as simple as that. As more and more people continue to digitise their everyday lives, more and more of what we do, where we live and what we prefer can all be found online. Social media giant Facebook reports that there are over 1 billion active users every day. With so much data being uploaded online every second, consumer data turns out to be very lucrative. In 2018, Facebook was put under the spotlight when it was released to the public that their consumer data was being sold to other companies. This just made apparent the truth that our data is being used without us knowing. However, it is not just our online privacy that is being infringed; we are also unable to protect our physical privacy, even behind the safety of our walls with advancements in technology. Spy cameras and hidden microphones are particularly common in developed countries like Japan and Korea, where people - mostly women - are filmed committing erotic acts, sometimes even in their own homes. This has become such a problem that in 2020, South Korea released a law to regulate the sale of spy cameras. This shows that our physical privacy can also be infringed. Hence, it can be seen that technology has not given us control of our lives due to infringements in our privacy.

Another reason technology has not given us control over our lives is due to the fact that technology restricts our freedom. Freedom is a very important part of being in control; without freedom, it is hard to do so. As more of our lives become digitalised, the improvements in censorship tools have sought to restrict our freedom. China’s infamous ‘Great Firewall’ and Eritrea’s firewall are some examples of how governments can restrict what people can and cannot see. As more and more information is uploaded to the internet, being restricted by your country’s network firewall will certainly limit one’s freedom of using the internet. However, it is not just on the internet that our freedom has been restricted. In 2020, China unveiled the Social Credit System. Thanks to a hive of CCTVs and surveillance systems, coupled with one of the world’s best facial recognition software, you have a system that can monitor all 1.4 billion citizens wherever they are around the clock. This severely restricts the Chinese people’s freedom as they are unable to do anything without others knowing. With freedom restricted to such levels at both a virtual and physical level, can we say that technology has given us control over our lives?

That being said, however, technology has certainly given us more control over certain aspects of our lives. One such instance is letting us be who we want to be. It was long believed that due to nature and genetics, if your parents had blue eyes, you would have blue eyes, too; a simple but constant concept of natural evolution. That was the case until the invention of genetic editing. Genetic editing has improved significantly, and now scientists are easily able to make changes in our genetics, such as changing the colour of our hair. This is thanks to CRISPR, a genetic engineering technology that allows everyone to experiment in genetic engineering at a commercial level. Our gender identity can also be changed - gone are the times where a boy is a boy and a girl is a girl. With the awareness of sexuality and gender identity increasing globally in the last few years, more and more people are partaking in gender transformation surgery. We are now easily able to switch between the male and female genders, allowing those who do not feel comfortable with their birth gender to change it at their own free will. Plastic surgery and implant surgery also allows us to change our physical appearances to our liking; hence, since technology has given us more control over our genetic makeup and who we want to be, technology can be said to have given us control of our lives.

Technology can also give us control of our lives by allowing us to determine our own lifespan. It was long believed that death is all equal and unavoidable. Fortunately, this belief need not hold true for long. Humans have made significant advancements in the medical industry, and have managed to prolong the human lifespan by a significant amount. In the 1900s, the average lifespan of a human was around 60 years. In 2020, that number is close to 70. Furthermore, in certain developed countries like Japan and Singapore, the average lifespan is well over 80 years. Research in medical assets, such as vaccinations for influenza, polio and cholera - to name a few - have made what were once life-threatening diseases mere nuisances. Creation of technology such as the Da Vinci Surgical System and artificial hearts are examples of technology being able to prolong life. There is also heavy research regarding the ageing process. In the future, we might be able to completely stop the ageing process, essentially making us humans immortal. With the aid of technology, humans will likely have successfully defied death, a natural phenomenon, and are able to choose as they please on when they want to die. Such significance in being able to have the power to control our lives is heavily credited to technology. Without such technology, we would simply be like wild animals left to fend for ourselves. Hence, with the greater control over our lifespan that technology provides us, it can clearly be seen that technology gives us control over our lives.

Lastly, technology has enabled us to decide what we eat, giving us control over our lives. As the saying goes, "you are what you eat"; food is an extension of who we are, and the types of food we eat can define us. With the aid of technology, we are now able to control what we want to eat and drink. We are able to modify a food to the last calorie to suit our liking. Food is no longer a natural occurrence; they can be developed in the labs or grown from the smallest of DNA samples. People who are running and trying to control their metabolism no longer need to worry, as technology can now make the exact kind of food they want. The use of genetically modified crops can increase harvests and yields, as well as make crops stronger and more resistant to pesticides. 'Wonder Rice', a genetically modified rice, is said to contain double the nutritional value of normal rice, yet be grown in half the time. Poultry like chickens and pigs have nearly doubled in size since the 1960s. Thanks to genetic engineering, we are able to change the nutritional value and shelf life of foods to meet our needs and demands. Food is a critical part to our lives, it is what gives us the energy to continue; with the aid of technology, we are now able to fully control the types of food we eat and grow, suiting our

needs. Hence, it can be said that technology has given us control over our lives by allowing us to control what we eat.

“Technology is a great servant but a terrible master.” Technology has the potential to be the tool that defines us, but it is also capable of being the tool that destroys us. We need to find a balance between our technology and our humanity. While technological advancements will let others exploit our privacy and freedom, losing our control in our lives, it has certainly brought us more benefits, giving us more control over our lives by allowing us to be who we want to be, prolonging our life and controlling the food we eat. Compared to the past, we certainly are able to control our lives more with technology today.

Comments:

Fairly extensive scope of discussion and range of examples given on the whole.

‘Technology has given us control over our lives.’ To what extent is this true?

Nikhitha Khasnavis 21S51

The 21st century is the age of technology. Just like the Ice Age and the Golden Age, we have slowly moved into an era where we are constantly surrounded by technology. Technology, which is the theoretical and practical application of science and theory into devices, has taken over the world at an inexorable allegro and it will only continue to become more prevalent in our lives. The ubiquity of technological devices has inevitably, over time, resulted in the human species relying on mobile devices and websites for their day-to-day activities, and it is now an integral part of even our prosaic human interactions. With this new tool that has been flourishing in recent years, it is often debated about whether technology has genuinely helped augment our experiences by giving us control over our lives, or has instead subverted it. Defenders of this powerful conduit may argue that it has indeed given us more authority over our lives by affirming us with a sense of security and even allowing us to be more connected to the world. However, this would be too myopic of a view, as while technology has given us control over our lives to some extent, we are also faced with the increased risks of the loss of livelihoods, cyberterrorism and even a decreased sense of privacy. Thus, it is my conviction that technology has given us control of our lives to a rather small extent.

Due credit has to be given to technology for its most primal function that has allowed us to be in more control of our lives - is helping users stay connected to most parts, even from remote areas. The ease and convenience of technology has allowed most of us, regardless of age, to access technology and receive all sorts of information from it. With proper internet access and the click of a few buttons, we are able to obtain news and data from all over the world from reliable sources such as BBC News, The Economist, The New York Times, The Guardian... the list goes on. We are constantly updated on and about the happenings around the world, and this helps us stay connected with the rest of the world. Applications such as Facetime, Skype, and Google Meet bring even the furthest people close together via technological devices. Besides helping us keep track of the activities of our loved ones, technology also serves a more global role and updates us about international news as well. Take for example the Myanmar coup in 2020. People used technology to share their stories and helped spread awareness on what was happening in the country when the junta forcefully took rule. This allowed others in other countries to contribute by sending them psychological and financial aid, giving the victims a sense of affirmation. When people have greater access to information, they can then better decide what to do with their lives or how the information can impact them. Therefore, through the use of technology, one is able to keep connected with the happenings in other parts of the world and is not left in the dark, allowing him to be more informed, thus giving him control over his life.

In this ever changing, fast-paced world, technology has also helped affirm us with a sense of security over our livelihoods, with increased data and statistics giving us more authority in our lives. New forms of technology developed with the intent to aid people assure us that there are avenues that can guide us in the various prospects of our lives. Online websites like MySkillsFuture help one plan their post-education career. With a rough outline, one will be more certain of what their future is going to look like, giving them a goal to work towards and preparing them for ambivalent times. This, one will be allowed more control over his future. Biomedical technologies such as the artificial

intelligence machine developed by Shravya Shetty, a Harvard University researcher, helps identify lung cancer cells with 11% more accuracy than human specialists, confirming to patients the conditions they have or do not have. This gives them more control over their lives, instead of not knowing what to expect due to inaccurate reports. Women are also increasingly able to engage in cryopreservation, which allows them to pursue other priorities instead of mothering a child. Thus, through new technological research and inventions, technology plays an imperative role in predicting trends and even augmenting our life experiences and processes. Therefore, we are guaranteed a sense of security, and a sense of control over our lives.

However, technology also unfavourably takes away opportunities from us, especially in today's fast-paced and globalised world, as it can cause people to lose their livelihoods and thus lose control of their actions and lives. It is no surprise that with the proliferation of technology with automated machines, artificial intelligence (AI) in particular has been flourishing. This is the application of technological theory in computerised systems, allowing them to perform repetitive yet complex jobs in simple terms. The burgeoning of such 'smart' objects and AI has threatened the jobs of many, especially blue-collar workers. Such automated systems are especially felicitous in factories where repetitive manual work is required. With the implementation of cheaper technology up to 40% more productive, the jobs of many low-skilled workers are threatened. With the recent Covid-19 pandemic, the livelihoods of these workers have been challenged even further. More emphasis is being placed on technology that takes over dispensable jobs, leading to the loss of 144 million jobs in 2020 alone. Research done in 2017 by PricewaterhouseCoopers has predicted that 38% of jobs in the UK, 35% of jobs in Germany and 21% of jobs in Japan will be replaced by smart robots. In Singapore, it is predicted that one quarter of workplace jobs will be displaced by technology by 2030. Thus, while technology has indeed provided job opportunities for us to some degree, it is only more so for highly educated and specialised workers, who are the minority. Technology has caused the majority to lose their jobs or be constantly haunted by the fear of losing their jobs to more efficient technology. This has led to an increased number of people losing their livelihoods, leaving them hopeless and in less control of their lives.

There is also an ongoing debate over the amount of technology governments invest in for the supposed welfare of its citizens, which only leads to the loss of privacy of their lives. With many countries such as Singapore, China and India developing into smart nations, the implementation of technology in daily activities is being done to a larger extent. While some technology implemented by the government is used to improve problematic situations, like the Alibaba cloud system which improves the traffic flow in cities by 15% due to its dynamic light control, the use of such technologies by governments is still highly criticised by most of its citizens, who feel that they must eschew their privacy in exchange for some of these initiatives. In China, for example, the government has installed smart surveillance cameras with the intent of preventing residents from spending excessive amounts of time outside their house during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, residents felt threatened over time that their every move was being taken note of, which led to them losing their sense of freedom as they felt constantly watched. A local case would be the use of TraceTogether tokens to assist the government in contact tracing, with the intent of making the identification process smoother. However, when the government announced that they were looking into using the data collected from these tokens to give them leads in police cases, there was a national furore. Citizens felt cheated and threatened that they were about to lose their sense of privacy due to the data collected by a little

technological device. Therefore, especially in the political sense, the usage of technology has compromised the privacy of many, making them more wary of its deployment and thus causing them to lose control of their lives, as every move of theirs begins to be scrutinised.

Flourishing technology has also led to increased social unrest due to cyberterrorism that impacts or even marginalises groups of people, causing them to lose stability over their lives, giving them less control. Cyberterrorism is now a concerning aspect of technology, as terrorism no longer sees geographical and physical territorial borders. Terrorism that was once restricted by the tight security of some countries is now spreading at a faster rate thanks to technology. Technology, when deployed properly, is a puissant tool in garnering the support of millions of users worldwide, and this particular function is exactly what big terrorist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) turned to, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Just recently, two Singaporean teenagers were detained for plans to attack religious places, as they were radicalised and galvanised online by terrorist groups and incidents. This has led to the lives of people around them being threatened as well, and they start to lose control over the guarantee of their lives. The Christchurch shootings in New Zealand in 2019 have caused discrimination against Muslims in the UK to increase by over six times. Technological sites such as 8chan, 4chan, Reddit and even common social media platforms were used to perpetuate hate against some of these minority groups, and this goes to show the extent of technology's power. Thus, as cyberterrorism is on the rise and its impacts are faced more widely around the world, victims and even other individuals tend to lose control of their lives due to social unrest, and they have to live their lives in fear for they are not certain what is going to happen to them.

In conclusion, the advent of technology has only allowed us to be in control of our lives to a small extent, despite increased interconnectivity and a greater sense of security from the data, statistics and procedures offered by such devices. Technology has also led to an increased loss in livelihoods, loss in the sense of privacy and more unrest due to cyberterrorism, which has instead snatched away our sense of control over our lives. While the birth of technology has indeed helped to gradually ameliorate the dystopian situation of our world, we are now at the stage where overreliance on technology could instead backfire on us, and be the cause of our own destruction. Starting with our fundamental human right, which is our autonomy and authority over our lives, technology has the capability to take away everything and leave us in the lurch. Thus, we must be careful not to place too much reliance on technology and regulate its use in order to guarantee our sense of control over our own lives.

Comments:

Fairly extensive score of the discussion covering various forms or aspects of technology and whether it controls our lives. Good organisation of points using the broad to narrow approach such as the point about affirming us a sense of security and using a range of technology in different fields to discuss the point. Some felicitous expressions and profound use of words in an appropriate way. Some points on how and why technology has given us control can be explained more clearly - just providing us information, how and why does that give us control? And is it only limited to new media?

'Technology is advancing too fast.' Do you agree?

Chan Ken Wei, Kenneth 21S51

200 years ago, in the heart of Europe, the first signs of technology began to emerge in what we now know as the Industrial Revolution. Since then, we, as well as our technology, have advanced in leaps and bounds. It would be fair to estimate that we have surpassed 10,000 years of evolution with the aid of technology. It is thus not surprising to hear that there are some who believe that technology has advanced too quickly, citing the incidents where artificial intelligence has outsmarted us and the rise of genetic engineering. Yet, I opine that technology is not advancing too fast, as we still have existing problems we are unable to solve with technology, there are still many people that lack access to technology and there are still problems that require humans, not technology, to solve. Hence, I do not believe that technology has advanced too fast.

Critics of my stand may state that technology has advanced too fast, as we have created technology that is able to surpass our own intellect. Many leaders of the technological field, such as Elon Musk and Stephen Hawking, have all talked about technology one day surpassing us in a 'doomsday' manner. Well, that 'doomsday' might have already occurred. Take for example Google's Deep Learning AI. It was able to analyse more than 1,600 possibilities in a fraction of a second to defeat the reigning top chess player in the world, Magnus Carlsen in 2019. There is no way the average person has the processing capability or speed to match that of the Deep Learning AI, hence it is hard to argue that we are smarter than them just by looking at pure capability. Chess, long thought to be a game of the highest intellect, was conquered easily by technology. In this aspect, it is thus fitting to say that technology has advanced too fast.

Naysayers of my stand may also cite the points of genetic engineering defying nature as proof of technology advancing too fast. The invention of genetic engineering software such as CRISPR and Karyomapping have opened up a new wave of possibilities regarding the human body, some of which people believe we are not ready for. CRISPR and karyomapping have allowed us to finetune and make changes to the smallest fragments of DNA. No longer are we bound by the nature of evolution; no longer are we a slave to our own genetic makeup. We can now change our appearances by changing the colour of our eyes or our hair. Yet, it was assumed that genetic engineering could only make such harmless changes. That was until in 2019, when Dr LI Jiang and his team from the University of Beijing created the first genetically engineered human embryo using CRISPR. This was a totally new ball game. We were no longer editing nature, instead we had created nature. As such, some people feel now that technology, in particular genetic editing, has mutated and diverged from its original path, and the rate of development of technology is too fast for their liking. Hence, in this aspect, when technology is able to defy and replace nature, I think it is fitting to say that technology has advanced too fast.

Yet, I believe that it would be myopic to assess technology's rate of advancement only using a few points. We still have yet to consider the current limitations of technology, the strengths humans have over technology and the unequal distribution of technology. Firstly, the current technology still has many existing flaws. Despite heavy investments in the medical industry by both the government and billion dollar pharmaceutical companies, we are still unable to find cures for many existing

illnesses such as cancer and HIV. It is believed that one in five Americans suffer from either cancer or HIV, yet there has still been no progress regarding the development of a cure for either illness, with the only alternatives being chemotherapy and immunosuppressants, both of which have adverse side effects on their patients. How are we to say that technology has advanced too quickly when there are still such major flaws that we are unable to address. In Singapore, desalination plants that attempt to convert salt water into drinkable fresh water has received nearly S\$70 billion in funding since 2000 to increase its efficiency and effectiveness, yet we are to this day only able to rely on desalinations plants to satisfy a measly 20% of our water consumption needs. This evidently shows that regardless of the different types of technology available in all sectors, the current state of technology still lacks efficiency and effectiveness. There are still many limitations regarding our technology. Hence, I think it is appropriate to say that technology is not advancing too fast.

Secondly, technology today is not advancing too fast as they still lack human aspects, separating them from us. Humans are able to think, not just based on an algorithm that has been written out for us, but also by using our cognitive and emotional skills. The current state of technology is still unable to replace humans in jobs that require such skills, and are largely still heavily reliant on human supervision. In Japan, human-like androids have been commissioned by the government to fill a gaping hole in the nursing industry to sustain Japan's ageing population. These humanoid robots are produced by a Japanese company known as RoboLife. While these robots can fulfil the physical requirements of being a nurse such as performing cleaning services on the patients, they are unable to fulfil the emotional aspect of the job. Talking to a human requires emotion and empathy that a robot simply cannot provide. The sense of empathy and care is superficial when given by the robot, yet feels real and genuine when provided by a human. Aside from lacking the emotional skills of humans, current technology is still heavily reliant on human supervision to operate. Take for example Tesla's self-driving car, which boasts an Anti-Collision-System which allows the car to detect objects that can obstruct the car. However, such systems have proven to only have an effectiveness of about 80%, which means that for the most part, such advanced forms of technology that were marketed as 'automated' still require human supervision to operate safely. Hence, it can clearly be seen that since existing technology still lacks the emotional and cognitive ability of humans, technology still has waves to improve. Thus, it is not advancing too fast.

Lastly, it is unjust to say that technology is advancing too fast due to the unequal distribution of technology. For someone to proclaim that technology is advancing too fast, one of the criteria definitely has to be that technology must be widespread and available for all. Yet, people in most developing countries are still not using technology, and are instead using backwards and traditional methods to go about their daily lives. Take the agriculture industry for example; in developed countries like Singapore, hydro stack farms that are fully automated, and where all aspects of the farm can be regulated such as the temperature and humidity of the farm by the pressing of a few buttons, are used. In such cases, technology is certainly present and helpful. Yet, in developing countries like Eritrea and Niger, more than 80% of all farm work is still done by hand without the aid of even the simplest technology like tractors or ploughs. Eritrea, in particular, still records 90% of its farm work done by hand, and its five farmhands per square mile of farm is an immense amount of manpower when compared to Singapore's measly 0.3 farmhands per square mile. Hence, an unfair and uneven distribution of technology, coupled with the fact that so many people still lack access to technology

begs the question: how can it be fair to say that technology is advancing too fast? As a result, I opine that unless such distribution issues are resolved, technology cannot be said to be advancing too fast.

“Any technology that is too efficient will feel like magic.” That is the quote from famous writer Arthur C. Clarke, and I strongly agree with this quote. Technology currently does not feel like magic, and it still has a long way to go before we can feel magical using technology. Certainly, our current state of technology is still filled with limitations, and there are still many areas to improve on. Consequently, I believe that technology is not advancing too fast, and it is simply a tool that we use to achieve our goals. However, how we use it will determine its rate of advancement; if we control it well, we will always be one step ahead, and we will be able to control it as we please. If we are to falter, technology will most certainly surpass us, and will soon advance to heights even we cannot control.

Comments:

Apt and wide-ranging examples used. Relevant arguments that evaluated the issues caused by the pace and degree of technological advancement.

‘Technology is advancing too fast.’ Do you agree?

Yang Xu 21551

If you asked anyone in the 20th century what kinds of technology they would expect to see in the 21st, “flying cars” and “robots” would be some of the most common answers. Even though we do not see flying cars in the skyline or robots roaming the streets today, technology has no doubt been accelerating at an ever-increasing rate. While some are adapting quickly to these changes in technology, others struggle to keep up, falling behind in the rapid-paced society. This comes to show that technology is indeed moving too quickly.

A largely favoured argument that technology is advancing at an appropriate pace is that a part of the global population can keep up and adapt to the new changes. As shown, many people all around the globe keep up with the newest technological trends. For example, online shopping, which has surfaced in recent years, has become one of the popular go-to options for shopping for many. Youths are also picking up modern-day technological skills in schools through courses such as computer science and coding, helping them to stay afloat the rising tides of technology. Even in restaurants such as Genki Sushi, the usage of electronic tablets to order food has now become the norm in society, and people seem to be receiving this change well. As such, this may lead many to conclude that the modern-day advancements in technology are reasonably paced.

While the above presented argument holds true, there are many other parts of society whose perspectives have not been taken into account. These members of society struggle to keep up with the fast-paced, ever-changing technology in the modern world. Firstly, technological advancements are too fast for most elderly to keep up with. Cashless payments and mobile phone applications are just some of the many challenges that the elderly receive poorly. In an interview by media company Mothership, many of the elderly in Singapore are uncertain about changing from physical cash to credit cards and e-payments. Many are unwilling to learn or adapt as they have grown used to physical coins and notes. Yet, many food and beverages outlets have stopped accepting cash, leaving the elderly with fewer food options. Software on mobile phones have also left elderlies scratching their heads. Many are unable to get around on their smartphones even with help from their children and grandchildren, not to mention the group of elderlies who are living alone. This also comes to show how the rapid acceleration in technology has caused many to struggle with keeping up.

Secondly, advancements in technology also entail rising prices. Top-notch, high-end technology has to be funded in its research and development, and these funds come from the pockets of consumers. This rise in prices has been consistent across many tech giants, such as Apple and Google, with their devices growing in prices over the years. While the affluent minority continue consuming these technologies merrily, the medium and low-income experience increased pressure. Many in the United States are becoming less able to afford a living due to these advancements in technology. This has been further augmented by the recent Covid-19 pandemic, where electronic devices were no longer luxuries, but necessities. Numerous parents were unable to buy laptops to support their children’s home-based learning, while others struggled to work from home on their run-

down desktops. This trend is not a rare sight and has been brought to light by the pandemic, that 'tech-celeration' has become too expensive for the majority to afford.

Thirdly, governments have also been seen to fall behind in terms of their policies. With the advancements in technology comes accessibility of the mass media and the wide web by youths. With accessibility comes numerous implementations of such technology which the government ought to anticipate and resolve. For example, a sixteen-year-old has recently been arrested under the Internal Security Act for planning a terrorist attack in Singapore. This youth was self-radicalised on the Internet, where sufficient preventive measures have yet to be put in place to prevent far-right extremism from influencing youth. Another problem that has yet to be combated, this time more widespread, is cyberbullying. Advancements in technology allow for anonymity and ease of commenting: the perfect breeding spot for hate speech and cyberbullying. Even with the normalcy and ubiquity of cyberbullying, governments have not done much to curb this problem, proving that technology is moving faster than governments can react. Hence, technology is advancing too fast.

Lastly, the rapid advancements in technology have dealt great damage to the environment. Compared to a couple of decades ago, modern technology does much more harm to the atmosphere and the environment. For instance, fuel-powered cars on the roads emit tonnes upon tonnes of carbon into the air each day. Technology advancements in the logging industry have also been accused of massive amounts of deforestation due to the ease of cutting trees. These are just a few of the countless sources of damage to the environment, which stem from an overly rapid growth in technology causing rising temperatures, surging sea levels, extinction of animals and so much more. Compared to this, a slower rate of technological growth could help save our planet as fewer resources are depleted, helping to sustain future growth as well. As can be seen, technological advancements are too fast and unsustainable for the environment.

On the surface, the growth in technology may seem to benefit the masses. However, it also brings about many implications which are augmented by its rapid speed. Groups of people, governing powers and even the environment are struggling to keep up and support the rapid advancements in technology. As such, it would be rational to take a step back and question ourselves, "is it really worth it?" Perhaps it would be more beneficial, inclusive and sustainable if we were to take on a slower rate of technological growth, as the costs of overly rapid technological advancements far outweigh the benefits.

Comments:

Fluid piece with relevant points and developed argumentation. Could work on the range of examples to demonstrate familiarity with topic and subject matter.

‘Technology is advancing too fast.’ Do you agree?

Mishra Aditi Rakesh 21S54

In the 21st century, with the 4th Industrial Revolution underway, we have all certainly witnessed exponential changes to the way we live due to the adoption of cyber-physical systems, the Internet of Systems, and the Internet of Things; all of which are ground-breaking innovations. Technology, due to its ubiquitous nature, is playing a significant role in all our lives today, and it is extremely difficult to imagine life without it. However, some critics argue that despite all this, technology has actually wrested control of our lives from our hands by making us overly dependent on it. I disagree with this. While this may be true to some extent, I am of the opinion that technology actually enables us to, quite literally, control how long we live, go beyond our physical limitations to do what we want to, and for previously oppressed groups make their voices heard to free them from oppression.

On the surface, it cannot be denied that technology is making us lose control of our lives. Nowadays, technological gadgets have become extremely affordable and convenient, and everyone owns at least a few of them, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Phones, arguably the most commonly used and popular technological device, now have so many attractive features and applications that make it difficult for one to live without it, especially social media. For example, teenagers spend more than ten hours on their phones every day, especially on social media. Tell any teenager that their phone will be taken away for a day, and they will be very shocked and angry as they cannot imagine what they will do without it. The fact that we cannot wake up on time in the morning without our phone alarms, and rely on food delivery apps like FoodPanda and GrabFood to ensure we have food to eat every day, highlights the ways in which we are overly dependent on technology to live our lives - hence proving that we have lost control over our lives in the process.

However, technology has enabled us to gain control over our lives in many other ways. Due to advancements in technology pertaining to the field of healthcare, we have managed to control how long we can live for, albeit not forever but at least much longer than just a century ago. With the rise of artificial intelligence and machine learning, it has become especially more efficient and faster to detect life-threatening diseases promptly and accurately. For example, Google’s new AI-powered software has proven to be more accurate than doctors in breast cancer detection. Not only that, we have also managed to discover the cures for many diseases previously considered incurable. With the help of AI, doctors were able to develop the drug Milasen in just a year. That was effective in curing a young girl who was suffering from a unique genetic mutation that no one had heard about before. It is only due to all this that the average human life expectancy has more than doubled from nearly 30 years in 1900 to 73 years today, showing how effective technology has been in helping us gain control over our lives.

Moreover, technology has made it possible for us to do what we want to without any restrictions due to its ubiquitous nature. Previously, people from less privileged backgrounds or those born in less developed countries had no way of improving their education levels, due to the lack of access to resources. Thus, they remain trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty. However, with the

widespread usage of technology today, textbooks and resources are available for free online. Not only that, but with the rise of MOOCs or massive open online courses, millions of people around the world have been able to gain access to university courses, free of charge from the comfort of their homes. This enables them to expand their knowledge and hone their skills to secure a better future for themselves. Beyond the field of education, people with disabilities are also now able to overcome their physical limitations and be mobile. With the help of technology, self-driving car companies like Waymo are developing self-driving cars that are wheelchair friendly, enabling them to get around independently. All this shows how technology has improved accessibility for all, enabling one to do things that were previously unimaginable and gaining firm control over our lives.

Lastly, technology has enabled marginalized groups' voices to be heard, not just on a national scale but on a global scale as well, enabling them to be lifted out of oppression. Most of this is possible due to the power of social media, which can help raise global awareness about pertinent and pressing issues that need urgent attention. This helps to garner ample support and assistance for those in need so that they can gain control over their lives once again. For example, the news of the unjustified murder of George Floyd spread widely on social media, bringing global attention to the plight of African Americans. Such sheer international pressure forced the American government to pass tougher legislation preventing such inhuman incidents from happening in the future. These measures were greatly appreciated by African Americans, as they could now feel a greater sense of security in their country and achieve more freedom to do what they want to do, thus enabling them to gain control over their lives once again. This emphasises the power of technology, in helping even those who believe their future was bleak to see light at the end of the tunnel once again.

In conclusion, I agree that technology has definitely given us a lot of control over our lives. While for some people, technology may have caused them to lose control and become overly dependent on their gadgets, it has proved to be an invaluable asset for most. It has freed them from boundaries that they previously never thought they could cross. Certainly, technology has largely had a positive impact on the world that we live in today, benefitting millions of people by improving their standard and quality of living. We should embrace technology and continue to harness its benefits to make the world a better place for everyone to live in.

Comments:

Aditi, this is a fully relevant essay showing good knowledge in the topics (the range of tech innovations covered is good) and the issue examples are well chosen (except for the phone alarm, which is low-tech and mundane) and show good knowledge. Balance is present but limited to only one point - over-dependence. There could be better evaluation and even deeper analysis to have a more considered response. Very well organised essay, effective paragraph development and sound use of English.



Social Issues

“

**There's nothing more dangerous
than someone who wants to make
the world a better place.**

”

Banksy

Famous graffiti artist and political
activist

2021 Events in Social Issues

12 February: Tokyo Olympics chief resigns over sexist comments

Yoshiro Mori, 83, was quoted as saying women talk too much, and that meetings with many female board directors would "take a lot of time". The remarks set off a firestorm of protest, and Mr. Mori resigned following mounting pressure from major sponsors, including Toyota. Shortly after in March, Mr Mori was yet again under fire for another sexist remark, with him commenting about a female political staffer being "too old to call a woman". This incident was seen as reflective of the institutional sexism present and pervasive in Japan.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-56020674>

15 February: Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala chosen as Director-General of World Trade Organisation (WTO)

Dr Okonjo-Iweala became the first woman and the first African to be chosen as Director-General of the WTO. This follows months of uncertainty which arose when the US initially refused to join the consensus around Dr Okonjo-Iweala, throwing its support instead behind Trade Minister Yoo Myung-hee of the Republic of Korea. But following Ms Yoo's decision to withdraw her candidacy, the administration of newly elected US President Joe Biden dropped the US objection, and announced instead that Washington extended its "strong support" to the candidacy of Dr Okonjo-Iweala.

Source: https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news21_e/dgno_15feb21_e.htm

19 July: River Valley High School incident

A Secondary 4 boy was arrested after killing a fellow Secondary 1 student in the boys' toilet with an axe. The two did not previously know each other, with the killing apparently carried out at random. It was revealed that the perpetrator had previously attempted suicide, a nationwide dialogue on the state of mental health support in Singapore, and in particular the local education system, was sparked.

Source: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/river-valley-high-school-incident-as-it-unfolds>

6 August: Belarusian sprinter Krystsina Tsimanouskaya defected from home country Belarus over fears for her own safety

Krystsina Tsimanouskaya, an Olympic sprinter, was repatriated against her will after she publicly criticised Belarussian Olympic officials for forcing her to participate in an Olympic event she had never competed in before. She managed to escape them at the airport in Tokyo and was eventually granted a humanitarian visa by Poland. This incident has served to bring

renewed attention to the climate of repression cultivated by Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, often called “Europe’s last dictator”.

Source: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/belarus-olympic-sprinter-says-she-fled-after-family-s-warning-n1276027>
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/05/24/faq-lukashenko-belarus/>

14 August: Haiti earthquake sparked a refugee crisis

An earthquake of 7.2 magnitude hit southwestern Haiti, followed by flash floods, leaving more than 2,200 people dead and injuring or displacing thousands more in a nation already suffering from widespread poverty and hunger. In September, after tens of thousands of Haitian refugees gathered at the US-Mexico border, the US government drew criticism for its response, including border agents rounding migrants up on horseback and mass deportations back to Haiti.

Source: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/11/20/haiti-dangerous-sea-voyages/>

23 August: The US imposed sanctions on an Eritrean official over serious human rights abuse in the conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region

Filipos Woldeyohannes, the chief of staff of the Eritrean Defence Forces, was blacklisted by the US. The forces, sent by Eritrea in support of the Ethiopian federal forces’ offensive, were accused of being responsible for massacres, sexual assaults and purposefully shooting civilians in the streets, amongst other human rights abuses, in addition to prolonging the crisis. The crisis was a result of attacks on federal government bases by forces loyal to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), to which Ethiopian federal forces responded with an offensive.

Source: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/us-blacklists-eritrean-individual-linked-ethiopias-tigray-treasury-website-2021-08-23/>

12 November: Termination of Britney Spears’s conservatorship

The pop singer finally had her conservatorship terminated after 13 years. Originally placed under a conservatorship against her will due to concerns over her mental health, she started a legal battle in 2020 to remove her father as conservator of her assets, with the end goal of removing her conservatorship. Her fans helped sway public opinion in her favour, and after a long court battle, Judge Brenda Penny officially ruled to terminate her conservatorship. This case was a standout as it dealt with the abuse that handicapped conservatees do experience at the hands of their conservators. The mainstream popularity of this case even led to a reform of conservatorship laws, to try to prevent such cases of abuse from happening again.

Source: <https://www.politico.com/states/california/story/2021/09/30/newsom-signs-freebritney-bill-to-help-reform-conservatorship-laws-9427463>

19 November: Kyle Rittenhouse acquitted of all charges regarding fatal shootings

In the aftermath of demonstrations in Kenosha, Wisconsin, in the US in August 2020, three white men - two of whom died - were shot in alleged self-defence by Rittenhouse. At the controversial trial, questions about gun rights, violence at racial justice protests and vigilantism divided the nation. Despite facing three homicide charges, the prosecution was unable to prove Rittenhouse did not act in self-defence as dozens of videos showed the happenings of the night itself, which constituted sufficient evidence to the jury to acquit him as he “feared for his life when he opened fire”.

Source: <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/11/19/us/kyle-rittenhouse-trial-friday/index.html>

7 December: Chile legalised same-sex marriage

In this historically conservative Catholic country and amidst much criticism, same-sex marriage was legalised by Chile's parliament, four years after it was presented by former President Michelle Bachelet. The legislation also enabled gay couples to adopt children, a huge milestone for the Chilean lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual, (LGBTQ+) community after a decade-long legal battle. Currently, 30 countries in the world have legalised same-sex marriage.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-59570576>

29 December: Uptick in domestic violence around the world due to Covid-19 pandemic

The coronavirus pandemic has caused unemployment, a phenomenon disproportionately affecting women and causing them to be more dependent on male figures in their lives, and often confining them with their abusers. Almost 70% of women said domestic violence increased in their community since the pandemic began, and about 25% said they felt less safe at home during the pandemic. States have been attempting to intervene, but their already-meagre resources dedicated to supporting victims of domestic violence have been further strained due to the pandemic-resultant economic crunch.

Source: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/12/29/coronavirus-domestic-violence/>

**‘Women’s rights issues are largely resolved today.’
How far is this true in developed societies?**

Vaidyanathan Shraddha 21S37

The 21st century is an unprecedented one due to the rise of significant phenomena, one of which is feminism. Feminism is the belief that women are not inferior to men and deserve the same rights as their male counterparts. As the renowned feminist Emma Watson has declared, it is time society views gender as a spectrum rather than two opposing ideals. Developed societies have made considerable efforts to translate this goal into reality; the basic rights of education and freedom of mobility are granted to women in developed nations. However, it would be fallacious to think that women's rights issues are largely resolved today. This is because issues regarding economic rights, justice, ownership over one's body and the right to live as comfortably as men remain significant in developed societies.

Firstly, developed countries have made significant progress in the area of women's rights by providing women with access to education and thus granting them the freedom of mobility. In the past, cultural and socioeconomic barriers prevented women from attending schools; however, today, there are many laws in developed societies which ensure women are just as educated as men. For instance, Singapore enforces the Compulsory Education Act which states that all children aged six to fifteen must receive formal education, regardless of their gender. There are similar laws in Finland, a country which has gained international recognition for its excellent education system. The literacy rate, equal for both men and women in Finland, sits at 99%. Thus, issues involving women's rights to receive education have been resolved to a large extent in developed societies today. Similarly, women in such nations are granted freedom of mobility as well. This means they are able to live wherever they want and travel to any place they please. This is as opposed to less developed societies like the mountainous communities in Nepal, where women are forced to live in unsheltered huts when they are menstruating, and more conservative Islamic societies where a Guardianship System is imposed, preventing women from travelling freely unless granted permission by their male guardian. However, such issues are nearly never encountered in developed societies today. Thus, one may be under the impression that women's rights issues are largely resolved today.

Some believe that women's rights issues have been resolved to a large extent in first world nations due to the fact that women have more control over their bodies in these states. Such claims are justified with evidence that there are low genital mutilation rates of less than 1% in countries like Singapore and Japan. In addition, women in such nations have access to affordable sanitary products to keep their bodies clean when menstruating. However, although it is important to acknowledge that while such issues have been resolved in first world countries, there still exist less developed societies like those in Ethiopian villages, where 25% of women undergo genital mutilation procedures and over 60% lack access to pads, and issues regarding ownership of one's body still remain largely unsolved. Also, women from a sizable number of developed nations are not allowed to undergo abortion or terminate their pregnancy. Although most laws allow teenagers and victims of rape to undergo abortion procedures, women who are not financially or emotionally ready to bear a child are not granted the same rights. For instance, abortion is illegal in some Midwestern US states and even where

it is allowed, intervention by 'pro-life' activists often prevents abortion. For example, a patient at one of the US Crisis Pregnancy Centres (CPCs) recounted how she was told that her baby could not be aborted due to complications that would risk her life, but it was later revealed that the true reason the abortion was not conducted was that a 'pro-life' medical professional at the CPC did not wish for the pregnancy to be terminated. Such incidents are common in many developed societies today. Hence, although issues like genital mutilation and lack of access to sanitary products have been largely resolved, thus giving women more control over their own bodies, it would be an erroneous assumption that such issues have been largely resolved, for abortion remains a pressing issue in developed societies.

Furthermore, issues regarding women's rights in the workplace remain largely unresolved. Even in developed societies where women and men are equally educated and equally eligible for a job, women still receive significantly lower salaries. For instance, the pay gap in Switzerland sits at about 15%, despite both men and women being 98% literate and suitable for their position in the company. Many companies have stated that they fear that young women would leave once they start a family, and thus would not be dedicated or loyal employees. Hence, apprehension about future economic losses hinder them from giving women the promotions and pay that they have the right to claim. One may rebut that many companies in developed societies have begun to provide childcare facilities in their offices; however, only a limited number of larger multinational organisations like Google provide this service. A majority of women in developed countries belong to the middle class of society, and work for smaller companies which may not be able to afford such facilities or simply see no value in them. Whichever the case, the fact remains that women's rights to earn just as much as a man has not been addressed significantly enough, as can be seen by the gender pay gap which still remains significant in developed societies.

To add on, a woman's right to receive justice for mistreatment and harassment is an issue which continues to be overlooked by society. Even in developed societies where one would expect greater civil order, the unfortunate reality is that women continue to suffer domestic abuse, rape and sexual harassment. What makes matters worse is that women who are courageous enough to speak up about the abuse are often distrusted or dismissed. A survey among victims of rape in the USA revealed that the number-one question that victims were asked was "What were you wearing?" or "Why did you wear such clothes?" Men, and society at large, continue to engage in victim blaming, shaming women for being sexually harassed. Little fruition is seen when women fight for their right to bring punishment upon their predators. This can be seen from statistics which reveal that only roughly 20% of rapists receive severe or capital punishment. Therefore, women's rights to punish their abusers and obtain justice remains an issue which is largely unresolved in developed societies.

The feminist movement has given rise to a fresh perspective on women's rights issues. One such issue is the inability of women to live life as comfortably and freely as their male counterparts. While the expectation of women to be 'stay-at-home mums' in developed societies has changed, and they are increasingly able to go to work, this merely addresses one half of the issue. Women are still expected to balance their professional commitments with their domestic roles. Even though women go to work, women are still expected to take up the larger portion of familial duties in middle income families where hiring a maid or helper is too expensive. This is partly because the mindset that women are primary caregivers is deeply rooted in society. In Singapore, where

working adults are expected to take care of their parents and provide for them during their golden years, a study by The Straits Times revealed that a whopping 20% of women are willing to resign from their jobs to care for their parents, children or in-laws, while only about 5% of men are likely to do the same. This could be explained by women internalising their domestic responsibilities as a result of traditional upbringing. This additional workload is burdensome to women and induces greater levels of stress, anxiety and potentially depression. Thus, an argument made by many feminists today is that a woman's right to live as peacefully and comfortably as men has not been addressed, due to the mindset that women should be the primary caregivers of their families.

In conclusion, I believe the women's rights issues have been solved to a great extent in the case of education and freedom of mobility. However, I opine that the view "Women's rights issues are largely resolved today" is highly myopic. While we do live in a fairly forward-thinking society, issues regarding ownership over one's body, economic rights, justice for victims of abuse and the right to live as comfortably as men, remain prominent. I am hopeful that in the near future, the rise of feminism would lead to further improvement in the lives of women, and Emma Watson's dream would be realised.

Comments:

This was such a pleasure to read! Insightful and well-balanced argument with a range of examples from different contexts; Good job and keep up the good work!

**‘Women’s rights issues are largely resolved today.’
How far is this true in developed societies?**

Sherman Lee Meng Hong 21546

Compared with the past, women today have rights that women in the past could never even dream of having. With universal suffrage, women in positions of power, women holding positions equal to men in the workforce... Activists have undoubtedly made great strides in resolving issues regarding women’s rights, such as equality, the ability to make their own choices, and levelling the playing field in all arenas for women. These improved rights that women enjoy now are further magnified in developed societies; where governments and people are more forward-thinking and less bound by archaic beliefs and traditions, where governments are more liberal in their policies, and where people are generally more open-minded and liberal in their worldview. While it might be tempting to concur that women’s rights issues are largely resolved in developed societies today, it would be myopic to make that judgement, as solutions to these issues have been largely perfunctory and many fundamental women’s rights are yet to be granted. While society has come a long way in resolving such issues, there is still much to be done. Thus, I believe the statement that women’s rights issues are largely resolved in developed societies today is true to a certain extent.

Proponents of the belief that women’s rights issues in developed societies today are largely resolved will relentlessly highlight that women now have more rights than women at any other point in history. Compared to the past, developed societies have allowed women a say in the political arena, through forms of universal suffrage and the election of women into the government, a significant leap considering the state of affairs in the past. In Singapore, there are more women in parliament now than there ever has been and the state’s current standing President is Halimah Yacob, a woman. This is revolutionary as women now have a greater say in the governance of their society than before. This seemingly resolves the issue of them being suppressed by men in important decision-making roles. Furthermore, in the corporate sphere, there are more female CEOs in Fortune 500 companies than there ever has been in the past. This goes to show that beyond having a say in who holds decision-making positions, women themselves are now excelling and are being put in those positions as well. Citing these examples, some may argue that women’s rights issues are largely resolved, as women’s rights issues in the past were largely centred around equality, and it may seem that equality has been obtained.

Superficially, these issues may appear resolved. However, upon further inspection, it would be realised that these arguments are fundamentally flawed, as they are all centred around comparing the past with the present. While there have been great improvements in the rights that women have, the focus of the argument should be objective and absolute assessment if these issues have really been solved, not just improved upon. To that, the answer is a resounding no. Re-evaluating the example of women in power from the previous paragraph, while there have been the most women in positions of power now, the fact remains that their absolute numbers are still much lower than that of men. This would mean that in arguments involving the clash between men and women’s rights, the voices of women in power would still be easily drowned out. As such, absolutely and objectively

speaking, women's rights issues in the form of equal power and equal say still persist in developed societies today.

Furthermore, many developed societies continue to deprive women of their right to make choices over their own bodies. In some US states, anti-abortion laws were enacted such that women may not perform abortions in the third trimester, even in circumstances of rape or incest, where the women may not be aware of the pregnancies. In some developed societies, the choice for abortion is completely outlawed. To say that such laws are dehumanising and oppressive would be an understatement. Developed societies are legally stripping women of their right to govern their own bodies, instead forcefully dictate what women can and cannot do with their bodies. On top of this, many developed societies disallow women from undergoing mature oocyte cryopreservation treatment, known as 'egg-freezing', which ensures that they do not risk pregnancy when they are not ready and only have children when they are ready and desire to. Such legal oppression may browbeat women into feeling unsafe as they do not even have protection from the legal system to govern their bodies and carry out abortions in potential cases of rape and incest. Beyond that, these unconstitutional legal barriers continue to deprive women of their rights as they are effectively telling women that they do not have much of a choice in matters relating to their own bodies. As such, the presence of systemic oppression of women's rights to choose remains a largely unresolved issue even in many developed societies today.

Lastly, despite the efforts that have been made, women's rights regarding equality in the workforce remain largely unresolved. While there have been many more women entering the workforce, many are still trapped by 'glass ceilings' and 'sticky floors'. While most focus on 'glass ceilings' which prevent women from entering high-ranking roles in corporations, there is a large number of women trapped by 'sticky floors' - stuck in jobs with no potential growth or development. For example, most women are deemed 'more suited' to administrative roles and are often placed there, even if they may have the same skills as a man working in another department. For many women, hitting a 'glass ceiling' is already seen as a form of achievement, considering the majority of women in the labour force are mired at the 'sticky floor'. This reflects blatant inequality in the workforce, as men with the same skills as women are promoted at accelerated rates compared to women. A survey found that female leaders in corporations are often viewed as more caring, understanding, capable and well-liked than male leaders, and that women-led startups tend to be more successful than male-led startups. Despite these facts, only 2% of leadership positions in Fortune 1000 companies are helmed by women. This highlights an intrinsic bias in the workforce, with a preference for males to be in positions of power. Going back to the fundamental argument of equality as the crux of women's rights discussions, the fact that these inequalities and preferences in the workforce still exist go to show that even in developed societies, fundamental issues surrounding women's rights issues have not been resolved.

Although we should not discount how far we have come in resolving women's rights issues in developed countries, we must understand that this is merely the beginning. We must not be short-sighted and think the issue of women's rights is fully resolved, or even largely resolved in developed societies today. Despite that, the strides we have made no doubt herald a utopian and egalitarian future where women's rights issues may potentially be largely, or even fully, resolved in our societies.

This is merely the start of a revolution, and we can all be hopeful that one day, women's rights issues may be fully resolved and eradicated from societies.

Comments:

Written with fair knowledge of the issue, though at times, the stridency of your criticism overlooked the key word 'largely' that was in the question. No doubt, issues will always remain, but to what extent have we addressed them? Enough to warrant judging it as being 'largely resolved'? Nevertheless, an enjoyable read.

**‘Women’s rights issues are largely resolved today.’
How far is this true in developed societies?**

Wong Liang Min Hannah 21S47

According to world-renowned journalist Gloria Steinem, “we have begun to raise our daughters more like our sons, and few have begun raising our sons more like our daughters”. While many women’s rights activists have popped up over the last few decades, the issue of gender inequality has taken a backseat as notions of gender disparity have been unknowingly and unconsciously diffused into our heads. Famous and well-respected female leaders, including United States (US) Congress Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi have definitely proven that the fight for women’s rights has taken massive leaps in our society today. Nonetheless, it would be shallow to think that women’s rights are largely resolved today, as a multitude still experience shaming of their outward appearance, misogynistic attitudes of men and are widely still sexually objectified. For instance, tennis star Serena Williams, as accomplished as she is, has long endured body shaming due to her masculine appearance, often likened to an ape. While women’s rights have gained much progress in our world today, many pertinent problems remain and cannot be taken light-heartedly.

Admittedly, women’s rights have gained ground in developed societies as compared to the past, showing that gender discrimination against women could potentially be resolved. Women have gained more access to opportunities in education, employment, and healthcare services, with states and companies doing more to ensure women are treated equal to men. This shows the desire and willingness, including by men, to help change the views and attitudes toward women. After years of campaigning by the women’s rights group AWARE, the Singapore government is considering approving laws granting women protection against marital rape, where married women are sexually assaulted by their husbands. This thus shows that the long gruelling years of fighting for justice have proven worthwhile. The situation sheds light on the need and urgency for women’s rights issues to be resolved for women to be deemed equal before the law. In addition, women’s rights are evident in more democratic societies such as the US. Kamala Harris, the current Vice President, is the first woman of colour to hold such a high office. She is highly regarded by many, as she is a symbol that women can dream big and lead a nation. Hence, women’s rights issues have evolved throughout the years and can definitely be overcome in future.

Nonetheless, while women have obtained great progress in gaining their rights, women’s rights issues remain largely unresolved since women still experience stereotyping and sexual objectification. Increasingly being seen as sex objects or even social escorts, there has been a steady rise in the number of sexual assault reports across the years. Women have been deprived of their basic rights as there is an intrusion of privacy when upskirt photos or even intimate videos are taken and shared online. The recent case of National University of Singapore (NUS) student Monica Baey being a victim of sexual harassment and voyeurism is hard evidence of how the system deals lenient punishments to male offenders. Baey had voiced her outrage on social media about how her perpetrator, who had taken a video of her showering, was only given a warning and short suspension. Furthermore, NUS was also sluggish and slow in their reply to her. Former education minister Mr Ong Ye Kung even remarked that the punishment was “largely inadequate”. This resulted in NUS and other

universities reviewing their student policies. This case has led many to question Singapore's stance on women's rights as the punishment meted out by the school seemed to normalise and trivialise such behaviour. Even in a pluralistic society like Singapore, much focus has been put on women protecting themselves rather than having men be educated that sexual advances have to be taken with mutual consent and respect. This shows that women are still deemed as highly submissive and vulnerable. Furthermore, in developed nations such as South Korea and Japan, working mothers are not taken seriously as professionals in their line of work, as women are supposedly meant to be committed to their family, and should only have the responsibility of doing housework and caring for children. Stereotypes, which are present in local billboard advertisements portraying women as mere housewives, efficient at housework and poor at mathematics, have been deeply entrenched in people's mindsets to the extent that even women have begun to believe them. The issue of women's rights being largely insufficient has been highlighted as women are viewed as inferior and thus unworthy of certain privileges. Thus, women's rights issues remain a problem in society today.

Lastly, women's rights issue remain largely unresolved as women still have to actively campaign for their rights and seek justice against gender discrimination. With an Instagram account with 59.9 million followers, Emma Watson, who advocates for women's rights to education and is staunchly against child marriage is a respectable role model for women and men worldwide. Women like her have been actively campaigning for years, yet nothing much has changed in our current world. This is a cause of concern to many, as numerous people have undermined the urgency of the situation. Gender disparity has not gained as much support as other issues such as racial inequality, and this could owe to the preconceived notion that this issue is not a prevalent one. Hence, this results in many having to relentlessly raise awareness and fight for the rights of women. The hashtag #MeToo, was popularised by US actress Alyssa Milano when she opened up about the sexual advances she faced in her career. She urged women in similar circumstances to speak out. This generated a flurry of online attention, as millions more who remained in silence due to fear and stigmatisation revealed experiencing similar ordeals. This movement had reached the ends of the world, and was strong evidence of the lack of protection against sexual predators. Grappling with the fear of their career being on the line and publicly bringing to justice their perpetrators, it was indeed a brave act for all these women to come out and speak of their story, shedding light on the gravity of the situation - that women's rights are still vastly inadequate today. In addition, in the US states of Alabama and Georgia, laws have been passed banning abortion even in extreme cases such as rape or incest. This was a highly controversial topic as the laws were signed and passed by a majority-male group of legislators. The irony that women have no choice and no say, in deciding what to do with their reproductive system in a democratic society, shows that women are still seen as the weaker sex while men hold more control and dominion over society. Therefore, it is evident that women are still unfairly treated and unequal in our society nowadays, and do not receive opportunities that men do. Hence, women's rights issues are still largely unresolved in society.

All in all, I argue that women's rights are still largely unresolved today in developed societies. Indeed, numerous women's voices have been recognised, and many have been praised for fighting for justice of women's rights. Nevertheless, it is needless and ignorant to view women's rights issues as largely resolved, and that there is nothing more to be done. While mindsets and attitudes remain ingrained, all have to play a role in reaching parity for both women and men, and much more effort has to be put in by the various stakeholders to work towards providing equal opportunities and access

to services regardless of gender. While women's rights issues remain a challenge, it is not completely impossible to resolve them in time to come.

Comments:

A well-informed and fully relevant response showing strong reasoning and substantiation. Writing can be more succinct, paragraphs a little 'tighter'. Fluent English, strong personal voice.

How important are grades in an education system?

Jovianne Tay Suen Ni 21S35

Every year, more than ten million pre-university students in China partake in the nationwide examination or 'gaokao', one of the most significant and important exams of their lifetime. University spots in China are limited, and this serves as the only pathway for them to get a seat in their preferred university through grades achieved in the nationwide examination. As such, some may perceive grades to be the most important reason for an education system. However, this is not true, and grades are only important to a certain extent.

Meritocracy is practised in many countries around the world, and there is great emphasis on succeeding in school in order to earn valuable opportunities for oneself. Such a system elucidates the importance of grades. For example, in countries such as China, many parents pump in an exorbitant amount of money into their children's tuition fees. A recent news article published by the South China Morning Post called tuition companies in China a "money making industry". In 2019, tuition companies in China were expected to achieve an annual growth rate of over 20%. Even in Singapore, there are extensive advertisements in malls showing the number of distinctions students from that tuition centre achieved in national exams. This shows that grades are a priority to most, and many parents would be willing to sacrifice their wealth to help their children attain perfect scores, which can improve their chances of succeeding in society. Therefore, this further reaffirms the fact that grades are a prominent part of the education system today.

However, recent adjustments to education systems worldwide have shifted the emphasis away from grades. Education ministries in many countries have come to the realisation that getting good grades should not be the only way for a child to succeed, as every child is unique and has their own talents and gifts. Hence, in Singapore for example, many schemes and programmes were rolled out for students to be enrolled into prestigious schools even without top grades. For instance, the Direct School Admission exercise in Singapore allows students who are not academically inclined to showcase their individual talents, thus still giving them opportunities to succeed. This shows that grades are no longer as critical as they previously were in the education system, allowing individuals to focus on their other talents without being fixated on achieving good grades.

Despite this, getting good grades continues to be the most viable way for the underprivileged to break out of the poverty cycle and do well in life. Those who do not have the financial means to explore their strengths and talents will mostly have to depend on their own determination and grit to achieve good academic results. Only then will they be able to obtain scholarships and secure a better future ahead, as many scholarships available for pre-university students usually establish the criteria of excellent academic qualifications to even be shortlisted for an interview. In recent years, graduates with a bachelor's degree are also highly sought after by employment companies, making such degrees even more of a prerequisite. The underprivileged must hence have excellent academic results to obtain scholarships in order to avoid exorbitant university admission fees. A university degree will significantly improve their chances of holding a stable career to pull their family and themselves out

of poverty. Therefore, grades continue to be important in the education system, especially for those of lower economic status.

While grades seem to be important in an education system, it does not offset the importance of other goals that the education system hopes to achieve, such as inculcating good moral values in students. Even with good grades, one with crooked morals will be shunned by society. Stringent background checks regarding previous behavioural records are conducted on all scholarship applicants. Any major incident which suggests improper moral values in an applicant will most likely result in a failed application. Schools also highlight the paramount importance of one's moral values. In Singapore's education system, lessons such as character and citizenship education emphasise to the younger generation that while grades are important, the education system also places great emphasis on the importance of the students' core values. Therefore, this shows that the education system values one's character more than their grades and achievements.

In conclusion, while the education system continues to showcase and highlight the significant importance of grades, it also demonstrates to us that grades are not everything in life and that one can still succeed even without good grades. Moving forward, it is hoped that there will continue to be improvements to the education system to reduce the importance of grades to create a less stressful education system which allows all its students to thrive, even without good grades.

Comments:

Generally well written with insightful points raised. However, you might want to show off your command of current affairs by stringing together countries that share similar traits or characteristics to show trends and patterns.

Is sustainable living a realistic goal in your society?

Balachandar Srividya 21S34

Recently, a new change was noticed in the Milo packets that both students and adults consume on a regular basis. The plastic straw that came attached to every carton of Milo had suddenly transformed into a paper straw. This change was due to the company's movement towards more sustainable packaging for their products, and was met with both praise and criticism from the general public. Many applauded the change to reduce plastic usage, while others complained that the Milo had lost its signature taste due to the paper straw getting damp if left inside for too long. This clash in opinion highlights a chasm that exists in our society, dividing those who actively work towards living more sustainably and those who prioritise their own comforts and ease over living sustainably. The existence of this clash leads to the question of whether sustainable living is a realistic goal in our society. Personally, I believe that it is largely realistic as even though changing people's mindsets is a long and arduous task, with increasing awareness of sustainability, more stakeholders are putting in effort to promote sustainability among the general public. This, along with more innovation taking place among youth based on sustainable living, as they are exposed to the issue of sustainability in schools, may lead to sustainable living becoming the norm in the near future.

Firstly, the increased awareness of sustainability propagated by both social media and traditional media has led to an increasing number of people working towards living in a sustainable manner. More and more people have turned to producing content that encourages and informs the public about the serious issue the Earth faces, and the impact our lives and lifestyles have brought about to speed up the deterioration of our planet. A classic example of this would be the documentary *Seaspiracy*, which provided an uncensored, raw insight on the atrocities and terrible deeds that are committed daily in the commercial fishing and whaling industries: more specifically, the dolphin massacres that take place even today. The documentary peaked at number one on Netflix's Top Ten Shows in Singapore immediately after it was released, and garnered critical acclaim all over the world. Such pieces of media shock viewers and make them ponder their own lifestyle and whether they are contributing to the issue they just learnt about, which in turn piques interest in sustainable living. On the other hand, for those who do not have the patience to sit through a two-hour long documentary and require something that can catch their eye instantaneously, social media has become a catalyst for learning more about the world around them. Take, for example, the #SaveTheTurtles movement that swept the internet by storm in 2019 and 2020. A simple image of a turtle wrapped up in plastic waste while eating a plastic straw inspired many to give up their extreme plastic usage habits and turn to more sustainable cutlery, packaging material and so on. Some may argue that trends like these oversimplify the issue of our unsustainable practices. However, it is due to these trends that issues of sustainability have garnered large public support, and inspired many to learn more about the subject. Due to the different platforms available to spread information and news about sustainability issues, there has been an ever-growing increase in the number of people who read, learn and experiment with the concept of sustainable living. Thus, due to this phenomenon, I do believe that sustainable living is a realistic goal in our society.

Secondly, we are seeing a change in mindset in major stakeholders, such as big businesses and our own government. Many believe that even if civilians move towards sustainable living, big corporations, which contribute to 71% of carbon emissions in Singapore, have to change as well to ensure a sustainable and healthy country. This puts many off from working towards sustainability, as they feel that their change will be negligible in comparison, due to the sheer difference in percentage of their carbon emissions compared with the business sector. However, this excuse can no longer be used due to the fact that we are witnessing more businesses moving to sustainable business practices, as encouraged by the government. This can be seen in the Green Plan released in 2021 by the government, which included an increased amount of resources provided to businesses to promote more eco-friendly practices. The government has also started working towards increasing the recycling rates of citizens through the use of incentives. For example, in a shopping mall located near Bishan MRT station, recycling machines for plastic bottles have been placed next to vending machines for bottled drinks. These machines provide incentives such as shopping vouchers and even free goodies, after a certain number of bottles have been recycled per pax. This incentive system has benefited our society, with a 59% increase in recycling rates in 2018 and 2019 as a result. With the government serving as a catalyst, the movement towards sustainable living by the civil and business sectors has seen an increase in both speed and numbers, and I believe that if we continue to come up with new and creative ways to inspire others to learn, live and think more sustainably, sustainable living will be a realistic goal in our society.

Although a change of mindset has been seen in the business sector, changing one's mindset on a more personal level requires patience, time and resources. It is not easy to relearn a certain way of life, especially if the change is one that is currently negatively received in our society. For example, the founders of Insectta, an insect farm in Singapore, mentioned that they wanted to use insects as a substitute for meat as protein in our diets when they first came up with the farm's concept. However, this idea was quickly shut down by the National Environmental Agency as it was too contemporary for our still majorly-conservative population. It is said that it takes three generations for a complete change in mindset, and looking at the urgency of living sustainably, such 'innovative' ideas may actually not be effective enough to counter our societal problem of sustainability. However, due to the increase in innovation among young Singaporeans, these issues are easily resolved via resilience and out-of-the-box thinking shown by the young people in our society. Insectta is an example of this. After their idea was originally rejected, the team went back to the drawing board to come up with other ideas, and eventually got one approved. They now breed Black Soldier flies, which eat compost and food waste generated by our society to excrete out rare materials such as keratin, to be sold to the beauty and pharmaceutical sectors. This novel idea not only contributes back to our economy, but has opened up the insect farming sector to the public eye and has caused more to contribute to research in this area. The imaginations of young minds has proven to be beneficial to our society, encouraging educational institutions to encourage students to come up with their own ideas on this topic. An example of this would be Nanyang Technological University's Nanyang Research Programme being opened to secondary and junior college students. In 2019, the Singapore Centre for 3D Printing also allowed young students to conduct their own research on 3D food printing, which uses alternative sources of nutrition more sustainable than the agriculture and meat industries, creating food items that have the same look and texture as the original items. Thus, with more resources being available for our students and an increase in encouraging innovation amongst youths, I believe sustainable living is a realistic goal in our society.

Lastly, sustainability is becoming more talked about in our education system, and this inclusion has encouraged and enlightened our students about sustainability and its impacts. An example of this would be sustainability discussed in our General Paper lessons, and Ecosystems and Pollution as topics for Biology in our syllabus. Many more of our students learn more about this issue, and hence feel compelled to speak out about these topics. To encourage them, the Ministry of Education has also provided them with platforms for them to share their thoughts. One such platform is the Pre-University Seminar, which takes place annually and encourages students to speak up about issues that may affect Singapore in the future. In 2021, one of the key topics during the seminar was Sustainability; many students from many institutions were given the opportunity to speak up about their thoughts, and come up with ways to counter these issues in the future. Thus, the inclusion of this issue in our education system has led to an increased amount of student activism; this, along with the numerous platforms provided by the Ministry of Education, has allowed more students to inculcate sustainability in their daily lifestyles. Due to this, I believe that sustainable living is a realistic goal in our society.

Overall, we are seeing a large outpour of support for sustainability in our daily lives due to increasing awareness, stakeholders changing their mindsets, innovation and the inculcation of the topic as part of our education system. Even though it takes a long time for individual mindset change, I strongly believe that with more and more people working towards sustainability, our society can let go of material whims and comforts in order to live more sustainably and be kinder to our planet. All it takes is one step towards being more empathetic to our environment, and we can enjoy this comfortable life for generations. It is predicted that climate change will become irreversible in 2030 if we do not change our way of life now. So, I appeal to everyone to sacrifice their own little comforts, similar to how Milo switched from plastic to paper straws, so as to safeguard our planet and keep it healthy and safe. Our society has always been kind and compassionate, especially the younger generation, so I do believe that we have a very good chance of ensuring our Earth recovers. Empathy is the key to living sustainably, and I know that if we work together, we can change the world - both literally and figuratively.

Comments:

Thoughtful response that considers the issue from a wide range of perspectives. Outline could be more targeted and focused at points.

Is sustainable living a realistic goal in your society?

Chew Yu Han, Rayna 21S44

Mahatma Gandhi once noted that “Earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s needs but not every man’s greed”. This proves especially true in our society, where we reside on a tiny landmass with insufficient natural resources. Sustainable living -- leading a life mindful of the environment and taking steps to conserve it -- is key to ensuring we leave behind a habitable planet for future generations. Pessimists may believe that such a lifestyle is merely a utopian dream, citing our attitudes and mindsets as indicative of sustainable living being impossible. However, I believe that with increased education, actions taken by the youth and various agencies, sustainable living can be a realistic goal in our society, as long as we work together as a unified community.

The current mindset of Singaporeans may cause some to see a lack of hope for a greener future. With a bustling cityscape and a meritocratic rat race to keep up with, Singaporeans can be seen to value convenience over sustainability. Simply put, as long as something is easier, we will most likely make that choice. For example, food delivery services have been on the rise in recent years, where services like GrabFood and FoodPanda offer deliveries anytime, anywhere. On-demand goods delivery has also gone up, and online shopping is a trending mode of obtaining items, mainly for its convenience. Even with 20 cent charges placed on Styrofoam boxes, people are willing to fork out extra fees, just to avoid the hassle of cleaning Tupperware containers. With these choices made by Singaporeans, it is no wonder that some have lost hope in the possibility of sustainable living in our society.

Critics of our society and its inner workings may also point out that the actions taken by the masses or by companies are merely ‘for show’, or tokenistic in nature. This may have some verisimilitude, where metal straws became a trending item to purchase, yet many just ended up unused in the depths of a drawer. Fast food restaurants such as McDonald’s and Burger King also followed suit by removing straw dispensers in their outlets. These gestures are viewed with skepticism, as straws are only one aspect of the larger issue that is large amounts of waste generated daily. Beyond plastic waste, the annual Earth Hour taking place at the end of March can also be seen as a one-off gesture with no real impact. Why bother turning off the lights for an hour, then, when it has no effect in the long run? Hence, it may appear to some that sustainable living is too idealistic in our society, where actions taken are seen as performative with no apparent impacts.

While this may hold true in some aspects, this is not to say that we should give up on living sustainably. Certain groups of people may value personal convenience over sustainability, but this is slowly changing as youths, the leaders of tomorrow, are stepping up to make a difference. As for the actions that appear to be tokenistic, measures have been put in place to ensure concrete actions are taken, coupled with education to help shift people’s mindsets - key to making sustainable living a reality.

Firstly, Singaporean youths have been increasingly participative in environmental conservation efforts. Stepping up to take action is no small feat, and the initiative taken goes a long

way in putting us on the path to living sustainably. Youths in Singapore are highly educated, using social media to keep up with environmental news globally. With role models such as Greta Thunberg - famous youth activist for climate action - and Isra Hirsu - leader of the United States Youth Climate Strike - stepping up to play their parts, Singapore youth have begun to follow in their footsteps. In 2018, Singapore Youth for Climate Action held a conference, educating some 60 youth participants and urging them to reflect and come up with innovative solutions in the battle against climate change. This spells hope for the future, as many more youths join the good cause of saving the environment. With this increased action, and the innovation of youths, sustainable living will soon be the norm for Singaporeans.

Next, education on the topic of environmental conservation and sustainable living has gained traction among the general public. The year 2018 was Singapore's Year of Climate Action, where some 800 initiatives and events were rolled out, reaching out to Singaporeans from all walks of life. These initiatives mainly encouraged the masses to rethink how they lived and make the necessary changes. On a smaller scale, FairPrice, a supermarket supplying groceries to many citizens, has introduced reusable plastic bags and pushcarts. These bags are an investment for many who continue to use them in daily life. Recycling bins and electronic waste bins are also made available in public spaces, encouraging Singaporeans to not only live sustainably through the '3Rs', but also through proper waste disposal. Hence, sustainable living is a lifestyle choice that has been encouraged, and a goal that has been made more attainable for the general public.

Lastly, companies and agencies with the resources to do so have been looking into boosting our nation's efforts in sustainability. As we rely heavily on fossil fuels and natural gas to provide electricity, solar power is another option that will aid in reducing our reliance on these unsustainable sources of energy. Shell and JTC are looking into building a solar farm the size of 112 football fields on Pulau Semakau, which will be able to provide electricity for 17,500 households. Under the Singapore Green Plan, the Ministry of Education also plans to help tackle sustainable living by aiming to reduce the carbon emissions of schools by two-thirds, by 2030. Given that companies and agencies are putting in the efforts to make sustainable living a reality, this goal is certainly achievable for our citizens.

All in all, as sustainable living becomes increasingly convenient and environmental conservation becomes a major concern for many, the goal of living sustainably is indeed realistic. As long as Singaporeans are cooperative in their efforts to make our Garden City a sustainable one, we can all look forward to an educated, environmentally conscious society.

Comments:

A well-informed essay with many concrete examples. You dealt largely with how with changing attitudes, sustainable living can be realistic. Would have liked to see more evaluation of the constraints we face in terms of resources -- import of food, and other imperatives that drive resource use. For balance, perhaps looking at the factors that hinder us from going forward might be more relevant than looking at why we have not yet achieved success.

Is sustainable living a realistic goal in your society?

Kow Ming Yuan 21S47

In recent years, great strides in terms of environmental conservation and sustainable living have been made. The era of fossil fuels is coming to an end, with the signing of the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Climate Conference. Under this agreement, countries submit their Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and commit to it, with the goal of limiting global temperature rise to 2.0 degrees Celsius and if possible, 1.5 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels. This is just one of the many commitments Singapore has made in the fight against climate change and the push for sustainable development. Sustainable development means having a lifestyle that can be continued for generations, where there is no drastic impact on the environment and its inhabitants. While the aim is for our society to live sustainably, is this aim realistic? While some may feel so, I beg to differ. Sustainable living is not a realistic goal in Singapore society.

Many feel sustainable living is a realistic goal in our society due to the technological advancements we have made in the push for sustainable living. There is no doubt that we are coming closer to a utopia where we can live 100% sustainably. The electric car revolution has only just begun, and Singapore has caught on, with its aim of phasing out all internal combustion vehicles by 2040. Not only that, we are one of the only few countries that has had its waterworks go 100% green, with a 60 megawatts solar panel bed in Tengah Reservoir providing 100% of the power. These advancements do contribute to our goal of sustainable living, where they play a part in our push for renewable energy, through substituting the combustion of hydrocarbons that emit carbon dioxide - a greenhouse gas - with electricity. This is not only much quieter, but also sequesters the carbon emissions internal combustion engines produce. Solar panels harvest the energy of the sun to power our waterworks, substituting the burning of fossil fuels for something renewable. However, reality is not that picture-perfect. The concept of sustainable living is very much an idealistic one, and much less pragmatic. It would be perfect if all our energy generation could be replaced by renewable energy, and all our vehicles become electric, but there are also consequences unbeknownst to us. The production of electric cells such as hydrogen fuel cells require extensive mining for precious metals. These metals can only be found in certain regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, where destructive mining methods are employed, and causing toxic metal pollution of lakes and rivers, resulting in a detrimental impact on the environment. While it may seem like we can live sustainably forever without solar panels and electric vehicles, can we really say so after looking at the detrimental impact on the environment that these alternate energy sources leave behind from their production? It is certainly not sustainable to continue producing solar panels and hydrogen fuel cells, while countries such as the Congo bear the brunt of the environmental impact these energy sources have on their environment. Hence, we cannot say we are living sustainably if we continue to destroy the environment from the production of alternative renewable energy sources.

The problem with solar panels and electric vehicles is only a small part of the larger barrier Singapore faces when striving to live sustainably - our dependence on trade and imports from other countries. Being a small island with no natural resources on its own, Singapore has a huge dependence on other countries for necessities such as food, electricity and much more. We have little control over

methods international firms and countries employ in producing and transporting their goods, and hence over the sustainability of our supply chains. We have certainly made strides in the sustainability of our water supply, being one of the only countries to close the water loop and recycle every drop of water through water catchment reservoirs, desalination plants and NEWater - the recycling of sewage water. However, there are many other aspects Singapore has to tackle in order to truly live sustainably, yet these are the areas we cannot control. An example of this is the aviation industry in Singapore. It is possible for us to have our home-grown airline, Singapore Airlines, to go net zero. In fact, they have recently rolled out a scheme where passengers can pay for their carbon emissions. However, this is not something we have a say in for other airlines. Costa Rica, despite having 80% of their energy production running on renewable energy, does not account for the carbon emissions it generates from the influx of tourists in its country, even though it is a tourism dependent economy. Hence, we cannot say they can go carbon free if their aviation industry continues to pollute the environment from inbound and outgoing flights. Likewise, Singapore cannot truly go carbon-free and say that we live sustainably if the flights in our aviation industry continue to pollute and emit carbon as they have yet switched to carbon free energy sources. With how globalised and interconnected the world is today, it is almost impossible to say Singapore can live sustainably, since its imports and trade will be subject to the policies of the producing countries and firms. If these firms continue to engage in unsustainable methods of production, Singapore will never be able to achieve its goal of sustainable living as it is still supporting unsustainable methods of living through its demand for such goods.

Furthermore, the lifestyle of Singaporeans is an unsustainable one, and is something that is too ingrained in our society that is very difficult to change. Consumerism is prevalent in Singaporean society. Being an affluent society with an ingrained throwaway culture, we are obsessed with the acquisition of consumer goods where we constantly buy and buy with no end. It is a result of consumer capitalism, which is a concept that consumers' demands are manipulated by marketing strategies that advantage the sellers. The shopping mall is the epitome of this consumerism culture. In Singapore, we have almost 171 malls, a huge number for such a small city-state. Other countries such as the United States have only about two shopping malls on average for the same area of land. It is carefully crafted to maximise our consumption, from the placement of the shopping malls right where MRT stations are, to the layout of the malls from its escalators and shops. All this entices us to shop and never stop. The constant sales, such as the famous Great Singapore Sale, or the monthly sales on days which the month and day coincide, such as 11:11 sales, make shopping an addictive drug that shoppers cannot escape from. It has resulted in the phenomenon of fast fashion, where large volumes of fashion pieces are produced, sold and thrown away, at the expense of the environment - from its production methods to the waste it creates. A survey conducted by Channel News Asia indicated that every 1,000 Singaporeans throw away 34 pieces of clothing on average, and buy 27 pieces of clothing a year. With the prevalence of consumerism in Singapore, the goal of sustainable living is nothing but wishful thinking, as we would require cultural and economic shifts before we can start living sustainably. As long as there is consumerism, there will not be sustainable living in Singapore.

Lastly, the phenomenon of greenwashing also makes it much harder for consumers to live a zero-waste lifestyle. With the recent push for sustainability globally, consumers and producers alike have started to switch to greener consumption and production techniques. Many consumers start to live a zero-waste lifestyle where they aim to reuse, reduce and recycle. Producers likewise aim to meet their customers' demands, switching to greener methods of production and producing eco-friendly

products. Yet, not all of it may be genuine. The problem of greenwashing, where the push for sustainability has led to companies advertising their products as seemingly eco-friendly yet not being so, has undermined the goal of consumers to live sustainably. In Singapore, there are many instances of said greenwashing, such as RedMart supermarket bags being advertised as recyclable despite not being so, or Starbucks straws being said to be biodegradable and compostable, yet still requiring industrial facilities to compost. With these so-called 'green' products flooding the market, will consumers truly know when they are consuming eco-friendly products? As long as such fraudulent green products exist, Singapore will not be able to achieve its goal of sustainable living.

In conclusion, it is not realistic for Singapore society to live sustainably. With our reliance on imports, the prevalence of consumerism and greenwashing in Singapore, it is hard to say when we will be able to achieve this goal. However, it is something we still have to try to achieve, as some progress is better than absolutely no progress at all.

Comments:

Your essay has original content - both arguments and examples. Your understanding of this issue and knowledge of the topic are impressive. Fluent, idiomatic expression. Makes for a pleasant read.

Consider the view that education is not able to cope with the needs of today's world.

Lim Jie Xin Dorcas 21A15

With a mere flip of the newspaper, we are greeted with news of income inequality, abject poverty, food insecurity – and the list goes on. As society progresses, we find ourselves experiencing a myriad of problems requiring different stakeholders to collectively overcome. And by what means is education one of the possible approaches to overcome these? The answer is yes - indubitably, education has a significant role to counter these problems. While this may seem like a Herculean task, I am confident that education is the key to ensuring society progresses, even for minute issues.

Detractors of my view would argue that education is not able to cope or develop the skill set necessary to overcome the issues of contemporary society. Nothing more than a paper chase, the structured rote learning promoted in many Developed Countries (DCs) is unable to solve pressing world problems, evident in how the main focus is purely on academic performance. These students are made to pursue academics like it is the only yardstick that will determine their success in life, which inculcates in them characteristics like competitiveness, 'kiasuism' and even elitism. Such a stringent focus on education only serves the individuals' needs, instead of rendering help to those in the world who are vulnerable and require assistance. In China, the university entrance exam or 'gaokao' is a single exam taken at age 18 that determines the trajectory of one's life. That being said, it is unsurprising that Chinese students would mercilessly devour their books, as their success would solely benefit them, not anyone else. Hence, when one is too caught up in the pursuit of individual affairs, it is highly unlikely they would spare time to reach out to the more needy and vulnerable.

That being said, education may still instill skills and values in these students that can provide long-term solutions, relieving the vulnerable from the unfortunate circumstances that they are subjected to. A well-educated person would be able to put the theories they have learnt into practice, and this can have far-reaching impacts. Extending the example of the gaokao, China's Xi Jinping, who had achieved outstanding results in the gaokao, has been key in eradicating some of the most pertinent problems in China, like corruption. A learned man, Mr Xi is well-known for his authoritarian regime that helped pull the majority of China out of poverty. This sheds light on how even a structured and cyclical education that may be largely unappealing to most can still be successful, if students are able to put what they have learnt into action to benefit the world. Having accelerated China's transformation from a Less Developed Country (LDC) to a DC with booming economic growth and a thriving workforce, Mr Xi is exemplary of how one can use education to provide a remedy for the world's largest problems, such as poverty.

To further substantiate my point, education can be the missing puzzle piece to achieve equality, an age-old divide that can lead to social instability. Oftentimes, the lack of education, or more specifically formal education, is the key factor causing people to be trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty. According to Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, having free access to primary education is mandatory. However, 171 million people globally are still suffering from poverty

due to lack of access to basic education. Hence, if education were to be provided freely to all, society can progress cohesively, which is one of the time-critical needs that should be achieved.

Furthermore, as we progress towards an automation-assisted and technology-driven workforce, education gives us a head start for the future, as we venture into online education for many across the globe. During the Covid-19 pandemic, students from 186 countries were forced to switch from traditional classroom learning to online learning – and this change is here to stay in many countries. Thus, however they may do so, students must adapt to some form of online schooling, and this extensive use of technology as part of their everyday lives would provide them with the footing they need when they enter the workforce. In Singapore, due to rapid industrialisation, it is projected that 30% of our jobs will be lost to automation in the near future. As such, it is thus critical that we are armed with the necessary skills and qualifications to capitalise on and adapt to technology. Hence, it is crucial that as the world evolves, education also extensively adopts technology. Perhaps a blessing in disguise, the pandemic has led many nations to adopt technology in their schools, proving that education is progressing along with today's world.

Moreover, technology can nurture inclusivity in students, one of the important values in modern society that should be instilled in students from a tender age. From persons with physical disabilities to those with intellectual disabilities, there is a minority of the global populace that are excluded due to their differences. As such, it is of vital importance that education provides students with a solid moral compass that promotes inclusivity in order to achieve a state in society where everyone is treated equally and with respect. In the Singaporean education system, a mandatory hour of Civics lesson is conducted once a week, where teachers guide students in developing sound moral values. The prevalent belief that the system only focuses on academics as the singular determinant of success is false, as students' characters are also developed during these Civics lessons, which have been interwoven with academic lessons from primary school. In the same vein, inclusivity is also espoused in Finland's education system, where students with special education needs are placed in the same classes as mainstream students. By providing the opportunity for students to interact with people who are 'different' from them and see them being treated in a similar manner, the message of inclusivity is subtly being communicated. This is a key value that should become intrinsic for all students as society progresses. This ensures that everyone has the same starting line and despite any differences, every individual is equally valued and treasured.

In a nutshell, I strongly feel that education can cope with the needs of today's society. From facilitating students in transitioning into a technology-based workforce to promoting inclusivity, the education system adopts various pragmatic approaches to meet the needs of today's world. Of course, while educators can transmit knowledge and morals, it is only to a limited extent, as it is ultimately up to the beneficiaries of education whether they apply the knowledge, which may either contribute to or impede the solving of modern-day problems. However, in the long run, I believe that education serves to empower us in putting an end to some of the worlds' largest crises.

Comments:

Good that the context of today's world is surfaced and woven into point/development. Competent language use, visible attempt at sophistication, largely successful. Given that the subject matter is education, it is good to include more examples of education (initiatives, policies, practices) and to evaluate these in view of their ability to cope with the needs of today's world.

**Consider the view that education is not able
to cope with the needs of today's world.**

Goh Jia Ying 21537

Education, an inextricable part of our lives, has been a highly debated topic for generations. Every country's government channels exorbitant amounts of funds into their education system, hoping to shape the leaders of tomorrow. However, the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world we live in today begs a question: How relevant is the education we receive in this ever-changing 21st century? With the advent of technology and the increasingly globalised world, many fear that the skills and knowledge they learn may become obsolete. In spite of this, I believe that the future is not all bleak. Education today is evolving just like much of the world, and is largely able to cope with the needs of modern society.

First of all, it is undeniable that the advent of technology has challenged many traditional education methods. Gone are the days when students only studied with pen and paper, and learned by rote memorisation. The pervasiveness of technology has left many students uncertain about the future. After all, what can they offer that artificial intelligence cannot? This is evident in how despite having received a university degree, many graduates around the world still feel threatened by modern technology. Singapore, for example, has seen a rising number of fresh graduates joining the gig economy as the traditional workforce fails to provide them with a sense of security. In light of this, it can be argued that the education system has failed to impart the necessary confidence young people require to face an ever-changing workforce.

However, the education system has also seen a seismic shift in recent years, as it aims to readily equip students with the skills required in a tech-driven world. Many countries, especially developed ones, have poured in the resources to provide students the opportunity to learn with technology. From robot fairs in Japanese schools, to coding workshops offered in American high schools, as well as the personal learning devices like laptops and iPads that every secondary school student in Singapore will be equipped with, education has gone to great lengths in a bid to ensure that future generations not just survive, but thrive in a technological age. Technology should not be seen as an enemy, but rather a tool to be wielded, and the education system has taken definitive steps in creating a world where students can harness the potential of technology.

Some may also argue that education today places far too little emphasis on resolving real-world issues, and far too much emphasis on chasing after grades. Proponents of this view will bring in case studies of the likes of China and South Korea, where the education systems have become notorious for their academic rigour. Due to their highly competitive education systems, students are caught in a rat race from an extremely young age, as young as six, all in the hopes of pursuing academic excellence. Not only has this style of education failed to equip students with the soft skills necessary in today's world, it has also resulted in a lack of awareness of pressing current issues. Learning about global warming or the widening inequality gap is not necessarily going to get one a place in a top university. Although the future may sound bleak in countries like South Korea, not all countries solely focus on the pursuit of academic achievements. For instance, Singaporean junior colleges have Project

Work as an examinable subject, which aims to bolster students' involvement in identifying social issues and proposing possible solutions. This provides students with a holistic learning experience, which is imperative as they will face real-world issues in the future. Countries like Taiwan have also sought to educate students on dire global issues, such as global warming, and how they can do their part to mitigate its effects. Schools in Taiwan have recycling centres and an allocated time slot for students to engage in recycling efforts. This cultivates care for the environment and encourages students to actively participate in resolving such issues. Hence, it is apparent that despite certain countries' continued chase for academic excellence, most societies have taken a step further to nurture students into active citizens with a voice for societal issues, as the education systems seek to shape better citizens of the future.

As the world becomes increasingly globalised and interconnected, there is also a pertinent need for the young to appreciate diversity and develop cohesiveness in society. The barriers that once separated people of different socioeconomic classes and communities are being lifted, as countries work towards building a more inclusive society where no one is left behind. Inclusivity and diversity thus become key values that the education system must inculcate in students. A prime example of inclusive education would be Finland, where special needs children are not segregated from normal children. This is because the country believes that schools are simply a microcosm of society, hence it is imperative that students interact with individuals from all walks of life from a young age. Over in Singapore, the Express, Normal (Academic) and Normal (Technical) academic streams previously used in secondary schools will be abolished by 2024, as the education system works to reduce the categorisation of students based on their academic ability alone. Moreover, the education system seeks to allow for students of different classes to mix, which will strengthen the nation's social fabric. The mixing of different races, cultures and classes of people will burgeon as the world becomes increasingly connected. It is inevitable that there will be a need for students to work with and foster camaraderie with individuals who are different from themselves. In the world today, it is almost impossible to survive isolated, hence education is taking the first step in providing diverse environments for students to learn in, which will prepare them as they enter society.

Ultimately, education has certainly come a long way since schools were first known to mankind. As the world evolves at a neck-breaking speed, our societal landscape has become more complex and volatile than before. More and more education systems around the world have recognised that it will be parochial to remain fixated on academic achievements as the only definition of excellence. I remain hopeful that in time to come, the education landscape of the world will equip students with the necessary skills to become leaders of the future.

Comments:

Thoughtful unpacking of the needs of today's world and examining relevant characteristics of education that enable it to cope with these needs. Discussion supported by relevant examples from various countries. To do better, you need to more critically evaluate the reforms you discussed - to what extent do they make education able to cope?

Consider the view that education is not able to cope with the needs of today's world.

Kaza Naga Sasmitha 21S37

The world we live in today is one that is incredibly complex and unique. It is constantly evolving and is starkly different, even from the world just about 50 years ago. Changes can be observed in nearly every area and aspect of life, with one major example being the exponential advancement of technology. Education is a powerful tool that needs to progress in line with the world today, to ensure that youth are well-equipped to flourish. However, my belief is that currently, education is not sufficiently coping with and catering to the needs of the world today. Education does not do enough to develop the soft skills of youth, address mental health issues and reduce inequality in today's world. One area education has been able to keep up with, though, is the advancement of technology. Overall, I believe that education is still failing in many areas, and is not sufficiently coping with the needs of today's world.

To thrive in today's world, youths need to have a strong set of soft skills to prepare them for their future job landscapes, which education is failing to impart to students. Effective communication, empathy and teamwork are just some of the skills that employers are increasingly looking out for when hiring people. Education, however, has a central focus on rigorous academic vigour. Education today vastly focuses on content mastery and excellence in examinations. Singapore's education system is deemed to be one of the most successful in the world, with the second highest OECD scores in the 2018 international PISA test. Yet, these tests only assess the academic excellence of students, which would not take them too far in today's world. With an all-time high in technology consumption among youths today, the chances for youths to practise several soft skills are slowly slipping away. Due to decreased face-to-face interactions, youth have little chance to develop their interpersonal skills. Colleges and corporations now look for people with portfolios outside of academics, as it is a marker that these people have developed soft skills necessary to function and thrive today. Yet, the excessive academic rigour of students leaves little time for them to engage in non-academic activities. A Singaporean study shows that although 60% of primary school students in Singapore attend some form of enrichment class at primary school level this figure falls to about 30% once students reach secondary school. With less engagement in extracurricular activities, youth are deprived of the chance to interact with others and develop the soft skills necessary to thrive in their future workplaces.

Mental health issues have become prevalent in the modern world due to several factors such as extremely stressful education systems and increased social media usage. Education, however, is not sufficiently addressing these issues. Suicide rates among youths are at an all-time high, with most of them being linked to mental health issues such as depression. Similar to how schools teach students to maintain their physical health with nutritious diets and sufficient exercise, equal effort needs to be put into addressing mental health. From a young age, children need to be taught how to deal with powerful emotions such as grief, and be well-equipped to face the many difficult, emotionally-damaging experiences they will inevitably encounter in their lives. They also need to learn how to recognise signs of mental health issues, how to help the people around them, as well as sources of professional help they can reach out to. In spite of the availability of counsellors in schools, visiting

counsellors is still deeply stigmatised. After the recent River Valley High School incident, in which a student with mental health issues murdered another student with an axe, the Ministry of Education plans to increase the number of counsellors in schools and will be training teachers to recognise symptoms of mental health issues. Yet, this is not sufficient, as a lot more extensive efforts need to first be put into eliminating the stigma surrounding mental health issues, and conversations about mental well-being cannot be taboo anymore. Therefore, education is still greatly lacking in terms of teaching students how to handle mental health issues well.

In the modern world, education is the key to addressing inequality as education can empower the disadvantaged and minority groups. Education is often seen as a way to bridge the gaps between people. Over the years, organisations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) have made efforts to spread education to groups who traditionally lack such access, including the poor, girls in developing countries and racial minorities. However, the education provided for these groups tend to be of lower quality, leading to little improvement in their lives. In India, government schools are often run down, allocated lousy teachers and are not provided with sufficient infrastructure or educational materials. Typically, middle to upper class families would opt to send their children to private schools, where education standards are much higher. Although students in government schools follow the same syllabus and go through the same education, they fare much worse and their education does little to help them ascend the social ladder. In the USA, there are several schools known as 'ghetto' schools where 90% of the students are people of colour. These schools have fewer facilities and produce significantly lower SAT scores than average. This shows how, despite the facade of increasing accessibility to education helping marginalised groups, more needs to be done to truly have education be an equal opportunity for people from all walks of life. Only then can education be used as an effective tool to reduce inequality and social disparity in today's world.

Acknowledging the fact that the world today is technologically-driven, education systems, especially in developed countries, have begun to use technology to help youth develop skills necessary in the world today. Technological tools are being effectively used to facilitate learning. G-suite accounts, which consist of applications such as Google Docs and Google Classroom, are being used in schools worldwide to aid students in their learning. The Ministry of Education in Singapore introduced Personal Learning Devices recently, personal gadgets which every secondary school student will be getting by the end of 2022, that can be effectively used to improve the quality of learning in students. Coding classes are becoming increasingly common too, all to equip students with the necessary technological skills required for students today. Therefore, education has succeeded in keeping up with technology in today's world.

In conclusion, I believe that the education systems all around the world are not keeping up with the needs of the constantly evolving world today. It is certainly difficult to keep up with such changing needs, and education systems are already putting in great effort in an attempt to meet the needs of the world today. Yet, I believe that more extensive efforts should be put in so that the education system can respond further and more effectively to these changing needs.

Comments:

Evaluation seen in earlier paragraphs for how education is unable to cope with the needs of today's world. Can include evaluation of opposing views. Adequate range of relevant examples. Some sophistication and general accuracy in language use.

**Consider the view that education is not able
to cope with the needs of today's world.**

Chloe Ng Hui Min 21549

Historically, education has been known to be a great leveller and necessary foundation in society. Yet, with the rapid progress of today's world, many have begun to wonder if the education systems are too outdated to provide any skills development to meet the needs of today's world. Critics have pointed out that the antediluvian and traditional teaching methods that many education institutions stick to leave students unable to adapt to the quickly, constantly evolving world. Not only are teaching methods outdated, but many institutes also fail to offer the relevant programmes needed for one to delve into the myriad of fields that today's multifaceted world offers. However, detractors have argued that with the popping up of organisations and institutes beyond traditional schools, students have access to resources to develop the soft skills needed to navigate today's competitive and ever-changing climate. Coupled with traditional educational institutes turning to technology to keep up with today's technologically advanced world, it is unfair to say that education is not able to cope with the needs of today's world.

Firstly, rote learning and memorisation, commonly practised in many acclaimed education systems internationally, are archaic and outdated. This leaves students unable to develop problem-solving skills needed in today's constantly evolving society. Many education institutes are unwilling to let go of their old teaching methods, tried and tested over many decades, that have produced superior and widely acknowledged results thus far. Many education systems fear that by changing the way they teach, they might face a retrogression in the results they produce. This fear holds them back from changing from their teaching methods. However, as society advances, these learning and teaching methods have slowly become irrelevant. Useful only in an industrial era where many lacked the foundation of reading and writing, rote learning proved useful in producing stellar, by-the-book students. However, as our society becomes increasingly educated, many students do not need ten to twelve years to develop such a foundation. Rote learning instead restricts them to their comfort zone and inhibits them from developing critical thinking skills to tackle the novel issues that are bound to arise in today's ever-evolving world. For example, Singapore, Korea and China are well-known for their acclaimed education systems that produce stellar results. Students from these countries constantly top international tests on English, Maths and Science. Yet, as such systems continue to rely on outdated learning and teaching methods, the students they produce fail to succeed in the real world beyond these institutions. Being a degree holder from a top university in Singapore does not guarantee one a job. Rather, someone able to display their critical thinking skills is more likely to get hired. As companies look for graduates who can adapt to real-world issues, graduates with such an educational background do not stand a chance in today's world.

Beyond the absence of updated learning methods that lead to education being unable to fulfil the needs of today's world, many education systems lack the programmes and syllabus for students to develop their niche and unique interests. Many educational institutes offer very basic and foundational subjects, and the syllabus does not allow students to develop their interest in other areas. Given that developing a new programme and syllabus would take more than a few years, it is difficult

for educational institutes to catch up with the world's current needs. Many schools are unable to offer programmes relevant to today's world as these take a long time to launch. By the time a programme is introduced, it might already be irrelevant as society advances rapidly. Moreover, many educational institutes are unwilling to take the risk to create a course that is not guaranteed to be popular amongst students, especially when the syllabus is niche and very specific. Currently, Singapore only offers a few subjects beyond the usual Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics subjects for the A levels. Such subjects, which include the likes of Art, Music and Tamil Language Literature, have also slowly lost their relevance in a society that values more practical programmes like coding. Programmes in secondary schools like Food & Consumer Education, where students pick up basic cooking skills in addition to learning about food hygiene or about their diet and health, and Design and Technology, where students are taught simple workman and carpentry skills, are also growing obsolete today. There is a lack of effort put into the development of relevant programmes, as education systems today continue to emphasise the same few core subjects. More time and resources are dedicated to making small tweaks to the main science syllabus, than to actually creating relevant programmes. Therefore, education today lacks the relevant programmes and syllabus required in today's world.

However, with the development of new educational programmes beyond the traditional education institutes and systems, many students have found ways to develop their skills in areas relevant to today's societal needs. Even as many educational institutes stick to their outdated teaching methods and syllabus, the world around them evolves and adapts. There has been a growing demand and need for young students to develop skills that fit the current climate, leading to an increase in instructional organisations that can quickly adapt and change without the dreary process and legislation many education systems need to go through. Several professionals who developed their niche interests on their own have started programmes that impart students with the knowledge that traditional schools fail to teach. These independents need not deal with the shackles of legislation and laws; thus, there can be changes to the education industry without the need to completely reform the education system. Such organisations have made education relevant and able to keep up with the needs of today's ever-changing climate. For example, Karlie Kloss, an American fashion model and entrepreneur, launched a coding programme for girls called Kode with Klossy in 2015, serving as a platform for girls to pick up a skill needed in today's technologically advanced world. Schemes like SkillsFuture, many covering programmes not under any traditional institutes, also provide students with the option to explore and choose an interest they wish to develop, equipping them with more skills relevant to achieving social mobility in today's economy. Such organisations have changed the landscape for education, allowing education to meet the needs of today's world.

Lastly, and most importantly, even as many educational institutes are still stuck in their old methods and syllabus, more attempts are being made by these institutes to adapt to today's technologically advanced world. As the world becomes increasingly reliant on technology, the relevance of traditional schools diminishes. However, many education institutes have noted this trend and are turning to technology to remain relevant. As many schools have begun to digitise their materials and lessons, they continue to stay relevant by meeting the needs of people today, who need to have access to such materials on the go to keep up with today's fast-paced climate. This digital shift has been accelerated due to the Covid-19 pandemic, where educational institutions have been forced to go online. The Student Learning Space is an example, where lectures can be viewed online as large groups of people are not allowed to gather physically in one place. Platforms like Skillshare also allow

Internet users to learn from professionals online, without having to attend any physical lessons. In Singapore, Personal Learning Devices will be distributed to all primary and secondary school students as the education system turns away from pen and paper assignments. Especially with the current Covid-19 pandemic, the introduction of online lessons conducted through platforms such as Zoom have turned out particularly useful. As education systems have begun to turn to technology to adapt to the current situation, albeit not entirely by choice, they have started to cope with the needs of today's society as they transform the way students can learn.

In conclusion, education is indeed able to cope with the needs of today's world. Despite the glaring existence of traditional educational systems and methods, the development of outside learning institutes allows students to get educated through other platforms. Furthermore, even traditional education systems have made an effort to adapt to the needs of today's world. Even though only certain aspects have been reformed so far, the trajectory of the education system appears to be promising. Coupled with novel and young leaders taking up the mantle, it is likely that in the near future, even traditional institutes can catch up and thereafter keep up with satisfying the demands of today's world.

Comments:

Hit and misses - but mostly big hits! You've clearly got a good grasp of the topic of education and what it takes for education to stay relevant and keep up with the needs of the world today. More importantly, keep up the good & principled work when it comes to fleshing out logical explanations! Use of language is sophisticated and applied with restraint & maturity.

Assess the view that education no longer determines future success.

Abdul Mateen bin Abdul Malik 21546

‘Moulding the future of our nation’, reads the mission of Singapore’s education ministry. Indeed, this is far from hyperbole, and reflects the critical importance education possesses in the world today; more so for a city-state like Singapore which is reliant on human capital and our workforce, having no natural endowment. Across the globe, education for all remains one of the objectives of the United Nations. Education plays an essential role in achieving future success in today’s world in terms of wealth, satisfaction, attainment, and impact. Yet, it is no longer the be-all and end-all of ensuring success as it once was. Education today remains absolutely important globally to individuals’ success, due to it continuing to be a stepping stone into the professional world, as well as a determinant of potential. Still, education alone will amount to nought if individuals themselves do not possess stellar interpersonal skills and possess a holistic portfolio of achievements and accomplishments.

Despite the recent push across the developed world to reduce pressures on and the importance of education and academic achievements, it remains idealistic and somewhat naïve to suggest that education is completely indeterminant of one’s future success. For one, education remains crucial to professional services. These include highly skilled occupations requiring specific skillsets. Examples include medical practitioners, lawyers, dentists, and architects. For such careers, there is simply no acceptable substitute for a thorough and rigorous formal study in one’s field of interest. The highly demanding and specialised nature of these services demands prior education. These skills and knowledge cannot be credibly self-taught and examined unlike in many other fields, and hence many professional institutions exist to regulate them, such as the bar for legal professionals and the Singapore Medical Council for Singaporean medical practitioners. All of these institutions impose strict requirements on prior formal education in the field of interest before one is able to join the industry. Despite the emergence of work-learn schemes and apprenticeships throughout the world in which employees substitute a formal education for on-the-job training or study and learn simultaneously, such schemes are often impractical for these professional services due to the high-risk nature of their work. As such, if one attributes ‘future success’ to satisfaction in working in their ideal job or wealth through these highly paid industries, education remains both an important stepping stone and a barrier to entry. As such, education remains an important determinant of one’s future success.

At the same time, education plays a key role in determining potential amongst individuals, and hence continues to determine one’s future success. For one, possessing a degree or a formal educational certificate is more than a declaration that an individual possesses certain knowledge. Rather, it acts as a critical signal to others, including employers, that an individual possesses certain skills. These may include determination, resilience, and grit, in order to graduate from a stressful and taxing educational program. It is simply rational behaviour for employers to favour prospective employees with degrees and higher levels of education as compared to one who is not so highly educated, because it acts as an effective screening device for employers to sieve through a large and diverse pool of applicants and extract those with the best qualities and who stand to contribute the

most to an organisation. All around the world, numerous major financial institutions such as J.P. Morgan, Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs conduct the bulk of their fresh hires through outreach programmes to Ivy League and Russell Group schools – elite universities in the USA and UK respectively. This is because students who are able to have made it to such educational institutions in the first place are often sufficiently competent to serve as a large asset to companies. Indeed, this extends far beyond the world of finance. Even for scholarships such as the prestigious Public Service Commission scholarship in Singapore, which guarantees an iron rice bowl and a prosperous career in the public service, educational achievement remains the first and foremost selection criteria, although there has admittedly been a slight shift away from this in recent years. Yet, the fact still stands that as a whole, education remains an invaluable indicator of potential and is hence vital to achieving success in the form of wealth, satisfaction, and career progression.

Despite all of the importance education holds in determining future success, other factors must complement education in order to ensure such success. Primarily, interpersonal traits are becoming ever more relevant in today's world. Employers of today are placing an increased expectation on how individuals conduct themselves. For example, in customer-facing roles, employees must have a suitable standard of proficiency in communication and negotiation. The emphasis on such skills is widespread today. The National University of Singapore Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine uses holistic interviews in the admissions process. In these interviews, candidates are assessed based on their empathy towards potential patients as well as the interpersonal skills they display. Globally, there has been a surge in demand for consulting firms which are able to evaluate employees' personal characteristics and traits, in order to provide advice on improving one's self, so as to increase productivity. As interpersonal skills form a central part of the hiring process across many industries in today's world, including the ability to work together as a team to complete projects, these skills are complementary to education and are also necessary for future success. Thus, education alone no longer determines future success.

Lastly, a holistic portfolio of achievements and accomplishments is equally as important to future success as education is. Top universities and employers around the world often intend to look beyond educational attainment to determine if an individual is well-rounded and holistically developed. This may be in the form of co-curricular activities and service-learning that students choose to engage in. Aside from this, employers increasingly value achievement in the form of minor work experience as well, as this shows commitment and a dedication to learning more about the role. Internships remain an important way for employers to identify high-performing students for recruitment onto full-time staff. Outside of the working world, having a wide variety of such experiences imbues individuals with qualities and traits that will augur them well throughout life. These experiences allow individuals to form strong networks with others, potentially contributing to future success. Many top US universities targeted by employers declare that their admissions policies look far beyond grades, and instead look towards how an applicant has matured and learned from prior life achievements and accomplishments. As such, education alone is not enough to yield future success.

It remains far from the truth to suggest that education no longer determines future success. Yet, it has certainly become less of a falsehood in recent times. Individuals need to equip themselves with sought-after, desirable traits and characteristics while developing themselves as holistic persons,

capable of seeing the world through a pragmatic, non-academic lens. Only through this complementary combination with education may individuals discover the future success they desire.

Comments:

You have shown a great understanding of the question and the central issue behind the phrase 'no longer'. I appreciate your consistent inclusion of nuance in your writing – it made your analysis multi-layered and convincing. For this question, an obvious point of discussion would be the role of the internet and digitalisation in making independent online learning more viable – instead of only formal education. This issue was not covered. Nevertheless, apt examples that were wide-ranging, as well as clear and compelling arguments made this a joy to read. Clear and sound use of language.

Assess the claim that education no longer determines one's future success.

Cheng Jia Yun Tricia 21561

We have always heard about how education has come a long way from the past, in terms of educational opportunities, inclusiveness of education, and quality of education. These are always so highly spoken of and viewed as a determinant of success in terms of societies progressing. There is no doubt that education is viewed as important in many countries, where children and youths must go through the mandatory education system for the first decade of their lives. The number of years of education completed per person and adult literacy rates of a country are even used as indicators of a country's development. Governments, such as the Singapore government, also place a huge emphasis on the importance of education. This can be seen in how highly subsidised education is in Singapore, in order to allow everyone to enjoy good quality education. All this focus put on education shows that many people believe in the importance of education for children and that education will allow their children to thrive and do well in the future. In short, they believe that education is the key to future success. However, with the world progressing at such a fast pace, the needs of society are changing rapidly too, and education, by itself, will not be able to determine one's future success.

Many people hold the view that education has the power to determine one's future success, and that going through the education system will equip one with the necessary skills to get a job in the future, as well as aid one in achieving success. There is no doubt that education does equip one with the necessary skills. Basic literacy and numeracy skills taught in schools are important and necessary in many jobs. Learning how to discern, tell right from wrong and think critically are also important life skills that will certainly be beneficial to them even in the future. These skills help them survive in society, and allow them to communicate, be more cautious, and not just trust everything they see and hear. This is a necessary skill, especially since we are now living in a technology and internet-filled society and the amount of 'fake' news is constantly on the rise. Thus, there is no doubt that education does play an important role in one's future success, in terms of preparing one to be able to survive in the harsh society.

Additionally, education also provides one with focused skills and qualifications in terms of certificates, which is often seen as a prized possession in society today. For instance, many companies all around the world still look at qualifications, as well as educational levels, as a criterion when hiring people. This is especially so for companies and sectors that require specific skills such as Engineering and Sciences. This shows how going through the education system does open new doors, giving one more opportunities and choices, and it increases the chance of one getting a good job or a job that one desires in the future. Therefore, education plays a part in determining one's future success by allowing one to get a decent job and by providing one with an extra advantage in terms of qualifications.

However, education can determine one's future success if one's definition of future success is just to get a decent job and have a stable income. In the case where one's definition of future success encompasses much more, such as having a good job and having a high position in society, education itself will not be enough to secure that type of future in mind. In today's world, there is an increased

amount of competition due to globalisation. Not only is one competing with others in his country, but also with others from different parts of the world. With everyone receiving and going through the same education system, with some countries even being better than others, everyone will possess these basic skill sets offered by education. This then makes education not a special skill anymore, but rather a basic requirement and expected skill set. Instead, society has started to look past education and demand more. Companies, schools and society have moved past education-based criteria, and have started to look at one's personality, attitude and character too. The education system does try to instil certain character traits in students through activities such as Character and Citizenship Education CCE lessons in Singapore's education system, and the practice of allowing students to clean up after themselves, allowing them to oversee their own and their classmates' lunches in Japanese schools. However, one's behaviour and attitude ultimately boil down to the individual himself. Besides having a certificate and qualification, one also must have the right qualities such as being self-motivated, hardworking and determined in order to stand out from the rest and have a greater chance of rising to the top. Therefore, although education does equip one with necessary skills, one cannot completely rely on education to secure a successful future. Education must be complemented with one's attitude and character in order to determine one's future success.

Along with the different definitions of future success, some may also view future success as having a happy, healthy family or having a good work-life balance. In these cases, education may not necessarily guarantee achievements of these versions of success as the aim and purpose of education are different from these goals. Many education systems, such as Singapore's, China's and South Korea's education systems, focus on developing skills such as hard work, determination and perseverance, which are valued in their stressful and competitive nature of society. All of these are done with the aim of enabling students to get good jobs in the future. It is not common for educational systems to teach students skills directed at having a good work-life balance or having a happy family. Thus, education does not guarantee one's future success as it is not geared towards these ideas of success. Adding on to that, the constantly changing and advancing world today makes the future even more uncertain and unpredictable. Jobs of today may become obsolete tomorrow, and jobs never imagined before may be in demand and the norm in the future. Thus, it is impossible to guarantee that what education teaches today will be useful and needed in the future. For instance, in the past, when technology was not so developed yet, the education system did not think that computing and information technology skills were needed. Yet today, many classes on computing and coding are being added to the education system to equip students with the necessary skills for the current society. Therefore, education is unable to determine one's future, but it certainly can play a supporting role for youths by constantly changing along with the times to provide more relevant skills needed in the twenty-first century.

In conclusion, education no longer determines one's future success. Instead, it plays a supporting role and leads one on the right path in the early stages of one's life. However, what one becomes in the future also depends on them and their choices. With a good attitude and personality, coupled with education, one can achieve success. However, with the various definitions of 'future success' that differ from person to person, all of these 'successes' cannot be achieved through education alone. Therefore, education can no longer guarantee or determine one's success. Instead, it is the individual himself who determines what he wants to do in life, how he wants to live, as well as the amount of effort put in to achieve his dreams. Not only is education no longer able to determine

one's future success, it has never been able to. If you were to think back on past successful people such as Mark Zuckerberg or Bill Gates, you will realise that they never completed their education. In fact, they dropped out of universities, and yet they were able to become two of the most successful people today. Thus, education is not the key to success; rather, it serves as a guide to success.

Comments:

Examine the pathways to success that will require educational or professional certification/training. Which are the routes where education is helpful but not necessary or not even necessary at all? Examine also the different education systems and how progressive they are in terms of preparing one for future success. More examples would help to illustrate your points better. A good range of relevant considerations, articulated cogently, otherwise.

To what extent is it possible to have work-life harmony in your society?

Clara Ng Hiang Cheng 2148

Almost attainable, yet just out of reach, work-life balance has been gaining increasing attention in recent years. While spinning the gears of our fast-paced corporate system, many dream of an ideal paradigm where work exists alongside sufficient rest time. However, this dream is quickly shattered as people are brought back to the reality of our ticking clock, especially in our Singaporean society. While it is true that people are gaining more autonomy and there is increasing emphasis on work life balance, these trends cannot compare to the competitiveness and lack of boundaries in our Singaporean society. Coupled with the volatility of our society and lack of physical demarcation of rest spaces, it is not a surprise that the work-life balance of many has constantly been skewed towards 'work', and will continue to do so.

Some may believe that, considering recent discourse and movements, our society will progress towards one where work-life harmony exists. Globally, a spotlight has been shining on the phenomenon of work-life balance. This is apparent in recent buzz words like 'self-care' and 'mental health' which have been trending on the Internet. Fortunately for Singaporeans, these progressive ideas trends have also trickled down to our little red dot. Discourse surrounding work stress has surfaced due to rising suicide rates, even moving up to discussions in our Parliament. With that, many are hopeful of concrete action taken to alleviate this unhealthy culture in Singapore. Thus, some Singaporeans are looking forward to a more balanced society.

However promising the journey towards work-life balance has been, hopes have to be crushed as we evaluate the underlying competitiveness of our society, making people willing to overstep boundaries of work and life. Despite long discussions, little tangible action has been taken. This may be because of the competitive spirit that underpins many actions in Singapore. Such a culture is often inculcated from young, even taking on a unique name is Singapore - 'kiasuism', referring to the fear of losing out. Before even entering the education system, work-life balance is positioned to be a thought pushed to the back of Singaporeans' minds. From preschool tuition to endless piles of assessment books, Singaporeans are always going that extra mile to be the best. Such an attitude is amplified in the workplace where overtime and coming in even when sick almost seems to be an award worthy of flaunting. Such a mindset is especially detrimental when considering the Singaporean context. As one of the most educated countries in the world, Singapore has a high concentration of educated, experienced and overachieving high-calibre citizens. As everyone fights to one-up each other, the extra mile for one to take is becoming miles long. In this pursuit, many choose to sacrifice their time to do better than others, slowly chipping off on their own work-life balance. Thus, the kiasuism in our society breeds a culture where work-life balance is barely possible, or causes one to be seen as not trying hard enough.

Despite the prevalent competitiveness, some may argue that Singaporeans are getting increasing autonomy over their lives, making it possible for them to strike their own work-life balance. In recent years, entrepreneurship has been on the rise. With current technological developments, the barrier to entry for starting businesses is being lowered. This can be seen from the influx of small Instagram

shops selling a whole range of items from art, knitwear, pottery to baked goods. Even on a larger scale, it is now easier to build a website and start profiting. With this, there seems to be hope that people have greater control over their work and personal lives, making it easier for them to strike the balance without the pressure from corporate bosses and higher-ups. Thus, this movement towards independence has demonstrated the possibility of work-life harmony.

However, for the majority in society, the blurring of boundaries between work and rest in recent times has further skewed the balance, demonstrating the opposing detrimental impact of technology. Amidst the current pandemic, the shift towards Work From Home and Home Based Learning has caused our work and leisure to merge into one entity, with work constituting a huge portion. When physical spaces of work and relaxation become the same while hours seem to blend together, working does not stop. Working seems to take up a larger part of each individual's life as boundaries are no longer set. Phones and emails continue to make work present beyond office hours, encroaching into what used to be leisure time. Coupled with the previous phenomenon of Singapore's competitiveness, it is now a lot easier for Singaporeans to cross the line and pass it off as being hardworking for long-term benefits. Beyond employees overstepping boundaries, employers seem to do the same. In Singapore's overworked and already exhausted healthcare industry, taking leave is not permitted and working hours are being stretched endlessly. With both of these instances, the overstepping of work-life harmony is becoming normalised in Singapore, with little hope for improvement.

Considering these above-mentioned factors, it is even more detrimental that Singapore is a volatile and unpredictable country. Globally, we often hear the term 'VUCA' and this is especially so in Singapore as a developed, fast-paced society that is small and largely reliant on other countries. Time brings numerous changes to our economy, technology we possess and mindsets we have. As such, change is really the only constant in Singapore. To keep up, Singaporeans are expected to constantly adapt with changing times. This pressure to keep up causes Singaporeans to really feel the stress, and hence be willing or pushed into overstepping work-life boundaries. Programs like SkillsFuture indicate how Singaporeans are expected to keep up, be it in terms of technological skills or newfound knowledge. With this pressure to constantly do more to stay relevant to the evolving workplace, many Singaporeans see work-life balance as secondary, as this skills-upgrading takes place outside of working hours.

On top of this, there are few physical avenues for stress relief. Mentally, there is a crumbling of boundaries between work and play in Singapore, which is now reflected in our city landscape. Being a small country, Singapore's favourite tagline is 'City in a Garden'. However, this means that leisure spaces like parks are now becoming coherent with a cityscape. While taking leisurely strolls to destress, Singaporeans are surrounded by the chatter and view of looming office towers. With such a blurring line in terms of physical space for leisure and work, there is no doubt that mental spaces are also blurred. Hence, as apparent in our infrastructure, Singaporeans are unable to truly rest and get their minds off work due to insufficient proper leisure spaces.

In conclusion, there is little hope and possibility to attaining that coveted work-life harmony in our Singaporean society. Perhaps, what Singaporeans can turn towards instead is finding work that they enjoy. In this way, every moment of work would still be leisure and relaxation. Many have

stepped forward and led the way in recent years, with small businesses or transforming their hobbies into their jobs. Now, it is our chance to follow their lead, and reclaim our own work-life balance.

Comments:

It was a joy to read your essay Clara! You have demonstrated a good understanding of the issue, and your nuanced analysis allowed for depth of argumentation. Relevant arguments raised with a broad range of issues covered. Valid examples discussed. Clear and consistent attempt to relate your points to key attributes of the Singapore context. Fluent use of language with some very artfully constructed expressions. There was a missed opportunity to discuss what the government & employers are doing/trying to do to improve work-life balance. You did great! Enjoyed the range of arguments and some interesting/original considerations in your writing.

Effective introduction that captured the crux of the question. For the specific example of healthcare workers, give some context as to why this is happening since it's an anomaly rather than a norm, few industries are as punishing as healthcare. While the point on physical rest spaces is valid, is it also unfair to conclude this based on what you discussed? Is it really because there's a lack of such spaces?

How far is social media a distraction from real-world issues?

Teo Wei Xian, Dominique 21S35

Since its conception, social media has evolved significantly over the past two decades from a simple avenue for text and photo sharing to a booming new industry, skyrocketing influencers into fame and lives of luxury. Yet, the potential of social media as a considerable force for social change is sometimes overlooked. Social media is often seen as a distraction from reality, with its users prone to self-indulgence and neglecting to consider tangible societal issues affecting others around them. In recent years, however, social media has proven itself as a force to be reckoned with – not as a mind-numbing distraction, but as a platform with mind-blowing impacts capable of aiding the rise of social movements.

Social media is often dismissed as a platform of mere frivolity, with its users obsessing only over superficial metrics like view counts or follower numbers. Critics often point to influencers such as Charli D’Amelio or Addison Rae, whose social media feeds are dominated by ‘OOTDs’ and dance trends, as evidence for social media’s ability to detract from real-world issues. They claim that these influencers promote a lifestyle of narcissism and blind their young, impressionable audience to more pertinent problems in society. Indeed, this is further corroborated by the recent rise in displays of performative activism, particularly during the peak of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, where countless celebrities thought it would be apt to post a row of three black squares and declare a social media blackout in the memory of George Floyd. These actions have been labelled by some as tokenistic and merely preventative measures for them to avoid getting ‘cancelled’ for inaction and apathy. However, I believe that it is precisely these shows of support for social causes, no matter how brief or cursory, that are able to bring these issues to light. As humans, while we are constantly learning and adapting to the changing world around us, we are also bound to make mistakes – and these celebrities are certainly no exception. Even while assuming the worst of their intentions, and despite their methods of raising awareness not being the most suitable, the fact remains that with their huge followings and substantial reach, they were able to alert people from all over the world to the injustices occurring in their communities. Furthermore, many of these influencers proceeded to make hefty donations to charities supporting the African-American community after receiving feedback from their followers on social media. Hence, I believe that social media is not a distraction from real-world issues, and is instead a powerful platform for awareness on these issues to be raised.

Additionally, social media is able to empower the marginalised and give them a voice to speak out about real-world issues. Rather than distracting us from society’s ills, I believe social media can allow us to forge more personal connections with these issues and strengthen our sense of empathy. Hearing about crises through traditional mainstream media, like the television or newspapers, may provide us with factual information about the situation – the number of casualties, or perhaps the names of the people affected – but they give us a sense of detachment from the problem at hand. Listening to reporters talk about people as mere statistics or case studies makes these issues feel foreign, and maybe even surreal to us. A personal recount uploaded on social media, on the other hand, allows us to understand the true gravity of the situation from first-hand experiences. Social media is also able to empower the disenfranchised when mainstream media refuses to. Take the

#MeToo movement as an example: with all the red tape and authorities questioning the plausibility of victims' accounts, mainstream news outlets were initially unable to shed light on the plight of these sexual harassment victims. It was only on social media that the movement truly took off, with millions of women from all over the globe coming forward to share their stories. Without the power of social media, these women might have remained silenced, and change would not have been enacted. As a result, I believe social media does not distract from, but instead amplifies the voices of those implicated in real-world issues.

Furthermore, social media, with its ease of use and accessibility to all, is a convenient platform for people to take action upon hearing about real-world issues. The very features of social media that are often criticised – the one-tap like button, hashtags, the never-ending explore feed, the follow function – are the ones that play the most major roles in galvanising people to show their solidarity. The #IWeigh movement, started by British actress Jameela Jamil, has an Instagram account with over a million followers, featuring women of various body types listing attributes they feel contribute to their worth, beyond just a number on a scale. Women can submit an entry by simply attaching a hashtag to their post, and their image and caption will then be shared with millions of other people soon after. Social media, in this case, has been a means for women to show solidarity and feel less alone in their journey towards self-acceptance, which they might have struggled to experience without the #IWeigh movement. The benefits of social media are also apparent when conducting fundraisers for social issues – humanitarian organisations can simply enable donations on their page, and countless Instagram stories can then be shared with just a single click, encouraging others to contribute to the cause. While there may be more meaningful ways, such as volunteering, to help alleviate these social problems, social media provides an efficient avenue for people to do their part. In fact, it is also because of this convenience that every time a notable social movement begins to crest, it is heralded by a flood of informative posts and graphics on our social media feeds, all shared by the friends and family we follow. As a result, social media is not a distraction, but an effective tool for rallying people together to combat real-world issues.

In conclusion, although social media is widely perceived to be a distraction from real-world issues where users are more preoccupied with garnering likes and views than enacting social change, I believe that this is far from the truth. Social media does not detract from, but instead enhances, awareness of social issues. It can empower those at the epicentre of these issues, and serves as a platform for others to display their solidarity and provide support. Over the years, social media, as an inherently neutral innovation, has indeed evolved from a mere tool for sharing to a platform for social change – one can only hope its trajectory continues to be a positive one.

Comments:

For a more balanced discussion, you might want to bring in the ways in which social media distracts our attention from real-world issues besides just the point on the frivolous nature of it. Generally, a very well-written discussion, covering a nice range of points and perspectives, with examples cited from different countries and contexts.

How far is social media a distraction from real-world issues?

Goh Jia Ying 21S37

Social media: a word synonymous with the digital age. It is widely regarded as a necessity in our daily lives, especially among the millennials and younger generation. Studies have shown that an individual can spend up to six hours a day mindlessly scrolling through applications such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The proliferation of social media has changed our lives more rapidly than we can keep track of, and we may be oblivious to the effects these platforms carry. Some have condemned social media to be the root cause of the increasing lack of interest towards real-world issues. However, is social media nothing but a distraction? I believe that social media, when used effectively, is not a distraction from real-world issues, but rather serves as an aid towards raising awareness on such issues.

Critics may say that social media promotes nothing but a culture of vanity and superficiality, taking the attention away from contentious real-world issues. The algorithm of social media applications is fundamentally built on likes, saves and shares. As a result, content creators resort to posting more and more frivolous, over-the-top and extravagant content in a bid to grab the increasingly short attention span of users. They share glorified and glamorous versions of their lives that do not bring any benefit to those consuming their content. Take for example socialites Kendall and Kylie Jenner, who are the two most followed individuals on Instagram. A look into their respective accounts will reveal the heavily beauty-centric content, with immaculate outfits and painstakingly edited photos. However, despite amassing such a huge following and undoubtedly having monumental influence on social media, both of them have drawn flak for remaining silent about many pressing social issues. With the existence and prevalence of such influence on social media, and as even more people consume their content, it is unfortunate that social media is indeed a distraction from real-world issues.

However, I opine that it would be myopic to believe that social media only has room for these frivolous content creators. On the contrary, social media is a platform where an assortment of content and issues coexist. The light-hearted manner which social media was designed for has also enabled it to shine light on solemn social issues, making them more palatable for the masses. Social activism has become a trend on a multitude of social media platforms in recent years, from Instagram to Twitter. The movement has been effective in bringing about more conversation on topics that may have been previously shunned by society, such as debate around the LGBTQ community in Singapore. Topics previously considered taboo are now endowed with a platform where the issues can be made more light-hearted and relatable, such as through the sharing of anecdotes and infographics. Besides that, social media has also empowered people to step forward and share issues they feel strongly on. This gives rise to relevant social issues that were previously ignored by society, such as gender discrimination and toxic masculinity, both of which are widely posted about on social media. Hence, social media is not a distraction from real-world issues when it is wielded as a tool to shine light and raise awareness on pressing social issues.

Social media is also not a distraction from real-world issues as it has increased connectivity across geographical borders, prompting interconnectedness globally and encouraging individuals to be active global citizens. The pervasiveness of social media worldwide has played a monumental role in tearing down the walls that once separated communities and building bridges to connect different countries together. With the rise of social media, ordinary individuals have gained greater access to first-hand information about real-world issues, as the speed and connectivity of social media has allowed audiences to gain insights towards these issues without external involvement or censorship. The Black Lives Matter movement, which quickly made waves internationally after an incident of police brutality in Minneapolis in the United States, as well as the fight for independence in Hong Kong against the Chinese government, are both testaments of how local issues rapidly garnered international attention and support through the effective use of social media in both cases: by resharing of content globally on online platforms. Such issues have prompted debates on the topics of systemic racism and autonomy respectively, both indisputably relevant and crucial real-world issues that go largely unresolved even in the 21st century. Thus, it is evident that social media has given immense power to the voices of oppressed ordinary citizens to become agents of change. It is thus unfair to purport that social media is a distraction from real-world issues.

However, some may argue that most people do not use social media with the goal of educating themselves on real-world issues. That is the role of newspapers and news outlets. The main purpose of social media is to entertain; to provide leisure entertainment and a mindless escape from our mundane lives. It is undeniably that the vast majority of content on social media sites are pop culture and entertainment news, with K-pop boy band BTS trending at number one on Twitter last year, not any other real-world issues. It becomes ostensible that social media is in fact merely a distraction from the important real-world issues. However, in actuality, the influence of these pop stars and entertainers can help to increase awareness and add value towards the issues that they promote. Using BTS as an example, the boy band donated large sums of money, as well as masks, towards the Covid-19 relief fund in South Korea. This had the effect of encouraging their fans not just in South Korea, but globally as well, to wear masks and follow safe distancing measures in the fight against Covid-19, as young and impressionable fans deeply admire and adore the band. The impact of their actions thus has great influence over their fans. Hence, the popularity of entertainers and influencers on social media will not be a distraction as long as they use their platform effectively in times of need to speak up about world issues.

Lastly, social media also provides a good platform for the rallying of people to support a cause. For those marginalised, social media can be their beacon of hope as it helps to amplify their voices, allowing more people to become aware of their plight. For example, in Singapore this year, the restrictions imposed by the government to curb Covid-19 has greatly affected the livelihood of small businesses and hawkers as their business fell drastically. As a result, some of them have turned to social media to seek the support of those online. Social activists such as Instagram page Wake Up Singapore have constantly publicised local hawkers to their followers in hopes of supporting them through times of crisis. Other accounts have also set up funds to deliver care packs to delivery riders during Covid-19, as they continue to work tirelessly amidst the pandemic. These initiatives were only able to gain momentum through social media as a larger audience was reached. Social media platforms also facilitate the collective support from each individual and turn it into something tangible

that can be given to those in need. Thus, social media is not a distraction from real-world issues, as it provides individuals with a platform to act on their support for such issues.

In conclusion, I disagree to a large extent that social media is a distraction from real-world issues. Although I concede that social media has undeniably promoted a culture of superficiality where the sites are often clouded with unimportant celebrity gossip, social media has also played an irrefutable role in shining light onto many more world issues that we were previously oblivious about through its connectivity. Ultimately, I believe that the power of social media lies with its user, and when used right, social media can aid us in our fight against real-world issues.

Comments:

This was such a pleasure to read. Points were insightful and well developed with good use of a range of examples. Balance was aptly handed. Keep up the good work!

How far is social media a distraction from real-world issues?

Ariel Tan Wei 21S49

The continuous rise in use of social media has brought about numerous significant changes in the world today. Whether these changes have been beneficial or not is often questioned. Social media has been a key asset to spreading awareness on real-world issues, as it acts as a tool for people of minority groups to use to speak up, as well as allow people to stay updated with the latest news through following social media accounts and celebrities. However, some might argue that social media is a distraction from real-world issues as users get caught up on things of irrelevance, taking attention away from the real problems that need recognition.

Social media can sometimes feed users with an overload of information, causing its users to end up paying attention to issues of less importance. One prime example would be the amount of time and effort spent on staying up to date with the latest celebrity dating scandals. Many YouTube and Instagram posts are created to update people on the situation. The sheer number of updates on such dating scandals goes to show just how much time people invest in keeping up with things that are not of significance. For example, in 2021, users of social media decided to pay attention to the drama between singers Olivia Rodrigo and Joshua Bassett. Curiosity over what happened between them got the better of most users, and many were thus invested in the drama instead of focusing on more pressing matters. Social media also causes users to focus on unimportant things, such as posting a photo just to gain followers or likes. Celebrities on social media also portray a false, unrealistic image of themselves by posting flawless photos, leading users to feel envious. They hence place greater focus on their physical appearance and in stalking celebrities who look almost perfect in the pictures they post. For example, socialite Kylie Jenner often photoshops her pictures to make them look perfect, thus gaining the attention of many users, and starting many discussions on whether it is right for her to constantly put up an unattainable image. Therefore, social media can take away attention from more prevalent and urgent real-world issues, as users focus on unimportant issues like celebrity drama, as well as hoping to attain the perfection that some celebrities seem to have.

On the other hand, social media has played a vital role in spreading awareness of real-world issues. Social media acts as a platform for people of minority groups to use to speak up and bring their unheard problems to light. For example, a video of a black man, George Floyd, being brutally murdered by police officers in America was posted on Twitter, and the whole world knew about it overnight. Once it started gaining attention on social media, change was almost instantaneous. The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was the number one trending hashtag worldwide, causing an uproar on multiple social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter. This incident was a turning point for African Americans, a minority group that has been constantly discriminated against and facing police brutality, with police officers' rampant discriminatory actions often going without any repercussions. It led to a whole array of protests demanding justice for George Floyd and equality for the Black people. Therefore, social media allows such real-world issues like discrimination to be noticed, allowing people all around the world to know about these events that would otherwise go unnoticed if not for social media.

Social media also allows users to easily access news and information. Many official, verified accounts on social media keep users updated on real-world issues, which is a convenient way to keep up with the latest issues around the world. For example, the Instagram account Mothership helps to spread important information specifically targeted at adolescents. Since teens are less likely to read newspapers, following such social media accounts helps them stay updated with relevant issues. Many accounts have also helped to spread awareness of the 2020 Australian bushfires, which were the worst bushfires the country had ever faced. The bushfires caused about 34 deaths, and over 5,000 houses were destroyed. The availability of news articles and videos helped to keep people well informed, and educated them on ways they could provide help, for example through donations to help the country recover from this tragedy. Therefore, social media helps to spread awareness on real-world issues, as people can easily access these reliable accounts to receive updates on these issues.

Furthermore, celebrities who are active on social media can also play a part in the spreading of awareness on real-world issues. Celebrities have a large following and many fans, and they can thus use their accounts for a good cause to speak up about pressing matters in the world. For example, the internationally famous K-pop boy group BTS donated about US\$10 million for the #BlackLivesMatter movement. This act of benevolence immediately gained attention on social media, thus helping to keep their younger fanbase updated on such movements. Celebrities can also serve as a good role model for their fans and help such real-world issues gain attention. Another example is Oprah Winfrey, a highly respectable media personality who donated about US\$10 million to the Hurricane Katrina Relief Fund and another US\$50 million for education, healthcare, and advocacy for women and children. Such actions are commended on social media, allowing these real-world issues to not only gain attention, but also encouraging users to make a change by taking part in similar actions and doing their best to help with such real-world issues.

To conclude, social media does not pose a distraction from real-world issues. Though some might get caught up in the more trivial and irrelevant events, and thus may be distracted, there have been many cases that have proved otherwise. Social media has been essential in spreading awareness. It helps to make what was previously unattainable centuries ago, achievable now. Social media helps users keep up to date since they can receive news almost instantaneously, and the speed at which news can travel in this day and age is revolutionary. People all over the world can come together to help make a change in real-world issues, and celebrities can also make use of their large fan bases on social media to help spread news on important real-world issues.

Comments:

A decent range of issues that have been pertinent to both real-world and social media conversations have been raised in your essay. Links to social media (beyond just media in general) can be more consistent.

‘Ageing is to be feared’. How true is this of your society?

Glenda Goh Jiaen 21S37

In a metropolitan, fast-paced society like Singapore, we can often see young individuals leading meaningful and fulfilling lives, spending time with their loved ones or doing activities that they derive much joy from. However, as our society marches towards development, our greying and ageing population has risen over the years. The fear of ageing is real amongst Singaporeans, given that the word ageing is often negatively associated with poorer health, lack of leisure activities and being left out by society. These are some of the many factors that the ageing population bear as burdens on their shoulders. In my society, however, these fears are swiftly targeted by the government and individuals, making the term ‘ageing’ a less fearful one. Ageing should be welcomed and not feared, given that it is a rite of passage that one must go through during their lifetime. As one ages, the fear of it reduces as Singaporeans have access to world class healthcare, a multitude of activities and can still stay relevant due to various schemes implemented.

Pundits claim that ageing is to be feared in the context of Singapore, given that it has a correlation to worsening health and higher living costs due to exorbitant medical bills. Many Singaporeans are afraid to grow old and develop serious health conditions like cancer or diabetes, which are especially prevalent in the context of my society, and having to pay high medical bills for it. However, this fear is debunked because in Singapore, we have a multitude of schemes available to support medical bills. For instance, the Community Health Assist Scheme or CHAS card can be applied by Singaporeans from low to mid income groups to obtain subsidies or sometimes even free visits to the doctor. This provides a safety net allowing older Singaporeans to feel less reluctant to visit the doctor when they are sick, and get the necessary treatment that they need. Additionally, for major conditions like diabetes or cancer that might develop with age, Singaporeans can also apply for financial assistance schemes applicable to them, lessening the burden of high costs from long term illnesses. For Singaporeans who fear ageing because they are uncertain about the availability of treatment options available to them, this fear is eradicated because of the highly developed and world class facilities that we have in Singapore. Singapore is known to have some of the best healthcare facilities, with the option of choosing between private or public hospitals for treatment. This eases the worry of being unable to find a suitable doctor for treatment, given that we have a plethora of healthcare options to choose from.

Ageing should not be feared in society because we have in place a myriad of activities to keep one occupied and stay connected to society. When one thinks about ageing, they often have the fear of being left behind by society. This is due to the fact that one faces deteriorating health, or is just unable to connect with the younger generation. Some from the ageing population might feel that they are very much disconnected from society. However, in the context of Singapore, this is not true. There is a smorgasbord of activities that the ageing population can take part in, from physical fitness classes like Zumba being organised by community clubs or the People’s Association to meaningful volunteering activities like partnering with Team Nila - a volunteering organisation supported by Active

Singapore which promotes healthy and active living in our society. The wide range of activities one can fill their time with allows them to feel more connected to society on a more personal level as they get to partake in meaningful activities that fill their time wisely, and at the same time connect with a wider group of individuals, young or old, and form meaningful friendships with them. This eradicates the idea of feeling lonelier and more disconnected from society as one ages. Additionally, many initiatives have been put in place to encourage acceptance and inclusivity of the aged. One such activity would be YOLDEN Switch 2.0, which is organised by the Youth Corps to allow youths to connect and communicate with the elderly. When the time of age does come and people officially become regarded as 'old' or 'not young', there are still plenty of schemes my society has been implementing to make these individuals feel included and welcomed. Hence, ageing should not be feared as although one ages in my society, there are still bouts of activities available for them to partake and stay connected.

Ageing should not be feared in my society because one can still remain skillful and relevant in their jobs. Many Singaporeans often fear ageing because they have the preconceived notion that the skills and traits they possess are becoming increasingly irrelevant to today's society. They have the fear that their job security might be threatened, due to the influx of highly educated fresh graduates or the large pool of foreign talents entering Singapore who may replace them in their jobs. However, this is not entirely true in the context of Singapore. In a small and open economy like Singapore where we face issues of brain drain, when talented Singaporeans choose to migrate overseas for better job opportunities, there has been a recent emphasis on skills upgrading and refinement especially for low income or older workers. This helped encourage Singaporeans to take up skills relevant to up-and-coming industries, for instance infocomms technology. The government has given out \$500 SkillsFuture upgrading funds for Singaporeans to go for courses ranging from baking to coding classes, all in the name of lifelong learning. This provides an avenue for Singaporeans, particularly those from the ageing population whose skills may be rusty and less relevant to society, to pick up new skills and upgrade themselves to become more efficient workers. Some Singaporeans even continue to pursue further studies in their degrees to have an even stronger and credible university certificate. A number of individuals from the ageing population have also chosen to do so, and were well applauded for by the public. The culture of lifelong learning and skills upgrading breeds a culture of Singaporeans wanting to upgrade themselves. Hence, this acts as a push factor in allowing Singaporeans loosen their fear of job insecurity and being incompetent compared to their younger counterparts, given the large support provided for them to hone their skills and remain equally qualified.

Ageing should not be feared in my society as Singaporeans are generally financially supported and have sufficient retirement savings. Many individuals fear ageing because it correlates to them having to retire one day and feed off retirement savings to go about their daily lives. Given the high cost of living in Singapore, many Singaporeans do fear that they are unable to sustain and lead a relatively comfortable life when they retire. However, in the context of Singapore, this fear is alleviated due to various efforts. Firstly, the Singapore government has implemented a compulsory savings account known as the Central Provident Fund, where working Singaporeans and their employers must contribute a portion of their income to the account. The account aims to provide a safety net for Singaporeans in terms of retirement savings to ensure financial security for Singaporeans. When Singaporeans are of a certain age, the money in this savings account would be given out as monthly payouts to supplement one's income, particularly for those who have retired.

This provides a stable source of money for Singaporeans, allowing the worry of having a lack of retirement savings to dissipate.

Detractors might argue that although Singaporeans do receive a monthly payout, that does not necessarily translate to them being able to cope with the high cost of living in Singapore. However, they have failed to recognise that there are already schemes in place to help reduce the cost of living for the aged. For instance, the supermarket NTUC FairPrice has discounts every Monday and Tuesday for the elderly, and bus ride fares are also cheaper for the elderly. All these minute implementations add up to indirectly support the elderly financially. The financial support and stable retirement income that Singaporeans receive debunks the notion that ageing should be feared in my society.

“Age is just a number.” This quote greatly encapsulates the true meaning of what it means to become older and join the ageing population. Ageing should not be seen as a deterrence from taking part in activities, nor should it be seen as something that hinders one from leading a meaningful and eventful life. Especially in the context of my society, much effort has been put in place to alleviate the stresses that growing old brings about. Some say that old is gold, and I could not agree more. Growing old merely means that one is just getting wiser, more experienced and has lived a meaningful life. “Ageing is to be feared”, but not in the context of my society, Singapore.

Comments:

Thoughtful response that's consistently argued. Comprehensive scope of fears associated with ageing and clear explanation on why there's no need to fear - balanced discussion. Apt use of illustration, though knowledge of these examples can be deeper. Greater insight can be achieved by critically evaluating the efficacy of the govt measures and not just merely examining the measures.

‘Ageing is to be feared’. How true is this of your society?

Vaidyanathan Shraddha 21S37

Biologically speaking, ageing is the process whereby our muscles weaken, our skin sags, our voice shakes and our hair grows white. However, ageing is also a process that leads up to ‘the golden years’, the years we spend after retirement - slowing down, engaging in hobbies and spending time with our loved ones. Many look forward to ageing as our final years may be considered the most stress-free part of life, since all the gruelling years of work would have finally come to an end. However, others question whether these years are really ‘golden’. Behind a golden facade, they see a cold, hard, and dark life and thus begin to fear the process of growing older. In my opinion, ageing should not be feared in Singapore as despite some concerns it brings about, the elderly can look forward to good health, company, retirement funds and being well-respected by society.

Firstly, many fear ageing as they are worried about not being able to sustain themselves financially in their golden years. In Singapore, it is not uncommon to see the elderly working labour-intensive and low-paying jobs like cleaning schools or selling ice cream on the streets. As people reach their mid-forties, they begin to fear that they would ‘suffer’ the same fate of facing financial struggles, and toiling even when they reach their seventies. Though such concerns are valid, I believe that ageing should not be feared for this reason, and most Singaporeans are not afraid of it. It is worth noting that many elderly continue working not because of financial struggles, but because they simply enjoy the work they do. For instance, Our Grandfather Story, a Singaporean YouTube channel, interviewed an 85-year-old uncle who sells ice cream at Sim Lim Square to this day. He had mentioned how he works not because he is poor, but mainly because it brings him joy to sell ice cream to others. Moreover, the aged who are financially unstable come from a time when there were no compulsory savings. However, with the introduction of the Central Provident Fund (CPF), Singaporean adults who have to save a portion of their income every month can retire more comfortably. Even with CPF, the aged who struggle to make ends meet can tap into outlets like the Silver Support Scheme and non-profit organisations to ease their financial constraints. The fact that many Singaporean companies like NTUC FairPrice offer discounts for the elderly also reassures people that they would be able to enjoy a decently high standard of living as they age. Therefore, I believe that the argument that ageing is to be feared in Singapore does not hold water, as there are plenty of resources and policies put in place to ensure that those ageing would be financially stable.

To add on, I opine that Singaporeans should not fear ageing for health-related reasons, due to the strong and reliable healthcare system in Singapore. We have all heard of elderly who had suffered excruciating pain in their lives or lost the battle to illnesses that they had fought for many years. For many, especially the working adults who will soon join the ranks of the elderly, this brings about a great deal of fear. Despite this, ageing should not be feared in Singapore. It is noteworthy that Singapore has one of the highest life expectancies in the world at about 80 years, and this is indicative of our strong healthcare system. Not only are clinics, polyclinics, and hospitals accessible to people living in almost every neighbourhood, but health treatments are also rather affordable for the elderly. For instance, Singaporeans need not pay for the Covid-19 vaccine unlike other countries, and great care has been taken to ensure that the aged, who are most vulnerable to the virus, minimise the risk

of suffering from it. Furthermore, the government has also provided subsidies to the public and private healthcare centres to provide adequate and quality care for the elderly. The aged may also use their MediSave, MediShield, and Community Health Assist Scheme or CHAS cards to enjoy medical services at subsidised rates. There are also programmes that encourage Singaporeans of all ages to stay active and healthy, such as Active SG's workout at community clubs and the National Steps Challenge. Singaporeans who actively participate in these activities can expect to be fitter and healthier as they age. Coupled with our strong healthcare system with special features that cater to the elderly, there is no need to fear ageing in Singapore.

One of the most prominent reasons for the fear of ageing stems from the fear of being abandoned or left alone. Naturally, one who pours love and affection onto their family would be shattered into millions of pieces when sent out to nursing homes. This fear is almost crippling in that it frightens those who are in their mid-fifties to start conversations about housing and moving out of their children's' homes. These concerns are exacerbated by the fact that many aged people live alone in one-room flats, especially those who have lost a partner or remained single. However, though this is a valid concern, it should not make Singaporeans inherently scared of ageing. It is heartening to see that with the Housing and Development Board's (HDB) subsidies for working adults living with or close to their parents, the proportion of aged people living with their families has risen by about 7%. Though the numbers may seem small, there is huge potential for more elderly to live with their families in the near future. At the same time, one must acknowledge that not all elderly want to live with their kids and burden them.

Yet, even those who live alone or foresee themselves living alone in the near future need not worry about ageing, as there are plenty of ways to spend their retirement years with good company. The spirit of volunteering has strengthened in recent years and non-profit organisations like Heartware Network have programmes where youth and parent volunteers visit the destitute elderly to befriend them. Similar programmes exist for elders with dementia and those in nursing homes. Though one might argue that such one-off events may not ease the fear of ageing, it is worth noting that such volunteering programmes have been occurring more frequently with a rise in the supply of volunteers. With Covid-19, many have begun to work from home and have more time to volunteer online. Schools also heavily emphasise having Values-in-Action hours, and have mobilised students to volunteer and help the elderly. With these changes, giving.sg has managed to connect seniors in rental flats with a daily befriender who will talk to or visit the elderly every day. This allows the aged to foster strong bonds and forge emotional connections with volunteers, easing the fear of being left alone. To sum up, the fear of ageing and being left alone has become less valid in Singapore, due to the rise in people caring for and befriending the aged.

Another prominent reason as to why ageing is feared is the mistreatment of the elderly by society at large. Even for those who age with family or have volunteers who truly care about them, the disrespectful and unempathetic behaviour by members of society instils a sense of fear in people as they grow older. For instance, it is unfortunately rather common for us to hear others calling the elderly a burden to society. Be it their slow movement which poses a hindrance to fast-paced workers or their need to be taken care of which puts pressure on working adults, the elderly are viewed as the most useless members of society by some. As a result, ageism has risen where people disrespect or discriminate against the pioneer generation. The working adults today will soon become a part of the

older generation, and with their age grows the fear of being ill-treated and shunned by society. However, Singapore has taken important steps to ensure that the elderly are treated well in society. Primary schools have civics lessons which teach children the importance of being respectful towards their grandparents who have brought them up and cook delicious meals for them. There is also legislation that disallows the retrenchment of workers simply because of age. Rather, the ageing employees are becoming more valued for their years of valuable experience and extensive knowledge which provides invaluable insights to youth. Moreover, initiatives like Smart Nation ensure that the elderly are not a burden to society by teaching them to be more internet savvy to cope with our digitalising society. Considering that by 2030, one in four Singaporeans would be aged 65 and above, it is fallacious to think that ageing should be feared. Not only would the ageing have the comfort of being surrounded by more people of their age, but they can also expect to be treated with kindness by the rest of society.

To sum up, the statement that “ageing is to be feared” does not hold in Singapore. Although concerns about health, finances, having a support system, and being treated with dignity are completely valid, rest assured that Singapore has put in place many schemes, policies, activities as well as educational measures to ensure that those ageing may lead comfortable and healthy lives while being surrounded by loved ones and treated with compassion. This is especially so for the middle-aged as they have begun ageing. In retrospect, ageing is inevitable and after all, age is just a number. As time goes by, we should not waste our years fearing this process, but rather embrace the incoming change and move forward together as a stronger and older nation.

Comments:

Thoughtful response that consistently depicted a comprehensive scope of fears associated with ageing, and clear explanation of why there is no need to fear with clear contextualisation. Balanced discussion with apt use of illustration, with some good knowledge of examples. Greater insight can be achieved by critically evaluating current measures. Language is functional with some variety.



Miscellaneous

“

**My father used to say 'Don't raise
your voice, improve your argument.'**

”

Desmond Tutu

South African Anglican bishop and
theologian

‘Is competition necessarily desirable?’ Discuss.

Elijah Boey Tzen Hsuen 21S43

Competition is defined as a challenge or race between individuals, parties or even corporations that are aiming to achieve the same end goal, with each competitor trying to one-up the next by performing better and more efficiently, and ultimately aim to be at the top of the standings. Competition can be quite desirable in many aspects of life, be it in school, at work, in finance or even research and development. Competition has allowed mankind to reach where it is today, in a fraction of the time needed for other species that roamed the earth for much longer. However, the issue of its desirability is one of major concerns in today's day and age.

The first factor as to why competition is desirable is that it provides motivation and supplements strife to its participants. In competitions, it is safe to say that most competitors try to perform to the maximum of their capabilities, with athletes training for the Olympics all year round to ensure that they are in peak condition to win their respective sports. Joseph Schooling, a swimmer who represented Singapore in the 2016 Rio Olympics and managed to clinch the nation's first gold medal, has been under professional guidance since his early teens. He has a story of hard work and dedication, fueled by competition and his desire to be the best at what he does. Due to this indomitable spirit, he managed to not only compete next to his idol Michael Phelps, a world-renowned swimmer from the US, but even managed to outswim his personal hero and achieve his dream. Competition breeds and grooms talents to seek and aim to be the best, excelling in the process while also allowing them to be motivated to chase their dreams.

Furthermore, competition improves economic efficiency and sparks innovation amongst firms and corporations. In this age of innovation, research and development (R&D) companies are in a constant race with each other to make the next revolutionary discovery. Such a case is evident in the context of the current Covid-19 pandemic, where in 2020, there was a race amongst R&D corporations to decode the strain of Covid-19 which was running rampant, claiming millions of lives around the globe. This competition allowed for vaccines to be created in record time and combat the virus. Now we have a plethora of vaccines to choose from such as Pfizer, Moderna and AstroZeneca, the products of such competition helping to halt the virulent spread of the virus, saving countless lives. Competition in the workplace also allows individuals to step up and assume larger roles in search of a higher annual income. This, in the grand scheme of things, aids companies as workplace efficiency increases, starting a domino effect which can push the financial landscape of a country in the right direction. Such is seen in Singapore where competition to be the most efficient worker is common and it is also home to the highest GDP per capita in the world.

Lastly, competition acts as a sieve and separates the excellent from the mediocre, while also building character. It allows for the effective categorisation of those who are apt or suited to pursue greatness in a certain field, while also signalling to the mediocre that maybe their talents lie elsewhere. One common occurrence is athletes changing their sports, some of whom were professionals, after realising that they will never be able to win in the major leagues despite their talent, seeking new beginnings in another sport where they can reach the podium. Additionally, after going through the struggles and tribulations of competition, individuals gain character development no matter the

outcome. This is evident in the sense that the victors gain self-confidence and pride, while those who lost gain resolution and determination to try their hardest to win the next time round.

These positives make competition desirable; however, they only hold true in a world of ideals. In reality, competition has also brought with it many negatives and undesirable gifts. Some countries like Singapore, Hong Kong, and China are driven by competition. This allows them to stand as some of the wealthiest countries in the world. However, due to competition for high-paying jobs and the desire to achieve the dream life of comfort and luxury, an exorbitant amount of pressure has been placed on the students to attain the highest grades and performance. This absurd amount of emphasis on a single letter scored in a national exam has brought about many detrimental impacts that make people question whether all this competition is really worth it.

With the grades that students receive being of utmost importance in securing one's future and livelihood, this has bred unhealthy competition with parents forcing extracurricular activities and tuition sessions with external teachers down their children's throats, many of whom no longer have time to live as a teenager and enjoy their youth due to a curriculum full of academics. With all this pressure and no outlet to release it, the pent-up stress from being overworked and pressure to achieve the maximum grade possible have resulted in many students in such countries to take their own lives, to rather die than continue living in a society of excessive competition and misery, as seen in studies showing sky-high student suicide rates in recent years.

Furthermore, excessive competition is undesirable as it could lead to the development of inferiority complexes, insecurities and even possibly Imposter Syndrome. Competitors who never see victory could feel demoralised and secondary to those at the top, with many athletes developing depression as discovered in a 2015 study on the effects of competition. Those at the top could also be excessively pressured to keep their position and harbour deep stress. Ultimately, this could lead to both parties resorting to any means necessary to achieve their desires in competition such as taking steroids or stimulants to give them the edge over the others in sports. These stimulants could have devastating impacts on one's health but are taken regardless for the sake of competition.

All in all, the concern over whether competition is necessarily desirable is a valid one, with the conclusion that it depends on the kind of competition. Healthy competition is desirable as it catalyses growth and innovation, while also helping to better individuals and ultimately work for the good of society. Alas, unhealthy and excessive competition could lead to devastating outcomes that ruin the spirit of competition and the beauty of it, transfiguring it into an ugly conglomeration of overwhelming pressure, insecurities, worry and negatives. Ultimately, competition is not necessarily desirable, but it is nonetheless important in human society.

Comments:

Wide range and scope of examples used, though some claims can be better supported instead of relying overly on assertions. A balanced look at the chosen issue.

**'The media tells us what we want to know,
not what we need to know.' Discuss.**

Ang Kai Li Cally 21S31

With the rise of new media forms like social media and online media, the media's influence on us has become a very relevant and necessary topic to be discussed. Be it the daily newspapers being sold in early mornings, the magazines on salon counters, or the more recent social media feeds we see, they all have an impact on the way we form our opinions and thinking. In my opinion, despite the media's pervasiveness and its ability to reach many, it mainly feeds us with what we want to know and not so much of what we need to know, such as content that pushes out of our comfort zone, challenges our thinking, or just provides useful practical information. This is due to the roles of the media, its inherent flaws, and the way we engage with content.

Firstly, the role of the media must be examined. While the media seeks to inform and challenge our ideas, it is undeniable that a large role of the media is to serve as mindless entertainment for the masses. This is evident in the exponential rise in fame of TikTok stars in new media, and even in celebrity gossip sections of magazines comparing beach bodies, post pregnancy bodies and discussing scandals. In a sense, media outlets serve frivolous, entertainment-oriented information that while mostly useless is attention-grabbing, and what better way to do so than feed the audience the content it craves for? This is also why local news outlets mainly report on local news, or how FoodKing - a local YouTube food review channel - mainly talks about local foods and their flavours and visuals, which appeal to more people than talking about the food's history, which is arguably what more Singaporeans need to know about.

Additionally, because of the way our media is structured today, particularly in new media, it is often more difficult to be exposed to what we may actually need to read more on, due to internet algorithms and interest groups, contributing to the formation of echo chambers. For example, on Reddit, a popular discussion site for millions of users worldwide, it can be expected that users are exposed to a wide range of media. However, this is often not the case as Reddit users get to subscribe or unsubscribe to a particular page, and from then, the content they view is increasingly targeted, with camps of opposing views rarely interacting with each other, such as the members of r/Socialism and r/Capitalism. Another instance would be through Instagram's algorithm, where your 'feed' only shows you posts based on what you've liked and shared, so perhaps for a football fan, a post on climate change impacting coastal communities, abortion banning in Texas, or other relevant news would not be shown. Hence, most users of new media are missing out on discussions on controversial but vital topics, and merely take in the content they are interested in, due to subgroups forming echo chambers and algorithms, a systemic flaw in the media.

It is easy to understand why some people may feel that the media does in fact tell us what we need to know, and is not solely frivolous or controlled by our interests. For example, in Singapore, Channel News Asia, The Straits Times and even online media outlets like Mothership do tell us the information we need to know like daily Covid-19 cases, changes in local policies, and also hold discussions on sensitive, hard to talk about issues like xenophobia and racism. These topics are content

that we truly do need to know more about, and the media outlets, be it traditional media or new media, are indeed giving that to us, and not just presenting content we are inclined towards.

However, this perspective is limited as it merely considers what the media outlets are doing, but does not consider the dynamic relationship between the viewers and the media. While the media may occasionally include information we need to know, it is in our hands to determine whether to even look at or engage with this information. For example, Instagram posts detailing the detainment and speculated torturing of Uyghur Muslims in China could be too emotionally difficult to read for some, and they can choose to swipe away, or even to flag the post to tell Instagram that they do not want to see more of such content. Either way, the person now has deliberately ignored this occurrence, and hence the media has not told the person what they need to know. Another example would be antivax Facebook groups. These groups form as people actively seek out antivax content and block out other content detailing the scientific truth on vaccines. Eventually, the media only feeds them with information they want to hear. With new media, despite occasionally showing important, thought-provoking pieces of information, it is easy to tailor it to fit one's lifestyle and for it to only show what one is interested in. For traditional media outlets, while they will always publish crucial news, it can be argued if those news and discussions are actually what we need to know. For example, The Straits Times holds discussions on topics like racism, but this information may be heavily regulated by the government or even withheld if readers dislike learning about these topics. Controversial topics such as egg-freezing or elitism might even be actively avoided, even if these sorts of content may just be what the masses need to hear and think about.

In conclusion, the media mainly only tells us what we want to know, and not what we need to know, due to the way media is designed, our engagement with the media and the fundamental roles of the media. Though the idea of the information the masses 'need to know' is subjective, more can be done to prevent the formation of echo chambers, possibly by media outlets recommending content that may not be 'liked' to the users, promoting public discourse such that ideas can be exchanged in hopes of concerted action. Since the media mainly tells us what we want to know, perhaps it is time we also venture out to uncomfortable topics and access new knowledge on our own volition.

Comments:

Cally, this is a thoughtful and considered response to the question that shows fair knowledge of the issue as seen especially from your examples used. Essay can benefit from more concise writing with 'tighter' paragraphs. Mostly fluent except for some awkward/strange expressions.

**'The media tells us what we want to know,
not what we need to know.' Discuss.**

Ayden Lee Yong Kang 21531

Do you rely solely on the media to get your information? My interpretation of 'media' would be new media like social media sites, television and newspapers; 'what we want to know' as topics that greatly pique our interest and encourage readers to read more about it; and 'what we need to know' as information relevant to society to help it progress and improve. Some may feel that due to the efforts that journalists make to ensure that their content is constructive, as well as the proofreading and editing in the process of publishing a newspaper or airing a television network, it is untrue that the media tells us what we want rather than what we need to know. However, due to the echo chambers in social media sites, vast amounts of attention directed solely at article headlines, and how easily the media can be profited from, I largely agree that the media tells us what we want to know, not what we need to know.

Social media offers a very tailored view of the world, where the personalised 'home pages' of the sites consumers use, like Instagram or Facebook, are very niche and crafted solely for the consumer themselves. For example, users choose who or what they want to follow on Facebook, Instagram and Reddit. When this is the case, the only thing that is appearing in the consumers' feed is content that the consumer accepts and enjoys. Whole communities and ideas are censored from the user as he goes along his path down extremely filtered content. Even if the user has a flawed opinion, or an inaccurate statistic that he thinks is right, there is no alternative voice of reason for the user to discern from the knowledge that he happily feels is true. Apart from that, the comments section of a post can exhibit a hive mind mentality, where only one idea reigns supreme and is absolutely correct, while the rest are simply wrong. For example, the posts on r/politics, a forum on Reddit, are mostly in support of the Democrats and critical of the Republicans in America. Any comment asking for credible sources or offering an alternate opinion is quickly 'downvoted' to oblivion, establishing an unspoken rule that users must support the Democrats and hate the Republicans. Similarly, an Instagram post by a well-liked celebrity might have many positive comments and likes, while conversely a celebrity who has made a public mistake in the past might receive mainly negative comments. This is because upon seeing everyone shower love on the celebrity, users are encouraged to give an impassioned response to the post and garner more likes. Conversely, users can become 'keyboard warriors' and jump on the hate train to bash another celebrity who has made a public mistake, regardless of whether the celebrity in question has made efforts to improve themselves. This censorship of alternative opinions blocks off avenues for constructive discussion, well-meaning suggestions for improvement, and food for thought. This echo chamber effect, where biased information is amplified and radicalised after reinforcement within a particular space, certainly exists. It leads the affected to assume that only their opinions and worldview is valid, contributing to the media telling us what we want, not what we need to know.

More often than not, too much attention is given to the headline as well, and too little to its attached article. Due to busy routines, it is common for readers to only eyeball the headline and move on. The necessary details, elaboration and counterpoints in an article may be largely ignored, with

only the sensational or misrepresentative headline and picture taken in. This can also happen when sharing articles, where the user screenshots only the headline and the thumbnail, but leaves out the rest of the article, especially if it is irrelevant to the point he or she wishes to make. Audiences then base their opinions solely on three lines of text and an image, when there are paragraphs of information available but ignored. This phenomenon can be observed in sites like YouTube, where channels try to gain traction and views by spreading sensationalistic lies or half-truths in their title and thumbnail as 'clickbait' luring users to click on their videos. This provides a false sense of knowledge on the issue at hand, especially if the user does not feel the need to watch the video in whole. This problem is made worse with the speed of new media, as the user can send the video to others, potentially creating a domino effect via sending this inaccurate video around. This blocks off key information showcasing a more informed perspective, whilst pouring fuel on a blind, misinformed viewpoint, allowing it to proliferate. For example, when Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat commented that Singapore was not ready for a non-Chinese Prime Minister, many left negative comments and felt that he was just stoking the flames of racism and xenophobia, or simply had nothing better to say. His quote was then reproduced in large fonts, and reposted in captions across social media and newspapers. However, if one were to read the article in full, it would become clear he was merely offering the view that the older generation was uncomfortable with a non-Chinese PM, and trying to raise awareness to solve the issue. Apart from vital context being omitted, the whole point of a debate can be lost as well: this was the case during a recent Parliamentary session on 14 September 2021, when Minister for Foreign Affairs Vivian Balakrishnan described Leong Mun Wai, an opposition Member of Parliament, as 'illiterate'. While the uproar that followed was certainly justified, hardly anyone focused on the points that they were discussing (which was about the India–Singapore Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement or CECA), or gave further thought on the issue of a foreign labour influx. Instead, everyone only talked about the comment Minister Balakrishnan made. This is another case where the media tells us what we want to know rather than what we need to know.

Furthermore, the media is a lucrative industry. Given the very high viewership and internet traffic, news sites and pages charge high amounts to advertise. This is especially the case for social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube: For example, YouTube plays advertisements before a video based on an algorithm formed from a user's history. After searching about food, an advertisement for a restaurant is likelier to appear. YouTubers themselves also often have sponsors selling products related to their channel content. Instagram often generates surveys on its advertisement experience, to further ensure commercials are relevant to their users. This causes the media to lose its function of educating the public, allowing itself to be instead viewed as a platform for marketing, and a corporate tool to push sales. The excessive advertisements tailored to the consumer's taste tell us what we want and like to see, instead of something better and more relevant.

Naysayers may say that in defence of regular newspapers, their advertisements do not take up as much reading space, and their articles go through many rounds of checking from a journalist to their editor and more. For example, Singapore Press Holdings hires a large group of people to ensure the quality of their print media, and television channels like Channel News Asia are renowned for their objectivity and are internationally trusted. While I acknowledge that mainstream sites such as these are unbiased and try to offer the perspectives of all parties involved, I would respond that these efforts are simply not enough. The emergence of new media has increased the speed of how information is

disseminated, far beyond what fact-checking can catch up with, and has given anonymous individuals the power to be moral arbiters of society. This new form of media has an equal amount of traffic and viewership to television or newspapers, if not more, and we can only expect it to increase as the years go by. Soon, most of the information we receive may be one-sided, tailored to our pre-existing beliefs. Objectivity and truth, alongside ideological diversity, will slowly fade away.

In conclusion, the media tells us what we want to know, not what we need to know: thanks to the echo chamber structure and hive mind mentality of social media, the overemphasis on headlines and ignorance of their attached content, and the profits that can be obtained from the media. Society needs to educate everyone to better learn to discern fact from opinion, to consider the perspectives of individuals apart from us, and be more informed about global issues and current affairs. Perhaps we may even need to put a 'check your source' warning for consumers before posting any form of content.

Comments:

A good understanding of the issue and a coherently argued response showing some balance and evaluation. Examples are effective. Sophisticated writing style; felicitous expressions bound.

**'The media tells us what we want to know,
not what we need to know.' Discuss.**

Chua Qi Yang Ethan 21543

In today's technologically advanced world, the medium which connects us with entities and information outside of our immediate physical reach is the media. Our relationship with the media today, be it new or traditional media, is one which almost controls how we perceive the rest of the world, otherwise unseen and unknown. The validity of this reality and our understanding of the world that the media reflects can thus be called into question; whether it provides objective and varied truth regardless of our subjective inclinations, or it succumbs to forming a distorted version of it, suited to our liking. Proponents of the media's objectivity may argue that media today provides a variety of platforms which hold an ever more open marketplace of ideas and information. However, detractors may disagree, positing that today's media has the proclivity to form echo chambers, churn up distorted narratives, and that the individual themselves has a tendency to absorb more of what aligns with their beliefs. In my opinion, the media tells us more of what we want to know rather than what we need to know.

Nonetheless, some argue that the presence of numerous media outlets and online platforms increases the variety of information, allowing objective truth to be found. There are many objective news outlets that do not hold extreme biases or political agendas, and attempt to document news as objectively as possible. An example in America would be the New York Times which publishes numerous interesting articles ranging from world issues to local interest topics. Even with the possibility of other platforms holding biases, the sheer number of platforms present which we have access to can provide a diverse range of information, ensuring that individuals are not brainwashed into one school of thought or one way of perceiving a certain issue. Polarising Reddit forums like r/Capitalism and r/Socialism both exist on Reddit, holding rather contradictory views. The fact that we have access to such platforms and forums suggests that conflict and debate in the media will always be present, thus deterring us from narrowing in on a single school of thought or conceptual schema to follow. In the political realm, one can find countless liberal, conservative and centrist publications and channels through social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and even Medium, an article writing platform where even Barack Obama publishes articles once in a while. The quantity of such platforms and outlets increases the quantity of ideas present, thus increasing the variation of ideas and preventing someone from only knowing and absorbing what aligns with their thoughts and beliefs. Thus, some argue that today's magnitude of platforms and outlets increases the variation in ideas, preventing one from ending up only knowing what they want to know.

Conversely, despite the variation of ideas, the media today has an unfortunate proclivity to trap individuals within echo chambers. As one browses through the web or subscribes to a news article, the media today - which chases after clicks and views for increasingly efficient ways to propel revenue - tends to present closely related information or products to consumers. The YouTube algorithm, for example, is superb at looking at the previous few videos you have watched and recommending more attractive ones on your homepage which are closely related and based on your viewing history. If one were to watch a video of Ben Shapiro or other conservative channels, YouTube can very quickly take

one down a rabbit hole of conservative videos promoting more right-wing ideologies and concepts. This thus forms a chamber which echoes the views one already believes in, not only failing to expand one's exposure to numerous ideas, but even restricting one's ability to do as articles or videos which confirm their beliefs are constantly smeared in their faces. Even in discussion forums like the aforementioned r/Capitalism and r/Socialism, as one joins one of these forums, they will only be met with information that subscribes to that same school of thought, rarely hearing the other side of the argument. Considering that one's thoughts are shaped by the information they are exposed to, the media's tendency to form such echo chambers in the pursuit of revenue and greater levels of interaction creates a pervasive and insidious cycle of rehashing already present beliefs to people, and further constraining one's ability to explore and interact with the marketplace of ideas. Thus, this proclivity towards constructing echo chambers within the media tends to tell us what we want to know.

Additionally, the media's tendency to churn up distorted narratives to the individual also contributes to an enclosing of ideas and paralysis in variation. Even traditional media outlets today can manipulate information around the world, or even choose to censor some which they may deem indigestible to their audience. An example in America would be the presence of two increasingly polarised news outlets. CNN and Fox News. which disseminate vastly different information about happenings within America. CNN tends to be more liberal and recently, there was an incident where a white woman wore a gorilla mask and threw something at a Black Republican politician while hurling insults as well. CNN largely avoided covering the incident while Fox News covered it, suggesting that if the politician was instead a Democrat, the incident would be widely covered in the media as a racist act. However, due to liberal beliefs about certain group identities and their assumed political beliefs, this can create a sort of cognitive dissonance in the viewers as it does not align with existing schemas adopted by people on the left. This deliberate censoring and at times misrepresenting of ideas from both the left and right through even traditional media outlets greatly reduces the validity of information filtered through the media, as media sources can be repeatedly seen attempting to appeal to their target audience and thus stray away from information that may contradict existing beliefs or cause frustration. The media today is thus adept at constructing narratives which will be well received by their audience, at the cost of thoughts and knowledge about the rest of the world. The concretising of schemas among the masses will further contribute in preventing exposure to varied, albeit occasionally uncomfortable thoughts and ideas. Thus, the media's ability to censor, morph and construct narratives reinforces existing beliefs and holds one back from greater exposure.

Finally, information from the media tends to align with an individual's beliefs, because of the individual's general tendency to absorb or be more receptive to what they believe in. There is a common concept in psychology known as confirmation bias, where one tends to look for evidence or pay more attention to content reinforcing their existing view on the world. Everyone has the tendency to subscribe to information that they already believe in. This has also been noted by David Hume, a past philosopher who explored the nature of reason and rationality. He was frustrated with the discovery that logic has little use for an individual, as the thought process tends to be that logic is used to substantiate an already pre-existing belief rather than to lead to the formation of one. This individual tendency to reinforce one's own beliefs takes some responsibility away from the media, but still contributes to the media confirming that which we already believe in. The individual tends to first subscribe to a news outlet, pick which Reddit forum they want to see, or continue watching the same

sort of YouTube videos. It is this relationship between the individual and the media that encourages this perpetuation and cyclical nature of an ironically narrow realm of thought being interacted with. Thoughts and beliefs are the cornerstones of one's value structure and low-resolution mapping of the world, responsible for psychic order. This initial bias in every individual boosts the effects of echo chambers and distorted narratives towards reinforcement and limited exposure to existing ideas, causing the media to even more effectively only tell us what we want to know.

According to the aforementioned arguments, while the multitude of media outlets may seem to increase the variation in ideas, the media's proclivity towards echo chambers and the construction of distorted narratives counter this variation, and a constrained realm of thought disseminated by the media is boosted by its contingency on individual impulses and inclination. Thus, the media does tell us more of what we want to know rather than what we need to know.

Comments:

Ethan, I must say this was an absolute joy to read! You have demonstrated an excellent understanding of the question requirements and subject matter. Relevant arguments were raised, and insightful examples discussed with some very original evaluation. Language was fluent, ambitious and frankly, delightful. Just be mindful of certain issues with expression. Well done!

**'The media tells us what we want to know,
not what we need to know.' Discuss.**

Sufiyyah Binte Mohammed Salim 21S62

The media serves as an avenue for many aspects integral to our lifestyle, be it entertainment or education - to be delivered to us, the public, in a digestible and accessible manner. However, the lines between the purpose and delivery of such information are getting increasingly blurred, leaving the public wondering if there are any non-profit-motivated, reliable sources of media left. A barrage of criticism has been hurled at the media for chasing commercial interests over the truth, and I agree with the statement that the media tells us what we want to know, and not what we need to, especially with the recent proliferation of superficial media.

Some may argue that what we want to know and what we need to know are not mutually exclusive, and that the public has become increasingly hungry for fact-based journalism covering hard-hitting topics such as political criticism and economic realities. They argue that these demands are being met and expectations exceeded, as the media releases one expose after another. Such was the case during the time of Donald Trump's impeachment, with one reporter after another releasing books and confidential audio recordings, as the media covered these stories with vigour and tenaciously chased after interviews. Factions of the American public were in uproar about the injustices and secrecy of Trump's presidency, and were vocal about their demands for a more transparent government. That was what they desired, and thus the American media, namely FOX News, delivered as such, despite notable disapproval by Trump and his administration. This demonstrates how the media does to an extent deliver on what the public needs to know about information affecting their daily lives and future.

However, despite there being cases of the media going against higher authorities and releasing confidential information of pressing concern to the public, there is always an element of exaggeration and theatrics to the delivery of such news. This belittles the severity of such information and its possible impacts to the public, rendering it as ingenuine reporting. For example, the manner in which the media handled the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan was superficial as it was heavily sensationalised and did not cover the true facts, history and on-ground realities of the issues, but focused mainly on how people fell to their deaths by trying to hang onto planes to escape. Such information is what one needs to know about the plight of the people; however, to have such an immense focus on family recounts of the victims instead of urging public awareness and campaigns for helping those victims was disparaging. Furthermore, the media's superficiality was further reinforced when it stopped covering the issue after a mere two to three weeks, although the abuses and injustices under the Taliban continue to this day. Much like the case of the military takeover in Myanmar, the media aims for shock factor delivered in an ingenuine and short-lived manner. Though this is enticing and effective in enrapturing one to immerse themselves into the news coverage, it is not what the public needs to truly understand and learn about the story, especially as the buzz dies after the media stops reporting it. It is during these times where true coverage of the news is most crucial, since public awareness is most important for any world issue. Thus, the media does not deliver what the public needs to know, at least not in a genuine manner.

For centuries, the media has been sensationalising and delivering shocking, marketable news. Such has been the role and thus expectation of the media, to “give the people what they want”. However, is what they want truly what they need? The media that has embedded itself into public consciousness seems to think so, and so focuses on inaccurate and ‘juicy’ news to entice audience viewership. News articles have popped up on genuine media networks, such as the Straits Times and CNN, about such fleeting and unbelievably unimportant news titles about what a celebrity chooses to eat at McDonald's or that a pig in Texas was named Chris. P. Bacon. Such titles being delivered during the short news segments on-air illustrates how the media has growingly catered to the segment of society that wants exciting and non-stressful news, which would not add to the anxieties of daily life. Such audiences are being mistaken for the general public, as the media releases stories that are exaggerated and without the important and legitimate framing. Even the fact that it is called a ‘story’ tells me that the true value and worth of the media and information being disseminated to the public is alarmingly declining. Therefore, the market-chasing media seems to have forsaken the original purpose and worth of the news, and has begun targeting shock factor instead.

Another perspective to consider is that government censorship has blocked or blunted the extent of the truth the public is exposed to. This is seen in how Singapore has recently been experiencing a spike in Covid-19 cases, and the government has been hit by a wave of criticism and pessimism about the way they are handling the situation. At the same time, a study and survey were released showing how most Singaporeans were pleased and reassured by how the government was handling the Covid-19 situation. Many, such as MothershipSG have commented on the irony and hypocrisy of such a survey at such a time. This illustrates that unofficial social media has more liberty and allowance for true reporting, as the more official - and more accessible - news outlets like The Straits Times are restricted and limited by government censorship and laws. Singapore Press Holdings is closely scrutinised by the Singaporean government: similarly, many news outlets in different countries will defer to the official government line, even if not directly and overtly censored. An example would be Fox News, which due to its alignment with the Trump administration rarely, if ever reported on the immense criticism of Trump and the anti-Republican sentiment that was rife amongst the American people. This goes to show that although the media reports superficial and sensationalised news, it can typically be due to government restrictions. Therefore, the statement of the media delivering the people's wants holds true, but it is to the people's disadvantage and to governments' benefit.

Additionally, the media's interpretation of what the public needs to know and what the public needs to know may be jarringly different. The media may assume that the public needs light-hearted or dramatic and theatrical news, but what the public may actually need are facts and realistic reports, especially during times of uncertainty and distress. China's recent crackdown on news and entertainment was highlighted and reported as mainly the disapproval of ‘effeminate’ men in media, instead of the setback in Chinese people's freedom to access global information and cultures that it was. It was a struggle to find an article stating the lead-up and true consequences of such a harshly censored policy on both China and the world. The idea of selective coverage should not be so actively practised in the media as it is now. What the people need to know should be delivered in a precise and fact-oriented manner, not in a style which belittles and minimises an issue's severity. Thus, the

media may not be reporting what the public needs to know, only what it thinks the public needs to know.

In conclusion, the media has been exclusively, for the most part, telling the public what we need to know, sensationalising and limiting crucial facts of the story for fear of lowering viewership. Although it has legitimate business concerns, the media is a service, not a marketing con job confused with real coverage where the story that causes the most uproar and earns the most profit. Despite being necessary to garner the public's attention, the media should work towards finding a balance between the two, minimising the dramatisation of events throughout the whole article or period of the news coverage. The public needs the facts, the numbers, and the impacts of current pressing political and socioeconomic affairs, and doing so would enhance the collective awareness of the public and society will flourish without the superficial and unreliable news so prevalent in today's media. Therefore, what the media has been doing is not what the media ought to do in the future, unless the world wishes to lose critical thinking amongst its future generations.

Comments:

Relevant arguments with some very meaningful observations and analysis. You have demonstrated a good grasp of the requirements. Good range of valid and apt examples across different contexts. The last argument was not very meaningfully handled, and it did affect the overall quality of your response- perhaps better planning will help in selecting what ideas should be included or left out. In all, an enjoyable read!

‘Nothing but empty words.’ How far is this true of global efforts aimed at tackling climate change?

Chinnakonda Sreeranjith Devasreshtha 21S41

A sobering and extensive report by the International Union for Conservation of Nature on climate change stated that by 2050, one-third of the world’s coral reefs will be endangered or extinct, alongside one-third of sharks and stingrays, one-fourth of mammals and one-fifth of reptiles. If environmental conversation continues to take a backseat, the pernicious effects from climate change will become increasingly pervasive and irreversible, with disastrous impacts on the environment. Most governments and nations, especially developed ones, have taken note of this and committed themselves to conservational efforts. This is to minimise the impacts of climate change, with the knowledge that it would sound the death knell for their countries and the Earth if sufficient efforts are not undertaken. Indubitably, some may argue that nations only talk the talk and do not walk the talk when tackling climate change as some nations are too profit-maximising and economically-driven, and are therefore unable to fulfil their promises. However, I am of the view that it is largely not true that global efforts aimed at tackling climate change are nothing but empty words because global firms and several governments have taken action against climate change, as they promised.

Prima facie, it is highly compelling to argue that governments do not follow through with their vows to take global efforts aimed at tackling climate change because some governments are too profit-maximising and economically driven, such that environmental conservation takes a backseat. This is especially true in developed countries, where governments’ utmost priority is to ensure their citizens’ economic security and material standard of living. A great case at hand would be the United States of America (USA). Ex-President George W. Bush stated that the USA complying with the Kyoto Protocol would result in a decline in economic progress, and it thus would not comply closely with the Kyoto Protocol, in order to protect its economic competitiveness. China is a culprit of this too. For a highly industrially driven nation like it to reduce its carbon footprint, it would need to slow down the production of goods and services. Therefore, China’s promised efforts have not been followed through in full force yet. These examples patently prove that governments do not walk the talk when it comes to carrying out conservational efforts aimed at climate change, because they are highly profit-maximising, with environmental conservation efforts at the back of their minds. Therefore, at face value, the argument that some governments do not follow through with their promises to take international efforts for environmental conservation may seem convincing.

However, it is equally persuasive to contend that global efforts aimed at climate change are not nothing but empty words, because countries worldwide are continually striving to put in place measures to preserve the environment. Firstly, carbon-neutral nations have put their best foot forward in maintaining environmental sustainability in their nations, with commendable efforts. For example, Bhutan has been carbon-neutral for the past decade or so, ensuring continued conservational efforts to reduce climate change and preventing its glaciers from melting. This proves that carbon-neutral countries like Bhutan are still undertaking efforts to minimise the effects of climate change, as promised. Moreover, developed countries have also taken part in these conservation efforts to protect future generations from climate change. One such country is Singapore.

During the 2020 National Day Rally, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong stated that climate change is a “life or death” situation that cannot be ignored, and that Singapore will surely undertake steps to conserve the environment. Singapore then rightfully took tangible actions, launching the Green Plan 2030 project as a nationwide program to preserve the environment. It has set aside 200 hectares of land to plant a million trees and create national parks to reduce carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. This patently shows that developing countries are taking necessary global efforts against climate change by following through with their promises. Therefore, I find it largely untrue that global efforts aimed at tackling climate change are nothing but empty words, because countries are working towards environmental sustainability with their conservational efforts.

Moreover, it is patently reasonable to posit that international conservational efforts targeted at climate change are not nothing but empty words because international firms have taken up greener manufacturing methods, as promised, and have committed themselves to carbon-neutral solutions. As consumers have become much more informed, less apathetic towards the environment compared to the past and prefer greener alternatives. Therefore, to cater to such consumers, international firms have committed themselves to greener manufacturing methods and products with smaller carbon footprint tags. For example, fast fashion brands like Zara and H&M have begun recycling used fabrics to manufacture their clothes on their clothing lines, as mentioned in their 2019 reports. H&M even provides discounts for those who donate their old clothing instead of throwing them away. Another international firm that encourages environmental sustainability is Scoop, a sustainable grocery store founded in Australia. It encourages customers to reduce their usage of plastic, and use glass bottles and cloth bags instead when purchasing fresh produce and home essentials. These examples evidently show that international efforts have been taken up by global firms, as promised, to tackle climate change. Therefore, it is largely unfair to contend that global efforts aimed at tackling climate change are nothing but empty words.

In conclusion, I am of the view that it is largely untrue environmental conservation efforts targeted at climate change are nothing but empty words as both governments and international firms have proven this wrong by taking tangible actions and following through with the conservational efforts they had promised. However, some nations are still too focused on improving and enhancing their economic standing that conservational efforts take a backseat, and they do not follow through with their vows. Ultimately, nations will have to undertake more efforts to minimise their carbon emissions, or else the situation will become assuredly more dire. I strongly believe that more environmental activists like Greta Thunberg should step forward and pressure larger stakeholders to step up their conservational efforts. We should thus protect and conserve the place that millions of species call home - Earth.

Comments:

Relevant points raised. Fluent use of language with some nice expressions. “Global efforts” was addressed, though the link could have been more clearly explained for some points. Range of examples can be broader. While you tried to link the idea of “empty words” by inserting phrases like “as promised”, this can be further improved by discussing some of the promises and pledges made by different actors and support with specific details.

‘Nothing but empty words.’ How far is this true of global efforts aimed at tackling climate change?

Lin Jing Yang 21S44

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released their report on the causes of climate change in August last year, and concluded that climate change was “unequivocally” caused by human activity. Moreover, the report states that the world is already headed to a 4.0°C rise in temperature, way above the 1.5°C set at the Paris Climate Conference. Thus, we question whether all our past efforts have been futile. Some argue that our past efforts were useless, because of the lack of results, as well as massive government inertia to climate action. However, others argue that there is still hope. Firstly, actions by communities around the world are increasing; and secondly, government action is also on the rise too; finally, we know that some nations are especially successful in certain climate action schemes. Thus, I argue that while the global outlook is mostly grim and gloomy as it seems that our efforts are simply useless, there is still hope, and more action is being taken to salvage what climatic health we have now.

Some argue that past efforts have been useless, having seen that the pledges governments and world leaders take were broken and unfulfilled time and time again. The Paris Climate Conference stipulated that global emissions must be lowered to limit global warming to a 1.5°C rise. However, we are on track to hit a 3.0°C or even 4.0°C temperature rise. In Europe and the United States, targets to reduce greenhouse gases are sadly not projected to be met. This is due to a multitude of other issues such as demolishing nuclear power plants in the wake of the Fukushima disaster, just to replace them with coal power plants, thus emitting and polluting even more than necessary. Fossil fuel companies around the world participate in rampant greenwashing, investing in ‘net zero’ sources such as biofuels or cheap carbon offsets. But these companies’ efforts instead contribute to other sources of destruction such as the hurt to agriculture by biofuels, and planting trees only to deforest them in a decade. It is thus so easy to see why so many around the world feel that this situation is so hopeless, that the world leaders and oil conglomerates running the global systems are building castles in the air when it came to climate action. Again and again, their promises to the people get broken, and people are disappointed that these leaders pledge so much yet do so little, or invest in the wrong things, resulting in greenhouse gases continuing to spew into our atmosphere, ruining global efforts targeting climate change.

These people also argue that all these actions are empty words because global leaders and governments are all so inactive in climate action. In fact, governments are even pulling out of climate deals and investing in projects that further endanger our climate. Take the BRICS nations, for example. Brazil has relaxed its curbs on deforestation and harvesting resources from the Amazon ever since President Jair Bolsonaro came to power, even encouraging it. Russia continues to invest in oil and gas extraction in the Black Sea and other oil fields. China has also signed a deal with Russia to develop the Arctic Maritime Trade Route, opportunistically accepting the melting of polar ice caps. Other nations also have not heeded the call to fight climate change. Malaysia has shunned activists’ calls and continued its deforestation of pristine tropical rainforests to make way for palm oil. Indonesia broke away from its deal with Norway for reforestation and conserving its rainforests. Thus, with all these

actions that arguably threaten to worsen the climate crisis, it is not difficult to see why people feel that the governments are doing nothing while speaking empty words that carry no impact, and that all hope for climate action seems lost.

However, while there is perhaps some truth in such gloomy thoughts, there is still hope, as action against climate change has been on the rise. Firstly, communities and organisations around the world have started to rally around and fight this war against climate change. Start-ups and non-profit organisations such as Wren and Ocean Blue Project have popped up to educate the masses on their own personal carbon footprint, persuading them to support carbon capture, conservation, and ocean cleanup efforts around the world. Massive global internet movements such as #TeamSeas and #TeamTrees aim to add to existing efforts to contribute to conservation and cleanup efforts around the world, to tackle the damage that we have done to Mother Earth. Other innovations in technology include cultured meat to tackle the emissions and pollution problems from livestock, new fashion materials using recycled plastic waste to tackle fast fashion such as Shein, and modular smartphones that can be easily repaired instead of replaced, to challenge the planned obsolescence model that current smartphone companies use. These actions by communities around the world, independent companies and scientists to tackle modern problems are definitely not empty words, setting the stage for climate action. These efforts, though small compared to what governments can muster, are still real, concrete actions being taken to tackle climate change, and hence are not empty words.

Secondly, the voices within the wider community, as mentioned above, have heralded this massive driving force that even governments cannot turn a blind eye to, and have started to listen to. Governments around the world are starting to heed the call for action against climate chaos. The Group of Seven nations, while making seemingly over-the-top pledges, have started to crack down on huge oil conglomerates, introducing massive taxes on these companies. Locally, Singapore has initiated its Green Plan 2030, and in 2019 our Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced an investment of \$100 billion towards climate action. Efforts like BlueSG and electric buses have popped up on Singapore's streets too. Even nations such as China, where climate action would theoretically go nowhere as the government has ultimate control, have seen 'mass incidents' relating to climate change and environmental pollution. The Chinese government has responded by pledging to peak its emissions by 2030 and achieve 'net zero' by the end of 2060. It has also started the ball rolling by stopping support for foreign coal power plants, while building up massive solar, wind and hydropower projects, leading to a drastic fall in the prices of solar panels and other green technologies around the world. These actions are not empty pledges, but concrete actions that we can see are taking effect around the world and back home in Singapore. Thus, 'nothing but empty words' does not seem so true of global efforts against climate change anymore.

Finally, some nations have actually put in place concrete systems that their nations rely on, and are successful in their efforts to combat environmental degradation. Scandinavian nations Sweden and Norway both have robust recycling systems that are so ubiquitous they are integrated into their people's lifestyles. These nations also boast the greenest power grids in the world, drawing around half of their energy from renewable sources. Germany has the title of 'global king of recycling', as it recycles and processes the most plastic in the world. These are examples of nations that have implemented concrete policies and are successful in doing so, becoming an intrinsic part of its citizens' lives. We can therefore see it is not so true anymore that global efforts to battle climate chaos are

nothing but empty words. Action has indeed been taken, and can even be a model for other nations to follow.

“Net-zero, net-zero, net-zero. Blah, blah, blah...” These infamous words by Greta Thunberg mocked world leaders for pledging so much, yet doing so little. While I can agree that the agreements at global conferences like COP26 have not been enough to stave off climate chaos and environmental degradation, concrete steps have still been taken. The world has awakened, and awareness about climate issues is higher than before. The massive, cooperative global effort to eliminate CFCs or chlorofluorocarbons from most of our markets and repair our ozone layer had proven to be a success. Let us hope that these baby steps, too, will lead to a human race that can soundly claim “we have survived the climate crisis”. Although these actions may have come a little late, it is never too late to fight - better late than never.

Comments:

Arguments reveal not only breadth of knowledge but also remarkable insight and nuance. They are well balanced, well-structured in order of impact, to create a persuasive essay.

‘Nothing but empty words.’ How far is this true of global efforts aimed at tackling climate change?

Mohit Parthiban 21S47

On 12 December 2015, 195 nations convened in Paris under the United Nations, coming to a unanimous agreement to make structural reforms to the world economy and promote global environmental health. It is true that at the current rates of environmentally unsustainable production undertaken by the world, devastating climate atrocities lie in our future. International cooperation to tackle climate change as agreed upon in the Paris conference signifies a significant step forward in the fight for global environmental health. However, how serious is everyone about their pledge to contribute to environmental conservation? Due to some failures of governments to keep their promises regarding conservation efforts, some may believe that global efforts to tackle climate change have merely been empty words. However, I stand contrary to this belief, as there have been significant efforts to tackle climate change by several stakeholders which prove we are on the right track to mitigate environmental harm.

Some people have come to the hasty conclusion that global promises to mitigate climate change are merely empty words. They may back their point by gesturing at the COP26 agreement, where developed and affluent nations promised US\$100 billion to less developed countries so they could make structural reforms to their economy and help tackle climate change. However, these wealthy nations such as America and Britain failed to keep their promises, attributable to their proclivity to pursue self-interests in economic growth over environmental conservation. Furthermore, several countries have failed to reduce their carbon emissions as promised, and governments continue to subsidise the extinction of humanity by allocating US\$1.8 trillion to fund environmentally unsustainable activities such as burning fossil fuels, water pollution from waste dumping and unsustainable road building which make up 8% of total global carbon emissions. Such non-binding agreements have led to the loss of hope that governments can be relied upon to stop climate change.

However, there is a need to dig deeper into the issue and realise that the nations’ inability to keep their promises made during COP26 were justified by the circumstances they faced then. Britain was faced with the issue of Brexit which brought about immense economic uncertainty, leading to the rapid depreciation of its currency and preventing it from being able to commit significant resources to mitigate climate change. Developing countries such as India and Colombia lacked the resources to invest in environmentally friendly production technologies and reduce carbon emissions, as these countries were still not able to provide jobs for their citizens to support their day-to-day spending. As such, global priorities generally swayed from environmental conservation due to other economic hardships that had to be resolved more immediately.

Despite the failure of COP26, there have been several promising efforts taken to mitigate climate change. In November 2021, electric car sales in Europe exceeded diesel car sales due to strong social advocacy for environmental care. Furthermore, Singapore has steadily increased its carbon tax over the years and made concrete plans to become carbon neutral by mid-21st century, proving to the international community that carbon neutrality is no longer an inconceivable feat. Such a pro-

environment mindset can also be witnessed in California's new building of solar panel lids, preventing the evaporation of water from their water bodies. These solar panels now provide a sixth of the state's total energy needs, reducing reliance on fossil fuel combustion and tackling global warming and climate change. Japan, despite already being one of the most environmentally friendly nations, has implemented new laws reducing air conditioning usage and promoting public transport usage throughout the whole country to further their efforts in tackling climate change. Countless such scenarios, where the pro-environmental attitude and mindset has been translated into action to better the environment, energises global efforts to tackle climate change. Therefore, it would be preposterous to assume that global efforts to tackle climate change have been nothing but empty words.

Furthermore, the rapid technological advancements that contribute to the fight against climate change, and the success by the world's greatest minds in tackling such issues, make global efforts to tackle this issue more noticeable, effective and efficient. For example, 1.3 trillion pounds of ice at the polar ice caps are lost every year. To solve this issue, scientists have come up with a special type of fine glass that can be sprinkled over the ice to reflect the radiation back to space, thereby successfully protecting the Arctic ecosystem. Recently, there has also been a push for thorium reactors that can produce large amounts of energy through nuclear chain reactions, without any harmful side products. Such appropriate and effective technological solutions bolster the pro-environmental movement. The significant periods of time, manpower and resources devoted to such research and development to craft such intricate solutions promotes the belief that global efforts to mitigate climate change are not just empty promises, but are extensive and promising.

To recap, the Paris Climate agreement serves as a significant step forward in our fight against climate change. Although the COP26 agreement did not bear fruit, it was initiated in the right spirit. Its shortcomings are justified by global circumstances, and this one incident is insufficient to prove that global efforts against climate change have been empty words. In fact, the current state of progress we have arrived at to tackle climate change was pronounced unimaginable just a few years back, as declared by the UN secretary of environmental conservation during a TEDx talk. As different stakeholders such as firms, governments and individuals persist in this fight against climate change, our once-inconceivable movement is transforming into an unstoppable one, and we are finally able to envisage a future global that is still fit to support life for centuries to come.

Comments:

Strong focus on "global efforts" shown, though it can be made more explicit. For example, when talking about electric cars in Europe, place emphasis in showing regional efforts and not just the trend for electric car sales in Europe. Fluent, good vocabulary range, personal voice is evident. Some minor slips in word choice.

‘Nothing but empty words’. How far is this true of global efforts aimed at tackling climate change?

Rachel Tan Yan Xin 21S62

Humankind is facing one of the most imminent threats to our existence today, and that is climate change. The impact of climate change is worsening every day, and urgent action is needed to slow or even stop it in its tracks entirely. Many have pledged global action against climate change, but often these proclamations are mere empty promises, with no real action taken. However, there have been actual efforts towards mitigating its impacts by various international stakeholders. It is thus my belief that global efforts towards climate change are not just empty words, but rather increasing concrete action undertaken in recent years.

Some say that global efforts aimed at tackling climate change are nothing but empty promises, and to some extent, this has been the case for many years. International actors such as governments and multinational corporations (MNCs) have often placed their interests first, and paid mere lip service towards the environmental cause. This creates the impression that they are actually doing something to help mitigate the impacts of global warming, creating a favourable brand image in hopes of garnering support from the masses. In the case of MNCs, they have operations in various parts of the world, and thus any action - or in this case, inaction - by these MNCs have a significant impact on the international climate. For example, Volkswagen, the second largest car manufacturer worldwide, has admitted to fitting its cars with defective engines in order to detect when an emissions test is being conducted, and to alter its performance as such. Otherwise, its normal performance is almost 40 times that of allowed emissions by international standards. This is especially significant as Volkswagen cars can be seen on highways everywhere, certainly causing unimaginable amounts of pollution. Another example is Coca-Cola, widely recognised as one of the leading plastic polluters globally. When faced with demands to be more environmentally friendly and sustainable, it has pledged to revamp its image to be a greener one, yet little to no action has been taken up till now. Thus, this shows how international corporations often pledge environmental action to create a favourable brand image, but do not actually adhere to these promises in the pursuit of self-interest.

This can be seen in various national governments as well. Governments often pledge environmental efforts and sign multiple climate change agreements, but then abandon these efforts in pursuit of economic growth. One very good example of this happening was at the recent COP26 Summit, where world leaders came together to renew and discuss action that had been undertaken since the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement. COP26 was a disappointment to many, however, as reluctance from many governments to commit fully to environmental action was clearly evident despite promises to do so. Leading up to the conference, almost thirty percent of countries had not declared their emissions goal for 2030, despite a global agreement to do so by the next climate conference. Even those who did were still grossly off their emissions goal for 2030, despite having less than a decade to improve. Even as countries pledge to become more environmentally conscious by coming up with numerous agreements and declarations, many are still reluctant to take up concrete action when push comes to shove, which can be seen from the rewording of a landmark fossil fuels agreement where the wording was changed from “phase out” to “phase down”, implying that

countries can still continue to utilise fossil fuels despite claiming not to do so. This way, governments can flaunt this agreement and loudly proclaim they are doing something for the environment, while in actual fact taking their own sweet time to ratchet up efforts - time that climate change may not necessarily accord us.

Lastly, global efforts are nothing but empty words due to the phenomenon of 'performative activism' that many climate activists are exhibiting today. Performative activism refers to when the calls for action to be taken, most frequently on online platforms and social media, are tokenistic in nature. They require little effort beyond following trends, and thus subsequently have little impact towards the environmental cause as well. This can be seen from celebrities reposting content onto their Instagrams with uncountable hashtags that bring little to no meaning for the cause. Admittedly, the rise of this phenomenon has raised more awareness on the issue of climate change, especially through the main medium of social media. However, greater awareness does not necessarily equate to greater action, which is desperately needed today. These calls to action are largely ineffective as people have been desensitised due to their proliferation, and those at the forefront of the movement do not make an effort to lead by example as well. Thus, efforts at tackling climate change are largely empty words due to the lack of substantial action taken.

However, in recent years, people have started to realise the severity of the climate problem; many have pledged to, and actually undertaken, actual efforts towards the cause. Numerous governments globally such as Singapore's have imposed stricter carbon taxes on their economies, discouraging emissions and encouraging cleaner methods of production in spite of the detrimental effect it has economically. Samsung, a major smartphone company, has promised to remove 500,000 tonnes of plastic fishing nets from oceans and incorporate them into their flagship products by 2030. Furthermore, climate activists have proven to be effective at pushing for real change in the past, despite criticisms of tokenistic actions. Ground-up initiatives originating from a scientist's claims that chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) were harmful towards the environment led to one of the most successful climate wins in history; the complete banning of CFCs in manufacturing sectors and replacing them with less-pollutive hydrofluorocarbons instead. Hence, this shows that global efforts aimed at tackling climate change have not completely been empty words, but can lead to concrete solutions instead. Furthermore, there has been an increased environmental awareness amongst the masses, and the prevalence of social media today has allowed for people to hold international stakeholders accountable for their actions. If allowed to gain enough traction, organised boycotts of brands may be undertaken as well, with consumers encouraged to switch to cleaner and greener alternatives.

In conclusion, despite most global efforts currently tackling climate change being tokenistic in nature, the increased sense of urgency of the crisis has led to the rise of more concrete actions taken towards tackling climate change. The impact of these actions remains to be seen, however, as despite actual efforts towards mitigating the impact of this crisis, it may be too little, too late. Thus, to avoid making this problem an inevitable one for our future generations, there must be an increased awareness and effort to hold these international stakeholders accountable for their actions, and push for concrete action to be taken fast - before it is too late.

Comments:

Good grasp of the demands of the question, and largely well supported by appropriate examples. Some assertions could have been less sweeping; after all, the question is 'how far,' so an examination of different scenarios/factors would deepen the discussion.

‘Crises bring out the worst in people.’ Do you agree?

Srinidhi 21S35

Our world has been met with multiple crises. From the most recent Covid-19 crisis to the environmental crisis that puts our very existence at threat, we are constantly in the face of crises. Crises take a toll on us; they are unprecedented events that bring damage to us and the harms crises can inflict on us have led to fear and panic. Amidst all this chaos, some succumb to their fight or flight instincts, doing everything in their power to ensure their survival, even when it hurts those around them. That being said, however, I disagree to a large extent that crises bring out the worst in people. Rather, they by and large remind us of the beauty of humanity as we witness acts of kindness, innovation and people standing up for what is right, bringing out the best in people in the face of crises as we come to realise just how powerful and capable we are.

Firstly, crises bring out the best in people as we see people come together to lend a helping hand and cooperate with one another so as to overcome a crisis together. Crises can be devastating. They bring about unprecedented issues, leaving people struggling to overcome them. This is worse for those already disadvantaged; be it financially or being on the receiving end of societal discrimination. During times of such pain and suffering, we see more people stepping up to offer help and aid that we may not normally witness. For example, the Covid-19 health crisis has left India devastated as it struggles to curb cases amidst the many thousands who are dying due to a lack of hospitals and vital resources. In such circumstances, privileged people such as Bollywood actor Mr Sonu Sood do their part to help people by using their wealth and influence to arrange for hospital beds and oxygen supply. In a more local context, there were also many Singaporeans who volunteered to supply masks and essential items to elderly during the early stages of the Covid-19 crisis. As such, it is apparent that the pain and harm that crises inflict on us push people to collaborate and help one another as they act selflessly in times of such desperate need, bringing out the best in people.

Secondly, crises bring out the best in people as we are forced to deal with the issue at hand in innovative ways, so as to overcome the challenges posed by the crises. When crises present us with major issues and changes we have never dealt with before, we find ways to move forward in order to survive. This brings out the best in people as we deal with adversities, resorting to innovation to move past them. Crises like Covid-19 and the environmental crises have resulted in major changes to our ways of living. Covid-19 has now required us to shift to online settings for work, and the environmental crisis has us scrambling to find alternatives to things such as fossil fuels that have become the very basis of development and prosperity in most countries. Although the situation is difficult, we are constantly finding ways to overcome such crises, and the perseverance and intellect we display in that pursuit is the best in humanity that comes to light. For example, when Covid-19 forced businesses to shut down as lockdowns were imposed, preventing people from going outdoors, businesses harnessed the power of technology and the internet to sustain their livelihoods. Hawker stall owners in Singapore resorted to online delivery platforms to continue with their sales and keep their business afloat amidst the pandemic. Moreover, in view of the environmental crisis, countries like Singapore are looking to replace fossil fuels with clean energy sources like solar energy and hydrogen. As such, people's willingness to keep innovating and finding ways to overcome crises bring out the best in us.

Thirdly, crises bring out the best in people as we see them stand up and fight for what is right. Crises such as human rights crises or political crises often hurt people as they plunge societies into chaos, as those in power undermine the rights and wants of civilians. Yet, in the face of such a crisis, we see an immense display of courage and strength. We witness people standing together in solidarity as they battle those in power to protect their rights and to protect what is right. For example, the recent crisis in Myanmar saw the military overthrowing Aung San Suu Kyi's democratic rule and forcefully seizing power over Myanmar, effectively reinstalling the military rule that the Burmese have fought against for a long time. Despite the military arresting and killing them, we see many people take to the streets in Myanmar, in protest of the military rule. They are willing to sacrifice their lives in pursuit of a democratic Myanmar. This courage they display in fighting for their rights and the unity they display in doing so is a stark reminder of the goodness and power humanity holds, yet again bringing out the best in people.

However, there are instances where crises bring about the worst in people. Crises threaten people's well-being and the stability of their lives. At times, it endangers their access to basic necessities and threatens to leave them with losses in terms of money, the lives of their loved ones, their jobs and so on. Undeniably, times of such chaos leave people with anger and despair, as they fail to cope with their lives being turned upside down. Thus, they begin to look for reasons or people to blame for their sufferings, channelling their anger and frustration at a group of people. This manifests as acts of cruelty unfairly inflicted upon some people. For example, the Covid-19 pandemic, first found in China, sparked racism against Chinese people across the globe. There were people blaming the Chinese and going as far as to hurt and assault them. The recent Delta variant, first found in India, has also spurred a similar response, with racist attacks against Indians. Such acts of cruelty and hatred, although irrational, are results of the fear and desperation that such crises bring about. While it is undeniable that we do witness such abhorrent behaviour, it is also key to recognise that such people are of the minority and that the majority do not behave in this way, calling out those who spread such hatred. For example, recent racist attacks against Indians in Singapore has led to many condemning such actions and standing up for Indians on social media. As such, while crises bring out the nasty side of people, it is safe to say that those are often the minority.

In conclusion, crises to a large extent, bring about the best in people as humanity joins hands to aid one another, innovate, and protect their rights so as to overcome crises together as a society. It is no surprise that, in time to come, we will continue to face crises of different forms and while we may not be able to predict or prepare for them, let us harness the good in humanity as we continue to bring out the best in us to overcome whatever we may have to deal with next.

Comments:

Interesting and well-organised discussion. You can afford to elaborate less and bring in more examples which reflect trends. For example, think of protests in Myanmar, Hong Kong, the US and what these protests stand for. For a more balanced discussion, are there other reasons for why crises bring out the worst in people?

‘Money cannot buy happiness.’ Comment.

Caleb Au Jin De 21S51

‘Money cannot buy happiness.’ People often tell this quote to each other, to inspire one to pursue their dreams or enter a field where the pay may not be as high as their current job. However, it is argued that if one is unable to afford their basic needs, it is hard for them to achieve happiness. Though this may be the case, some millionaires and even billionaires struggle to find happiness even with lots of money. Therefore, I believe that money cannot truly buy happiness.

Money can indeed buy happiness, especially for those who are unable to afford their basic needs. Those who have to work extremely hard just to make ends meet, or those who are in large amounts of debt: these are the people who would be much happier if they had more income or had their debt cleared. If given more money, these people would be able to explore new places, spend more time with their loved ones or do other intangible things that give them deeper fulfilment. This is why charities exist. Charities like Willing Hearts and Food from the Heart give residents who face financial difficulties something to eat. When these residents receive the food, it brings a smile onto their faces as they do not have to worry about being hungry for that day. The Make-a-Wish Foundation helps fulfil the dreams of children who are about to leave the world. The dreams of these children are usually more than what their parents can afford, like going to an amusement park. Thus, in this instance, money can truly buy happiness by making dreams come true. Therefore, for those who are in the lower income brackets, money can buy happiness by allowing them to experience new things or increase their standard of living.

However, it is often seen that even those who are well-to-do are not happy. If money can buy happiness and they are able to afford it, why are they not happy? Money can only go so far in providing happiness. A US research company did a survey on the level of happiness for each income group. It was found that after earning more than \$75,000 a year, the level of happiness no longer increases, and in some cases even decreases. This can be explained using Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where at the bottom of the pyramid are physical needs such as food, water and shelter. These are items which can be bought with money. However, at the top of the pyramid are emotional needs such as love and friendship. These are things that money cannot buy. Rich people, especially celebrities, are often not the happiest people as the stresses they face are extremely high. Some of them turn to drugs to get away from their troubles. The likes of Justin Bieber and Michael Jackson are some examples of rich people who took to drugs. Love which brings happiness can also not be bought. Recently, some of the richest people have had divorces, showing that even those with a lot of money still face relationship issues which reduce happiness. The Gates, Bezos and Musks are some of the rich who have also faced life's challenges. Thus, even with money, people will not be able to buy happiness as happiness comes from non-material things like love.

Though it can be said that those with large amounts of money may not feel very happy, their children may feel differently. These children can get what they want at any time. They do not have to worry about their financial status as they have their parents to lean on. Therefore, with an almost unlimited spending budget, these children can buy experiences, like travelling around the world, which

enable them to be happy. For example, Lance Stroll, son of Lawrence Stroll, can buy a seat in Formula One due to his billionaire father purchasing a team to allow his son to race, which is something he loves and derives happiness from. Another example is Peter Lim's daughter, who is now an influencer. She can travel anywhere she wants and eat anything at any cost. This allows her to experience things that most can only dream of. This results in these children from rich parents living a happy life with no financial worry. Thus, in this scenario, money can indeed buy happiness.

Happiness can come from one's job and so cannot be bought using money. This is often the case with teachers who are not paid extremely well, but are willing to put in a lot of effort to educate students. They do so as watching a child slowly improve and graduate is rewarding in itself, and also because they want to spread their knowledge to the generations after them. These jobs provide fulfilment and purpose to the person, supplying them with happiness. There are also countless stories of those who left a high paying job for one that allows them to be happier, especially in the financial sector where stresses are incredibly high. People starting up charities are all examples of this. Therefore, even with money, one is unable to feel and purchase this type of happiness.

Happiness can also be felt from spending time with loved ones. Eating a meal together may seem simple, but to a child whose parents are often working and only come home in the wee hours of the morning, seeing them for longer can make the child happy. During Chinese New Year, Hari Raya, Diwali or Christmas, seeing our relatives and catching up with them can provide joy to many - especially for elders, who may rarely see their children who are always busy at work, or their grandchildren who are studying. These are all instances where money truly cannot buy happiness, as the presence of a person is unique and unreplaceable even with large amounts of money. There are many who regret spending too much time on their jobs and neglecting spending time with their parents, who have a limited amount of time left. For the elderly, they will never come back when they are gone. Even the rich mourn, as cash cannot bring back those who have left us. Thus, money cannot buy happiness derived from spending time with others.

All in all, there are instances in which money can play a part in bringing joy to people. However, it must be said that money can only bring a finite amount of happiness. Money can only bring about materialistic wants that supply one with short-term happiness. Love, friendship, people and other non-material items are what provides people with a lifetime of happiness. It is the decisions we make that define how happy we are, not our net worth.

Comments:

A mature approach to answering a philosophical essay question, able to consider different groups of people or context and their perspectives or how they affect the situation. Lack of concrete examples, real-world situations and context.

**'More should be done to promote mental wellness
in modern society.' How far do you agree?**

Sherman Lee Meng Hong 21S46

Imagine living in the 19th century: a time when those who were not mentally well were shunned, despised and viewed as heretical maniacs; a time when mental institutes performed dehumanising and inhumane acts of torture to the mentally unwell, under the guise of 'medical treatment'; a time when those who were mentally ill preferred to suffer at the hands of their inner demons than to be ostracised and targeted by society. Looking back, most of us who did not live through these dark ages might think those scenes were pulled out of a dystopian, horror novel. Upon realising that these were very real happenings in the past, there is no doubt that one would be fascinated by the strides we have made in promoting mental wellness in modern societies. While I concede that we have indeed made unbelievable progress in this area, I believe that modern society - one that is progressive and inclusive - should do even more to promote mental wellness, so that its acceptance can become ubiquitous in society, and every stratum of society can enjoy the benefits that this acceptance can bring for them. As such, I agree to a large extent that more should be done to promote mental wellness in modern society.

Proponents of the belief that we have done enough to promote mental wellness will often cite the accomplishments of remarkable organisations and policies that have promoted mental wellness, to show that enough has been done. In many countries, many schools and universities, such as the University of Leeds, have begun very openly talking about the importance of mental wellness, and even providing avenues for students and faculty members to seek help whenever they need it. This example, one of many in the modern world, does have transformative impacts on many's perspectives towards mental wellness, as it reflects the eagerness and willingness of big, reputable institutes to promote mental wellness, which can lead to a domino effect on others' idea of the importance of mental wellness. Beyond the promotion of mental wellness by many institutes across the world, governments have also taken an increased interest in promoting mental wellness in societies. For example, in Singapore, the government has rolled out initiatives targeting the promotion and understanding of mental wellness. In schools, to ensure students understand this complex concept from a young age, there have been efforts to upskill many teachers to become teacher counsellors, and numerous collaborations with other organisations such as the Singapore's Association for Mental Health. All this aims to impart knowledge of the importance of mental wellness to students. These simple acts reflect a shift in governmental mindsets and views towards mental wellness, which can then help to influence and shape civilians' mindsets as well, since changes in mindsets are often easier passed top-down. Considering the great lengths that organisations and governments have gone to promote mental wellness in modern society, it might be tempting to agree that enough has been done.

Although I do concede that these changes have had an enormous impact on society's paradigm towards mental wellness, some of the initiatives are perfunctory and may not truly promote mental wellness as effectively as imagined. For example, despite the initiatives pushed out by the Singaporean government to promote mental wellness, many felt that the initiatives fell short due to

their limited scope and depth in their presentations towards students. For example, for compulsory civics lessons in schools, most of the content which promoted mental wellness - teaching people how to deal with it, and how to help others deal with it - focused mostly on stress and anxiety only. The lack of breadth in teaching about mental wellness may lead to people having a limited understanding of mental wellness as a whole, resulting in the objectives of these programmes not being met, despite them coming from a place with good intentions. Also, in China, the government banned private tuition across the country to promote mental wellness and reduce stress for young people. Seeing as academics is one of the greatest stressors for young people in China, banning it in conjunction with China wanting to promote mental wellness seemed like an insightful and assertive move to show that it will not compromise mental wellness for money, as private tuition was a multi-billion-dollar industry in China. However, further inspection into the matter would help us realise that private tuition was merely a symptom of the true problem - the overly competitive nature of Chinese parents. As such, while moves like these may seem impactful at first glance, one would realise that the move was extremely perfunctory upon further analysis. The root cause of the mental wellness problem had not been solved, and competitive Chinese parents will still be able to find other ways to ensure their children have a competitive edge over others, which still results in a lot of stress for these students. Thus, despite the initiatives put out by many, the ineffective and perfunctory manner of some of them compels us to do more to promote mental wellness in modern society.

For one, many believe that mental wellness promotion is just about raising awareness for it. However, we cannot just talk about it; we need to do even more in action to shift people's mindsets and bring about paradigm shifts if we truly want to promote it. For example, many governments in Scandinavian countries have put into place many effective policies that go beyond just superficially promoting mental wellness in their countries, but also physical, tangible means such as setting up many avenues for mental wellness support. This ensures citizens can get all the help that they need. The impact of these programmes can clearly be seen, as Scandinavians are statistically the happiest and most stress-free people in the world, with a very open and supportive culture towards mental wellness, in part due to the moves made by their governments. On the flip side, many Asian countries - like China, Singapore and South Korea - still have an unsaid stress-glorifying culture hidden in their societies' cultural fabric. Although each of their governments has put into place many programmes to promote mental wellness in their respective societies, statistics still show that citizens from these three countries are still some of the most stressed out in the world, and that mental wellness-related topics are still largely taboo in most parts of these countries. This is because while the governments have tried to promote mental wellness in their societies, a lot of their initiatives, such as examples in the previous paragraphs, merely address symptoms of the problems that are present in their societies. They are thus not always effective in tackling the root cause of the problems - the mindsets and paradigms that people hold towards mental wellness. As such, if societies really want to promote mental wellness, more needs to be done to bring about cultural shifts within societies to tackle the root cause of the problem - ingrained cultural paradigms.

Lastly, modern societies often overlook some strata of society when focusing on promoting mental wellness, leading to some being unable to enjoy the benefits brought about by the increased promotion of mental wellness. For example, many countries such as Singapore and South Korea target their mental wellness promotion campaigns at young people and students, marketing their programmes largely for them. However, in reality, there are many other groups in society that also

need that help. Especially with Covid-19, caregiver burnout is at an all-time high across the globe, and elderly loneliness is also at an all-time high in Singapore. Closer to home, 80% of Singaporean teachers were reported to have increased stress levels since the pandemic began. Despite these alarming statistics which should reflect the exigency in promoting mental wellness for different groups in society, many of them are still casually overlooked when initiatives are rolled out to promote mental wellness. I believe that while it is good that governments are placing much emphasis on promoting mental wellness in young people, more needs to be done to promote mental wellness in other groups of people as well - people like teachers, whom societies always paint to be stress-free and alright, may have their own problems too. Only when we put more effort into promoting mental wellness for every stratum of society, then will we be able to uplift whole societies together.

In conclusion, while transformative steps have been taken in the promotion of mental wellness in modern societies, I believe there is still more that we can and should do to promote it even more. I am sanguine that the trajectory modern societies are heading in, with respect to the promotion of mental wellness, is one that is filled with positive outlooks. The strides we have made clearly herald a utopian future where mental wellness will be a focus in everyone's lives. Until then, we must not be complacent, and keep working on the promotion of mental wellness in modern societies.

Comments:

Thoughtful response that's consistently argued, examining the issue on various levels and for different parties. Clearly evaluation was thoughtful (evaluation of efforts on current efforts to promote wellness), and aptly backed by a range of relevant examples from different countries. The essay also demonstrates a confident personal voice.

Is there still value in countries hosting major sporting events today?

Yip Jun Yung 21S44

Today, sports are a major avenue for worldwide entertainment. In many parts of the world, it has even transcended to be a part of culture, making it a valued aspect in the lives of many people. Despite its cultural value, whether countries should host major sporting events is largely dependent on its impacts. Wastage of resources and human rights violations are reasons why some may not. On the contrary, countries that do can use it for publicity and revenue, and to further indulge in sporting culture. Though these impacts vary with the state of a country, more countries should see value in being hosts.

Hosting major sporting events is no easy task. A mountain of resources is usually used in the construction of adequate arenas for these large-scale commercial events, where hosts must ensure these venues are satisfactory for global viewing. The building and perfection of these sites are often multi-year projects, consuming not just land, but also time. With so much effort used, it would be wasteful should these venues get destroyed or abandoned after hosting. But this is the predicament that some countries face, as built infrastructure for sporting events proves redundant for usage after. An example is when Brazil hosted the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics, constructing giant arenas and temporary living spaces for the event. Without any value after, these arenas were abandoned and left to rot, and the living spaces left uninhabited. If countries do not carefully consider before using resources, it can leave large amounts of land and material to deteriorate when they can be used to supply other needs instead. It may even cause environmental degradation. How resources are managed is thus a major component of consideration when countries decide to host, especially for one-time usage.

While on the topic of resources, another resource that hosts need to employ for these projects is labour. They are responsible for constructing and maintaining necessary venues for the event, but it is difficult to manage them all during large-scale projects, and rather easy to neglect them. The treatment of construction workers involved has been a hot topic for the construction phase of numerous events, where progress is prioritised over their wellbeing. An example is that of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, where mistreatment of construction workers has been regularly reported, making the public criticise the management. Priority for preparation has always been about speed and accuracy, creating perfect sites in minimal time, but the impacts it has on its workers go beyond monetary costs. Neglect and mistreatment of workers is something that cannot, and should not, be ignored. If construction occurs at the expense of these workers' rights, then perhaps countries that fail to manage this should not consider hosting at all.

Of course, for countries that are capable of adequately managing preparation, hosting is a viable option. The major benefits to be reaped are the publicity and revenue that is generated from these hosting sporting events. These events are large commercial events that attract worldwide viewership and sponsorships. They are platforms for the world's best athletes to showcase their craft to all, and nowhere is it better for sponsors to put their money than on the stage that fits all that sporting talent. Thus, these events are a source of major revenue. Given that the world is watching,

hosts can also use these stages to showcase their national culture, gaining worldwide publicity. For example, South Africa was initially a controversial choice for hosting the 2010 World Cup. However, through proper management, the revenue earned gave the South African economy a major boost, and showed the whole world their prevalent football culture. Another example is the 2008 Beijing Olympics, where China held an extravagant opening ceremony which showcased their culture, putting on a mesmerising show for the whole world to learn about their rich history. For any country that yearns for these benefits, the publicity and revenue from being hosts should be attractive to them, but only if they can bear the costs.

And for certain countries, another reason for hosting is the cultural impact. For those that indulge in sporting culture, being hosts can improve that. In many sports, there exists a dominant effect called 'home and away', which showcases the power of domestic support. Being the hosts often invigorates the people to cheer louder and grow the sporting culture of their country. This is because it gives people an opportunity to support their country from the arena stands, creating a sort of unity that is difficult to impose. It is how the people become tighter knit, and how a country's sporting culture grows richer. For example, there is a strong football culture in Europe. All countries in Europe want the chance to host the Euro tournament as it brings the people together and helps them immerse in the football culture. It is evidence of an underlying cultural impact as a result of hosting major sporting events; one that all sporting nations should be happy to have.

As goes for all decisions, one must weigh the costs and benefits. In this case, if a country can control the costs, they can consider the benefits. Hosting major sporting events is a daunting task that some may be able to handle, and others should not try to. If mismanaged, there are consequences as mentioned. But if countries do it well, they will understand that there is always value in being the hosts.

Comments:

Generally well-written except the point for ill-treated workers, where the link is not so clear.

Is there still value in countries hosting major sporting events today?

Nang Kal San Hom 21S54

The buzz of a crowd, cheers echoing around you, and an undeniable excitement in the air around you. Whether you are one with the crowd, or watching from behind a television screen from miles or oceans away, or even one of the very athletes that the whole world has their eyes on, there is no doubt that major sporting events still give one that giddy thrill wherever one is watching from. However, to have such events held right in your own country is a privilege many countries gripe about every year. This is especially so in this day and age, where globalisation is synonymous with our society; countries are now even more determined to make their mark. With the popularity and global coverage that major sporting events carry, I believe there is no doubt that there is still value, both tangible and intangible, in countries hosting major sporting events today.

A common argument that is made against the value of countries hosting major sporting events is that the extravagant sums of money used to construct facilities and make arrangements for athletes may go to waste. This is primarily a concern for developing countries who are likely to already be facing budget strains. When one hosts a major sporting event, there is an expectation that every aspect of it will be of high quality. This is only heightened by the effects of globalisation, where countries are always compared. There is now an added pressure to make the facilities for major sporting events as grand as possible. However, the major problem lies in the aftereffects of these decisions. A famous example would be the now abandoned Olympics facilities in Brazil that were once buzzing with life during the 2016 Olympics, but afterwards became empty shells that only stood tall from the outside. Countries that are unable to make future use of all the resources channelled into these facilities are essentially only wasting precious resources. However, while it is possible for resources to be 'wasted' in this manner, it is ultimately dependent on how thorough the planning of use of such facilities is for respective countries. For example, Japan had already made plans for their Olympic Village, which served as the residence of Olympics athletes in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, to be converted into a residential area that includes housing for the elderly. Thus, whether the use of resources for major sporting events lose their lifeline or are used as stepping stones for further developments after the games is highly dependent on the country, and not on the actual hosting of such events.

A technical but undeniably valuable reason for countries to look to host major sporting events is the economic revenue that it generates. Major sporting events like the Olympics and the World Cup are some of the most watched events in the world. By hosting such events, countries can generate revenue through television packages that broadcast the games online, through merchandise sales of the cute mascot that almost every major sporting event has, and - most significantly - through revenue from tourism as flocks of people fly from all over the world to witness a rare, sometimes even once-in-a-lifetime, experience in the flesh. The popularity of such events with tourists is clear to see, with Brazil even needing to declare off-days for work during the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics as roads were getting too clogged with tourists travelling to various venues for the games. Thus, the monetary value of hosting major sporting events in this globalised world, where tourism and travelling are built into most of our lives, has many countries bidding for their turns as hosts.

Hosting a major sporting event in one's country also means that one's citizens are more likely to tune in to support their country and the games. Major sporting events generate a level of traffic both online and in the real world, that is difficult to avoid when one is living in the host country. With many major sporting events being competition between countries, patriotism and a sense of pride for one's country is bound to emerge when watching such events. This effect is most seen in host countries, where citizens and athletes alike chase after that glorious feeling of winning on home ground. It could even be said that the increased levels of support that a host country has due to the ever-present excitement in the air at home can motivate and influence athletes to do better. This scenario of countries doing particularly well in major sporting events held at home has been documented multiple times, examples being England's only World Cup victory coming when they were host country in 1966, and how Japan took home 27 gold medals - one of the highest out of all other countries - during the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. Today, the fact that 'home support' is a phenomenon that exists and pushes home athletes to excel at the highest level, is proof of the way major sporting events hosted at home can help a country instil that sense of pride and dedication to one's country - critical in a time where globalisation may make us lose sight of this love for our country.

The value of major sporting events in one's country is most prevalent in how major sporting events are not just a stage for athletes, but also a stage for host countries to spread their own unique culture and broadcast it while the whole world is watching. Major sporting events do not merely consist of the games. There is also the opening ceremony, the closing ceremony, online promotions, merchandise and more. All of these are platforms and opportunities for host countries to add their own unique touch and spin on the event, on their very own stage. There have been many instances of countries doing so, such as in how South Korea had one of their most popular K-pop groups, EXO, perform during the closing ceremony of the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, and how the Google Doodle for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics was an anime-inspired role-playing game that became so popular, people even did speed runs of it. In a world where globalisation has led us to almost always be interacting with various countries, major sporting events give countries the opportunity to let the world know of their unique characteristics, and stand out from the sea of countries. Being hosts gives a country the chance to showcase themselves in aspects apart from the games.

Major sporting events may hold some risks for host countries in terms of the usage of resources, but if a country is able to plan well for the future use of such resources, the benefits to be gained from economic revenue, home support and the spreading of one's culture is undeniably a gold medal win for the country.

Comments:

Well written with good insights and analysis.

**‘Collaboration, not competition, is the key to
tackling the world’s problems.’ Discuss.**

Sidney Tan Wei Zhao 20S37

Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty stipulates that an armed attack on one member nation is considered an attack on all member nations. The September 11 attacks on the United States (US) proved the value of this article, as those part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation readied themselves to counter terrorism, with the aim of maintaining peace and stability. Such international organisations are a testament to the betterment of the world that collaboration has the capacity to achieve. Issues of poverty and climate change, that nations operating in silos lack the capacity to even broach, become far less formidable once surrounded by allies. Yet, international collaboration is inherently flawed as it is dependent on the alignment of ever-changing national interests in order to succeed. However, if one were to consider the alternative - that is, competition - it is highly evident that countries alone will fail to tackle the world’s problems at large. As such, collaboration, not competition, certainly is the key to tackling the world’s problems despite its flaws.

It is not uncommon to hear one lament the inefficient nature of collaboration, especially at an international level, with regards to tackling issues that afflict our world. Collaboration, as a concept, requires most if not all parties to agree in order for tangible actions to be made. With nations having frequently conflicting interests, this poses a significant challenge to attaining a consensus, thereby leading to gridlocks where no final decisions are made. The rationale behind this can be linked back to John Locke’s notion of the social contract and the responsibility of the state. Fundamentally, in a democratically elected government, citizens give up certain liberties and adhere to the rule of law in exchange for the state’s wise stewardship of the country. As such, nations have the responsibility to maximise the welfare of their citizens, and that forms the overarching interests of nations. When a problem arises in the world, nations look to their own interests in order to ascertain how they can gain from cooperation. Conflicting interests will only lead to inefficacy as nations struggle to come to a consensus. Consider the case of Myanmar where the Tatmadaw, the nation’s military, seized control of the government with claims that Aung San Suu Kyi’s party falsified electoral votes. Reports of human rights abuses, along with debilitating conditions under the resultant stratocracy, have drawn international attention, and the general agreement that something must be done. Yet, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations is unable to come to a consensus on what tangible actions must be taken to ensure peace and stability within Myanmar. The United Nations (UN) has also taken no tangible, meaningful action against this, thereby proving the fundamental flaw regarding collaboration. When this concept of conflicting interests is applied to other problems around the world, one can certainly discern that collaboration is lacking in terms of efficiency and efficacy.

Although one can certainly say that collaboration has its flaws, one must not neglect the fact that collaboration enables the amassing and pooling of resources to achieve greater positive outcomes that competition alone cannot achieve. Competition can lead to countries being at constant odds with each other and hence a worsening of the economy. Consider the case of the United States and China engaged in a trade war, whereby both countries placed retaliative, tit-for-tat tariffs on each other’s products. In a bid to surpass each other and establish themselves as global hegemony, the

intense competition has led to a rampant rise in income inequality, thereby exacerbating the problem of poverty. This is a testament to the failure of competition to tackle one of the most debilitating vices of our decade — poverty. In contrast, however, collaboration allows for resources - especially those financial in nature - to be shared between nations, thereby generating a much higher financial budget to adequately tackle global challenges. The UN High Commission for Refugees has improved the lives of refugees around the world, thereby addressing poverty brought about by war. Finances, when used as a collective for the greater welfare of the world rather than individual nations, bring about radical changes in the global standard of living. As such, the value of collaboration over competition is highly evident.

Collaboration holds the key to tackling the world's problems as only through such collective efforts can the problems that afflict our world be eradicated completely. Granted, competition enables firms to further research and development in order to pioneer new discoveries that better our world at large. One can draw reference to the Covid-19 vaccine race where national powerhouses like China, Russia and the US competed to invent the vaccine first. This led to a rapid increase in the pace of vaccine development, as the US began Operation Warp Speed, which facilitated rapid vaccine development. With the quick arrival of the Sinovac and Sputnik V vaccines - along with others - in record time one would normally not expect vaccines to be developed, the value of competition is apparent. The incentive of being champion on the world stage galvanised countries and spurred them on. Yet, it would be naive for one to posit that this is without collaboration. The Pfizer-BioNtech vaccine is the result of collaboration between an American firm and a German firm with aligned national interests. When allies collaborate and work towards a common goal, they can pool resources and further their cause. More importantly, the Covid-19 virus can only be completely wiped out if all countries tackle it together. The threat of a resurgence due to mutations is real and must be addressed. This was evident when United States President Joe Biden unveiled his plan to send 100 million doses of Pfizer-BioNtech vaccines worldwide, beyond merely his nation. However, the importance of collaboration in completely eliminating global problems does not apply solely to the Covid-19 crisis that has affected us on a global scale. Only through forming alliances that tackle global events like the climate crisis can one hope for global temperatures to be reduced. Countries such as Bhutan that aim to lower their carbon emissions independently are nothing more than a drop of water in a massive bucket that must be filled up. Global cooperation is necessary to tackle these challenges which competition greatly falls short on solving. The Paris Climate Agreement is a prime example of countries agreeing to lower their carbon emissions together, thereby limiting the overall rise in temperatures. This has revolutionary benefits, opening up the possibility of eventually solving the environmental crisis that threatens our very existence.

It is hence reasonable to conclude that collaboration is certainly the key to tackling the world's problems. In spite of the inefficiency brought about by the need for a supermajority or consensus, only through collaboration will countries have the capacity to tackle world problems and ensure that they are completely uprooted. Given the crises around the world and the ever-increasing scale of war and insurgencies, one may feel pessimistic about the outlook of our world. Yet, I hold a glimmer of hope for collaboration to, perhaps one day, eradicate the problems afflicting our world.

Comments:

The arguments raised are relevant and thoroughly argued, though this isn't always consistent. Examples are detailed and comprehensive. Language use is fluent and varied.

To what extent is risk-taking desirable?

Soh Sze Kai 21S43

Our decision-making process is put to the test every day. By making choices, we are often willing to sacrifice the utility gained from one activity in order to pursue and derive potentially greater benefits from another activity. There is no doubt that every decision we make is associated with an element of risk, albeit to varying extents. Often, we are more concerned with the costs we could potentially incur due to the risk the opportunity presents rather than the benefits of a successful outcome, which tends to become more enticing as it is risky. Therefore, is the act of risk-taking appropriate and does it produce a more ideal outcome than otherwise stated? Risk-taking should be desirable to a larger extent, due to the progress that can be achieved. However, risk-taking also comes with its own set of demerits, like the social stigma that arises from it.

Detractors of the opinion that risk-taking is desirable argue that the social stigma that could arise from taking risks far outweighs the benefits of the act. The quality of present-day life is significantly better compared to the past. Being that privileged, it is no wonder that our current generation has been deemed a 'strawberry generation' due to our fragility and sensitivity. Our actions only reinforce these views. Growing up in an era characterised by a technological boom, this electronic generation chooses to prioritise political correctness and subjectivity over civil discourse. As such, our freedom of speech is impeded by self-righteous individuals in pursuit of neutrality and inclusivity. One example would be the University of Washington banning the use of 'problematic' words like 'lame'. As a result, it is now more common than ever for the current generation to take up pseudo-moralistic stances solely for gestural purposes while discussing sensitive topics. This is demonstrated through boycotts like 'cancel culture', often criticised for its overly harsh treatment. One example would be the 'cancelling' of people for not wanting to defund the police in the US, in the wake of Black Lives Matter protests. Risks like these that assert bold claims inevitably expose oneself to numerous other individuals that have strong sentiments against this view or action. This would result in one having to face strong opposition in the pursuit of success, and this opposition has only gotten stronger due to increasing social media presence and boycott culture. Hence, one may find this too overwhelming to comprehend, and deem it undesirable as it is - simply put - not worth it.

However, this claim reflects an astounding naivete. While it is true that subjectivity often helps to prevent discrimination against group identities and opposition against bigoted views, it is insufficient to justify the condemnation of taking risks in order to fit in with societal norms. This is because the act of taking risks is often associated with the pursuit of truth and justice. Being able to take risks would indicate some form of learning and constructive feedback that can be derived, which helps one to understand and self-actualise, which is definitely desirable. Not only does being confined to a certain set of socially accepted rules and terms restrict one's right to freedom of speech, which many consider as a fundamental human right, it also prevents self-discovery and development of the world. An analogous example would be of Martin Luther King Jr, who consistently spoke out against racism and segregation of black people, as ordered by white supremacists in the 1900s. Racism and slavery were still considered to be normal then. It is shocking to see how inhumane acts of cruelty like these were regarded as society's norm in the past. Hence, the restriction of present-day cultures

should not hinder one's choice to take risks, as it serves as a platform to justice and truthfulness, which is objectively beneficial and hence desirable.

Risk-taking is desirable as it often leads to true progress. The advancement of science and technology is riddled with risk-taking. Scientific breakthroughs often require major risk taking in order to be successful. However, the result of taking this risk almost always brings about greater benefit than cost. One example would be the development of genetically modified (GM) crops. By changing the genetic data of certain crop types, GM crops have proven to boost production and profits, lifting farmers out of poverty and preventing famine in under-developed countries. One study in 2014 shows that GM crops increase yield by 22% and boost profits by 70%. With that much of a breakthrough, it is no surprise that it comes with its own set of risks. GM crops could potentially lead to destruction of crops in the long run, and the potential health hazard of these crops are undetermined. Naturalists also argue that crops should not be modified, and hence GM crops face a lot of backlash due to its ethical controversy. However, many of the fears are purely based on speculation and irrational fear, as there has not been any up-to-date scientific discovery that justifies the health hazard of these crops. These irrational feelings divert attention away from the true purpose of scientific breakthroughs like GM crops, which often help to improve the standard of living and pursue progress in our world. Risk-taking is not only paramount in pushing the boundaries of technological advancements, but also a crucial barrier that must be overcome in order to ensure progress in our society, making it desirable.

Finally, risk-taking is desirable as it helps us to determine our boundaries. Risk-taking involves a lot of moral reasoning. Controversial acts have occurred throughout history which have continuously demonstrated human's flawed moral reasoning. However, it is through these examples that not only are we able to better differentiate black from white, but we are also able to determine how we pursue success in our world. One example is the awarding of the Nobel Prize to Enrico Fermi in 1938 for his technological development of nuclear fission technology. This eventually led to the development of a nuclear bomb and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as ordered by United States President Harry Truman in 1945. This act of bombing innocent civilians, is one which many consider to be categorically wrong. On the contrary, consequentialists argue that the bomb may have prevented many more lives to be lost, and hence the outcome justifies the act. This example demonstrates how implications of risk taking bring about large-scale discussions on the act itself, which brings about changes to the way we approach events. As a result of this, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation alliance was formed, which promotes peace and banning the use of nuclear technology, preventing atrocities like that from reoccurring. Hence, risks help us understand our boundaries and develop our world to become a better place, making it desirable.

In conclusion, risk-taking is ultimately a demonstration of one's judgement and moral code. It is often a prerequisite of the pursuit of progress. However, our very social fabric has been stained by the increasingly hypermoralistic trait of people nowadays, wherein sanctimonious individuals influence debate on important topics in order to enforce political correctness, which diminishes meaning and discovery through debate and discourse. This is inimical to rational decision-making associated with risk. While it can be conceded that certain disproportionately unfavourable risks should remain untaken, risk-taking should still be collectively regarded as desirable as it is a mere obstacle to be crossed, in order to resume our chase for progress.

Comments:

Fluent, mature piece with several thoughtful observations. Keep it up.

‘With the rise of the Internet, books have lost their value.’ What do you think?

Nur Aliya Binte Mohamed Wari 20A11

The ubiquity of the Internet in today’s modern world has certainly caused a shift in how we interact with media – especially books. Information is now so easily accessible at our fingertips, and as such, some may argue that non-fiction books - be it long-form memoirs, recipes books or informative texts - have become far less important. With media platforms like YouTube, Netflix, Hulu and many more, some may argue that books like novels, short story collections and plays serving as a form of entertainment have become obsolete. However, in spite of the Internet’s meteoric rise, books still play a significant role in providing joy and as a tool for learning. Therefore, books have not lost their value today.

It can be argued that books have lost their value as a source of knowledge as the Internet has enabled information to be accessed immediately. The rise of search engines like Google, Bing and DuckDuckGo have allowed for such easy access. In search for data, the definition of a word, or the explanation of a theory, users can simply type their query and find millions of search results returned to them almost instantly, all pertaining to the question asked. This is in comparison to the past, where one might have needed to peruse through a thick dictionary to just to find the meaning of a single word, or where one would have to travel to the nearest library to search for journals with the pertinent scholarship necessary for one’s research. This means that books have increasingly become a more inconvenient means of gaining knowledge. Furthermore, search engines often tailor to users’ needs through algorithms, meaning that one can reach preferred results even faster than ever before. Books necessarily pale in comparison, lacking a search function that understands what one truly desires. Even in the case of online books where there exists a ‘Ctrl+F’ search, this only allows users to find specific keywords, which would mean that there is no guarantee to find the needed information, rendering it more difficult and inaccessible. Thus, books have become less significant as a source of knowledge in the Internet age.

It can also be argued that the Internet has drastically shortened our attention spans, causing books to be less cherished as a form of entertainment over time. With the world available to us at our fingertips, instant gratification has become a substitute for the traditional ways one relaxes and amuses oneself. Instead of curling up by the fireplace with a book and a cup of hot chocolate by our side, it is now putting on the first K-drama that catches one’s eye on Netflix while mindlessly eating popcorn. Instead of retreating from one’s daily toils to enjoy a book beneath the blankets, it is playing a gruesome session of ‘Call of Duty: Modern Warfare’ with strangers, eyes already strained from long hours of school or work peeled to the screen. Books necessarily call for their readers to slow down, take a deep breath and tune out the noise, whereas the Internet demands every second of a user’s attention. With the bombardment of users with constant noise, human brains increasingly become more conditioned, and hence wired to prefer instant gratification. Books inherently cannot provide their readers the quick release of dopamine received by Internet users at the same pace. Given this, books have decreased in importance as a source of entertainment due to the rise of the Internet.

However, books are still incredibly valuable as a means of seeking solace from one's troubles. It is because the Internet has greatly impacted our attention spans and our minds that we need books to cut through the noise. Turning away from the static of online platforms, constantly buzzing with updates about someone's curated and 'perfect' life that one may fall short of; with notifications about earthquakes in Haiti, bombings in Lebanon, and hurricanes in the United States; with consistent messages, calls and emails flooding in about work, life and every problem one must solve, books silence all that – even if for a few minutes. Online, distraction is bound to grab one's attention. For instance, it is easy to click from one article to the next one hyperlinked inside, regardless of its relevance to one's reading interests. Books, however, ensure that distractions are hidden from the reader. Instead, one can sink into the escape of a world of fantasy in books like 'Throne of Glass' by Sarah J. Maas, or into an escapade of adventure and romance in 'Looking for Alaska' by John Green. Digital books do allow this to occur too, as digital platforms, aware of their audience, have understood the importance of the safe space carved out for reading. Silent mode while listening to an audiobook on Audible or Libby should remove any notifications streaming in. Apps like Kindle have reading modes that prevent outside disruptions to the reading experience. Hence, books still have a lot of value in providing readers with a means to rest, and avoid the ills brought upon by the Internet.

Books are also still very important as a tool for learning. It is indeed true that the Internet makes certain functions like browsing the dictionary obsolete, given that searching for the word online is far easier than flipping through an enormous book for minutes on end. However, this does not mean that books are entirely useless for learning new things. A unique feature of books is that they necessitate their readers slowing down, pausing their incessant rush to gather information to instead, take it all in carefully. This is a shift away from online writers' tendencies to include an excessive amount of buzzwords atop buzzwords to gain a higher search result position on search engines. Books do not rely on such mechanisms. Rather, they use whatever words, in however many words necessary to convey authorial intent. Without competing for airtime, the writer's vision comes through more clearly. One example is recipe books. One could choose to easily search for recipes online, skip past any prologue and simply make the food in as short a time as possible. One could potentially choose to watch a YouTube video for the recipe, in which the creator must conform to the YouTube algorithm like ensuring the video length is not too long to ensure it is recommended on user's homepages, hence short-changing the amount of information they may include in the recipe. To maximise one's learning experience, one could instead choose to buy a recipe book, be it from Gordon Ramsey or Jamie Oliver, and through it learn about the cooking techniques they have painstakingly mastered as long-time chefs. They then better understand why certain ingredients work the way they do, and harmonise the way they do. As such, books better promote critical thinking than the Internet, as the latter enables one to grow more independent through the process of learning the recipes within the books, while the former only serves to leave one reliant on quick online recipes, without true knowledge of cooking. Furthermore, books are more easily annotated. Expert Ryan Holiday suggests that books provide the necessary space for notes to be created, enhancing the learning experience to be one that is more interactive, allowing for better recall of the facts as well as active engagement with the text. Articles and videos are designed for readers to consume as much as possible in as little a time as possible, as revenue is earned primarily through website hits, rather than amount of time spent viewing. In comparison, books only require a one-time purchase and thus do not seek that similar quick consumption. One should read 'The Art of War' by Sun Tzu mindfully, writing notes in the margins when something of interest catches one's attention. One should choose to actively glean insights from

Michelle Obama's memoir, remembering the struggles of a black mother and her tenacity in facing everyday challenges and applying it to one's life, rather than merely reading a quick summary of her life on Wikipedia. Hence, books provide great value in learning, and have not lost their shine even in the age of the Internet.

In conclusion, the rise of the Internet has indeed presaged a fall in the consumption of books. While this grim reality is true, it does not take away from the intrinsic value that books have. In fact, it is because of the Internet that books have become a bastion one can seek to escape from the cacophony that the Internet brings. As such, books have not at all lost their value, against all odds.

Comments:

Thoughtful response that is consistently argued – second supporting argument can be better, as it is not particularly persuasive. The essay's structure is clear, possessing breadth of sentence structure and vocabulary. Response is secure and communicated with conviction.

Do physical stores still have a future?

Koh Chan Ian 21S46

The Internet is a virtual space where people of all ages can visit in order to seek entertainment, information or simply to connect with others all over the globe. With the advent of the 21st century, more and more people have gained access to this 'World Wide Web', and the rapid increase in its popularity has definitely impacted how people interact with one another and how different systems function. One of the biggest changes is in how people purchase their clothes, food or other goods. Without a doubt, many companies and brands have moved their stores onto the Internet, some even going completely online. This begs the question: will physical stores still have a future? In my opinion, physical stores, although decreasing in popularity, will still have an ever-important role in society due to the fact that they allow for people to gather and connect with one another, and allow people to feel or sample the product first-hand, as well as provide a unique atmosphere which is unobtainable online.

Firstly, proponents of the counter argument that stores should move online, and that physical stores have no future may state reasons such as ease and convenience of such stores. These online stores are just a few clicks away and can be accessed any way and everywhere, be it on one's smartphone or tablet, so long as there is a stable internet connection. Physical stores, on the other hand, may require one to travel a great distance, or even overseas. An example would be the popular fashion store END, situated in Britain. While their physical store is only accessible to those in the UK, they have a mobile app which allows people like me, who live thousands of miles away, to access their catalogue. Therefore, due to this ease and accessibility, the benefits online stores have over physical stores may lead some to conclude that physical stores have no place in society moving forward.

Another reason why some may argue that physical stores might have no future is because running a physical store is much harder work than an online one. For example, Shopify, a service in the form of a mobile application, allows people to easily set up an online store on popular e-commerce platforms such as Shopee and Lazada by providing and implementing certain features. Furthermore, apps like Carousell have features such as automatic discounts if the product is not selling at the targeted quantities, and tons of e-vouchers which promote sales. In addition, having a physical store requires some of the profit to be set aside to pay the rent. Such disadvantages of physical stores make owning an online store all the more lucrative and rewarding. These features of online stores definitely improve the quality of life of the seller, which in turn increases the profits that they get.

Taking into consideration the numerous benefits of online stores compared to physical stores, it is profitable to switch over to online stores instead of physical stores. However, this does not mean that physical stores are going to die out, for they still provide countless benefits to the shopping experience of customers. One such benefit to physical stores is that they can provide a certain ambience and atmosphere, which can click with and intrigue customers, as well as improve their shopping experience. For example, the 'in thing' right now is thrifting, with many vintage stores popping up across the world selling used clothing at cheap prices. Some of these vintage stores deliberately decorate their stores with old analogue cameras, books, wooden furnishings and many

other items from the past. This gives the customer a nostalgic feeling, almost as if they have travelled back in time. This will not only attract new customers, but also give a reason for regulars to come back. Therefore, the atmosphere that a physical store can bring to a customer's shopping experience is one that cannot be achieved with an online store, and will be a reason why physical stores will still be around in the future.

Another reason why physical stores will still have a place in the future is that a physical store itself is a location, which means that it allows for people to come together, network and connect. Online shopping is a very individualistic process; it just consists of oneself and their screen. Physical stores, on the other hand, can provide an aspect of life that is of paramount importance: human interaction. For example, a YouTuber who goes by icykof, or Unknown Vlogs, has videos of him exploring different boutique stores around Europe, showcasing each store's uniqueness as well as the intricacies of each store that makes them unique. In many of his videos, he interacts with customers or shows them interacting with one another, talking about different clothing pieces or discussing whether to purchase a designer chair, or even just making acquaintances and interacting with one another. Another example would be the Foot Locker store in Orchard Gateway. This store in particular has a basketball court on the basement floor, which allows customers to try out the basketball shoes to help them with their choice, or to just play with one another. Other boutique music stores, especially in Europe, invite fellow creatives to showcase their talent, be it through DJ sets or the conducting of workshops in the stores. Even bigger designer brands respect this aspect of physical stores. KITH, a streetwear store, has their own cafés and ice cream stores within their main stores, giving the shoppers a place to chill and hang out. Therefore, physical stores provide a location for people to interact with one another and connect, which online stores cannot achieve.

Last but not least, physical stores allow one to test the product first hand and make a better decision when purchasing. How many times have customers purchased a product online, only to have it look nothing like what is seen in the picture on the website? Yes, although there are stores with return policies or reviews to help secure one's decision-making, nothing beats trying on the clothes for oneself, or taste-testing the packet of food one is buying; and this can only be done in physical stores. Many clothing stores, such as Uniqlo, have fitting rooms which allow customers to try on the clothes before spending money to buy them. With online stores, the most one can do is trust the standard sizing chart and pray that all goes well. Furthermore, the staff working there can also help with any questions one may face. Therefore, physical stores allow one to make better decisions when purchasing goods, by allowing the customer to see and test them first hand.

In conclusion, physical stores certainly do have a future, despite the rise in popularity of online stores. This is because physical stores allow one to have an immersive and unique shopping experience, have that personal human connection, and last but not least, make a better judgement when purchasing. However, in my opinion, having both physical and online presence is the way to go as it allows customers to get the best of both worlds. They get the benefits of physical stores as well as the global outreach, ease and convenience of online stores. At the end of the day, stores need to be adaptable and change according to the trends and the needs of the customers.

Comments:

Relevant arguments raised and a broad range of ideas explored. While you did attempt to relate your points to current trends, this needed to be more consistently done and explained in order to engage with “still”. Valid examples discussed; be mindful of your informal tone, whether in expressions or the use of “you” like you’re speaking to the reader.

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