2021

Kaleidoscope

An iGlobe Production

Editor's Foreword

Kaleidoscope is a compilation of VJ's best - top-tier essays written by students under rigorous exam conditions and compiled by a dedicated editorial team, aiming to assist you as much as possible in recapping the events of the previous year.

It is my wish that you see Kaleidoscope for more than what it seems at face value. More than a compilation of model essays, it is a collection of students' perspectives and personal voices, supplemented by concrete elaboration of their stances to anchor their arguments. Similar to the cherry blossoms incorporated into this year's design which represent rejuvenation and new beginnings, I hope that these essays remind you that there is always a point to start from and motivate you to take that first step, reminding you of the beauty it can potentially lead to - that spring is always around the corner, no matter how harsh the current winter might be.

I am aware that doing well for General Paper may seem like a puzzle at points, which is why apart from regular practices, I encourage you to be up to date with the developments in various communities and cultures all around the world. This is reflected in the inclusion of features such as a list of significant events in 2020, as well as a timeline noting how the world has evolved over the course of the pandemic that has otherwise cast a shadow on the year. Through this compilation with its added features, I hope you can draw inspiration and ideas from the world around us, and incorporate these elements into your writing as you reach new levels of confidence in your writing.

Yours Sincerely,
Eswaravaka Keerthana Reddy, 20A12
Chief Editor

VJC iGLOBE

Table of Contents

Science & Technology

Politics, Economics & History

Miscellaneous

Events of 2020

Socio-political Events

24 Feb: Muhyiddin Yassin appointed as Prime Minister of Malaysia
Coming after the collapse of the Mahathir-led Pakatan Harapan government,
PM Muhyiddin was elected the head of another coalition government involving UMNO. This shows how any opposition coalitions in Malaysia will have to be truly cohesive to mount a proper challenge against the Barisan Nasional coalition, instead of succumbing to infighting and losing their influence.
http://go.vjc.sg/pmmuhyiddin

9 May to 15 Jun: India-China border tensions
The latest round of tensions escalated from border guards throwing rocks at each other, to 20 Indian soldiers and reportedly 40 Chinese soldiers dying in a second clash. Border disputes, a trade imbalance heavily in favour of China, as well as China's strong bilateral relations with Pakistan are some of the many reasons as to why China and India have persistently had frosty bilateral relations.
http://go.vjc.sg/2r
http://go.vjc.sg/2s

26 May: Black Lives Matter protest in Minneapolis
The first of what would later be a whole array of protests that took place globally, due to police brutality directed at the African American community (and the general African diaspora) with limited repercussions faced by errant police officers. This deepened the already-widening divide in the US ahead of the 2020 US Presidential Elections, with a significant percentage of Americans insisting systemic racism did not exist amidst the police force.

3 Jun: US$5 billion class action lawsuit for infringement of privacy filed against Google
This was filed because of Google's widespread collection of private information, including even from users who did not directly utilise their web services. Furthermore, they were collecting data when the users were under Incognito mode, which was seen to violate their own claims that the mode would be where users 'could browse privately'.
http://go.vjc.sg/2q

10 Jul: President of Turkey Recep Erdoğan orders the Hagia Sophia to be reverted back to a mosque
The Hagia Sophia is a tourist attraction and regarded as a neutral religious site, but its status as a neutral museum was annulled by the Turkish courts, leading to President Erdoğan's decree that it be used as a mosque. Historically, Istanbul - known as Constantinople when it was under the Byzantine empire - has been a point of contention between Muslims and Christians, and the Hagia Sophia is an important symbol of this conflict.
http://go.vjc.sg/2t

4 Aug: Massive warehouse explosions in Beirut, Lebanon
One of the biggest non-nuclear explosions in history causing at least 204 deaths and US$15 billion in damages; this occurred due to lapses in the handling of the storage of highly volatile chemicals by the Lebanese government.
http://go.vjc.sg/2u

13 Aug: Third Israel–Arab peace deal brokered between Israel and the UAE
This was a ground-breaking peace deal as Israel has always experienced levels of high tensions with the Arab world ever since its formation post-WWII. This is the first diplomatic relationship Israel has established with an Arab state. The deal would delay Israel's annexation of the West Bank and foster greater cooperation between the UAE and Israel on the issues of energy, tourism and combined efforts to create a COVID-19 vaccine.
http://go.vjc.sg/2v

28 Aug: Shinzo Abe retires as the longest-serving Prime Minister of Japan
Citing health reasons, Abe resigned as PM, with Yoshihide Suga succeeding him. Abe was the youngest post-WWII PM during his first tenure and was infamous for being a right-wing nationalist as well as a proponent of 'Abenomics', his structural reforms to Japan's economy.
http://go.vjc.sg/2w

16 Sep: The UN formally accuses the Venezuelan government of crimes against humanity
The UN finally took an official stance against the atrocities committed by the incumbent Venezuelan government led by President Nicolás Maduro, including violent coercion methods brought to light by human-rights activists.
http://go.vjc.sg/2x

4 Nov: The USA formally leaves the Paris Climate Agreement
Being the only country to do so out of over 200 sovereign states, many have noted that this highlighted the Trump administration's commitment to economic progression at the expense of the climate.
http://go.vjc.sg/2z

26 Nov: The largest general strike in history held by Indian farmers
An estimated 250 million Indians went on strike because of 'Farm Bills' passed by the Indian parliament, which critics argue placed farmers at the mercy of big corporations as they were no longer offered price protection. This was compounded by the incumbent Modi government's sluggish response in providing support against COVID-19 induced economic recession.
http://go.vjc.sg/2-

15 Dec: The International Criminal Court accuses the Philippines of crimes against humanity
This was due to President Rodrigo Duterte's extremely violent 'war on drugs', which have involved murder, torture and mental harm in trying to crack down on drug abuse in the Philippines, with many critics further questioning the efficacy of such policies.
go.vjc.sg/philippinesicj

Environmental Events

1 Jan: 2019-20 Australian bushfire season
Similar to the wildfires in California, the Australian bushfires from late 2019 to early 2020 were the worst the country had ever faced. Exacerbated by global warming, the bushfires left 34 people dead, destroyed over 3,500 houses and burned over 18.5 million hectares of land, resulting in damages to property and the local economy amounting to over AU$100 billion.
http://go.vjc.sg/30

3 May: 2020 California wildfire season
An existing problem seen every year was further compounded by an exceptional number of trees dying this year, making the season's wildfires the largest recorded in California's modern history, with more than 4% of land being burnt. The fires killed 31 people and destroyed over 10,000 structures.

16 May: Cyclone Amphan hits India and Bangladesh
Cyclone Amphan made landfall in eastern India and Bangladesh, killing over 100 people and forcing the evacuation of more than 4 million others. It causes over US$13 billion in damage, making it the costliest cyclone ever recorded in the North Indian Ocean, shattering the record previously held by Nargis.
http://go.vjc.sg/35

18 May: Flash flooding in Somalia
Nearly 1 million people were affected and at least 24 people died in flash floods that hit Beledweyne and Jowhar, Somalia, due to heavy rain in the Juba and Shabelle river basins.
http://go.vjc.sg/33

25 Jul: MV Wakashio oil spill
Japanese tanker MV Wakashio split in half on the Mauritian coast, spilling 1,000 gallons of oil into protected ecosystems and wetlands and marking the largest environmental disaster in Mauritius' history. This also led to the 2020 Mauritian Protests, as 100,000 locals marched to the capital Port Louis to demand further investigations, as Mauritius' tourism-reliant economy was driven by natural touristic sites.
http://go.vjc.sg/31

31 Oct: Typhoon Goni hits the Philippines
Goni was the strongest tropical cyclone to make landfall in the Philippines' history, with damages of over US$369 million incurred and 32 deaths reported in its wake. The spread of COVID-19 was also a further concern amongst evacuees.
http://go.vjc.sg/32

11 Dec: The European Union agrees to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 55% over the next decade
Following round-the-clock discussions at a two-day summit in Brussels, the
EU member states approved the Executive Commission's proposal to
cut carbon emissions by 55% by 2030, among other policies that push for environmental
conservation and eventual carbon neutrality.
http://go.vjc.sg/36

Economic/Medical/Miscellaneous Events

9 Mar: DOW drops over 2000 points in its worst single-day drop
One of the most-followed stock markets sees its worst single-day crash in history as
a result of rising COVID cases worldwide. It pointed to the disastrous economic impact of
worldwide lockdowns and was a harbinger of the global economic downturn in 2020.
http://go.vjc.sg/3c

20 Apr: Oil prices fall into the negative range for the first time
The price of oil fell to -US$37 per barrel, due to oil storage space being so limited that oil
traders were actually paying others to offload their excess supplies. This sudden squeeze was
brought about by lockdowns leading to an excess of unused oil, compounded by a
breakdown in agreement between members of Organisation of Petroleum Exporting
Countries (OPEC).
http://go.vjc.sg/37

4 May: British and Kenyan scientists announce discovery of malaria-blocking microbe
Said parasitic microbe in the Microsporidia fungi group, Microsporidia MB, blocks mosquitoes
from carrying malaria. It has potential to end malaria as a disease, especially in Africa where
94% of the world's malaria cases occur.
http://go.vjc.sg/38
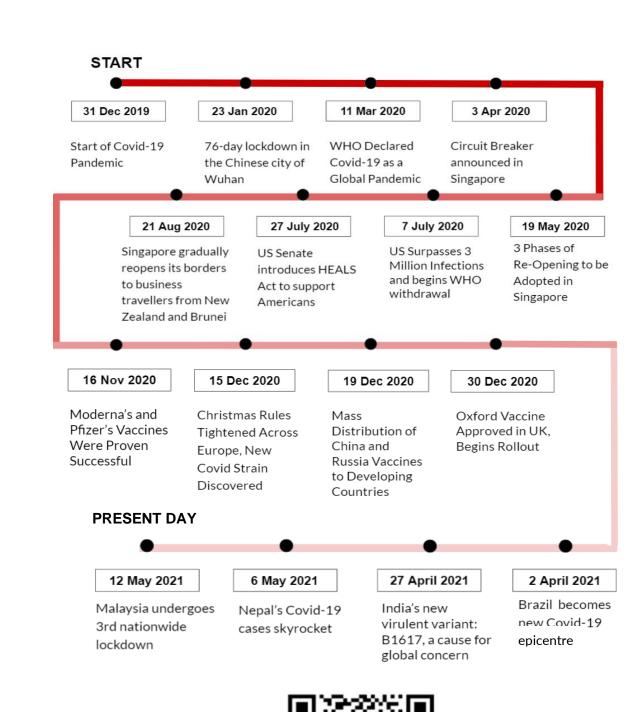
25 Aug: Africa is declared free of wild polio
A virus that can lead to paralysis, the eradication of polio in Africa means that the disease was
now only found in Afghanistan and Pakistan, thanks extensive vaccination efforts. Polio is the
second virus to be eradicated from the continent, after smallpox 40 years ago.
http://go.vjc.sg/3d

20 Sep: Whistleblowers expose financial institutions
BuzzFeed News and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) released
the FinCEN Files, a collection of 2,657 documents relating to the Financial Crimes
Enforcement Network. These described over 200,000 suspicious transactions valued at over
US$2 trillion that occurred from 1999 to 2017 across multiple global financial institutions, a
trail of dirty money that flowed for smugglers, politicians and a general array of unsavoury
characters.
http://go.vjc.sg/3e

COVID-19 Timeline

START

31 Dec 2019

Start of Covid-19 Pandemic

23 Jan 2020

76-day lockdown in the Chinese city of Wuhan

11 Mar 2020

WHO Declared Covid-19 as a Global Pandemic

3 Apr 2020

Circuit Breaker announced in Singapore

21 Aug 2020

Singapore gradually reopens its borders to business travellers from New Zealand and Brunei

27 July 2020

US Senate introduces HEALS Act to support Americans

7 July 2020

US Surpasses 3 Million Infections and begins WHO withdrawal

19 May 2020

3 Phases of Re-Opening to be Adopted in Singapore

16 Nov 2020

Moderna's and Pfizer's Vaccines Were Proven Successful

15 Dec 2020

Christmas Rules Tightened Across Europe, New Covid Strain Discovered

19 Dec 2020

Mass Distribution of China and Russia Vaccines to Developing Countries

30 Dec 2020

Oxford Vaccine Approved in UK, Begins Rollout

PRESENT DAY

12 May 2021

Malaysia undergoes 3rd nationwide lockdown

6 May 2021

Nepal's Covid-19 cases skyrocket

27 April 2021

India's new virulent variant: B1617, a cause for global concern

2 April 2021

Brazil becomes new Covid-19 epicentre

Scan the code to find out more!

Social Issues

"A decline of religion will create problems for the world." How far do you agree?

Ngm Yujie 20S54

"A decline of religion will create problems for the world." This is a statement that has been pondered upon by many of the world's most eminent thinkers. Among them is Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, who has lamented the increasing decline of religion in Singapore, as it means that people lose an important moral compass when it comes to making tough decisions. Apart from losing a moral guide, a fall in the importance, popularity, and influence of religion on society will create a multitude of other issues in the world as well. These include a loss in a way to heal divisions, and the loss of intangible cultural heritage. However, these issues can be mitigated by putting in place clear secular moral guidelines, using secular approaches to build bridges between opposing parties, as well as putting in place measures to preserve the history and culture of communities around the world. While I agree that a decline in religion will create problems for the world, I believe they can largely be mitigated.

A decline of religion may lead to world leaders lacking a moral compass to guide them, when making difficult decisions concerning controversial issues. This is especially true in an era dominated by technology which is progressing in leaps and bounds at an exponential rate. This has given mankind the unenviable task of deciding whether to utilise such technology that poses moral questions about their usage. One prominent example is the use of CRISPR technology, which allows parents to choose the characteristics (physical or otherwise) of their child. While some are for CRISPR, arguing that it can help to prevent children from being born with serious health conditions, others are clear that such designer babies should not be allowed, for who has the right to play God other than God? Adherents of the Catholic faith adopt this stand, thus eliminating a source of internal conflict. Another controversial issue is the use of nuclear deterrents in the realm of international security. While some have argued for such weapons, religious authorities like the Roman Catholic Church are against it, with followers of the Pope adopting this stance as well. This illustrates how religion can help provide the answers to controversial questions. Thus, the decline of religion could lead to issues where society and the wider world cannot come to a decisive consensus because they lack a clear moral guide.

However, religions do not have a monopoly on moral decisions. Secular organisations like survivors of the Hiroshima nuclear bomb have always maintained a stance opposed to the deployment of nuclear weapons and have lobbied politicians around the world to stop this. Thus, even if the popularity of religion goes into a downward spiral, the impact on the decision making of leaders may be limited, for secular organisations will continue to forge consensus on controversial issues.

A decline in religion may also result in the loss of a way to unite nations and communities. Political leaders have always seen religion as a useful tool to unite their people. An example in today's context would be how the Modi administration has used Hindu-centric rhetoric to unite India's many disparate communities under his rule. In America, the constitution contains the famous phrase "one nation under God". A decline in religion may

cause problems around the world because societies may fragment along other (apart from religious) fault lines, such as ethnicity or race, once the religious glue that once held them together fails.

Yet, a decline in the importance of religion may not entirely cause the world to be worse off. It could, for instance, lead to fewer religious tensions in society. It could lead to the end of ancient religious conflicts that still fester to this day, such as the antagonistic relations between Shia and Sunni Muslims, as well as the jockeying of influence among Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Jerusalem. In addition, religion is not the only way leaders can unite their people. Take Sir Winston Churchill as an example: his inspirational leadership of the United Kingdom as it battled its way through the Second World War relied less on the official faith of the United Kingdom (Christianity) and more on his superb oratorical and leadership abilities. Thus, a decline in religion may not result in clashes between countries, but instead a more peaceful world by eliminating long-standing religious issues.

A decline in the influence of religion in society could additionally result in the loss of millennia-old cultures. A people or nation's culture refers to the traditions and history that has been ingrained into their psyche. For some countries, religion plays a large role in their history, such as Buddhism in South Korea and Islam in Saudi Arabia. To some communities, like the Sikhs, their religion is central to their identity as a community. A decline in religion as younger generations drift away from the religion of their forefathers could herald a loss in a nation or communities' culture and history. Youth would lose contact with their roots and unique identities. The world would gradually become a more homogenous place dominated by a few cultures. Since religion helps to preserve the identity of entire countries, its decline may create the issue of a less diverse world where youths are unable to connect with their own cultures.

However, it must be recognised that a decline of religion does not mean that younger generations will abandon it entirely. For instance, in Singapore, most of the Buddhist population is advanced in age, with few young adherents of the faith. Yet, the Singapore Buddhist Federation does have an actual youth wing. This illustrates how even though the role that religion plays in society may decline, it is unlikely that the younger generation will abandon it entirely. Thus, the loss in history and culture will not be total, for some will be willing to continue to follow the faith of their ancestors, thus continuing to preserve the culture of their communities.

It is true that a decline of religion will create waves that would be felt globally, and yet the extent of this problem may not be as large as it initially seems. While a decline of religion may make it harder to forge consensus, secular organisations will continue to try to do so. Although politicians may no longer be able to use religion to unite conflicting groups, a decline in the importance of religion could possibly lead to a more peaceful world, as age-old religious conflicts are finally resolved. Finally, while wider society may lose touch with their own roots as they give up on religion, a core group of devout religious followers would ensure that the culture and history religion serve as a custodian for will continue to be preserved. I agree that a decline of religion will create problems for the world but argue that the extent of these problems will not be large.

Comments:

Sound arguments that reflect a critical awareness of religious concerns today. You might wish to consider terrorism in the world today as an issue. Overall, a well-written piece!

"The arts do not matter in times of crisis." What do you think?
Khoon Cheong Bin, Kenneth 20S53

The coronavirus outbreak has held the world in its thrall for nearly a year now, with no signs of abating. Considering the sudden, drastic shift in the world we live in, the role of the much-maligned 'artist' has come under further fire. The results of a survey conducted in The Straits Times listed 'artist' as one of the least important jobs in the pandemic, eliciting a flurry of enraged responses, not just in Singapore, but globally as well. Listening to songs will not help develop a vaccine, so say the naysayers. This is not false. The arts — film and song and artworks — will never be able to develop a vaccine or provide humanitarian aid in a crisis; but the intangible benefits that they bring — that of uniting people in times of need, of boosting our morale, or providing a much-needed distraction — are nonetheless invaluable. In times of crisis, the arts do not just 'matter', but are also instrumental in the ways it helps us to overcome those difficulties.

The most favoured argument against the arts is its lack of tangible benefits in a crisis. During a pandemic, a vaccine is needed, or medical professionals to treat the infected - not new songs. During a disaster like an earthquake or hurricane, humanitarian aid - provision of food, shelter, water to those displaced or affected - is what is in demand, not a new Hollywood blockbuster. Take, for example, the recent freezing of the power grid in Texas. Unnaturally cold weather conditions forced the largely privatised power grid to shut down almost completely, cutting off power to millions of households in the middle of sub-zero temperatures. In response, thousands of Americans took to Twitter to offer their advice on how to conserve as much heat as possible and prevent food from spoiling. This advice was helpful to many Texans, allowing them to stretch the little resources they still had until the government resolved the crisis or sent aid. What helped those people freezing in their homes was not the latest music album or Marvel movie; that would have been worthless in improving their survival. It was the advice given by strangers that helped. Nevertheless, in times of crisis, what people ideally need most is immediate aid. The arts aid little in teaching to stash perishables in the snow when the refrigerator stops working. People need tangible assistance: something to help them live to see the next day or face any immediate challenges and risks. In this regard, it is obvious that the arts are of no discernible value.

In the long term, however, the arts are fantastic for bringing people together, uniting them in times of crisis. Music has long transcended cultural boundaries and brought together people of diverse faiths, ethnicities, and backgrounds. The unifying abilities of the arts cannot be understated. In the first few months of the coronavirus outbreak, a video emerged on the Internet of an Italian man on his balcony performing a rendition of John Lennon's 'Imagine' while the city was in the throes of lockdown. This simple clip and many others (of opera singers, pianists and more) helped to forge a global sense of identity. It did not matter whether you were Italian or Singaporean or Chinese; everyone was going through the same hardships. He was a simple man making the best of a bad situation, and this unspoken message resonated with millions globally. Music helped to bring people together in times of crisis; it served as a rallying cry. It encouraged people to persevere, to hold on, and not give up even in such trying times. The message of "we're all in this together" gave many the morale boost they needed.

There were millions of others in the same situation, and this sense of universal experience, of a common hardship, was incredibly helpful in the midst of the pandemic. In times of crisis, the arts can also serve as a uniting force for people, aiding in the trials of combating hardships.

In times of crisis, the main goal of the arts is also helpful: that of entertainment. The coronavirus pandemic induced lockdowns which confined many people to their homes for months on end, artists included. One major complaint during the lockdowns was that of boredom since people were used to leaving their homes daily, after all. However, the pandemic brought on an onslaught of the arts. An example is Taylor Swift recording an entire album - *folklore* - alone. Just like the general public's hype towards her surprise album upon release, people will naturally and eagerly turn to the arts — music and film — to entertain themselves. Some artists even released music inspired by the pandemic. Virtual performances were held, from K-Pop groups performing to cameras in empty stadiums, or singers simply singing from the comfort of their own homes. All these helped to serve as entertainment, as a benign distraction for the general population. Though the pandemic was catastrophic, and people were stuck in their homes for months, there was always new music to listen to, and new films to watch. There were even plays held, live-streamed over YouTube as a much-needed source of free entertainment for people bored out of their minds. The arts can serve as an escape from the real world, reprieving us from the unending negativity in our lives. It served as a coping mechanism and a much welcome distraction for many. To that end, it was incredibly effective. People were no longer focused on the mounting death tolls but were instead more interested in their favourite artist's new music. Of course, some levity and some awareness of what is going on in the world is always necessary, but too much negativity is enough to make anyone burnt out. In this regard, the arts are a comforting embrace, a warm distraction from the overwhelming pessimism and negativity in times of crisis. Without music or film, the pandemic would have been so much worse.

In conclusion, the arts do in fact matter in times of crisis. Its role as a rallying cry to unite people for a common cause, and as a distraction during a crisis, is undoubtedly necessary. While the argument that the arts have no discernible tangible benefits in a pandemic or disaster holds true, its intangible benefits - of unity and of comfort - are all of equal importance. After all, every crisis does not just have an impact on our physical condition, but our mental psyche as well. The arts are an integral tool in aiding and maintaining our mental state. As such, the belief that they do not matter in times of crisis — that artists are the least valuable in such times — is wholly untrue.

Comments:
A beautifully written piece with much insight. The main issues to work on: informal language used (not suitable for an academic piece). You are encouraged to include another paragraph for a fuller exploration of the issue. Nice introduction.

"The arts do not matter in times of crisis." What do you think?
Tan Gin Suang (Chen Renxuan) 20S31

Step into any art museum in Europe and you will be bombarded with tons of marble statues displaying the Renaissance ideal— muscular, supple men and divine women sculptured with marble. Since time immemorial, the Arts has been recognized for its aesthetic value— the show of craftsmanship through both visual (through wonderful impastos on canvas and intricate marble carvings) and auditory mediums (the likes of Bach concertos in grand concert halls), providing a visual and auditory feast. Beyond its aesthetic merits, however, many critics are quick to point out the importance of the Arts in times of urgent economic, political and social uprisings is close to naught. However, such a view would be too myopic, failing to consider the ability of the Arts in rallying people beyond a common cause, providing economic relief and political awareness in times of crisis. Therefore, it is of my view that the Arts do matter in times of crisis.

The first common criticism is that the Arts itself is nebulous, lacking any grounding in reality, and hence does not serve to value add to our society. Therefore, in times of crisis, when real and pragmatic solutions to pressing problems are urgently required, the Arts is something of little significance. Consider Romantic artist Friedrich's 'Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog', where a lone figure stares into the unknown and is enveloped with smoke and fog from Friedrich's impressive brush works. The haunting painting and detailed craftsmanship serve to capture and even entrance the viewer to a state of aesthetic ecstasy as they admire his work. However, beyond the wonderful brush works begets the question: what more can the painting bring to us? Upon a closer inspection, one would realise the artwork, being completely a figment of Friedrich's imagination and developed from an art form created solely to celebrate aesthetic expression, has little value it can bring to our society. With little grounding and semblance to pressing issues society faces but instead solely focusing on creating aesthetic features, this means that the artwork can be relegated to nothing more than a piece of painting that serves to look pretty on a museum wall. More prominently, Jane Austen spoke of her magnum opus 'Pride and Prejudice' as being "too light, bright and sparkly", with superficial and ridiculous characters. One might be entranced by the romantic relationship between Darcy and Elizabeth, but after the story ends, there would be little the reader can bring into their lives. Therefore, as the Arts often lack any grounding in reality and are so far removed, some might concur that it does not matter in times of crisis — political, economic, or social.

However, I believe that such a view would be too myopic. It is exactly because the Arts lack little grounding in society, that many turn to it in times of crisis for comfort. The Arts, as an aesthetic medium, then serves as a respite for many who are looking for an avenue for themselves to fully unwind and find comfort in. This is particularly true in times of economic and health crises where large portions of society are crippled, with populations of people seeing their stress skyrocketing. In these times of crisis, the Arts then serve as a much-needed remedy for many. Most recently, because of the COVID-19 pandemic which saw cities going into lockdowns, causing an economic downturn and severely impacting the mental health of many, there seems to be a renewed interest in the Arts. From Irish booksellers reporting a 150% increase in book sales during the lockdown, to free YouTube live streams of multiple

Ballerina concerts gaining hundreds of thousands of views, it is then difficult to deny the Arts' role as a medium for many to engage in to distract and remove themselves temporarily from the messy and depressing world. Hayao Miyazaki's short 2D animation films showing the beauty in a simple life draws millions around the world to appreciate the calmness it portrays, and the invaluable lesson of pausing and appreciating life's little wonders. In times of crisis, then, when the world might feel a little too depressing, the Arts as an aesthetic medium can serve to provide people a medium through which they can unwind, either through the countless live streams of virtual orchestras around the world during COVID-19, or retreating back into the world of Elizabeth and Darcy.

However, some might argue that the Arts as an industry sees a humongous investment from governments around the world. Therefore, in times of economic crisis, the Arts would be of little importance as the money diverted to support the Arts sector could be channelled into more productive investments instead. Just look at Singapore, where the government has spent well over $200 million in the Arts sector. This sum of money is not a small sum. Besides investing in infrastructure like museums and galleries, such money is also used to subsidise museum admission fees to encourage patronage of museums. In times of crisis, when the most pressing problems of unemployment need to be dealt with, many would argue that this money could be instead diverted into other sectors of government spending like healthcare or more tax subsidies. Therefore, in times of crisis, the Arts is of little importance since it takes up so many productive investments that could benefit the economy and country in more tangible ways.

While this might be the case, adopting such a view would be ignoring the huge economic contribution of the Arts scene. Therefore, the investment is actually justified as the economic returns could be used by the country to re-invest in other areas to tide over hard times. Why else would Singapore invest millions of dollars in its Renaissance Plan? By placing Singapore on the world map as a burgeoning arts scene, thereby attracting hundreds of thousands of tourists yearly to the National Gallery and the Art Science Museum, it serves as an avenue for governments to rake in cash that would be able to benefit the economy in times of crisis. The world's richest artists like Jeff Koons, with over millions of dollars of net worth, is proof of the Arts' ability to translate its aesthetic merits into tangible economic gains - gains which countries are able to set aside as savings, and used in times of economic crisis or simply reinvested in another sector like healthcare to deal with any health crisis.

More than the economic sense, however, the Arts can rally people behind a common cause and push for change in times of crisis. In recent years, due to the democratisation of the Arts, the Arts have been increasingly accessible and popular to the masses. This allows it to be used as a powerful vehicle for change, especially by championing for causes and uniting people around the world. In times of crisis, when certain groups require more help, the Arts serve as an avenue to provide aid even for the most marginalised. In the realm of music, we see Lin-Manuel Miranda's enchanting and powerful song 'Almost Like Praying', which serve not only as a tribute to the challenges the citizens of Puerto Rico face in light of the hurricane damage, but also rally powerful people to provide immediate aid that these Puerto Ricans do not have access to because of red tape bureaucracy and racial tensions. Besides successfully garnering

the support of other big names like Camila Cabello, the song also raised over US$20 million in funds, showing music and the Arts' incredible power in uniting people to render help to the less fortunate in times of crisis. In Singapore, the rise of sexual assault cases has led to a crisis where perpetrators can get off scot-free at times or simply with a slap on the wrist while victims suffer long-term emotional damage. In response, Pangdemonium's play 'This is What Happens to Pretty Girls' serves as the visceral medium through which awareness of such issues can be raised, especially in a country like Singapore where outright protests and demonstrations are difficult to stage. Additionally, the Arts, through its varying mediums, can reach a larger audience as important messages are packaged in mediums easily understood by the masses. In response to the migrant crisis, Khaled Hosseini published a book titled 'Sea Prayer', which illustrated through beautiful imagery and simple storytelling a real-life account: the treacherous story of a migrant father whose son washed ashore in Europe a few years ago when they were trying to cross the sea into Europe. Considering the migrant crisis, this sheds light on the migrants, who otherwise had no way of telling their own story. Often vilified in local European media as the cause behind the ills of European society (such as rising unemployment), this story serves to impart onto its reader the pure intentions of migrants simply trying to make a better living for themselves. However, more than just the message the book imparts, revenue earned from book sales went to the UN Refugee Agency to help fund life-saving support, and build better futures for refugees around the world. The book went on to sell hundreds of thousands of copies, moving millions around the world and mobilising people to do their part in creating a more humane and welcoming society considering the migrant crisis. Therefore, amidst the multitude of social crisis societies around the world are facing — from societies crippled by natural disaster to the rise of sexual assault cases and the migrant crisis — the Arts would then matter even more by providing a powerful vehicle of change in which people can rally behind to alleviate such crisis.

Lastly, in light of political crises around the world, the Arts serve as a medium through which the disenfranchised are given a greater voice, as they express the systemic oppression they are under through the Arts. Additionally, the Arts can also inspire and empower citizens in times of crisis to push for greater change. For example, 'The Hunger Games', originally a book series, has been adapted into multiple films, and now even serves as inspiration for many in the ongoing Myanmar protests. The Hunger Games salute, which represents political oppression and the overthrowing of such unjust systems, is used by the Myanmar protestors not only during demonstrations but in political posters and cartoons created in this period. It serves not only as a unifying force for people in Myanmar in times of political crisis, but also as a medium through which people around the world are able to gain a better understanding of the political situation in Myanmar, through posters and demonstrators using this symbol. It has become a mobilising and empowering symbol of unity against the military, proving that the Arts is indeed as relevant in times of crisis.

So next time you step foot into a museum full of marble sculptures, let us not be too quick to dismiss the role it can play in times of political, social, and economic downturn. After all, the Arts has an intrinsic value of bringing solace to the people. More than that, its multitude of benefits means it still stays very relevant in times of crisis. Therefore, when looking at a

marble sculpture, let us look beyond the aesthetics to appreciate the greater value it can bring us.

Comments:

An engaging piece, written with passion and conviction. Sound knowledge of the issues is demonstrated and supporting evidence shows currency and understanding of issues at hand. Arguments are well developed with clear links between paragraphs. Be mindful of overly long paragraphs and spelling & expression errors.

"The arts do not matter in times of crisis." What do you think?
Anjali Elankovan 20A11

Throughout history, mankind has faced and battled various crises such as wars, pandemics and severe economic recessions. In such times, the country or the world's utmost priority is to solve the crisis to the best of their ability and emerge as minimally unscathed as possible. Amidst a crisis, the arts do matter as they serve as a platform to portray the masses' opinions on the crisis, to call for help and alleviate the challenges of the crisis. They are also a form of entertainment to deflect one's attention away from the stress of the crisis. Though the arts may not directly resolve the root cause of the crisis or the economic consequences of it, the arts are still important and hence matter in times of crisis.

The arts may not seem to matter in times of crisis because it cannot often resolve the cause of the crisis. This is because crises are often characterised by wars, healthcare issues and economic problems. The arts, as a form of creative expression through various forms, do not have the capability to address the above concerns. Hence, in times of crisis, when the priority of people and governments is to be brought out of the crisis as swiftly as possible, the arts may not be seen to matter, since they cannot contribute to this goal. The capacity to resolve the crisis instead lies with other factors like governments, political leaders and technocrats who run the country - not the arts. For example, during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, there was an emergence of artwork, such as in the form of political cartoons, revealing people's worry about the possibility of a nuclear holocaust. However, the real power in being able to avert such a fatal crisis lay not in the message of such artworks, but in the power of American and Soviet leaders of the time who engaged in numerous discussions and secret dealings. The arts played a rather insignificant role in contributing to the resolution of the crisis. Hence, the arts do not seem to matter in times of crisis.

The arts may also seem to not matter because they do not contribute towards revitalising a poor economy, which is a common side-effect of a crisis. Almost all crises come at a cost. Whether it is in the form of economic disarray or social instability, it would have taken a huge toll on the countries involved and even the global economy. Hence, part of resolving this crisis would entail addressing this economic concern. In the endeavour to fulfil this goal, the arts are rather inconsequential. In most countries, and especially for developing countries most hard hit by the economic side-effects of a crisis, the arts are not a significantly large enough sector to contribute meaningfully to economic growth. As a rather small sector of the economy, the arts hence seem to not matter as much in times of crisis. For example, the arts constitute about 1.5% of Singapore's GDP - a rather insignificant share. Taking the COVID-19 pandemic when Singapore used up about 20 years of its reserves to stimulate the economy, for instance, the arts are simply too small of a sector to contribute meaningfully and allow Singapore to recuperate its loss in revenue, or even stimulate growth. Hence, the arts seem rather insignificant in times of crisis.

Despite the arts not directly addressing a crisis, they still play a useful role and matter in times of crisis. This is firstly so because the arts serve as a medium to portray the masses' opinions on the crisis. When people disagree with how the crisis is handled by the government,

the arts become a medium for them to express their defiance or disagreement. The arts hence serve as a signal to those in power to make a change in how the crisis is being addressed. For example, during the terrorising control that the USSR exercised over East Berlin in the Cold War, many West Berliners took to the Berlin Wall to draw artworks that defied the Soviet's cruel treatment of their comrades on the other side of the wall. The Berlin Wall filled with visual art became a sign of defiance against the Soviet government regarding their dealing with the political and economic crisis in East Berlin. Hence, the arts could send an effective message regarding the crisis. Another example would be Pablo Picasso's painting titled 'Massacre in Korea', which condemned American intervention in North Korea during the Korean War. With such a renowned painter making such a bold statement on the crisis in Korea, the signal of defiance had been clearly made known to the American government. Hence, the arts could serve as a platform to voice people's concerns about crises, making the arts matter.

Secondly, the arts do matter in times of crisis, as they serve as a platform to raise awareness for the crisis and call for help. A crisis often does not impact everyone in the same way. Its consequences hit different countries and groups with varying levels of affluence, to a different degree. Moreover, some crises may only affect one country while the rest of the world remains mostly unscathed. Hence, groups who are more disadvantaged in times of crisis can turn to art as a medium to garner attention for their problems and seek help from others. In modern times especially, the creation of artwork has been made easier with technology, allowing the arts to be an effective medium to call for help. For example, in the recent crisis in Myanmar amidst the military coup and violence against peaceful protesters, various artworks by individual artists highlighting the violence were created. As these artworks reached the eyes of the world, the global community could better empathise and understand the situation and reached out to help. Hence, the arts serve as an effective platform to call for help. A similar example can be noted in the Sudan crisis from 2018 to 2019, where amidst the curbing of freedom of speech and exercise of violence, a group of Sudanese student protesters came up with a digital artwork of a crying woman clothed in the Sudan flag. This was widely shared through social media, increasing awareness of the situation and calling for condemnation of the government. Hence, the arts do matter.

Furthermore, the arts do matter in times of crisis, as the arts serve as a form of entertainment to deflect one's attention away from the crisis. In times of crisis, above all the tangible impacts of violence and economic problems, people's socio-emotional wellbeing would be greatly affected. This is because worries like loss of jobs or lives and concerns about the future are prevalent amidst society. Hence, as the arts involve an engaging experience of many senses, people's attention is deflected away from the stress of the crisis. The arts can bring more joy and meaning to their life even amidst tough times. For example, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, when almost all of the world entered a lockdown, various musicals were streamed on online platforms. 'The Phantom of the Opera' musical was streamed on YouTube and 'Hamilton' was put up on Disney+ to entertain people and bring about a livelier experience amidst a stale life during lockdowns. These serve as a form of entertainment to immerse oneself in and derive joy from, amidst being in a difficult crisis.

In conclusion, the arts do matter in times of crisis. Though the arts may seem to be inconsequential in addressing the greatest concerns amidst a crisis, it can also serve as a

medium to portray one's opinion, call for help and deflect stress. Hence, the arts tend to matter in addressing the secondary concerns that emerge out of a crisis. Though this may seem insignificant on the surface, the crisis may worsen as people's morale dip, without a medium empowering people to speak up on it. Therefore, the arts do matter in times of crisis.

Comments:

Relevant arguments and concrete examples, clearly exploring the value of the arts during crises. A great variety of examples of crises. Some examples could be more specific to demonstrate that you have in-depth knowledge of the topic. Could also include a greater variety of art forms such as dance, music. Language was fluent and clear.

"Traditions are no longer relevant." To what extent is this true in your society?
Lim Yu Heng Ansen 20S42

As a multicultural and multireligious society, Singapore prides itself as a melting pot of unique cultures and traditions. With its population largely consisting of Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian races, Singapore's annual calendar is filled with vibrant festivals and traditions that help foster a unique sense of identity. Singaporeans tend to take pride in the race or religion they associate themselves with, commemorating traditions that their ancestors had celebrated with importance years ago. However, as a first world country that is pragmatic and profit-driven, traditions may seem to be a factor that slows down growth, which is why the modern generation of Singaporeans largely do not see a point in commemorating traditions anymore. Nevertheless, given the symbolic importance it represents in fostering a sense of pride and belonging which unites Singaporeans together, as well as the moral benefits it offers to society, the argument that traditions are indeed still relevant is applicable in 21st century Singapore.

Firstly, some may argue that the role of traditions in modern-day Singapore is questionable as it has been perceived by the populace as obsolete and archaic, stifling progress in a competitive, ever-changing and fast-paced world. As one of the most developed nations on the globe, Singapore's economy is focused on profits, and takes a pragmatic approach towards achieving that. Unlike the past where Singapore's economy was still developing, modern Singaporean society no longer sees the importance in commemorating traditions when they are largely fixated on work and making profits, with little time to catch a breather. For example, when blessed with a long holiday during Chinese New Year, a time stipulated for families to come together and strengthen bonds, most young people have scrapped the idea of doing that and would rather use this opportunity to go for an overseas holiday, in order to escape the hectic pace of life. Even for other occasions like Hari Raya Aidilfitri and Deepavali, which are dates of great cultural significance to the Muslims and Hindus, only one day is allocated to them as a public holiday, providing them with hardly sufficient time to revel in the festive spirit and understand the importance of commemorating these traditions. Hence, we see how the emphasis of traditions in Singapore has been tuned down compared to the past. A significant number of people are starting not to see the importance of commemorating these traditions, as they deem them unrealistic and impractical toward their pragmatic goals of making profits and securing a good future. Hence, this seems to suggest that traditions in Singapore have lost their role and are thus no longer relevant in today's society.

However, contrary to popular belief, traditions can indeed spur economic growth in Singapore, dispelling the myth that they hinder growth and progress. Traditions are perceived as a lucrative source of revenue for many profit-driven firms, which contribute financial prosperity to Singapore's economy. For instance, During Hari Raya Aidilfitri, Geylang Serai is set alight with the dazzling lights of its Night Market. It is typically swarmed with locals and foreigners who would like to lay their hands on affordable local products such as the Ramly Burger. In a more modern context, shopping malls tend to host large storewide discounts during festivals, attracting large crowds to shop and dine. Through these, not only does

consumer spending contribute a significant proportion towards the rapid expansion of Singapore's Growth Domestic Product (GDP), but it also reminds people of the cultural significance that these traditions have in Singapore, such as when fashion retailers charge Chinese New Year themed clothing at discounted prices. Although the significance of traditions has been relegated to that of a money-making venture, it has nevertheless allowed our economy to stay competitive in a volatile global market. Hence, the benefit that traditions bring towards Singapore's economic growth highlights its relevance and influence on society.

In a conservative Asian country where good moral values are highly emphasised, the commemoration of traditions in Singapore helps to inculcate favourable virtues among the populace, which enables us to live in a conducive and civic-minded society with little disruptions in life. As these traditions tend to date back to centuries ago, the moral significance offered cannot be emphasised enough. Most of these traditions are related to family togetherness, which helps to build strong connections and enable effective communication between family members, including distant relatives. This helps to inculcate a sense of unity among families, especially in the context of modern Singapore where family sizes are getting smaller, hence the need for families to stay close and support each other in all phases of life is of vital importance. The young also benefit greatly from the commemoration of local traditions. During Chinese New Year, children usually greet their elders with well-wishes and blessings, and are rewarded with red packets containing money. This helps to foster respect for the older generation, which helps to foster a stronger sense of filial piety. During Hari Raya Aidilfitri, young children also seek forgiveness from elders for the sins they may have committed in life. This helps to foster a better sense of self and allow the young to understand the importance of integrity and discipline. Hence, the role that traditions play in grooming society appropriately allows society to progress as a people, dispelling the myth that traditions are no longer relevant in Singapore.

Finally, as a nation that prides itself on being a multiracial and multicultural society, traditions play a significant role in uniting people of different races and religions together and helping to inculcate a 'Singaporean' identity. The racial riots of 1964 have shown us the dire consequences of people of different races failing to cooperate with one another. Hence, the Singaporean government does its best in ensuring that people of different races and religions understand the importance of the various traditions and festivals commemorated in Singapore. Students will find themselves familiar with the annual Chinese New Year celebrations held at schools islandwide. Even the non-Chinese who do not commemorate this joyous occasion find immense pleasure engaging in activities such as the tossing of Yu Sheng. Community clubs also organise events to commemorate the various festivals, attracting large crowds from the community to enjoy performances and play traditional activities like 'congkak' and 'chapteh'. In a non-racial or religious context, Racial Harmony Day not only commemorates the anniversary of the dreadful riots which tore the social fabric of Singapore half a century ago, but also to remind citizens of the need to stay united and foster tolerance with one another. In a world impacted by numerous global events like terror attacks and infectious pandemics, there is a need for Singaporeans to come together and lend our support to one another in times of crisis, especially when Singapore is such a small country. Simply understanding the importance and rationale behind local traditions is already an influential factor that helps to foster a strong sense of nationality and what it inherently means to be a Singaporean, regardless of race,

language or religion. Hence, the argument that traditions are no longer relevant does not hold water in modern-day Singapore.

As a country that is severely lacking in natural resources, Singapore's most valuable resource would be that of human capital. The way for Singapore to move forward is dependent on how much Singaporeans are willing to stay united to support each other, in a world riddled with uncertainty and crisis. That is when traditions come in to positively influence the populace. From young to old, local traditions are catered towards the improvement of everyone, and it plays a significant role in Singapore's social progression. Admittedly, there may be some traditions and practices that seemingly make no sense and are irrelevant in a competitive, ever-changing and fast-paced society like Singapore, and many modern families seem to concur with that notion as well. However, as we take time to reflect and consider the moral, social and economic benefits it has delivered to our nation, we can indeed see that traditions are an indispensable feature of society. Hence, I conclude that traditions will always be relevant in Singapore despite the drawbacks, and Singaporeans will always have reason to feel proud of these traditions.

Comments:
Balance is provided, with relevant arguments clearly based on the Singaporean context. Be careful not to make claims that you have no evidence for, and it would have been good if you had included a line or two to reconcile Singaporeans' 'pragmatic' approach to traditions with the important role that traditions still play in reinforcing values/national unity.

Do celebrities have too much influence in modern society?
Kaila Boh Tsui Ning 19S52

Celebrities have long been highly regarded by society, placed on a pedestal to be worshipped and adored by many. Their highly sold-out world-tours or millions of followers on Instagram are a testament to society's desire to indulge in what celebrities offer to the world. In today's modern society, there has been a seismic shift in the role of celebrities: from merely being a charismatic poster boy or poster girl, to being a role model for billions watching worldwide. It is no wonder that modern-day celebrities are often dubbed as 'influencers', underscoring the sheer amount of influence they have amassed. Yet, I contend that celebrities hold too much influence, as the ability to positively influence millions worldwide is not a simple feat for many of these unknowing celebrities, who - to our dismay - have led others in the wrong direction.

Pundits may claim that celebrities do not have too much influence, because this influence can be used as a powerful force for doing good. They cite examples of how celebrities like BTS have used their wealth for charitable purposes, such as by donating $1 million to the Black Lives Matter movement; while simultaneously prompting their fanbase, known as ARMY, to also match this sum in a single day. Admittedly, this is a prime example of how celebrities could use their widespread influence to endorse a culture of mutual support, benefitting the collective humanity. Another example would be Oprah Winfrey, a name that has become synonymous with celebrity benevolence and charity. Over the decades she has funnelled millions of dollars to organisations, like $10 million to the Hurricane Katrina Relief Fund and another $50 million to education, healthcare, and advocacy for women and children worldwide. These are undeniably telling signs of how celebrities could inspire their followers by demonstrating commendable qualities. This influence is particularly prominent among young fans who are likely to look up to these figures as role models to follow.

Be that as it may, I opine that it would be myopic to relegate celebrities to benevolent figures that are completely altruistic. Examples of self-serving celebrities who have amassed billions of dollars for themselves, without sparing a thought for the millions starving worldwide, are unsurprising. What makes matters worse are celebrities who perform acts like visiting orphanages, pose for pictures beside malnourished children in third-world countries, and are caught in the act of donating a fortune to non-profit organisations, all ostensibly in the name of charity but more of a publicity stunt in actuality. In such unfortunate cases, celebrities are overtly aware of the influence they hold, such that they perform these acts of kindness in a bid to paint themselves as the hero of the day. Ultimately, the self-seeming attitudes of such celebrities simply render their acts of benevolence as merely an empty gesture, highlighting the lack of humanity and warmth they have. With that being said, is it then fair to say that celebrities' fame is well-deserved and justified?

Celebrities do wield too much influence as they could endorse ugly social practices that they are not prepared to take responsibility for. It is not uncommon to see the news peppered with salacious celebrity scandals and recounts of their inappropriate public behaviour. While taking liberty in their fame, these public figures could indulge in morally repugnant activities.

Just take the example of Justin Bieber spitting on 'annoying' fans or Ariana Grande spouting vulgarities at the paparazzi. Such juvenile and uncouth behaviour could lead young, impressionable fans astray, especially when they subscribe to or possibly emulate such behaviour. Two of the most influential singers of their time, Amy Winehouse and Whitney Houston, both lost their lives to alcohol abuse and substance abuse respectively. Such an undignified death should not be perpetuated within society. As such, it is ostensible that many of these celebrities are unaware, or simply ignorant, of the influence they yield, rendering them unsuitable recipients of such power.

Celebrities also wield too much influence as they ultimately uphold a culture of superficiality. Yes indeed, their crafts and works have invariably enriched the mundane lives of the ordinary. Yet, these entertainments are ultimately cheap thrills and add little value to our daily lives that often revolve around work. Take for instance how millions around the world turned to series on YouTube like 'Will it Blend?' and 'The Annoying Orange' to watch the meaningless antics of a talking orange or the frivolous act of an iPad being blended. It can be seen that most of this influence is often surface level, and lacks a profound impact on their fans. Celebrities have even stripped away the influence and importance of more pressing and crucial information. According to a recent Rasmussen Reports National Television Survey, 87% of American adults feel that the media pays too much attention to celebrity news, and too little attention to information that affects them. This, too, can be seen in how newspaper headlines often revolve around celebrities' lives, while crucial information like the stock market is forced to take a backseat in some inconspicuous column in the back. As such, celebrities wield too much influence in modern society given that this influence is, more often than not, only superficial.

Finally, celebrities wielding too much influence has led the layman to become disillusioned with reality. Celebrities like social media star Kylie Jenner often post Photoshopped, Facetuned images of themselves on social media platforms. But when 'perfect' photos of celebrities are placed on a pedestal as the ideal beauty standard, then those who are unable to achieve this truly impossible level of 'perfection' may feel defective or inferior. Hence, the stark contrast between celebrities' lives and our own may cause people to lose touch with reality, turning to plastic surgery treatments in a bid to fit into the tacit dogma built by celebrities. This disillusionment is also a testament that celebrities hold too much influence and generally are too highly regarded, when they may be hiding behind a facade of fame, wealth, and happiness.

In essence, it is truly no longer a question of whether celebrities hold the power to influence. Rather, it is whether or not these celebrities wield an excessive amount of fame that they are unqualified and unprepared to handle. Although I agree that they hold too much influence in modern society, where people are scrutinising their every move 24/7, yet I also recognise the sheer potential this influence has in igniting positive social change. But until the day that we can safely say that all celebrities are responsible agents of change, it would be fallacious to deny that celebrities hold too much influence.

Comments:

Written with knowledge of the topic and conviction about the issue. Strong personal voice and good argumentation. An enjoyable read!

Is modern life making us more lonely?
Neo Boon Zan 19S38

Modern living has blessed us with a lot. It can be characterised by its quickness, busyness, and even the extensive use of technology. The technology that has come out of it has improved many lives. People are now more connected than ever and for some, this has made life less lonesome, as it has given them the means to connect with so many more people. But for others, the briefness and rather superficial interactions that have come out of it has made them more lonely instead. I believe that modern living has driven people apart by intensifying competition in the global arena, and giving people the false impression that virtual interactions can replace actual ones.

The argument that most people have for modern life is that the technological advancements accompanying it have made people more connected than before; it is thus easier to form new relationships and maintain older ones. People now have a plethora of platforms to choose from to have virtual meetings, from WhatsApp video calls, Skype, Zoom to even FaceTime. These electronic mediums help people meet online without much trouble. The usefulness of such platforms has been amplified through this current pandemic, where people are prohibited from leaving their houses. We saw groups of friends meeting together through Skype, concerts being livestreamed through Naver, and community programs like block quizzes and game nights being held online. It is undeniable that at a time where people are isolated, modern living has allowed us to be more connected.

However, it would be myopic to only discuss the benefits of such modern living and ignore its consequences. It is a fallacy to think that the use of such technology is as good as or even better than real interactions. Communicating through electronic mediums cannot guarantee us the same sense of togetherness and kinship that face-to-face interactions can. Such platforms can crash, lag, and stop abruptly, and on top of that, it is obvious that human emotions and expressions may not be communicated across to others as well. Singaporean students have gone through Home-Based Learning (HBL), and many have felt that online lessons made them feel even more alone. This is because seeing tutors and classmates through a screen and 'logging off', and thus cutting off the interaction immediately, has seemingly taken the humanness out of interactions. Some American students from the graduating batch of 2020 had their graduation online, and it is obvious that the sense of achievement and euphoria from ending a phase of their lives and starting a new one is not the same. What is usually a day of celebration full of hugs and tears with the people who have helped the students make it to the end has been reduced to receiving the cap and gown through the mail, pre-recorded speeches, and half-hearted words of congratulations in group chats. Under normal circumstances, people have also been over-relying on this aspect of modern living. Instagram Direct Messages, WhatsApp and Telegram are only a few of the existing social media platforms that people use to communicate. However, the messages and emojis that people use, even voice messages, often fail to encapsulate ideas in their entirety, much less communicate complex emotions to others. Humans communicate and form connections on a much deeper level than just words.

We do so through body language, eye contact, and more; and the use of technology from modern living hinders that, making people feel less connected.

Furthermore, another aspect of modern living – globalisation - has widened the scope and depth of competition for people all around the world, and as a result decreased the quality of relationships. Previously, the idea of competition was most commonly understood as existing within communities, and the most global form of competition was probably the Olympics. That is not the case now. Opportunities in education and job offers are just some areas where people are no longer just competing against others from the same community. For example, students from different countries take part in the Programme for International Student Assessment or PISA, which measures the standard of students all around the world in numeracy, literacy and science; and countries compete for a higher rank in these tests. In an example closer to home, prestigious courses in the National University of Singapore (NUS) have become more competitive, even for Singaporean students, because of how openings are now open to foreign students as well. The cutthroat competition in the global arena makes forming honest and true relationships based on trust tougher, since people are often pitted against each other. The innate need for human understanding and support is thus harder to satisfy, and people tend to become more emotionally starved because of it.

Also, a characteristic of modern living is the presence of shallow relationships formed from brief and quick encounters with others who share the same interests as us. Humans are herd animals, and in a sense, we seek to find friends and companions that share the same thoughts as us. Previously, people do so through deep conversations, investing time and effort to spend time together, to know others well enough and conclude that the relationship is worth keeping. Now, with the proliferation of online sites like Tumblr and Twitter, people can just find other like-minded people and congregate just by searching a keyword or a hashtag. Sites like these are littered with fandoms of celebrities, movies, and books, and discussions within these groups of people are often with regards to similar topics. People gossip and share and discuss the latest rumours. When what binds people together is shallow and superficial, like celebrity gossip, then the relationship that these people share is bound to be hollow and easily broken as well. While there is nothing wrong with finding like-minded people to talk about light-hearted topics with, it becomes problematic when people start mistaking such relationships as substantial enough to replace real-life ones. And there is a growing trend of this happening as we see in the recent boom of renting businesses where people 'rent' friends. The friends in shallow friendships may be present to talk about light-hearted topics, but in times of actual need, they fail to show up because they have no reason to, causing people to resort to having to hire a 'friend' to fulfil a deeper need within them. The business and quickness of modern life have encouraged these hollow relationships that are less time-intensive and more superficially attractive than real-life ones, but it is pertinent that people understand the need for relationships in us goes far beyond finding people who agree with us. The need for human connectedness and deep understanding should be sourced from valuable and meaningful friendships. People become lonelier when they fail to see that.

In conclusion, the briefness of modern life catalysed by the increased use of technology in our daily lives has made people lonelier. The idea that connecting with others means forming

a relationship gives people a false impression of what human relationality is. At the core of loneliness in people having modern lives is the wrong understanding that being more connected to the world and having a wider social circle, both virtually and in real life, is sufficient to fill the need for human connections. In fact, the quality of our relationships should precede the quantity of it.

Comments:

Good arguments here that really consider the context of modern life. Keep up the good work. You could improve by bringing in more concrete examples to illustrate this phenomenon of modern loneliness.

Assess the view that today's young people are a misunderstood generation.
Timothy Swee Yong Xiang 19S53

The strawberry generation - the label given to the youth of today, the strawberry is affiliated with young people as adults look down on a weak and 'squishy' group of incompetent and self-serving individuals that are pampered and ignorant of the world and society. Many would deem young people today to be incapable of dealing with stress, and that they simply veer away from conflict. Yet, is that the truth? The modern world is flawed, and the youth tend to be victims as they are pitted against technologies that past generations never had to encounter in their adolescence. Furthermore, this 'incompetent' generation have often stepped up to the occasion when those above them, the people in power and the older generations, have failed to do so. It is undeniable that young people in today's society are indeed a misunderstood generation, as their capabilities go unrecognised even as they lay the groundwork for hope and progress in an ever-chaotic world.

Some would agree that young people today are intolerant of stress as they constantly avoid any obstacle or conflict that is placed in front of them. Adults tend to suggest that today's young adopt an 'easy way out' mindset, fearful of having to overcome challenges on a regular basis. The example that many youths rely on the gig economy for income would be brought up in favour of this perspective. The idea suggests that young people turn to the gig economy in the form of food delivery services in order to avoid taking up office jobs, as the baggage of working with others and having to fulfil expectations are far too daunting. However, what is not mentioned is the uncertainty of the gig economy. Young people that take up quick jobs in order to make a few bucks are not granted job security, the insurance provided to them is more than likely insignificant, and the income earned is insufficient despite being hard-earned. The uncertainty found in office jobs is also forgotten by those who argue that young people are incapable of confronting hardship, as many of these jobs are becoming obsolete in our volatile and ever-changing world. Young people are thus deterred from seeking such employment, as job security may also not be guaranteed in doing so. For instance, the print magazine industry is becoming less profitable in an increasingly digitalised society. Many young journalists, aspiring writers and editors are being retrenched as they are seen as unnecessary and surplus to requirements, especially alongside their lack of experience. Thus, it is definitive that young people are getting the short end of the stick, as their struggles go unrecognised while people continue to fault them for their fragility and lack of robustness.

Not only are young people seen as intolerant to stress, constantly avoiding challenges, but their self-presentation is often passed as superficial and to an extent pointless. Young people today are frequently caught up with the virtual, online world as they spend hours of their day on social media platforms scrolling and posting. The desire to display oneself is an innate trait of millennials and Gen Z and in being so, creates even more conflict between the ideas of society and the mindset of the youth. People deem young peoples' addiction to social media a flaw, yet is this truly a shortcoming or instead a mere necessity? The persona of an individual is often tied to their online presence. Their posts, comments and social interaction on the internet are what others judge them upon. Employers use these to gauge the competency of individuals, and can even determine employment based on one's online

appearance. Stories of past posts coming back to haunt individuals are becoming ever so frequent, such as Hollywood director James Gunn's offensive tweets resulting in his firing as they were deemed socially unacceptable and unaligned with the company's, Disney's, views. Such cases remind young people to curate the best visual of themselves on online spaces, as presenting one's ideal self may be the first step to reaching success in the future. Thus, it cannot be denied that such attitudes come across as superficial, but the reality is that this intrinsic superficiality is becoming a necessity for individuals in today's world. The idealistic presentation of online influencers moreover supports the necessity for such superficial behaviour as success online is translated into the real world, seen by the mountains of money earned by the most 'ideal' figures such as the likes of Kendall Jenner and Brooklyn Beckham. These internet 'beauties' are covered in sponsorships and monetised posts that enable them to make a living off social media, proving that superficiality does indeed pay. Therefore, there is a clear misunderstanding made towards young people, albeit a justified one to say the least.

Lastly, many fail to see the potential and capacity for change that young people bring to society. Adults tend to see society's issues as a problem left for the grown-ups to deal with. Ironically, the accused 'incompetent' youth are left bystanders to the failures of those in power, as they are continuously urged to distance themselves from the 'adult-world'. However, as the 'adult-world' becomes increasingly intermingled with the entire world itself, young people have begun to intervene and step up for the beliefs of the unheard. Youths such as Greta Thunberg have been brought into the spotlight as advocates for necessary and justified change, with Greta specifically being an advocate for a change in behaviour to counter climate change. Other young people have spoken up in the name of injustice, such as 22-year-old Manchester United player Marcus Rashford campaigning for children of lower-income families to have access to free meals beyond the school term, specifically due to hardships these families faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The campaign had resulted in the government making a U-turn on their decision to not provide free school meals to students during the school break. Rashford's efforts have gone duly recognised by members of the public throughout the nation. Such cases of change encapsulate the capabilities of the younger generation that continue to go misunderstood and under-appreciated by other generations in modern-day society.

Ultimately, the young people of today are often misunderstood and seen as weak, superficial and incapable individuals. However, the reality is that these individuals have been left to fight and fend for themselves in an ever-changing world where they so often are at the bottom of the food chain. Yet, their vibrance and abilities cannot be ignored, as they continue to grow into the leaders of the future that are bound to captivate and bring change for the better.

Comments:
This was a very insightful piece. Very good use of examples. Keep up the good work! You can deepen your evaluation by considering the changing world young people are growing up in.

Assess the view that today's young people are a misunderstood generation.
Chai Gien Lyn 19S51

The young people of today can be likened to the young mutants in the action movie X-Men. In the movie, superhero Charles Xavier is principal of the School for Gifted Youngsters – a sacred place for young mutants that possess extraordinary talents but are shunned by the public. Some are able to shoot lasers from their eyes, while others are able to control the weather; yet many have come to misunderstand the gifts and unique characters that these young mutants are blessed with. Much like these young mutants, many young people today have their own way of doing and perceiving things. However, in the eyes of the general public, especially the older generation, the actions of these young people might come across as mindless, weak, amongst many other names. Thus, the view that today's young people are a misunderstood generation is a valid one.

Firstly, with the high proliferation of technology in young people's lives, many might see their acts of self-expression as mindless and narcissistic. In today's day and age, the primary mode of communication and social interaction amongst young people would be through social media and other online platforms. Young people are free to upload photos or videos to express themselves however they like. As such, there has been a rise in the number of 'selfies' or even meme pages where young people share pictures and texts they find entertaining. This form of self-expression might seem slightly far-fetched and meaningless compared to the activities of the older generation, as they relied on non-technologically advanced ways to express themselves, such as attending book clubs or by meeting up with their friends to have more fulfilling conversation. Thus, the act of constantly updating their lives online might paint the young as narcissistic and vain, causing other generations to misunderstand this evolving way of communication. Furthermore, with the recent rising popularity of the app TikTok, more young people have shot to stardom after posting mere five-second-long videos on the mobile application. Most of the videos found on TikTok are rather nonsensical and are mere entertainment for people to pass their time; clips could feature dancing teenagers or even young people playing pranks on one another. People on TikTok also often chase after endless recognition through 'likes' and 'follows', which seems frivolous in the eyes of the older generation. With our daily lives being shifted onto the virtual world, it is no wonder that the new form of expressing oneself today might be misunderstood by other generations who are not used to the digital way of life.

Secondly, with the multitude of challenges occurring in today's world, young people might be seen as weak and are unable to withstand hardship. Born into a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world, the lives of the majority of young people today are ever-evolving and the young need to constantly adapt themselves in order to stay afloat in a fast-paced modern society. However, being at a young and tender age, young people may be more susceptible to negative influences around them. In recent years, teenage suicide rates have been increasing year on year and the primary reason for the suicides was due to high-stress levels. Cyber-bullying cases have been on the rise as more and more young people fall prey to online bullying in ways such as body shaming. Each time a young person crumbles under pressure, society labels them as weak and unable to withstand the tide of time. In Taiwan, the

young people are labelled as the 'strawberry generation' as there has been a growing generation of young people who are supposedly unable to work under stress.

However, the general population has failed to realise how challenging it is for the young to grow up in such evolving and unprecedented times. In the past, facing hardship for young people then meant being able to work hard to find a decent job and to provide for the family. However, with such an uncertain world today, working hard might not even guarantee jobs for today's young people. Youth unemployment in South Korea has grown by 28% in the last decade and the young often find their skills rendered useless due to the evolving needs of the jobs market. Globalisation has indeed made job seeking for young people more competitive. As such, it is inevitable that young people are not able to withstand this unsurmountable workload and expectations of them today, but society has failed to recognise that and often misunderstood them as weak.

However, with greater awareness of societal issues, people have slowly begun to put faith in this once misunderstood younger generation. Being more educated and better informed through internet usage, young people today are taking on more active roles as the future generation of the world; by involving themselves in things and issues they are strongly passionate about. The rest of society has taken a back seat as they begin to understand the reasons behind the young people's actions, and thus to support and respect their cause. For example, after the 2018 Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Florida, 18-year-old survivor Emma Gonzalez took to the streets to hold protests and rallies to pressurise the American government to abolish gun laws. 16-year-old environmental activist Greta Thunberg has also been widely applauded for her bravery in speaking up against climate change, in her United Nations speech in front of world leaders. These examples show how society has begun to put back the once misplaced faith in young people as they let go of the once judgemental and narrow-minded views they had against the young.

Ultimately, although it may seem that society has slowly begun to put aside their misunderstandings of young people amid these youth-led social movements, it is difficult to put aside this inherent and visceral prejudice that the young ages of these youths make them naïve and reckless. As young people utilise social media and other platforms to stand for their cause, many have made claims that young people often attempt to make headway into improving issues without considering its consequences. One prominent example would be Joshua Wong, who led the Umbrella Movement against the Hong Kong government's decision to hold a selective pre-screening of the candidates for Hong Kong's chief executive in 2014. Despite his best efforts to ask for basic human rights and freedom for his fellow countrymen, the media blasted his actions as naïve and baseless, as his protests caused gruesome violence that burst out onto the streets. In the more recent Black Lives Matter movement, many have critiqued young people for their reckless protests and marches that only bring inconvenience and hindrance to others. People claim that these young people are unable to comprehend the complexity of racism due to their young age, and are unable to make any structural changes in policies. Yet, people who made these remarks fail to consider the tremendous amount of bravery and courage it takes for young Black Americans to stand up against such systemic racism, and to reveal themselves in public to openly say "enough is enough". Thus, no matter

how hard young people try to stand up for their cause, the rest of society still views them as an innocent and naïve generation who are unable to see the reality of things.

In conclusion, the many intentions and actions of young people today are still misunderstood, especially by those who fail to relate to the relevance of their actions. For the young to escape the clasps of these inherent misunderstandings, there is a need to bridge the huge generational gap between the older and the young; for the older to continue putting their feet into the shoes of the next generation, and for the young to slow down their pace to allow others to catch up. It took quite some time for the X-Men universe to embrace the talents of the young mutants living amidst them; but I believe that in time to come, young people today can be fully embraced by society as well.

Comments:
A balanced and fair discussion of the nuances and complexities of young people. Substantiation could be boosted a bit further, but good attempt otherwise.

Assess the view that today's young people are a misunderstood generation.
Esther Tang Hui Jun 19S38

Young people today have significantly different characteristics compared to their counterparts in past generations. They are always characterized as weak, self-indulgent and other negative traits. This group of people are named 'Millennials' or the 'Strawberry Generation'. Many people only scratch the surface of the lives of young people today, thus citing all these negative traits. Although there are people who view young people today negatively, as a part of the young generation myself, I vehemently agree with the view that today's young people are a misunderstood generation.

Critics may argue that young people today are weak and that they feel their views are often justified, as they compare their past young selves to the current generation. It is undeniable that the past generation had it tougher than the young people today, in terms of survival. People in the past had to search for food, shelter and protection, while young people today mainly just have to study hard and get a job. Despite the easier tasks that young people have to do today, they often lament and complain, taking to social media to vent their anger. The rise of helicopter parents has also aggravated the situation. Overprotectiveness of the current generation has made them 'soft' and less resilient, hence the name 'strawberries'. In the Primary School Leaving Examination last year, many parents took to Facebook, complaining to our Education Minister that the Mathematics paper our 12-year-olds had taken was too difficult. A trivial Mathematics paper caused these students to shed tears, all because of the loss of two or three marks. If these young people today are not even able to overcome such tiny failures, the lack of fortitude would no doubt make the past generations allude to them as weak.

However, although I do share concerns with the past generation on young people being 'strawberries', we must not overlook the fact that young people today are facing a panoply of changes due to the constantly changing landscape of our world; thus, viewing them as weak would be a travesty. Considering the COVID-19 situation, many people have to adapt to changes in their livelihoods, such as working from home, the sudden need to take care of their children and so on. In my opinion, given the previous generation, such changes would have indeed taken a significantly longer time to occur, because they lack the skills required in terms of technology. Young people today also must face the incessant changing demands of the world. As the world progresses, different situations arise, and they require different demands. Young people today have to continuously upgrade themselves so they can remain relevant - for example, possessing the skills and knowledge required, such as 21st Century Competencies. Ineptitude will result in loss of jobs, and they may lose the ability to fend for themselves. Thus, young people today are misunderstood for their negative traits, because other people do not look at the big picture of what our young generation have to face today.

Moreover, young people are often misunderstood as being self-indulgent. They are perceived as selfish, self-centred and often only caring about themselves, something which I feel is an incredible misinterpretation. Young people today are far from indulgent: they fight for rights, for beliefs, for change. They have strong beliefs and believe that 'there is a lot of

wrong in the world we live in', as quoted by Chris Colfer. In the past, discrimination was highly prominent in society. Though it still exists, it has been toned down significantly. This is all due to changes made by young people. In recent years, young people have fought for rights for minorities, the LGBTQ community, for freedom and many more. Many people view the Hong Kong protests as barbaric, and that the young people involved in the protests are asinine or ignorant. However, they are only fighting for the freedom that is rightfully theirs, to fight for the country they love, to be free of China's control. Climate change activist Greta Thunberg is another prominent figure in fighting for changes in the world, to alleviate the problems of climate change. Though her views are slightly radical, she is merely fighting for a better world for future generations. Not to mention Malala Yousafzai, the girl who was shot just because she was fighting for educational equality for females. I do agree that some young people are self-indulgent and all that they care about is themselves, but we must not forget the young people who are fighting for a better tomorrow, to improve the lives of many others, who the past generations had and still have failed to protect. Thus, young people today are indeed a misunderstood generation.

Furthermore, young people today are often misunderstood for being apathetic to the needs of others. Past generations have invariably commented that young people today lack compassion. They purport that young people do not show care and concern toward those in need of help, such as the disabled or the elderly. They often cite baseless examples of how young people only care about school, grades and academics, and that nothing else is important in their lives. I do agree with this view to a certain extent, and that there are young people who only care about such trivial issues. However, such attitudes have been changing. In many parts of the world, we often see volunteer groups involving young people providing help to the less fortunate in other countries, especially less developed ones. An example would be UNICEF. Many young people participate under UNICEF to provide relief to people in need. Moreover, young people are also taught to be compassionate to other people. Schools have been paving the way for young people to be more concerned about the needs of other people. For example, schools in Singapore emphasize the need to help others by instilling moral lessons such as Civics in students' timetables. Students also take part in Values in Action (VIA) activities, such as helping the elderly or the poor. Young people today also make it a point to take the initiative to help others. For example, a group of 18-year-olds have been delivering free food to the homes of those who are unable to go out due to the COVID-19 situation. Thus, it would be wrong to label young people as apathetic.

Lastly, young people today are often misunderstood as being apathetic to current social issues. It is often cited that young people do not care about what is going on in the world, which I feel is an unjustified interpretation of young people. Young people today are well aware of the situations going on in the world. For example, they do know about the Black Lives Matter Protests that have been going on recently. Many young people from around the world have participated in the fight for rights for people of African descent. K-pop stans have also been seen using their 'influence' to make hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter, #MAGA, and so on to push for more attention on these matters. Moreover, a footballer in the UK also pressured the UK government to provide free meals for the unfortunate children in the country. Without the tweets and emails sent by the footballer, the UK government would not have made such a

change. Thus, if young people today were apathetic to such situations, such changes would not have been observed. Hence, it is unfair to misunderstand young people today as apathetic.

In conclusion, I stand by my view that young people today are a misunderstood generation. Every single generation has their own unique characteristics that make them inimitable and thus it would be unjustified to misunderstand any generation. I have a strong belief that young people today, with their strong beliefs, are going to change the world and make it a better place for everyone to live in. They will definitely make the world a more idyllic place for me and for you.

Comments:
Good argument that attempts to contextualise why young people are misunderstood. Arguments can be much stronger here by bringing in general trends drawn from real-world examples.

Is censorship still necessary in today's society?
Lee Young Kai 19S38

The issue of censorship has been an age-old debate. While there are some who vehemently fight for their rights to access different sources of information, others warn of the risks of not restraining information. The advent of the Internet, and its corresponding ease of access to various sources, has rekindled the debate on censorship as there are many who are concerned about the increased accessibility of posting and viewing online content. While some might argue that our educated populace is discerning enough, and censorship is outdated, I argue that censorship continues to be crucial, especially because of the risk of divisive politics and extremism.

With an increasingly educated populace, there are some who point out that censorship is a thing of the past. With rising education rates, many people globally are more sensitive and discerning of the news they read. As such, there is no longer a need for censorship as people can decide for themselves how to perceive and take in different sources of information. For example, despite Sonny Liew's 'The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye' casting doubts on the Singapore government's approach to handling communist insurgencies in Singapore, most Singaporeans understood that the government had to take a hard-line approach to ward off communism in Singapore. Hence, this example shows that the Singapore populace understands the nuances and cultural context of the issue, and are able to make a judgement for themselves. In the release of John Bolton's tell-all book that has been perceived to reveal Trump's wrongdoing, many also remain discerning of the accuracy of the contents of the book. While the 21st century has seen a rise in a vocal public, there is no need to intentionally hide information from them as they are able to exercise self-judgement. Hence, some argue that censorship is no longer necessary.

However, I feel that the above argument only holds true for certain scenarios. Firstly, while I acknowledge that today's youth are more educated than ever, I posit that many adults and seniors might still easily accept information at face value, and are less discerning of the media they consume. This is a concern because they are the majority of the electorate, who will inevitably decide on a nation's political future. Hence, there is an imperative need that the information they consume and by extension the political views they have are grounded on facts rather than falsehoods. It is thus a pity that sites like Fox News still systematically exaggerate and even falsify information for their own agenda, misinforming the public and distorting their views. Furthermore, even if I accept the erroneous assumption that, indeed, people are educated, that does not necessarily mean that they can fully discern for themselves, especially amidst the sheer amount of information that has inundated users. For example, the algorithm of tech giants like Google has been widely criticised for presenting users with sources that have similar viewpoints with theirs, reinforcing their sometimes-inaccurate view through the 'confirmation bias's phenomenon. Hence, even the most educated could fall prey to distorted viewpoints rather than challenge pre-existing viewpoints. While this is not to say that censorship will completely solve the entire problem of misinformation and falsehoods and eradicate the 'confirmation bias's phenomenon, I believe that censorship plays an important

role in mitigating the problem at hand by removing sites that put out blatant lies. Hence, even if a society possesses educated people, censorship remains necessary in today's society.

With the rise of extremism and terror groups, I believe that censorship is necessary to guard society against extremist factions. The rise of the Internet has allowed terror groups to post videos and content online anonymously and easily, radicalising Internet users. This problem is especially worrying as impressionable young children today use the Internet, and there is a concern that they will be easily influenced by radicalisation efforts. For example, the Islamic terror group ISIS has been known to dedicate large amounts of resources to its online recruitment efforts in terms of videos of what they do. With extremist groups harnessing technology for their own insidious intents, we need to block out such information for the sake of national security. 8chan is a popular alt-right website that has become a boiling pot of hatred and white supremacist sentiments, provoking governments to block the site to protect its citizens. In the cyber domain, under the veil of anonymity, people can very easily express hatred and post divisive comments, hence threatening the social fabric. In such cases, I argue that the trade-off of freedom of access to information is one that is worth it for the sake of national security. Hence, with the insidious spread of hatred and extremism online, governments need to continue policing the Internet.

Furthermore, I believe that the rise of online falsehoods and misinformation necessitates censorship to prevent divisive politics from occurring. The ease of spreading and sharing information in today's information age means that any fake news can reach thousands of people instantly. This is exacerbated by the fact that fake news has seven times the propensity to spread, and sensationalist headlines often garner the attention of viewers when seen. In this light, the censorship of false information is crucial to protect people and governments. For example, many false pieces of news were forced to be taken down from the site 'States Times Review' as they were found to be illegitimate and without grounds. While many Singaporeans understand the intent of the Protection Against Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act, few see its utility. However, the grim reality that the United Kingdom is facing shows us the possible consequence of unrestrained information. For example, during the Brexit referendum, many of those in the Leave camp presented fake information on the amount of government monies that was sent back to the European Union. While it is unfair to say that fake news alone caused Brexit, I believe that in a fast-paced era, the UK citizens could have taken in the falsehoods while being inundated with a lot of information, contributing to the Brexit referendum. This example highlights how dangerous fake news is, and by extension, how important censorship is. While I am not saying that Brexit would not have happened if not for the presence of fake news, I believe that censorship would have helped people exercise better value judgement even while they were overwhelmed with information. Hence, I believe that censorship is still necessary in today's world.

Ultimately, I believe that whether censorship should prevail in societies, and the degree of censorship that different societies should have, depends on the nature of the society. It is important to recognise that the issue of censorship presents the trade-off between national security and freedom of speech. While some countries pride themselves on freedom for its citizens, other nations see that censorship is necessary. For example, in the United States, despite the Charlottesville Protests leading to calls for the tightening of free speech, the

majority of US citizens still stood for their First Amendment right. In this case, the cultural norm of the US, where freedom of speech and freedom of information is held in high regard, meant that censorship would only lead to strong rebuke and backlash, and would not be beneficial. In China, the Xi regime has reinstated the 'Great Firewall of China', and even sites like Google and Facebook are banned. While many are shocked at this Chinese reality, it is worth understanding the cultural context – where the Chinese government has had huge control over the lives of its citizens. However, in today's society, this Chinese model has also raised questions on its sustainability, and the youths in China are increasingly finding new ways to gain access to banned sites, through the use of Virtual Private Networks. Ultimately, a balance between national security and freedom needs to be struck, and the extent rather than the existence of censorship needs to be considered. However, I still believe that a certain degree of censorship is necessary in modern society.

Comments:
This was a thoughtful and nuanced piece that considered the issue of censorship from multiple perspectives. Keep it up! You could also consider how feasible censorship is now in this day and age.

Is censorship still necessary in today's society?
Kayla Yong Enxin 19S38

In our increasingly volatile, complex, uncertain and ambiguous (VUCA) 21st century society, censorship has been an issue that is generally frowned upon. Being seen as a limit on the freedom of individuals to freely express themselves, both in the real world and online space, it increasingly appears to have lost its value due to the increasing pervasiveness of social media and a lack of trust in who controls the censorship. However, I believe that despite these limitations, censorship is still necessary in today's society to maintain the diverse and volatile social fabric and ensure national security.

Critics of censorship often point to the increasing pervasiveness of social media in society, making censorship largely ineffective and therefore arguably ineffective today. In today's technologically advanced and digitally savvy society, social media has become an increasingly integral part of daily life. Every day, countless amounts of information is being uploaded onto the digital space, reaching thousands in a matter of seconds. Hence, it appears that due to this sheer amount of and speed of information proliferated over social media platforms, it is challenging for censorship to keep up. This can be illustrated by the Christchurch shooting incident. The perpetrator live-streamed his horrific acts via Facebook, a social media platform, causing his crimes to reach the eyes of millions all over the world. Although Facebook had censorship laws against such violent and criminal content, it took almost 2 hours before it was censored from the public eye, which was obviously too late as the live stream had already achieved its intended effect of broadcasting his crimes to the world. Therefore, it is justifiable to say that censorship is becoming less effective with the growing adoption of social media globally, causing censorship to lose its value in today's society.

Additionally, censorship may be argued by some to be necessary due to the lack of trust in the people who control censorship laws, which is usually the government. It is no surprise that censorship may be used by the government to pursue their own political goals. Especially in today's society, where individuals are beginning to speak out more against the government and air their grievances, the likelihood of the government using censorship to protect their political power is even higher. In the case of China, the government has used censorship laws to remove online comments and discussions that were against the ruling party. Even more recently, China officials had forced Dr. Lee Wen Liang to remove his post on social media, where he aired concerns about the possible Coronavirus outbreak in China, in order to create the facade that the country was running well under the rule of the ruling party. The increasing incidence of such events has led to the erosion of trust between the people and the Chinese government as they feel the censorship laws are only a tool for the government to retain power, making censorship unnecessary for the betterment of their lives. Therefore, it can be argued that when trust between people and the government is lost, censorship becomes unnecessary as it may very likely become a political tool.

However, it is microscopic to condemn censorship solely on this basis as not every country uses censorship for political goals. Censorship, on the other hand, is still necessary for society as it can be used to uphold national security in today's society. With the prevalence of

fake news in today's world, censorship could very well serve as a barrier to them and protect the country. This is perhaps why countries such as Singapore and Germany, to name a few, have enacted laws that allow the government power to censor fake news. Respectively termed as the Protection Against Online Falsehood and Manipulation Act (POFMA) and the Network Enforcement Act, they aim to control and limit the spread of fake news in the digital world that could potentially threaten national security. Given that the danger of fake news in society has been especially evident in today's society, as seen by the potentially fatal incident of an armed man walking into Comet Ping Pong upon believing fake news that claimed it was a paedophile ring, it is justifiable for the government to enact laws to control fake news. Moreover, this is not to say that such laws cannot become a political tool for power-hungry governments as mentioned in the earlier paragraph, but it all hinges on how the government uses it in a transparent way. Take Singapore for example: when POFMA was passed last year, there was much scepticism about the fairness of the law and transparency the government would have. However, after bringing it into force a few times, the government has generally shown objectivity and transparency in enforcing this law, through the detailed reports on cases where this law was used, resulting in a large fall in dissent against the law. Hence, with the protection it brings to countries, censorship is still necessary in society as long as it is used in a responsible manner by the government.

Lastly, censorship is still necessary in today's society to maintain the social fabric, which has become increasingly diverse and volatile in today's society. Censorship prevents people from saying anything they want, which could spark racial or religious tensions that further divides society. This is evident in the Amy Cheong fiasco or Anton Casey saga, where both individuals passed discriminatory remarks that infuriated certain groups in society. In such cases, censorship is necessary as it prevents hurt to another party in society to maintain social peace and stability, especially as today's society grows incredibly diverse. Additionally, besides censorship to prevent sparking of tensions, censorship could also be necessary to prevent social tensions from being inflamed further. Censorship could be used to prevent tensions from becoming worse, as it restricts what each party could say in retaliation which could help to deescalate the social tension. For example, when racial tensions were high in the USA following George Floyd's murder and the subsequent Black Lives Matter protests, Twitter made an unprecedented move of removing one of President Donald Trump's tweets on the grounds of it 'glorifying violence', effectively censoring what he had to say. In this case, it was likely that Twitter wanted to prevent the protests riots in the USA from worsening by limiting what Trump would say, given his history of inflammatory tweets that would only antagonise the public further. Therefore, as censorship can prevent the breaking up of extremely diverse and volatile social fabric, which is becoming increasingly common in today's society, censorship is still necessary today.

In conclusion, I believe that censorship is still necessary in today's society, to protect a nation from the rise of fake news and to maintain an increasingly diverse and volatile society. Although there may be disadvantages, such as the government using it as a political tool, I believe the issue does not lie with the censorship alone but goes down to the values of that government — to serve the people or to serve their hunger for power. Censorship may only be a manifestation of the latter, and the government can easily find other ways to maintain their

power besides censorship. Lastly, though the efforts of censorship may seem ineffective, I believe that some effort is better than none - and who knows, with improvements in technology, censorship methods may soon be able to keep up with the proliferation of information on social media in the future.

Comments:

This was an insightful essay with nuanced thought and clear use of examples. Keep up the good work!

Is censorship still necessary in today's society?
Julianne Faye Ong 19S33

Censorship refers to the concealment of certain information by the discretion of government bodies and certain corporations. In history, eminent examples of censorship include Stalin's communist revolution in Russia and Hitler's Germany, where censorship played an integral role in societal and political reforms that required manipulating the spectrum and type of information and news that people have access to. Undeniably, the breadth and scope of news and information that people are exposed to can influence their beliefs and opinions on, especially sensitive subject matters. This thus made censorship in the past a necessary tool for certain governing bodies to tighten their control over their citizens, and even people abroad. In an increasingly globalised world where people are more digitally connected than ever, coupled with the rise and expedience of new media, censorship has become an even bigger moot point. I disagree to a large extent that censorship is still necessary today, despite its legitimacy in maintaining a measure of social order and as a form of public protection.

It can be conceded that censorship today is necessary to maintain some level of social order and to protect the public from radical and excessively harmful content that thrives on the internet. The advent of the world wide web has not only catalysed a global interconnectedness like never seen before, but has inevitably dragged with it through the door the great repercussions of unmitigated freedom of speech. In 2015, radical and extreme Islamic views that circulated on social media spurred 2 Singaporeans to adopt these beliefs and plan terrorist attacks on their own country. Without government intervention of censorship on such inflammatory and dangerously influential information that lurks and festers online, the impressionable in society are liable to be swayed and turned into pawns by these organisations —that might not even have a physical presence in the country— to carry out their dirty work and cause extensive damage to their society. In sensible and largely transparent forms of censorship where the government does not abuse the trust of its citizens and looks out for their ultimate well-being and security, censorship is important in maintaining some semblance of social cohesion and eliminating extreme threats, especially political ideologies that heavily contradict and oppose a society's own set of values and beliefs. The interconnectedness of the internet not only reels in the threat of extremism but also introduces a danger for graphic and emotionally disturbing content. Ex-Facebook employees whose jobs encompassed sifting through reported material gave tearful testimonies of the psychological impact they suffered having to look through such horrendous and traumatic online content, such as but not limited to rape, animal abuse, and murder. Many of them claimed to have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder before quitting their jobs. With an unregulated virtual platform rife with graphic and harmful content, censorship by the platform owners is indispensable to mitigate the psychologically damaging effects of such content, especially on emotionally sensitive and easily distressed individuals. If a few Facebook employees could suffer from such debilitating psychological damage, the effect of the same material exposed to the general public, including children, could be catastrophic. Hence, censorship is necessary to the degree where it can protect people from not only extremist and security-threatening content, but to shield the public from traumatic and unsettling content for their good.

On the other hand, censorship is usually far from ideal or transparent. Today, many governments use it as a political tool to fuel their political agendas and to tighten their grip of control. Government bodies often have the discretion to decide what can be accessed by the public via newspapers and the internet, which concedes a lot of leeway for them to remove libel and defamation against them, concealing their mistakes from the public. Following the airing of an episode of 'Patriot Act' on Netflix that delved into the murder of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi ordered by the Saudi Crown Prince, the show was subsequently blocked on Saudi Arabia's internet. Although Saudi Arabia argued that it was protecting its government from false and malignant defamation, critics across the globe were angered and viewed it as a curtailment of free journalism. In such cases, censorship is weaponised to protect those in power and to keep followers in line. This blindsides the country's citizens to the flaws and secrecies of their government and makes them victims of manipulation. Many social media platforms have also been criticized for not using their algorithms to show posts on urgent issues, such as the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, because of orders by Yemeni officials. Images of war-torn Yemen and the thousands of people suffering from war are scarcely featured on timelines, and this is partly due to government efforts to conceal the problems and crises in their country, reflecting how censorship can serve as a political tool to strengthen their vice grip on power and to deflect public attention. With a paucity of honesty and integrity, censorship can easily become a weapon of corruption and create a system of leaders and blind followers. Censorship might be necessary to maintain social order, but when it is done covertly and dishonestly fuelled by selfish endeavours of the powerful to control their followers' perceptions and deflect enmity, it is not merely unnecessary, but then becomes something extremely detrimental.

Censorship is also unnecessary in a society where freedom of speech and expression is increasingly valued, not just in the west, but now across the globe. The American values that uphold freedom of speech and expression as a human right have had a rippling effect across the globe over the past decades. People take to social media to express their opinions on global affairs and controversial matters, and regardless of the type of view expressed, many are recognising their license to freely express it. Although this could open a floodgate for disinformation, separate forms of regulations have been adopted by platform owners to root out fake news, such as many of Donald Trump's tweets. However, uncontrolled and biased censorship could take away the value and significance of meaningful discourse and academic debate, such as polarising topics like human migration and abortion, by streamlining the types of views that are allowed to be expressed. The problem with censorship is not censorship itself, but rather the consequences that entail it falling into the wrong hands of power. It can be easily turned into a malicious tool that deprives certain people of the privilege to speak out on polarising topics. That being said, the pretty and the ugly of discourse and expression of opinion is important in weaving the social fabric of communication and allowing all voices to be heard equally, provided that they do not have malicious intent to harm and target specific communities or individuals. For instance, the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 is a historical event concealed from the textbooks and internet of China. The great 'firewall' they have imposed on the internet is not only limited to virtual spaces, but even in school textbooks and scholarly research denying Chinese citizens information damaging to President Xi's reputation. In March 2020, Chinese school students were interviewed whether they knew about the brutal police massacre of protestors at Tiananmen Square, with shockingly few of

them aware of the event. In surveillance states like China, censorship is a well-grooved tool to deprive its citizens of access to crucial information and historical knowledge that could turn their opinion against them. People who defame the government are even tracked down and arrested. Citizens are stripped of their freedom to form opinions of their government as the streamlining of media and accessible news have influenced them to adopt a singular and confirmed view of their leaders. These views are more often than not compliments towards the government, as the government only permits journalism that sings their praises, while concealing their mistakes to thwart dissent and ensure everyone follows the opinion that their leaders are anything but corrupt. Although some countries in the world are granted this privilege to freedom of speech, some countries that cling to state censorship and uphold totalitarian or communist principles are reluctant to warrant their citizens such an entitlement to freely express their political views, which not only stifles discourse but also seems rather backward in today's society which increasingly values freedom of speech.

The opponents of censorship also argue that censorship cannot be done in a non-polarising and entirely placatory manner, making it more problematic than without it and hence rendering censorship unnecessary. Censorship can be perceived as inherently flawed, as it requires the subjectivity of the censor in deciding what should be concealed. On top of this, regardless of whether the censoring body makes as much an honest and objective decision as it can to benefit the majority of society, censorship will always be disadvantageous to at least one party and will be heavily criticised accordingly. Facebook has claimed to be a publisher in the public front to deny editorial decisions; however, in court, it has argued that by Section 203 of the Communication Decency Act in America, it is a user platform and is hence justified in making edits and regulations to the content posted on their platform. The legal loopholes and nuances that make censorship such a slippery slope have raised a lot of anger, especially from the public. An extent of censorship is necessary to maintain social order and integrity, but acts such as Singapore's Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act, allowing the government to tackle and remove content they deem harmful, introduce many loopholes that allow the government to reach further than they had committed to abide by. It becomes opportunistic for corruption, and many Singaporeans have expressed their outrage that the law could impinge their freedom of speech despite the government claiming that the tool was for public welfare. Given how Singaporeans have been known to possess a strong culture of trust in their government, this dissatisfaction speaks volumes on how censorship is something irrevocably inflammatory, and a tool that causes general unrest and distress. This does not discredit the necessity of censorship; however, in more cases than not, censorship has been seen to be a tool that cripples people's freedom of speech and smothers people's voices no matter the intention of the censorship, good or bad. The difficulty of carrying out neutral censorship hence serves as another proponent of why censorship is not necessary as it has the potential to create more problems than without.

Censorship needs to be reformed, and its outlines need to be redrawn, so that it can accommodate today's new society. In an increasingly globalised and digitalised world, where everyone and everything is connected, censorship is not only difficult but becoming something dangerous and prone to corruption, making it more unnecessary than not.

Comments:

This was an enjoyable read because your ideas flowed very naturally. Relevant arguments. Good range of concrete examples across different contexts. There were times where you could have made the link to the question clearer, by explaining why censorship is still necessary or not in today's society. Consider the changes that have occurred over time that would warrant the need for censorship (or not).

"Traditional schooling is more important than ever in the age of the Internet." Discuss.
Fong Wai Kei 19A11

Society has progressed a long way with its level of technology. Debates on whether it is a boon or bane often encircle job stability, with the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as well as environmental impacts, and its position as both a cause for concern and cure. The educational institution is also one impacted by the widening reach of technology, and in particular with a rising competitor in disseminating information to the people - the World Wide Web, also known as the Internet. The overwhelming rise of the Internet in the education sector has been perceived as both great help but also a threat to its staff, students, and society. Perhaps an accurate phrase to classify the Internet's role in education is that it is a good servant but a bad master, as the need for traditional schooling is even more imperative in today's world of the rising Internet.

In education, it cannot be denied that the Internet has been of useful service in educating the masses. With growing penetration rates across the globe, people are becoming more connected to the world digitally and have often benefited from the accessibility and convenience that the Internet markets itself as. The most renowned and commonly used platform would be the search engine giant Google, with its user-friendly interface that allows people to get specific answers on a wide variety of topics. Even educators have sought the help of engagement platforms tools on the Internet, such as YouTube videos by TEDTalk, that offer insightful arguments from a variety of voices, or even catchy tunes for learning about Photosynthesis (for instance, 'The Photosynthesis Song') or about the arrangement of measuring units in Mathematics. The interactive experience has also been evolving. The rise of PhotoMath has allowed users to send in personal queries and allow for others to solve them, often with a guided explanation that is much similar to how a Mathematics teacher would break down a summation on the Whiteboard. For higher-order thinking learners, platforms such as JSTOR and EBSCOHost offer a myriad of scholarly articles and journals, allowing users to hear from and be enlightened by professionals in the comfort of their homes. Hence, there is no doubt that the Internet is a useful educational tool, benefitting people with its wide and in-depth knowledge stored in its database, ranging from different mediums and having increasingly interactive elements.

However, it is precisely this broad accessibility at the user's fingertips that also means the Internet poses a threat, proving that traditional schooling is not to be belittled. The growing amount of data on the Internet partially stems from the fact that more people are given the ability to upload and circulate information. More often than not, this gives rise to 'fake news' and extremist opinions, often posted by emboldened users who ravel in being able to hide their identities behind a keyboard. Without face-to-face learning, learners may perceive such information as accurate when they are not and become misinformed or misguided. The alarming 2017 incident where 49 people were shot by a 8chan user in America is one such reminder of the dangerous influence that the Internet can have, and an avenue to be exploited by extremist groups. Hence, there is still a persistent role in traditional schools and educators to occupy.

Educators in those institutions are required to undergo compulsory training, both in their field of knowledge as well as their teaching skills. For example, in Singapore, teachers are required to train at the National Institute of Education (NIE). This would equate to a decent level of competency from these educators that make them reliable and trustworthy. Compulsory subjects taught at school equip students with necessary skills, especially in today's world. Arts and humanities subjects, such as History and Social Studies, teach and train students to critically analyse and further question the reliability and provenance of sources. This is particularly useful with the rise of 'fake news' that has become prevalent on social and news media platforms, allowing discernment of information to become quickly dispensed. Science subjects also teach students to more precisely select and adapt facts to support their answers. Coupled with the skill of logical reasoning and coming up with trains of thought, traditional school thus plays a key role in teaching people not to simply download any information they see or deem to be true.

Furthermore, even with the rise in accessibility of the Internet, traditional schooling plays a pivotal role in fighting for improved equity and social mobility in societies globally. Traditional schools provide the physical campus and learning environment that the digital and virtual Internet is unable to compete with. From face-to-face interaction with teachers to classroom learning with their friends, traditional education provides the human connection and touch that is so deeply innate in everyone. Having a conducive environment helps to facilitate concentration and processing of information that results in a better learning experience. The rise of the COVID-19 pandemic has spotlighted the pillar that traditional schools provide in learning, for instance when Channel News Asia interviewed a low-income household of a single mother with eight children. Family members were somewhat stressed out and displaced with having to learn in such cramped living conditions, including the cacophony of noises from the different Home-Based Learning (HBL) experiences, be it watching videos or talking with their teachers virtually. One member taking the 'O' level examinations even had to retreat to the staircase. Traditional schools provide a form of leverage, better allowing students to learn in similar environments. A Harvard study also proved that increased Internet use shortens people's attention span, which is a problem that traditional schools help to curb, with writing practices that span up to three hours long in one sitting and demand for acute focus. Hence, traditional schooling helps to fill the void of human interaction, and provides a stepping for improved equity in society.

Lastly, in the case of an all-rounded and meaningful learning experience, traditional schools also take the cake. Although the Internet allows for a spectrum of ways to fill up leisure time, such as through gaming on platforms like Origin, and guides for completing exercise routines at home from YouTube channels like MadFit and Chloe Ting, traditional schools provide healthier and more accurate ways to do so. Prolonged periods of sitting can incur and exacerbate health problems as highlighted by countless researchers. Traditional schools provide space for extra co-curricular activities ranging from clubs to sports, promoting healthy lifestyles. Physical Education (PE) is compulsory in schools, and the presence of PE teachers also ensures the student's safety and accuracy when engaging in exercise, especially for strenuous and high-intensity ones that pose health hazards if unaware. Again, the physical

space of schools can be brought into this argument, as schools are funded with facilities and equipment that better their exercise experience, such as sports halls and fields. Exercising with peers also creates healthy competition among individuals, unlike virtual gaming which is often accompanied by loud cursing and profanities being thrown at their virtual opponents. Hence, traditional schools create a more meaningful experience for people overall, especially since students are young and are still exploring and navigating the outside world with their piqued curiosity.

All in all, there is credit given to the Internet in facilitating the educational experience for many individuals. However, the Internet's potential threats are rising and alarming, and hence still require the need for traditional schools to intervene. The Internet's large range of resources should be complemented with the critical skills taught in schools, allowing people to get a better tailored and enjoyable learning experience.

Comments:
Nice range of perspectives and examples reflected in the discussion. Learn to be concise: break the paragraphs up if necessary and watch out for awkward phrasing.

"Poverty can be eliminated if the poor work hard." How far do you agree with the statement?
Lim Zhao Xun Jerrell 19S55

In an interview with a CNBC reporter, Kevin O'Leary was asked to comment on a statistic about the poorer half of the population only having as much wealth as the richest 88 people. The renowned judge of 'Shark Tank' remarked: "It is great. I think this is the kind of statistic which motivates people to work harder and lift themselves out of that situation." This kind of thinking is not uncommon, especially amongst those who are very successful. They believe that world poverty can be eradicated when people work harder and make fuller use of their own labour. Consequently, such mentality also harbours a sense of elitism and snobbery: that those who are poor are poor because of laziness. However, this kind of thinking ignores many of the root causes of poverty and disregards the fact that poverty is a necessary corollary of our capitalist, globalised society. In the 21st century, improved technology has widened the wage gap between labourers in impoverished communities and those in wealthier communities with access to said technology. In addition, greed, which manifests itself in the exploitation of workers for corporate gain makes it nearly impossible for those at the bottom of the corporate ladder to rise to the top. The result is the prevalence of abject poverty in developing nations and relative property in developed nations, even if the poor do work hard.

Some claim that poverty can be eliminated when the poor work hard. They often point to meritocratic societies like Singapore and India as success stories. The core tenets of meritocracy are simple: hard work is rewarded with higher income; everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed and those who work harder will more likely succeed. In Singapore, where the young are taught the virtues of hard work, many citizens have been lifted out of poverty in the past 50 years due to government investment in education and human capital, and the doctrine amongst many that hard work breeds success. Many Singaporeans in the 1970s worked hard to get an education which put them in higher-paying jobs in emerging industries, which not only raised their personal incomes, but also made the country richer overall. The result is a sharp fall in the poverty rate by 80% since our independence, and an improvement in our standard of living. In India, as more workers from rural communities are trained in the technology sector, many have gotten to enjoy higher standards of living, and over 100 million in India have been lifted out of poverty in the past decades. These two case studies show that hard work raises the productivity of labour, which makes workers more attractive hires and allows them to earn higher wages. In addition, hard work also allows the whole country to benefit from higher labour productivity, higher output, and a higher standard of living. Indeed, in a meritocratic society, hard work will be rewarded, and only through hard work can poverty be eliminated.

However, the concept of meritocracy often differs from its ideal in reality. The above argument starts with a very flawed assumption, that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed. This is simply not true because poverty is an entrenched phenomenon. A child in sub-Saharan Africa will not have the same likelihood to succeed as a child in the UK who is receiving full-time education, and who has parents who are earning a sizable income. For one, that African child may have to work from a young age in the fields, doing strenuous hard labour in

order to feed his family. The child might also be denied the opportunity to go to higher education, due to cost or accessibility concerns. Hence, many in impoverished communities often do not have the same luxuries to upgrade their skills, as do those in developing countries. This means that the hard work of the poor is often less valued than the hard work of a more skilled labourer. The dramatic wage differential between the 'haves' and the 'have nots', despite working for the same number of hours and being equally as diligent, prevents the poor from earning enough to lift themselves out of abject poverty.

In addition, even in developed nations, there could be differences in the opportunities for low-income households and high-income households. Many low-income households often suffer from dysfunctional family issues, lack of access to higher education, and having to earn income to supplement their education fees. By contrast, wealthier parents can get their children the best resources and provide more conducive home environments. This similarly leads to a difference in the skills and level of education amongst people of different incomes, contributing to a wage differential. In Singapore, for example, the booming tuition industry is estimated to be worth $1.1 billion, and fees typically range from at least $100 to $200 per month. Many well-off parents who can afford to send their child to tuition gain an advantage over those who are unable to. In our meritocratic society where good grades are rewarded, it is those wealthier children who often graduate with better results, get employed in jobs, which earn more, while the poor continue to live in relative poverty. The high GINI coefficient of Singapore of 0.41 from 2012 to 2016 is a testament to this level of relative poverty. This is despite the fact that there is no evidence to suggest the poor are working any less hard than the rich. In fact, one could argue that the poor have worked harder to overcome financial barriers, and the fact they still cannot escape poverty disproves the proposition in question.

Despite hard work, many continue to live in poverty because of rapid technological change. The rate at which technological advancements are made has grown rapidly since the industrial revolution. Humans have invented machines, then computer systems, and now artificial intelligence to improve productivity, cut costs and make a profit. This, however, has widened the disconnect between the work that labourers put in and their impact on the profits and the overall productivity of a firm. A study by the Economic Policy Institute found that the rise in wages has not kept up with the rise in labour productivity since 1980. In Nigeria and Ethiopia, many multinational corporations producing biofuels have moved in due to tax incentives from local governments. Yet, many such firms have recently hired fewer locals due to improved technology, which diminishes the necessity of labour. As a result, many locals do not get good-paying jobs and are forced to work in less lucrative occupations for longer hours and less pay. On top of that, the artificial intelligence revolution may also have a similar effect on the poor in developed nations as the technological revolution had on developing countries. In the next 45 years, it is estimated that 47% to 80% of the population will be displaced from their current line of work as artificial intelligence outperforms humans in numerous tasks. Those who were sold on the idea that hard work is a ticket out of poverty and chose to work hard in schools may find their skills no longer relevant in the new age. It is evident that their rise in the relative importance of technology over labour in many production processes has and will continue to displace many workers and job seekers, who have worked hard to undergo

arduous training and education, and thus deny them the fruits of their hard work. Hence, it is not true poverty can be eliminated if the poor work hard.

Lastly, poverty cannot be eliminated even when the poor work hard, because laziness is fundamentally not the root cause of poverty. Capitalism and the profit motives of companies are the root causes of poverty. In a capitalistic world, firms or private enterprises exist only for one purpose, to make money. Profit maximising firms are also cost minimising and will choose to produce their goods in a way that is most cost-efficient. Lately, that has manifested itself in the exploitation of the hard work of the labourers. For instance, fast fashion giants like Zara and Forever 21 have led to an increase in demand for clothes production. Many firms in less developed countries mass manufacture clothes on the cheap for these big fashion giants. However, in order to cut costs, those firms have hired small children, some as young as 5 years old, to sew, dye, and package the clothes for hours on end, and only pay these child workers starvation wages of less than US$1.25 a day. Can anyone argue these children do not work hard enough? Clearly, the answer is no. Yet, they are still trapped in poverty-stricken communities due to the unwillingness of profit-motivated firms to reward them for their hard work and labour. Another case in point would be the COVID-19 pandemic which we are all living through. Due to increased demand for delivery services, medical services, and medical equipment, workers in these industries have been deemed essential and have worked tirelessly to meet the needs of society. A group of workers in a mask producing factory in Indianapolis even had to work on-site for a month to meet the increased demand for PPEs. However, in America, many workers have been denied extra hazard pay, and make less than US$15 per hour. Amazon even famously refused to increase the worker pay to a liveable wage of US$15 an hour, and received strong admonishment for it. Again, can anyone argue these essential workers are not working hard enough? The answer is still no. However, despite their hard work, they still do not earn nearly enough to cover their current daily expenses, let alone have any leftover to improve their living conditions and move to a higher socioeconomic status. Hence, they remain in relative poverty. Therefore, the profit motives of firms make poverty a necessary corollary of capitalist societies, and hard work alone will not eliminate it, since it is not the root cause of poverty.

The notion that poverty (be it abject poverty in developing countries or relative poverty in developed ones) can be eliminated if the poor work hard is a lie. It is a lie sold to the working class by wealthy elites, most of whom obtained their wealth due to inheritance or a stroke of luck. It is a lie propagated by the media and pundits to elevate themselves and to stigmatize the poor as lazy. It is a lie attempted to distract the working class from the real causes of poverty: exploitation, technology, and unequal opportunities. Thankfully, I am sanguine about the future of this debate on poverty. Growing class consciousness around the world has started to put the spotlight on worker exploitation and the disruptive effects of technological change. The rise of worker-owned co-ops in the US and the yellow vest protests in France are evidence that more people are aware of the need to remodel capitalism and rethink our relationship with technology. With that, I am hopeful that the utopian ideal of meritocracy will be fulfilled, and that poverty can eventually be eliminated through the hard work of the poor. But, for now at least, there is still quite a lot of 'hard work' to be done.

Comments:
This has been an enjoyable read. You have managed to identify and examine extensively the various causes of poverty, as well as evaluate the effectiveness of hard work in overcoming poverty brought on by those causes. Every paragraph is substantiated with apt examples, though some points can be written more concisely. Save for a handful of errors, the use of language is very competent, and your personal voice is strong. Good job!

"Celebrities today do not make good role models for young people."
Comment.
Chan Li Hsin Adele 20A11

For as long as modern media and entertainment have existed, celebrities have also made up a portion of the population in every country around the world. The attention and fervent following that their achievements and actions inspire, whether it is in the film industry, professional sports, or more recently social media, has without a doubt had a significant role in shaping pop culture and the mindsets of generations of young people who grow up with it. Today, many celebrities use social media as a platform to connect with their fans, through the use of flashy Instagram posts highlighting their luxurious lifestyles, and captions showering praise and gratitude on their fanbases. Some may argue that the frivolous and excessive lifestyles that celebrities showcase to young people today make them poor role models. However, many celebrities also use their platforms to inspire their young following to pursue their dreams, and even to fight for social change and the betterment of society.

It may indeed be argued that the excess and frivolity showcased by celebrities makes them poor role models for the young people that idolise them. With the recent advent of social media platforms and the sheer amount of time and attention that young people dedicated to them, it is now easier than ever for celebrities to reach out to their young audience and leave an impression on them. However, instead of using their platforms for the greater good, many celebrities today use them to flaunt their frivolous lifestyles, luxury clothing and to promote their own brand of excessive living. Celebrities such as Kylie and Kendall Jenner are at the top in terms of popularity, with millions of young followers between them, and the luxurious, excessive lifestyle that they advertise has indeed left an impression on the youth. Across social media, young people as young as thirteen-years-old post pictures and videos of themselves attempting to emulate the expensive clothes, excessive living, and extreme vanity that has become synonymous with the Kardashian-Jenner brand of celebrity fame. By flaunting these unattainable yet attractive lifestyles, celebrities are teaching young people to prioritise materialism and one's personal image and branding above all else, which does not actively promote a healthy and meaningful lifestyle amongst young people. Celebrities today acting as role models for young people can, therefore, result in heightened vanity, wastefulness, and an unhealthy culture of material envy amongst young people, making them poor role models for the young people who idolise them.

Additionally, celebrities today are more inclined to share their personal prejudiced and discriminatory views on their platforms, which acts as a bad example for the impressionable young people that follow them. Due to the nature of fame causing celebrities to constantly be in the limelight and under the rapt attention of their followers, celebrities will undoubtedly end up sharing their personal thoughts on current events and other relevant issues. For instance, Felix Kjellberg, better known by his alias 'PewDiePie' on YouTube, was criticised for supporting anti-Semitic and racist content creators on YouTube, and for advertising such content to his predominantly young and impressionable fanbase. Celebrities who use their platforms to encourage their young fanbase to view such content can lead to the latter internalising and normalising discriminatory and racist views, as well as hate speech towards marginalised groups

at a young age. Therefore, as young people are highly impressionable and tend to indiscriminately support the celebrities they idolise, celebrities with their own personal, prejudiced views do not make good role models for young people who are unable to discern right from wrong.

However, celebrities may also inspire and motivate young people to do good through their own actions. Many celebrities use their fame and platforms to promote social causes that they believe in and encourage their young followers to support. For instance, the household name Emma Watson not only champions female empowerment, but is also a UN ambassador for children's rights, and repeatedly uses her platform to educate and inspire her audience on important social issues. Another example is Greta Thunberg, a fourteen-year-old climate change activist who made waves throughout the world, especially amongst young people, for daring to speak up against governments and corporate giants, to fight for tangible change to protect the environment and the world we live in. Celebrities who use their fame and platform to promote social causes and encourage young people to fight for social change, therefore, make good role models for young people, as can be seen from the countless young people that mobilised to march with Greta Thunberg for climate change, and the countless young people that take up the mantle to raise awareness and fight for their own social causes. They inspire young audiences to speak up for what they believe in, and to not remain apathetic to issues that plague the world they live in.

Celebrities today are truly capable of acting as good role models for young people, as their achievements as well as the value of hard work and determination present in their backstories inspire young people to do the same. Although some may criticise the rags-to-riches backstories that many celebrities proudly share, these stories act as a beacon of hope that can spur young people to work hard and chase their dreams, especially those from less fortunate backgrounds and minority groups. Simone Biles, the most awarded female gymnast in modern times, is a celebrity in her own right, with multiple talk show interviews and millions of Instagram followers under her belt. However, instead of showing off luxury brands and expensive cars as some celebrities do, her platform is used to show off the fruit of her hard work and determination. Her Instagram page boasts numerous photos of herself with her Olympic gold medals and posing with other accomplished athletes. Using her fame, Simone inspires young people, especially African-American girls, with her success by encouraging them to believe that as long as they work hard and remain determined, they will also be able to achieve their own dreams. For young people from minority groups, who do not see nearly enough representation of people like them being successful, celebrities who look like them and whom they can relate to are capable of inspiring them deeply. Therefore, as some celebrities inspire young people to emulate their work ethic and important values such as determination in order to achieve their dreams, celebrities today do make good role models of excellence for young people to aspire to.

Ultimately, I agree that celebrities today do make good role models for young people. There are undoubtedly many celebrities that misuse their platforms to promote their excessive, luxurious lifestyles and encourage materialism, as well as to indoctrinate their impressionable, young audience with their own questionable views. Having said that, celebrities who use their

platforms to inspire and motivate young people have become increasingly prevalent in today's climate. More and more celebrities are speaking out against social issues, climate change, and social injustices, and using their platforms to encourage young people to further educate themselves on such issues. This new age of social activism amongst celebrities may be but a passing trend, but it undeniably forces celebrities to use their platforms for good and to be good role models for their young audience in the long run.

Comments:

Not immediately clear how you weighed between the two sides and came to a conclusion. That said, good range of celebrities and mostly relevant examples (although there can be up to 2 examples per paragraph ideally). Language usage is generally fluent and assured, with the essay well structured.

Science & Technology

"Technology will destroy us one day." Do you agree?
Tengku Shamel B Tengku Abdul K 19S53

As famous social scientist Christian Lous Lange once said: "Technology is a useful servant but a dangerous master." This statement has never held truer in this day and age, where we see technology continue to grow by leaps and bounds. This exponential pace of technological development has led to a wide array of breakthroughs in many fields, such as transportation, communication, and medicine, which is set to improve our lives day by day. Furthermore, technology has proven to be a tool for positive change in society, which gives voice to the disadvantaged and lends a helping hand to the underprivileged. Thus, it is fallacious to claim that technology will destroy us one day by causing irreversible damage and harm to the lives of many and to that of the environment we live in. Hence, I agree with this statement to a small extent.

Some would contend that that technology will destroy us one day due to the innate greed of humans for wealth and power, which is made achievable through the use of technology. Technology can be used to perpetuate income inequality in society while also causing uncontrolled damage to the environment. Income inequality has been worsening in developing countries such as India due to wealthy multinational corporations using technology to exploit the poor to increase their profits, manipulating and ruining the lives of thousands of innocent people. This is apparent in the case of Monsanto, an agricultural biotechnology corporation that supplies genetically modified seeds to farmers in India. Through the use of technology, they were able to alter the genes of the seeds such that they became infertile after a single harvest, with the intent of forcing uneducated farmers to pay royalties for more seeds after every harvest. Thus, these poor farmers were never able to make a profit to support themselves and their families, highlighting how technology has led to the poor being trapped in a never-ending poverty cycle, which resulted in more than 250,000 Indian farmers committing suicide. Hence, technology seems to be aggravating a global issue that is set to destroy millions of lives going into the future. Furthermore, due to the advancement of technology, the production of goods has become extremely efficient to the extent where it is harming the very environment we live in. For example, the technological boom has seen cities like Beijing becoming technological hubs for the efficient and low-cost production of any good. However, this increased production due to technology has led to air pollution in Beijing repeatedly exceeding the maximum allowable air quality index value of 500 over the last decade. This not only harmed the biodiversity within the city but also led to a 60% increase in lung cancer rates. Thus, it is clear that technology is destroying us as it continues to harm the environment and the poor in society.

It can be conceded that the argument made on how technology can be destructive is valid. However, it will not destroy us 'one day' going into the future, due to technology also being used to eradicate such issues. While technology seems to perpetuate income inequality, it is truly not the case other than a few bad apples among a basket of multinational corporations that use it to help bring the poor in developing countries out of poverty. Hence, technology is simply a tool, and the reason it is destroying us is due to its misuse. For instance, we can see how various multinational corporations are partnering with the United Nations Development

Programme to bring production over to these developing countries, with half of the world's largest companies set to be based in developing countries by 2025 according to the McKinsey Global Institute. This will allow corporations such as Nestlé to upgrade the technical skills of over 450,000 farmers through teaching them how to operate technologically advanced machinery instead of farming with a rake and plough. Also, by employing the service of these farmers, Nestlé would be providing them with a stable source of income, which they can bring home to their families. Also, as for the issue of growing pollution due to technology in countries like China, the governments in these countries are currently looking into more sustainable ways of production using technology such as solar power rather than the burning of fossil fuels for energy. Thus, while these issues are prevalent, much is being done through technology to ensure that technology does not harm us further going into the future.

Secondly, technology will not destroy us one day as technology is improving our standard of living and quality of life through fields such as transportation, communication, and medicine instead. As technology continues to flourish, it is clear that it is slowly integrating into our way of life and is revolutionising it for the better, be it by increasing our productivity, increasing our convenience, or even safeguarding our lives from diseases. For example, we are entering an age where self-driving cars are going to make our lives more convenient. It will also make driving, an activity that carries a high risk of fatality due to car accidents, safer due to artificial intelligence systems such as Tesla's Collision Avoidance System. Furthermore, communication is ever improving, and technology has provided us with a platform for seamless connection with anyone no matter where we may be. This proved to be a crucial tool during the recent COVID-19 pandemic as people were separated due to many cities being on lockdown. Yet, technology was present to ensure lives went on as per usual since lessons and work meetings could still be conducted wirelessly through online platforms such as Zoom. Lastly, when technology is used with the right intentions, it can be a force for good to better the lives and save many more lives going into the future. This can be seen in the Singapore government recently spending $900 million to fund research in artificial intelligence projects such as the creation of devices that can detect heart failure as well as systems that can screen for chronic illnesses such as diabetes more accurately. Hence, it is clear that technology is going to improve the way we live and better our lives day by day.

Lastly, technology will not destroy us one day as it is a tool for positive change in society instead. Technology has allowed us as a human race to connect in ways deemed unimaginable just decades ago. In this day and age, through the various social platforms such as Instagram and Twitter, conversations on pertinent social issues have never been more rampant. The power of technology has allowed the problems or issues faced by a minority or disadvantaged portion of society to come into the view of the whole world. For example, a video of a Black man, George Floyd, being brutally murdered by police officers was shared by one person on Twitter, and overnight the whole world was aware of it, and change happened almost instantaneously. #BlackLivesMatter became the number one trending hashtag, which raised awareness for the discrimination of Blacks in America as well as against police brutality. Furthermore, petitions were signed by millions of people all over the world to have the officers involved sentenced. Due to the tremendous show of support, change was able to take place, and the government was pressured to take action on those men as well as create legislation that would help solve the problems of discrimination and police brutality in America. Another

case in point would be the Landfill Harmonic Movement, a project to fulfil the hopes and dreams of young musicians from the slums of Paraguay who play on instruments made of recycled materials. Kickstarter, an online platform dedicated to helping worthy ideas find funding, was used to raise over $200,000 in funds for the orchestra to travel on tour to raise awareness for poverty and waste pollution. Thus, it is clear that technology has brought us together as a human race, allowing us to support one another and bringing to light the issues of others so that we can help bring about positive change to make this world an equal place for all. Hence, technology will not destroy us one day. Instead, it will unite the human race one day, as we gradually use it to eradicate the archaic problems that exist in our society.

In conclusion, while technology seems to be harming us through income inequality and the environment, it will never destroy us one day. It will benefit us as long as we learn to use it as a tool to improve our lives, bring about positive change to those in need and even correct the problems caused by it, rather than allow our greed to get the better of us and cause us to misuse it for our destruction.

Comments:
This was an insightful piece on how technology benefits humanity. You could strengthen this argument with a closer engagement of the keywords 'will' and 'one day', pointing out how technology is very much a tool, and we can use it to benefit humanity. Hence, it is not inevitable that technology will destroy us all.

"Technology will destroy us one day". Do you agree?
Eunice Chew 19S63

Computer scientist Gordon Moore famously predicted that the processing speed of computers would double every two years, a testament to the exponential growth technology was seen to have during his time. Even in the twenty-first century, technological advancements seem to proceed at a rapid pace, and all sorts of technological gadgets, machinery, and computers now play an integral role in daily life. In our modern age, the pursuit of advancing technology is relentless, but could such developments lead to mankind's destruction? Given that technology has helped mankind combat threats to its survival, such a dramatic claim might be met with scepticism. However, considering the dangerous things technological developments have allowed us to create, such as nuclear weapons and artificial intelligence (A.I.), as well as the devastating environmental degradation catalysed by our consumption of technological products, worries of the endless development of technology precipitating mankind's extinction event might not be completely unrealistic.

Mankind's dogged pursuit of technological development has led to creations that, in the worst-case scenario, may kick-start the mass destruction of the human race. The advancement of artificial intelligence, or A.I., has led to developing concerns of a 'singularity' occurring. The 'singularity' would occur if A.I. got so advanced that it became more intelligent than the human race, and could replicate or improve itself. At that point, scientists would no longer have control over the A.I. as it would be getting more intelligent and capable at exponential rates, and would pose a significant threat to the human race. Far from being a conspiracy theory birthed by laymen on the Internet, the idea of a 'singularity' occurring was posited by respected scientists and experts, including Elon Musk. Other than A.I., technology has also led to the creation of nuclear weapons that had already destroyed two large Japanese cities in World War II, and threatened to decimate the United States and Russia during the Cold War. Now, nuclear weapons are even stronger; in the event of a nuclear war, it is conceivable that the incredible blast range of the bombs, or the horrible effects of the resultant nuclear fallout, could wipe out most if not all of the human race. It seems that we are in an age where our scientific knowledge gives humankind the power of gargantuan proportions to invent ridiculously dangerous things, which could cause death and destruction in a very short span of time if not handled properly. Thus, technology may indeed destroy us one day.

Additionally, our species' pursuit of furthering technological innovations has led to ever-increasing damage to our environment, which could devastate the survival of future generations if left unchecked. The rise of technology has led to much strain on the environment; two of the most significant impacts mankind has had on Mother Nature include pollution and global warming. The technological innovation of plastics has led to tons of plastic pollution to the extent that microplastics have now infiltrated our seas, bioaccumulating in the bodies of fish which eventually make their way to our dinner plates. Microplastics in our environment have led to the accumulation of plastic in our very own bodies. If the plastic pollution issue is not addressed quickly, plastic accumulation in humans could worsen every generation, leading to health issues for our descendants. Furthermore, the release of exorbitant amounts of greenhouse gases as a result of the technology we use in our lives - such as cars,

airplanes, and industrial factories - has led to global warming. Scientists have claimed that if the global average temperature rises by five more degrees Celsius, the animals on Earth would undergo a mass extinction, and the human race would suffer grievous and life-threatening implications. Thus, our pursuit of technology has reaped detrimental effects on the environment. If left unaddressed, this may cause our descendants to suffer a bleak fate. Hence, technology might lead to the gradual destruction of mankind in the future.

Yet, it is undeniable that technology has also saved the human species from natural threats to our survival, as well as helping us address issues threatening our species that were of our own doing. A shining example of this is a medical technology that has eradicated diseases that led to once terrible pandemics or epidemics that caused millions of deaths. Such technology has isolated plague bacteria, and provided cures and vaccinations for previously incurable diseases such as smallpox. Influenza and cholera are among the other diseases medical technology has helped to make less life-threatening. Other than saving millions of lives, and thus preventing the mass destruction of human life, technology has also helped us address the environmental concerns brought on by technological advancements. Biotechnology has identified and is now developing the growth of bacteria that eats plastics. Such bacteria could help address the problem of plastic pollution and the bioaccumulation of microplastics in human beings, saving future generations from plastic poisoning, and protecting the environment around us. Thus, despite the destructive power of technology, it can also save humankind from destruction.

In conclusion, technology has led to the development of immensely dangerous innovations and environmental degradation, which could destroy future generations. However, the power technology grants us would also enable us to come up with solutions that can prevent demise and save the human race from devastation. I espouse the view that ultimately, the way we use technology will determine whether it will lead to mankind's destruction or not. As such, those advancing technology need to be cognisant of how their efforts would impact those around them.

Comments:
Relevant examples, though a wider range especially in the balance would have enhanced your response. You have demonstrated a good understanding of the question and have successfully met the requirements of the question. It was especially meaningful that you recognised that the way to address 'one day' is to examine historical and current trends that would be a projection into the future. It was a joy to read your essay!

Do celebrities have too much influence in the modern world?
Aung Miri Yin-Toe 19S33

"COVID-19? It's not that big of a deal," said Vanessa Hudgens on an Instagram livestream to her 16 million followers, the comments flooding with gushing agreement from teenage fans who have worshipped her music for years. The average parent watching would be absolutely appalled - who is this woman? Is she even qualified to be making such bold statements to such a devoted audience? Such is the alarming truth of modern celebrity culture: In a consumerist society fuelled by the Internet, the power of the media has placed unprecedented influence in the hands of celebrities, from musicians to sportsmen to models, who may not truly be qualified to hold such power at all. From propagating misinformation to intervening in sectors beyond their qualifications to promoting harmful lifestyles for economic gain, it may indeed be true that celebrities have far too much influence in modern society.

Firstly, the power of social media has hugely inflated the presence and prominence of celebrities in the media, which may be dangerous when accompanied by today's capitalist and consumerist cultures that lead them to use their influence irresponsibly for financial gain. The undeniable power of social media influencers and celebrities with millions of devoted fans online may be problematic, with the increasing trend of companies using celebrities as tools for advertising. Celebrities are, after all, working individuals themselves who do stand to gain financially from their fame, and this may lead them to strike lucrative financial deals with companies, using their massive audience to promote products that may not necessarily be truly credible. In fact, too often, celebrities have used their influence irresponsibly to promote harmful products for cash grabs. One need only look at the latest trends of diet pills and supposedly miracle health products such as 'FitTea' promoted by social media beauty gurus and online stars such as Kylie Jenner and model Anastasia Karanikolaou, who are each paid by the company hundreds of thousands of dollars for each promotional post. However, these questionable products have also been criticised by health professionals for promoting eating disorders and causing toxic side effects. Other alarming cases include those in which highly paid celebrities may advertise products that are in fact incredible scams - Models like Hailey Baldwin and Kendall Jenner were paid $250,000 for Instagram posts promoting Fyre Festival, a music event that turned out to be completely illegitimate. Thousands who followed their favourite stars' encouragement to purchase tickets ended up stranded without adequate food or shelter on a Caribbean island. In such instances, it is all too apparent how the inherent position of celebrities as working individuals themselves seeking financial gain may corrupt their influence to cause harm to their devoted followers. Far too much dangerous influence is placed in the hands of celebrities today.

Moreover, today's culture of online fanaticism around celebrities may lead their influence to be a cause for alarm when unqualified celebrities become motivated to intervene in industries they are wholly unqualified for. This is most prominently the case in politics. Social media echo chambers and fanatical culture have amplified the prominence of many celebrities to the level of idolisation, which may be worrying when this platform leads celebrities to believe they have the capabilities to comment on or enter other industries that are in fact far beyond their expertise. President Donald Trump, for example, originally gained prominence on a reality

show, the original source of the fame that propelled him during the 2016 elections - many experts have pointed out how deeply alarming it is that someone with no political background now possesses a seat in the Oval Office. Other celebrities such as Kanye West, a musician and fashion guru, have followed his lead, even declaring a presidential run in 2020's elections and already scoring some votes during the primaries. The booming popularity of celebrities thus becomes perilous when this influence places unqualified individuals in positions, where they may have the power to enact real change. Moreover, the fanatical culture surrounding celebrities may be problematic, when the often-uneducated opinions of celebrities are taken by impressionable young audiences at face value. Hordes of online fans may blindly trust the ignorant words of celebrities such as Vanessa Hudgens who claimed COVID-19 was not a "big deal" and did not require attention, which could motivate impressionable fans against wearing masks or observing social distancing, placing public health and risk. Moreover, an increasing number of celebrities have used their massive influence to comment on political issues, including promoting the campaigns of particular politicians. If devoted fans were to blindly follow their instructions, this could be a threat to the legitimacy of elections and to the importance of encouraging independent thought and discourse. Instead, massive celebrity influence may promote groupthink, following the words of their favourite icons who may themselves be unqualified to offer such an opinion.

Some may argue, however, that this celebrity influence may not be dangerous, but in fact, useful and beneficial when used to mobilise the masses for positive social causes. They point to the likes of Lin Manuel Miranda, who used the massive fame he gained as creator of hit musical 'Hamilton' to raise funds for hurricane recovery efforts in Puerto Rico, raising millions with his devoted audience through online donations. Celebrities such as musician Ariana Grande and actress Zendaya have been praised for using their influence to educate on causes like Black Lives Matter, with Zendaya using her Instagram clout of over 70 million followers as a platform for experts in African American history to educate the masses on systemic racism. Actress Emma Watson, educated at Brown University, has also been cited as a reliable and trustworthy source using her massive platform to promote feminism. However, these are often only exceptions. The booming power and virality of social media has also allowed many everyday individuals to suddenly gain massive fame overnight, which may be problematic when some individuals embody negative lifestyles that impressionable young fans may blindly mimic. Danielle Bregoli, for example, is now a successful recording artist, but originally gained notoriety as a bombastic teenage criminal known for her rude language and mannerisms - unfortunately, some of the vulgar slang and vernacular she popularised within this 'tough'" persona has actually become trendy and is now adopted by many young fans online. In such cases, the influence of celebrities may be harmful, when these celebrities act as negative role models that young audiences unfortunately seek to emulate.

In conclusion, while there are indeed instances where celebrity influence can be used positively, the nature of celebrities as individuals who themselves seek financial gain, who may be unqualified to be idolised as they are or who may act as negative role models, leads them to indeed have too much dangerous influence in modern society. Consumers must be critical to discriminate between respecting a popular figure they admire, and being blindly influenced down negative paths to be led astray.

Comments:

An excellent read - arguments raised are insightful and perceptive and, more often than not, backed up by detailed and recent examples. Some small gaps in reasoning and substantiation need to be plugged, but overall, an enjoyable read. Language is fluent but could do with more varied vocabulary.

"It has never been more pressing to impose regulations on scientific research than today." Discuss.
Kong Zheng Yao 19S38

Since our appearance on Earth, humans have been and still remain, eager to understand the world around us. As time progressed, we discovered science as a way to explain natural phenomena through experiments, observations and logical reasoning. We hope that through a greater understanding of the world around us, we can utilise this body of knowledge to better our lives. Some may agree that because of the potential benefits scientific research can bring, it would be ludicrous to impose regulations on scientific research, yet others would argue that specific research is getting out of hand and should be regulated before there is a chance for its disastrous consequences to materialise. I am of the latter view; I believe that it has never been more pressing to impose regulations on scientific research than today, due to the ability of anyone with an internet connection to contribute to the field of science, potentially burying credible research with spurious claims.

Proponents of the counterargument opine that any regulations imposed upon scientific research would hinder progress. They point to examples such as in vitro fertilisation, which was initially rejected by religious authorities and various morality experts in the 20th century, but these scientific procedures are now seen as important developments. They point to examples such as Galileo and Darwin, who proposed the Geocentric model and Creationism. Both men were ridiculed by the religious community, but the scientific theories they had put forth are heralded as scientific truths today. Detractors of the argument posit that there should be essential regulations in place implemented gradually, so there are no restrictions on the progress of mankind and it can occur at a greater pace, as scientists and scholars can freely conduct research to reveal more of the world that is still an enigma to us.

While I concede that certain regulations do sometimes restrict progress, I think that this view would be impractical. Regulations need not always hinder progress. In fact, regulations can promote progress most of the time. In today's day and age where false news is rife, it is crucial that regulations be placed on scientific research to prevent the corruption of knowledge. In modern times when scientific reasoning dominates, greater pressure is placed on the scientific community to prevent results that have been rigorously tested to be true, as these results often have a significant impact in our modern life. False results do have a severe impact on many of us, as evidenced by the fake scientific results published by a Norwegian scientist who published flawed data since 1997, who claimed that certain medical drugs could lower the risk of oral cancer development by a significant amount. It was later discovered that he did not actually conduct any rigorous research on the subject matter, and his papers were repealed. This could have caused immense damage to society, as health-conscious consumers were lied to and influenced to purchase certain medications. Therefore, I believe that it is important to have an organisation that checks the integrity of scientific research to ensure that only truths are advocated, for only truths can help us progress in today's world where fake news attempts to tear our social fabric apart. Hence, I think that it is important to impose regulations on scientific research today as this will promote progress.

Apart from that, the very nature of science means it does not concern itself with ethics. As science progresses and we uncover more truths about the world, scientific research is having a greater effect on our lives. It has never been more pressing than today to impose ethical regulations guiding society on how to obtain and utilise the knowledge that we have found in today's increasingly pragmatic and practical world. For example, the advancements in medical science largely stem from scientific research done on lab animals. While some may point out this is all in the name of advancing human health, they often do not see how cruel this research can get, for example taking the genes of a fruit fly to grow an eye on its knee, or testing out the potency of cancer drugs on lab mice. Animal testing is not the only way forward, especially when there is a less cruel option available in the form of stem cell cultures. By testing pharmaceutical drugs and medical procedures on stem cells, we can not only achieve the advancement of human health, but also safeguard animal rights. Even then, it may not be the ideal scenario, considering that many stem cells are harvested from embryos that are then destroyed.

Of course, this begs the question: in what stage of development of an unborn child can it be declared alive? So far, this question has not been answered, but it has raised moral dilemmas that are being relentlessly debated upon, sparking animosity between pro-life and pro-choice groups. I think that it is apparent much of our scientific progress, at least in the field of medicine and pharmacy, stands on top of a mountain of animal carcasses and unborn children. We cannot pursue progress for the sake of progress through scientific research and lose our humanity, and that distinguishes us from all the other savage beasts in the animal kingdom. Until we exercise more caution with the privilege of intelligence gifted to us, I believe that we are not fit to wield the power of science. In today's world that places heavy emphasis on efficiency and progress, we must put in place regulations on this body of knowledge that does not concern itself with ethics, with the intention of restricting the way scientists conduct research, but not with the intention of restricting progress. Our humanity is a heavy price to pay for progress, and I believe that progress without humanity is no progress at all. Thus, I stand firm in the belief that in today's world which values efficiency and practicality, it has never been more urgent to impose regulations on scientific research, guiding the moral compass of our society in the process of obtaining knowledge.

While it is not in the nature of science to concern itself with ethics, it is the nature of science to concern itself with innovation. Innovation, simply put, is the application of results from scientific research in a novel way to fulfil a function. This can come in the form of breakthrough medical procedures, or new technology. One such innovation that has become almost synonymous with the Fourth Industrial Revolution that we are progressing towards, is Artificial Intelligence (AI). Some may point to the rapid advancements made in the field of AI and argue that it will not be long until a "terminator" title world would replace the one we know, as depicted in the Terminator movies, where robot uprisings topple human cities and establish machines as the master of man. While it may seem implausible, or only possible in the future, we are closer to a world where AI can achieve true intelligence. The field of AI development carries with itself the dangers of machine uprisings as illustrated above, no matter how implausible it may seem in the modern world, and I believe that certain regulations should be imposed on scientific research in the field. For example, Facebook had to shut down the

chatbot system, when its chatbots developed a communication language among themselves that Facebook's engineers could not decipher. There is a constant fear of the rise of AI that would topple our civilisation, and we are right to be afraid as machines have the potential to be stronger, faster and more intelligent than us through each upgrade. In today's globalised world, a malignant AI would tear the world apart as it can travel across nations or even continents in the blink of an eye. For scientific fields such as AI development, we have to exercise great caution, and thus I believe that it has never been more pressing to impose regulations on scientific research than today to limit the danger that these research can bring.

In conclusion, while absolute freedom in scientific research seems to entice many due to the allure of potential progress, I believe that this view is myopic as evidenced by the above arguments. Martin Luther King Jr. once said: "Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men." This shows that without regulations and exercising caution, humanity will be doomed instead of attaining progress.

Comments:
Written with conviction. The need for regulation of scientific research is argued for strongly. The sense of urgency, however, is not always shown; why is it "never been more pressing"? The paragraph about roaming into AI addresses it. Some good turns of phrase.

"It has never been more pressing to impose regulations on scientific research than today." Discuss.

Muhammad Farhan 19S62

With the recent global outbreak of the malignant coronavirus pandemic and the accompanying harm it has brought about - impacting multiple sectors of countries and facets of life - the fervent desire for the development of a cure or vaccine to alleviate this problem is a natural consequence. Inevitably, due to the nature of the virus, the development of a cure can stem from only one thing – scientific research. Scientific research is a pursuit that has spanned centuries, and with each new discovery and breakthrough, it has also seen new concerns and worries about the potential harm this scientific research can cause, resulting in the need for regulations. With the acceleration of scientific developments and research in recent times, it thus begs the question – is it more pressing today to impose regulations on scientific research than ever before? I largely agree that there is a more pressing need, due to the acceleration of scientific developments and the desire for more breakthroughs, as well as the decline in the influence of ethics in the scientific community given the inherent potential for clash between the two.

The need for the imposition of regulations has become more pressing than ever before, due to the acceleration of scientific developments in recent years. The leaps in advancement in technology the world has experienced in recent years has greatly aided scientists in carrying out scientific research more efficiently and the rapid breakthroughs in research have also caused a greater desire for more discoveries and breakthroughs. However, it is this fervent desire for breakthroughs, and the rapid pace at which they are occurring, which exacerbates and accentuates the harms and potential dangers caused by this research. Many detractors of Artificial Intelligence (AI) have been raising concerns and fears for quite some time about its dangers and potential to surpass human understanding, with even prominent scientific figures like Stephen Hawking and Elon Musk echoing this sentiment. With the rapid advancements in research, it now appears more likely that this concern may materialise. A case in point is the development of AI chatbots by Facebook. These chatbots, after being created, eventually began communicating and interacting in a language that the creators could not decipher, thus forcing Facebook to shut them down. With accelerating research into developing more powerful AI with greater machine learning capabilities, the possibility AI could surpass human understanding and cause greater harm than good is now more real than ever before, thus regulations need to be imposed to prevent such an outcome in the future. The fervent desire for scientific research is also being witnessed in the race for a COVID-19 vaccine, and the desire for faster breakthroughs once again has led to potential harm to people. In August, both the US and Russia claimed they had come up with a viable method of treatment and a vaccine respectively. However, many in the scientific community and medical industry have raised pressing concerns over this research. The US proposed method of blood plasma transfusion has seen to have little effect on curing patients, and in certain circumstances has even led to potential harm due to incompatibility of blood. Vaccines in Russia seem to be insufficiently tested, with test results remaining undisclosed by the governing bodies. Thus, the acceleration of research breakthroughs and the desire for more has led to potential harm to people, necessitating the imposition of regulations more pressing than ever before.

Another reason for the need for regulations is the decline in the influence of ethics on the behaviour and practices of the scientific community. There has always been an inherent potential for clash between scientific research and ethical concerns in many fields of research. However, in recent years, it appears that scientific research is showing less and less regard for ethics, leading to research into areas that are highly controversial or even malpractices in research. Embryonic stem cell research is a field where this clash can be evidently seen. The research involves using stem cells from embryos for other purposes, such as the regeneration of other organs. However, this raises major ethical issues as the embryo can be considered a living human, albeit at an early stage; and thus carrying out such research unregulated is almost akin to taking a life. The decline in ethical concerns has led to a phenomenon of 'ethics dumping' which involves scientists whose research is restricted by regulations in their home countries travelling to other countries with more lax regulations to carry out their research. This was recently seen in China, where a foreign doctor was involved in an incident where the genomes of two female embryos were edited. It would thus appear that the decline in the influence of ethics in the scientific community has emboldened scientists to carry out controversial research, unconcerned with restrictions and finding ways to circumvent them at times. Hence, there is a more pressing need today to impose regulations than ever before, to keep such malpractices in check.

However, some may opine that the imposition of regulations on scientific research is not a pressing concern. They point to the many benefits that scientific research has conferred on us in the past, and the future potential benefits current research can provide. For example, stem cell research, if successfully carried out, will allow for the regeneration of organs which can be used for organ transplants for those who have lost their limbs. AI research development can be applied to many fields, such as data analytics to better analyse data and trends, as well as in the medical industry to study protein folding mechanisms that can lead to a potential cure for cancer and other diseases. Thus, due to the great benefits that can be reaped from research, they claim that regulations are not a pressing issue, as they would curtail the benefits that people enjoy.

While it is true that breakthroughs in scientific research can at times elicit enormous benefits for humanity, it is the case that the ends do not always justify the means. While research may confer these benefits on us, insufficiently regulated research can also lead to research carried out in an unsafe manner that can lead to harm at the same time. The benefits will thus come at the expense of great cost, such as the loss in human sanctity and a potential loss of control over our own creations. Taking this into account, unregulated research may in fact not confer a net benefit to society, due to the numerous external costs borne. Furthermore, it is not always the case that the 'ends' are beneficial to begin with, as scientific research can also be carried out by parties for malicious purposes. One example would be Monsanto, a firm that has carried out scientific research in fields such as genetically modified foods. However, this research was not used to benefit people in need of food, but was used to exploit farmers as seeds were modified so as to not reproduce after their first growth, forcing farmers to continue to buy seeds year after year in order to line the company's pockets. Thus, despite the myriad of benefits that scientific research can provide for us, there is a pressing

need to impose regulations today more than ever, lest we offset those benefits with the numerous costs incurred.

To conclude, in the modern age of science and technology we live in, scientific research is an inevitable and integral part of our lives. While the benefits conferred by successful research are undeniable, one needs to take a step back and look at the bigger picture. Benefits accompanied by numerous costs stemming from unregulated scientific research is not favourable nor ideal to society. The consequences of accelerated developments and decline in ethical concerns are proof of the pressing need to impose regulations, more so than ever before. For us to truly reap the benefits of such endeavours, what is needed is scientific research that is carried out safely, ethically and responsibly; a goal that can only be achieved by coupling research with regulations.

Comments:
Farhan, this is a thoughtful response which is consistently argued. Examples used are apt and clearly and effectively support arguments raised. Very good linguistic ability, felicitous expression apparent throughout response.

Has the impact of recycling on the environment been overrated?
Veronica Angelin Setiyo 19S41

With ever-increasing awareness for global issues, especially in recent years, waste management has been one of the issues that is often highlighted. Recycling, in particular, is often seen as a convenient and effective solution to our waste problem. Extreme champions of recycling have even shamed people who do not bother to recycle, citing just how crucial recycling is to save the environment. Unfortunately, the impact of recycling on the environment has been highly overrated, in fact, recycling lies low in the hierarchy of waste management efforts when considering effectiveness and sustainability, just slightly higher than incineration. This is because most 'recycled items' end up in landfills and incineration plants, while the process of recycling still emits a substantial amount of pollution and waste. Nevertheless, recycling is not as futile as others claim it to be, as it has allowed humans to keep using certain types of materials such as metals, without putting too much strain on Earth's finite resources.

Firstly, the benefit of recycling to the environment has been overrated, because most items thrown into the recycling bin are not recycled and end up in landfills or incineration plants. In Singapore alone, 96% of what goes into the blue recycle bins are sorted to go to the incineration plant. This is because many of the items thrown into the bins are not actually suitable to be recycled due to various reasons: unsuitable materials, complex components or even contamination of dirt or foodstuff. Most champions of recycling would be discouraged to hear that only 4% of what they expect to get recycled are actually processed. Furthermore, among that small percentage of items being sent to recycling plants, a portion of the materials still end up as waste due to inefficiencies in current recycling technologies. This is called 'downcycling' and happens because some materials like plastics have been broken down to constitutional materials which, under current recycling technologies, are not able to be recycled hence ending up as waste. Therefore, with an overwhelming portion of 'recycled items' ending up in incineration plants and eventually landfills, it is clear that the merits of recycling on the environment have been much smaller than how people perceive it to be.

Moreover, touting recycling as one of the best solutions to environmental problems is a flawed argument, as recycling processes can emit as much, or even more pollution as compared to producing goods from scratch. While some people have the perception that recycling transforms used materials into new products seamlessly, the fact cannot be further from the truth. Due to the non-virgin nature of the materials, recycled items often have to undergo more rigorous treatments and processes before they can be remoulded into new items. For instance, recycled paper requires more and a stronger type of bleach than paper made of virgin pulp. They also require a comparable amount of water to produce relative to virgin papers. While it is indeed true that recycled paper does not require the logging of more trees, most people would not expect recycled papers to contribute to a comparable amount of pollution in the factory stage as virgin paper. Moreover, recycling plastics requires the melting of plastics, which releases toxic gasses into the atmosphere. The amount and toxicity of these gasses increases as the plastic undergoes more rounds of recycling. This is partly why most plastics can only undergo at most three rounds of recycling, although most stop being recycled

after the first round. From these, we can see how recycling processes are not as clean and environmentally friendly as what people expect. Thus, the benefits that recycling brings to the environment is indeed overrated.

However, even though recycling as a whole has been highly overrated, it is not as futile as some claim it to be, especially when it comes to metals. In fact, it is one of the reasons why humans have been able to consume more resources than what the Earth provides. As many have realised, almost all of the resources consumed daily by people only exist in a limited amount. With an exponential growth in resource consumption over time, the United Nations International Panel on Climate Change (UNIPCC) projects that we might require 3.8 Earths to sustain ourselves in the next few centuries. This figure takes into account the current recycling efforts done in many countries. Thus, recycling shows its importance as without recycling, humans would have put a heavier strain on Earth's resource crisis. Not only that, some materials, such as most metals, can virtually be recycled infinitely, hence imposing fewer needs for us to constantly extract for metal ores. One of the most highly recycled materials is aluminium. Due to its simple purification methods, and its high aluminium concentration as compared to its metal ore, recycled aluminium has been highly used in many of our everyday items, from tin pails to smartphone components. 80% of the aluminium being used today have been recycled countless times throughout the ages, since its early extractions before and during the 19th century. The high recycling rate for aluminium has substantially decreased the need for more open-pit aluminium mining, which is often linked to environmental degradation issues such as leaching and barren land. Additionally, recycling aluminium requires much less energy to produce due to its high aluminium concentration as compared to its ores. This is the common case for most metals. Hence, although other materials pose a larger drawback to the environment, the recycling of metals has been tremendously useful and helpful to the environment, making it almost underrated.

In conclusion, the impact of recycling on the environment has been overrated in many ways, as a gross proportion of items being sent for recycling end up in incineration plants and landfills instead, and its processes' contribution to pollution is far from negligible. However, recycling has indeed stretched the lifespan of resources by putting them into a more circular metabolism rather than a linear 'use-throw' one. This is especially prominent among metals which have been recycled almost infinitely and will continue to do so, reducing the need for new extractions which have been linked to many environmental issues. Therefore, the general impact of recycling on the environment has been overrated, with the exception of metal recycling. However, with the advancement in technology and material science, recycling could potentially be the answer to saving the environment.

Comments:

Veronica, a very well-organised and coherently argued response to a topic you are well-versed in. The focus on the issue is sustained and there is fair evaluation, showing a mature response. Language is fluent and the ideas are well articulated. A pleasure to read!

Has modern technology made people more vulnerable to exploitation?
Neo Celene 19S31

From the latest iPhone to fresh innovations such as wireless earphones, it has become apparent that most of us feel modern technology has become an essential part of our lives. With frequent articles about the latest transaction scams, however, it is unsurprising that many are concerned about being exploited. While some may feel that recent advancements have reduced the likelihood of being exploited, many others would disagree. Due to the use of technology by stakeholders such as large transnational corporations and social media outlets, it is undeniable that we have become more likely to fall victim to exploitation via modern technology.

Some may feel that modern technology has made us less likely to be exploited. This is because social media platforms like Twitter, which have an ever-growing user base, can be used to promote awareness about the latest transaction scams and ways to avoid being exploited through the use of eye-catching advertisements and infographics. Hence, some may think that modern technology has helped to make people more aware of methods of exploitation, reducing the risk of being used for monetary gain.

While using technology to spread awareness has definitely helped to educate certain users on exploitation methods, this unfortunately does not hold true for the majority of internet users. Although some may actually gain insight on how to avoid falling victim to scams, it should be noted that users nowadays tend to skim through information instead of taking time to read thoroughly. A study conducted by University College London concluded that browsing activities on Google indicate a pattern of skimming through large volumes of information. Such habits may arise due to the desire to acquire more knowledge within a short amount of time. Consequently, this results in people knowing about potential frauds, but not learning how to decrease their exposure to such forms of exploitation. For instance, although Singapore has high levels of internet penetration and literacy, e-commerce scams are the most frequently reported scams that Singaporeans fell for in 2019. This demonstrates that the increase in the usage of online platforms does not necessarily translate to greater precautionary measures taken to reduce the chances of being exploited. Moreover, the screen of anonymity that people hide behind has resulted in increased vulnerability to being exploited. Since one has no way of differentiating strangers that they meet online, scammers leverage their anonymity to exploit personal information and property from unsuspecting victims. For example, love scams in Singapore have become more prominent in 2019, with combined losses from victims totalling in the millions, as scammers exploit the emotional attachment they have created with their victims. This further illustrates how the increase in online usage has worsened instead of improved the tendency to be exploited. Hence, with the proliferation of more scams, modern technology has increased the chances of becoming a victim of exploitation.

When considering other forms of technological advancements such as the increasing use of machinery in workplaces, workers have become more vulnerable to exploitation by their employers. As more manual jobs get replaced by machinery, companies are able to reap more profits as they have fewer employees to pay. Due to the fear of losing their jobs, workers tend

to endure poor working conditions as well as low wages in order to earn income. This is especially the case in developing countries, where the concern of being replaced by technology has forced labourers into the position of being exploited by their employers. For example, the introduction of robots along Foxconn's production line in 2014 caused many manual jobs to become obsolete. This also resulted in a further decrease in daily wages, which ultimately triggered 14 Chinese employees to take their own lives. This only shows that the latest advancements in technology have resulted in inhumane working conditions that many have to put up with. Therefore, the developments in technology have made workers more vulnerable to the exploitation of labour by their employers.

Furthermore, modern technology has made people at higher risk of being exploited, due to the commoditisation of user information. Technological companies have been taking advantage of the exponentially rising number of active users on the internet each day. Online platforms like Instagram and Facebook are now able to collect user browsing data and even user activity, such as likes and shares. This data is then sold to companies, who are free to use the data whichever way they want. With the ease of accumulation and transfer of data made possible through modern technology, the selling of user information has become an increasingly common practice amongst businesses. For instance, in the last 2 years, Facebook, an online platform that is widely regarded as one of the most popular networking websites, was placed under the international spotlight when it was revealed to be collecting the activity of its users and selling it to private companies. People believe that their online information is secure and that their personal details would not be shared with the world; however, such practices by corporations are seen to exploit the trust that the general public has placed in them. This highlights the fact that user information is essentially being seen as a form of profit, which breaches people's personal information and violates this implicit relationship of trust. Hence, modern technology has made people more vulnerable to exploitation, as it allows their private information to be traded away by companies.

In conclusion, while some may reckon that modern technology has helped reduce the likelihood of being exploited through increased awareness, this is not the case for a large majority of people. In fact, it has become impossible to overlook the fact that modern technology has made us more likely to fall victim to exploitation by businesses and social media kingpins. Having said that, while the future of this situation may look bleak, it is important to note that the inherent ability to exploit can be reduced through government regulations. Similarly, the actions of non-state actors such as watchdogs can help to spotlight and condemn the poor working conditions imposed on employees. Overall, although it is true that modern technology has made us more vulnerable to exploitation, this may change in the future.

Comments:
Thoughtful response which consistently argues why and how modern tech has made people more vulnerable to exploitation; and well supported by a range of relevant examples. But clarity in some paragraphs can be improved. Balanced discussion reflects the depth of evaluation.

"Science and technology is the answer to global challenges today." Do you agree?
Mattheus Cheong Chi En 20S54

Science and technology has long been touted as the answer to many of the world's problems. Indeed, the limitless potential of technology can truly aid humanity in overcoming many of the challenges faced by the world today. Through scientific advancements, humans have continuously grown and expanded our capabilities as a race, achieving multiple industrial revolutions and an exponential increase in our quality of life. Detractors of this statement might argue that science and technology is not the be-all and end-all - global issues like social issues cannot be resolved readily by it. Nevertheless, I agree to a very large extent that science and technology is, in fact, the answer to global challenges today. It can successfully solve many of the greatest challenges faced by us, due to its methodical nature, limitless potential, and infinite scalability.

It should be conceded that science and technology is not omnipotent, and will be limited in solving some global challenges. Science and technology is unable to solve social issues, due to its complexity and unpredictable nature. Such issues stem from human nature, and science and technology is unable to solve such issues due to its inherent methodical nature. Take the global challenge of the lack of female empowerment as an example, where women are constrained by society due to its views and traditional gender roles. Another issue is racial discrimination, whose effects are felt by all of the world. These issues cannot be resolved by science and technology. Rather, it requires years if not decades of social advocacy to bring about reform and change in society's beliefs. These problems fundamentally are not structured, and do not have clear solutions. They involve understanding of the human psyche, and the complexity of human thought is far too great for mere machines or even artificial intelligence. It is impossible to expect a computer to be able to systematically deduce a solution to such an issue, simply due to a gross mismatch in their natures. Hence, science and technology tends to fail when dealing with such significantly complex and uncertain issues.

Yet, where science and technology does excel is in issues that can be resolved methodically, and one such global challenge it does so is in environmental issues. Science and technology can help resolve such issues through development of novel technology that directly reduces the problem's extent. These problems typically have straightforward solutions, being structured and methodical in nature. Research into technology can hence effectively reduce such problems by developing these solutions. Take the issue of climate change and pollution as an example, where the primary cause of pollution is reported to be from transportation, with an average of 73.6 kilograms of carbon dioxide per passenger every kilometre by cars as reported by the British Broadcasting Corporation. One of the key solutions to this issue is developing cleaner and more efficient cars that emit less carbon dioxide and pollutants which drive climate change, with electric cars being a frontrunner. Another environmental problem faced globally is the issue of melting polar ice caps as a result of global warming. This is again resolvable through technology, where a new type of glass the size of diatoms and with a very high albedo can be scattered finely over the most vulnerable parts of the Arctic, effectively preserving the ice by reflecting radiation back to space. It can hence be seen that in such issues,

science and technology excels in finding solutions. These problems are often relatively simpler to fix and are only constrained by the level and advancement of technology. Should there be sufficient research and development into such issues, science and technology can help fundamentally correct global issues at its core and address its root causes. Hence, its methodical nature can effectively address global challenges.

Another aspect of science and technology that makes it highly appealing for solving global challenges is its limitless potential, allowing us to find solutions originally inconceivable. Science and technology has no limit to its maximum potential, and improvements and breakthroughs can always be made as long as humans continue their work in research. Unlike humans, who are fundamentally constrained by biological factors where our maximum capability is limited by our size and strength, science and technology face no such constraint. As a result, it can be as advanced as needed to find a solution. This means that not only can we not solve some global challenges by ourselves, but science and technology is the only feasible way in which to do so. A global challenge of growing concern is the uncertainty of humanity's fate. Humans have steadily been increasing their resource consumption, placing immeasurable strain on the planet and its natural processes. This is unfortunately unavoidable as a direct result of human overpopulation. An indicator developed by world-class environmental research teams places human consumption levels at more than one and half to two times Earth's capacity. This indicator, called the World Overshoot Day, places a date within the year when humans have exceeded the planet's natural regeneration capability. In effect, it measures how much we are straining the planet. To solve such a problem, humans once again turn to science and technology and tap on its unlimited potential, this time in the form of space exploration. In order for humanity to survive and flourish, it is necessary for us to start looking into the skies for potentially habitable planets. Space exploration and research agencies like NASA and private firms like SpaceX are attempting to inch humanity closer to the day we are able to leave Earth, as it is a fact that it will eventually fail to support all of human life. These problems require solutions that are far beyond the capability of humans. As a result, science and technology can fill in this role, allowing us to harness its capabilities to devise incredible and effective solutions to the world's greatest challenges.

Finally, yet another aspect that makes science and technology such an effective candidate for solving global challenges is its infinite scalability, global nature, and reproducibility. Some global challenges are massive in scale and require far more than what humans can do. A few humans specialising in a certain field looking to resolve a global challenge will not be able to do it themselves. Rather, they require a solution that is easily expandable and can be promoted globally. Science and technology fills this requirement readily. All it takes is just one breakthrough research in solving one problem, and that solution can be mass produced and shared with the entire world to tackle a problem of equivalent magnitude. As long as the information and data is available, they can be reproduced and hence has incredible scalability. Furthermore, science and technology can be shared, which means that humans can efficiently work on solutions and collectively solve issues rather than forcing all to independently develop solutions. This greatly reduces the time and effort required to devise a solution, which lends itself immediately to a highly effective solution conceived in a relatively short period of time, and is thus extremely important due to the highly volatile nature of global challenges. Take the COVID-19 pandemic as a showcase of science and technology's ability.

This global challenge is being dealt with using science and technology through and through. From the start of the pandemic, science and technology has enabled researchers to immediately decode the virus genome and structure through advanced methods like polymerase chain reaction (PCR), and that information can be shared with everyone globally, which greatly speeds up efforts to develop a vaccine since no one has to start from scratch anymore. Science and technology's global scale has seen great use, allowing the entire world to contribute at once regardless of their expertise. Folding@home, a program that helps to distribute heavy computing processes like simulating protein folding, has allowed the entire world to lend their computing power to the efforts using their personal computers, which helps researchers learn more about the virus and simulate solutions to test their efficacy. Science and technology is hence an infinitely scalable solution that can be expanded to match the magnitude of the global challenges faced and effectively solve them.

To sum up, I agree to a large extent that science and technology is the answer to global challenges today. For many global challenges, the magnitudes and complexities are simply far too great for humans to handle by themselves. Science and technology has become the final piece in the puzzle to help humans transcend their limitations and achieve solutions that can deal with such issues. As we progress and encounter more challenges, our reliance on science and technology will only increase, as we place our trust in its abilities and potential.

Comments:
A thoughtful assessment of the situation with credible examples. Quite elegantly written. Keep it up!

Examine the view that advancements in science and technology should always be for economic gain.

Kiran Mika Rajlingam 20S31

"It has become appallingly clear that our technology has exceeded our humanity." As so eloquently worded by the great physicist Albert Einstein, advancements in science and technology have brought into question the ethics driving our technological innovations. Whether or not advancements in science and technology should always be fuelled by a desire for economic benefits remains a major issue of contention in today's world. While others may argue that economic gain should always be the reason for developments in science and technology since it drives innovation and improves living standards, I would posit that advancements in science and technology should not always be made with the goal of economic growth in mind, as it can compromise our ethics, freedoms, and humanity.

Some may assert that advancements in science and technology should always be for economic gain, since when such technologies enhance economic growth, living standards are enhanced and quality of life improves as a result of the economic prosperity that science and technology bring about. Profit-motivated firms backed by governments seeking economic gain, resulting in the development of productive and efficient technologies which drive economic growth, according people with employment opportunities, higher incomes, and greater access to goods and services as a result. Citizens thus enjoy the economic benefits brought about by developments in science and technology, driven by the pursuit of economic growth. Thus, having economic progress in mind when advancing the level of technology significantly improves people's living standards. To illustrate, a 2018 study by the McKinsey Global Institute found that mainstream integration of autonomous machines and artificial intelligence has the potential to raise global economic output by 13 trillion dollars, enhancing profits for firms, which in turn brings about higher wages and income for households - whose ability to consume to satisfy their wants and needs greatly improves. Developments in science and technology, such as artificial intelligence, were made to enhance the productivity of production processes and boost economic and financial progress, but still bring substantial benefits to the masses. As such, many would argue that advancements in science and technology should always be fuelled by the goal of economic gain, since this pursuit enhances economies and raises living standards in our societies.

However, I would argue that developments in science and technology, when fuelled by rapacity for economic gain, cause the developers of such technologies to disregard the innumerable deleterious side effects that these advancements could pose. In their ravenous pursuit for economic benefits, developers of technologies can often turn a blind eye to the catastrophic levels of environmental damage that their inventions can pose. In such cases, though economic growth may be achieved, it comes along with a slew of adverse implications in other areas, which these developers and firms ignore due to their profit-motivated principles. Climate researchers in Hawaii's climate observatory recently recorded an atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration of 415 parts per million, a level that has not been reached since 300 million years ago, when temperatures rose so greatly that trees grew at the South Pole. According to the researchers, advancements in technology, fuelled by a list for economic gain,

have brought about ruinous and potentially irreversible effects on the world we inhabit. Thus, given the massive environmental damage that is all too often left in the wake of technologies as they advance towards economic growth, I would argue that science and technology should not always be developing for economic gain. Rather, I would assert that advancements in science and technology should be made with the goal of sustainable development in mind. In Iceland, innovations in renewable energy have enabled the nation to harness geothermal energy to meet 80% of its heating and electricity needs, without ravaging the environment we inhabit. Blindly pursuing economic gain through advancements in technology merely leaves future generations with innumerable environmental problems for them to solve. Hence, science and technology should advance only where its applications do not leave devastating damage to the environment in its wake.

Some might postulate that economic growth should always be the reason for developments in science and technology since the financial gains to be earned from such inventions acts as an incentive to drive the innovation of more efficient and capable technologies, which in turn can still bring about benefits to the world at large when applied in various fields. To a substantial degree, money is and remains a key motivating factor behind researchers' and firms' willingness to innovate and tinker their way towards more advanced technologies, as such developments incur great operational and research costs. Without the monetary incentive, the overwhelming majority of developers of new technologies would lack both the willingness and ability to invest resources towards technological innovations, greatly hampering the development of technologies that can improve our lives. In the medical field, innovations in healthcare technology are still greatly driven by profit-motivated medical firms, yet generate critical life-saving technologies. In December 2018, a team of Singaporean heart specialists became the first in Southeast Asia to perform robot-assisted angioplasty to treat coronary heart disease. The precise surgical manoeuvres could not have been performed with such a degree of accuracy without the technology developed by a for-profit bioengineering firm, whose profit from selling their innovations fuels further developments in life-saving technologies. By allowing researchers and developers of technologies to innovate with the goal of self-interest and profits in mind, the tools and devices developed contribute back to our lives in a myriad of manners that would otherwise not happen without the economic rewards encouraging these productive developments. Thus, some would argue that economic gain should always be the goal of advancements in technology.

However, I would argue that advancements in science and technology, when made solely for the pursuit of economic gain, can greatly compromise our ethics and strip us of our individual freedoms. When developers of science and technology regard economic growth as the quintessential goal to aim for regardless of the social ramifications it could impose, the technologies developed to drive revenue streams and fuel economic growth often generate significant harmful effects to the social fabric and values of our societies, which threatens our individuality and freedoms. For instance, China's social credit system utilises face recognition technology to monitor and assign each of its 1.4 billion citizens a social credit score based on factors, ranging from jaywalking to simply spending too much time playing video games. The system, which was created to boost labour and economic productivity, has encroached on the autonomy and privacy of its citizens. I would argue that, should economic growth be driven by technological advancement come at the expense of our individual freedoms, the potential

financial gains are nullified by our lack of liberty and autonomy. Compounding this, when economic gain is the sole motivator for advancements in technology, ethical principles are often thrown out of the equation, as seen in 2018 when Chinese scientist He Jiankui announced he created the first pair of genetically modified human babies using a DNA editing tool, CRISPR, sparking a cacophony of outrage in the scientific community for trampling on the ethical norms of research science. In the interest of protecting our social liberties and staying true to our values, technological developments should by no means be made if their implementation impinges on personal freedoms and morals. Thus, I would argue that economic gain should not always be the driving force behind advancements in science and technology, if they threaten to break down the egalitarian values and ethics that form the foundations of fair and equal societies.

To put all views into context, though some might argue that economic gain fuels developments in science and technology to improve our quality of life and encourage innovations across various fields, I would assert that economic gain should not be held above environmental conservation, individual freedoms and ethics. Yet, we often fail to consider that science and technology are intrinsically inanimate, and it alone can bring about no benign or malevolent effects. As technology forges ahead inexorably, the onus is on us to ensure more ethical and principled applications of such powerful tools at our disposal.

Comments:
Straight-forward intro. Essay could have considered what the advancements of science and technology could have been used for if not for economic gain.

Examine the view that advancements in science and technology should always be for economic gain.
Ahmed Saheer 20S52

Nothing has permeated the lives of human beings more than science and technology. From the type of food we eat to the mode of transportation we use to travel, it has left no stone unturned. Having the potential to transform so many aspects of our lives has made this industry lucrative. Hence, it is indisputable that the economic gain from advancements in science and technology is immense, raising the standards of living of many people through the employment opportunities it brings about. However, giving significance to economic gain solely will lead to the lives of the vulnerable poor being neglected, and at times going against the morals and principles of human beings as well. Hence, I strongly believe that the advancements in science and technology should not always be for economic gain.

Advancements in science and technology with the focus on economic gain can bring about plenty of employment opportunities, further raising the living standards of many. Deepening research on markets, which are predicted to have rising demand in the upcoming years due to changes in preferences, would allow industries to produce products which can improve the convenience and comfort of the users. The expanding market would create more job opportunities for those being employed in the production of such goods. A very popular example would be the expansion of the automobile industry in recent years, due to the exponential rise in demand for electric cars in the fight against global warming. Companies such as Tesla have quickly gained their competitive advantage in this industry by adapting to the change in demand. By furthering their research in electric cars, they have produced three different models which have been pre-ordered by individuals from various countries. This international rise in demand allows Tesla to hire more engineers and researchers, improving their quality of living. Moreover, those who consume these goods benefit as well. The USA has also claimed that 50% of economic growth since World War II can be attributed to advancements in science and technology. As such, it was able to transform its nation to a first-world country, raising the living standards of its citizens. Hence, advancements in science and technology with a focus on economic gain improves the lives of the consumers and producers.

However, claiming that advancements in science and technology should always be for economic gain is debatable, as it can end up neglecting those who do not have the financial means to consume the products. Having economic gain as the priority will lead to industries catering to the needs of the rich, as the poor do not provide lucrative opportunities. This leads to their needs being not taken care of, worsening their lives. For instance, one in six human beings in the world are plagued with perennial tropical disease. However, most of these people affected are concentrated in regions with poor sanitation and lack access to healthcare. Coupled with a lack of financial assets and low income, they are not seen as good opportunities for scientific advancement to take place. Profit-driven industries do not deepen their research to manufacture cheaper medicines and cures to cater to the needs of these people. As a result, the vulnerable poor's lives worsen with no one willing to give them a helping hand. 33% of the Ethiopian population is plagued with such diseases, but the low income level deters companies from investing to help them. Hence, prioritising economic gain in advancements of science and

technology will lead to the poor being neglected, widening the income gap and living standards between them and their counterparts in developed nations.

Moreover, having economic gain as the priority in science and technology advancements may cause such research or findings to go against the morals and ethics of human beings, leading to social instability. Science research requires scientists to be objective, hence may lead to them being immoral. A demand-driven profit motive may convince certain researchers to utilise unorthodox methods that include experimentation with living things. This can create great dissatisfaction among the general public. For instance, the Obama administration was heavily lambasted by the public for reversing the ban on stem cell research which necessitates the termination of five-day old embryos. Stem cell research showed immense economic benefit, as it had the potential to solve many medical related issues. However, as it went against the morals of people who believe in pro-life and against religions such as Christianity and Islam, it raised furore leading to social instability. Such unorthodox methods of experiments which go against the human conscience and principles cannot be downplayed, with the immense economic benefits they can bring about. Hence, ethical considerations also have a huge significance too when it comes to advancements in science and technology.

Lastly, advancements in science and technology with a main focus on economic gain can lead to the misallocation of resources, which can otherwise be used to solve perennial problems plaguing the world. Certain advancements in science and technology, such as space exploration, promise to make imagination a reality and bring immense economic benefits. Hence, more land and financial resources have recently been allocated by many nations and private agencies worldwide. However, despite the astronomical sums of money invested until this day, it has only brought us minimal benefits while raising our hopes high. For instance, SpaceX has made three trials in landing its spaceship, with the third spaceship SN10 being successful but exploding afterwards. This progress has convinced many around the world that it is going to create a lucrative industry, leading to the rising price of SpaceX shares in the stock market. SpaceX eventually gained US$820 million. Such progress is often an illusion and does not bring about any immediate benefits, whereas an equivalent investment could have been made to alleviate significant problems such as lack of access to safe water in many nations around the world, improving the lives of the impoverished. The illusion of progress further convinces people to invest in such advancements, as it has the potential to bring immense economic benefits. However, since it does not bring about immediate benefits and could have been allocated to other issues, advancements in science and technology should not always be for economic gain.

In conclusion, despite bringing about actual growth and raising the living standards of many by providing employment opportunities, having economic gain as the sole purpose of advancements in science and technology will worsen the global income inequality and leave several significant problems unattended. Advancements in science and technology have the potential to improve everyone's life, like how it has changed everyone's lifestyle thus far. Hence, it should be tapped on to bring a more inclusive and sustainable growth, without having economic gain as the main focus, to achieve more.

Comments:

Valid issues raised; check that examples do support those claims. Generally clear throughout. Some minor errors.

Examine the view that advancements in science and technology should always be for economic gain.

Dewangan Neya Praveen 20S55

Upon the advent of the Industrial Revolution, the world took a turn and saw technological and scientific advancements revolutionise the world, and this phenomenon has not slowed down since. Every day, we continue to see, hear about, or even experience breakthrough discoveries and improvements in science and technology. With science and technology's prevalence in today's world, there is a large emphasis on making it bigger and better for a myriad of reasons. Additionally, in today's society, where open markets are encouraged and with the cut-throat competition between economies, everything is run like a business with the end goal being seen as profits. This applies to advancements in science and technology as well, where it is sometimes believed that these advancements should always be for economic gain. Though it is true that advancements in science and technology should be for economic gain to make them sustainable, this should not always be the case as always focusing on the economic gain may cause the neglect of people's welfare, the environment, and the current pressing needs of the society.

Economic gain is indeed the factor that causes the advancement of science and technology to be sustained in the long run and thus, the goal of such advancements should naturally be for profits. When advancements in science and technology bring about profits, this increases the funds available for the firm to invest in research and development, which further allows more breakthroughs and advancements in science and technology to be made. As such, this process is akin to a cycle, where advancements in science and technology create profits and these profits then aid in advancements. As such, the two are largely interdependent. On the other hand, when advancements in science and technology do not bring about any economic gains to a firm, the firm may not have the means to develop its science and technology, causing a stagnation in the level of advancement. In today's society, it can be seen that the major companies that are known for their advancements in science and technology are the ones that have the most economic gain as well. For example, Apple and Google are among the most profitable and well-known tech companies in the world, which have pioneered the advancements in smartphones and search engines. Due to their profits, they can invest large sums of money into research and development to make further advancements to their products, which earn them more profit. This illustrates how advancements in science and technology should be for economic gain to make these advancements sustainable.

However, this should not always be the case, as always focusing on profits causes other essential factors for these advancements to be neglected. Advancements in science and technology should not always be for economic gain as focusing on profits may neglect the welfare of the people. Sometimes, rendering technology as profitable does not meet the needs of society. With governments having a social contract with their people and the moral obligation to maximise their welfare, they sometimes would have to compromise economic gains in such advancements. Governments must ensure that their advancements in science and technology bring about social gain as well. Sometimes, such advancements must be made more accessible to the people, which increases government expenditure and may not necessarily

bring economic gain. For instance, in Singapore, where we look forward to improving longevity with an ageing population, the government has to invest in ensuring advancements in the healthcare system and medicine, constructing more facilities with advanced technology such as polyclinics with machinery like Magnetic Resonance Imaging, as well as fund advancements in scientific research on ageing. These developments do not bring about economic gain as the majority of the costs are incurred by the government, but are still vital for the future of the country and its people. Hence, despite not bringing about economic gain, scientific and technological advancements should also focus on social gain. Therefore, scientific and technological advancements should not always be for economic gain.

Secondly, advancements in science and technology should not always be for economic gain as this could pose threats to the environment. Usually, always focusing on profit causes the environment to be neglected, due to wasteful practices and unsustainable materials which are cost-effective. This includes improper disposal of chemicals from scientific laboratories as well as the dumping of e-waste from advanced technology or in research and development laboratories. However, advancements in science and technology could provide the very solution to this as well, by using these advancements for environmental gain and sustainability. This is especially essential in today's world battling global warming, with many societies already facing the detrimental consequences of climate change. Despite not bringing about economic gain as such advancements are usually costly, science and technology must focus on environmental conservation as well to aid in our war for the planet's survival. For example, the scientific and technological advancement of electric cars to replace cars powered by fossil fuels is largely seen as beneficial, despite the fact that it might not bring economic gain, at least in the short run. This is due to the high cost of production of batteries, compared to the profitable regular internal combustion engines and the cost of building numerous charging stations around the country. Nevertheless, this advancement is still regarded as an important step forward for the future, due to the environmental benefits it brings about. Hence, advancement in science and technology should not always be for economic gain.

Lastly, advancements in science and technology should not always be for economic gain as this should not be a priority in urgent situations where such advancements are needed. In times of crisis, it is important to develop such technology in terms of the urgency of the situation rather than seeing how much profits it brings about. This can be largely seen amid the COVID-19 pandemic, where the large-scale implementation of such advancements may not be the most economically viable, but is necessary. Huge sums of money were poured into the research and development of various vaccines, different types of swab tests, robots, and even a TraceTogether token for contact tracing. With about $13.8 million spent on the development of digital contact tracing tools and with many of these services being rendered free to the public, these advancements may not have been profitable, but were still vital in Singapore's fight against the spread of the virus. Hence, in these situations, economic gain is seen as secondary, with the main priority being saving people and tackling the crisis. Hence, advancements in science and technology should not always be for economic gain.

In a nutshell, even though economic gain is essential to boosting scientific and technological advancements and making them sustainable, these advancements should not always be for economic growth as this causes neglect of social welfare, the environment as

well as urgent needs in critical situations. These advancements are largely multidimensional and impact society in a variety of ways; hence, it is essential to ensure that its purpose is not always just for profits.

Comments:
Relevant arguments and a balanced discussion. Some examples could have been more clearly explained and developed, to better support your points. While they can be similar, note that 'always' is not equivalent to 'only'.

Examine the view that advancements in science and technology should always be for economic gain.
Wang Penghao 20S64

The technology company Tesla was first heralded by the media as a pioneer in furthering humans' knowledge and capabilities in aerospace engineering, when it launched the world's first recyclable rocket in early 2015. It drew the public attention again this spring but for a different reason: its stock prices rocketed, making founder and CEO Elon Musk the wealthiest man worldwide. This seems like a good example of how development in science and its application in technology lead to lucrative financial returns. However, despite their benefits in encouraging innovation, we should recognise that profits ought not to be the all-time priority of scientific progress in every situation and for each state.

Economic benefits should be the main pursuit of scientific developments to spur innovation and research, especially in countries with less advanced technology capabilities. Research and developments which further our scientific knowledge and promise technological benefits are associated with great uncertainties and considerable investments of time and capital. For less developed states, their tight budget may prevent consistent investments in such projects and discourage companies and researchers from engaging in such innovations. For instance, aerospace projects in Egypt were frequently interrupted by inconsistent funds, and the developments were hence more hindered as compared to its rich neighbour Saudi Arabia, which channelled tremendous resources into the field and successfully launched its own space shuttle orbiter in 2020. Thus, it is justified for scientific advancements to focus on fields with promising returns for companies to cover the early research costs, and to ensure their survival on stable income resources. An example would be pharmaceutical companies in the United States which develop drugs for a large market, and thus are expected to cover the initial costs and achieve sustainable growth. Therefore, scientific developments should aim for financial returns.

However, this principle does not apply to every country, which has its unique economic characteristics and problems, including environmental degradation. The less wealthy states would readily develop technology in the fields that enable them to move up the value chain and reap more profits, even at the cost of environmental devastation. This is because the residents are living on a low level of material satisfaction and rely on increased income to solve problems such as hunger and poor housing. India's New Green Revolution serves as a good example. From 2005, the country invested heavily in developing fertiliser production in an attempt to boost its agricultural returns, while disregarding the potential soil erosion threats from excessive fertiliser usage. Similarly, many South American countries have been developing technology to harvest more trees in recent years, such as designing more powerful logging machinery while ignoring the ongoing desertification. Their wealthier Asian counterparts on the other hand, such as Singapore and China, are focusing scientific research on green energy and cleaner production techniques to tackle threats of pollution and climate changes. The plans of the two countries - Singapore Green Plan 2030 and Science and Technology Plan 2025 - are evidence of this. These projects, despite being currently unprofitable, promise a cleaner environment for future generations. Hence, economic returns

may not be equally looked upon by each state, which may have alternative goals for technological development.

Furthermore, financial gain may cease to be the overarching goal of scientific and technological advancements when there are more dire crises to resolve. Due to the urgency of such crises, companies may face insufficient time to fully evaluate the economic boons and banes. Still, they push for technological development to resolve the crises and minimise harm, even at the expense of economic gains. During the ongoing COVID-19 global health crisis, countries and businesses worldwide are investing heavily into biomedical and pharmaceutical research in hopes of developing a vaccine and saving the lives of millions. Given the unpredictability of the virus and uncertainties linked with developments and distribution of the vaccine, it is challenging to evaluate the expected returns. Nevertheless, research is being conducted to tackle the disease. Other examples include the locust swarms in 2020 which threatened North Africa and middle Asia, as well as the Australian wildfire in mid-2020. In both cases, resolving the crisis was of utmost importance as researchers set out to explore novel scientific and technological approaches to these natural disasters. Thus, economic gain is not the overarching objective of scientific advancements in face of crises.

In conclusion, we should recognise that while economic gain motivates scientific and technological advancements, the latter has more complex roles to play in society. We should aim to develop science and technology sustainably to bring the maximum good to society.

Comments:
A very good attempt! I'm so glad that you understood the question, and that you had the examples to support your points. Your language was a little long-winded toward the end, but this was nicely phrased in general. Just be careful to interpret the question properly - only/sole does not equal always.

Politics, Economics & History

In today's world, can a country afford to isolate itself?
Lau Yong De, Lucas 20A11

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and its various socialist republics and Eastern European satellite states in 1991, this marked the end of the bipolarity and ideological divisions that have gripped the globe for much of the 20th century, paving the way for the integration of former democratic and Communist nations and states to form an inclusive and united international community notwithstanding their political or economic disparities. While our increasingly globalised and modernised world has to bear witness to the fostering of greater ties and cooperation between nations, this has also increased the propensity of nations to bicker and international tensions to arise stemming from conflicting self-interests, epitomised by the tit-for-tat adventurism that has characterised the series of retaliatory tariffs exchanged between the USA and China, two of the world's economic powerhouses, thereby begging the question as to whether countries should return to a policy of self-isolationism in order to safeguard their national interests. However, I truly beg to differ, as the increasingly complex and intricate global issues and circumstances have made it unfeasible for countries to isolate themselves.

Purveyors of the belief that countries should isolate themselves often revert to the tried and tested argument of countries needing to place greater emphasis on the governance of its people. A country's population forms the backbone of the government and country, driving the country forward economically while being physical representatives of a country's image and reputation on the international stage. In addition, the populace forms the foundation of a country and government's legitimacy and their support and backing grants such governments and countries the necessary moral justification and right to rule. As such, it is imperative that countries tend to the needs and demands of its people in terms of equitable economic growth and provision of social welfare and benefits in order to ensure a country's progress as well as its legitimacy. Failure to do so has often sparked widespread populace anger and resentment against the government, creating social and political instability that will only plunge countries into chaos and anarchy. This can be seen in the rise of nationalism across Europe, as European citizens have protested and demonstrated against existing governments over the lack of attention towards the needs and interests of the populace. This is most evident in the recent Brexit debacle which has gripped the United Kingdom as British citizens demanded for the country to be from the European Union, citing how Britain and its citizens were not receiving any benefits of being in the European Union. Citing such examples have emboldened and strengthened claims of countries needing to isolate themselves in today's world to focus on fulfilling the needs of the populace as well as ensuring order and stability within the country.

In addition, such purveyors of isolationism have also cited the need to protect its systems and institutions against any foreign subversion. A country's political institutions and systems of governance are not merely enablers of a country's policies and decisions, but also indicative of the dignity and reputation it commands in the international community with the credibility of its political systems. In an increasingly globalised and integrated world, foreign ties and relations have unfortunately opened the door for foreign interference and subversion,

threatening to derail a country's system of governance which harbours far-reaching consequences and ramifications for its dignity and credibility. Case in point, in the recent 2016 US presidential elections, Donald Trump was suspected of soliciting foreign interference from Russia in harming the electoral prospects of his Democratic rival Hillary Clinton by conducting various acts of espionage and hacking in order to derail her campaign, begging the question over the credibility of the American political system and how it is easily susceptible to foreign interference and collusion for the benefit of one party over another. As such, this provides further credence to the argument that countries should isolate themselves in order to preserve the sanctity and credibility of its institutions and systems.

While such arguments may be credible in their own right, they fail to take into account the fact that in an increasingly globalised world, it is imperative for countries to be well integrated into the global community in order to reap mutual benefits. By fostering ties and strong relations regionally and internationally, this can pave the way for greater economic and political opportunities for countries, opening the door for economic growth and social progress. This cannot be said for countries who choose to isolate themselves and shun the establishment of any foreign ties or relations, as this would leave them secluded from being included or integrated into multinational economies and partnerships, curtailing a country's growth and progress in the process. This is most evident in China's Belt and Road Initiative, the world's most ambitious infrastructure and economic initiative to date. First unveiled in Kazakhstan and Indonesia in 2013, China has become a major donor of infrastructure in the remotest countries in Africa and the most mountainous regions in Central Asia, providing multi-million dollars loans and grants towards the construction of railways, highways, industries and other infrastructural developments. Take the city of Gwadar in Pakistan for example. Originally a small fishing town in 2001, the Belt and Road Initiative saw China building a deep-water port in the city. By 2018, the deep-water port in Gwadar as well as its road and highway connections have formed a US$62 million corridor as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. While detractors have often labelled the Belt and Road Initiative as a political ploy by China to monopolise global trade and expand her political and economic influence into other countries and regions, research by the College of Duke and Mary have found that countries in Belt and Road Partnerships have witnessed major economic and social progress. Pakistan's GDP rose to its highest in 8 years while it was able to forge strong economic and political ties with a major power, challenging the preconceived notion that China is in it for its own benefit. As such, being integrated into the global community has proven to be mutually beneficial for countries worldwide, notably developing nations who are in most need of economic assistance and political backing.

In addition, a globalised and developed world that we live in today has inadvertently yielded issues and problems that are transnational and subsequently more complex in nature, necessitating the need for countries to band together in order to resolve such globalised issues. Like our world today has advanced and developed at such a rapid rate, this has resulted in many countries reaping economic prosperity and growth. Unfortunately, this has also resulted in many developing and third world nations falling behind economically, often unable to keep abreast with the rapid and often unforgiving nature of globalisation. Without the necessary economic growth and development, these countries would often be plagued by wide-ranging and extensive socioeconomic issues such as poor standards of living, shortage of basic necessities and extreme poverty. With such governments often weak and ineffective, these

countries provide the perfect breeding ground for terrorism and extremism to fester and grow as terrorists and other armed insurgents capitalise on the socioeconomic grievances of the populace to radicalise them in support of their extremist goals and beliefs. Amidst the economic turmoil and political instability that has gripped Iraq and Syria, the terrorist group ISIS emerged from its ashes and its armed insurgencies and groups have taken control of many territories in the region, plunging the Middle East into further anarchy and chaos. In addition, ISIS has been able to spread and disseminate its extremist values and beliefs worldwide, indoctrinating and radicalising individuals in other countries in order to carry out and fulfil their extremist ideology often through acts of violence and disruption. This is most evident in the Paris Attacks in 2015, whereby radicalised individuals under the directive of ISIS carried out a series of simultaneous attacks across Paris, leaving hundreds dead and thousands more wounded. With such developed nations such as France susceptible to acts of violence and terrorism, this is testament to how global issues we face today are often widespread and extensive. Given the transnational nature of issues such as terrorism and its ability to transcend physical boundaries and borders, the ability to combat and alleviate such problems in silos is increasingly unrealistic and unfeasible. Such globalised issues and problems, therefore, necessitate a mandatory shift towards cooperation and mutual assistance as countries worldwide need to step away from isolation and collaborate together, so as to present a more credible and united front towards resolving such widespread and complex global issues.

As former British Prime Minister Lord Palmerston once proclaimed, "Nations do not have permanent friends or allies, they only have permanent interests". This is indicative of how a country's national interest and goals remain at the forefront of its decisions and foreign policy and how the need to safeguard or protect such interests has spurred countries to adopt a policy of isolationism and shun any attempts to partake or contribute towards the global community. While such interests and goals should be championed and upheld for they are clear indications of the country's power and reputation, excessive prioritisation of such self-interests at the expense of the issues and collective interests of the global community has been proven to bring about negative repercussions. With the increasing complexity of global issues we face today and the myriad of benefits that come with foreign ties and relations, I implore countries to cast aside their naked self-interests and shift away from isolationism and towards integration in our global community, for the self-interests of a country cannot be prioritised at the expense of the collective needs of our international community.

Comments:
Arguments are largely very sound, and display a strong command of the relevant issues. There is a clear fluency and eloquence in writing as well. The main area of improvement is to be a lot more concise with examples and just focus on the key relevant areas, or risk becoming too example-driven; and along the same lines, include more examples for each argument. Otherwise, this is a very good attempt.

In today's world, can a country afford to isolate itself?
Lim Jin Le, Alexius 20S49

No man is an island; while many men strive to be independent, they all cannot help but depend upon one another for the greater collective good which proves to fulfil more greatly their own self-interests than if they were to go about it alone. A man can be seen as a microcosm of a country, for similarly in today's world, a country is not a planet; as hard as a country tries to be self-sufficient, not one would wish to completely cut itself off from the outside world, for too much is lost and passed up when a country decides to cordon itself off from the rest of the globe. The reality is that in today's world, a country cannot afford to isolate itself.

Borders, citizens, national sovereignty, unique culture: these are some of the key things that define a country - things that nationalists, who believe a country should isolate, fear is and will be challenged as countries become more integrated with the broader world. As a country decides to form relations with others for trade, it opens itself up to the loss of national independence; as on top of being dependent on others economically, they leave themselves vulnerable to political pressure and outside interference. For illustration, take Africa, a continent of developing economies and widespread poverty. In a bid to improve their economic well-being, individual African countries turn to other countries for help, most prominent of which today would be China. China did help some of these African countries by aiding them in building infrastructure and trade ties, but also ended up taking advantage of them, miring them in diplomacy debt-traps. The politics of many of these African countries are heavily meddled with by the Chinese government, and they also become mouthpieces of the Chinese government during international meetings. In such a scenario, we see that when a country opens itself up, it may end up being taken advantage of, losing its national independence on many matters. To go up north, the United Kingdom (UK) has also left the European Union (EU), for its people believe the union hurt its national sovereignty: its laws and trade relations have to follow those of the EU. Many of its citizens felt that the UK joining the EU diluted what it meant to be a country, and thus decided in a referendum to isolate itself from the continental project. Indeed, many who fear a country involving itself with others believe that doing so end up hurting its independence, and as such align themselves to the view that a country can afford and even should isolate itself.

It might be true that as a country becomes more open to others, it becomes more vulnerable to threats of gradually losing its independence as a country. However, too much is passed up as a country isolates itself, that it simply cannot afford to do so. For one, a country on its own is not able to achieve as much as when multiple countries collaborate for a common goal. As today's world becomes more globalised, we begin to see just how much countries working together can achieve. The particle physics laboratory of the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN), hosting the Large Hadron Collider, is only made possible by the collaboration and pooling of funds from multiple European countries. Its annual budget is more than a billion euros, and its funding is simply unfeasible for one single country to undertake. The fact that it is a transnational project also meant that researchers are not confined to the limited pool available within one country, but instead enables talents from all over Europe and

even the rest of the world to push its vast capabilities. Indeed, the facilities have led to some of the world's most ground-breaking recent scientific discoveries, which would not have been possible if all countries simply isolated themselves. Additionally, in today's world, many global problems identified plague not just one country but the whole world and these problems are also too daunting a task for one single country to tackle. An example that epitomises this is how Bhutan faces difficulty tackling climate change on its own. The most significant impact of climate change in Bhutan is the formation of supra-glacial lakes due to the accelerated retreat of glaciers with increasing temperatures. The result is that glaciers in Bhutan are receding at a rate of almost 30-60 metres per decade. Bhutan is one of the world's most self-sufficient and isolated nations. However, despite doing everything it individually could, such as being carbon negative and planting huge areas of forests, it was not enough for Bhutan to overcome the global problem of climate change. Realising that international collaboration was crucial, its leaders opened themselves up to other countries for a serious global response to a serious problem. There is a genuine need to tap on knowledge, technology and a global effort to combat climate change.

Further, a country isolating itself holds itself back significantly for achieving its economic potential. Just like each man having different talents and hence professions to create an interdependent society, a country also each has something unique to present to the table of the world. Some countries are better suited for agriculture due to natural climate, while others have a unique advantage in technology and others in manufacturing. It is counterproductive to have a country be a jack of all trade in an attempt to be self-sufficient, instead of each country drawing on its strength, providing its unique goods and services while enjoying those of others. To see this, we look no further than North Korea. By isolating itself from the world economically, it must do everything by itself, seriously limiting its economic potential. To prove the point, North Korea has natural resources estimated in the trillions, but is not effectively able to harvest and process them due to poor equipment. The reason for this is due to its isolation and thus not wanting to draw on the strengths of other countries with the infrastructure in place for the extraction and processing of these natural resources, such as South Korea which has a strong machinery manufacturing sector. In the end, North Korea is unable to reach its economic potential as it isolates itself. The point is that global trade enables individual countries to cooperate economically and bring out their economic best, but that is not possible if countries block off the rest of the world. China during the mid-20th century lost a huge amount of its economic growth under its leader Mao Zedong, who was extremely hostile to foreign nations. Later leaders such as Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and most prominently Deng Xiaoping overturned it to bring China soaring as an economic power, but so much potential economic growth has been lost over the years by then. Indeed, this is a huge nation with the world's largest population, but even they could not be fully self-sufficient and not miss out on economic prosperity. Hence, a country simply cannot afford to isolate itself, for it means the loss of much economic potential.

A country can isolate itself; this was how it had been for much of human history. However, it is to be argued that the reason for isolation stems not from the deep desire to be isolated, but from a simple lack of means to not be isolated. In today's world, however, things have changed. Today, we do have the technological means to cooperate with other countries and not be isolated. Seeing the past good that cooperating with other countries has brought

about as we open the Pandora's box of globalisation, no country can afford to isolate and pass up the infinite possibilities that opening up and cooperating with other countries bring.

Comments:
Examples could be a tad more concise (with maybe one more paragraph in your response as well) but otherwise, you largely managed to successfully discuss the advantages of global collaboration while couching it in forms of the costs of isolation as well. Good job.

"Firms should pursue profit as their key goal." Do you agree?
Lam Shi Le 19S38

In Economics, firms are defined to be 'profit-maximising', which means that the ultimate goal of a firm is to increase their profits. However, firms large or small all have an influence over their consumers, the environment and their workers. Since the impacts of a firm's decisions go beyond simply themselves, I believe that firms should not pursue profit as their key goal, but instead pursue the interests of other stakeholders as their key goal.

Firms should pursue environmentalism as their key goal instead of profits. Though the pursuit of profits is seemingly beneficial for firms, profits often come at the expense of the environment. Be it through the burning of fossil fuels or deforestation to increase production and hence profits, such self-interested behaviour of firms destroys the environment. Chesapeake, an oil production firm, was one of the leaders in using explosives to blast up the ground as the costs of doing so were low, hence increasing their profit margins. They received severe criticism because this method of production released tonnes of dust and greenhouse gases into the air, polluting the area and accelerating global warming. Since firms' decisions end up leaving significant impacts on the environment, firms should adopt sustainable models to use limited resources wisely. An example of such a firm would be Refash in Singapore, a clothing firm which buys and sells second-hand clothing items. Never having to produce clothing items on their own, Refash's focus on conserving the environment provides a platform for consumers to buy into this idea of upcycling second-hand clothing. As firms play a significant role in determining their impacts on the environment, I believe that firms have the responsibility to pursue sustainable models as their key goal to conserve the environment, instead of harming it in the pursuit of profits as their priority.

I also believe that firms should pursue the interests of their consumers as their key goal instead of profits. The first role of firms should be to provide goods and services which bring benefits to consumers, even if that means firms being at the expense of a narrower profit margin. Large pharmaceutical companies like Bayer (now Bayer-Monsanto) are constantly pushing out new drugs to their consumers, branding them and selling them off to consumers in their pursuit of stacking profits. In actuality, some of the new versions of drugs do not bring about significant improvements to their consumers' health. Instead of pursuing profits and channelling their funds to invent new drugs with mere minor adjustments, then slapping patents on to them, these firms should focus their research into drugs that bring genuine and significant benefits to consumers. Though I acknowledge that generation of such profits are necessary to drive funding for research and development, and should be a goal of firms, I argue that these profits should not be channelled towards generating even more profits. Profits may be the goal of most firms, but I believe the consumers come first, and firms should place their key focus on generating benefits for society rather than increasing their profits further.

Firms should additionally pursue the interests of their workers as their key goal instead of profits. Firms do provide many with employment; however, some firms may exploit their labour by paying meagre wages, to push costs down and increase profits. Going down the production line of toys, clothes and shoes, it is not uncommon to find workers working for

below the minimum wage, or even in dangerous working conditions. 'Fast fashion', for example, has become a pejorative term as more light is being shed on the poor working conditions and low wages of workers who make the cheap prices at Zara and Forever 21 possible. Workers' wages represent only a fraction of what consumers pay for the clothes because of deep-rooted structural power dynamics. To profit off consumerist behaviours on one side of the world, sweatshop workers bear the larger costs on the other side of the globe. Bangladeshi workers in the garment industry are being paid less than $3.19 per day! Taking care of the workers first by providing acceptable working conditions and wages should be a firm's key priority. Though this may shrink the firm's profits, I believe it is a necessary trade-off firms should make to pursue the interests of their workers as their key goal.

However, many still stand to say that profits should be any firm's key goal. Profits are necessary for continued production and expansion, to provide more benefits to their consumers, firms have to place profits as their first priority. While I acknowledge the necessity of profits as a goal of firms, I believe that the pursuit of other factors besides profits as a key goal, can still ultimately work for the firm and for them to reap more profits. As brought up earlier, growing awareness of fast fashion's insidious impacts on the environment and their workers has led to consumers boycotting products from such stores, turning to stores which place emphasis on a sustainable and ethical model like the one brands like Reformation and Urban Outfitters adopt instead. Growing awareness of ethics and impacts of firms on the environment is sure to sway consumers interests. This shows how firms who place environmental needs as a key goal have successfully gained more profits.

To conclude, I agree that profit is a necessary goal, but other factors are even more crucial; and firms should prioritise other factors like the environment and their workers as their key goal ultimately.

Comments:
Some very compelling arguments here with good use of examples. Arguments can be much stronger with better balance.

"Economic growth should never be at the expense of the environment." Do you agree?

Thum Wei Hong Nicholas 19S30

As evident in many of the world's developed and developing countries, economic growth is inevitably linked to environmental degradation. This is largely due to the nature of economic growth in today's highly industrialised world, which involves the repurposing of large portions of natural land, excessive extraction of resources for construction and material needs, as well as pollution which is the by-product of many manufacturing processes. With governments and firms seeking growth and development in the most effective way possible, environmental considerations are normally unfavourable and treated as an afterthought. Given its benefits in cost-effectiveness and ability to cause rapid economic growth, many may argue that economic growth at the expense of the environment can be justified in certain scenarios. However, it is my belief that economic growth should not be at the expense of the environment due to the many negative consequences and effects that environmental degradation can cause, negatively affecting stakeholders and hindering further economic growth.

There is no doubt that environmentally destructive economic growth can be highly beneficial, and proponents of the counterargument argue that this is especially justified in extremely poor or undeveloped regions. By going through such developments, the benefits of increased welfare and standards of living vastly outweigh the costs incurred through environmental degradation. In many developing regions, environmentally sustainable methods of economic growth may not be largely affordable or accessible due to the lack of budget or technology. As such, destructive methods could be the only recourse for such regions to develop and survive. This can be easily seen in the case of China, the world's largest carbon emitter, which was able to greatly improve poverty rates in many rural regions during its period of rapid industrialisation. They were able to significantly improve the standards of living for countless individuals and greatly reduce the rates of famine and mortality. Furthermore, when environmental degradation is contained, many of its negative impacts can be avoided. This can be done through the utilisation of modern technology in reforestation of restoration of mines. Hence, given its extensive benefits, many believe that economic growth should be prioritised over environmental conservation in struggling countries or regions.

In reality, however, most forms of environmental degradation as a result of economic growth in the world is not sustainable. This brings about countless long-term effects which can be detrimental to the country. For example, the irresponsible chemical dumping in Pasir Gudang, Malaysia in 2019, led to the closure of businesses and thousands of individuals were hospitalised as a result of the harmful fumes. Not only did this cause harm to residents, but further economic growth was also halted as the workforce was disabled. In terms of even longer periods of time, the emission of greenhouse gases, which leads to the enhanced greenhouse effect and global warming is set to cause massive fluctuations in climates, causing long term droughts in certain areas and flooding in coastal regions. As such, despite its possibly massive short term benefits, such economic growth is not sustainable, severely hindering such countries in the long run by causing problems for future generations to come. This may result in reduced welfare in even more people over time, as compared to the few who benefit in the

short run. Hence, it is my stand that economic growth should not be pursued at the expense of the environment.

In addition to detrimental effects on one's own region, economic growth at the expense of the environment could also lead to damages and consequences to third parties, for example, the frequent burning of forests, as well as farmland in Indonesia, has caused poor air quality levels and haze in neighbouring countries such as Singapore and Malaysia. A similar case can also be seen in the burning of large portions of land in the Amazon forests to make way for economic development. As a result, such practices are extremely irresponsible, causing harm to other non-related parties for one's gain. Additionally, this can cause international tension and conflicts because of the spillover environmental impacts borne by third parties, which can further harm one's own country as a result. For example, the displeasure on the part of Singapore and Malaysia towards Indonesia has resulted in many Indonesian brands and firms being boycotted, reducing their exports and hindering further economic growth. Strained relations and tensions have also reduced Indonesia's negotiating power in this region, negatively affecting their international status. In other countries, sanctions may even be put in place by large economies or international organisations, severely impacting such developing regions. Hence, economic growth should never be at the expense of the environment, due to the international backlash it could cause.

With many new as well as up and coming technologies in green energy, alongside sustainable development, there have also been many more opportunities in sustainable economic growth, making there be no excuse for environmental degradation. For example, the cost of solar panels over the last twenty years has fallen more than ten times, showing how technologies have been made much cheaper and easily available. Sustainable growth can be achieved in many areas, as evident in nations such as Australia and New Zealand who derive a significant portion of energy from green sources including wind and solar farms. This point is especially true in highly developed countries who have the capacity and ability to invest in and carry out such practices. With nations such as the United Kingdom and the United States having a very poor history of carbon emissions and environmental exploitation, it is only reasonable that they utilise and develop such technologies to mitigate the damage caused by years of economic growth. Hence economic growth should never be done at the expense of the environment.

In the cause of developing nations, who may not have the capacity or ability to carry out such green practices, international aid is much more readily available than was before. With organisations such as the United Nations and World Bank promoting sustainable development, developing nations can easily tap onto their resources and expertise, as well as gain the help of other nations or individuals in the international community. For example, the World Bank offers loans to developing countries at little to no interest rate, giving them the financial capacity before returning the loan. As such, developing countries can gain the ability to develop sustainably, not at the expense of the environment, with help from the international community. Where parties are unable to help, such developing countries can pressure them through highlighting their hypocrisy, as many developed countries have only been able to develop as a result of years of environmental degradation in the past. Hence, despite the lack of factor endowment locally, developing countries are capable of seeking aid internationally,

giving them the necessary resources to develop sustainably. As such, economic growth need not and should be at the expense of the environment.

In conclusion, I stand firm in my belief that economic growth should never be at the expense of the environment. While there are many possible benefits that it can bring, destructive economic growth can cause many more detrimental effects in the long run to both developing regions and third parties. Furthermore, there is a much greater ability to develop sustainably today, due to the accessibility and availability of technology, expertise and international aid in today's highly globalised world. Sustainable economic growth would not only be beneficial to us, but also to the many future generations who would inherit the benefits. Perhaps the next question to ask would be how environmental standards can be enforced both within countries and internationally.

Comments:
Very insightful and thoughtful piece which considers the issue from multiple angles. Keep up the good work. Having more concrete evidence of points would really strengthen your essay.

"Democracy has failed to live up to expectations." To what extent is this true?
Kristen Joseph Fernando 19S36

"Of the people, by the people, for the people" is an often-cited quote by Abraham Lincoln. Ever since Ancient Athens first gave birth to the idea of democracy, human civilisation has always been fascinated with the great promise democracy held for governance and the functioning of society. With the power that an individual's voice now held in shaping the political landscape, democracy was preached as the way forward in protecting the tenets of liberty, representation, and inclusiveness. Perhaps this belief was best exemplified in the 20th century, when the collapse of the Soviet Union and autocratic regimes, such as those of Germany and Turkey, gave rise to many fledgeling democracies. However, with the advent of technology and the proliferation of fake news through social media, amidst an ever-volatile global landscape, the lustre of democracy has since started to fade. What set out to be a system that encouraged individual participation in politics has and promoted inclusivity has since evolved into a system that has erased informed choice, eroded minority rights and undermined institutions. And with many democracies incorporating autocratic elements today, I firmly believe that democracy has fallen short of meeting its expectations.

In today's volatile political landscape, some might argue that democracy is showing its promise now more than ever in meeting its expectations. They argue that democracy allows the voices of individuals to be heard in political conservation, be it through individuals that express their opinions or through collective protests that illustrate the shared sentiments of disenfranchised groups. For instance, consider the recent Hong Kong protests against the Chinese extradition bill, where thousands of protestors amassed in the streets to voice their discontent with the autocratic actions of the mainland Chinese government. The protests illustrate the potency of democracies to allow for freedom of speech and assembly, which are crucial to alert governments of their complacency so as to enable positive reform. The power that democracy provides by engendering the freedom of speech is perhaps epitomised when it is used as a tool by the marginalised to fight for their civil liberties. The significance of this power can be seen in the recent wave of #BlackLivesMatter protests, where many minority groups are using media platforms and taking to the streets to protest against systemic racism and endemic inequality. Therefore, it may seem that by allowing diverse voices and opinions to be heard, democracy today is still living up to its promises of protecting civil liberties and enabling political participation.

However, the reality is far from being that simple. In the large majority of instances, democracy today is failing to protect its core tenets more than ever, such as by erasing informed choice. The success of a democracy is contingent on the fact that voters can express their opinions and stake in politics in an informed manner. Perhaps this was true in the past when news was obtained from a close circle of reliable sources. With the rise of social media, however, it has become increasingly difficult for voters to make informed choices given the proliferation of fake news. For example, consider the 2016 US election, where social media was used as a tool to spread the appalling lie that Hillary Clinton ran a paedophilia sex ring in a pizzeria to undermine her campaign. This illustrates how social media today has lowered the

barrier for entry to spread information, such that anyone can be espousing lies and misinformation under the guise of free speech. Furthermore, politicians are also increasingly dismantling the truth, to fulfil their partisan political agenda. This can be exemplified by the rise of right-wing populism, and the many techniques populists use to pander to their voter base, such as Donald Trump muddying political debates by espousing lies about immigrants. By bringing politics to the gutter and engendering fake news, democracy today has made it almost impossible for voters to make informed choices. Since a democracy is only as good as its voters, it is evident then that democracy has failed to allow for informed choice.

Furthermore, democracy today has also led to the erosion of minority rights in the modern world. While it is important to allow for free speech and representation, democracy has begun to allow the desire of the majority to be fulfilled at a heavy cost – the liberties of minority groups. Whilst catering to the popular voter base, politicians in democracies are increasingly ignoring the plight of many marginalised groups, by using tactics like identity politics and creating an increasingly polarised society, which is problematic given that democracy once preached the rights of all individuals and to allow inclusivity in politics. This can be illustrated in the phenomenon of right-wing populism. Populists have to cater to a broad coalition of voters with diverse interests, and hence choose to scapegoat and vilify minorities as a form of psychological projection, so as to distract their voters from their often-shallow policies that fail to target the root cause of the issue at hand. An example of this would be Donald Trump's constant anti-immigrant rhetoric, which involves pushing the blame to the 'bad hombre' for the struggles of the white majority. While it may seem that these right-wing politicians reflect the will of the people, such as the economically disenfranchised who face the problems of globalisation, this has come at the expense of minorities living in a climate of fear and having to take to the streets in order to fight for their basic liberties. Hence, it is clear that democracy has evolved into a tyranny of the majority, with minority rights being forsaken.

Moreover, many democracies today are increasingly incorporating autocratic elements and by-passing checks and balances. Modern society is increasingly becoming disillusioned with a problem that has plagued democracy for centuries – inefficiency. With the amount of time it takes to hear out diverse views and to reach fair middle grounds amongst increasingly polarised parties, debates in parliaments are often ending up in gridlock. Politicians, however, are increasingly becoming frustrated with these inefficiencies, and are resorting to bypassing institutions and removing the checks and balances in order to fulfil their political agenda. Examples of leaders taking advantage of their rights include President Vladimir Putin of Russia trying to bypass institutions and extend term limits in order to extend his presidency till 2036, or Trump trying to use his executive powers to enforce the Muslim travel bans. However, these societies reflect how democracy is compromising on the very checks and balances it promised to protect, in order to protect liberty and keep the powers of leaders in check, which is a failure of democracies.

To conclude, democracies today are evolving in order to adapt to the modern world, and in the process are depicting that it is more an ideal than a practical form of governance.

Comments:
Some good points, but you do need to contextualise some of your points/examples a bit more.

"Democracy has failed to live up to expectations." To what extent is this true?
Zhang Ming Jun 19S38

In the book 'The End of History and the Last Man', Francis Fukuyama put forth the idea that democracy, or more specifically Western democracy, is the final stage of evolution in social ideologies, that it should be the model for all countries to follow if they wish to prosper. That was more than three decades ago. Ironically, just a few years back Fukuyama published another article on the fall of democracy, implying that democracy has not lived up to expectations. Indeed, while democracy has given power to the people in most cases, societal outcomes have not necessarily improved, due to widespread misinformation clouding people's judgement, lack of ability to make hard choices in emergencies, and elected officials not necessarily being held accountable.

Democracy has been able to give voices to people throughout society. The main appeal of democracy has always been that it lets the masses have a say in social policies, which is a welcoming shift away from the aristocratic system many western societies followed previously. This ensured that people's interests are represented, and society shifts to accommodate these interests. For example, the LGBTQ+ campaign which started a few years ago has since made tremendous strides in securing rights for the LGBTQ+ community. It should not be surprising that places in which the campaign gained significant traction, such as the US, UK, Taiwan, South Korea and New Zealand, also happened to be few of the most developed democracies in their region. By giving voices to the people, including minorities, democratic societies seem to have made more significant progress in bettering rights for the people. People expected the democracy to work for them, to put their interest forward, and democracy has certainly done it in this case. The election of Barack Obama in 2008, the first black US president, was no less a product of the democratic mechanism. The masses wanted a leader to take them through the crisis, and the democratic elections prevailed. Despite competing against a white majority, and with there being no precedent of a black president in office, people were able to vote in their interest to elect the president whom they deem as an effective leader.

However, while democracy has given a voice to many people, the ultimate societal outcome may not have improved as expected. A key reason for this is the increasing prevalence of fake news and misinformation being spread online. Democracy gives power to the people to vote for their interest, yet this power can be easily corrupted when people lack information and make misguided decisions. In the election leading up to Donald Trump's presidency, he often made comments regarding issues such as job loss, and inflow of foreign migrants. He commonly alluded to the idea that China is 'stealing US jobs' and cutting some ties with China would benefit the economy of the US. However, this was not the case, as seen from what happened after the election. The lack of credible sources of news outlets in many areas in the US made people believe that it is really the case. Even empty promises, such as building a wall and making Mexico pay for it, appeared credible to many voters, who otherwise had no source of information to verify or rebuke Trump's claims. Hence, it can be seen that the assumption of people making independent, thoughtful decisions to put forth their interest, may not necessarily hold in modern democracies. The times have changed, especially with the rise of

new media, poor and uninformed decisions made by voters could well undermine the expected efficacy of democracy in bettering societal outcomes.

Democracy may also not fare as well as expected in times of emergency. This is because oftentimes in an emergency, quick, decisive actions by the government are needed. This could be a trade-off with letting people have a say in the matter, which takes time and requires sufficient information as mentioned above. In a chaotic environment, it may be better for there to be a sole decision-maker who can respond more quickly, so that decisions can be made quickly too. Involvement of too many people may inevitably slow down the process. Taking the example of COVID-19, it is seen that countries such as China and Singapore, which seemed to have had better control of the situation in the initial stages, also happened to be more authoritarian, and certainly not conforming to democracy in the western sense. Their decisive lockdown allowed for the spread of the virus to be more manageable. On the other hand, the US was much lacking in their efforts to stop the pandemic. The protests in Michigan were an apt example of how giving voice to the people in a state of emergency could lead to even more chaos. The push by many people to reopen the economy has since resulted in a second wave of infection in many US states, again showing that following the people's will may not lead to better outcomes in such emergencies. Of course, such issues are vexed and there are exceptions like Taiwan and New Zealand, which are democracies that seemed to have prevailed in the battle against COVID-19. Such examples highlight that while democracy gives power to the people, the people need not be involved in every decision. Sometimes, better outcomes can be achieved when people have trust in their elected officials and are willing to put the larger society before themselves.

However, this is not always the case. In a number of democracies, many elected officials fail to be held accountable for their actions which could undermine the ability of democracies to bring about better societal outcomes as expected. In a typical democracy, officials are elected by the people, so they are expected to represent the interests of their people and push forward policies that benefit the people. However, in reality, democracies may not always be free from external influences. For example, Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam has failed to be held accountable towards the Hong Kong people and their demands, possibly due to interference and pressure from the Chinese government. This shows that democracy may not work well in situations where the power of the people is potentially nullified by an even more powerful third party. The issue of accountability is further complicated, when institutions such as the press, which are meant to ensure transparency and accountability, are undermined. Trump's endless stream of tweets aimed to delegitimise any opposing voice, such as through dropping the phrase 'fake news' on any press that is incongruent with his stance, is one of the main reasons he is able to escape accusation after accusation. Without a strong institution to ensure checks and balances, the power of an elected official can be easily corrupted, leading to worse outcomes for a democracy.

In conclusion, this essay would like to highlight that there are many different systems of democracies. One that is followed by the western societies is certainly not a be-all and end-all model for all societies to follow. There are various limitations to which a democracy can achieve its goals and live up to the expectations of the people, as highlighted in the essay. As the world progresses, and with the rise of Asian economies like China and India, it is time for

everyone to review the effectiveness of democracy as we know it, and be open-minded about the various 'shades' of democracy, differing due to countries, context and culture. That could be a democracy that better lives up to the expectation of the people it is meant to serve.

Comments:
A thoughtful essay on the effectiveness of democracy in the world we live in today. Arguments could be stronger with more development and explanation of examples.

"Democracy has failed to live up to expectations." To what extent is this true?

Timothy Yap, 19S62

Democracy is a revolutionary idea that was conceptualised in Ancient Greece, created on the virtue that society should be ruled by the people and not the few on top. It is now considered the de facto ruling mechanism in the modern world, and as such, a very high set of expectations has been laid on it: It should fairly represent citizens' interests, protect the rights of the people, and lead to civil discourse that promotes progress. However, recent polling indicates that a majority of Brits and Italians no longer feel that democracy in their country is working for them. This can be attributed to gridlock in government and tyranny of the majority which have led many to become disenfranchised with the way democracy is working.

Democracy has failed to live up to expectations because of gridlock that prevents effective government. The opinions of people are not binary, and a diversity of opinions can mean that there is no consensus, meaning that no political entity can move the country forward. For example in Israel, three elections have been conducted over the span of the last two years due to neither of the main two parties being able to form a governing coalition. This leads to an impasse in parliament, where crucial legislation is unable to move forward due to an inability to achieve consensus. This of course means that democracy cannot meet any expectations of governance in circumstances where it is not even governing. Even in circumstances where there are two parties, the impasse can still occur, frustrating the efforts of parties to rule and understandably making citizens disenfranchised with the current political system. In the US, due to a bicameral system, both chambers of Congress are split, with Republicans controlling the Senate and Democrats the House of Representatives. In the wake of recent protests over police brutality, both parties have been racing to implement police reforms to increase accountability for officers. While both parties agree on their intended outcome, neither party wants the other party's proposal to pass due to partisanship and disagreements on implementation. Thus, the Republican proposal was blocked in the House and the Democratic proposal in the Senate, letting neither proposal come into fruition. This has deepened racial tensions and created the impression that no one in government is willing to address key issues, hence leading to the growing sentiment that democracy is not working for them.

In addition, democracy has failed to represent and protect all people as it promotes the tyranny of the majority. In a pure democracy, 51% of people can technically do anything they want to the other 49%. While espousing the values of "we the people", the majority can be used as a political tool to oppress the minority. For example in Malaysia, the use of identity politics to gain the vote of the majority Malay and Muslim population has led to minorities such as ethnic Indians and Chinese having certain rights taken away from them. Policies such as the New Economic Policy or NEP mean that jobs and school applicants are reserved for the majority Bumiputra population, while grants and shares in major companies are denied to minority investors and entrepreneurs. This showcases how democracy has entrenched the interests of the majority, who simply give themselves benefits at the expense of others. In addition, this is compounded by the rise of populism around the world. Rising nationalism in

certain countries has led to intolerance and xenophobic policies targeted at certain groups, and the resurgence of extreme parties of both sides of the political spectrum. In Germany, the rise of the far-right Alternative For Deutschland or AFD party, and in Portugal, a resurgence of the Communist Party both showcase the growing divide between the people. Either side no longer wants to find a compromise or work through the centre as democracy has promised; rather, they seek to merely gain power and push the other side away. These examples thus showcase that democracy does not always represent the goals of preserving the rights of all citizens, especially minorities and that civil discourse can entirely break down in the face of populism, thus leaving many disenfranchised with it.

However, it can be argued that these expectations are unfair as democracy has vastly improved the lives of many and perhaps the bar is being set too high for democracy. While democracy can in some circumstances entrench the interest of the majority, it is far more desirable to other systems where power is concentrated in the hands of a ruling political class, and few are fairly represented, such as in dictatorships and monarchies. After all, there is no silver bullet that can meet all the needs of all peoples at the same time, and it would be unfair to rest all these demands on democracies when other political systems fair much worse in meeting these expectations when applying the same litmus test. Democracy allows the voices of people to be heard, a platform not available to most other systems of governance. For example, the use of referendums has shown itself to be a useful tool for progress and changes have been seen in the various bills to increase the minimum wages in American states such as California and Kansas to improve pay for low-income workers. Democracy also forces political parties to stay accountable to voters as they can be voted out at any election, and hence parties will be more receptive to change and listen to the people's voices. Thus, democracy is indeed the best system of governance available, and perhaps that should be the only expectation that is placed on it.

Nonetheless, while it is true that not all the high and lofty aspirations of democracy can be achieved, its current model can still be improved to better meet some of these expectations. This shows that democracy has indeed fallen short in certain areas and that there are methods available to help it improve. For example, the issue of complete political impasse has led to innovative measures such as the addition of 50 seats to whichever party wins the most votes. This incentivises parties to move to the middle to get more votes rather than splintering, as well as helping parties just short of a majority make it past the finish line. In Singapore, the introduction of Non-Constituency Members of Parliament has also been introduced to provide opposition parties with a platform to voice their opinions and fight for necessary change even if they fail to win their constituency. This increases the quality of debate in parliament and improves the level of accountability so that more people will hopefully have their interests heard and met. Further changes can be implemented in various countries to improve the way democracy functions as a system to become more efficient in meeting these goals. Societies cannot ignore the grievances of its people lest they lose faith in democracy altogether, and implementing these targeted measures can thus improve democracy to a point where the interests of most are met.

From the fall of the Berlin Wall to the streets of Hong Kong today, the pursuit of the ideals of democracy is evident all around the world. It is a testament that people can indeed

work together, that they need not be subjugated by dictators and rulers. However, democracy in its current state is undeniably lacklustre in some areas, and much of this failure can be attributed to its implementation. Hence, it is up to governments and people around the world to make use of democratic platforms to reform and revive trust in democracy itself.

Comments:
Overall, this essay provides an insightful and balanced discussion. There is a nice range of examples used for effective substantiation. Notwithstanding the few errors in your writing, your use of language allows a clear personal voice to come through in your writing.

"The public, not politicians, hold the key to social change." How far do you agree?

Hong Jun Hao, Kelvin 19A12

"People vs the Politicians" was Boris Johnson's election manifesto, as he professed his belief in the power of the ordinary citizen to 'take back' their country and push through the disruptive social change resisted by the elites. While the power of the public is often seemingly demonstrated through their ability to vote and replace politicians, as well as initiate ground up movements to torment ground-up change, this essay argues that the public largely do not hold the key to social change. Rather, politicians who not only hold control over many aspects of the political process, but also are the only ones capable of confronting today's mighty economic institutions, hold the key to social change and can choose to enable or cripple it.

Proponents of western democracy often cite their most compelling evidence of the public's primacy in determining social change: the sacred ballot box. The belief in 'one person, one vote' enables the general masses to make decisions of governance and change by electing representatives that espouse their interests. This can be strikingly demonstrated by the years-long Brexit saga, with two Prime Ministers removed by the painful process that was opposed by many of the politicians not just in Downing Street, but also the champagne toting intelligentsia of the Labour Party. Nevertheless, despite the fierce attempts by politicians to prevent Brexit, displayed through their repeated actions to leave Parliament in a gridlock, the ordinary citizen proved that he was the final arbiter of social change through the historic vote that propelled Boris Johnson into power to push forth their interest. The ability of the public to not only determine who gets to represent them to push forth social change, but to hold politicians accountable to them arguably does reinforce their influence over determining social change. George Bush, who had famously and ironically declared 'Read my lips, no taxes', was dealt a fierce lesson by the public when they voted to expel him from the White House. While politicians can advance their own agendas, the masses can not only serve as a countervailing force that checks them, but can also elect new leaders to reverse any decisions previously made that opposed their interests. The Eurozone debt crisis reinforces this stance, revealing how the voting process enabled ordinary citizens to resist the punishing social change the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) austerity measures would have had by electing new politicians who were in line with their interests. As such, the public seemingly do hold the key to social change.

However, critics often argue that the ordinary citizen has little say in determining social change due to the control politicians have over the political process that enable them to find loopholes around democratic processes and impose their own control over social change. Although citizens seemingly do have the final say over determining social change, that is often not the case. When the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) fell in Malaysia, western commentators praised the public's ability to push forth positive societal change that would leave the politics of nepotism, corruption and collusion behind. Yet, the decision by politicians such as incumbent Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin show that such actions are superficial,l and that the realpolitik of Parliament and the manoeuvring done by elites can reverse and distort the social change initially driven by the public. Regardless of what the ordinary citizen

wants, he often has no say of what occurs in Parliament, and even if he does elect new leaders in order to drive his own desired social change, many actions undertaken by previous politicians are irreversible or hard to repeal. For example, while statistics show that the overwhelming majority of Americans oppose bank bailouts, that did not prevent Obama from bailing out Wall Street with his US$700 billion Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) package, with such actions quite obviously being irreversible. The public is unable to undo the actions of Obama, and like it or not, his actions pushed forth a shift in corporate culture to even greater negligence, which the masses can do little against. Furthermore, politicians can control the political process through disingenuous methods in order to maintain their iron grip over whether social change occurs, with the widespread voter suppression and intimidation tactics imposed in Belarus that undermine the public's push for greater democratisation. Once in office, politicians have access to many instruments such as the police, the army and the treasury that can enable them to use military might to control the direction of social change and crush the public's voice. This is quite evident across huge swathes of Africa, where much of the populace may desire to change their leader, yet are unable to do so as they are under the dictates of widespread voter fraud and other illegal processes. Ergo, politicians do demonstrably display themselves as having primacy over social change.

Yet, it must be conceded that in some cases, the public does hold the key to social change due to their ability to initiate ground-up movements. America's history of racism and police brutality has exploded in the form of Black Lives Matter protests and widespread chaos, with the nation forced to confront its ugly past. The reason why it is the public, and only the public, who hold the key to social change in some cases would be due to the very endemic and societal nature of these cases. Issues such as racism, which are essentially social constructs that exist through individual perceptions and collective action by the masses, often concern the shared belief of the common people. While politicians can try to influence their behaviour, it is ultimately the public who decides whether to enable social change by deciding what to believe in. If the public does not desire to change the national narrative, it is exceedingly hard for politicians to impel social change when it comes to issues so dependent on community beliefs and perceptions. While Singaporean politicians have indicated that they do not oppose the Gay Pride movement, Section 377A of the Penal Code is still propped up by the vociferous voices of powerful churches, conservatives and anti-Westerners who are determined to protect traditional values. As such, it can be seen that the public does hold clout in the arena of social progress when it comes to issues more endemic and community based.

Nevertheless, I ultimately conclude that politicians are the ones who hold the key to social change, if only by virtue that they are the only ones capable of confronting today's mighty political institutions. It is a common sentiment nowadays that no longer is it 'one person, one vote', but 'one dollar, one vote'. There is an increasing sense that corporate power has grown too unbridled, and that they often are the ones holding the brakes on social change. The public is largely impotent to stop them, from their rampant destruction of the environment due to blatant worker abuses to monopoly pricing, the voices of labour unionists, workers and activists who call for social change have been crushed. Corporations are too powerful for the masses to confront, as evinced through the Global Financial Crisis where big banks like Goldman Sachs evaded responsibility for their predatory lending activities and blatant fraud, instead leaving the public to drown under their junk mortgages. Only politicians have the

concentrated power required to regulate and check these corporate titans, with the famous Sherman Act a clear example of how trusts were hemmed in and broken up by politicians, as giants like Standard Oil disintegrated. Politicians are the ones who hold the key to whether they will push forth positive societal change of accountability, environmental conservatism and good, corporate governance, which explains why it is always politicians whom corporations seek to buy. Our own local context provides a salient example of this, with politicians ultimately the one with the fiscal and political clout to push for change in the way employers hire their workers, raising the required rates for employment passes as well as preventing discriminatory hiring practices. As such, politicians ultimately hold the key to social change.

In conclusion, while the public does exert influence over the determinants of social change in some contexts, politicians ultimately have the final say in enabling or striving for change.

Comments:
The arguments raised are insightful and quite clearly evaluate the hold on power each party has. Examples are wide-ranging, but not all are appropriately recent nor detailed to convincingly support the points raised. Language use is fluent. Confident and shows good control.

"The public, not politicians, hold the key to social change." How far do you agree?
Kaaviya Ramesh 19S31

"The government is from the people, for the people, and to the people," is a popular quote often mentioned when people talk about democracies. In most democracies, governments are forced to pander to the requests for social change if they want to continue to stay in power. Social change is a change in the mindsets of those in society, or a change most often leads to improvement in the lives of many. It could also be an improvement to an issue that was plaguing society for years. I am a firm believer that for change to be true in the long run, it has to be organic. Thus, I believe that the voices of the public are the catalysts for social change as they start the movements and changes can only be made with public demands and that even though governments may have the power to amend constitutions, play a supporting role in this process. Thus, I agree to a large extent that the public, not politicians, holds the key to social change.

Firstly, proponents of the counterargument may posit that governments have the final say in making constitutional changes which are vital to ensure sustained change. Thus, they are the key to social change. More often than not, social issues such as racism are further perpetuated by structural inadequacies and impartial justice systems. The perpetrators of these hate crimes are often vested with power by the state to carry out these atrocities and leave unscathed as they are protected by powerful lawyers while minorities are left with neither closure nor power to seek justice - worsening the power asymmetry in society. A popular example of this would be the alleged police brutalities in the US, where countless African-Americans are shot and killed by police officers, often for unconfirmed crimes, on the pretext that they look dangerous or suspicious. The death of George Floyd sparked protests in the USA after Floyd was tackled and held down by police officers and eventually died, despite him crying for help and saying he could not breathe. Protestors took to the streets and demanded that the police officer be charged, and the police department be defunded. Many saw this as a milestone in America's fight for racial equality and as a remarkable social change in society. However, just weeks later, another African-American man, Jacob Blake, was injured by police officers under alleged circumstances as well, showing that there were no real changes that occurred in the justice system as these incidents continued to happen. Unless governments legislate stricter laws to punish officers who wrongfully use violence on citizens and hold police officers who engage in such crimes accountable to jail terms, it is unlikely that the situation will change. Only with constitutional change will more police officers be deterred to act on impulse and racism. Through such changes, the minorities can feel as though their cries have been heard, as they are brought more justice and closure. Hence, long term and true social change can only occur if the politicians make constitutional reforms. Thus, the politicians, not the public, hold the key to social change.

However, it is undeniable that these issues would not have been brought up without the protests of the public. Even though there is no constitutional change in the issue, current protests such as the George Floyd protests illustrate that citizens truly care about such issues and are willing to come out of their comfort zones to fight for their rights of the minorities in

their society. This implies that the mindsets of citizens have shifted and it implies that citizens will no longer tolerate social injustices. Thus, in the long run, if politicians in office do not address such issues, they will not be voted into power through this checks-and-balances system in democracies. Citizens are able to hold politicians accountable for making constitutional amendments to enact sustained and true social change, proving that the public has the key to social change.

Next, the public holds the key to social change, as they can kickstart and galvanise movements demanding change and justice. Most victims of social injustices such as sexual harassment are unwilling to come out with their stories - often because they are too embarrassed by their stories, afraid of social stigma, or have been silenced by their perpetrators. Thus, only when members of the public start voicing out their own stories, kickstarting a movement, more victims feel emboldened to speak up as well. Moreover, it allows victims to find solace in the fact that they are not alone in such cases. For instance, the popular #MeToo movement in social media saw thousands of women across the world coming forward with their sexual harassment stories, from celebrities to young children. Through the creation of this movement, long-time sexual predators like Harvey Weinstein were brought to justice, when he was given a prison sentence of 23 years. This illustrates how the voices of the public are needed to galvanise such involvements into embodiments of social change, and mete out justice for victims. In India, the 2012 Nirbhaya protests following the brutal gang rape of Jyoti Singh saw the accused charged with life sentences. Such protests send out a powerful narrative to society that the actions of perpetrators will no longer be tolerated, and that they will be punished accordingly. Moreover, it demanded political reforms, resulting in an amendment in the laws concerning sexual violence to include different forms of assault such as oral and anal sex. Thus, illustrating how powerful the voices of the public can be in galvanising and kickstarting movements that lead to social change. Hence, the public, not politicians, hold the key to social change. It must be noted for such movements to begin, the public must be willing to listen to the stories of the victims and not be dismissive of their struggles. Only with such cooperation, social change can begin.

Next, change can only occur if the public demands it. Thus, the public holds the key to social change. As governments enact policies, they may be unaware of the effects it has on the people living on the ground. Moreover, in today's rapidly changing society, governments may not be dynamic enough to respond to the changing needs of the people. Thus, only when citizens make strong demands that they want certain changes, politicians can act on them. For instance, during the Arab Spring in Tunisia, many youths took to the streets when unemployment levels were high and the citizens suffered from a poor standard of living. Thus, Tunisia emerged successfully from the protests as the government made efforts to revitalise the economy and provide employment to citizens after which the living standards rose considerably for citizens. Similarly in India, youths in Tamil Nadu who were keen on keeping their cultural roots protested against the banning of the 'Jalli Katu', a battle between rogue animals and men, stating that it was an important aspect of their heritage and a symbol of bravery. Eventually, the government gave in and allowed these contests to continue. Hence, both of these examples go to show that change will not occur unless citizens demand it, as only then politicians will be aware of their problems and priorities and tailor policies to suit them. Hence, the public holds the key to social change.

However, all countries are not this lucky as corrupt governments may not act in the best interests of the people. For instance, when the Arab Spring took place in Syria, it led to the Civil War instead, as the Bashar government was unwilling to make changes and responded with violence against its citizens. Thus, for social change to occur, citizens have to be blessed with honest governments, which may not be true for all countries.

All in all, the public, not the politicians, hold the key to social change, as they are able to galvanise movements and demand for change. It is inevitably true that politicians hold the final key in social change, as they have the power to modify laws and constitutions to nip the problem in the bud to improve the lives of the victims. At the end of the day, it boils down to what we consider as social change. To many, the changes in societal mindset may be sufficient to improve their lives significantly, like the acceptance of their peers and the knowledge that they are not suffering alone. The public, and only the public, have the power to make such changes as mindsets cannot be easily shifted by politicians, and such changes can only occur if the public is willing to listen to the stories of the victims and recognise them. For others, they may not be fortunate enough to live in countries where governments respond to the demands of the people. Hence, for problems that require structural changes to be solved, the support of a functional government is vital.

Comments:
Relevant arguments raised and discussed to examine the relative roles played by the public and politicians in social change. Many relevant examples of social change used to support arguments, but a lack of clarity at some points of the essay.

"The public, not politicians, hold the key to social change." How far do you agree?
Lee Zhi Rong 19S62

"Power to the people!" is a commonly heard dictum that is used by public protesters worldwide. From the People's Power Revolution in the 1970s to today's protests against the Thai monarchy and the Lukashenko government, this phrase encapsulates the zeitgeist and the sentiments of the masses who are disillusioned with their government and are demanding social change. While politicians are in influential and powerful positions to enact social change, it is still largely the public who holds the key to social change considering they make up a large majority of the population. The collective voice of the public possesses an ability to pressure politicians to enact change.

With strength in numbers, the public holds the key to social change as their solidarity and collective belief in a cause will pressure government authorities to implement the necessary policies in pursuit of social change. In a democratic society where the politicians are elected by the public electorate, they are held accountable for their actions, alongside the government to display a high level of transparency. Strong institutions and checks and balances are in place to ensure that the politicians carry out their duties to benefit society's welfare. Hence, when the disenfranchised masses are galvanised into demanding social change, a functioning democracy will help the public achieve their desired goal. For example, the previous South Korean government under President Park Geun Hye was under fire from the public due to her ignoble dealings with the country's chaebols. The South Korean public who has been disenchanted with decades of corruption and graft decided to stage large-scale protests and strikes to remove President Park and her cronies from government. Discussions on social media were fervent and vitriolic, uniting the public towards a common cause and enacting a change for a fairer and more transparent country. Such immense pressure from the public eventually led to President Park's conviction and catapulted Moon Jae In into power, whose government is touted as the least corrupt in South Korea's history. Hence, when the public come together and use their collective voice, they become the driver of change and betterment of society.

However, the argument above hinges on the presupposition that countries are truly democratic, and thus such an argument would not hold for authoritarian countries. In such countries, the key to social change lies in its politicians. They hold the power to decide whether or not social change should be pursued. Many countries ruled by despots stifle free speech and engage in extensive censorship and regulation of the media and internet such that the public is unable to unite together for a common cause if it runs counter to the politicians' values. China is an archetypal example of such a society. Its politicians and authorities hold a tight grip on free speech, and they have the Great Firewall which restricts external internet access. Public dissidents clamouring for change online are promptly arrested and some even 'disappear'. With such a climate of fear, the balance of power when it comes to change shifts to the politicians instead. The politicians are so averse to change and demands from the public, such that when protesters demanded a freer society in 1989, the government sent in tanks to Tiananmen Square which resulted in a cataclysmic massacre. Evidently, it is inconceivable for the public to

hold the key to social change in authoritarian states due to strict controls and the need to obey the state.

Nevertheless, the sheer power of the masses should not be underestimated. History has shown that even the most brutal of despots can be overthrown by the masses when they fight hard for it. When politicians are too extreme, even their own troops will turn on them. For example, Romania's Ceausescu was executed after vehement public protests. Social movements in the Eastern European states in the 1980s were able to boot out communist rulers, and the Arab Spring movement in 2010 was able to remove dictators in the Middle East, inter alia.

Granted, politicians hold the key to social change because they are in an influential position where they can pass important legislation and enact policies that will directly impact the masses. In a democratic society, even if people are demanding for social change, the onus eventually lies on the elected officials whether or not they want to proceed. For instance, even though Taiwan is a typical conservative Asian society that espouses Confucian values, its legislators and lawmakers are open-minded enough to give in to the people's demand to decriminalise gay sex. Eventually, its politicians passed a bill that legalised same-sex marriages. Taiwan is now the first Asian country where same-sex marriage is legal. Such a symbolic piece of legislation passed by the politicians heralds a new era of acceptance and diversity, something which the Taiwanese LGBT community had been longing for. Thus, politicians hold the key to social change due to their role in passing legislation and enacting policies.

Nonetheless, the public holds the key to social change if the social issues themselves are caused and perpetuated by the public themselves. It would be dangerous and foolish to dump the responsibility of creating change to the politicians. We must be the change we want to see and we cannot shirk our responsibility and neither can we apportion the blame to others. The United States has been upended and rocked by a series of racial protests sparked by George Floyd and the Kenosha protests in Wisconsin. Many members of the public are clamouring for change, namely the equal treatment of Black African-Americans. NBA teams and players like the Milwaukee Bucks and Lebron James had staged a boycott of the NBA in light of the events unfolding in Kenosha. When it comes to such issues of systemic and institutionalised racism and discrimination, the key to social change lies in the public because legislation by the government is not a panacea for racism and it cannot cure prejudices. To stop the racial fault lines from worsening, the public, including various stakeholders should come together and have fruitful discussions on how to move forward as a society. Inter-racial dialogues should happen more frequently to ease up tensions and create a safe milieu where different races have carte blanche to speak their minds. Mediation, dialogue, consensus-building, mutual respect - these must come from the public themselves to prevent the chasm from widening.

In conclusion, it is largely the public who holds the key to social change. It is only in exceptional cases that the politicians do so because they are despots. Even so, people still have the power to overthrow dictators. It is time for every human being to be the change he or she wants to see in the world.

Comments:

This is a thoughtful response evaluating which party holds more power to bring about change. There is an apt use of illustration which effectively supported the arguments raised. Good linguistic ability with evidence of felicitous expression noted.

"The main role of governments should be to ensure economic development."
What is your view?
Lau Yong De, Lucas 20A11

With the advent of globalisation and modernisation in the 21st century, economic development is one of the main goals embedded within such a phenomenon, dictating and defining the domestic and international policies and decisions of governments and countries all around the world. With both developing and well-developed nations still seeking economic growth and development, many have attributed the primary role of governments worldwide to ensuring economic progress, backing such a claim with arguments such as the intrinsic value of economic growth benefitting a country's people as well as economic strength serving as a clear indicator of a country's power and reputation. Yet, I truly beg to differ with such a view, as the excessive prioritisation of economic growth can result in governments and countries neglecting their other roles and functions, thereby yielding negative repercussions to their legitimacy and reputation which would curtail any economic development or progress.

Purveyors of the belief that the main role of governments should be to ensure economic development often revert to the tried and tested argument of the trickle-down effects of economic growth in benefitting a country's people. For countries worldwide, especially developing ones, economic growth serves as the crucial factor which would allow these countries to break out of the vicious cycle of poverty. Through the building and establishment of fundamental infrastructures such as housing and hospitals, as well as the development of avenues of economic activity such as consumption and retail, these measures serve to tackle the most fundamental socio-economic problems and issues that its people are facing, thereby improving their socio-economic well-being in terms of living standards and financial ability. Purveyors of such a belief often cite the success story of Singapore under our founding father Mr Lee Kuan Yew, where he embarked on a 'politics of survival' and prioritised economic growth and development of the country in the wake of Singapore's separation from the economic security provided by the Malaysian hinterland. Although such policies have come at the expense of the people's civil liberties and basic freedoms, an area in which detractors have often fired their criticism towards, the growth and progress of Singapore as a result of such pragmatic economic policies is undesirable, with Singapore transforming from a developing nation to one of the world's most well-developed ones, boasting a standard of living, infrastructure and amenities that other countries can only envy. With developing nations in less financially-stable regions of Africa, Latin America and Asia still devoting much of their resources and efforts towards economic development, this is a testament to the myriad of benefits that economic development brings about, thereby emboldening such claims that the main role of governments should be to ensure economic development.

Such ardent believers of economic development as the main priority of governments worldwide have also cited the fact that the economic strength serves as an indicator of a country's power and reputation on the international stage. In an increasingly globalised and competitive world that we live in, governments and countries have sought to gain an edge and surge ahead of their regional or international competitors through various means. Economic strength and light serve as the most basic and fundamental indicator of a country's power and

reputation among the international community. With a country's socioeconomic status serving as the arbitrary metric of a country's prestige and reputation in the eyes of the globe, this adds further credence to the argument that the main role of governments should be to ensure economic development in order to increase the prestige and honour of a country. Case in point, the astounding success of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) can be attributed to its economic might and influence, with over 60 nations worldwide from various regions in Central Asia, Africa and even Europe establishing economic relations and partnerships with China as part of the BRI. While detractors have often denounced the BRI as a political ploy by China to monopolise global trade and expand her sphere of influence into the domestic economies and politics of nations all around the world, the basis and foundation of the BRI's success inherently lie within China's economic strength and prowess which increased her reputation among the international community as a profitable avenue of trade and development, thereby emboldening such claims that the main role of governments should be to ensure economic development.

While these arguments are credible and even justifiable to a certain extent, they often fail to take into consideration the fact that relentless economic pursuit without tending to the various needs and concerns of the people will undermine its legitimacy and position of power. The bedrock and foundation of every country is their citizens, driving the country forward while being physical representatives of the country on the international stage. Moreover, in an increasingly democratised world and society that we live in, whereby people are accorded certain civil liberties such as the freedom of speech and expression, they are able to raise their interests and demands to their governments towards fulfilling their needs and concerns. With democracy providing the most basic and fundamental avenue for the common folk to raise their diverse interests and concerns, it is therefore imperative that governments devote resources and attention towards fulfilling and appeasing the diversity of interests and demands, with economic development no longer serving as the 'one size fits all' solution towards the demands and concerns of the populace. This can be seen in the context of modern China, where its stunning economic growth and development through the introduction of capitalist ideals and systems are no longer able to placate and appease the diversity of interests and demands from various strata of Chinese society, notably its ethnic minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet. Despite economic incentives being implemented by the Chinese government towards poverty alleviation and economic development of such minority regions, minority calls and demands for greater religious and social freedoms have continually been unheeded or suppressed by the central government, sparking tensions and animosity which have culminated in various social disturbances such as protests, demonstrations or even secessionist movements, threatening both the political legitimacy and right to rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), as well as its ability to ensure good social governance and stability. Failure to take into consideration the people's demands in spite of relative economic prosperity and progress can also be seen in the various well-developed nations of Europe as the perceived demographic aggression and increased competition of jobs and economic opportunities through the influx of migrants from the Middle East has given rise to a wave of nationalist fervour sweeping across Europe, with far-right, anti-immigrant political parties such as Alternative for Germany (AfD) rising and challenging the political status quo, winning 94 seats in the Bundestag during the 2017 federal elections and becoming the largest opposition towards Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU). As such, economic incentives or

prosperity is not the be all end all solution towards good governance, as the failure to appease the populace's demands and adequately deal with socio-economic realities can serve to compromise a government's power and legitimacy.

Furthermore, excessive prioritisation of a country's economic development serves to neglect the fundamental role played by each country within the international community to contribute their efforts towards transnational affairs. Given the fact that our global order is built on multilateral cooperation and international cooperation in various worldwide organisations and partnerships, it is both a legal responsibility and moral obligation for governments worldwide to play a role and contribute their efforts towards tackling and resolving the international affairs and issues faced by the international community. In addition, the transnational nature and global scale of the issues the international community faces today have meant that the ability of governments or countries to combat such issues in silos is increasingly unfeasible and counterproductive in nature. Therefore, this mandates a shift from every country towards focusing on such transboundary and multinational issues whereby the onus is on every country to uphold their duty and responsibility as members of the international community towards tackling such issues.

Conversely, failure to do so and a government's prioritisation of its naked self-interests such as ensuring economic development serves as a clear signal that it is moving away from contributing towards the negotiated consensus and common interests of such multilateral organisations, thereby harming its global image and reputation. Case in point. Donald Trump, the 45th US President, has continued on his 'America First' policy that he had so widely espoused during his presidential campaign and galvanised the nationalist sentiments of the American people, embarking on a policy of protectionism in order to develop America's domestic industries and to pave the way for American economic rejuvenation. Yet, such policies have come at the expense of US participation and contribution on the world stage, with the US withdrawing from the Paris Climate Accord due to Trump's blatant refusal to acknowledge the severity of climate change and global warming despite a 2018 UN Intergovernmental report on Climate Change stating that the globe would increase by 1.5-degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels by 2040, refuting Trump's claims that climate change and global warming was a benign issue. As such, excessive prioritisation of economic development at expense of a country's role and contribution on the international stage can cost both its legitimacy as well as the international community's ability to combat such issues.

As former British Prime Minister Lord Palmerston once proclaimed, "Nations do not have permanent friends or allies, they only have permanent interests." This is certainly indicative of the globe that we live in today, whereby a country's interests and domestic affairs such as its economic development often serve to dictate its decisions and foreign policies on the international stage. While such interests and goals should be upheld and championed for they serve to improve their people's well-being as well as an arbitrary metric of a country's power and prestige, excessive prioritisation of economic development by governments serve to neglect other fundamental roles and responsibilities, such as tending to the diverse needs and concerns of its populace, as well as the moral obligation and responsibility of each country within the international community to lend its efforts towards alleviating and combating transnational issues - inadvertently yielding negative repercussions such as weakened foreign

relations or even social unrest and instability. As such, I implore governments to avoid excessively prioritising economic development, and instead devote an equal amount of resources and effort towards other domestic concerns such as the populace's interests and demands, as well as transnational affairs of the international community.

Comments:

Relevant arguments. Balanced discussion. Concrete examples. Your handwriting is a major issue. It really affects clarity and flow. It could be a pity if your marks are simply affected simply because your essay cannot be read. Your paragraphs are rather long. Could be more concrete. Language: a good grasp of the language.

Is it necessary for people to be aware of the history of their country?
Anjali Elankovan 20A11

From ancient Roman empires to the narratives of the American Founding Fathers' venture to build today's America, most people are aware of the major historical events that have occurred in their own country's history. This allows people to foster national unity in their country, understand the present state of their country and learn from the past mistakes that their country had committed. This is necessary as it allows them to advance. Though critics may argue that knowing one's history may be obsolete in a modernised world or become emotional baggage that prevents people from moving on, it remains necessary for people to know of their country's history.

It may seem that it is rather unnecessary for people to be aware of their country's history because it can no longer connect with the values of the contemporary world. Ancient history regarding a country's past may not be necessary for people to know, because it serves no tangible purpose in today's world. In the past, values such as honour and bravery in war may have been celebrated. However, these values are not valued as much today, with other aspects like innovation and collaboration being increasingly valued in a world driven by technology. For example, people living in Rome may find it increasingly useless to know of the history of ancient Roman empires because it is a distant occurrence that present-day Romans may not feel connected to. Similarly, in India, it may not help for people to know of the history of the wars fought by the Chola empire. Such historical events do not narrate the values of modern-day India which is increasingly emphasising computer skills to move into a technology-based economy that requires innovation. This does not stand with battling for one's honour that these histories depict. Hence, in today's world, whose values largely differ from that of the past, historical narratives that showcase particular values may now be obsolete and inapplicable. Hence, there seems to be little need for people to know their history.

It may also seem that people need not be aware of their nation's history, because history may become emotional baggage that may hinder countries from advancing today. Knowing the struggles of one's history may result in people feeling an emotional zest to take revenge for past events that may not even have been brought forward to today's world. This may cause people and governments to act rashly, aggressively or even believe that they are of secondary status, based on how they were treated in the past. Such beliefs and actions may significantly hinder the country as it moves forward, limiting the tangible progress it could achieve today. For example, Belarusians being aware of their history of being treated as a state of secondary importance in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) has led to Belarusians still viewing themselves as under the influence of today's Russia, even though the USSR disintegrated almost thirty years ago in 1991. This has halted Belarus' progress and is a hard obstacle for them to overcome as they continue to be insecure about their independence. An instance where historical baggage may cause aggressive actions hindering progress would be in China. Being aware of the histories of the Opium Wars fought against powers like the British, French and Americans have led China to adopt an anti-Western mentality up till today. As seen through government policy, this has caused significant tensions, especially between the United

States (US) and China in the trade war, hindering China's economic progress. Hence, it may be unnecessary for people to know their country's history.

Nevertheless, knowing the history of one's country is still very much needed. This is firstly because knowing one's history can help to instil a sense of belonging in an individual, which can expand to foster a sense of national unity for a state. Knowing the struggles that ancestors faced and overcame together allows the people of a country to feel a sense of togetherness based on their past shared experiences. This unites groups across various divisions like ethnicity or religion to be unified as a country. For example, for Singaporeans, knowing the struggles that the nation had faced during the Japanese Occupation and in times of uncertainties upon leaving the Federation of Malaysia, and being aware of how the nation had battled these obstacles, helps to instill a sense of collective trust in one another and a sense of togetherness that they can advance together, overcoming various racial and religious barriers. Another case would be in Vietnam, where knowing the collective struggle for independence during the First and Second Indochina War can help to unite the previously divided Vietnam, as the struggle was a common aim shared by both sides. Hence, it still remains necessary that people know of their history, as knowing collective experiences helps to foster a sense of unity in people, which is needed for people and stability in a country.

Secondly, it is largely necessary for people to be aware of their country's history because it allows them to understand the present state of their country. Knowing one's past would allow people to understand why certain events are occurring today. It helps people to empathise with other groups of people in their country and be more empathetic towards others in their community. It allows people to understand the justification behind the events of today, as much of what happens today does not occur in a vacuum but often stems from sentiments arising from what happened in the past. For instance, for Americans to better understand the Black Lives Matter Movement of today, it is not enough to only know about current occurrences of discrimination against African Americans. They also need to be aware of the history of African American slavery in the past, and the decades of racial discrimination that has also added to the sentiments the movement champions. Viewing the issue in isolation would not capture the true essence and motivations behind why it is occurring. Hence, one needs to know one's history to better understand their country's current position.

Furthermore, knowing one's history allows for people to not repeat the mistakes of their ancestors. When people are aware of a largely unfiltered history of their country, they are better able to understand the faults of past systems and learn that they should not repeat the mistakes of the past. This is necessary so that the country does not fall into a trap of repeating its own past mistakes today, especially if it had risked a large loss in the past. When people are aware of these past faults, they can push the government or other institutions to not commit the same mistakes again. For example, Americans in the 1980s who were aware of the risk of nuclear war that their country had taken during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 protested against President Ronald Reagan's nuclear armament build-up through the Anti-War and nuclear freeze movements. The people were aware of the risk undertaken in the past and were determined to not let their country commit the same mistake again. These movements became one of the key considerations taken by the Reagan administration before signing the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in 1987 that banned all intermediate nuclear

weapons. After knowing their country's past mistakes had propelled them to champion for change, it results in past mistakes to not be repeated in the future. This is necessary for a country to be able to progress and move forward.

In conclusion, citizens do need to be aware of their own nation's past. This is so that they can foster a greater sense of national unity, understand the present happenings of their country and not repeat past mistakes. All these are very much needed for the country to progress and achieve tangible advancements today. There may inevitably be no way to be aware of certain historical occurrences, especially if there are no written accounts to learn about these narratives. Nevertheless, it is still essential that people try their very best to salvage every piece of their history and decipher their history, as it forms an essential basis of who they are as a citizen of their country. Moving forward, it is also our responsibility to account for the narratives of today in the most transparent manner possible, so that future generations can be aware of the history of their country and derive the same benefits as we do from being aware of our past.

Comments:
Relevant arguments and concrete examples, but the first body paragraph could have been better developed. Both sides of the argument were presented. Generally good grasp of the language, with a few occasional errors.

Is it necessary for people to be aware of the history of their country?
Lock Yi Xuan 20A12

In modern times where we have functioning robots, accessible fingerprint identification on our phones, and even talks of creating technology to reverse the natural ageing process, do we need to look back on our past? Many countries have progressed to the point where we own incredibly advanced technology that stands to be even more refined, and the future shines brighter than ever before. When the future seems so promising, it raises the question- is there any value in remembering the past? Particularly, is there any need to study the history of the countries we call home? Some people believe in only looking forward; the past can never be changed, thus there is no use in remembering what happened in the past. Instead, people should be focusing on the now and moving towards new horizons. On the other hand, others believe that in order to progress towards the future, we must first understand our history. They feel that when a person recognises the process in which the country they grew up in was formed, they are even more capable of bringing the country to flourishment in the present. Hence, I strongly believe that people must be aware of the history of their country to a large extent.

Being aware of the history of one's country is crucial in instilling a sense of national pride and identity in the country's citizens. When we look back on the achievements completed by the generations before us that have created the thriving environment we live in today, we form a newfound sense of gratitude and appreciation. If not for the hard work of the nation's pioneers, we would not have the place we call 'home' today. By understanding the history of one's country, we learn of the difficulties the country went through to become what it is in the present, and so we learn not to take what we currently have for granted. Take Singapore for example: growing from an obscure third-world fishing village to a thriving first-world urban city that is widely known for its status as an economic hub. Singaporeans have much to be proud of. The rapid developments that the country underwent were not easy, and Singapore faced hardships along its journey. From severely lacking natural resources to having racial riots in the late 20th century that threatened the social stability of the country, the road towards becoming a vibrant economic hub was not an easy one. Hence, when Singaporeans are made aware of the history of their country, they learn to be thankful towards the older generation for building their city and gain a sense of pride as a citizen of Singapore. Looking back at their accomplishments, citizens will cultivate a greater sense of national identity derived from the awe and gratitude in understanding the sacrifices that people before them have made to create a home for their future. Thus, people need to be aware of the history of their country as it instils a stronger sense of pride and national identity in the citizen, encouraging the citizen to contribute to the country as well.

Understanding the history of one's country is also important because it equips one with a greater ability to address future problems. The recognition of events that have happened in one's country enables one to apply the understanding of the areas of improvement in modern problems. Having been made aware of the issues that a country has once encountered prepares one to tackle the challenges more efficiently, should the problem surface once again in the future. Being drastically hit by the SARS outbreak in 2003, Singapore was even more

prepared to handle its next pandemic in 2020: COVID-19. From its previous disease outbreak, Singaporeans and the Singapore government were more ready to combat the pandemic through the reinforcement of improved measures and the implementation of necessary rules, such as the wearing of masks outdoors. This resulted in relatively more successful containment of the disease compared to other countries. Thus, it is evident that by being aware of the previous events that have occurred in one's country, its citizens gain foresight and are even more ready to defend the country against similar problems in the future. Even while everything seems bright looking forward, the future also brings uncertainty. The past gives us a sense of grounding; the knowledge of the past and the history in which the people before us have tackled similar challenges, we are granted further insight into finding a better way to solve current issues. Hence, it is necessary for people to recognise their country's history.

However, some people may argue that modern problems require modern solutions. The lives we live today are certainly very different from the lifestyles from decades ago, so applying ancient solutions today would not only be useless, but irrelevant and also wasteful. The advanced technology we have today is humanity's greatest achievement yet, and we lack any old handbooks or manuals to refer to should things turn sour. In this aspect, the past cannot help us, no doubt. Moreover, some people may believe that it is unnecessary for people to be aware of the history of their country as clinging to the past prevents people from moving forward. For example, education in Japan does not include information regarding its role in World War II - the aggressive takeover of other Asian countries, leading to the suffering of many innocent lives at the hands of cruel Japanese soldiers. Many people have regarded the exclusion of Japan's involvement in WW2 as a try to bleach out a dark spot in their history to remove accountability and attempting to preserve an honourable image to newer generations. However, people who have defended such ideas state that history cannot be erased, but holding on to past mistakes only prevents the country from progressing forwards. Hence, such actions enforce the belief that people do not have to be aware of the history of their country, as it is only a hindrance in the country's journey to achieving success.

Regardless, I still believe that it is crucial for people to be aware of their country's history. As people often say, "The past can teach us a thing or two". Indeed, learning from the past allows us to learn from our mistakes and not commit the same mistake again. By realising how something has gone wrong in the past, we know what to do in the present to prevent ourselves from going down that path again. The Holocaust, where over 6 million Jews were killed and even more have suffered, has been known to be one of the worst atrocities of mankind and one of the darkest spots in humanity's history. Such a horrifying circumstance reminds us of the tragedy and suffering that can unfold when ignorance and hate are left unchecked and given room to grow. No matter how uncomfortable these events may be to people, it is even more important to remember the Holocaust today, when anti-Semitism in Germany is on the rise again. Upon understanding this black spot in Germany's history, people feel a greater sense of urgency and are more compelled to take action to reduce anti-Semitic sentiments, prejudice and hate from manifesting into a bloodbath again. Thus, I believe it is extremely important for people to be aware of their country's history to ensure that they will not repeat past mistakes.

In conclusion, the value of remembering and honouring the past should not be underestimated and cast away. Without knowing the past, how do we understand who we are today? Many privileges we have today are only because of what people in the past have done for us. Without the Stonewall riots in 1969, the LGBT community in the USA would not be as accepted as they are today. Recognising the history of one's country only ensures a better tomorrow, where we know what not to do and from comparing past and present, we know where we can improve and strive to bring the country to greater heights. Therefore, I strongly believe that it is necessary for people to be aware of the history of their country to a large extent.

Comments:

Well-argued and evaluated for the most part, although some examples can be analysed in more detail. Overall, a well-written piece.

Is it necessary for people to be aware of the history of their country?
Theodore Choy Zhi Yang 20A12

History is increasingly seen as a 'secondary' subject in schools or an afterthought in the minds of the working class. We, as a society, find that history —a study of dead people and their mistakes, instead of opting for knowledge and study in the field of science— is meaningless. However, history is not merely the study of the past, it is a study of our civilisation and society as we know it. Countries are founded and sustained upon historical studies. History is the study and research of the past of our society and what has shaped society, through understanding key events dating back for centuries. Its necessity is thus defined as of utmost importance, a field that all citizens should have a comprehensive understanding of. Thus, being aware of our history entails more than just knowing the dates of key events, but also how they have shaped our society and how and what we can learn from them. Some argue that history does not help society in any economic way, thus its necessity is unjustified. However, I believe society rests upon more than just its economy, and thus, is necessary for people to be aware of the history of their country.

Some argue that history contributes nothing to the economy, in that those who study it are not aided by their knowledge of history in their contributions to the economy. Those who contribute to our economy, be it through research in science or production of goods and services, are in no way augmented by an awareness of the history of their country. Historical knowledge rests in the back of the minds of the layman, as they toil away in factories or repetitive desk jobs. Knowledge of the Cuban Missile Crisis thus appears useless; knowledge of past historical events does not aid in productivity or output. Hence, if society rests on the bedrock of economic advancement, is history still necessary? Some bring up examples of China, which has heavily censored its History curriculum in schools, such as a censorship of the Tiananmen Square events in textbooks. Yet, China's economic output still appears rapid. For an average Chinese factory worker, knowing the intricacies of Chinese History helps them in no way. Thus, some find History unnecessary.

However, I argue that history does indeed contribute to the economy on a macro-scale. History encompasses past economic reforms of countries, and through this, we can find out what works, and what does not. By analysing past economic reforms and their impacts, governments evaluate the best possible way to move forward, as well as extrapolate the trajectory of the economy. For instance, Singaporean history teaches us about some of the past economic policies which were undertaken during her early years, such as national education reform, or extensive Foreign Direct Investment, These reforms caused the Singaporean economy to skyrocket in growth. Understanding the past policies undertaken has then motivated future policy choices, and allow Singapore to continue to be a knowledge-based economy, as the Singaporean government mimics the successful past policies of 1970s Lee Kuan Yew, into 2020s Lee Hsien Loong, through skills upgrading policies. Although this knowledge appears fit only for government scholars, understanding the intricacies of history starts its impact on the people. People make choices in both voting and careers through history. Those who understand the history of the People's Action Party might choose to vote for them again based on their past successful economic reforms, and choose to enter the financial sector

instead of the manufacturing sector, by being aware of Singapore's past in phasing out of production to automation. Through History, we make smarter economic decisions, not just as an autonomous nation, but also as individuals.

Firstly, I believe that History is necessary because it teaches the layman of the past transgressions and failures of our society, and how to not repeat them. In other words, without history, we are doomed to repeat the past. History teaches us of our failures and our transgressions from an objective viewpoint. From there, we can change how we see the future and the present to be better than those before us. For the average citizen, this helps them distinguish what they must and must not support to be better than those before them. For example, Japanese History entails understanding the past war crimes of Japanese armies. Horrible atrocities like the Nanking Massacre or tortures and massacres of innocent citizens have made Japan unable to have a standing army, even today. For any Japanese citizen, this knowledge is important to understand how to reform themselves and be on a better side of history. Without knowledge of such atrocities, a Japanese citizen might believe that Japan is faultless, and is then doomed to repeat the same transgressions as their ancestors. In fact, in some Japanese communities, such details were deliberately omitted from History textbooks, and thus, have produced far-right, isolationist, xenophobic citizens that fail to see why Japan must change its course in history from one of the massacres to one of peace. To this day, Japanese citizens continue to support peacekeeping armies rather than armies of war, and this has allowed Japan to not only become a country of peace, but also develop better relations with those they have wrong in the past, such as the United States Of America, and China. By understanding History, every citizen makes themselves cognisant of what they must do differently, what they must push for instead, and how to be on a better side of the history textbooks of the future generations.

History also allows us to be aware of our core values as a people. It helps us learn what our country was founded upon, and the key values that have steered our country to where it is today. Sometimes, History tells us what not to change, and what to hold steadfast in our heart, rather than what to change. By understanding this, we provide ourselves with the impetus to stand strong and fight for our core values that make our country what it is today. There has never been a better example than in Singapore. Understanding the Racial Riots of the 1960s, and how multiculturalism and multiracialism are so important to Singaporean society could explain why Singapore maintains this peace and understanding among the races. By understanding this, Singaporeans have preserved racial harmony by keeping away from racial incitement and learnt to be tolerant, and understanding of the other races. We can only understand the importance of our core values when we chart how they have shaped our society throughout history. Core values are one of the unifying factors in civil society, and by being aware of history, we learn of its importance, and why we must continue fighting for them.

Lastly, History teaches us why society is still the way it is, and thus how we should reform it. History, essentially, charts how society has progressed throughout the years. If we learn this, we can also learn how to chart the future. Not only by mimicking successful economic policies as previously mentioned, but also to understand what must be changed. Only by understanding how we got here, do we learn how we can get to a better place. For example, in America, centuries of Jim Crow laws and Segregation acts have significantly disadvantaged

African-American communities. From gerrymandering to educational segregation policies, African-Americans have been set up from the start to fail. Thus, by understanding the intricacies of past race-related policies throughout History, one can better understand why African-American communities have higher crime rates, or unemployment rates, and thus what must be fixed to change this. However, many American high schools do not even teach the intricacies of race in history, and thus simply perceive that African-Americans are just incompetent or more prone to crimes than Whites. Thus, we must understand our history, to understand the true nuance behind our situation, before knowing what we must change to reach a better place. Amidst the Black Lives Matter movement, many Americans begin to learn more about African-American history and have thus begun to truly understand the plight of African-American communities. This has spurred them to fight for positive reform, ranging from the black activists waving the "Defund the police" slogans to voting for senators that fight for their cause. In other words, History teaches us how we got here, and how we can get to a better place.

There is hope yet for History; as we enter, and are in the midst of the Information era, historical articles and knowledge have never been so readily accessible. However, access must come hand in hand with perceived importance. History helps us learn from the mistakes of the past, and explains why our core values are so important, and how we must reform our society. Without history, we perceive the world to be stagnant. On the contrary, with history, knowing that things were different then allows us to know how things can be different in the future.

Comments:
Arguments are sound and clearly evaluated. Provide more coherent links in your paragraph development in the discussion. Some examples can be more thoroughly explained. Overall, a well-written response.

Is it fair to claim that your society is overly reliant on the government to resolve issues?
Arya Bharathwaj Vijay 20S37

Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan, Singapore's Foreign Minister, mentioned last year that TraceTogether data would be used for the sole purpose of contact tracing in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, within a span of eight months, the government has reversed its stance, stating that this data could also be used for criminal investigations as per the Criminal Procedure Code. This drew anger from the Singapore populace, who perceived the reversal as a betrayal of their trust. Such issues are a rare mistake on the part of the local government; most of the time, the government resolves problems that arise quite efficiently. Some may argue that, when the government is resolving these problems, people expect too much from the state. They believe that citizens wait for the government to provide a complete solution to problems instead of taking the initiative to build on the work done by the government to improve and safeguard their welfare. I am of the view, however, that Singaporeans are not excessively reliant on the government to resolve issues, and it would be unfair to claim as such.

Some may posit that Singaporeans are overly reliant on the government because our statesmen are so competent that people start believing that they can solve virtually any problem that comes their way. The proponents of this argument hold the view that, given the precedent established by the previous generations of the government, which has made seemingly miraculous changes for Singapore, locals expect the same of today's administration. Our first generation leadership, for instance, successfully managed to convert Singapore from a developing country to a developed one. Also, the current administration is handling the COVID-19 pandemic exceedingly well, in contrast to other governments like that in America, which is experiencing a consistently rising number of cases and deaths. These people hold the view that constant exposure to such sound governance has resulted in an over-reliance on the government. To exemplify this, they may consider the electorate's response to income inequality. Despite the fact that the government has introduced initiatives like SkillsFuture and the Progressive Wage Model to promote upskilling among low-wage workers, many lament that the state has not done enough to help the poorest in our community. This is further exemplified by the convenient ignorance from the electorate that income inequality in Singapore, measured in terms of the Gini coefficient, was the lowest last year in the 21st century. Therefore, these people postulate that locals expect far too much from the government, since they not only want a solution to alleviate poverty, but also want the government to pull them out of poverty instead of taking the initiative to use existing government measures to enjoy a higher income. It would therefore seem fair to claim that Singaporean society is overly reliant on the government to resolve issues.

However, I find that the above view fails to account for the other side of the story. It is undeniable that some people would complain about the government and that they would expect the state to resolve issues in their entirety. This is a feature of almost all well-run countries. It is unfair to suggest that Singaporeans are overly reliant on the government simply because of this fact. The very fact that the government is so competent means people have the opportunity to resolve their own issues. Clever initiatives on the part of the government

have been designed so as to ensure that the government merely provides the foundation for people to pursue a higher level of welfare and quality of life. Considering the same example of income inequality, the Job Support Scheme only extends wage support to low-wage workers. Unemployed individuals do not receive any benefits. This means that people are incentivised to work. In addition, the Progressive Wage Model enables workers to upskill and increase their wages by market mechanisms rather than relying on a Minimum Wage. It is therefore evident that, while the government does exercise intervention, it does so in a manner that places the onus on the individual to pursue their interests. Without this individual effort, people are still unlikely to succeed. Therefore, while it must be conceded that people do rely on the government for some foundational support, they are not excessively reliant on the state and it would be unfair to claim as such.

In addition, the increased political literacy of citizens today means that they are not overly reliant on the government to resolve issues. Political literacy essentially refers to an understanding of the political landscape and local political institutions. The rise in political literacy has been largely due to increased education of citizens, which has in turn prompted government institutions to be more transparent in their decision-making process. This can be seen by increased engagement of cabinet ministers with the media, recording of parliamentary sessions for the public to view and ministries being more open about their aims. Even the Internal Security Department - notorious for its secrecy - has been updating the public on the developments of the self-radicalised 16-year-old boy. This increased transparency has meant that the Singaporean people have started to understand the intricacies of policymaking, thus realising that the government simply does not have the capacity to provide excessive aid to people or to solve problems with a simple solution. Most recognise the issues surrounding dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, especially regarding vaccine deployment, and thus do not rely excessively on the government to protect them from contracting the virus, instead making sure to 'wipe down' surfaces to minimise the risk of transmission (on top of the compulsory mask-wearing and social distancing). This is due to their understanding of issues like vaccine prioritisation - which arises due to increased political literacy. Thus, it is evident that people are willing to take steps of their own to safeguard themselves without excessive reliance on the government. As a result, it is unfair to claim that Singaporeans are overly reliant on the government to resolve issues.

Lastly, the advent of technology has meant that people are not overly reliant on the government to solve their problems. Technological platforms like social media present locals with the unprecedented opportunity to coordinate nationwide responses to issues, which has meant that there has been increasing power in the hands of citizens. Citizens use this power and influence to engage in activities or behaviour that serve to advance their interests and that of their peers. For instance, the Pink Dot movement has garnered a following of several thousand online, which has been used by ordinary people to promote a more inclusive and encouraging environment for members of the LGBTQ+ community, instead of waiting for the government to roll out initiatives to prevent stigma against this community. This has resulted in increased acceptance of the community, as evidenced by the rising support for the Pink Dot movement. This action is timely, because our state remains conservative and disapproving of the non-traditional family, while pro-LGBTQ+ sentiments are rising globally. Thus, it is evident that technology enables people to influence community behaviour without relying on the

government to solve the issue. This ability is amplified by the ubiquitous nature of technology in Singaporean society, which has meant that we are not overly reliant on the government to resolve issues.

In conclusion, it is unfair to claim that Singaporeans are overly reliant on the government to resolve issues. It is the ability of our people to complement the government that enables issues to be resolved. Otherwise, our problems would remain just as they are. It is therefore fitting that Singapore is the prosperous state it is today. The people, perhaps more so than the government, have been indispensable in our progress.

Comments:
Pretty good. Some bits were not as tight as they could have been, but overall, this was a sensible discussion.

Consider the view that the mass media bring more detriments to politics than benefits.
Lim Min Keat, Terence 20S52

In today's world, politicians cannot gain influence without controlling the mass media, consisting of newspapers, online news, new channels, and books. Much of the millions of dollars spent on the presidential campaign in the United States, for example, was channelled to the mass media to win hearts and minds. Yet, it is my opinion that such a trend brings about more negative effects than positive ones.

It is true that the mass media helps to democratise politics. By virtue of it being meant for the masses, as many people as possible are brought into contact with the world of politics. In a world where most countries are either republics or parliamentary democracies, this bodes well for the lofty goal of giving every citizen power over his own life, and this is done by spreading awareness of that power. There is a reason why regimes that tend towards authoritarianism, such as the current military government in Myanmar or Modi's government in India, have always targeted the mass media in times of crisis - most notably and effectively with internet 'blackouts', where no citizen is allowed access to the internet, but also by keeping newspapers and publishing companies on a leash, making it such that they are nothing more than mouthpieces for the government. The positive impact of mass media is hence best seen by its absence, where the freedoms and platforms one used to enjoy, contribute and consume from are taken away. This could only lead to power being concentrated in the lucky few, encouraging the formation of a political elite. On the contrary, we have events like the Arab Spring, where the proliferation of the mass media provided the spark for a democratic revolution. Hence, mass media does indeed help to democratise politics, bringing about a great benefit.

However, the mass media can also be a detrimental force on politics, since it would exacerbate the issues with democracy. In countries where the populace is less educated, there is a greater margin of error if the country were to make decisions through direct democracy. Hence, most nations today are representative democracies. However, with the proliferation of mass media, it is possible for citizens to comment on any decisions made by the representatives and subsequently pressurise them and organise protests if they wish. This is the other side of the coin, where the populace might try and exert their influence although they might lack the expertise and political know-how. One example of this would be the Extinction Rebellion protests in the United Kingdom, where citizens protested the lack of action taken by the government to slow climate change. Although it was a righteous cause, very few if any of the protestors were climate scientists or had done sufficient research on the issue of climate change. Instead, they were galvanised into action, notably by reports of such an event occurring, and at times even being goaded by publications such as The Guardian. The mass media hence encouraged citizens without a deeper understanding to participate in democracy. This shows how dangerous the mass media is where a populace that thinks themselves educated but is not, could cause serious harm to ordinary citizens and political institutions. Hence, the mass media brings about the detrimental effect of exacerbating the flaws present within democracy.

Furthermore, the mass media could be used as a means to use politics as a front for other purposes. This means that organisations could appear to be political in nature, even portraying themselves in that way via the mass media, but have a more sinister purpose. This would give them support and protection as unsuspecting consumers of the mass media would be drawn to that political cause, and upon accusations of it being a more nefarious organisation, leap to defend it as they are themselves protecting their political convictions due to the presence of a herd mentality. There have been numerous accusations of this being the case for organisations on both the left and the right, notably organisations such as the English Defence League (EDL) in the United Kingdom, Black Lives Matter and Antifa, which are based in the United States. These organisations have placed themselves in the category of political organisations in the mass media. In all cases, the allegations are that there is a hidden agenda behind these organisations. These organisations allegedly make use of social media such as Twitter as well as sympathetic publications to advance their cause, which seemed political in nature. For the EDL, it is bigotry against immigrants. For Antifa and Black Lives Matter, it is allegedly the use of violence to persecuting right-wingers. Although it is unknown if the entire organisation is directed towards these purposes, they undoubtedly provide cover for those with dangerous and illegal aims to carry them out. Without the mass media, supporters would be forced to be more discerning, and not automatically defend these organisations as crucial parts of their political identity. Therefore, the mass media is deleterious as it encourages the use of politics as a front for more harmful activities.

Finally, the mass media also abbreviates politics, meaning that politics could be reduced to a thirty second soundbite, or a few paragraphs in a newspaper, or even a book because these are the forms of media most prevalent and the most popular. Instead of taking the time to learn more about politics, by reading specialised books for example, citizens now prefer to consume political knowledge in the form of the mass media, which eventually leads to a much more shallow understanding of politics and political systems and events. This has led to the infamous 'Twitter Culture', where people on the social media platform Twitter argue about their different political opinions. Perhaps it is revealing that Twitter itself has a word limit, restriction and therefore reduces the depth of what a user has to say. This is reflective of the impact of the mass media on politics in general, with books such as 'Why Socialism Sucks!' being published and the incredible popularity of videos on YouTube by political commentators such as Ben Shapiro, where fifteen minutes of political point scoring seems to have convinced most of his viewers that his political philosophy was superior to his opponents. Hence the quality of discourse on political thought on popular media platforms has also worsened. Politics is now a part of internet entertainment culture, with terms such as 'libtard' being coined and politicians being evaluated based on trivial qualities such as appearance. Therefore, the mass media has had a detrimental effect by cheapening politics.

All in all, while the mass media does have the positive effect of democratising politics, it could also exacerbate the issues ingrained in democracy. It also allows organisations to hide behind false portrayals of themselves while they have a completely different agenda, and it abbreviates politics by reducing the time and quality of thought on material being put out. It is doubtful that the mass media would bring more benefits than detriment to politics, either in the present or in the future.

Comments:

Clearly organised ideas. Expression was pretty well controlled and largely accurate. Could support claims with concrete examples and details to strengthen arguments.

Consider the view that the mass media bring more detriments to politics than benefits.
Sim Yan Zi 20S42

In Singapore, a study has shown that about 80% of our population has made use of or are active on social media, and this could directly be linked to why there has been a flourishing of political discussions and civic engagement here. The fact that the media has a significant role in shifting the nature of locals' participation in political issues as well as shaping government policies clearly manifested itself in the General Elections last year, where political parties spread their various credo through a deluge of mass media platforms, from traditional print newspapers to Instagram. Consequently, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of threads discussing politics, as well as conversations between the ground and the authorities. While this is promising, as it signals greater eagerness towards politics which would lead to more democracy and awareness that comes with the media, the widely vaunted role the mass media plays also has its detriments. The ills the mass media may bring include greater polarisation and possible destabilisation of various regimes, and more alarmingly tear at the social fabric. Thus, the view that the mass media brings more detriments to politics than benefits is only partially true, as it glosses over and negates how the mass media can indeed allow for better governance and government-citizen understanding in most societies.

Those who censure the role of the media in politics cite that it causes more harm than good because the influx of participation in politics that the media grants us leads to more politicisation and polarisation in society. They assert that various political organisations or figures maliciously exploit the media to spread their extremist agenda, rather than messages meaningful to the public. Such incendiary sentiments easily reach the ears of the populace through the media instantly, given how various media platforms are at the fingertips of these politicians. More alarmingly, those who have great trust in such public figures become indoctrinated and hence would begin to further propagate such invidious and polarising sentiments. Consequently, they would be emboldened to resort to violence in order to bolster the politicians they support, and this may lead to much tensions in society and also cause the notion of democracy to be lost should they take to overthrowing the incumbent government. These critics cite the recent Capitol Hill Riots where erstwhile President Donald Trump made inflammatory statements about the elections and disputed Joe Biden's electoral victory. He even encouraged his staunch supporters to storm the Capitol, which they eventually did. This gave birth to a slew of violent and malevolent riots and protests regarding American governance and ultimately culminated in the protestors' infiltration into the supposedly sacred Capitol. This harrowing incident brought about much anxiety and uncertainty about the future of US politics. Thus, critics argue that the mass media leads to the accentuation of division in society because of greater exposure to extremist politics, which breeds political cults and echo chambers. These have an extremely detrimental effect on society despite greater access, knowledge and conversation about politics, doing more harm than good.

Besides, opponents of the mass media also maintain that it is greatly harmful, rather than helpful to the legitimacy of governments and prevents leaders from effectively leading the country, leading to unrest and instability. Authoritarian regimes have prided themselves on

regulating news about politics in various countries, with the social contract being greater societal security, in exchange for limited press freedom. This quid pro quo, however, has been threatened by the prominence of the increasingly interconnected mass media outlets. Citizens of totalitarian regimes are now able to witness political developments unfold within and beyond their countries, thanks to the ubiquity of the mass media. As such, more of them would be cognisant of their relative lack of liberty compared to democratic counterparts, and hence have a greater impetus to call for change by rallying together. Thus, many of them take collective action to champion more rights through protests and civil disobedience. The sheer participation in such political movements often overwhelms even highly despotic governments and causes them to lose their grip on the country, destabilising the political landscape despite the increase in citizen consciousness about politics, severely harming politics. These naysayers cite yet another recent example in Myanmar where youths have made use of VPN to campaign online and rally against the Tatmadaw in spite of Facebook blackouts. This has gained much traction, and hundreds of thousands of Burmese and ethnic minorities collectively participated in mass protests and civil disobedience movements after the military coup and Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest. This, while highly galvanising and heartening to the outside world due to pro-democracy sentiments, has severely put a dent on the military junta's reputation both locally and internationally, and has led to recurring civil instability and unrest in Myanmar, since the Tatmadaw espoused immense force to suppress such movements. As such, critics assert that the mass media is more disruptive for authoritarian governments as it leads to dissent and instability which they cannot control effectively, leaving the country in ruins.

Granted, the mass media has its evils in the political realm, and the aforementioned arguments are highly warranted. However, the assertion that the mass media brings more harm than good across all governments is simply too extreme, as the arguments above fail to take into account that the mass media only causes such horrors in society when they are malevolently exploited by politicians who are cavalier and immature about their conduct in public. Similarly, only tyrannical regimes would stand to face such massive opposition stemming from the media, which are scant in today's world, given greater popularity of democracy in the present, which the mass media has been expedient in providing for recently.

Conversely, the mass media brings more benefits to politics in democratic societies as it allows greater citizen participation. Hence, governments can better garner feedback and become more politically effective. With the ascendancy of the media, citizens are able to engage their leaders in mature conversations regarding societal and political issues. This is because governments can now communicate and bandy with locals directly through various social networking sites, which are highly accessible to all. Through such discussions, citizens can understand the government's thoughts and considerations when putting in place certain policies and legislations, not least the unpopular ones. In turn, governments can also better understand the needs and concerns of citizens and hence review any policies that may eclipse such anxieties. This leads to overall better and healthier governance as a result of effective conversation and transparency. This, in turn, prevents the outbreak of violence and incendiary when disputes and disagreements emerge. As such, the politics of the country becomes more effective, transparent and satisfactory in the eyes of the people as they are more aware of public and government issues. In 2012, the Our Singapore Conversations and OUTREACH programme was kickstarted by the government. This has led to more than 13,000 exchanges
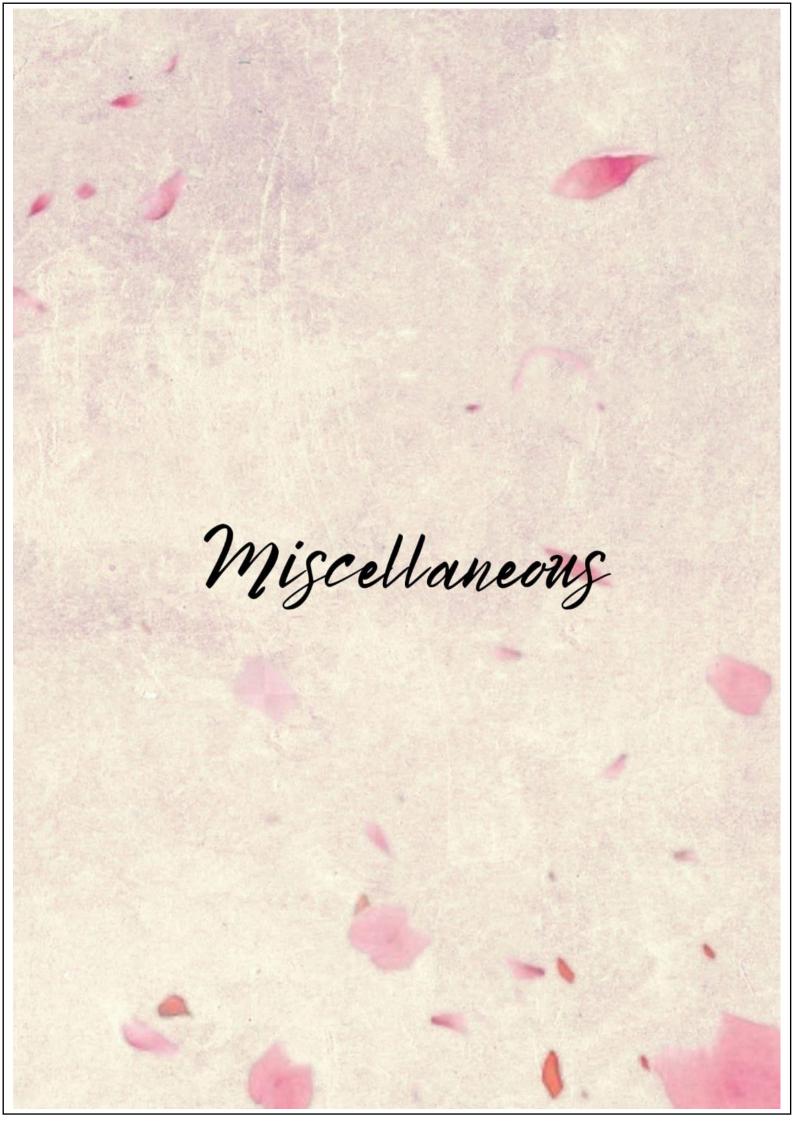
between citizens and local politicians online, where locals came together with key Ministers like Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Senior Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam and Parliamentary Secretary Baey Yam Keng to discuss public issues ranging from gender policies, BTO flats and also the preservation of various historical sites like Bukit Brown Cemetery. Locals have expressed great support and approval for such media campaigns and MPs have also actively championed such issues in Parliament to advance these interests, in hopes that compromises can be struck. Consequently, the leadership and governance in Singapore has become more consultative, with the media being an important platform for political discussions between people and politicians. This certainly does more good than harm, as the maturity that comes with greater exposure to contentious issues leads to more amicable negotiation with the government online, rather than citizens outrightly voicing or demonstrating their dissatisfaction raucously. Hence, judicious use of the media is more beneficial for politics in democratic and cooperative societies which have become more of a norm and aspiration in recent times.

Moreover, when utilised wisely and healthily by the government, the mass media is able to allow leaders of various countries to disseminate advice to locals and this could lead to the country becoming more successful in dealing with adversity. With the mass media gaining traction in society, and more citizens being connected to others in the ether, governments can tap on the media conveniently to inform citizens about various issues very rapidly. This is especially beneficial to politics and leadership in times of crises, where citizens' obedience and sangfroid are paramount in ensuring that the country is able to contain threats to social order or public health. This way, governments can ease and assuage citizens by giving them well-meaning advice and instructions. This prevents citizens from panicking and hence paves the way for the government to put in place countermeasures to ameliorate the situation, boosting their political credibility considerably. Examples include how New Zealand's Jacinda Ardern made use of Twitter to reassure citizens after the mosque shootings two years ago, where she condemned the perpetrator. This boosted locals' confidence in her when dealing with such delicate situations, and prevented them from blaming one another. Similarly, in the USA, after Joe Biden took office, he made use of various media platforms and traditional print media to assure citizens that COVID-19 curbing measures were being deliberated and would be put in place, as well as urge citizens to continue adhering to safety measures and receive any available vaccines to protect both themselves and their loved ones. This has led to greater trust in his administration's leadership. Closer to home, during the haze outbreak in 2013, PM Lee Hsien Loong urged locals to look out for the vulnerable and guard themselves against the haze. This then led to an onslaught of civic movements where locals banded together to donate masks to the elderly and disabled. Likewise, during the pandemic, most ministers and politicians urged Singaporeans to stay united and constantly addressed locals that the government was navigating the situation and assuaged them that they would be protected. This once again led to an outpour of support for badly hit locals and migrant workers as well as obedience on the part of locals, enabling Singapore to emerge stronger and achieve a relatively low mortality rate. As such, the media actually benefits politics more as it can lead to more cooperation and confidence, which enables more meaningful engagement and unity in society, rather than disquiet and chaos during times of crisis.

The view that the mass media does more harm than good across all societies is simply too exaggerated and lacks nuance because of countries' varying approaches to governance, together with how the media has been mobilised by the ground and government wisely most of the time. While it damages authoritarian regimes and causes them to lose their grip on society, as well as engenders a more radical and polarised society in some countries, it ultimately allows for greater democratisation and effective government. Cases where the media has a greatly destabilising effect on the political landscape fortunately remain limited, since most democratic governments, while astute, are mature in their utility of the media. Furthermore, the detriments can be circumvented and mitigated if we are more mature and discerning when consuming media sources.

Comments:

A sensible and compelling argument which is clearly presented, save for one paragraph, and supported by relevant examples. Don't forget radicalisation through the media, for instance ISIS. You could have looked at how the media can be mandated to address misinformation. Look at investigative journalism & citizen journalism, as well as media watchdog governance as well.

Miscellaneous

"Libraries have no place in modern society." Discuss.
Fathinah Al-Husna Subhan 19A11

As the world progresses into the digital age, virtually all things have been made digital, questioning many traditional institutions regarding their necessity. The library - once recognised as a place of knowledge for the vast collection of books it is known for, has not been exempt from such judgment. Many regard libraries in their physical form to be obsolete, due to digitisation and the capabilities of technology in aiding this transition. Many, however, tend to overlook the steadfast role of libraries in providing for those without such access to technology, being the underprivileged in modern society. Furthermore, libraries continue to play a vital role in educating children through reading and acts as a place of learning for them. We have also begun to see how libraries have expanded their roles, beyond their traditional roles of place for books to one that is more wide-ranging and accessible to all.

In this digital age, libraries are increasingly argued to be irrelevant, as practically all resources can and have been made available online. With technological advancements and digitisation, there has been a rise in the availability of e-books and online resources that could only be accessed in libraries previously. In countries all over the world, libraries have moved to the virtual realm, with Singapore's very own National Library Board having its application and web page for users to borrow eBooks and use the services online. The libraries themselves have begun to recognise the potential that digitisation brings, due to the convenience it seemingly provides for all parties. This, therefore, lead many to conclude that there is no longer any need for the physical space of libraries, due to technology that allows users to borrow the same books without the administrative hassle and then get to enjoy them in the comfort of their own homes. In New Zealand, eBooks that are borrowed also come with timely reminders for the users to return them, lessening the risk of overdue books and having to pay fines which makes borrowing books much more pleasant for library-goers. Despite such benefits and perks that come with digitalization. Libraries still stand important, especially for those who are left behind with no access to technology.

In modern society, there still exists a group that is often overlooked who still need libraries as an avenue to knowledge and resources, as they may not have as easy access to technology as the average person. These are the less privileged who may not have access to technology for eBooks and making use of online services. As a result, the traditional roles libraries have remained relevant, and can even be argued to be made increasingly relevant, as they act as the only access to resources that these people may have, unlike for those with technology with access to an expansive collection of resources, especially with the internet. For underprivileged children, for example, the Molly bus is a mobile library in the form of a bus that routinely journeys to neighbourhoods with higher concentrations of underprivileged children to provide them with special, convenient access to books. This reflects how libraries are recognised as a crutch for such children and people, who depend on such institutions to provide them with resources for a comparative standing with those who have access to resources online.

Libraries are also recognised for their role in equipping children with literacy skills, as they have always been. Besides attempts to provide all children with equal access to resources, libraries feature heavily in the learning experience for children all around the world. The majority of libraries around the world have storytelling programs and reading sessions to encourage and promote better literacy for children, especially important in the starting years. In libraries, there are often rosters put up to remind the public of programs being held at libraries for children to participate in. Many parents still bring their children to the library to borrow books, in hopes of cultivating a reading habit. Libraries, as a symbol of learning and reading, are therefore still relevant in modern society, as they continue to be recognised for it. Furthermore, it seems that with the rise of digitisation, many parents turn to libraries to deter their children from excessive online activity, by encouraging the reading of physical books found in libraries. Many libraries have special children's reading corners to pander to these children, and libraries can instead be argued to be increasingly relevant in their continued goal to encourage reading and promote better learning for children.

Beyond that, libraries have also adapted to current day demands by expanding beyond their traditional roles, to remain relevant as a place of reading and learning. Libraries have always been known as a place for reading leisurely or for studying. Increasingly, libraries have been upgraded to better fit these roles, through renovation and creation of more productive spaces for reading and studying. Singapore's Tampines Regional Library, built-in 2017, offers a wide variety of study and reading spaces across six floors, to provide a better library experience for library-goers. Additionally, the Tampines Regional Library has in-house kitchens that are used for cooking lessons, located near their collection of cookbooks. All of this was done to enhance the learning experience, but to also attract a wider audience to remain relevant in today's ever-changing society. Libraries, though not in their most traditional form, are therefore still relevant in today's society - especially with the adaptations to suit the needs of, and to provide for a larger group of people. The role of libraries being loaning out books is also expounded on so they do not get washed away by the tides of change and time.

Though it may seem that traditional libraries are starting to lose their footing in an increasingly digital world, their role in such a society has transformed to remain relevant and to protect their role as institutions of learning, beyond merely loaning books. Some roles libraries play are irreplaceable, such as in providing resources to the resourceless and shaping the childhood learning experience, and therefore continue to be steadfast in such aspects. But beyond that, they have adapted to the needs of the time and enhanced their role as a social space that makes learning accessible to all people, asserting that they have a valuable place in modern society that will be hard to replace, as long as they stay adapting.

Comments:
An insightfully written discussion, with a wide range of perspectives and examples provided. Perhaps you might wish to carry out some research into the libraries found in countries like Finland and China. It will open your eyes to how integral libraries are perceived to be in those societies. Lovely essay to read.

To what extent are games a waste of time?
Tsai Yi Zhen 19S36

With the rise in gaming technology, creativity, and the introduction of improved gaming consoles such as the new Nintendo Switch, games are becoming increasingly intertwined with our daily lives when more people engage in them in hopes of having fun. No matter what type of game, be it board games, mobile phone games, or computer games, there is no doubt that all of us have played one before, either alone or with friends and family. Due to the many purposes and benefits of games, such as building bonds among players and gaining soft skills, I believe to a large extent that games are not a waste of time, as the pros of gaming can outweigh the cost of time forgone, although other beneficial things could be done with the time spent gaming.

Detractors may argue that games are a waste of time, as the time spent playing could have been used for more productive activities such as work or study. Usually, games take up a substantial amount of time, as the duration for a round of Monopoly, for example, could take up to an hour. The same amount of time could be used to finish homework, which contributes to our academic ability and eventual success when we learn and practice what was taught in lessons. The opportunity cost of gaming in terms of time wasted is hence significant; therefore, I do see value in the arguments of detractors. I would like to bring in the fact that gaming is largely for relaxation, when people want to get away from work or schoolwork for a while. Hence, there is the knowledge that the time spent on gaming is not futile as they would rather spend that hour playing rather than doing other productive work. Games offer a refuge for people of all ages from the stressful and hectic pace of life, hence many play games as a form of relaxation and stress relief. For children, simple card games and board games such as UNO and Cluedo can bring them joy and remove their worries about studies, while adults play role-playing games (RPGs) such as League of Legends to escape from reality. These exciting games provide a short break from our mundane lives, and can even increase our non-material standards of living when we feel happier and less stressed after gaming. Hence, the intangible gain from gaming makes the time spent more worthwhile, and I therefore disagree that games are a waste of time.

Furthermore, multiplayer games bring even greater intangible benefits that can outweigh the opportunity cost of time lost. Games, especially multiplayer games, are platforms for people to forge stronger bonds with each other through more interaction and communication. Family games such as The Game of Life and Mario Kart Wii allow for the entire family to spend time together through playing games, strengthening familial ties when everyone has fun together. This is especially important in today's world, where families are spending less time together due to the different school and work schedules of the children and adults respectively, so playtime is one of the rare and critical times where the family can get together to reinforce bonds among members, and for the parents to get to know their children deeper. Even for adults, a short round of mobile phone games such as Brawl Stars during break time allows for colleagues to bond by playing together as a team, strengthening friendships outside of the office, and allowing each other to understand how others work better through their gaming styles and strategies. Computer games such as Counter-Strike and DOTA allow

for strangers to interact and widen their social circle by communicating with people all over the world, hence increasing interconnectedness around the globe. Therefore, gaming can bring about benefits for many groups of people as it is an avenue for friendship-building and bond-strengthening, and so is not a waste of time.

Also, playing games can increase both hard and soft skills such as heightened awareness, adaptability, critical thinking and deftness. Most games require strategic thinking, as methods and tactics are needed to win the game. Hence, by playing games, we can build our creativity, inventiveness as well as problem-solving skills. Board games such as chess, and mobile games such as Clash Royale need players to think ahead, predict and anticipate the opponent's moves to prevent themselves from losing, as well as mount an effective counterattack to emerge victoriously. Also, computer RPGs require adaptability and quick thinking to score the highest kills or longest survival times. More often than not, playing online games also improves deftness when intensive hand-eye coordination is needed to keep up with the fast-paced happenings in the game, hence improving typing speed in the real world for example. Games teach us more soft skills than what we learn in school or daily life, and those skills are highly applicable to the current VUCA world we live in as we need to be inventive and adaptable to overcome many challenges, similar to games. Therefore, playing games does bring about great benefits that can make up for the loss of time for more productive activities, as it helps enhance our abilities to be even more efficient in the future by increasing our skill sets.

Lastly, games may not incur wastage of time if gaming is used as a source of income. Famous YouTubers such as PewDiePie play computer games and review them, generating income from YouTube viewers. Some people play games professionally and take part in e-sports competitions and receive rewards when they win. Hence, gaming is not a waste of time if there are monetary gains that can be derived from gaming.

In conclusion, gaming does bring about more benefits than expected, despite the general basis of playing as a form of relaxation. Unknowingly, gaming has brought people closer together, not just as a common interest, but as a platform for people to spend more time together to strengthen ties, as well as nurturing soft skills needed for the volatile world today. The positive effects of gaming may not be seen now, but I believe that as more people pick up gaming when more advanced gaming technology and more interesting games are created soon, the pros of gaming will outweigh the cons of wasting time. Hence, I stay strong to my stand that games are not a waste of time to a large extent.

Comments:

Essay has consistent links to "not a waste of time" in most of the body paragraphs, as well as examines a wide range of games in various contexts that are usually well-explained. Greater insight can be demonstrated by examining what about modern society might have resulted in the view that games are a waste of time.

"The Arts should only be enjoyed." Comment.
Sam Lie Yong Wen 20A12

When admiring a painting, one would usually first observe if the piece is aesthetically pleasing, but not many would go a step further to try to identify the artist's intention behind the painting. In this current society, there exists a perception towards the Arts - that it is only made for others' enjoyment. Today, there are numerous different artistic mediums, ranging from the traditional Fine Arts, to Visual Arts and Performance Arts. There is a belief that the Arts only serves one purpose of giving people enjoyment, providing them with a temporary bliss while viewing the artwork. Despite the common belief that the Arts should only be enjoyed, I believe that the Arts should also serve other deeper purposes other than simply providing enjoyment.

There is a prevalent belief that the Arts should only be enjoyed. Some believe that the singular goal of the Arts is to provide enjoyment to the people, and successful artists are those who have been able to achieve this goal. They believe that a good artwork should simply be pleasing to the eyes, or a theatre performance should give its audience a fun experience. Even among the artist community, there are those who believe that the Arts serves the main purpose of providing enjoyment for people. There is a group of well-respected artists among the art community called the Impressionists, whose artworks mainly consist of landscapes and buildings, which usually does not hold a much deeper meaning. They explore different painting techniques to produce work that is pleasing to their audience, and the works do not tend to hold much deeper significance. Even so, artists such as Claude Monet and Berthe Morisot are still well-respected and well-loved artists in the art community.

However, this belief may not always be true, and the Arts should not only be enjoyed. Granted, there are many successful artists who had found their success due to producing work which was well-received by the general public. There are, however, many other artists who look beyond the face-value when creating their works. Take for example performance art piece Rhythm 0 by Marina Abramović, where she allowed the people around her to do anything they wanted to her for six hours. She intended for this piece to reveal the darkness of human nature, and true enough there was a person who announced that he wanted to stab her, much to the dismay of the other audience members that were around. Despite not being able to provide 'enjoyment' in the traditional sense, this was still a successful performance art piece which conveyed the artist's intentions. Hence, the Arts has shown to not only be for the enjoyment of people.

I also believe that the Arts should not only be enjoyed, as it is able to act as a tool for artists to convey social or political messages. It is important not to see artworks at just the superficial level, as numerous artists usually have a deeper message they wish to convey through their art. With the existence of social media and the Internet today, it is very easy to spread art around for people to view, and some artists use this opportunity to convey their beliefs or views through their art towards social issues. In the process, they use their art to get people thinking about these social issues from different angles, in hopes of inciting some change in social or societal norms. This use of the Arts was present even as early as the 1940s.

German playwright Ernst Toller, known for his expressionist political plays, wrote 'The Machine Wreckers', a play which questioned the power of the government over its people. On the opening night of the play, riots began breaking out among the masses in response to the message of the play. Even today, we have artists such as Ai Weiwei, an artist known for his political and often controversial works. In his art piece 'Laundromat', he collected discarded clothes from Syrian refugees and laid them out, with the intention of bringing across the message that the refugees are more similar to us than we think, and that we should rethink the true costs of the Syrian Civil War. As such, I do not believe that the Arts should only be enjoyed, as it is able to serve as a tool to bring across a deeper political message.

I do not believe that the Arts should only be enjoyed, as it is also able to give a voice to different groups of people that the public does not usually hear from. Another important function that the Arts can serve is that it can sometimes act as a platform for different groups of people to share their cultures or their own living experiences. Art from different countries has their own unique traits and quirks which set them apart from other countries. The artworks from a country can carry a great deal of its culture along with it, and the audience is given privy to a slice of this culture when they view these artworks. Aside from culture, Art has also been able to share the experiences of people with mental disabilities, a group of people that many do not usually encounter in their day-to-day lives. Art can convey what it is like to live with a mental illness, or what it is like living with someone with a mental illness, allowing audiences to better empathise and be more understanding toward these people. Take, for example, the play 'Flowers for Algernon' which throws viewers into the mind of someone living with a mental illness, and the sense of entrapment they can feel living in modern society. Even in the local art scene, we have plays like 'Falling' by local theatre group Pangdemonium, which shows the exhaustion and anxiety that comes from having to take care of a family member suffering from autism. As such, Art should not only be for enjoyment, as it is also able to serve the purpose of giving a voice to different groups of people.

Finally, I believe that the Arts should not only be for enjoyment as it acts as a form of self-expression. To artists, the Arts can act as a form of catharsis, to share and release their innermost thoughts and emotions. In the appreciation of the Arts, aside from simply enjoying the aesthetic quality of art pieces, we should also recognise and acknowledge the artists' feelings and thoughts when creating a piece. For example, Carlos Gonzales is a Bay Area-based muralist who shares many of his life experiences and stories from when he was a troubled youth under probation through his murals.

In conclusion, I do not believe that the Arts should only be enjoyed, as it is also effective in acting as a political tool, a voice for different groups of people, and as a form of self-expression for people. As such, for us, as a society to be able to fully appreciate the Arts in its many forms, we need to be able to look beyond the superficial level, viewing art through a deeper lens.

Comments:
Essays explore a good range of artistic mediums and movements. Piece can be written with more naturalistic language, although it is still well-structured.

Does failure serve any purpose?
Lim Lyn-Zhou 20S61

"If you do not learn from your failure, you have failed twice." This common saying aptly illustrates what people need to take away from failure: it is a tool for learning and development. Humankind, in its millennia-long history, has been no stranger to failure. From Thomas Edison's hundreds of failed experiments to the unsuccessful campaigns of the United States military, humanity has learned so much from its shortcomings, be it the need for technical ingenuity and perseverance, or the futility of modern-day colonisation - 'peacekeeping'. However, some perfectionists, perhaps, find that failure is unnecessary: a result of carelessness, laziness, or any other undesirable human trait. If done right the first time, with due diligence, failure becomes a pointless middleman. Despite this, I believe that failure serves a purpose, essentially, for us to understand where we had strayed off the path, and to remind us to get back on track.

Firstly, proponents of the counterargument believe that failure is counterproductive. In a sense, they believe that the road to success through failure is a "two steps forward, one step back" type of endeavour. Failure is sometimes caused by idleness, nonchalance or overconfidence. For example, a common critique by many in Singapore is that the government had failed to foresee that the workers' dormitories were potential hotspots for infection in this year's COVID-19 pandemic. This resulted in the mass infections of tens of thousands in said dorms. Singaporeans had also attributed this failure to the overconfidence of the Multi-Ministry Taskforce, which may have been fed by Singapore's initial success at stifling the disease's spread. This may all be true, and in that sense, cynics also believe that it is something that need not have happened should the responsible parties be more diligent. Failure, in their view, is not caused by unforeseen circumstances that leave no one to blame, but rather as a result of human oversight. With due diligence, failure is simply counterproductive and serves no purpose.

While what was mentioned in the previous paragraph applies, it is important to consider that the validity of that argument rests on the mindsets of those viewing the failure, and the idealness of the world. If one chooses to believe that failure is ultimately an effect caused by human negligence, then he is correct: in finding that failure, while present, serves no purpose. However, a more open-minded individual might have a different view. He, while understanding that failure may sometimes be unproductive, would accept that it may be the only way to drill the lesson learned into the relevant parties. In an ideal world, human negligence will always be avoided, but in reality, failure also serves as a 'whip'. It is sometimes the only way to teach a lesson. When people understand that the consequences of subsequent failure outweigh the effort needed to improve, change is brought into this world. With reference to the previous example, the government has responded by beginning the construction of new dormitories with better facilities for workers, improving their quality of life. Without this failure, the abhorrent living standards of foreign workers would have gone unnoticed. Therefore, with a more open mindset, one understands that failure educates. With that lesson, positive change, otherwise not achieved through failure, is brought about.

On top of education, failure also aids in an individual's development. Through the lessons from failure, humans are taught resilience. An infant falls numerous times before learning how to walk. Students face academic setbacks, which helps them learn how to cope with failure in their lives, developing mental fortitude. Another way failure aids in development is through making success so much more enticing. When one must go through trials and tribulations, the fruits of their labour often taste much sweeter. That satisfaction - bonus satisfaction - drives them to greater heights in the future. These messages are echoed throughout the world, from the famous, energetic Gary Vaynerchuk to Nick Vujicic's inspiring testimonies. Speakers around the world share their stories, resonating with millions, because of failure. They live through tough lives full of ups and downs, but now they have made it. The failures in life are what give meaning to success; this is what motivates people to chase their dreams because failure has shown them a reality they do not want to live in, and success is undoubtedly more lucrative, spurring them forward. This is evident in literature across time, from Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics - his most influential work - to the modern day's rise in popularity of self-help books. These, especially Aristotle, always discuss failure as a stepping stone to greater and better things, by showing us the room for improvement; how failure is a constant in our lives, and the desire to overcome it is what gives meaning to our life, to attain fulfilment or "eudaimonia". Therefore, failure aids in personal development by teaching us how to improve, providing motivation, developing one's mental resilience, serving as opportunities to become better people.

On a much larger scale, failure guides society on our next step forward. Often, the way forward is quite muddy. This is apparent in the huge range of differing ideologies and views. Capitalism or Marxism? Left or Right? The answer is almost impossible to derive theoretically, as each side has its pros and cons. However, the failures of different systems and the toppling of regimes push us closer to what the ideal should be. For instance, communist ideologies were popular in the 1900s, and the world was divided on whether it was ideal. American politicians condemned, some calling it "evil incarnate". However, the rise of the Soviet Union hotly contested that, but its collapse showed the world what was a better rule of governance. The Union's failure to adequately provide for its people or the silencing of criticism against its regime ultimately led to its downfall. This failure had shone more light on the steps that the world should take to pursue. As a result, most countries today live under democratic governance, many adopting capitalist economic policies. In a more modern context, a government's failure to uphold basic human rights like fighting racial injustice or to provide employment for its people has had consequences as well. The #BlackLivesMatter movement, for instance, is a result of the institution's failures to afford black citizens equal rights in the courts, police enforcement or employment. Society understands the depth of the issues more greatly, due to the failures of governments and institutions.

Therefore, it is unfair to say that failure does not serve any purpose. On an individual level, it breeds resilient and motivated people. On a macro-level, it is the guiding hand for society.

Comments:

Some lovely insights. However, the writing can be more accurate. Good reasoning was marred by flawed expressions. With reference to the rebuttal paragraph, I'm generally fine with the point, but was not comfortable with how failure has been positioned as the only way to learn. It's not a perfect essay, but you made several good points nicely. which, given the exam conditions, is quite commendable. Keep it up!

Should fashion ever be taken seriously?
Ang Jia Ning Alyssa 20S37

Societal fashion has evolved constantly, with each era having its own unique style, to what we have today. Fashion being seemingly everlasting often brings up the question, what value does it bring to society in our present-day and age? To examine if fashion should ever be taken seriously, we must uncover the role and importance of fashion throughout the times. Most people would think that fashion holds no importance or value and is just a way for people to clothe themselves, and thus should not be taken seriously. However, I believe that such a view is parochial and myopic as upon further observation, fashion holds much meaning and value in our political, social and economic landscape, and thus should be taken seriously.

Due to the glitz and glamour fashion often presents, fashion can be said to serve purely aesthetic and entertaining purposes with no other deeper meaning, and thus it does not have to be taken seriously. The fundamentals of fashion are to allow one to appear aesthetically pleasing and to be visually appealing, thus it can be said to serve no other purpose than just aesthetics. Dating back to the Medieval and Renaissance periods, women used to dress to impress and to fit into the social construct of what was 'stylish' in that period of time. Despite the ever-changing nature of fashion, the value of fashion serving aesthetics and beauty still remains timeless and unchanging. Currently, our fashion trends also serve almost the same purpose with styles that we deem trendy and aesthetic. Celebrities often dress in whatever way they think looks aesthetically pleasing, and their fans and followers start hopping on the bandwagon just because it looks good. One example would be Blackpink member Jennie, who has been known to be a trendsetter for her impeccable taste in fashion. Her fashion sense brings nothing more than just aesthetics with a representation of what is in trend. This has led to fashion being trivialised and perceived as a product of vanity, resulting in a buy-and-throw-away culture. Some celebrities also dress for the entertaining aspect, such as Lady Gaga and her meat dress in 2010 that was just a form of entertainment without greater meaning. Such a costume's purpose was to garner attention from the media. With little meaning in fashion, as it simply serves to be visually appealing and aesthetic, some claim that in such cases, fashion does not have to be taken seriously. However, much like how fashion is concerned with aesthetics, some perceive the term 'fashion' to ring hollow, and they fail to notice the hidden beauty and meaning behind all this glitz and glamour.

Through my observations and analysis of fashion today, I believe that fashion holds a much deeper meaning than just serving the visual appeal. In the educated and aware society we are in today, fashion has turned into a medium for self-expression. With the notions of "loving yourself" and "standing for what you believe in'' being widely popular today, people in society have used fashion to raise awareness and show what they support or stand for. Such a concept can be said to be political fashion. Political fashion is a form of self-representation to wear what they represent and these outfits usually bring a deeper meaning. Some examples of political fashion include wearing pink during the annual Pink Dot campaign at Hong Lim Park. Supporters of the LGBTQ+ community wear pink in support of the campaign to show that they stand with this marginalised group in Singapore. This brings much comfort and hope for the minority groups. In 2018, when a new President was nominated rather than elected in

Singapore, some people showed their disapproval and discontent by wearing black as part of the #notmypresident protest. More international examples include "Make America Great Again" T-shirts and hats that were worn by Donald Trump supporters back in 2016 to show the obvious political stance these supporters were biased towards. The most recent example would be Lady Gaga's outfit during the recent inauguration ceremony for incoming US President and Vice-President Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. This included a dove brooch representing peace. All these examples of self-expression of individuals, which show their support and political stance on social issues, shows that fashion indeed serves a deeper meaning and purpose, and should thus be taken seriously. It should also be treated with respect as it raises awareness for the marginalised, and is a subtle yet obvious platform where people express themselves by voicing their opinions and support via what they wear.

In a more communal aspect, fashion is often a binding force for many cultures, nations and communities. Fashion also exists in all different cultures around the world, as a means to showcase their differences and uniqueness. The cultural fashion pieces also bring the younger generation back to their roots, giving them a slight idea of their history and ancestors. In the multicultural Singapore we live in today, it is common to see each race dressed in their traditional clothes during their respective festivities. During Chinese New Year, it is common to see women dressed in their traditional 'qipaos', a traditional Chinese clothing. The Peranakans also have their own set of unique traditional wear such as the Sarong Kebaya and the intricately beaded slippers. These traditional fashions bind such racial communities together by giving them a glimpse of their past. On a national level, Singaporeans are often seen decked in red and white clothes during National Day, showing their national pride and solidarity. Seeing most of our fellow citizens wearing red and white gives us all a sense of belonging and pride towards our nation, acting as a binding force towards the society we belong in. Thus, fashion should be taken seriously as it serves an essential role in binding communities together as it acts as a common symbol that individuals can identify with, providing them with a sense of belonging.

Additionally, fashion should be treated with respect and seriously, as it brings profits for those in the industry. For many, fashion is their rice bowl and thus should be treated seriously. Ranging from great luxurious fashion designers of all time, such as Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent and Dior, to the big fashion companies which provide more affordable options, such as H&M, Forever 21 and Zara, to even the smaller home businesses that sell handmade clothes and jewellery, one thing they have in common is that fashion drives their revenue. Fashion brands such as H&M have raked in millions in profits, with countless outlets all over the world providing a source of income to thousands of workers, from their factory workers to the managers in the company. The increase in spending on fashion has provided employment for many, and a livelihood for many families. The income gained by these companies also contributes significantly to the country's economic growth – thus, it cannot be considered as child's play or unimportant. This is why fashion should be taken seriously, as it is a form of livelihood for many, and has contributed significantly to economic growth to many around the world.

Fashion is also often said to be a determinant of the era and an indicator of time. Fashion should be taken seriously, as it has the potential to impact our society today in our

political, social and economic landscape. As fashion has evolved and has crossed paths with many different sectors in our lives, it can be seen as important and should be treated with the respect it deserves. With the ever-booming fashion industry, the values it holds will only multiply in our communities. However, although fashion is slowly evolving into a platform to flaunt someone's wealth, it is essential to keep in mind that fashion, fundamentally, is just like any other art form where self-expression is key. With the roles of fashion being widely relevant in our societies, it would be myopic to dismiss its significance and meaning. Therefore, fashion should most definitely be taken seriously.

Comments:
The writing got better as you warmed up. The initial bit tended to meander. Read through your essay to see how the different paragraphs were constructed. Good, solid points. Just be mindful of grammatical slips.

Should fashion ever be taken seriously?
Chung Suh Yun 20S53

Since time immemorial, the act of wearing apparel has been a necessity, and people have been purchasing clothes and accessories to decorate themselves. As time passes, an increasing number of people are starting to claim that fashion is more than just to beautify - it carries a much more multi-dimensional value. It seems valid to claim that in today's modern world, fashion is - more often than not - weaponised, not only as a medium to showcase one's beliefs, but also strengthen one's identity as a member of a community. Yet, it is also too much of an exaggeration to myopically claim that fashion must always be taken seriously.

In today's world, many use fashion as a means to identify themselves as a part of a community, therefore strengthening the feeling of belonging in individuals. Fashion of the past, which involves traditional costumes in many countries, such as the kimono of Japan and hanbok of Korea helps to re-establish the sense of belonging and identity to the nation for these individuals, especially in this globalised world. Many use their traditional costumes, which are often linked to traditional practices, to remind themselves of their roots. This function of fashion as an establishment of identity is the real reason for the recent outrage amongst the South Korean populace when the Chinese started claiming that the hanbok was their traditional clothing instead. Not only is the claim seen as a challenge to the history of their nation, it also threatens to uproot the citizen's sense of belonging by confusing them and weakening the element of power that the set of fashion carries. Therefore, this furthers the claim that fashion should be taken seriously as it strengthens one's sense of identity. Also, wearing a set common item at a particular event shows that one is a part of the community. For instance, in Singapore, during the National Day celebration, one is strongly encouraged to wear red and white, as they are the colours in the nation's flag. This establishes the identity of 'Singaporeans', and it reinforces the citizens' sense of belonging to the nation. When they appear in red and white, and attend the National Day celebrations, they will feel the nationalistic sentiments on a deeper scale as only their fellow citizens will also be wearing red and white. This emphasises the fact that they are citizens of Singapore, hence strengthening the sense of belonging and patriotism. As only those who know about the event will be able to standardise their apparel, wearing the same things will evoke stronger camaraderie in the people who are in the community. Therefore, it is valid to believe that fashion should be taken seriously.

Fashion can also be weaponised to showcase the social change that one believes in, and sometimes helps one to create tangible change. By wearing a particular colour or by wearing apparel with a quote of certain significance, an individual is often identifying their support with the cause. For instance, the current Finnish Prime Minister, Sanna Marin, is known to be a progressive young woman who believes strongly in women's rights and equality. In 2020, she went for a photoshoot with a women's magazine while wearing a blazer without a shirt. In this case, she is weaponizing fashion to challenge social norms, and to push for the elimination of prejudice against women who wear revealing clothes. There was also the "no-bra" movement where women who believed in gender equality started questioning why only women had to wear bras despite it being uncomfortable. They hence started not wearing their bras. This type of fashion shows the strong support that the women have for gender equality

and women's rights. Hence, it is valid to claim that fashion should be taken seriously as it is a method of expression for the cause that one believes in. Another example is the Pink Dot Movement in Singapore, where people wear pink to show that they support homosexuality in Singapore. This weaponization of the colour pink helps to showcase the support that one has for the cause, and also aids the LGBTQ+ community to champion for their rights and push for social change by challenging social standards. Hence, due to fashion's ability to encompass one's opinion towards social issues, it is valid to claim that fashion should be taken seriously.

However, the aforementioned claims may be an exaggeration of the meaning of fashion, as the majority of the people treat it as merely a necessity in their everyday life. The previously mentioned claims may only be applicable to more one-off events, where people make a special effort to wear something that is of significance. In one's daily life, fashion is just a way to ensure that one is presentable in public. More often than not, we do not have much thought when we are considering what we should wear. Most people do not enter an apparel shop like Zara, Cotton On or H&M, and only decide to purchase clothes that they believe will align with the causes that they strongly feel for, nor do they buy fashion to emphasise their identity in their community. Clothing is just treated as an essential for daily life, and hence, although fashion does sometimes contain certain meanings, it is too much to claim that it always carries a meaning and should always be taken seriously.

Fashion may also not be taken seriously if it contains pure elements of humour that do not offend. For instance, if one wears a graphic painting of a meme - such as Pepe the Frog - on their shirt, it is more likely than not that the person is doing it for pure entertainment. Fashion can sometimes be used as a method to show one's sense of humour, and purely, just for fun. Even if it carries a certain meaning, it is often light-hearted and not at all solemn. This makes it pointless to be scrutinising fashion apparel to look out for a certain hidden, serious meaning. This light-hearted, humorous set of apparel adds to the claim that fashion is a visual way to showcase one's sense of humour, and should not be taken too seriously.

Ultimately, whether or not fashion should be taken seriously depends on the individuals and the situation. Fashion can be seen as a more light-hearted manner of conveying meaning to others as it can successfully contain satirical black humour without having to result in violence and aggression. Fashion can also be seen as just a set of clothing that serves as an everyday essential. Different people can be wearing the apparel for different reasons. For instance, a student may be wearing a customised class tee as he or she feels a sense of involvement and belonging in the class, whereas her mother may be wearing the same shirt merely for the convenience or how comfortable the material is. Another instance is that one may be wearing pink during the Pink Dot Gay Parade, but when the same person wears the same apparel to meet one's friends, it may not carry as much meaning, devolving the clothing into just a daily attire. All these analogies show the flexibility of fashion, and how it depends on the individuals and the situation for us to make a judgement if fashion in that particular scenario is a tool that should be taken seriously, or merely a decoration of our bodies. Hence, it is only right to claim that it depends on a case-by-case basis when it comes to deciding if fashion should be taken seriously.

In conclusion, fashion should be taken seriously when it contains a certain socio-political message or when it presents an individual with an identity. However, in normal situations, most people think of fashion as nothing more than beautiful covers for their bodies, and sometimes light-hearted comedy. Ultimately, it depends on the individual and the situation if fashion should be taken with great solemnity, or merely as a decorative element.

Comments:
An attempt to provide concrete examples and targeted analysis to answer the question. Issue could have been more elegantly phrased, though. I think the essay is generally sound, but you can work on more experimental ideas for a higher mark. A very good effort!

Should fashion ever be taken seriously?
Joyce Ho Shi Huei 20S43

Fashion - when one encounters this term, what exactly comes to mind? The bedazzling, sequined, puffy dresses that billow around celebrities' bodies as they strut the red carpet at the Grammys? Or perhaps the plethora of youthful trends which many label as fun aesthetics such as cottage core, e-boy, or even 90's vintage styles? Or perhaps one might indulge in a more expensive taste of fashion - dreams of individually stitched on glitter and multi-layered rouches on an impossibly constructed work of art: the grandeur of haute couture fashion. Fashion is indeed such a broad term that encompasses so many levels of expression. Yet, many criticise its frivolity and shallowness. However, fashion goes beyond what one can see at the local mall -- it is rich in culture, heritage, identity, and is even a strong tool to incite change. Hence, it is of my strong belief that fashion should indeed be taken very seriously.

Firstly, one must concede that fashion can appear frivolous and materialistic, which causes one to be inclined to label it as a form of mere entertainment without real value. Indeed, fashion is a reflection of the trends that pervade our society, and are naturally inclined to parallel beauty standards which are shallow and inconsequential. Fast fashion has made fashion cheap - not only in price but also in value. People no longer hold the same reverence to pieces of clothing or accessories when they are made available to reality by consumerism. The term 'basic' has also been widely coined to encompass how diluted 'fashion' has become, lacking its sense of uniqueness, but rather, led to fads of copycat culture to fit in. Indeed, following the trends are something we cannot deny that we derive a simplistic sense of pleasure from, and it is admittedly a rather mindless process, merely for entertainment. Ultimately, fashion is enjoyable due to how readily one can access it - from picking one's Coachella outfit to what one wears to the gym, fashion's light-hearted nature is what allows us to enjoy it best.

Nonetheless, fashion is reflective of one's culture, history and heritage, and hence should not be taken lightly. From the strict rules and regulations of couture culture, one can already gauge with pristine clarity just how much importance tradition is given in the world of fashion. It is not a random community of random creators, but one where designers must go through rigorous and strenuous pains to be acknowledged in maintaining the charm of the very first couture designers, even through the years. The idea of cultural appropriation in fashion has also brought to light the value of fashion which honours cultures, such as ethnic and indigenous costumes. To wear such pieces of clothing connote more than a simple piece of material to look good - it is representative of a community's past struggles, traditions, and rich history, which all demand a certain level of reverence and respect. Even in more light-hearted examples of the royal costumes in Netflix series 'Bridgerton' and 'The Crown', the public have been critical over the accuracy of how the costumes are compared to the actual fashion of the era. Evidently, historical and cultural value runs deep in fashion and people involved in, or even those merely enjoying such fashion have the responsibility to take it seriously as a form of respect.

In addition, fashion holds immense power in activism and should hence be treated seriously. Fashion is indeed an art form - an array of material cleverly sewn together, just like

every deliberate stroke of a painters' brush. Just as how paintings and sculptures are able to capture key messages to the audience, fashion is just as impactful. In fact, with fashion being such a commonality in today's world, one could argue that the impact of fashion is even more magnified and should have to be treated even more seriously. A key example would be the phenomenon of sustainability in fashion - where designers use environmentally friendly materials to construct their creative pieces, in order to send a strong message against fast fashion, and promote ideas such as recycling and repurposing. Not only has this been adopted by professional fashion designers, but even social media fashion influencers have also taken to promoting such green messages. 'BestDressed', is a Youtuber who promotes finding one's fashion style through thrifting - popularising the idea of choosing unique second-hand pieces over basic fast-fashion tropes. Thrifting has since trended widely and encouraged a much more eco-friendly method of fashion in many teenage girls' lifestyles. Evidently, fashion holds immense power to influence and as a form of activism, and hence should definitely not be taken lightly to some extent.

Additionally, fashion is a form of identity and self-expression, and should be acknowledged as important in asserting oneself. The vast trend of Youtubers and TikTokers making videos where they try different 'aesthetics' such as the e-boy, cottage core, 90's vintage, or even academia styles have gone madly viral. Indeed, the very tendency of society to categorise people into stereotypical tropes based on their dressing is reflective of how one can create one's persona based solely off one's appearance. Fashion is a form of connecting with one's ideal version of oneself, and is liberating in how it is an outward assertion of what one may otherwise have no courage to express, or even because one lacks another outlet to do so. Fashion has often been described as empowering, with many minority groups or discriminated communities using it as their pride in their identity -- such as those in the LGBTQ+ community proudly flaunting multicoloured pieces, and minority groups wearing their ethnic clothing like kente cloth dresses to reclaim their culture. Even in a more professional sense, fashion such as the kebaya uniforms of Singapore Airlines stewardesses are indicators of one's sense of belonging and nationalism towards Singapore. Hence, fashion is powerful in its ability to allow one to curate one's identity and by giving one autonomy for self-expression. It is thus undeniable that it should be taken seriously.

Most importantly, ethics in fashion is a pressing issue that requires urgent attention and serious consideration. Many view fashion as the end product on the rack, but fail to see the process behind its creation. Fast fashion brands are often caught up in selling and profiteering, resulting in the neglect of proper ethical methodologies adopted in the process. For example, Nike was heavily condemned for its sweatshops in Africa, making use of cheap labour and having workers underpaid and working in cramped conditions. Fashion should not only be about caring about how the piece of clothing looks, but also how it was made. Certainly, it is morally irresponsible to take such human rights issues lightly just because it is easily covered up by the flamboyance of the idea of fashion. On a more insidious note, fashion can be unethical when it promotes divisiveness and discrimination, polarising society. Yes, it must be conceded that fashion, in its very unique nature itself, will inevitably target some audiences above others, such as how haute couture is obviously catered towards the wealthy, Yet, brands such as Brandy Melville have received much flak because of fitting policies catering specifically to skinny girls of a certain unattainable body shape, one unachievable for many others, Fashion

that polarises to capitalise on profit is unethical and corrupts the uniting nature of fashion. Hence, it is painfully clear that fashion without an ethical approach is unacceptable, and this is an issue which should be thought of very seriously.

Yet, on an ending note, it is somewhat understandable that fashion is not always to be taken seriously. As strongly as fashion can be used to assert oneself, it is also a means to polarise and divide those which do not conform to the beauty standards in the fashion industry. In addition, fashion as an art form or form of sending controversial messages could sometimes come across as offensive. Yet, it is crucial that one recognises that fashion is ultimately a tool for self-expression, and some pieces may simply be in the name of entertainment or creative expression and hence should be taken with a pinch of salt. For example, Lady Gaga's meat dress is definitely not meant to deliberately target those with conservative cultures or religions, and Kim Kardashian's famous 'wet look' is similarly only meant for those who do and can appreciate it. Indeed, fashion's controversy comes from its subjectivity, but so does the enjoyment of it. Hence, when approaching fashion, it is important to not take it as a personal provocation, but instead appreciate it as an art form.

Fashion is the culmination of an explosion of rich colours, textures and materials, frills and fancy; yet, it is also more than that which pleases the eye - it is significant in its deep culture, identity, and even its power to empower. It is truly a form of art, where one's individualism and values are simultaneously captured in one unique outfit: a mishmash which cannot be replicated and is unique to a person. The power of fashion is indeed more than meets the eye, and it commands our reverence - those who take it lightly are foolish and fail to see fashion as anything past its frivolity. If poetry and art can change the world, what more something that pervades our faulty lives so much more? In recognising things, I therefore assert strongly that fashion must indeed be taken seriously.

Comments:
A confident and mature piece with some insights and apt use of supporting examples. Essay demonstrates multi-layered analysis of this issue of fashion and probes further into what fashion can offer to society and its different stakeholders. A delightful read.

Consider the importance of creativity in your society.
Kang Kaiyu 20S47

There are many traits that humans would like to possess and creativity is one of them. In this fast-paced society, Singaporeans tend to tap on their imaginations and envision a plethora of possibilities to help them temporarily escape from the demands that society has set in place for them. Singaporeans should also exhibit creativity to be able to cope with the ever-changing economic and societal landscape, allowing them to adapt to these transformations essential to survival. However, whether or not enough emphasis is placed on cultivating and displaying creativity, and the significance of creativity in Singapore is arguable. While it is true that Singaporeans are result-oriented, thus neglecting creativity due to the standardised way of doing things to achieve success, Singaporeans also recognise the gravity of creativity in this over-competitive society. Therefore, creativity is very important in my society in order to solve societal issues, remain competitive in the global economy, as well as instil cultural and national identity in citizens.

Many may argue that Singapore is overly competitive, with this intrinsic characteristic imbued since a child's first steps into the education system. Singaporeans place excessive emphasis on results, leading to both students and adults alike constantly striving for excellence and being preoccupied with chasing perfection. Singaporeans tend to use results as a measurement of how well one is doing, making comparisons and pitting themselves against one another to determine who is more competent. To emerge victorious in this rivalry, Singaporeans tend to stick to conventions to help us fulfil our tasks as these proven methods guarantee success, leaving no room for creativity. Creativity leads us on a path that is more fluid and unpredictable, which most Singaporeans refuse to take due to the risk associated with not conforming to the norms. This is evident from the large uptake in STEM-related courses in university, as compared to the Arts courses as the former is stereotyped to open doors to higher paying jobs and the notion of being able to score better in these courses. Therefore, due to the obsession with chasing paper qualifications and results in Singapore, creativity is not important as it reduces the chances of Singaporeans achieving success due to its unpredictability.

However, in recent years, the Singapore government has recognised that creativity should be inculcated as creativity itself can cultivate many other desirable traits in us. To detract from the rote memorisation and practice, schools are now integrating lessons and programmes which aim to develop students' creativity. Since creativity opens up an endless wave of possibilities, students are highly encouraged to think out of the box and come up with novel ideas. Classrooms are gradually shifting to becoming an open space with minimal judgment, allowing students to feel comfortable to think about even the most bizarre ideas, encouraging creativity. No one is too young to create a change in our society, thus creativity is inherent in helping us solve social issues. For example, Civics lessons are conducted in all schools to allow students to brainstorm in response to a case study or scenario presented to them. Students engage in classroom discussions to allow them to see that there is no hard and fast way in solving a problem as everyone has their own perceptions. Thus, these classes do

not limit them to getting a 'correct' response. In addition, there are some specialised programmes offered to students such as the Innovation Programme, which provides students with an avenue to ideate and actualise their imaginations to find solutions that tackle pressing societal concerns. Students are pushed beyond their limits to think creatively, and create a product that is yet to be sold in the market, but effectively addresses and circumvents the social problem presented, helping them develop empathy and compassion. Therefore, creativity is important in my society as it allows us to be active contributors and help solve societal issues.

Creativity is important in Singapore not only for the social aspect, but also economically. Creativity drives innovation, which allows Singapore to remain competitive in the current globalised world. Singapore is a small economy with a lack of resources, but we still have to stay afloat despite the possibility of being easily overwhelmed by larger economies. Hence, to stimulate economic growth and propel the society forward, Singaporeans must be creative in order to come up with novel products that are highly sought by the world due to their distinctiveness from what is already supplied. For example, Razer, a Singapore start-up, developed a gaming chair that was highly demanded by people all around the world. The founder realised that the gaming chairs in the market were not appropriate for long hours of gaming, giving him a sore back. Thus, using his creativity, he innovated and created a gaming chair that was comfortable to sit in for long hours. Therefore, to stand out from other economies which are larger in size and thus have a greater influence over us, creativity is important in my society.

Creativity also fosters and reinforces our sense of cultural and national identity through the assimilation of different traditions. Singapore is an immigrant society, thus being a multi-racial and multi-cultural society where different racial backgrounds coexist in the same space. Despite Singapore being rich in culture from the diversity of races that we house, our traditional culture is diminishing as younger generations tend to have the mindset of culture being old-fashioned and insignificant in the present-day context. To preserve these cultural practices and traditions, creativity is required to remind people of the importance of culture, exciting especially the younger generations with new modifications to traditional items. For example, mooncakes used to be baked, but many did not like the taste of the charred skin and lotus filling. To encourage people to continue celebrating the Mooncake Festival, which is a traditional Chinese festivity, manufacturers of mooncakes adopted creativity and came up with the snow skin mooncake, which is lighter and widely preferred by children. Creativity is also used to connect us with the rest of the world, through the integration of Singaporean flavours into international dishes, strengthening our national identity. The craze over the Nasi Lemak Burger served at McDonald's is an example of fusion cuisine, where Singaporean dishes are fused with dishes from other regions, creating a whole new line of delicacies. Therefore, creativity is important in my society to prevent cultures from dying, as well as forging a stronger sense of cultural and national belonging, reminding us of our roots.

In conclusion, creativity is important in Singapore as it forms the basis of solving societal issues, allowing us to stay competitive and relevant in the global economic landscape and creating alternatives that suit the preferences of the younger generation to preserve culture

and national identity. With an increased focus on creativity, Singapore will continue to thrive in not just the economic aspect, but a panoply of other areas as well.

Comments:

A focused discussion on the importance of creativity in Singapore, with clear references to characteristics of Singapore. Some examples could be better chosen and developed. Language is clear with some flair, but work on eliminating your existing errors.

Acknowledgements

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