

LENSES



St. Michael's Sixth Form Academic Journal

2023/24

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

Dear Readers,

We are delighted to present you with the 2nd issue of St. Michael's Academic Journal 2024, Lenses, featuring four captivating and thoroughly academic papers. We are sure that these articles will be of great enjoyment to our readers.

This issue features an array of political, social, environmental and scientific articles, which vary from the investigation of the human brain, the uncovering of certain social phenomena with regards to the film industry, the exploration and comparison of humour through generations, and the analysis of environmental degradation and warfare as threats to the international community. We strive to provide our readers with a genuine range of intellectual nourishment and food for thought that stretches beyond the curriculum whilst preserving its accessibility to all year groups with academic curiosity.

The aim of this Academic Journal is to foster academic interest amongst all year groups, strengthen analytical skills and critical thinking, inspire others with the art of essay writing, and of course encourage everyone involved (both those writing and reading) to absorb these waterfalls of knowledge with an open mind, always being receptive to various points of view, an element which is key in academia. We hope that you find these articles thought-provoking and deeply informative, just as we did upon reading them for the first time!

Last but not least, we would like to wholeheartedly thank all of our exceptional writers who produced such excellent and thorough referenced research and papers for this journal. Their hours of dedication when researching, planning and writing their essays have truly yielded spectacular results. We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to Madame Gray, without whom this opportunity to run and publish the Academic Journal would not at all be possible. Thank you for the continuous guidance and support provided.

Again, we thank all of our readers for interacting with the perceptive content displayed in our school's Academic Journal on an intellectual level, not shying away from having complex and broad-minded conversations with those around you. We also hope that these exemplary papers will inspire more of you to conduct academic investigations and research into topics of your own interest that can be shared with the rest of the school body.

Many thanks and enjoy reading!

The Editorial Team. (Sivali Gutiérrez, Niamh Jones, Manasa Krishna and Maria Cook)

Social Media and Its Impact On Film and Film Companies Today

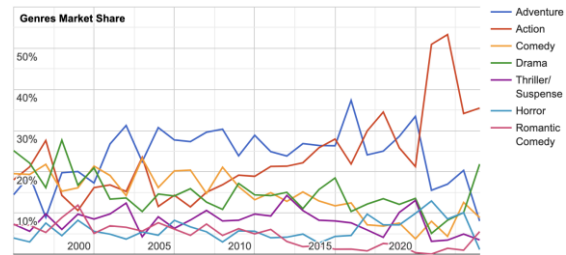
Clemence Woolford



Films, a timeless and convenient form of entertainment, have been a constant in our everyday lives. Society has been watching films since 1888 and there is no sign of them potentially going obsolete, effortlessly creating conversations during and even after a film's screening period. Marketing strategies like billboards and adverts on television and the radio were crucial to a film's success before the rise of the internet and social media. However, due to the emergence of the latter, film companies have increased their marketing campaigns worldwide and mostly, for free. In conclusion, this essay will provide opinions from different social media platforms as well as facts on how film and film companies have changed due to the influence of social media and, in summary, how social media can be a catalyst for a film's success or demise

One only needs to take the demographic of films in 2023 as an example for how CGI and action films have slowly started to become more and more popular over the years. As an example, in 2023, recognised as one of the biggest years for film since 2015, adventure and action genres dominated the title as the top grossing genres and has been for 24 years [4] in the US. Responsible for 110 films and 54.39% of the overall film demographic in 2023, one can infer that these genres are known worldwide for their international and effortless success. In 2021, Action films

had accumulated £296.7 million, putting itself with a £231.6 million lead ahead of comedy in 2nd place for films in the UK.



To attract a wide audience, the statistics above imply that people tend to be more fascinated by impressive explosions and captivating CGI. Therefore it could be argued that directors tend to go down this safer route and adopt this genre in order to maximise profits and attendance turnout. One of the most influential demographics for a film's success is the younger audience, [2] with the overall average of 88% of 18-29 year olds saying that they enjoy these types of films. This suggests that social media plays a big impact on the success of a film as well, especially when a majority of 18- to 29-year-olds say they use Instagram (71%) or Snapchat (65%), while roughly half say the same for TikTok.

In 2023, taking the example of the 'Barbie' film by Greta Gerwig, we saw the potency of marketing and social media and how these had influenced it to become the biggest grossing film of the year with an impressive \$1.446 billion created in the span of its screening period. With online trends such as : wearing pink to the cinema, 'Hey Barbie!' and 'I'm just Ken', social

media had catapulted this film to enthrall the whole world for one summer and as a result, its legacy will leave a mark on cinema history.

However, another trend that we can see film companies adopt is their obsession with social media's approval of their project. This will be shown with a multitude of posts trying to create 'memes' out of the most relatable or funny moments of their film in order to get internet users 'hyped' for the release of a film, usually directed to the social media's overall age demographic, 18-29 year olds. This sort of 'encouragement' can be seen on the adverts with social media and sometimes film companies make their own social media accounts to spread the word of the film's release. With TikTok accounts such as the Dreamworks one with 1.1 Million followers, one can see how the help of social media definitely influences the success of a film.

Another trend film companies use of social media is relying on the already existing fanbase to boost their new film on social media therefore, making them the main catalyst for a film's success. One example where we see this is through the MCU franchise and its continuous trilogies, epilogues and sequels created to keep its fanbase involved and engrossed in its universe. Recent successes such as 'Spiderman : Across the Spider-verse' by Joaquim Dos Santos, Kemp Powers and Justin K. Thompson in 2023 had secured its spot of 6th most grossing film [5] with The Observer describing that 'There's not a frame of this rich, kaleidoscopically detailed animation that isn't dazzling.' However, as much as this film would have

been a great success by itself, one cannot ignore the incredible 'headstart' the film must have gotten due to its connection to the MCU franchise and the world of 'Spiderman'. The unique style had interested many on social media and pushed them to know more about the film and what the story is about, and with the help of the fanbase, the earnings for the Spider-verse franchise had gone from \$375,582,637 accumulated world wide with its first film to \$690,897,910 accumulated worldwide with its second film [1]. Therefore, film can successfully become a phenomenon single-handedly, however, it tends to achieve social sensation with help from 'fan bases', social media's approval and 'hype'.

As much as Social Media does help in multiple cases for a film's success, social media tends to be a very critical platform with very narrow-minded ideas. Some film companies do try and follow the trends that social media adopt in the present time but tend to fail. However, one of the most damaging impacts a film company can suffer from is social media accusing a film company of doing something out of laziness and as a result 'boy-cotting' a film in its entirety.

A trend we also see emerging in film today is resorting to nostalgia and 'deja vu' as a way to attract fan bases into watching sequels of the films which they hold most to heart. An example of this is one of the most famous and notorious Disney films, 'Frozen.' Created in 2013, the film centralised its plot on the importance of sisterhood and the morality of differences. The film, which later went on to become a sensation on the West End and Broadway, included the illustrious 'Let It Go' and 'Do

'You Wanna Build a Snowman?') by Kristen Bell and Idina Menzel. This film had undoubtedly created the Disney blueprint for remunerative success and, from then on, Disney has since attempted to revive the lucrative galore they had experienced as a company. Anna's (the protagonist) personality of being a kind, clumsy and naïve princess had become such a success that social media content creators have started to complain that they see the same personality adopted by the ensuing heroines the 'Walt Disney' company created, many people blaming Disney for being 'lazy' and 'unoriginal'. Youtube videos such as the viral 'ModernGurlz's 'Disney's 'adorkable' problem' with 2.1 million views concretise many people's belief that the new heroes of this reputable franchise have started to clone each other internally. The princesses 'ModernGurlz' describes with this so-called 'adorkable' personality are : Moana (Moana, 2016), Venelope Von Schweetz (Wreck it Ralph, 2018), Raya (Raya and the Last Dragon, 2021), Mirabel (Encanto, 2021) and Asha (Wish, 2023).

Social media has especially been unhappy with Disney after the release of its 100 year anniversary film, 'Wish'. One of the biggest successes of Disney after 'Frozen' was the world widely known 'Encanto'. Legendary lyricist Lin Manuel Miranda, famous for his iconic 'Hamilton' on Broadway and the West End, had been given completely creative freedom for the songs for the film, and was responsible for the reputable 'We Don't Talk about Bruno' and 'Familia Madrigal.' Being from Puerto-Rican descent, he incorporated beats and music from his culture and, as a result, became an earworm for all Disney fans for a good couple of months. However, social

media is criticising that 'Welcome to Rosas', the opening song for 'Wish', resembles too much the opening song of 'Encanto,' 'Familia Madrigal,' deeming the film company to be 'lazy' and 'repetitive.'

Another complaint raised by social media is the lack of 'evil antagonists' which Disney used to be respected for. The viral Youtube video by 'Schaffrillas Production,' "So is Disney Just Never Gonna Have a Real Villain Again," with 3.4 Million views elevated the topic that Disney is 'shying away' from their 'purely evil characters,' and instead basing their 'villain arcs' as being a 'misunderstood softy with forgivable characteristics.' One iconic Disney villain which really strikes to mind for the younger generations which grew up with Disney is 'Frollo' from 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame' and his song 'Hellfire'. Disney used to create insanely animated and write villain songs which sent chills down every 2000's toddler, however, the infamous latest disney villain song from 'Wish' 'This Is The Thanks I Get?' has been an important reason as to why the hatred of this 'new' Disney has been brewing recently. When the film company was marketing its songs on their respective social media platforms, many social media users condemned them: to be using AI (artificial intelligence) to create their lyrics and were 'cringed' by the fact they were using more 'trendy' words for songs which should be timeless, for example, 'I'm always there when you need to vent'. As a result, internationally known 'game theorists' released the video 'Disney is Finally Dead, Here's Why' with 4.4 million views and judging on the opinions of the comment section, most people are in favour of this opinion that Disney is trying 'too

hard to bring their success back' and that Disney is starting to follow the fatal trend of 'quantity over quality'.

Some people comment that the deficit of creativity and innovativeness has resulted in Disney resorting to producing 'live action remakes' to stir popularity again. Live-action remakes, as much as they should have been a success single-handedly, had unfortunately reached their level of fame due to 'controversy'. Live action remakes such as 'The Little Mermaid' and 'Snow White' were, sadly, were renown for: their casting of the main protagonists 'Halle Bailey' and 'Rachel Zegler', racist individuals admitted to 'boycotting the films' due to the casting choices made, and the excessive cyber-bullying of both women, labelling them as 'unworthy' and 'ungrateful' of their roles, had definitely made social media the main reason as to why to the film's did not succeed to their full potential. An example of social media shutting down and severely damaging the prospects of what should be a highly anticipated film, was the prejudice against the live-action remake of 'Snow White'. Rachel Zegler would have been the protagonist in the live-action remake of 'Snow White', however, her responses to interviewers and the reveal that the film's

plot would deviate from the original 1938 'Snow White' had lead to social media bullying Disney and Rachel Zegler to push back the film all together from the 22nd March 2024 to the 21st March 2025. However, due to the immense backlash the film got during its marketing campaign, critics are assuming that Disney will cancel the production of the film altogether.

Therefore, social media has definitely played a massive role in the world of film and marketing, however, it can alternate between becoming the villain or the hero of the story. Marketing strategies involving social media, adopted by the 'Barbie' film and 'Spiderman: Across the spider verse', have been renowned successes for both of these films. However, Social media can also lead to a company's failure, with influencers and content creators analysing flaws and faults in a production's design, like Disney, and therefore impacting the box office achievement of a film. In conclusion, one could argue that films will have to fit a mould if wanting to succeed economically and socially as well as being creatively indulging and interesting to the audience. In an ever changing society with fluctuating social normalities, the world of film will definitely be an interesting story to follow.

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Beyond limits: Unleashing the full power of our brains

Jasmine Sabapathy



The brain is the powerhouse of the human body. It is an extraordinary organ, weighing about 3 pounds, filled with 100 billion neurons, and has the capacity to control our thoughts, memory, emotions, touch, vision, breathing, and just about every process that regulates our body. [1] Each and every part of our brain plays a vital role in the way we live our lives, from the cerebral cortex guarding your memory to the medulla protecting your breathing, and the cerebellum guiding your movement and balance control. Its various components create the ultimate organ, functioning like a computer, as it processes and interprets information to send out the correct response in milliseconds. [2] But how much of our brain do we really use in our day-to-day life? Is it really and truly the powerhouse of the human body?

The notion that humans use 10% of our brains is all but a myth, yet it is still believed and sought out by many. [3] No evidence has been brought forward to validate this statement, but as humans, the idea that we could be capable of unlocking a new and profound intelligence has carried and brought this idea to life. The truth has remained that we do not use 10% of our brain and we are not capable of achieving abnormal superpowers. [4] Rather John Henley, a neurologist at Mayo Clinic in Rochester stated that 'Evidence would show over a day you use 100 percent of the

brain'. Throughout the day and even when we are asleep the brain is always active, rapidly firing millions of neurons and this proves that we use 100% of our brain, as different tasks and actions use various parts of the brain.

So, if we can use 100% of our brain, how can we improve its capabilities? Well, [5] the brain's storage capacity is considered virtually unlimited, and it continues to grow and develop. The neurons are the fundamental units of the brain that receive sensory inputs from the external world, to send motor commands to our muscles, and as we grow and learn these neurons create new paths, and new connections in the brain, to allow humans to adapt to a changing environment. [6] The ability to be able to improve the brain's cognitive skills poses a major advantage in heightening academic performance, improving brain function, and reducing the risk of age-related cognitive impairment and diseases such as Alzheimer's disease. [7] Some simple ways to achieve this and to train your brain is to:

Get enough sleep

Sleep is essential and a basic need for everyone. It helps our brains and bodies to recover and aids with mental, physical, emotional, and social development. It is only through sleep, that the brain

consolidates and communicates our memories to a different region called the neocortex, where they are stored long-term. The ability to retain and store information is majorly affected by sleep, to which studies have highlighted that sleep deprivation results in difficulty remembering things, trouble learning and focusing, as well as poor emotional and behavioural control. Getting enough sleep (7-9 hours a night as recommended by experts) is indispensable, allowing you to analyse all the information absorbed through the day but to also take a break to breathe and relax. [8]

Mindfulness

A major benefit of mindfulness is that it encourages you to pay attention to your thoughts, actions, and your body. It is a way to reduce stress, and anxiety and boost memory and intuition and there are many ways to carry this out. [9] Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche is a world-renowned meditation teacher who integrates traditional Buddhist practices and philosophy with the scientific understanding of the mind and mental health. As a child living in Nepal, he had severe panic attacks, and in response, his father told him to meditate, later in life when scientists invited him to Wisconsin to look at his brain they discovered that although he was 41 he had the brain of a 33-year-old. The remarkable impact mindfulness had on his brain depicts the importance of being able to practise mindfulness in our day-to-day lives and the massive benefits it has to the development of our brains.

To learn new things

By deciding to learn a new language, or to learn to drive we are adapting and changing

the connections in our brains. [10] The new experiences we face build and maintain our cognitive skills and by physical exercises, we can improve memory and concentration, or simply learning an instrument reduces stress and improves coordination. Hence, by picking up and improving new skills we can further grow and make new connections to heighten the ability of our brain.

The food you consume

Your diet surprisingly has a large impact on your brain and diet patterns that are high in sugar, refined carbs, unhealthy fats, and processed food lead to impaired memory and learning. It further can lead to an increased risk of Alzheimer's disease and dementia. [11] What occurs is that a poor diet results in inflammation of the brain which can cause it to rapidly degenerate. However, by eating high-quality food with the right amounts of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, nourishes and protects it from oxidative stress. A few examples to get you started are to eat green leafy vegetables that provide you with healthy nutrients, fatty fish which is an abundant source of omega 3, and berries which can improve memory.

In summary the brain is capable of controlling just about every process in a precise and organised manner while using 100% of its power across the day to get the dishes done or to revise for an exam. It is by far the most distinguished organ, and day by day we continue to train and grow our brains, through new experiences and skills, so that we can achieve a form of purpose and enlightenment. It still holds many secrets today but it truly is the powerhouse of the human body.

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Exploring the Humour of Generation Z and Millennials

Sachit Kori



“The Age of Irony Comes to an End”, reads the headline of a short article from TIME magazine in September 2001, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. But, rather than immediately dying out, irony would become even more prevalent in the coming decades - especially in internet humour and the content consumed by millennials and Generation Z.

Growing up in a period of relative stability and prosperity after the end of the Cold War, millennials were born into what seemed to be an incredibly fortunate time compared to their parents and grandparents - they seemed lucky to live in a prosperous time where people tended to be more optimistic towards the future (at least in the Western world). This was especially true in the US, which was in the midst of the 1990s United States boom around the time that many millennials were growing up. According to William Strauss and Neil Howe, millennials “had never known a year in which America didn't get richer”. [1] Similar levels of prosperity were also present in many Western countries - and it looked like many non-Western countries would also be able to look forward to a much more prosperous future. [2] But the 9/11 attacks and the 2008 financial crisis shattered this perception, and millennials were arguably the most affected by these events; they took place while many millennials were growing up, and many soldiers who fought subsequent wars under

the broader War on Terror that followed the 9/11 attacks were millennials.

The 9/11 attacks and the 2008 financial crisis changed this and also had several less direct effects. The 2008 crisis contributed significantly to the difficulties faced by millennials when trying to buy a home, and the 9/11 attacks led to the decades-long War on Terror. Millennials, and Generation Z, have also lived through other changes - mass shootings (in the US) have become much more prevalent with the shootings at Sandy Hook, Orlando and Columbine shootings making it to the top 10 most significant events for millennials, according to survey data from Pew Research. [3] The climate crisis also gained much more publicity during their lives, and all of this was nearly the opposite of what millennials had expected for their adulthood. There were also some positive changes, however, such as the election of the first black president of the US and the increasing attention and support given to LGBTQ+ rights as well as an increase in those identifying as LGBTQ+. [4] Same-sex marriages and civil unions have also become legally valid in more nations.

Generation Z have lived through many of the same events but have also lived through the COVID-19 pandemic and an era of yet more coverage and awareness of the climate crisis, as well as the murder of George Floyd by a police officer which triggered worldwide protests and brought

attention to institutional racism. Generation Z were also the first generation to grow up with social media - a major difference to previous generations (which had only been exposed to social media later in life), allowing this generation to become much more accustomed to social media and its workings. However, Generation Z were born into a more tumultuous world to begin with and, as a result, weren't made to feel 'betrayed' in the same way that millennials were.

Such striking events and changes would affect all aspects of life for these generations, including their sense of humour. There are many differences between the experiences of generations and so their cultures often differ; humour is one of the ways generations can vary.

There has also been a massive change in some of the ways that millennials and Gen Z communicate with each other. The rise of the internet and social media have not only made communication much easier but have also enabled people to reach much wider audiences than ever before, enabling information to spread much faster. This has had many effects, such as accelerating globalisation and allowing people to be much more informed, whilst also leading to increasing political polarisation. [5]

However, a more interesting effect of the internet is the way that people express themselves on it. While many older generations who use the internet would express themselves much like they would in real life (for the most part), those in Generation Z in particular sometimes separate their online identities from real-life ones - and express themselves in

completely different ways online. This, as well as the novel formats on the internet and social media (such as memes and short-form videos), means that people are expressing themselves online in ways that are completely different to what we would see in the real world. In particular, it is Gen Z humour on social media and the internet that is very different to any other kind of humour.

This kind of humour relies heavily on irony (particularly verbal/situational irony), but rather than simply being ironic, it instead uses several layers of irony (often with the irony itself being the punchline - or the confusion about *what* is ironic being the punchline). This is a feature unique to millennial and Gen Z humour, though it is a lot more present in Gen Z humour. While the humour of older generations has centred around either using irony or not using it, the humour of Generation Zers incorporates multiple 'layers' of irony. [6] A basic example of this is the 'dab,' which was a dance move that first became extremely popular in 2015. After it had already become widespread, many started to consider it 'cringe' and uncool, which resulted in people starting to use the dab ironically (for humorous purposes) and to mock those who thought it was trendy. This is called 'post-irony' and can be thought of as the second layer of irony.

Generation Zers often use even more layers of irony. The next layer of irony, 'meta-irony,' is all about making it unclear whether something is ironic or not, and this deliberate ambiguity is what makes something humorous. To continue the previous example, meta-irony would be someone doing a dab but making it unclear

whether they were doing it because they think it is genuinely cool or doing it to mock those who thought it was in vogue.

Many notable memes that would fall under this type of humour also appear completely meaningless (and this is part of what makes it amusing).

The use of irony in humour is not the only way that Gen Z and millennial humour differs from other generations' humour. While Generation Z and millennials have lived through many positive changes, there are still many issues that affect the world today and the majority of them are not at all easy to solve. Examples of issues like these include climate change, nuclear weapons (and more broadly, war), and the underdevelopment of the global south. The sheer scale of these issues makes them appear incredibly intimidating, but the magnitude and urgency of these issues also means that they are widely known - especially amongst Generation Z and millennials.

As a result, some resort to making jokes or 'memes' about some of these issues. This could be described as a coping mechanism of sorts. These generations have bore witness to dramatic events and changes, and are facing such enormous issues, thus humour has been one way in which some try to deal with this. Similar to how many emergency service personnel and soldiers turn to dark humour to cope with the conditions and what they are often exposed to (and are sometimes encouraged to do), millennials and Generation Zers use humour to deal with these societal fluctuations. They can make light of the situation they are in to make it easier to

cope with, and so dark humour has become much more prevalent for these generations.

Police brutality and institutionalised racism are two issues that have gained much more attention in recent years (particularly after the murder of George Floyd). Both are extremely complex, deep-rooted and multifaceted issues not just in the US but also in the UK, albeit to a lesser extent. These have been major problems for a very long time - modern police forces in the US (particularly in the South) owe their existence in part to organisations created to capture escaped slaves and suppress uprisings. [7] In the UK, they partly have their origins in private security forces that protected those who could afford it as well as their property. [8]

Recently, a trend involving people filming skits where they act in ways that put them in danger when around police officers has become more popular. These skits often have titles that seem to encourage people to act in similar ways. For example, a skit might involve someone quickly retrieving their wallet or ID from their pocket or a storage compartment when pulled over by a police officer (like in [this TikTok video](#)). The person may then point it at the police officer in a very specific manner - similar to how someone may threaten a police officer with a firearm. Usually, commenters play along.

Skits of this kind seem to downplay the significance of police brutality in a way that seems disrespectful and potentially even dangerous (as there could always be some people who think that the advice is not ironic). However, judging by the attention that this trend has gained, many people

don't view it in this way and even find this trend to be comical.

The example outlined seems a lot like dark humour, and is likely a way that some may cope with the deep-rooted and seemingly unsolvable issue that is police brutality in the United States. This is especially the case in the US, where the militarisation of the police [9] and poor training serve to separate police from their communities and alienate these groups while encouraging heavy-handedness and perpetuating a cycle in which opposition to police only makes police unions try to increase funding and equipment, also making the police view people as ungrateful. This cycle can seem nearly impossible to break, and by campaigning for the demilitarisation or defunding of police, one might end up further perpetuating the cycle. [10] It is something that seems completely out of anyone's control, and so one of the ways people might cope with this is through humour.

Another phenomenon that has become more infamous as the Internet and social media have become more prevalent is "shitposting." Merriam-Webster defines a "shitpost" as "a deliberately absurd, provocative, or offensive online post" and the Cambridge Dictionary interprets it as "something put on the internet that is not especially funny or interesting and does not make much sense, or does not have anything to do with what is being discussed, especially to make it difficult for other people to discuss something." "Shitposting" is a much wider phenomenon that started to gain traction around 2014 according to Google Trends data. [11] It is characterised by how meaningless and out-

of-context the posts seem - the content of these posts is often completely unexpected and illogical and is therefore perceived as humorous. Often, it does not serve any purpose other than to, in some cases, irritate people and obstruct discussion.

An example of a very popular meme that takes the form of a shitpost is the blue smurf cat, which is simply an image of a blue creature with a mushroom-like hat, often with the chorus of *The Spectre* by Alan Walker playing alongside the image, and there is sometimes a caption in Russian which translates to gibberish. The image itself was made in 2011 by artist Nate Hallinan who titled it "Smurf Sighting" and the (completely unrelated) song was released in 2015. [12] The meme itself isn't meant to have a meaning and it also doesn't leave anything open to interpretation.

The meme went viral on TikTok and other social media sites and is an example of a broader trend of content that appears completely absurd and incoherent. The more absurd something is, the more likely it is to catch someone's attention.

Art and designs that revolve around this kind of meaninglessness and absurdism are by no means new. 'Dadaism,' or simply 'Dada,' was an art movement (initially in performance art, but later across media) in the early 20th century that was characterised by nonsense, silliness and irrationality, and was often seemingly bereft of meaning.

Dada came about in the aftermath of WWI, as a response to and a rejection of the modern capitalist society, its rationality, and bourgeois elements of society. It sought to reject traditional art and raise questions

surrounding what art actually was. Artists of this movement generally avoided traditional techniques and materials and used Dada as a way of criticising traditional art (somewhat ironically using art). Much of this art also tended to appear quite meaningless and nonsensical. One of its main characteristics, however, was its irrationality and randomness.

The main intention of the movement was to make a statement and to question ideas of what art was, as in the case of *Fountain*. *Fountain* was a signed and dated upside-down urinal. Duchamp had purchased the urinal from a Manhattan plumbing supply outfit and submitted it to the organisers under the false name “R. Mutt,” which was intended to mock the organisers. [13]

The exhibition that *Fountain* was submitted to, which was hosted by the American Society of Independent Artists, was planned to be a very open exhibition. The organisers declared that anyone who paid the required fees would be allowed a place, but they rejected Duchamp’s submission. With *Fountain*, Duchamp intended to reject traditional art and question what art actually was - Duchamp had not made the urinal himself or changed it in any way (aside from turning it upside-down and signing it).

The purpose of humour is quite different to that of art, especially art that is meant to make a statement. However, some surface-level similarities between millennial and Gen Z humour and Dada art are quite interesting. Both use very unconventional methods and, in many cases, appear senseless. In some cases, themes such as police brutality and the abuse of power by institutions are also briefly covered in

various memes, even not explicitly political ones.

There will always be differences between generations and their culture due to each generation's different experiences. Humour is just one of the many ways in which generations can differ, with other differences (like attitudes to minorities, higher education and how politically active a generation is) having been mentioned briefly in the introduction of this paper. The rise of social media has made these differences much more obvious by introducing new formats to share content. Social media also acts as a new medium - not just for communication but even for news and other forms of information. Social media has also become very prevalent much more quickly than other similar changes; it went from conception to everyday reality in mere decades, and the Internet, the technology enabling it, has not been around for significantly longer. Other forms of mass media, such as newspapers and television, took much longer to reach the scale they reached at their peak as the technology required took longer to mature. The fact that social media has been able to mature so quickly has made the difference between communication and expression *before* social media and *after* social media much more evident. Generally, the technology sector also advances very quickly compared to other fields, and this combined with the ease of publishing content online has resulted in people being able to develop novel methods of expression much more quickly - the emergence of cinematography and photography as we know them today happened over a much longer period as the technology did not advance as quickly, so

people simply had to wait longer before adapting. As a result, the humour of Gen Z and millennials can seem almost alien to those who do not understand it. One can

conclude that it is a result of advancements in technology combined with the unique experiences of new generations.

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FINALIST ESSAY:

Is environmental degradation a greater threat to the international community than war?

Alyssa Moniz



The biggest challenges facing society to date are environmental degradation and war. Our



world has seen a relative decline in war and violence, tending to be less deadly and

residing domestically since the UN was founded in 1945 [1]. In contrast, we have also seen a rapid increase in environmental issues, with continuing warnings from scientists urging governments around the world to act now if we want to see a liveable future. Both of these issues have posed a great threat and have had a detrimental impact on our global society, both physically and emotionally. The aftermath of war is generally more sudden and short-lived, whereas the repercussions of environmental degradation will affect the world for generations to come. However, environmental issues can be said to exacerbate tensions between people, which could potentially escalate into conflicts. Environmental degradation is currently a much more adverse issue than war, as governments are more willing to maintain their security by advocating against war rather than maintaining the lives of their people by advocating against their own socio-economic interests, which are greatly affected by the need to protect the planet. Thus, preventing warfare is prioritised against preventing environmental degradation, despite environmental degradation posing a greater threat to the international community than war.

Environmental degradation is defined as any change or disturbance to the environment perceived to be deleterious or undesirable. The immense variety of these disturbances across the world has become a 'common concern' in our global society, with the two prevailing factors being global warming and climate change. Significant changes observed in Earth's climate since the mid-20th century are driven by activity from the ever-increasing human population such as burning fossil fuels, which increases heat-trapping greenhouse gas levels in the atmosphere and

in turn raises Earth's average surface temperature by trapping the Sun's heat. Since the pre-industrial period, human activities are estimated to have increased Earth's global average temperature by about 1.4°C, and the current global warming trend is proceeding at an unprecedented rate from human activities. This contributes to climate change - a long-term change in the average weather patterns. The consequences of this heavily vary [2]. The Earth is a system - everything is connected - meaning that changes in one area can influence changes in all others. Changes in the climate have resulted in varying consequences, such as the lack of water in some areas through intense droughts and water scarcity and the surplus of water in other areas through rising sea levels and flooding. This imbalance correlates to the Earth's system, which is facing an increase in population and therefore a decrease in land available for human use. Environmental degradation of this land through severe weather events has damaged infrastructure and disrupted supply chains, leading to resource scarcity and economic instability [3]. People experience climate change in diverse ways. Without us realising it, climate change is affecting our health, ability to grow food, housing, safety, and work. Our obliviousness to this is the most dangerous thing of all, providing a grave threat to our community if not combatted internationally.

Historically, war has prevailed between nations for one reason: the thirst for power. Power is defined as the ability or capacity to do something, and it can be said that a leader's capabilities are restrained by the territory that they control. The land on which we live has shaped the wars, power, politics, and social development of our world because of its geographical restrictions. In different

parts of the planet, different geographical features are among the dominant factors in determining what people can and cannot do [4]. This is a cause for conflict in the geopolitical sphere, as people with power do not like the idea of being restricted in their actions, and people with power will do whatever it takes to maintain their power. The regionalisation of conflict across borders has seen many conflicts become prolonged and less responsive to traditional forms of resolution, and the complex nature of this issue means that it is unclear whether impedance or cooperation will enhance peacebuilding efforts [5]. Regional conflict significantly reorganises global structures and relationships, thus destabilising regions and leading to war. War is ultimately inevitable between nations as the desire for a greater degree of power will always prevail, no matter the stakes. The different tactics and strategies that states use during war affect the severity of the conflict, and how long-lasting it is [6]. Heinrich Böll, German Nobel Prize winner for literature stated that “The war will never be over, never, as long as somewhere a wound it had inflicted is still bleeding.” [7] A physical example of this is the victims of the atomic bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki who died years later because of their exposure to the radiation. However, the word ‘wound’ does not necessarily have physical connotations. The psychological effects of war are a significantly documented topic that directly affects not only civilians and soldiers but also those consuming the war through the media. The modernisation of global society has resulted in the digitalisation of the media, making it easier for people all across the globe to access information instantly and become more aware of world affairs, thus also contributing to the global mental health crisis. Overall, war is a significant

contributor to societal upheaval across the international community, affecting anyone aware of it.

The nature of warfare enhances environmental degradation, while environmental degradation can induce warfare. Displacement is one of the greatest humanitarian challenges that affects both individuals and communities alike, especially when they are unprepared and lack the support that they need. The intensity of the issue may also have an influence on how long people remain displaced, and whether they return, which is based on factors such as security, remnants of war, and the destruction of infrastructure [8]. As well as this, environmental degradation has advanced to the point where whole communities have had to relocate. By the end of September 2023, more than 114 million people were displaced worldwide due to conflicts and violence, as well as the disasters and impacts of climate change. This demonstrates the immediate threats that both environmental degradation and war pose to society, however, a war is one large event whereas environmental degradation is a slower yet more harmful threat with long-term ramifications such as irreversible damage to ecosystems and loss of habitable land. A dominant driver of conflict is the scarcity of resources, which is exacerbated by climate change. The reduction of precipitation levels in some parts of the world has led to water scarcity, which has raised geopolitical tensions between countries such as Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. The Tigris and Euphrates rivers are vital water sources for these countries, yet the effects of climate change have resulted in the competition between these countries for limited water resources and led to disputes and accusations of water hoarding, thus

straining geopolitical relations [9]. On 17 April 2007, the Congolese representative at the UN Security Council debate stated “This will not be the first time people have fought over land, water, and resources, but this time it will be on a scale that dwarfs the conflicts of the past.” [10] Geopolitics, however, plays a crucial role in ensuring cooperation to tackle climate change, with 196 countries bound by the 2015 Paris Agreement. However, despite adopting these policies, the overall progress made has not been enough to reach ‘net zero’ by 2050 as agreed. But why? As well as looking after the interests of the whole population, governments also have the responsibility of looking after the interests of their people, which is primarily seen in developed countries maintaining their stance on a subject depending on what benefits them the most. This means that between environmental degradation and war, war will always be a more pressing issue for a country to prioritise for the maintenance of their security, thus a greater deal of resources will always be present in the war efforts of individual countries rather than the environmental efforts.

Environmental degradation and war are therefore both proven to be significant threats to the international community, with similarities such as the displacement of people from their homes, although for different reasons. Climate change is the number one threat to mankind. The dangers that countries face from environmental threats are no less serious than threats by warfare. Our increasingly unstable climate has severe consequences for the security of all nations in our interdependent world, leading to the exacerbation of frequent severe conflicts if the international community fails to address these issues as quickly as possible. The Security Council debate on 17 April 2007 marked the recognition of climate change as an unprecedented threat and core security issue that must be met with greater urgency and ambition, however, not enough has been done since then to reverse the effects of climate change due to the self-interests for the security of the leading global powers. This demonstrates that the threat of environmental degradation to the international community is known to be a greater threat compared to warfare, but is neglected because it infringes on global powerful interests.

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