

Is life today better than it was 100 years ago?

Introduction:

The question of whether life today is better than it was 100 years ago is a complex and multifaceted one. Every day our world and the way we live changes, and life 100 years ago vs life today is very different. For instance, people used to be different towards one another and towards the elderly. Money and life had a different meaning back then. The way men and women interacted back then was different from the way they do today. So, to properly address this question, we need to consider the various aspects of human existence, including technological advancements, healthcare, social progress and overall progress of life

In this discussion, we will explore the arguments on both sides of the debate and in the end, come to an agreeable conclusion about whether life today is in many ways, indeed, better than it was a century ago. Now let's delve into some of the comparative factors we need to look at about life today versus in the early 20th century. They include:

1. Technological Advancements:

How has technology changed in the last 100 years?

One of the most striking differences between life today and life 100 years ago is the remarkable advancement of technology. Today, we live in a fast-paced, technologically progressive society where smartphones, high-speed internet, advanced transportation, healthcare and farming systems are an integral part of our daily lives in comparison with the early 1900s where innovations such as the telephone and the early primitive automobiles were considered groundbreaking. The major invention at that time was the first toggle light switch while the major invention of today is the CRISPR/Cas9 genome editing technology.

These advancements have transformed the way we travel, communicate, work and access information. Let's get deeper into each of these advancements at depth;

A. Communication:

How has the way we communicate changed?

Communication has seen a revolution in the past century. In the early 20th century, long distance communication was limited to telegrams and letters that could take weeks to reach their destination. It's important to note that these methods of communication, though obsolete by today's standards, were still only available to a handful of the world's biggest economies at the time including countries in Europe and the United States.

In less developed societies including Africa, Asia and South America, communication was mainly done by way of a messenger who would either ferry the message by word of mouth or written letters if the sender and recipient were literate enough to understand a written language. In Africa, the use of more primitive methods like lighting fires to send smoke signals, or using drums to convey certain messages to nearer distances was also very common. These methods of communication faced many challenges. For instance, telegrams could take a long time to reach their recipients. Messengers would also take days or even weeks to deliver messages and there was the possibility of loss either by delivery of incorrect or incomplete messages, or total loss if the messenger lost their written messages. Smoke signals and drums also faced the risk of either not being seen or heard, or misinterpreted as well.

However, this is not the case in our modern society. Today, we can instantly connect with anyone worldwide through voice and video calls, emails, or social media. These methods of communication are incredibly accurate and secure ensuring that the right information reaches the intended recipients in good time and form. This interconnectedness has brought the world closer together, fostering global collaboration and understanding.

B. Transportation and Mobility:

How about the way we travel?

The transportation sector has seen a major revolution in the last 100 years. In the early 20th century, depending on where we look at, transportation was very different. In more civilized economies, long distance travel was possible by way of trains, ships, cars and airplanes for the wealthier folk. Horses were also widely used to ferry people and goods over long distances. However, in less civilized societies including those in Africa, transportation happened a little differently. For the few African countries that had railroads connecting their port cities to inland towns as a result of colonial trade and rule, people and goods could be ferried using trains. The use of animals like donkeys and camels to carry goods for trade was also a common way of transportation. For the wealthy folk, including business men, government officials, and educated white collar employees, there was also the possibility of travel by automobiles and airplanes.

However, people today are able to travel vast distances in relatively short periods of time be it for business, official government engagements or simply for leisure. Planes have become more advanced, faster, and more affordable. Automobiles and ships have become more modern and accessible as a result of an improved global economy. Business has especially seen a major boost as a result of this advancement as goods and services can be transported with relative ease across vast geographical borders. This advancement has not only helped connect the world but has improved the standards of living for many people by opening up new markets not before possible with the limited means to carry goods and services to distant lands.

C. Healthcare

How has healthcare changed in the past 100 years?

We can all agree that there have been significant advancements in healthcare over the past century. In the 20th century, diseases like tuberculosis, malaria and influenza were major causes of death. Global life expectancy in the 1900s was generally around 30 to 50 years over the course of the century. Many of the same barriers to longevity seen today, including poverty and lack of access to proper healthcare and sanitation systems, were major contributions to the limited lifespans witnessed at that time.

In detail, healthcare facilities were limited especially for the folk that lived in rural areas. And as earlier discussed, reliable transportation wasn't that readily available as it is today hence a lot of preventable deaths were witnessed. Another area that has drastically changed is in regard to sanitation and hygiene. Back then, there were no proper sanitation and waste disposal systems. This was so for a variety of reasons; People were not as educated on matters personal health and hygiene as a majority are today. For instance, showering daily, brushing one's teeth ever so often and removal of unwanted body hair was largely disregarded, which contributed heavily to a lot of infections and diseases. There was also a very high rate of infant mortality witnessed as a result of a high percentage of home births without proper equipment and expertise due to a lack of healthcare facilities, and affordable ones at that, and a prevalent malaria menace across many regions in the world.

However, in modern times, the development of vaccines, antibiotics and other advanced medicine and medical practices has dramatically reduced mortality rates from these diseases. People now are able to access healthcare relatively easily and get proper medical care in good time. These vaccines and other medicine are also able to boost our immune systems often preventing certain diseases and conditions before they're even a concern. The boom in healthcare facilities even in our remote villages has also seen our mothers, wives and daughters get proper maternal care drastically increasing the chances of survival for our newborns. Global life expectancy has risen to over 70 years as a result of these advancements.

Moreover, medical technology has advanced to the point where organ transplant, minimally invasive surgeries and personalized medicine are commonplace, offering hope and improved quality of life for those facing serious health challenges. These advancements have significantly improved both the quality and longevity of human life.

D. Agriculture

Now let's compare agriculture of the past with today!

If you ask your grandparents how they got their food, they might have a different answer from what you think. Why is this? It's because agriculture has changed over time. Changes in equipment have made a large impact on the way farmers are able to farm and grow food. In the past, farmers would have to do field work by and or with horse or cattle-drawn equipment. This work would take a long time to complete, which meant that farms were smaller because farmers could only work so much land. Horses and cattle were not very fast, and since they were animals, they would tire out and need rest to recover.

Today, most farmers use tractors and other motorized equipment to help with field work. Tractors, combines, ploughs, etc. are much larger and move much faster than animals, so farmers are able to produce more food in a shorter amount of time. These machines still need to be taken care of because they can break down, but they can run for longer periods of time and don't need recovery periods.

The way in which farm animals are raised and where they live has changed as well. Through research with animals, scientists have discovered what types of housing make the animals the most comfortable. In today's times, dairy cows typically live in barns that provide soft mattresses or sand beds. There are also nutritionists to feed them special diets, and fans and sprinklers to keep them cool when it's hot outside. Making the animals comfortable is important because farmers want their animals to be healthy for meat production, but also for other reasons like for dairy cows to produce more milk yield.

On top of the animal agriculture industry changing throughout the last 100 years, crop production has improved as well. Advanced biotechnology like the CRISPR/Cas9 genome editing technology we had mentioned earlier which is in essence the manipulation of a living organism's DNA to improve the quality of human life through advances in crop and animal production. Seed technology has changed over the years through the help of both biotechnology and genetic engineering. In the past, crop harvests have been destroyed due to crop diseases, harsh weather conditions among other factors, but now scientists can change crop outcomes by modifying seeds in the first place.

All along, farmers have been trying to make the most out of their resources, but with continuously improving technology, modern farmers have been able to partake in sustainable agriculture and farming practices such as conservation, preservation and moderation.

E. Leisure

In the modern era, leisure is a very precious concept, almost a saviour of our modern lives from the stressful hours we dedicate to work or studies. It's also important to acknowledge that in different communities, countries and on different continents, leisure varies depending on customs, traditions, economic situations and other factors that influence the possibility of real rest and what to do with free time.

In the past, we must agree that when the opportunity for leisure activities presented itself, people would engage in a lot of outdoor activities across the world regardless of customs and traditions. For instance, in African communities, it was possible that the young ones would gather together to play together, or get told stories by their elders, often their grandparents about the past or stories that would instill certain disciplines and principles in them. The older folk would engage in social events like weddings, circumcision ceremonies or other events that would give them a chance to make merry, possibly over a beverage that they would have made beforehand.

With the evolution of technology and its influence, many people today invest hours of their free time in activities where technology is involved. From chatting with friends in the many different applications available on mobile devices, playing digital games, to streaming platforms to watch movies and listen to music. All these are leisure activities that are increasingly frequent throughout the world and are related to technological advances.

2. Social Progress:

How else was life 100 years ago vs life now different?

Another dimension to consider when evaluating whether life is better today than it was 100 years ago is social progress and equality. While significant strides have been made in areas like civil rights, gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights, there are still challenges to overcome.

A. Civil Rights:

The past century has seen significant progress in civil rights, particularly in the fight against racial discrimination. The Civil Rights movement in the United States and similar movements around the world led to the dismantling of legal segregation and the advancement of equal rights for racial and ethnic minorities. While challenges persist, there is no denying that progress has been made in the pursuit of a more just and equal society.

B. Gender Equality and inclusivity:

Well, it's also worth mentioning that women have made a lot of progress towards equality. The life of a woman 100 years ago was very different from what it is today. They still wanted to be seen as more than just mothers and wives, possessions of their husbands. After being seen as the weaker sex, for instance, during the world war, women had to step up to fill men's vacant jobs. Of course, they were still expected to return to their domestic roles when the men returned from war. But the cause was already underway. Women have gained greater access to education, job opportunities, and political representation. The fight for gender equality continues, but the advancements in women's rights are undeniable and have led to improved opportunities and freedoms for half of the world's population.

C. Social norms and relationships:

Dating in the past vs now has evolved quite a lot. In the 20th century, in many parts across the world, dating and courting was a serious undertaking between two parties. It often led to marriage. Depending on the traditions and what part of the world the couple hailed from, it was common to witness the boy approaching the girl's parents even before they ever approached the girl they intended to court as a sign of respect and to receive their blessing. In other traditions, the girl would be married off to the boy even before they ever met as long as the parents of both sides met and agreed.

In today's times, thanks to the internet, new generation relationships often start via online dating. People also commonly live together without getting married. One of the biggest differences in dating then vs now is our openness about it. We are no longer so conservative about our love and sex lives. As a result, infidelity and casual relationships are quite common these days.

3. Quality of Life:

Quality of life encompasses various factors, including economic well-being, access to education, and personal fulfillment. When evaluating whether life today is better than it was 100 years ago, we must consider these aspects. Over the past century, scientific progress, innovation, greater investment, and trade and exchange across the public, private, and social sectors have led to greater advancements in prolonging and improving life.

A. Economic Well-being:

In many parts of the world, standards of living have improved significantly. Advances in technology and industry have created new job opportunities and increased economic prosperity for a lot of people. This has been achieved through improved communication, transportation and education. However, it is important to acknowledge that economic inequality remains a pressing issue, and not everyone has benefited equally from these advancements.

B. Education:

Access to education has expanded dramatically in the past century. In the early 20th century, many children, especially in rural areas, did not have the opportunity to attend school. Today, primary and secondary education is nearly universal in many countries, and higher education is more accessible than ever. Education is a key driver of personal and societal progress.

C. Personal Fulfillment:

Personal fulfillment and well-being are difficult to measure objectively, but there is evidence to suggest that people today have more opportunities to pursue their passions and interests. The internet and digital technology have opened up new avenues for creativity, self-expression, and leisure activities.

Is there any other way life has changed over the last century?

Why, yes of course! For instance, 100 years ago, money was important, but it wasn't the cornerstone of everyone's life. For instance, you could get a handful of candy for a penny, but now you have to pay a lot more just for a candy bar. Inflation has taken a toll on our society. In the past, people stored basic items and had more access to fresh foods and raw materials. Which is not the case today. Profits made on commodities are skyrocketing. Big companies are keeping people dependent on manufactured products more than ever. I'm sure there are a lot of other ways that life today vs the way it was 100 years ago is different, but I believe the few comparisons we've made can at least be used as a basis of comparison.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, life today is, in many ways, better than it was 100 years ago. Technological advancements have transformed the way we live, communicate and access information. Healthcare has improved, leading to longer and healthier lives. Social progress has been made in the fight for civil rights and gender equality, although challenges persist. Quality of life has generally improved, with greater economic well-being, expanded access to education, and opportunities for personal fulfillment.

However, it is important to acknowledge that not everyone has benefited equally from these advancements. Economic inequality, environmental challenges, and social disparities are issues that demand continued attention and action. Additionally, the question of whether life today is better is subjective, as it depends on individual experiences and perspectives.

As we reflect on the progress of the past century, it is essential to recognize the achievements while remaining committed to addressing the remaining challenges to create a more equitable and sustainable world for future generations. Ultimately, the question of whether life today is better than it was 100 years ago is not a simple yes or no but a nuanced evaluation of the many aspects that shape our existence.