

Beyond the Past: Evaluating Life's Advancements Over the Last Century

Introduction

The world has changed dramatically in the last century—from technological changes in every sphere of life to advancements in healthcare. It has transformed societies, raised living standards and presented possibilities that were not even imaginable 100 years ago. That life as it was in 1923 takes the measure of how far humanity has progressed and simultaneously exposes the complexities introduced by modernity. Throughout this essay, I will be examining how things are generally better in life today than it was 100 years ago — from a glimpsed perspective on technology, healthcare, the state of living and all its advantages as well as drawbacks from progression.

Technological Advancements

Since the technologies were yet to be developed, daily routine was very much divergent during the beginning of 20th century. Electricity was not available in many parts of the world, and even basic appliances such as a refrigerator or washing machines — which almost all households now own (Roser et al., 2023) — were unheard of. In 1923, communication was slow and expensive, with the written word being primarily by handwritten letters or telegraphs. While phones existed, they were luxury items, so long-distance calls were expensive and slow.

Today, drive a few years down the road to find technological advancements everywhere in life. The internet that perhaps constitutes the greatest technology transformation of the prior century ties together all people, across billions of individuals worldwide. In most recently, approximately 4.9 billion individuals or an equivalent of 63% of the total global inhabitants were able to use the internet (International Telecommunication Union, 2021). This unmatched connectivity has not only enhanced communication but also education, health care and commerce.

With smart phones becoming ubiquitous, access to information and services has only improved. Knowledge was mostly confined to the one hundred years of book, library and newspaper — making it sound like a LIFETIME PAIN OF OBSTINATE AND MILKED TOIL. Fast forward to today, you have the likes of Google, and literally anyone with a smartphone can search for stuff within seconds. This ubiquitous availability has revolutionized education, leading to online learning markets like Coursera and Khan Academy serving millions of lifelong learners.

When it came to travelling, the 1920s was not as easy a task compared to today. Among long-distance transport modes, railways and steamships predominated, with the automobile still in its infancy and mainly owned by affluent citizens. By contrast, air travel gets people across continents within a span of hours. The availability of commercial airlines and affordable cars, have brought the democratization of

transportation expanding opportunities for work, leisure, and education in a way that no man had done before (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2021).

Additionally, artificial intelligence (AI) and automation are speeding up industries and increasing productivity around the world. From helping us make better decisions in areas like finance and healthcare, to streamlining repetitive tasks with automation freeing up space for more creative and intellectual pursuits. Automated driving and individualized medicine are not taking full advantage of AI yet with still room for much more progress in the future.

Improvements in Healthcare and Increase in Life Expectancy

The impact of healthcare advancements on life expectancy and the quality of life achieved in the last hundred years cannot be downplayed. The year 1923 can be described as the time when life expectancy rates in a number of countries would have been individually deemed negligible by contemporary standards. For instance, in the United States, the life expectancy of men and women on average was around 58 and 61 years respectively (CDC, 2021). Many died because of treatable infections like tuberculosis, small pox, and polio, for which at that time, there were no good therapies to manage the diseases. The knowledge about medicine was in its infancy, while the level of hospital facilities was poor in comparison with present time.

Now a regular average life expectancy has almost reached or surpassed 80 years in the countries classified as developed economies (Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). This growth can nearly solely be described by the advent of antibiotics, vaccines and present day surgery. Moreover, condition that used to wipe out majority of the population like small pox have been completely eradicated while other disease like polio have all but nearly depleted out of the world through nations adopting massive vaccinating protocols. The advent of antibiotics in the middle of the 20th century made it much easier to treat bacterial infections and saved a lot of lives. Even an ordinary infection would probably lead to death in the times before penicillin. Presently, there is no risk of death from an infection due to the presence of antibiotics (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2020).

Accessibility and sophistication of healthcare is another major improvement. Only the rich or people living in cities with hospital facilities had access to medical treatment during the 1920s. However, even in distant places, medicine is gradually becoming universal due to such developments as tele-medicine. Smart gadgets such as smart watches can track the levels of different vital parameters and scan for an onset of some illness and treat it at an early stage. Such changes and enhancements in approaches towards health management have radically improved the wellbeing of persons.

These days, the management of chronic conditions like heart diseases and diabetes bears dramatic changes. Most types of cancer such as breast cancer that seemed difficult to treat are cureable today as a result of progress in chemotherapy, radiotherapy and immunotherapy. HIV/AIDS has today changed radically from being

a death sentence into a long term low power disease that most art therapy living people enjoy.

Improved Standard of Living

The global standard of living has improved immensely over the past century. In 1923, many people lived in impoverished conditions, particularly in rural areas lacking access to clean water, sanitation, and electricity. Economic hardship, exacerbated by the aftermath of World War I, was prevalent in many regions. Housing was often cramped and unsanitary, and basic amenities such as heating and indoor plumbing were considered luxuries.

Today, most people in developed countries enjoy a much higher standard of living. Basic necessities like clean water, electricity, and indoor plumbing are now standard in most homes, even in many developing nations. Global poverty rates have dramatically declined over the past century. According to the World Bank, the global extreme poverty rate fell from around 60% in 1920 to less than 10% in 2020 (World Bank, 2020). This reduction has been driven by economic growth, technological innovation, and international development efforts.

Moreover, education has become more accessible, profoundly impacting social mobility and quality of life. In the early 20th century, literacy rates were low, particularly in developing nations. Many children did not have the opportunity to attend school, and higher education was largely reserved for the elite. Today, global literacy rates have soared, with over 86% of the world's population able to read and write (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2016). This expansion of education has empowered individuals to pursue careers and improve their socioeconomic status.

Additionally, modern conveniences such as central heating, air conditioning, and home appliances have greatly enhanced quality of life. Appliances like washing machines, dishwashers, and microwaves have alleviated time-consuming domestic chores, allowing people more leisure time, work opportunities, or educational pursuits. In the 1920s, many household tasks required hours of labor each day.

Furthermore, the rise of global markets and trade has contributed to greater economic interdependence. Countries are now more connected than ever, allowing for the exchange of goods, ideas, and cultures. This interconnectedness has led to a more diversified economy, increased access to a variety of products, and a broader understanding of global issues. For example, international cooperation in response to crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, illustrates how collaboration has become vital in addressing global challenges.

Environmental and Social Challenges

Despite the significant improvements in life over the past century, the modern world faces new challenges that did not exist 100 years ago. Environmental degradation is one of the most pressing issues of our time. Industrialization, while driving economic growth, has contributed to pollution, deforestation, and climate change. In 1923, environmental concerns were not as prominent, largely due to the smaller scale of human impact on the planet. However, the rapid industrialization and urbanization of

the 20th century have led to rising greenhouse gas emissions, resulting in alarming increases in global temperatures (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2021).

In addition to environmental challenges, modern life has introduced new social and psychological stressors. The digital age, while offering unprecedented convenience and connectivity, has also increased feelings of isolation and mental health challenges. The constant pressure to stay connected and productive can lead to burnout, anxiety, and depression. While the slower pace of life in the early 20th century was not without its difficulties, individuals today face a different kind of stress stemming from the fast-paced, technology-driven world (JustIELTS, 2024).

Furthermore, the quick as well as the widespread use of the internet, especially social media, to circulate false information poses a serious threat to the current state of society and public health. The very mass media which was hailed as the source of better articulation of issues has instead worked to peddle, and further confused by, such issues as health and social movements on a scale that the impact of the false narratives is more than the good done on the cause of action.

Conclusion

In the end, life nowadays is better than it was a hundred years ago. Building technologies, using better medicines and increasing the standards of life have all transformed countries and improved the Lives of billions of people. But such improvements carry certain new problems, such as pollution or mental illness. Innovation and growth directly correlate on the improvements on living standards, let none of this growth be wasted by avoiding problems instead of thinking on the best ways to solve them from now. Change must be responsible so that generations yet to be born will be greater than these average ones.

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