BEHIND THE FILTER: FROM DUMPSITES TO DATA LABS, ASIA'S HIDDEN GIG ECONOMY FUELING TIKTOK

Fikry Muraza

At Jakarta's Bantar Gebang landfill, dawn breaks over towering mounds of garbage—and more than 4,000 pemulung (waste-pickers) are already at work. They pick through some 100 kg of refuse each day, pocketing about IDR 1.2 million (USD 78) a month—barely half of Indonesia's legal minimum—while risking landslides, toxic exposure, and even the roar of bulldozers. "Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice," Nelson Mandela once said, yet most of us scarcely register their labor at all.

What drives so many into this backbreaking routine? The answer lies in what economists call structural unemployment—when sweeping changes in technology, trade, or geography leave large swaths of workers without viable jobs. With roughly 60 percent of Indonesia's labor force operating outside formal contracts, millions have no choice but to find whatever means they can to survive. Meanwhile, companies and governments pursue ambitious growth or trade agendas, comfortable in the knowledge that any fallout will land on those least able to shoulder it—a classic case of moral hazard.

You see a similar story in the world of AI. Platforms like Remotasks promise flexible "work-from-home" gigs while dispatching thousands of Filipino annotators to tag images or transcribe audio for pennies a task. Payments get delayed, quality standards shift without warning, and entire accounts vanish under the scrutiny of faceless algorithms. This is algorithmic management in action: software that hires, rates, and fires without ever sparing a thought for the human on the other side of the screen.

At the same time, Asia's wealth gap has never looked steeper. In India, for example, the top 10 percent take home over half of the entire nation's income—and it isn't much better elsewhere in the region. This kind of imbalance doesn't just feel unfair; it erodes the social bonds that keep communities—and democracies—healthy. Yet, our news feeds overflow with stories of economic miracles and startup unicorns while the people who power those successes remain out of sight.

Then there's the geopolitical ripple effect. From 2018 onward, U.S. tariffs soared to 145 percent on Chinese exports and 46 percent on Vietnamese goods. Factories shuttered shifts. Recycled-metal prices collapsed. Waste-pickers and gig workers alike saw their income sources shrink overnight. In the name of "protecting" domestic jobs, policymakers ended up deepening insecurity halfway around the globe.

So why should you care? Every TikTok filter you play with, every "smart" gadget you buy, every recycled coffee cup you toss away depends on these invisible laborers. If you ever think about picking up micro tasks online for extra cash, remember that the promise of flexibility can quickly turn into precariousness.

What can we do? Start by asking tough questions: Which apps and brands disclose how they treat their workers? Push for laws that give gig and informal workers real rights —like California's AB 5 did for ride-hail drivers. Support global standards for algorithmic accountability, so that no one can be "fired" by code without due process.

If justice demands more than charity, it demands that we see and value every worker—whether they stand amid landfill debris or click away in a cramped room halfway across the world. Only then can we begin to deliver on Mandela's promise.

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THE BEAUTY OF THE UNAPOLOGETIC: WHY BRUTALISM STILL MATTERS

Aarna Kapadia

The term "brutal", originating from the Latin brūtus, meaning "dull," "stupid," or "unwieldy" is commonly associated with Brutalism. However, the architectural style could not be further from this meaning. Often dismissed as monolithic, authoritarian, or outdated, many Brutalist buildings have been demolished, left to decay, or hidden behind more "palatable" styles. But these structures were never meant to be polite. They were built with purpose, with principle, and with the perception that architecture should be honest, functional, and bold.

As cities around the world grapple with an affordable housing crisis, a climate emergency, and the erosion of public space, the core values of Brutalism, namely structural clarity, material efficiency, and ambition, echo strongly.

A Brief History of Brutalism:

Brutalism primarily arose in the aftermath of World War II, a period defined by material scarcity, mass displacement, and the need for large-scale urban reconstruction. The name derives from the French "béton brut", translating to raw concrete; a material that, while aesthetically disfavoured, enabled fast, fireproof, and financially effective construction. Concrete could be poured into virtually any shape, enabling architects to experiment with form while meeting the urgent demands of function.

British architects Alison and Peter Smithson were among the style's earliest champions, framing Brutalism as an "ethic, not an aesthetic". Their buildings, such as the Hunstanton School in Norfolk (1954) and Robin Hood Gardens (1972) in London, used exposed materials and structures to allow the raw beauty of the materials to speak for themselves. Reyner Banham, writing in The New Brutalism (1966), emphasized the movement's commitment to "memorability as an image, clear exhibition of structure, and valuation of materials as found."

Robin Hood Gardens (London) & Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation (Marseille)

These weren't only theoretical flourishes. From 1945 to 1975, governments across Europe built millions of public housing units, with over 1.5 million in the UK alone. Soon, Brutalism was transformed into an architectural symbol of the welfare state. Structures like Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation in Marseille (1952) or Erno Goldfinger's Trellick Tower in London (1972) housed thousands in durable, accessible spaces.

From 1945 to 1975, governments across Europe built millions of public housing units, with over 1.5 million in the UK alone.

Beyond the West:

While Brutalism had a stronghold in the UK, France, and Germany, some of its most radical expressions can be found in former Soviet countries. Here, Brutalism formed for two different reasons: political ideology and urban-planning needs. Yugoslavia's postwar boom led to the construction of monumental civic buildings, memorials, and housing blocks by architects like Bogdan Bogdanović and Mihajlo Mitrović. The Spomeniks—massive war memorials scattered across the Balkans—combine Brutalist massing with sculptural abstraction.

The word "Spomenik" translates to "monument" or "memorial" in English

While often seen in the West as symbols of authoritarianism, these structures also represented state investment in public life—libraries, schools, hospitals, and cultural centers built not for profit, but for use. Scholars like Vladimir Kulić and Maroje Mrduljaš have documented how these buildings, particularly in Yugoslavia, were part of an architectural modernism that was regionally distinct and often surprisingly progressive in their book, Modernism In-Between. However, in Soviet-era Russia and Ukraine, entire neighborhoods were built using prefabricated concrete panels, designed to meet the demands of rapid urbanization and industrial labor migration.

Why Brutalism Still Matters:

We are now in a new moment of crisis. Cities are struggling with skyrocketing rents, housing shortages, and deepening inequality.

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The United Nations estimates that 1.6 billion people globally will lack adequate housing by 2025. In parallel, the construction industry is one of the largest contributors to global carbon emissions. They account for nearly 40% of total emissions worldwide.

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In this context, the core tenets of Brutalism are worth remembering:

- Material Efficiency: Concrete, while regarded as unappealing in appearance, has become the emblem of Brutalist form for good reason. They have lower long-term maintenance and replacement costs than many modern lightweight constructions like steel and drywall. Moreover, the material is often criticized for its carbon footprint, but it can also reduce the need for energy-intensive finishes and claddings. When reused rather than demolished, concrete structures can offer a lower environmental impact over their life cycle than the building of new structures.
- Social Purpose: Brutalist architecture was designed to serve the many, not the few. It prioritized function, accessibility, and the creation of shared, communal space. In today's era of luxury condos and privatized public squares, architecture being redefined as a civic act is imperative.
- Honesty of Form: In an age of hyper-branded, glass-wrapped facades, Brutalist buildings offer a refreshing architectural integrity. They reveal their structure, expose their materiality, and engage with the urban environment without resorting to illusion.

Conclusion:

Brutalism was never about "looking pretty". It was about being useful. It was about building housing, schools, and cultural centers to withstand time and serve communities. Today, as we aim to overcome crises, like the erosion of public space, that echo those of the mid-20th century, it is vital that we look past Brutalism's surface and engage with the material.

The question is no longer whether Brutalist buildings are aesthetically pleasing. The question is whether we are willing to value architecture that puts people before profit, that expresses the raw truth, and that still has something powerful to offer in an increasingly superficial environment.

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"YOU'RE NOT ALONE": RUNE KIER NIELSEN ON SPEAKING UP IN THE FIGHT FOR OUR PLANET

Morgan Dinh

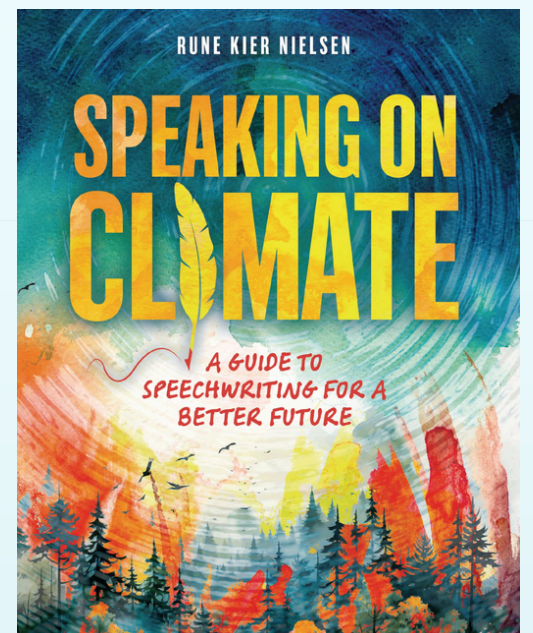*"Take them by the hand and lead them to the action you want them to take."*

It's a sentence that feels almost too soft to change the world, and maybe that's exactly why it works. In a world deeply divided by ideology, politics, and beliefs, it asks us to do something far harder than shouting or arguing: listening. Connecting. Meeting people where they are.

Not to win. Not to prove a point. But to stand together, because the world we're arguing over is already burning.

These words weren't mine. They were Rune Kier Nielsen's, spoken near the end of our interview—from someone who's spent years driving change in the climate crisis the only way it works: side by side.

Speaking on Climate

Rune Kier Nielsen is a cultural anthropologist, award-winning political speechwriter, and a force in the climate advocacy world. He's worked with government ministers in Denmark, was the Public Advocacy Lead on Climate Action at the UNEP, and authored Speaking on Climate —a powerful book that serves to guide anyone who wants to advocate for change in our world.

When I asked Rune what inspired the book, he took me back to his early fieldwork in Brazil where he worked with the Brazilian Black movement, a grassroots campaign fiercely dedicated to fighting for racial equality for Afro-Brazilians. That experience taught him something foundational: people don't move for data; they move for stories. Real lives. Real voices. Personal stories that grip you by the heart and refuse to let go.

With this, Rune left Brazil with one key takeaway: storytelling can shape identity and ignite action. He brought this knowledge with him into his work as a speechwriter for the Danish government, where he wrote not about racism or diversity, but about the climate, environment, and energy. But it wasn't long before he noticed a gap: people in power had entire teams helping them speak up, while young people—those with some of the most urgent and heartfelt things to say—were often left without advice or a script.

As Rune put it, "People in power, often men, often of a certain age, have all the tools available to help them, and young people often do not. But it is often from young people that we see the direction of where we need to go as a community."

Upon realizing this, he decided to help. "I wanted to help young people use the same tools as people in power do," he said. Because in a world on fire, we need to listen to the future. We need the stories, the voices, and the energy of the next generation leading the way.

The Power of Emotions in a Climate Crisis

A major thread through our talk was this: we talk too much about climate change, and not enough about how it makes us feel.

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Rune explained how the phrase climate change itself has become numbingly abstract. "It doesn't sound urgent. It doesn't sound important," he pointed out. "We spend too much time debating the science behind it and not enough time actually talking about the feelings and actions we need to take."

He's right.

When he said this, I thought about how often I've been overwhelmed by statistics—rising sea levels, carbon emissions, charts that look like they're forever climbing. But throughout our conversation, Rune reminded me that "your emotions on a topic are your superpowers." Caring about the future, about the planet, and about the generations to come is what drives real change. "You know, the fear of what you love or the fear in your loved one's eyes—that is what motivates us," he told me. "It doesn't have to be a graph."

When I asked Rune what if there was a specific moment that made him care about climate change, he didn't cite a statistic. He told me about his daughter—about her love for penguins, and about the moment he realized they might not survive her lifetime. It went like this: in 2013, his daughter fell in love with penguins. Around that same time, he read an article saying emperor penguins were heading toward extinction due to rapidly melting sea ice. "The chicks aren't old enough to swim when the ice breaks," he explained, "so they just roll into the freezing ocean and freeze to death." For Rune, that moment didn't teach him about climate change. It made him feel it.

Youth Voices: Uncompromising and Necessary

This tied in with our discussion on youth voices and how they impact the future of the planet. When I asked Rune if there was a quality in youth voices that made them uniquely powerful, his response was immediate:

"Young people have tremendous power. They have the power to see the world as it should be, not just as it is."

He reveals that youth perspectives are more direct, more emotional, and often more truthful. And most importantly, political leaders want to be pushed by youth. He's seen firsthand in his experience working with government officials, ministers, mayors, and UN environment program leaders that they want to represent youth voices, because they know these voices matter. They want young people to speak up. They want to include their perspectives at the negotiation table. Because when young people speak up, we create momentum that can't be ignored.

Although the power of youth voices cannot be understated, even by those in power, Rune shared a hard truth.

"Two-thirds of young people are scared about climate change," he told me, "but never talk about it. That scared me a little, no—a lot."

Rune's honesty was unsettling because it forced me to confront the idea that unspoken fear doesn't just linger; it isolates us. It stalls change. Fear is something we typically try to bury, something we're told to overcome, but this kind of fear, the kind that plagues a generation with a sense of helplessness, is a fear we can't afford to ignore. When young people stay silent about the climate, it's not indifference. It's the damaging belief that no one will listen, no matter how loud they try to be. But Rune's honesty also reminded me that real change can only begin when we open up, when we share what scares us, and let those conversations build connection. And from that connection, a movement.

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Rising Climate Tensions

Although youth advocacy is powerful, so are the forces working against climate progress—hesitation, apathy, and the strategic retreat of institutions once committed to change. On the topic of climate deniers, Rune didn't dance around it.

"Some people, you just can't reach," he said. "But what you can do is convince them that you're human."

His approach, as always, starts with connection. In a workshop at a Danish agricultural school—where climate skepticism ran deep—he didn't speak of carbon budgets or global pacts. Instead, he reframed the conversation, asking: How do we protect the rain that feeds our crops? The ecosystems we depend on? By connecting people through shared feelings and concerns, Rune draws them into the climate movement, united by a care for the future.

But human connection alone isn't enough when institutional backpedaling begins. With the recent pushback on ESG efforts, particularly from corporate and political actors, Rune put it simply, "If companies are simply cutting ESG work just because it's not being demanded politically anymore... then they didn't mean it." His words cut to the core of the issue: genuine climate leadership cannot be performative. It must be rooted in principle. If it collapses the moment pressure disappears, it was never true commitment.

When I asked Rune how we can respond to these ESG pushbacks, he outlined a dual approach to resisting this regression. First, he called on youth and activists to "show up and speak out"—not just in the streets, but in any open shareholder meetings, boardrooms, and corporate forums. "Make your voice heard, be there." Rune urged.

Secondly, Rune sees another opening for the next generation to step forward. He urged young people to wield their economic influence as future employees.

"Whenever you are in a job interview... ask them, where are you on ESG?"

It's a strategic reframing of climate advocacy, treating sustainability not as an optional virtue but as a non-negotiable condition for employment.

This moment, Rune suggests, is a litmus test. Companies now face a choice: retreat or recommit. According to Rune, their response will reveal whether they are on the right side of history or the wrong one.

Hope for the Future

Despite the intensifying climate trends and rising tensions surrounding the crisis, Rune remains optimistic about the future. "A lot of projects could create a lot of jobs to do a lot of good... there's tons of roles young people could fill." he said, citing Kenyan environmentalist Richard Munang's call for youth to build their own green economy, creating jobs with sustainability at their core. From constructing dams and planting mangroves to expanding solar and wind infrastructure, managing projects, fundraising, or working in communications, the opportunities are vast. There's a place for everyone in shaping a greener future.

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And Rune isn't just imagining what's possible; he's already helped make it real. Through his work on the UN's ACT NOW campaign, he helped spark over 25 million climate actions around the world—a reminder that even small, individual choices can add up to something monumental when people act together.

"There are a lot of things that give me hope," he continued. "One thing is the switch in energy that we are seeing—that so much wind power and solar is coming out because it's cheaper than fossil fuels. That's extremely important." His optimism is reinforced by the growing global consensus: citing the UN's People's Climate Vote, he emphasized that "80% of the world's population are concerned about the climate and want more climate action." And while misinformation remains, Rune finds comfort in a shifting tide.

"Until recently, we were moving in a direction where climate denial was almost non-existent. It was a very small minority that actually denies climate change."

And honestly, I share that hope. I do believe we're moving toward something better—slowly, unevenly, maybe—but still forward. I don't expect a clean arc. I expect resistance, burnout, backpedaling. But I also expect ingenuity. I expect young people to turn their frustration into innovation. I expect them to refuse to inherit a broken world without trying to change it first. When I think about the future, I think about how much isn't decided yet. That's what gives me hope. Not certainty, but possibility. And possibility is powerful. It means there's still time to shift course, still room for bold ideas, still space for all of us to take ownership of the world we'll grow old in.

My Takeaway: You're Not Alone

My final question to Rune was, "If there's one thing you hope that young listeners can remember from our conversation, what would it be?"

He left me with a simple message:

"You're not alone in being concerned about the climate. Speak up and allow others to tell you how they feel about it."

Those words stuck.

His message was clear: if we're going to change the world, we need to bring people with us. The climate crisis is waiting for more momentum. More connection. More unity.

It's waiting for us.

So, if you're reading this and you care about the climate, but you don't know where to start, start with this: tell someone how you feel. Take their hand. And go do something. Together.

CALLOUT CULTURE: THE FINE LINE BETWEEN JUSTICE AND CHARACTER ASSASSINATION

Teu-Khanh Phuong

What role does "pain" play in social progress? Does it assist people in their development and personal growth, or does it trample human dignity in hatred?

It's important to understand how pain affects different parties involved when it comes to callout culture. Callout culture refers to the practice of publicly shaming and denouncing someone for their wrongdoings, often online, particularly on different social media platforms. This culture involves the act of spreading awareness on actions or statements that may be considered immoral or inappropriate, with the aim to hold a person accountable for their actions. In this specific case, both emotional and psychological pain contribute to the nature of callout culture since naming and shaming are used as tools to potentially defame an individual. In this article, we will explore the origin of callout culture, along with the positive and negative aspects of this phenomenon in our lives.

1. The Origin of Callout Culture

Originally, calling out someone was used to bring awareness to issues, such as racism, sexism, or homophobia when traditional systems (courts or the government) failed to take immediate action. People often perceive these callouts as virtual courts, where they discuss crimes and wrongdoings of individuals, ultimately fostering change and social reforms.

This culture began gaining prominence in the early 2010s when platforms such as Tumblr and Twitter were used to address social issues. It first emerged from social movements, particularly among marginalized groups who felt like they didn't have a voice. Specifically, they were mostly used by black women to respond to abusive language or inappropriate behavior they encounter daily.

2. Positive Aspects of Callout Culture

Throughout history, callouts have been used effectively to challenge norms and drive social change and improvement. Social justice movements, including the MeToo Movement and Black Lives Matter, extensively use this method to get their message across, as well as gain support from the public.

Firstly, callout culture gives marginalized communities the incentive to seek accountability when the justice system fails. The MeToo Movement accurately exemplifies the above claim as it acts as a platform where men and women alike can hold their abusers accountable. Historically, it has been known that people coming from a poor background who are less powerful, are not given enough chances to speak up and contribute their opinions for a better society. However, with social media, callout culture gives them the opportunity to address the inequality surrounding their lives.

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Furthermore, this helps create transparency when issues are brought to light on a platform that is easily accessed by millions of people worldwide. Greta Thunberg, one of the youngest environmental activists, uses her voice and platform in order to help people learn from past mistakes and call out activities that are devastating to ecological balance. Her movements, online and offline, are completely nonviolent and involve methods such as peaceful protests among students to bring awareness to climate change and organizing events and speeches to call for changes. A notable example can be seen in Greta Thunberg's speech at the UN Climate Action Summit. This in turn has caused great attention and sympathy within the online community, helping them understand the destructive behaviors that we as human beings are carrying out.

3. How Did Callout Culture Shape its Way to Toxicity?

Over time, the term "callout culture" has sparked controversy, as critics have pointed out how it's been used to publicly shame an individual for their past instead of promoting real change and growth. Callout culture has definitely defined online conversations and how we view certain social issues.

From a powerful tool for activism and accountability, this has over time turned into a reckless tool for character assassination.

Public shaming has been nothing new. Since social media is a free platform for freedom of expression and speech, anyone has the right to voice their opinion. However, this comes at a cost. Moreover, in the age of social media, these punishments and attacks come mainly in verbal form instead of physical. What makes callout culture so toxic is not its frequency, but rather its nature and how it is being carried out. On platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, calling someone out is not simply an interaction between two individuals; it's a public activity where everyone can input their beliefs and political views towards the wrongdoers.

4. From Callout Culture to Cancel Culture

According to FEE.org, "Cancel culture is a subset and outgrowth of call-out culture." Cancel culture aims at boycotting, withdrawing support, and publicly criticizing groups of people in question. The end goal of cancel culture is to destroy the reputation or career of the people involved in scandals and past controversial actions. From a psychological perspective, both callout culture and cancel culture pose significant harm to the victims. Some individuals face extreme consequences, from death threats to bullying and potential character assassination, when their reputation is intentionally being destroyed by public discourse. This in turn can lead to mental health conditions and feelings of isolation from all of the cyberbullying and boycotting online.

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One of the most critical concerns of cancel culture is a significant shift from mutual understanding and forgiveness.
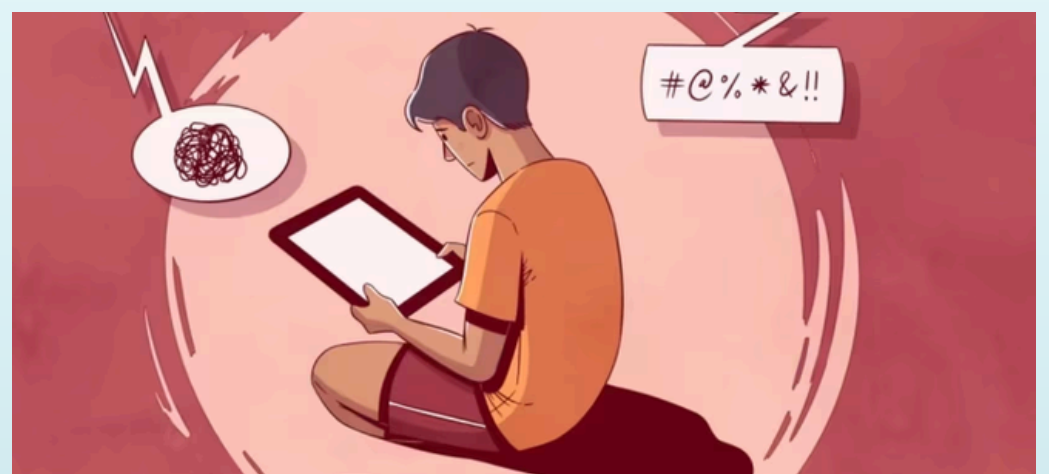
The initial aim of calling out a person is to reach an understanding and assist the wrongdoers in fixing their past mistakes. However, with the rise of verbal abuse and the trend of boycotting, this creates an environment of toxicity and bullying where people are hesitant to engage in meaningful conversations for fear of being canceled. This fear has resulted in online spaces where only the most noticeable opinions are heard, potentially leaving out minority voices. Moreover, cancel culture is believed to be counterproductive and doesn't drive social change. This means when individuals are easily criticized and judged for their actions, it leaves little room for improvement and personal growth. For instance, a celebrity can face severe backlash in their career once they have been ostracized for their views. Instead of being given a chance to stand up and simply "say sorry," they are being trampled with hatred from the public with accusations of their past mistakes.

5. Conclusion

Although the use of callout culture in social justice circles came about with good intentions, it has been abused and slowly turned into something toxic and damaging. It is up to us, future leaders, to change social media and make it a platform of forgiveness where open-minded people shape the world.

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TO BE OR NOT TO BE: HOW HUMANS DEFINE THE TRUTH

Truong Bao Ngoc

The ancient Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi once posed a thought-provoking question that puzzled philosophers and scientists: "If I dream that I am a butterfly, how do I know I'm not a butterfly now dreaming that I am a man?" This timeless thought experiment challenges our very perception of reality and raises a profound question: how can we ever be confident that we're truly awake? If experiences within dreams can feel just as vivid, emotional, and real as those in waking life, what distinguishes one from the other? This paradox not only blurs the boundary between illusion and truth but also calls into doubt the foundations upon which we build our understanding of the world.

In attempting to answer the question of whether or not we're truly awake, many philosophers have come up with several solutions. Bizarre things happen in dreams; you can conjure an all-you-can-eat buffet out of thin air, get stuck in a never-ending hall leading to a room you've seen before, and look through the window to realize everything suddenly looks like Paris on the other side of the planet. However, these strange things don't seem strange while we're dreaming, so how do we know if we're not in a dream that will seem very strange after we wake up?

The French 17th-century philosopher René Descartes pointed out that in our memories, dreams are disconnected. Most of the events in our dreams don't fit in with the chain of events that happen when we're awake. You can't be bungee jumping in Kansas in the middle of April, because you didn't leave home, and you have rock-solid evidence that you didn't do so. One of Descartes' contemporaries, the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, had said otherwise, pointing out: what if Descartes was performing his test in a dream? Even if you get a neuroscientist to measure your brain waves and tell you whether or not you're awake, that doesn't prove that the test didn't happen in a dream either.

The sleeping paradox is only one of the few ideas that challenge the definition of knowledge in the human mind. At the end of the day, what philosophers want to know isn't whether or not we can prove that we're awake, but what justifies our beliefs in things that are seemingly definite truths. We all have reasons to believe in things, not just because they "seem right". Philosopher David Hume once asserted that our expectations are irrational, as irrationality is what we do best and goes to the heart of how we think. "The sun has risen every morning for millions of years, so there's no reason to assume it won't do the same again tomorrow". Hume then points out that we have no more reason to be certain that the sun will rise than we have to say it won't. We believe the sun will rise tomorrow because it always has, and our minds are trained to expect patterns to continue—this is a habit of thought formed by repetition. On the other hand, there's no guarantee that the future will mirror the past, so there's also reason to believe it might not rise. In that sense, neither belief holds more rational weight than the other—they're both built on assumptions, just from different angles. He stated that it's only our belief that the sun will rise, and the same applies to many other things, including all of our scientific theories.
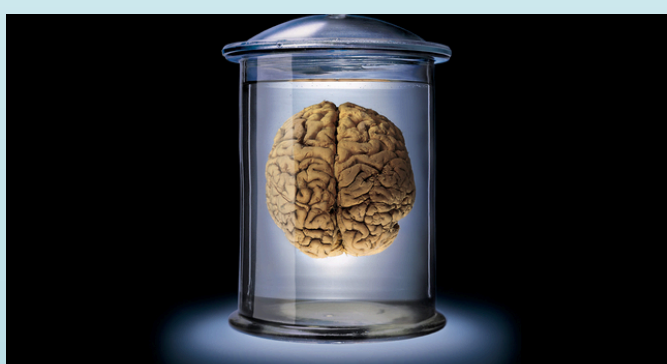
TO BE OR NOT TO BE: HOW HUMANS DEFINE THE TRUTH

Truong Bao Ngoc

Knowing how to separate truth from lie, or simply, knowledge, cannot be defined. Descartes once said, "I think, therefore I am" (originally "Cogito, ergo sum") to reason for whether or not he knows he exists. Descartes brought up the question of whether his senses are all deceiving him and everything is fake, however, he realized that even when he is doubting everything, he is still "thinking", and so the ability to "reason and think" proves that he must be an entity that can "think". That is why, even if anything about us and our external world cannot be proven, we can at least prove that we exist through our reasoning. He argues that knowledge should come from reason and not the senses, and as seen before, he argued against the sleeping paradox. Plato famously defined the idea that knowledge is "justified true belief" and that true knowledge comes from understanding eternal forms, not just sensory experience. Simply, to believe in idea A, Plato states that you have to believe it, it must be true, and you must have justification for believing it. A Gettier Case famously challenged this idea of Plato, by showing a major flaw in Plato's theory, that someone could believe in idea A, and idea A must be true, and you could justify idea A with your own experience. But take an example: Andy sees Ben in the library, he believes so, the fact is also true, and he's justified because he saw Ben. But unknown to Andy, the person he saw at that time wasn't Ben in the library, but someone who looked exactly like Ben. The knowledge is still considered true, but it was "true" by coincidence.

Philosophers and scientists haven't yet proven what justifies most of our beliefs about what is true, and so they will continue to prove it in the future. Knowledge may exist in many forms, and every eye will look upon it differently. From Zhuangzi's dream paradox to Gettier's modern challenge, every theory uncovers just how fragile and uncertain our beliefs might be. While we strive to justify what we think we know, the deeper we dive, the more we realize how much is built on assumptions, coincidence, or flawed reasoning. Sometimes, the biggest challenge isn't to prove why we shouldn't believe something, but simply proving the opposite that seems completely obvious to us all. Perhaps the real strength of human understanding lies not in claiming certainty, but in our willingness to question, challenge, and continuously re-examine what we hold to be true.

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CRUELTY FROM A KIND HEART: HOW MACHIAVELLI SHAPED REALPOLITIK

Ken-Nhat Hoang

The controversial 15th century statesman and philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) revolutionized realpolitik with his "infamous" work titled The Prince.

Immersed in the field of politics and having experienced what the game really is—deceptions, betrayals, and schemes—having undergone chaotic events of conflict and instability in his time, Niccolò Machiavelli laid the groundwork for modern politics by realistically examining the world, not how should it be idealistically. Suspected of conspiracy, Machiavelli was tortured and sent to exile in 1513, where his famous works The Prince and Discourses on Livy were written and published after his death.

The Prince & Machiavellian Philosophy

Despite admiring the Roman Republic, his work Discourses on Livy discusses how republics collapse due to their idealistic trust in human nature. Humans are self-interested, greedy, and as time passes, civic virtue cracks, and corruption creeps in, killing the system. His work The Prince provides rulers a guide on how to maintain power and dominate, strongly separating ethics and politics.

Machiavelli believed that it is better to be feared than loved if one cannot be both, because love is unconditional and therefore unsustainable as a form of support considering the unpredictability of relationships (people could betray or hate at any time), whereas fear coerces people to act correctly, keeping order. However, fear is different from hatred, which grows resentment, fueling instability rather than maintaining peace. It is thereby important for a ruler to be feared while avoiding hatred from unnecessary cruelty or controversial actions. For instance, North Korea's oppression of its people, for no purpose other than political domination and selfish gains for leaders, attracted international hatred, isolating it diplomatically.

"... but putting all else aside we must adopt whatever course will save the nation's existence and liberty."

How can one avoid hatred, solve instability, and strengthen his nation? Machiavelli believed that "the ends justify all means"—all methods essential for the good of the state should be considered. Even cruel, unethical actions going against mercy, religion, humanity… are necessary if doing so is better than doing nothing and if other methods don't work.

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This idea is comparable to ancient Greek morality of prioritizing the state over the individual. It relates to the concept of consequentialism, where an action's morality is based on its impacts, such as morally lying to save someone or deceiving to save the state. Nevertheless, such forms of cruelty and violence must be carried out efficiently and swiftly "in a single stroke" while retaining the ruler's reputation. Machiavelli praised Cesare Borgia, who used bribery and assassinations, appointed a cruel governor to pacify a region and once peace was restored, publicly executed that governor for Borgia to appear virtuous, winning people's hearts.

By strategically using cruelty and deception, Borgia successfully brought stability to a violent region, much better than "kindness" which would have prolonged suffering.
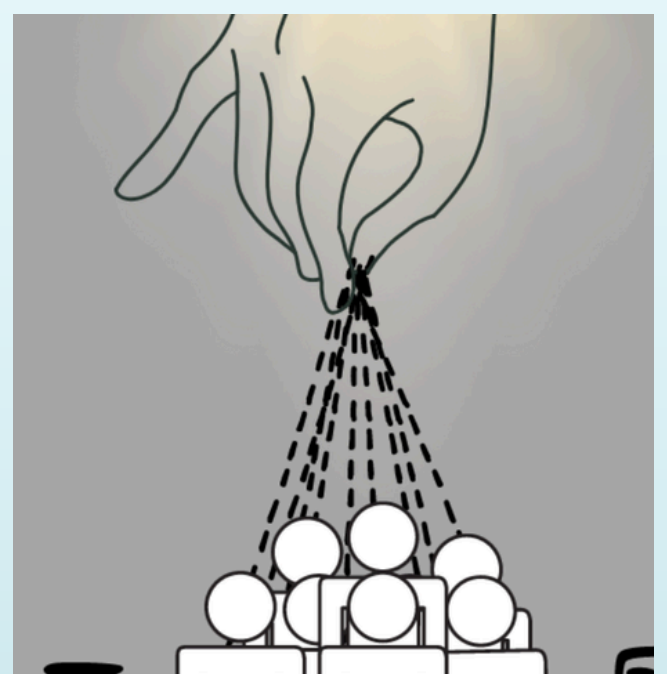

This rule seems to apply to even modern nations and corporations, using hard force and manipulation to selfishly grow national interests, or scandals, these schemes quickly outcompete competitors and clasp profits.

A good ruler must possess certain characteristics like flexibility. Machiavelli called them "Virtù". Rulers with Virtù, even if unable to act morally, are still able to act effectively for the greater good, surviving changes and bad luck. "Fortuna" refers to fortune, which can be shaped or overcome by Virtù according to Machiavelli.

The Debate

Unsurprisingly, Machiavelli's seemingly immoral ideas have sparked intensive debate.

"Maintaining order" is an authoritarian excuse for "fear" and oppression. Being feared is no better than being loved because fear could also be voluntary, and a dangerous trigger for rebellion. A government exists to serve its citizens, i.e. to be loved, not to be feared by strictly regulating its people, which easily turns into hatred when their freedom is suppressed. Research shows that "fear" and dictatorship decrease society's creativity, creating a "toxic work environment" where people are hesitant to share their ideas or go against the norms, along with serious mental health impacts such as stress, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, etc.

Similarly, striving to achieve the ends by all means is questionable when it comes to democratic principles. If revealed, governments' actions violating morality by deceiving and manipulating would hardly earn democratic support. Short-term controversial actions may introduce unexpected challenges or reduce long-term trust in the government.

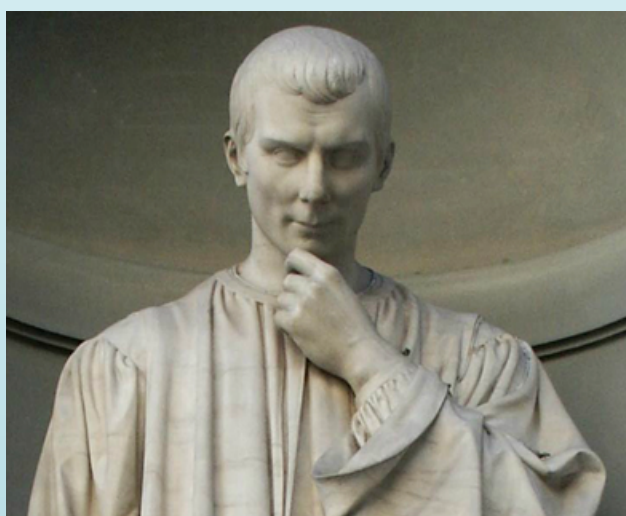# CRUELTY FROM A KIND HEART: HOW MACHIAVELLI SHAPED REALPOLITIK

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The US 2003 invasion of Iraq, aiming to remove its (nonexistent) weapons of mass destruction, worsened instability, a terrible end resulting from terrible means. The brutal French Revolution's Reign of Terror paved the way for Napoleon's dictatorship. Violent actions are never guaranteed to achieve the ruler's desired outcome and may easily backfire. Hence, the huge risks of such gambles must be carefully considered, and to avoid dire consequences, we must not justify violence in the first place.

By strategically using cruelty and deception, Borgia successfully brought stability to a violent region, much better than "kindness" which would have prolonged suffering.

Lastly, Machiavelli's concept of Fortuna contrasts with Aristotle's belief that fortune is an uncontrollable, influential force. He believed that fortune influenced virtues, as anyone, however virtuous, is never free from misfortune and on its occasion would struggle to achieve Eudaimonia (the state of happiness and prosperity, which Aristotle believed to be the best possible condition for human beings). Although Cesare Borgia ruled brilliantly, the death of the pope (his father) caused him to lose support and power. Machiavelli's own death by torture and exile was bad luck, but did not prove that he lacked Virtù. "Decameron" by Boccaccio provided a more neutral perspective, that fortune and intelligence are both among the three major forces shaping the world.

Would cruelty work, or was Machiavelli's purpose actually to expose the dark side of politics because he was writing his work under poor conditions and oppression from the system? At the end of the day, the realist Italian philosopher, grasping the true nature of politics, dared to oppose moral norms, leaving behind a major legacy in politics.

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UNDERWATER HABITATS:
THE NEW FRONTIER

Anh La

English writer Samuel Johnson once said,

"It is common to overlook what is near by keeping the eye fixed on something remote."

Although humans have travelled more than 300 times to space, the ocean, which covers 71 percent of Earth, remains largely unexplored. Undoubtedly, oceans are the heart of our planet, producing half of the world's oxygen and food for people around the world. Not to mention, oceans also sustain the lives of trillions of organisms.

Unfortunately, the ocean is currently at risk as a result of climate change and destructive human activities such as oil spills, pollution, and overfishing. Climate change causes the seas to warm up, become more acidic, and contain less oxygen. To address these concerns, enhanced ocean research is critical. In an effort to advance ocean exploration, the UK-based ocean technology company DEEP is building an underwater habitat called the Sentinel system. This device will allow scientists to stay underwater for up to a month. While the final project will be completed in 2027, a smaller version called the Vanguard will be released in 2025. This prototype will enable three people to stay underwater for up to a week.

The Environmental Issue

Corals constitute an essential part of the marine ecosystems. While they occupy less than one percent of the ocean floor, coral reefs are home to more than 25 percent of all marine species. However, in recent years, coral bleaching has been posing a major threat to many coral reefs around the world. The cause of this problem is none other than global warming as increasing global temperatures are rapidly warming up the ocean. In fact, NASA reported that 90 percent of global warming is occurring in the ocean alone, disrupting the habitat of many species, especially corals.

Corals naturally possess bright and vibrant colors thanks to the microscopic algae living inside them called zooxanthellae. They share a mutually beneficial relationship where they help each other survive. However, as the surrounding water gets increasingly warmer, the coral stresses and expels the algae, causing it to lose its color and turn completely white. While bleaching does not directly kill the coral, it increases their chances of mortality by weakening them. Notably, in 2005, the U.S. lost half of its territorial coral reefs in the Caribbean due to bleaching.

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Recognizing the severity of this issue, scientists have rushed to conduct more research on the ocean to find solutions. However, one challenge to this research is decompression sickness among scientists. Because there is higher pressure underwater than on land, a scuba diver takes in extra nitrogen while diving underwater, which then travels from their lungs to their blood. When the diver resurfaces, the surrounding pressure decreases. If this transition takes place too quickly, the nitrogen will not have enough time to clear from their blood, and it will instead separate out of their blood to form bubbles in their tissues or blood, leading to joint and bone pain. Hence, an underwater habitat might be the optimal solution as scientists could spend more time underwater to conduct research without having to swim back to the surface each time, thereby limiting the risk of decompression sickness.

Operation and Implementation

Components of the Sentinel system are 3D printed with the outer layer made from steel and reinforced with a nickel-based superalloy called Inconel. It can withstand extreme conditions and has been used to make Space Shuttle and SpaceX rockets. A strong outer layer is crucial in ensuring that the structure can endure high underwater pressure and won't implode. In addition, the accommodation is divided into living spaces and is equipped with furniture as seen in a typical house, including individual suites with showers and toilets, workplaces, a shared dining area, and social and meeting rooms. The entire structure is powered using renewable energy sources such as wind turbines or solar panels situated on land. Initially, scientists could enter the habitat by submarine or through a moon pool opening at the bottom. This opening is a hole that leads out into the ocean. During their stay, scientists could conduct research on the seabed and study the nearby coral in order to find solutions to coral bleaching.

Strengths and Limitations

Some advantages of the Sentinel system are reusability and redeployability. The system can be easily deployed, picked up, and redeployed to a different location.

With a lifespan of up to 20 years, its reusability makes it environmentally friendly by reducing waste. Another advantage of the Sentinel system is the fact that it's "pressure adapted." It can operate at either ambient pressure by matching the surrounding water or one atmosphere by being at the average sea level pressure. Without this pressure adaptive feature, implosion could occur if the structure collapses inward due to a higher external pressure than internal pressure.
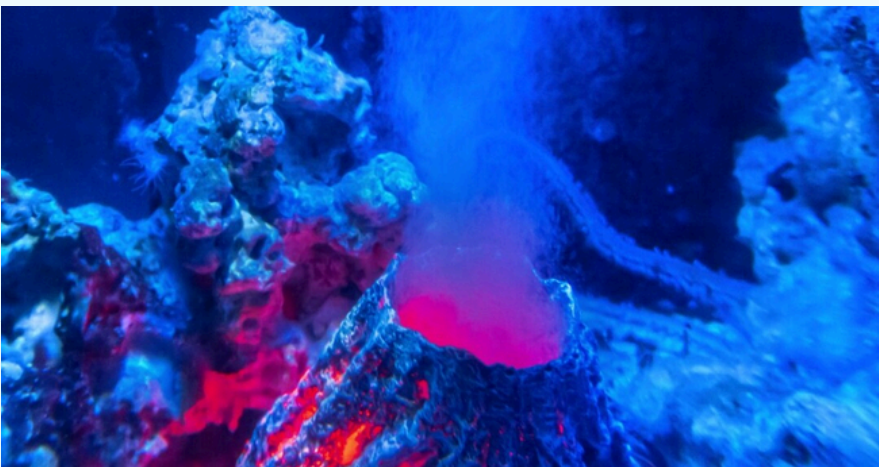
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On the other hand, there are also many drawbacks that come with the Sentinel system, one of which is its complex maintenance process. Since the system is located at a depth of 200 meters, it would be difficult for people to come and inspect its condition frequently as well as clean the inside and repair any broken parts. Cost is another significant limitation to the creation of an underwater habitat. As evidenced through the funding cut of the first underwater habitat Aquarius Reef Base in 2012, maintaining an underwater habitat can be a costly endeavor even for the U.S. government. This issue raises questions regarding the sustainability of the Sentinel system as well as its widespread implementation in the long run.

Moreover, staying in an underwater habitat may become life-threatening when natural disasters, such as tsunamis or volcanic eruptions, take place.

It would take too long to swim back to the surface, and it would be difficult for help to arrive immediately. Therefore, two possible improvements to the current design would be the installation of a tracker for upcoming natural disasters and an emergency button. Even an easily accessible escape route in case of emergency could provide protection against such dangers. Finally, an underwater habitat can be potentially disruptive to the natural habitat of many marine species. For example, there may be collisions between the sea creatures and the structure, or the structure may block the animals' free movement.

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THE UNFINISHED GENIUS: HOW RAMANUJAN'S LOST NOTEBOOK CONTINUES TO CHALLENGE MODERN MATHEMATICS

Minh Le Nguyen Tuyet

Among the silent halls in mathematical history, Srinivasa Ramanujan's Lost Notebook emerged as a discovery that generated exceptional curiosity. The notebook Ramanujan left behind decades after his passing demonstrates both unfinished and unpresentable work because it presents raw insights through perplexing formulae and elusive identities that hint at a broader mathematical reality. This finding gains substantial value from its historical significance and constant ability to perplex and push forward leading mathematicians in the twenty-first century. The Lost Notebook operates as a vibrant document because it presents incomplete ideas of intellectual brilliance and deep intuition that actively influence and test contemporary mathematical research.

During the early 20th century, Ramanujan, who taught mathematics, produced revolutionary discoveries in number theory along with infinite series and modular functions as an Indian mathematician. The method he used contradicted the established methods that mathematicians had followed at the time. Throughout his time at Cambridge University, G.H. Hardy Ramanujan was able to develop formal versions of his mathematical concepts, but his many undocumented or unproven ideas remained in a state of discovery. Mathematician George Andrews discovered The Lost Notebook in 1976 at Trinity College, Cambridge, where it expanded dramatically the mathematical works Ramanujan had produced after his death. Approximately 600 mathematical formulas without proofs took up all 100 pages of the notebook, which expanded on existing theories and showcased new structural possibilities.

The main distinction of the Lost Notebook emerges from its content composition. The notebook differs from standard academic papers in its unstructured format, which displays mathematical ideas as immediate thoughts before human comprehension. The notebook contains multiple mathematical components, such as continued fractions and q-series, as well as modular forms and the unexplained mock theta functions developed by Ramanujan. Nowadays, mathematicians focus their attention on the study of mock theta functions. Research into harmonic Maass forms began in recent decades through Ken Ono and Kathrin Bringmann, but Ramanujan had already discovered this modern field through his work despite lacking modern mathematical tools or language.

The notebook contains some of its most astonishing implications through its ability to predict future discoveries. Ramanujan predicted mathematical theories that people would not develop until almost 100 years after his time. The mock theta functions proposed by Ramanujan are now recognized as holomorphic components of non-holomorphic modular forms that relate to the string theory black hole entropy and the monstrous moonshine conjecture. The mathematical connection between deep number theory and theoretical physics indicates that Ramanujan predicted concepts that proved useful for physics research that scientists are exploring today.
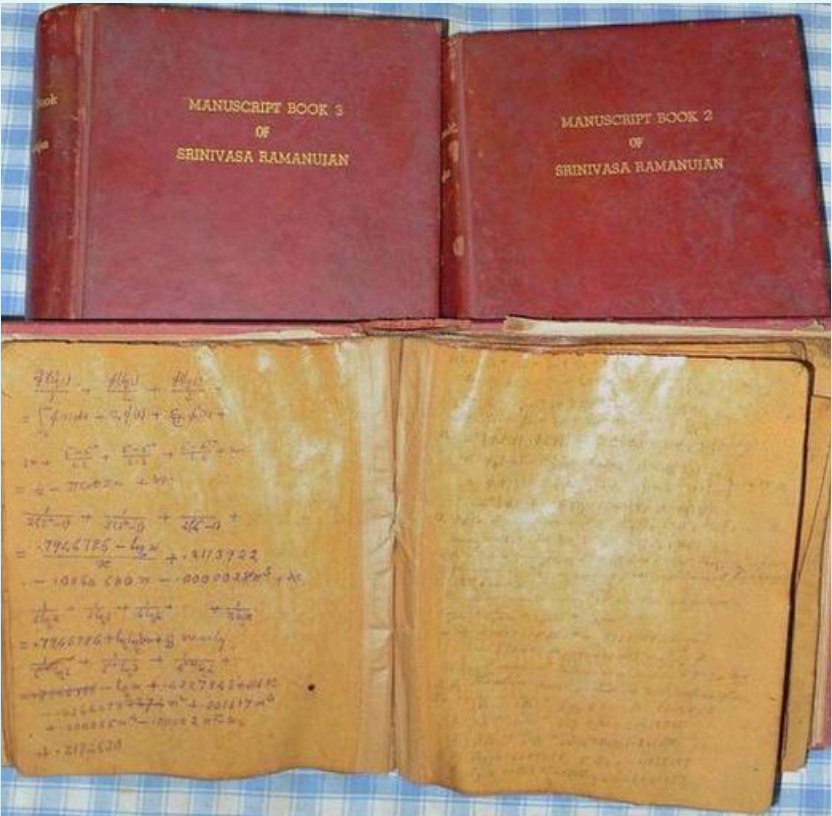
Still, the greatest mystery of The Lost Notebook exists beyond its disclosed content.

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The mathematical insights contained in the notebook show philosophical impacts that explore the foundational principles of mathematical ways of thinking. Ramanujan frequently stated that divine inspiration from the Hindu goddess Namagiri provided his insights into mathematical concepts. Ramanujan employed an approach that seemed mystical by modern standards, yet his intuition operated in parallel with mathematical structures that could not be proven. Owing to its dual nature, The Lost Notebook allows mathematicians to explore mathematical insights that extend from concrete to abstract realms.

Presently, studies have verified numerous Ramanujan's theoretical statements and developed their findings into new mathematical concepts. Through his partition function research, he developed a method for expressing integers through other integer sums, which now serves combinatorial statistical mechanics and computer science applications. Relevant identities from the Lost Notebook have enabled researchers to develop new concepts about modular forms, L-functions, and the theory of elliptic curves (on a graph). The mathematical discoveries of Ramanujan function as live research fields that continue to advance, while benefiting from his unfinished work.

People are drawn to view the Lost Notebook as the last testament of an abandoned intellectual genius, yet such romantic sentiments can hide its essential meaning. The Lost Notebook functions as an active invitation that enables present inquiries to interact with past brilliance. The Lost Notebook presents both a decoding challenge to the mathematical community and the call to rethink mathematical innovation itself. Human discovery follows a single straight path that relies solely on logical reasoning. Ramanujan's evidence suggests that mathematical discovery might result from spiritual clarity alongside intuition, which exceeds traditional epistemological methods.

Ramanujan's Lost Notebook serves as an active intellectual puzzle, above its role as a mathematical resource. The notebook contains mathematical insights that the genius mind is viewed as a divine revelation rather than an academic discipline. Modern tools gradually reveal the contents of notebooks, but this scientific progress maintains its position as a wondrous and humbling discovery. Every unexplained pattern and unproven identity in the book teaches us that some important mathematical truths evade logical understanding but instead need a new, brilliant mind to reveal them.

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CLEAN BORDERS, DIRTY DEALS: HOW POLLUTION CROSSES BORDERS WHILE PROFITS STAY HOME

Trinh Nguyen

In the morning in Stockholm, Sweden, people ride their bikes peacefully beneath an azure sky and are surrounded by fresh air and a clean environment. Meanwhile, in an industrial zone in Dhaka, Bangladesh, a thick blanket of haze covers the sky. Not clouds, but polluted air and smoke rising from chemical factories.

They're two pieces of the same world, but one enjoys a clean and green environment while the other bears the burden of pollution to serve the former.

1. What are Industrial exports?

For the past few centuries, many wealthy nations have adopted a strategy of outsourcing pollution-intensive industries to developing countries. This involves relocating factories involved in metallurgy, chemical production, and fossil fuel processing—industries that consume vast amounts of energy and significantly harm the environment—to countries with more lenient environmental regulations. A study by Yale in 2021 revealed that more than 70% of industrial waste related to products in some advanced economic countries, such as Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States, originates from developing countries' factories.

2. Profit is real, but what about the cost?

In developing countries, economic projects from wealthy nations are extremely important, as they provide employment and a large amount of income. Nonetheless, the expense incurred is far from negligible.

In China, a study by Nature (2022) estimated that there are roughly 1.24 million deaths annually related to air pollution from industrial factories. In Gujarat, India, regions near oil refineries have recorded air pollution levels up to 12 times higher than the WHO's safe limit.

In Vietnam, the Formosa event in 2016 serves as a case study that reveals the downside of industrial projects from foreign countries. Just days after the wastewater discharge incident from the Formosa steel plant in Ha Tinh, thousands of dead fish washed up along the central coast, eradicating the livelihoods of thousands of fishermen. Villagers were poisoned, the beach was no longer safe for tourism, and aquaculture was completely swept away. Moreover, a lingering fear of long-term contamination continues to haunt the villagers to this day.

In contrast, financial reports from Formosa's parent company in Taiwan continue to show profit, and the industrial zone that was affected by the incident is now preparing for expansion.

Once again, the issue of "development at any cost" should be raised afresh, where the price is being paid by the environment, public health, and the quiet sacrifices of local communities.

CLEAN BORDERS, DIRTY DEALS: HOW POLLUTION CROSSES BORDERS WHILE PROFITS STAY HOME

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3. Will there be solutions?

To prevent unfair practices of "pollution outsourcing," wealthy countries need to do more than just show goodwill. One of the practical solutions is to include strict environmental regulations in trade agreements, resembling how the EU requires ecological standards in many of its transactions. Wealthy nations can also invest in renewable energy projects in developing countries. For instance, Japan has supported solar energy initiatives in Southeast Asia.

Another approach is to ban the import of outdated, polluted technologies or materials that can significantly harm the environment. For example, some developing countries are manufacturing electronic devices (such as TVs, computers, and low-cost phones) by using old technologies that involve lead, mercury, and cadmium. These chemicals are tremendously harmful to the environment and human health when leaking into soil and water.

The European Union (EU) has banned electronic devices that do not meet the standards of RoHS (Restriction of Hazardous Substances Directive), meaning products that contain toxic chemicals that are above the permitted level. This regulation forces foreign manufacturers to refurbish their production technologies if they want to export to the EU's market. These approaches not only mitigate global carbon emissions but also promote fair, environmentally friendly technologies and practices.

If all of these issues remain unaddressed, they will not only persist but also deepen the divide between the rich and the poor, intensify economic disparities between nations, and inflict lasting damage on exploited workers.

This cycle of injustice may be perpetuated for generations, evolving into a full-blown brain drain and further entrenching the suffering of the voiceless those who bear the brunt of globalization yet are rarely heard.

4. Conclusion: Environmental problems are not just issues in some other countries!

The Earth is finite. No nation can thrive in peace on a planet that is half-destroyed. While wealthy countries enjoy clear skies, they must also question themselves: are these skies truly clean, or is the pollution merely carried by the wind to the other side of the world?

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AMERICA FIRST 2.0: TARIFFS, TURMOIL, AND THE HIGH COST OF ECONOMIC ISOLATION

Phu Hoang

United States President Donald Trump brought back the tariffs on America's imports from Mexico and China, the EU, and even allied countries like Canada and Japan after being inaugurated in 2025. "America First 2.0" is what he called this program, aimed at resolving the trade crisis with America while simultaneously "Americanizing" economic dominance.

Under Trump, America's new policies implemented 60%+ tariffs across the board for all imports coming from China, 25% on Japanese and European automotive imports, and set a 10% universal tariff for all nations allied with America. As of March 2025, over $2.1 trillion worth of goods were impacted due to flagship engagements in his 2018-2019 trade wars.

The Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE) found that these tariffs might decrease the U.S. GDP by 3.5% over two years, nearly negating any gains. In Chad Bown's words,

"We're witnessing a full-blown retreat from global trade integration. The U.S. is retreating into an economic shell at a discomfort we haven't faced in over fifty years."

A Reuters/Ipsos poll suggests that the US is divided on this matter. The poll states that while 73% of respondents believe the tariffs make goods more expensive, 57% disagree with them. Even among die-hard Trump voters, opinions were mixed: 41% support the tariffs, yet 38% of others are concerned with rising inflation.

Tariffs are predicted to harm the entire American job market. The Brookings Institution attributes these changes to rural areas to Trump's election campaign. The estimated loss of about 675,000 jobs is primarily in these areas, and that's where the majority of Trump's campaign spending was targeted.

According to the WTO, the United States and China will fall into two opposing blocs and almost destroy global trade. Trade between China and the US has already plummeted 80% since 2010. Inward foreign direct investment to the US also fell by 22% in the first quarter of 2025, according to the US Department of Commerce.

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The tariffs also complicate relations within NATO and the Indo-Pacific. Japanese and South Korean automakers, who are some of the most severely impacted by imposed tariffs, have begun lobbying their respective governments to withdraw from military and trade agreements with the US as a form of protest.

Pushback has come from Democrats and some Republicans. California Governor Gavin Newsom has sued the administration for the tariffs, calling them "economically abusive and constitutionally questionable." The Chamber of Commerce has also slammed the tariffs, stating that they "threaten to derail the post-COVID [economic] recovery."

AMERICA FIRST 2.0: TARIFFS, TURMOIL, AND THE HIGH COST OF ECONOMIC ISOLATION

Phu Hoang

Responding, Republican Senator Mitt Romney of Utah expressed: "Protectionism didn't work in the 1930s, and it won't work now. We are repeating high-stakes history. It stands to reason."

Regardless, Trump's supporters are still fired up. "It's about time we stop being the world's doormat," rallygoer Mark Spencer said at a rally in Ohio. "I'd rather pay a little more and support American jobs."

The goal of President Trump's tariffs is to project power and roll back the loss of American economic superiority. Still, the picture that emerges from the data is that consumer prices are rising, GDP growth is slowing, more expensive in the long run, jobs are declining, and global backlash is just one of the other impacts.

Some industries might have gained economic advantages, but now the global consensus is that the U.S is losing out on opportunities to be more competitive in the world: isolated, and nearing recession only months into Trump's second term.
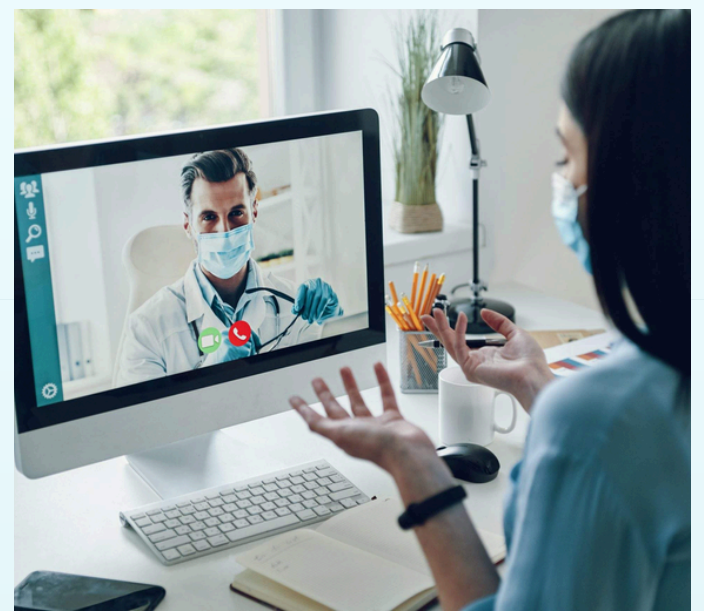
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THE BENEFITS OF INCREASING ACCESS TO TELEMEDICINE IN HEALTHCARE FOR RURAL AREAS

Moon Tran

Imagine a world where a patient in a remote village or area can consult with a specialist in a bustling city without ever leaving home; this is the promise of telemedicine, transforming healthcare access and bridging the gap between patients and providers. This raises an important question though: How has telemedicine changed the landscape of healthcare access? In this essay, I'm going to answer this by looking at how telemedicine increases access to healthcare in rural areas in a cost-effective way, improving mental health services for people worldwide.

First and foremost, telemedicine provides access to healthcare for rural and underserved populations by eliminating geographical barriers and providing important medical services that were previously out of reach. In rural areas, people often lack access to local medical facilities and specialists as the infrastructure is not developed; telemedicine allows them to connect with healthcare providers as one only needs a web camera and a secure patient portal that connects the doctor through a secured electronic medical record data baseline.

Nearly one in five individuals living in rural America resides more than half an hour away from the closest hospital (U.S Department of Health & Human Services, 2021).

Telemedicine improves efficiency in healthcare delivery because it reduces the amount of time the patient needs to wait for their appointment. Consultations via telemedicine can decrease waiting periods by as much as 90% (American Hospital Association, 2020). Additionally, telemedicine provides more care as it can have follow-up appointments directly online so that there's ongoing management of chronic conditions. Those who utilize telemedicine for follow-up care show a 25% higher rate of compliance with their prescribed treatment plans (Journal of Telemedicine and Telecare, 2020).

Secondly, telemedicine offers healthcare convenience and cost-effectiveness, making it an ideal solution for both patients and providers. One of its primary advantages is the accessibility it provides; patients can consult with their healthcare providers from the comfort of their homes, eliminating the time and expense associated with travel. According to McKinsey & Company (2021), patients can save approximately $100 per appointment by avoiding costs linked to transportation and time away from work. Additionally, telemedicine contributes to lower overall healthcare costs by decreasing the frequency of emergency room visits and hospital admissions. Research from Health Affairs (2020) indicates that the use of telehealth services can lead to a reduction in hospital readmissions by as much as 25%. Furthermore, telemedicine streamlines the process of prescription management, enabling patients to receive essential medications more efficiently. Approximately 60% of individuals report better adherence to their medication regimens due to the simplified process of prescription refills offered through telehealth services (Journal of Managed Care & Specialty Pharmacy, 2021).

THE BENEFITS OF INCREASING ACCESS TO TELEMEDICINE IN HEALTHCARE FOR RURAL AREAS

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Last but not least, telemedicine is significantly improving mental health services by increasing accessibility, reducing stigma, and providing a broader range of treatment options. One of the key benefits of telemedicine is its ability to connect individuals to mental health services from remote locations, thereby facilitating access for those in underserved areas. A study by the American Psychological Association (2020) revealed that 75% of individuals in rural areas believe that telehealth has improved their access to mental health care. Additionally, telemedicine plays a crucial role in diminishing the stigma surrounding mental health treatment, as it allows patients to seek help in a more private and comfortable environment. According to research published in the Journal of Anxiety Disorders (2021), 80% of individuals utilizing teletherapy reported feeling more at ease discussing their mental health concerns compared to traditional in-person therapy. Furthermore, telemedicine offers a variety of therapy sessions and options, including online support groups and behavioral therapy, tailored to meet patients' needs.

Engagement in online support groups saw a remarkable 50% increase during the pandemic, highlighting the growing demand for virtual mental health services (International Journal of Group Psychotherapy, 2021).

In conclusion, telemedicine improves healthcare access and convenience, particularly for mental health services, offering substantial benefits to populations with limited resources. By minimizing barriers to care, telemedicine not only improves patient outcomes but also reduces overall healthcare costs. The ability to connect patients with providers from their own homes fosters better patient engagement and adherence to treatment plans, ultimately leading to healthier communities. Therefore, it is imperative that we continue our efforts to integrate telemedicine into our healthcare systems. Embracing this innovative approach can pave the way for a more equitable and accessible healthcare landscape, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their location or circumstances, have the opportunity to receive the medical attention they need.
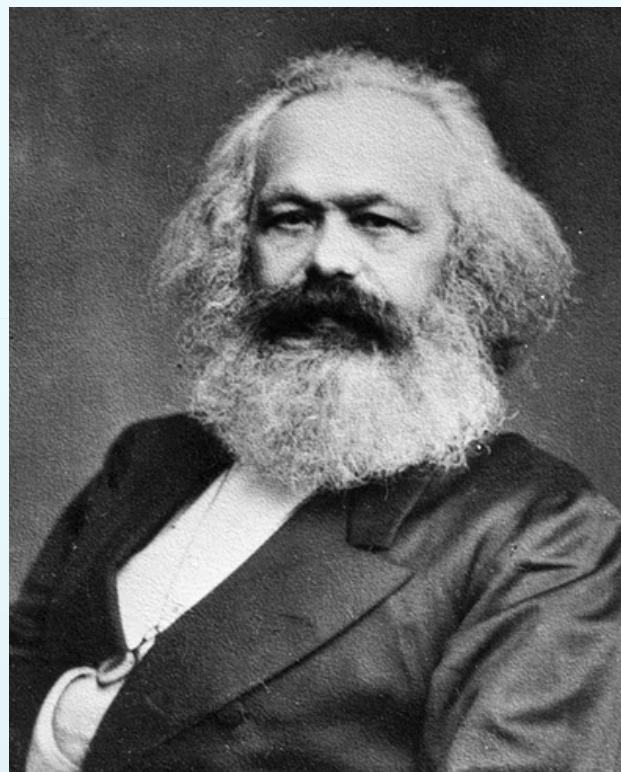
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MARXISM - WHAT AND WHY?

Lucie Kealey

Marxism, a term coined by philosopher Karl Marx in the late 1800s, has sociologically governed how individuals perceive modern-day society. In its meaning, the theory argues from a social, economic, and political standpoint that the ruling class (the bourgeoisie) has a negative influence on labourers (the proletariat); consequently, this results in an imbalanced distribution of wealth and privileges in society, leading to an exacerbated inequality divide between social classes. This often results in lower socio-economic classes feeling marginalised by higher groups in society, causing them to protest for their rights and financial stability.

Marxism in the Workplace

The notion of Marxism leads to questioning how employees are treated in the workplace; most frequently pertaining to whether they are overworked by the system and whether labour is a facet of capitalist production. According to Marx, the consensus is "that every individual is required to work is a social convention and disciplinary apparatus rather than an economic necessity." In this light, it would be plausible to argue that the enforcement work is less of a financial need but instead a political doctrine introduced to separate the ruling class from the working class in aiding capitalist means.

This correlates to the idea of surplus value, defined as 'the surplus produced over and above what is required to survive, which is translated into profit in capitalism.'

Although the concept of surplus value is not exclusive to this demonstration, the illustration of this in the working environment aligns closely with capitalist ideals.

This economic success can be increasingly generated if the labourer works longer than required of them in the typical working day, hence why employers extend shifts beyond reason. For example, research on the topic found that if the working day is extended to twelve hours, the average profit brought in is 41%, whereas if this is further stretched to fifteen hours, the profit margin increases by 9% more, resulting in roughly a 50% intake. Thus, the fact that higher working hours result in a mirrored outcome in terms of profit intake for a company justifies why certain businesses increase their employees' working hours even though this is deemed unnecessary on the surface.

Counterargument to Marxism

Whilst Marxist ideals address the issue of capitalist production in contemporary society, the theory is often criticised both for its idealism, as well as its tendency to overlook alternative factors that contribute to social inequality.

MARXISM - WHAT AND WHY?

Lucie Kealey

For example, sociologists have argued that whilst Marxist notions deal with economic injustices, the philosophy fails to recognise things such as ethnicity and religion, which regularly result in social imbalances.

Statistically, in 2020, it was noted that 46% of individuals living in a household where the head individual was part of an ethnic minority were experiencing poverty, in comparison to their white counterparts, whose figure stood at 19%.

Thus, this illustrates how social injustices are a mixture of different factors, despite Marx primarily pointing to economic explanations.

How to Combat Capitalism

In overcoming capitalist ideology, we must tackle this with a collectivist approach, working together as a society to instill socialist educational notions into the modern world. The Medium, a popular newspaper, uncovers four layers to combating capitalist production: understand that selfishness is not an innate human trait, recognise that jobs are not the sole purpose of a happy and successful lifestyle, understand that capitalist hierarchy does not accurately reflect meritocracy, and commercialise things such as knowledge and relationships that aren't for economic prosperity. In following these guidelines, it is assumed that capitalism will become less of an instinctual following point, but rather, communism and socialism will begin to prevail in society.

Ergo, although a subjective philosophical notion, this article has demonstrated the very basics of Marxism in the working environment, and how this ideology can be contradicted when brought to public opinion. It is necessary to understand how capitalist means influence our everyday working lives, and how this can be tackled by members of all classes to ensure that social inequality is ameliorated.

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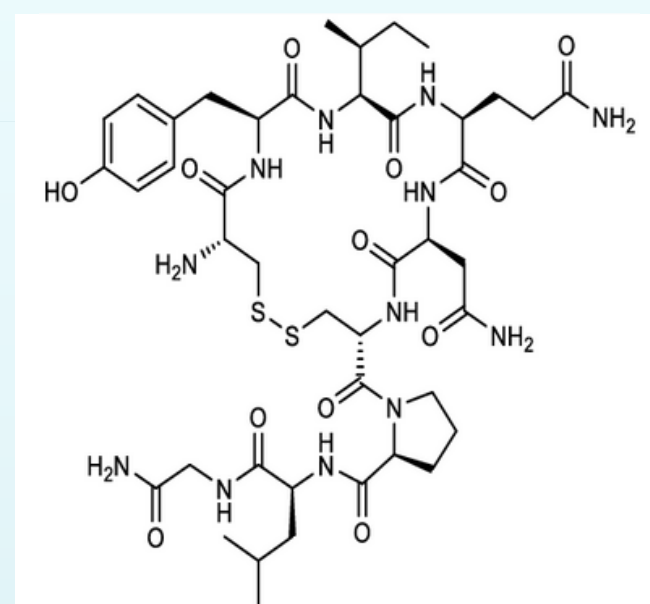## SOFT POWER, NARRATIVE, AND TRUST

Elza Elif Mehdiyev

Soft power, a concept put forward by Joseph Nye, is a crucial phenomenon in contemporary international relations. Nye defines soft power as a particular country's ability to influence other nations' behavior and preferences through persuasion by using non-coercive means. In order to achieve political success, the basis of these non-coercive means must be narratives that the collocutor forms connections with. However, my purpose here is not to elaborate on the relationship between soft power and narrative particularly, instead, this article aims to show that countries use soft power to achieve political goals through the persuasiveness of narratives.

For a narrative to be persuasive, it must instill a sense of trust in the collocutor. There are numerous academic studies on the crucial role of trust in narratives. Among these, the idea that impressed me the most and one I believe will help us better understand the relationship between soft power, the persuasiveness of narratives, and how these things relate to the concept of trust belongs to Paul J. Zak.

Zak's studies show how narratives shape our brains and move us to be more trusting of others.

The basis of this idea begins with the hormone oxytocin. Oxytocin is found in blood, and is most commonly recognized for its physical effects such as uterine contractions during childbirth and breastfeeding.

However, Zak's studies revealed that oxytocin can have effects in the brain as well, showing that the persuasiveness of a narrative for its ability to connect with the collocutor is a leading factor in the rise of oxytocin levels.

Additionally, in their famous research, Zak and his colleagues discovered that oxytocin is connected with trust by observing that rising oxytocin levels are proportional to being more likely to trust. Zak's work has not been limited to laboratory experiments and has also been tested in various field studies over the years as seen in his book The Moral Molecule (2012), which emphasizes that oxytocin is the basis of moral behaviors such as trust. This connection between trust and oxytocin is a crucial discovery because it proves that a sense of trust can be established between people without them meeting face to face or without even knowing one another. It is not difficult to reach the following conclusion from Zak's views: what makes a narrative persuasive is tied in with the trust it inflicts on the collocutor.

SOFT POWER, NARRATIVE, AND TRUST

Elza Elif Mehdiyev

Persuasive narratives are helpful for soft power and achieving political goals because of the sense of trust they create in the collocutor. Trust towards a country from other countries in international relations helps generate a favorable image of that country. Thus, the country's soft power grows. Additionally, it is expected that the favorable image will generate more support for the country's political goals.

An example of this connection can be observed by analyzing "The American Dream."

This persuasive narrative by the United States of America contributes to the country's soft power by making the collocutor trust that the US is a land of freedom and opportunities.

The American Dream is built through many mediums; the most prominent one is Hollywood, where the movies reflect key elements of the American dream: suburban houses, schools with yellow buses, big cities like New York and Los Angeles, and opportunities gained through hard work. All over the world, these films are cast on screens, and as the collocutors consume these narratives, the rise of oxytocin levels in their bodies makes them more likely to trust. Hollywood thus maintains an important role in the development of the USA's soft power.

I think we can now see more clearly the relationship between soft power and persuasive narratives that generate a sense of trust: persuasive narratives that create a sense of trust in the collocutor are a necessary condition for the success of soft power.

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RECESSION RADAR: ARE THE WARNING SIGNS FLASHING FOR GEN Z?

Darray Robinson

Why Are People Suddenly Talking About a Recession Again?

There is a phrase going around TikTok, Instagram Reels, and even X feeds: "Recession Indicators." People are pointing out everything from rising food prices to changes in how the McDonald's menu looks. Lotion and baby formula are sometimes now locked in boxes in drugstores, triggering alerts like they're high-value electronics. Some millennials are even saying that 2025 is starting to feel like 2008, a year remembered for its economic collapse and its strong, escapist party culture.

While recessions may seem like a far-off adult problem, the signs are here, and Gen Z is already feeling the impact.

One example? That same party culture is making a comeback. From increased substance use to social media glamorization of coping through excess partying, it's not just fun and games. It could be a generational reaction to rising stress, financial anxiety, and uncertainty about the future. In a way, this is our version of what a lot of twenty-year-olds lived through 17 years ago.

What is a Recession?

A recession is a significant decline in economic activity that lasts for months or even years. It's typically marked by falling GDP (Gross Domestic Product), rising unemployment, and reduced consumer spending in a country

Common Causes:

High interest rates make borrowing money more expensive, leading businesses and consumers to pull back.

Inflation reduces the purchasing power of your money, making goods more expensive.

Low consumer confidence means people are scared to spend, which slows down economic growth.

Signs We Might Be Entering a Recession

It's becoming harder for young people to find jobs. Many large companies in tech, media, and retail are laying off workers or implementing hiring freezes. In some cases, paid internships have disappeared or turned into unpaid roles.

Even part-time jobs are getting harder to secure, especially in cities where competition is fierce. At the same time, costs of living are rising, making it tougher to save money even when you do have a job in the US.

So...What Can You Do About It?

Here are some proactive steps you can take to make your future recession-proof:

Learn Basic Financial Skills

Start an Emergency Fund
Even saving $5–$10 a week in an emergency fund adds up. An emergency fund helps you stay afloat if you lose a job or face unexpected costs.

Look for Recession-Resistant Careers
Fields like healthcare, education, tech repair, public utilities, and supply chain logistics tend to remain stable during downturns.

Focus on Transferable Skills
Strong communication, teamwork, time management, and digital fluency can help you pivot across industries.

Recession talk might feel overwhelming, especially when you're still trying to figure out school, jobs, and your future. But staying aware is the first step toward being prepared.

Economic downturns are temporary. But knowing how to deal with them? That is forever knowledge. Gen Z has already proven they can adapt, mobilize, and think creatively.

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PROCRASTINATION - VILLAIN OR VICTIM

Chi Anh (Amber) Ta

"Procrastination: the act of postponing tasks or decisions by avoiding the completion of them with the substitution of less tiresome tasks or even by yielding to the temptation of simply putting them off to the last minute or leaving them as they are."

This is what most people undoubtedly and inevitably think of when hearing of such a topic. It can be inferred that the majority of society regards procrastination as a heavily detrimental and insidious action that is likely to be the determining factor of success or failure in life.
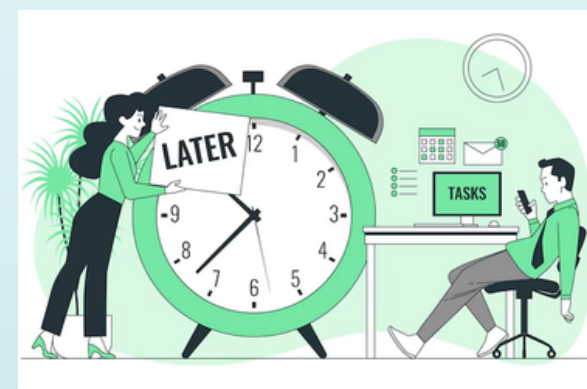
This is because procrastination is often presented as something people choose to do. If repeated throughout a prolonged period of time, it becomes second nature. Building on this, procrastination generally holds the infamous connotation of being a common trait among the "lazy and undisciplined" proportion of society. This thereby urges others to eschew being a procrastinator due to the probability of poorer overall productivity, efficiency, and time management.

Setting academic and working aspects aside, it is also noteworthy to highlight that procrastination is known to potentially engender certain mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and ADHD. Briefly focusing on ADHD in particular, this neurodevelopmental disorder has been empirically proven to align with procrastination as a symptom or side effect. A study of 3525 Swedish university students conducted by the NIH throughout three consecutive years (2019, 2020, and 2021) found that procrastination was indeed connected to declined mental health as well as worsened lifestyle behaviors and exacerbated psychosocial health factors.

The aforementioned points have demonstrated how procrastination could stem various mental health issues, with ADHD being one of the most broadly recognized branches. Nevertheless, despite procrastination having already been proven to be able to cause mental health problems, this prompts the debate of whether procrastination is a mental health problem itself, specifically a trauma response. This conflicts with what people typically deem it as: merely an adverse habit or just one of the minor probable causes of mental health issues. Therefore, it can be seen that many have rarely or never taken into account that a source of mental disorder could ironically be one itself.

Indeed, procrastination could be considered one of the subtle coping mechanisms that are a sign of a traumatic response. The reason behind this is that procrastinators have a tendency to unknowingly delay tasks to avoid emotional triggers or distress linked to possibly traumatic past experiences.

PROCRASTINATION - VILLAIN OR VICTIM

Chi Anh (Amber) Ta

Supporting evidence from GP Psychology reads:

"From a trauma perspective, procrastination may occur when certain parts of a traumatic memory that has not been processed fully are unconsciously triggered. An individual may not be able to understand why they put things off, or have a strong emotional response to being asked to do something."

The CSW also adds that when faced with a task at work, for instance, the fight-or-flight response can be triggered, leading to a cycle of avoidance behaviors, which is essentially procrastination.

In these cases, procrastination does not automatically equate to laziness, as Dr. Nicole LePera quotes:

"If you procrastinate, it's not because you're lazy. It's because your body is in a threat state."

Procrastination is now rather a survival mechanism that manifests as an avoidant coping strategy, hypervigilance, or difficulty with decision-making. Yet, it can subsequently create additional stress through intrapersonal appraisal processes, which in turn amplify contextual stress more cyclically and dynamically, as the NIH further states.

Such statements raise the question of whether procrastination can be improved by any means. The general answer to this lies in the "type" of procrastination that one experiences. Procrastination as an unhealthy habit or action that simply stems from a lack of motivation and self-control can most certainly be decreased with the implementation of discipline, as prior research has strongly suggested.

In contrast, procrastination as a mental disorder or trauma response is an entirely different matter. For example, if a victim repeatedly and forcefully reminds themselves that they procrastinate solely because of being undisciplined, even when that may not be the case, such an action could exacerbate their possible unnoticed mental health issue. To properly address procrastination in such a situation, its root causes must be considered, meaning that seeking professional counseling and treatment is crucial since solutional measures vary from individual to individual.

Therefore, on a closing note, after exploring procrastination's reputation, mental implications, and essence, one can concur that the definite roots of procrastination vary and should be researched with more depth. Nonetheless, as of today, the fact remains that procrastination will still have clashing opinions. No matter the evidence provided, procrastination will still be seen as a harmful attribute. No matter the positivity spread, procrastination will still not have precise individual solutions, no matter the endeavor.

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BREAKING THE CYCLE OF RAGE BAIT

SaiShruthi Avutapalli

Political wars, gender wars, pop culture controversies, and tech warfare. Have you ever wondered why sometimes, your entire social media page is suddenly filled with rageful content like this? At the most arbitrary times, with seemingly no explanation, you come across the same type of wrathful content repeatedly—the kind that grants instant gratification but causes long-term negative effects. You find yourself going about your day, furious over things you once used to shrug off, and you catch yourself realizing that your temperament has no real substance. How would someone ideally deal with something like this? And how can one try not to be captivated by these emotions in the first place?
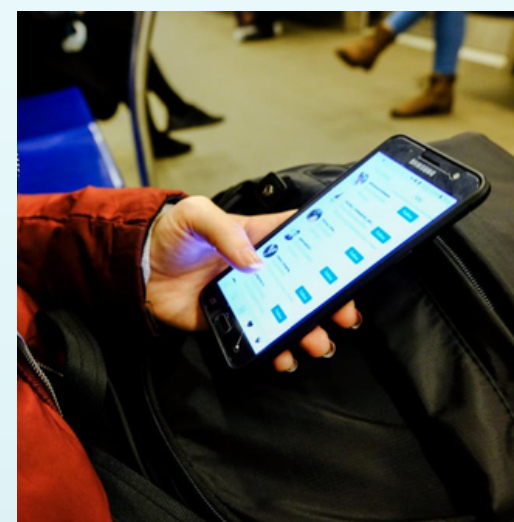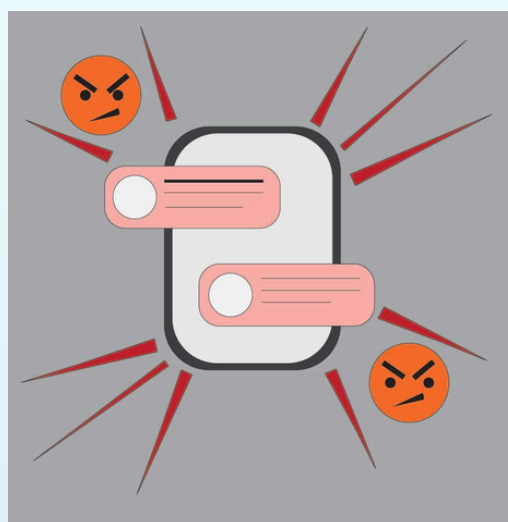
With social media becoming increasingly pervasive worldwide, it is very easy to fall prey to provocative content that triggers strong sentiments, especially negative ones, such as anger. Anger, fury, vexation, and displeasure… from one piece of content to the next, the more one is provoked, the more they unwittingly engage with more. That is exactly what content creators look for, with the incentive of monetary compensation for user engagement.

In the context of social media, rage bait is an increasingly popular phenomenon where viewers and audiences are deliberately made to feel infuriated, resulting in more content consumption, be it in the form of likes, shares, or comments.

It might be projected as harmless, but there are constant lingering effects. Not only does it take a toll on an individual, but it also affects society and its functioning as a whole. There are increased social tensions and decreased trust. With creators prioritizing monetary gain and fame over the moral quality of content, the concepts of ethics and ideals have become almost non-existent.

As rightfully put, rage-bait is the best new marketing clique in town. One obvious counter-effect of this kind of instigation is extremity. As audiences sink deeper into this trap, more extremity will be evident in society. With politics today following this line of content production, it can be established that there are very real consequences to this kind of social media behavior. It's a constant source of energy drain and emotional taxation at your fingertips, all possible with the touch of a button, all because of an algorithm, which viewers curate for themselves. The algorithm is tuned based on the content you consume, and the content you consume is based on what the algorithm curates for you. This is why it is called a vicious "cycle"—not a line, but a relentless loop feeding itself that's not easy to break free from.

These algorithms in question are built to satisfy certain biases and standards, which might not always be "principled". For the most part, they are based solely on engagement, view count, and user behavior patterns, which can sometimes be misaligned with user interests. Creators may take advantage of patterns to engage more viewers, even if it means welcoming a negative reputation and triggering extreme emotional responses among audiences. Because of this, there is an unnecessary presence of sensationalism and exaggeration in the digital space as we know it today. Psychologically, it activates dysregulation, feelings of anxiety, and fabricates an attitude of pessimism, which could even shadow into daily life. Morally, it might evoke corrupt feelings of judgment and hatred over irrelevant, distant things. Clearly, other than the momentary gratification it provides creators and the public, there are so many factors that are ethically incorrect when it comes to rage bait. As the name itself suggests, it is a manipulative tactic and a bait for consumers to indulge in participation to satisfy the algorithm's requirements. All of this makes us as consumers question, what can we do to break free?
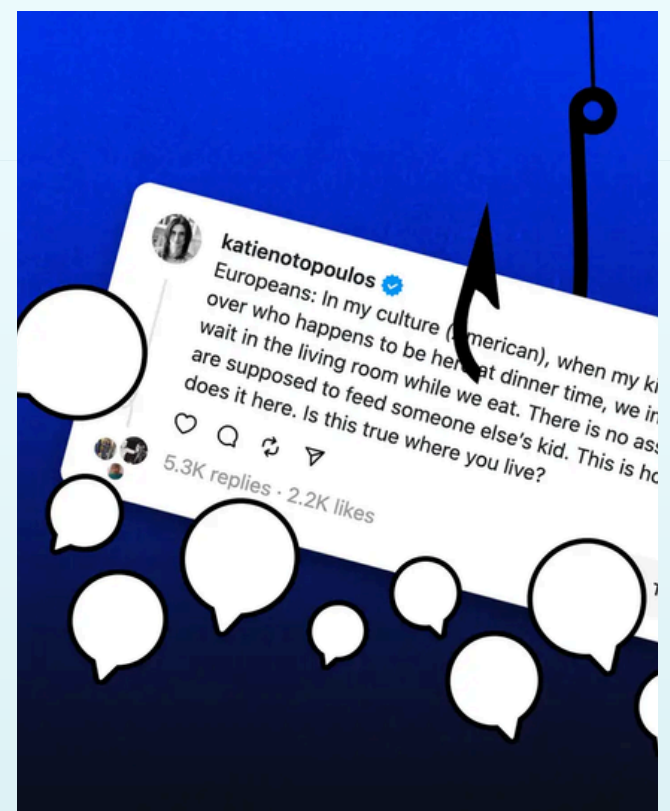
Mindfulness is the answer.

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF RAGE BAIT

SaiShruthi Avutapalli

No matter how much we try to change the way these algorithms work, creators who produce inflammatory content will inevitably exist, and there will surely exist spectators willing to consume that kind of content. Above all, these algorithms, unlike us, are impassive and apathetic—their focus lies more in keeping users engrossed, which is why as an individual, it is very important to maintain boundaries by trying to understand the deceit that an impulsive emotional reaction would cause.

It must also be understood that there is a difference between instigation as a rhetorical fallacy and fury that is born from deep understanding.

Rage bait thrives when consumers fail to differentiate the two, forcing users to react rather than reflect. Mechanisms and approaches for dealing with both of these situations also vary greatly, which is why it is essential to be more in tune with one's own emotions. This comes from experience, proper apprehension, and a defined sense of situational awareness. Knowing what is wrong and what is right for yourself can help you better understand what to consume and what to dispose of. It might take time, it might take a series of trials and errors to get it right, but the most efficient road to not letting the algorithm take over is conscientiousness.

Rage might be real, but not all rage is ours. To overcome the challenge of this fallacy overpowering you, take a moment to pause, think, and decide whether or not to engage, keeping in mind that it is a step taken to curate your feed. Breaking this cycle doesn't have to mean shutting off from the world—it merely means taking control over the type of content you consume.

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THE COST OF SUCCESS: THE HIDDEN TOLL OF HUSTLE CULTURE

The Paradox of Achievement and the Glorification of Overwork Among Young People

Braelyn Burris

In a world that never stops moving and runs on a 'work hard, play hard' mentality, it's natural to wonder: at what point do people actually play? We glorify lost hours of sleep and commitment to success, labeling it as ambition. However, are we thriving because of our progress, or are we just playing ourselves?

Idealization of Hustle Culture

Since the late 2000s to the early 2010s, hustle culture has noticeably increased in popularity, especially among younger generations. Being a "hustler," according to modern social ideals, extends beyond the typical 9-to-5. It means working all the time while simultaneously feeling as though there aren't enough hours in the day. It's the idea of a person who juggles a full-time job, their own startup, content creation, and a social life unfazed.

Perhaps, the most impressive part of being a "hustler" is being able to portray oneself as unexhausted despite the ever-moving finish line in the race for success. It's practically an unspoken badge of honor. Cultural capital now stems from being perceived as constantly in motion. Busy equals productive. Productive equals valuable. This mindset feeds a dangerous narrative that our best is just the baseline. It overlooks the harmful realities of practically running on empty just to reward oneself with checking another task off a never-ending list.

The Real Cost of Success

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Association, 60% of U.S. workers report being stressed a significant amount of the time. This burnout doesn't just begin with adulthood though.

The American Psychological Association found that around 50% of high school students consistently experience burnout. Success, as defined by hustle culture, is no longer a destination, but a constant chase that never slows.

That chase doesn't just challenge the work-life balance, it eliminates it. By purposefully tipping the scale so far to "work," "life" becomes an afterthought when in pursuit of the reward that meritocratic ideologies promise.

But what happens when the scale is tipped too far, and the weight becomes too much to carry?

Research shows that turning self-neglect into a new symbol for ambition isn't just unhealthy—it's unsafe. Overworking can contribute to cognitive decline and threaten the strength of the immune system. A 2015 study conducted by University College London found that employees who reported working excessively long hours per week have a 13% higher risk of suffering a heart attack and are 33% more likely to suffer a stroke.
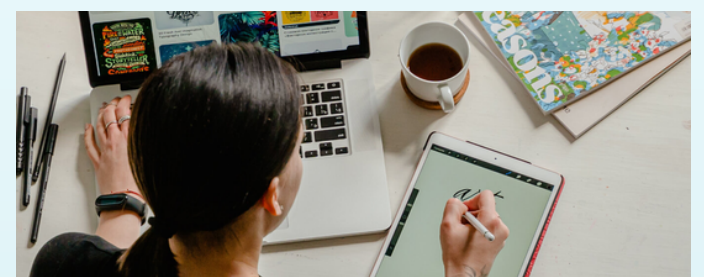
Mentally, the toll can be equally severe. The problematic implications of hustle culture are often linked to battling with impostor syndrome. When people constantly undermine their accomplishments in hopes of more, it's often realized too late that more is never enough. Someone out there will always seem to be doing better. Additionally, pushing oneself to meet the unrealistic standards offered by such comparison can trigger anxiety and depression.

When Productivity Loses Its Purpose

While hustle culture promotes relentless productivity as a fast track to success, the documented effects of this warrant a closer look at the validity of the relationship in question.

The inherent value of professional advancement, academic excellence, or business success is questionable if achieved at the cost of one's capacity to genuinely appreciate those accomplishments.

Success is a socially constructed concept. The shared benchmarks of progress often trick people into believing they're behind, when in reality, they've just stopped to breathe after coming so far. As a society, it's time we rethink the false choice between productivity and self-care. Making room for both isn't simply a suggestion, it's a necessity.
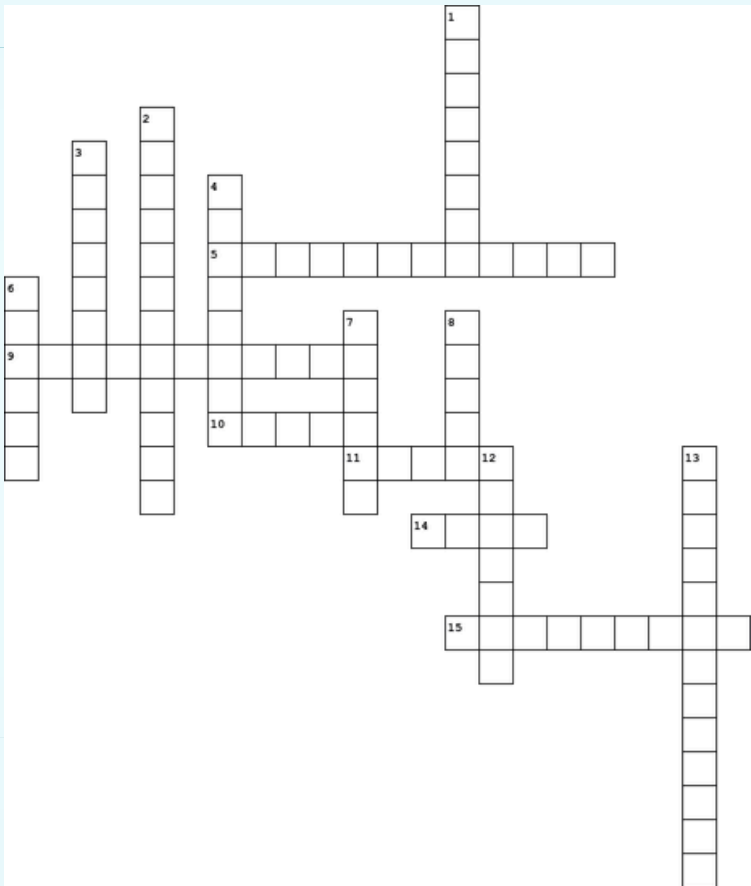

The healthiest, happiest version of oneself is the most productive one. The person who can work and play is the one who has it all. Not the one with the longest to-do list.

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Crossword: Isolation

Across:

5. "____ lenses."
9. You can find anything from batteries to slushies in this type of store.
10. The opposite of urban.
11. What you may do if you and your coworker both don't like your shift times.
14. One letter away from a common wooden toy for young children.
15. A situation where you might take the fire exit or call an ambulance.

Down:

1. A question that succeeds a prior question.
2. Medical services that are provided remotely.
3. A key ingredient in making tofu.
4. The great lake that is the furthest north.
6. You can't enter a restricted area without this.
7. This type of potion is often pink in video games.
8. A natural disaster that often occurs alongside hurricanes and typhoons.
12. "In this ____?" A common saying.
13. The practice of shielding a country's individual economy.

Word Search: War Online

Word Bank:

algorithm	cycle
bait	hate
callout	justice
canceled	rage
culture	trigger

Crypto-Quote: Gentle Guidance

"CUDZ CNZE TX CNZ NUBY UBY QZUY CNZE CW CNZ UVCRWB EWS PUBC CNZE TX CUDZ"
-- LSBZ DWZL BWZQGZB

Rules:

Figure out the quote from one of these articles by figuring out a simple code. In this code one letter will replace another, (it will be the same letter throughout the puzzle). Example: KLFFRFLP = SYNNONYM. Solution is found through trial and error.