

# The Dilbert Future in Retrospect

Subjectively marking XX comic predictions about the 21st Century written in the late 20th Century

Prediction 1: In the future, authors will take a long time to get to the point. That way the book looks thicker.

This both waxed and waned. Books that had simple and easily marketable messages, so were repetitive and padded, did become more popular. But then books themselves have become less popular. (At least non-fiction. Fiction loves taking a long time to get to the point.)

Prediction 2: In the future, you will wish I had never put the image in your head of me doing jumping jacks in an open kimono.

This follows Adams' long standing interest in and overegging of techniques for persuasion, including a tendency to describe a lot of manipulative behaviours as being some kind of hypnosis.

Prediction 3: On average, individuals who are alive today will experience 80 years of complaint-free living. Unfortunately they'll live to 160.

It is true that for the last generation or so the gap between life expectancy and healthy life expectancy has grown.

Prediction 4: The people who are studying Tai Chi Chuan instead of saving money are planning to beat us up and take our stuff when we're retired.

This seems to be an insinuation that more conscientious and less open types will tend to be more right wing, and less conscientious and more open types (thinking OCEAN/Big Five) will tend to lean left wing

Prediction 5: The people who are alive today will appear grotesque to the perfectly engineered children of the future.

There are many memes about how (say) 35 year olds from the 80s look much older than 35 year olds from the 2010s and beyond. So though not genetic engineering there's maybe something here.

Prediction 6: In the future, we will accelerate our successful practice of brainwashing children so they'll be nice to us while we plunder their planet.

There's maybe been more cultural enforcement of performative niceness. But this seems to be younger cohorts influencing themselves, not older cohorts intentionally and successfully influencing younger cohorts.

Prediction 7: Life in the future will not be like Star Trek.

Very true. Even Star Trek's no longer much like Star Trek.

Prediction 8: In the future, there will be a huge market for technology products that help workers goof off and still get paid.

True (but not huge). Especially with home working. For example devices that move mice and press keys on a keyboard so it looks like someone's at their keyboard, even if they're not.

Prediction 9: In the future, Internet capacity will increase indefinitely to keep up with the egos of the people using it. Cost will not be an issue.

Capacity and speed have continued to grow exponentially, such that it's largely become a water-like commodity.

Prediction 10: In the future, your clothes will be smarter than you.

Not clothes (water and electronics don't mix). But extend this to wearable tech and this is broadly correct.

Prediction 11: In the future, Network Computers will be purchased and used with the same enthusiasm as home exercise equipment.

Truish if I understand context. Smartphones made 'proper computer' use less common; hence the web becoming mobile first.

Prediction 12: In the future, ISDN services will improve to the point where you can mention it in a crowd without generating laughter.

If internet services, yes.

Prediction 13: In the future, we'll all use sophisticated Bozo Filters to prevent idiots from communicating with us.

Blocking, filters, algorithmic matching of content to feed people people they want to hear from and ideas they want to hear. Broadly true. This includes the shadowbanning on Twitter Adams complained about in the pre-Musk days (which in this sense makes him the bozo being filtered.)

Prediction 14: In the future, kids won't have access to online pornography, because the X-rated Internet sites will be clogged by horny adults who have more patience.

Self contradictory with other claims about increased capacity. Not happened I assume.

Prediction 15: In the future, technology will continue to make our lives harder and many of us will be delighted about it.

I have a broad sense this is true but it's so vague it's just a gut feeling that can neither be verified nor falsified.

Prediction 16: In the future, scientists will learn how to convert stupidity into clean fuel.

If eating deep fried food is stupid then I guess it's true in that oil from takeaways and restaurants are increasingly being used as biofuels.

Prediction 17: In the future, technology will become the leading cause of death.

Flip this: technologies may instead be the leading cause of poor, overextended lives spent in poor health and with low quality of life.

Prediction 18: In the future, computer-using men will be the sexiest males.

No.

Prediction 19: In the future, we'll realise that the creatures we thought were from other planets are actually smart people who live in Switzerland.

Nope.

Prediction 20: In the future, the trend of "personal services" will continue until busy people are handling almost none of their routine bodily functions themselves.

Exaggeration. But takeaway and delivery apps means there's less need for personal planning and many essential errands are now outsourced or outsourceable

Prediction 21: Lack of education will not be the biggest problem in the future. The problem will be an excess of stupidity as more people fall below the incompetence line.

This feels true, but likely my prejudice. The share of young people going into further education has tended to increase, but arguably the quality and value of many courses that constitute much of the expansion has decreased.

Prediction 22: In the future, there will be a huge increase in the number of "household services" to compensate for the pathetic incompetence of the average person.

See prediction 20.

Prediction 23: Democracy and capitalism will continue to give the shaft to lazy and stupid people. Neither group will complain.

This is just a cynic's Shibboleth.

Prediction 24: In the future, most democratic countries will be led by tall people with good hair and smart staff members.

I expect this is true (adjusting for changing sex composition in political office)

Prediction 25: In the future, the value of your vote will become less than zero. That happens when the amount you pay in taxes to have your own vote counted is less than the value you get from the vote itself.

See prediction 23.

Prediction 26: In the future, voters will be so baffled that they'll want smart people with bad hair to tell them what to do.

No. They'll prefer smart people with good hair, or settle on dumb people with good hair before listening to smart people with bad hair. (However, they'll increasingly consider no hair to be good-enough hair.)

Prediction 27: In the future, scientists will create a powerful and legal aphrodisiac.

Semaglutides?

Prediction 28: In the future, women will run the world in all democratic countries.

An increasing trend, but a comic exaggeration.

Prediction 29: In the future, religious groups will get mad at me, thus boosting my book sales.

Depends on whether Adams would have considered 'The Woke' to be a (secular) religious group. Instead ironically the last few months of Adams' life involved a lot of support from Christians, leading to Adams' deathbed conversion because Pascal's Wager.

Prediction 30: Most scientific and technical breakthroughs in the next century will be created by men and directed at finding replacements for women.

Maybe an element of this but I don't think it's been the prime driver.

Prediction 31: In the future, skilled professionals will flee their corporate jobs and become their own bosses in ever-increasing numbers. They'll become entrepreneurs, consultants, contractors, prostitutes, and cartoonists.

There has been a marked increase in self employment and diversity of contractor services. There seem to have been both push and pull reasons for this.

Prediction 32: In the future, the balance of employment power will change. We'll witness the revenge of the downsized.

Maybe this hasn't happened so much as younger generations demanding different rules and conditions in employment - such as better work-life balance and improved mental health services - than earlier generations.

Prediction 33: In the future, highly qualified people will go on job interviews purely for recreation.

Not really. Getting a job interview has itself become a very effortful process. They're too rare and valuable to be treated recreationally.

Prediction 34: In the future, salaries will go down for people in medium-skilled jobs; thanks to the godforsaken hellhole called North Dakota.

Median wages have long been suppressed, and gone down in real terms due to inflation. But this isn't due to North Dakota.

Prediction 35: In the future, employees will either be superstars or perspiration wipers. Those who aren't qualified to do either will become managers.

In many roles the gaps between top and median outcomes seem to have increased.

Prediction 36: In the future, all work will be outsourced, until all the work on the planet is being done by one guy.

Much as been outsourced. But this is another trend that seems to have slowed down or reversed.

Prediction 37: In the future, more people will work for themselves, creating a huge market for bizarre products.

See the crap advertised on Facebook. And Gwyneth Paltrow.

Prediction 38: In the future, voters will be so baffled that they'll want smart telecommuters, until someone points out they aren't being paid.

Self employment does make it easier to designate oneself as being someone one isn't getting routinely paid for longer.

Prediction 39: In the future, aggressive companies will replace standard cubicles with head cubicles.

Worse: open plan!

Prediction 40: In the future, your only choices for new project names will be ones that sound undignified.

Wrong. Project names can be just as bland as ever. Combinatorials do a lot of work.

Prediction 41: In the future, it will become increasingly obvious that your competitors are just as clueless as you are.

Only if you work across multiple competitors. Which given shorter tenures in any particular role is maybe more likely.

Prediction 42: In the future, all barriers to entry will go away and companies will be forced to form what I call "confusipolies".

This was Adams' best genuine economic contribution. By making products incomparable and multi-factorial, standard market pressures fail to make products 'better' than each other, just different. This creates more scope for personalisation of services for customers, or more ways for multiple companies to generate excess profits from consumed customers. What happened with mobile phone contracts seems almost perfectly predicted by the Confusipolies concept.

Prediction 43: In the future, the science of advertising will improve to the point where buying what you see in an advertisement is no longer optional.

The problem will be an excess of stupidity as more people fall below the incompetence line.

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Prediction 45: In the future, it will be easy to find customers who are gullible enough to buy any product, no matter how worthless and stupid it is.

See prediction 37.

Prediction 46: In the future, the most important career skill will be a lack of ethics.

Especially POTUS and POTUSians?

Prediction 47: In the future, poverty will be eliminated, along with the people who are hoarding all the money.

Nope.

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