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Upper Secondary

English

Comprehension Skills

Reflective Essays

Social Media Essay

Current Affairs: Hawker Culture

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ORAL THEME – ENVIRONMENT (CURRENT AFFAIRS)

There are 8 different issues on Environment. Be familiar with it for Booster 2.

1. Climate Change
- Global warming
- Greenhouse gas emissions
- Rising sea levels
- Extreme weather events

2. Deforestation
- Habitat destruction
- Loss of biodiversity
- Soil erosion
- Climate impact

3. Pollution
- Air pollution (smog, industrial emissions)
- Water pollution (oil spills, plastic waste)
- Land pollution (landfills, deforestation)
- Noise pollution (urbanization, transportation)

4. Waste Management
- Plastic waste
- E-waste (discarded electronics)
- Overconsumption & landfills
- Recycling & sustainability

6. Resource Depletion
- Overuse of fossil fuels
- Water scarcity
- Overfarming & soil degradation
- Unsustainable mining

7. Ocean and Marine Issues
- Coral bleaching
- Plastic pollution in oceans
- Overfishing
- Oil spills

8. Sustainable Solutions
- Renewable energy (solar, wind, hydro)
- Conservation efforts
- Eco-friendly practices (reduce, reuse, recycle)
- Policy & legislation

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Question Types

1. **Factual / Direct Recall / Identification** of words or phrases
2. **Inferential** – where you will need to use the clues from the lines before and after to explain the answer.
3. **Paraphrasing / Use your own words** – (vocabulary/synonyms)
4. **Language effect** – Figurative Language
5. **Author's style**
    - 5.1 Unusual and Effective
    - 5.2 Punctuation
    - 5.3 Long / Short Sentences
    - 5.4 Repetition
    - 5.5 Other styles
6. **Explanation / Claim**
7. **The Global Question**
8. **Summary**
    - Finding points that answer the question (cause-effect, reasons, benefits & harms)
    - Paraphrasing without losing the main point

COMPREHENSION SKILLS – THE GLOBAL QUESTION

Analysis of past year questions to identify question types & providing structures on how to answer these questions followed by exercises that test understanding.

This is a 4-mark question at the end of the narrative comprehension. It is **crucial** that students score all 4 marks for this question.

How to do this question?

Step 1 – highlight the key words in the question. Remember to also highlight the main character in the question.

Student Activity: Highlight the key words from these past year questions.

2024 - The structure of the text reflects how Ruma's feelings changed during her father's visit to her new house. Complete the flow chart by choosing one word from the box to summarise how Ruma's feelings changed in each part of the text. There are some extra words in the box you do not need to use.

2023 - The structure of the text reflects how the writer's feelings change during the encounter with the giraffes. Complete the flow chart by choosing one word from the box to summarise the writer's feelings at each stage of the encounter. There are some extra words in the box you do not need to use.

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2022 - The structure of the text reflects how Lucy's feelings changed during the visit to the old house. Complete the flow chart by choosing one word from the box to summarise how Lucy was feeling in each part of the text. There are some extra words in the box you do not need to use.

2021 - The structure of the text reflects the different stages of Alma's transition to a different life. Complete the flow chart by choosing one phrase from the box to summarise each stage. There are some extra phrases in the box you do not need to use.

Step 2 – **Understanding the passage holistically:**

- Identify the key message or themes of the paragraph in question.
- Recognize the overall tone of the text.
- Look out for the MOST prominent theme/feeling
- Spot emotional shifts in the passage.
- Choose appropriate vocabulary (e.g., anxious vs. nervous, joyful vs. satisfied).
- Determine why certain actions are significant to the storyline.

Step 3 - Check understanding of the given words.

- Interpret subtle cues about emotions, behaviors, or attitudes.
- Use contextual evidence to infer what the protagonist feels or intends.

Step 4 - Process of elimination from the given words to narrow down your options before searching for the strongest emotion/best answer:

- If unsure, number the possible answers for each paragraph.
- Re-look the paragraph with the options to re-assess which best fits and if the given word better fits another paragraph.

Practice 1

Title: *The Surprise Visit*

1. The doorbell rang sharply, echoing through the quiet apartment. Leah glanced at the clock—it was barely past 7 a.m. She wasn't expecting anyone. Rubbing the sleep from her eyes, she padded across the living room and opened the door. Her heart skipped a beat when she saw who was standing there.

2. "Dad?" she gasped, blinking as if she couldn't believe her eyes. Her father stood there, a weathered suitcase by his feet, his familiar face creased with a sheepish smile. "I thought I'd surprise you," he said, shifting nervously from foot to foot. Leah's initial shock melted into warmth as she stepped aside to let him in.

3. The apartment was still messy from the night before, with laundry piled on the sofa and dishes stacked in the sink. Leah hurriedly cleared a space for him to sit, apologizing for

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the clutter. Her father waved it off. "I didn't come to inspect your housekeeping," he joked, settling into the chair with a sigh.

4. They talked over coffee, reminiscing about old times. Her father's laughter filled the room, chasing away the awkwardness of his unexpected arrival. For the first time in weeks, Leah felt a sense of peace.

5. As the sun climbed higher, her father glanced at his watch. "I can only stay a day, unfortunately," he said regretfully. Leah's heart sank, but she masked her disappointment with a smile. "Then let's make the most of it," she said, determined to savor every moment.

Question 1:
Complete the flowchart by choosing one word from the box to summarize Leah's emotions in each part of the passage. There are extra words you do not need to use.

worried,	**surprised**	**joyful**
relieved	**hesitant**	**disappointed**
confused		

- **Paragraph 1:** (i) _____
- **Paragraph 2:** (ii) _____
- **Paragraph 4:** (iii) _____
- **Paragraph 5:** (iv) _____

Answer:

1. **Paragraph 1: surprised**
   Reasoning: When Leah hears the doorbell at 7 a.m. and "her heart skipped a beat" upon seeing the visitor, the sudden, unexpected interruption is best summed up as being surprised.

2. **Paragraph 2: joyful**
   Reasoning: Although her first reaction is shock ("Dad?"), her disbelief quickly turns into warmth and welcome. The recognition of her father and his lighthearted joke bring a happy, affectionate feeling—thus, joyful.

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3. **Paragraph 4: relieved**
   Reasoning: Over coffee and reminiscence, the awkwardness of the unexpected visit fades. Leah's long-awaited sense of peace and the easing of tension are captured by feeling relieved.

4. **Paragraph 5: disappointed**
   Reasoning: When her father announces he can only stay a day, Leah's heart "sank." Even though she masks it with a smile, the underlying sadness at his short visit is best described as disappointed.

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Practice 2

2 As Sophia began to play, the notes floated through the air, delicate and light. I watched in suspense. Could Sophia keep her runs sparkling and clean? Had she overpracticed, and would her hands give out? I had to force myself not to rock and back forth and hum robotically, which is what I usually do when she performed a difficult piece. I knew every note, every silence, every witty touch like the back of my hand. I knew where the potential pitfalls were; Sophia blew past them all. As I watched her deft fingers fluttering and tumbling up and down the keys, each note resonating with a clarity and emotion that belied her young age, I was overcome with pride, exhilaration, and hope.

3 Sophia had her first big music moment when she won the Greater New Haven Concerto Competition, earning the right to perform as a piano soloist with the New Haven Youth Orchestra at Yale University's Battell Chapel that evening. I went wild. I blew up the article about Sophia in the local newspaper and framed it. I invited more than a hundred people to the concert and planned a huge after-party. I bought Sophia her first full-length gown and new shoes. All four grandparents came; the day before the performance, my mother was in our kitchen making hundreds of Chinese pearl balls (pork meatballs covered with sticky white rice), while Florence made ten pounds of gravlax (salmon cured with sea salt under a brick).

4 On the practice front, we kicked into overdrive the moment we learnt about the performance. Mozart is notoriously difficult. His music is famously sparkling, brilliant, effervescent, and effortless — adjectives that strike terror in the hearts of most musicians. There's a saying that only the young and old can play Mozart well: the young because they are oblivious and the old because they are no longer trying to impress anyone. Sophia's Rondo was classic Mozart. Her teacher Michelle told her, 'When you're playing your runs and trills, think of champagne or an Italian soda, and all those bubbles rising to the top.' Sophia was up to any challenge. She was an unbelievably quick study with lightning-quick fingers. Best of all, she listened to everything I said. I had become a drill sergeant. I broke the Rondo down, sometimes by section, sometimes by goal. We worked late into the night every day for weeks. I spared no harsh words and got even tougher when Sophia's eyes filled with tears.

6 The applause that followed was thunderous, echoing through the chapel. Sophia stood up, beaming, and took a bow, her face alight with the joy of her accomplishment. Friends and strangers came up to congratulate Jed and I. Larry, the boisterous director of the Neighbourhood Music School, said to me, 'You can't sound that good if you're not having fun.' For some reason, Larry's comment reminded me of an incident from many years before, when Sophia was just starting the piano but I was already pushing hard. Jed discovered some funny marks on the piano, on the wood just above middle C. When he asked Sophia about them, a guilty look came over her. 'What did you say?' she asked evasively.

Jed crouched down and examined them more closely. 'Sophia,' he said slowly, 'could these possibly be teeth marks?'

'Maybe,' I answered, and smiled politely at Larry.

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REFLECTIVE ESSAYS

A **reflective essay** is a personal piece that shows how a meaningful experience affected you and what you learned from it.

It answers questions like:

- What happened?
- How did I feel at the time?
- What does this event mean to me now?
- How did it shape me or my relationships?

Common GCE O Level Themes in Reflective Essays

Here are the broad **categories** your questions fall into:

1. Regret & Guilt

- *'I have never felt so guilty before.'*
- *Describe a time when you did something you later regretted.*
- *Write about a time when you caused great disappointment to another person.*

2. Moral Dilemmas & Difficult Decisions

- *Write about a time when you had to make an unpopular decision...*
- *As I look back, I realise I had made the right decision.*
- *There were times when I struggled to make a decision.*

3. Friendship & Trust

- *Teenage friendships*
- *How I choose my friends*
- *Write about a time when you let down a friend in need.*
- *Write about a time when you received help from someone you least expected.*
- *"I'm thankful I have a friend like..."*

4. Conflict & Misunderstanding

- *Write about a time when you were unhappy with someone...*
- *Write about an occasion when you had an argument because of a misunderstanding.*
- *Write about a time when you had a big misunderstanding with someone.*

5. Hope, Growth & Kindness

- *"Behind every dark cloud, there is a silver lining."*
- *"No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted."*
- *The time I stood up for what I believed*

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The SPIRAL Structure

Use the **SPIRAL** framework to stay focused and meaningful:

Element	Description	Example from your prompts
S – Situation	What happened? Set the scene clearly.	*"I had just argued with my best friend over something I didn't even understand..."*
P – Problem	What was the conflict/challenge?	*"...we stopped talking for weeks, and I couldn't stop thinking about what went wrong."*
I – Internal Reaction	What were your thoughts and feelings?	*"I felt torn, angry, and even more confused. Was I the one in the wrong?"*
R – Response/Action	What did you do about it?	*"Eventually, I decided to confront her and ask for her side of the story..."*
A – Aftermath	What was the outcome?	*"We finally understood that it was all a misunderstanding. We both apologised."*
L – Lesson	What did you learn about life, people, or yourself?	*"Now, I always pause before reacting. Miscommunication ruins friendships too easily."*

Writing Techniques to Use

- **Use Authentic, Honest Voice:**
  - "Looking back, I realise..."
  - "At the time, I thought I was right, but..."
  - "If I could relive that day, I would..."

- **Show Emotional Growth:**
  - Shift from confusion → clarity
  - Anger → empathy
  - Shame → redemption
  - Regret → wisdom

- **Use Sensory & Figurative Language:**
  - "My stomach dropped like a stone."
  - "Her silence was louder than any insult."
  - "The weight of guilt sat on my chest like an anchor."

- **Avoid Generic Statements:**
  - Instead of "I felt bad," try "A wave of regret washed over me as I watched her walk away."

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PRACTICE PLANNING TASK:

Pick any one of these and use the SPIRAL structure to plan your response:

1. "As I look back, I realised I had made the right decision."
2. Write about a time when you were unhappy with someone.
3. Write about a time when you received help from someone you least expected.
4. 'No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.' Write about a time when this was true for you.

Title:		
Element	**Description**	**Example from your prompts**
S – Situation	What happened? Set the scene clearly.	
P – Problem	What was the conflict/challenge?	
I – Internal Reaction	What were your thoughts and feelings?	
R – Response/Action	What did you do about it?	
A – Aftermath	What was the outcome?	
L – Lesson	What did you learn about life, people, or yourself?	

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"Social media is a double-edged sword." Discuss why it is both a curse and a blessing in modern day life.

This is a discursive (some schools call it an expository) essay requiring students to explore both the pros and cons of social media, therefore a stand is not required. Students may instead choose to give a nuanced and balanced view of why social media is a double-edged sword based on various factors.

Question Analysis

"Social media is a double-edged sword." Discuss why it is both a curse and a blessing in modern day life.

1. Highlight and understand the keywords

- **'Social media'** – websites and applications that **enable users to create and share content** or to participate in social networking.
- Understand what **"Double-Edged Sword"** means.
- **'Curse'** – detriment, bane, disservice, evil.
- Notice '**AND**' in the question so you would need to give a balance view of both the good and the bad.
- **'Blessing'** – benefits, advantages, boon, help, gain
- **'Modern day'** – 21st century, today, current society. This requires a focus the **current realities and areas of life / lifestyle / social issues / things that affect many people**.

Do you remember some of the things we learnt?

When a question is about Today, Nowadays, Now, At Present, what do these acronyms stand for.

C	**Competitive**
D	**Digital Natives / IT Savvy**
E	**Ever-changing**
F	**Fast paced**
G	**Globalised**

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Other assumptions about youth today

- Reliant/Addicted to Mobile Phones/Gaming – **Need to be unplugged from devices**
- Not Strong at Inter-Generational Communication
- Pampered & Entitled

2. Unpack the question with relevant questions.

Think Time!

What is social media and what **good** and **bad** has it done? Come out with as many points as possible for each point.

Good:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Bad:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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Social media: More than a mental health crisis

A number of studies say social media adversely affects the mental health of many users. But it also affects users' social, spiritual and physical health, data shows.

GEN Zers	MILLENNIALS	GEN Xers	BABY BOOMERS
13 to 24 years old	25 to 40 years old	41 to 56 years old	57 to 75 years old

ALL AGE GROUPS HIT, WITH GEN Z THE WORST AFFECTED

(Respondents who report their health as poor or very poor, by type of health, % of those surveyed)

NOTE: Spiritual health refers to the ability of people to integrate meaning into their lives.

ASIA'S GEN Z POPULATION VULNERABLE

(Gen Z respondents who report their health as poor or very poor, by type of health, % of those surveyed)

	Mental	Social	Spiritual	Physical
China	13	14	6	8
India	9	8	6	7
Vietnam	9	13	12	13
Indonesia	21	15	10	10
Australia	24	17	18	14
Japan	27	22	16	16

GEN Z AGE GROUP, MILLENNIALS SPEND LARGE AMOUNTS OF TIME ON SOCIAL MEDIA

(Time spent on social media daily, % of respondents)

NOTE: The survey collected responses from 42,083 people in 26 countries across continents. The respondents included 16,824 Gen Z individuals, 13,080 millennials, 6,937 Gen Xers, 5,119 baby boomers, and 123 from the silent generation (aged 76 to 93).

SOURCE: MCKINSEY HEALTH INSTITUTE GLOBAL GEN Z SURVEY

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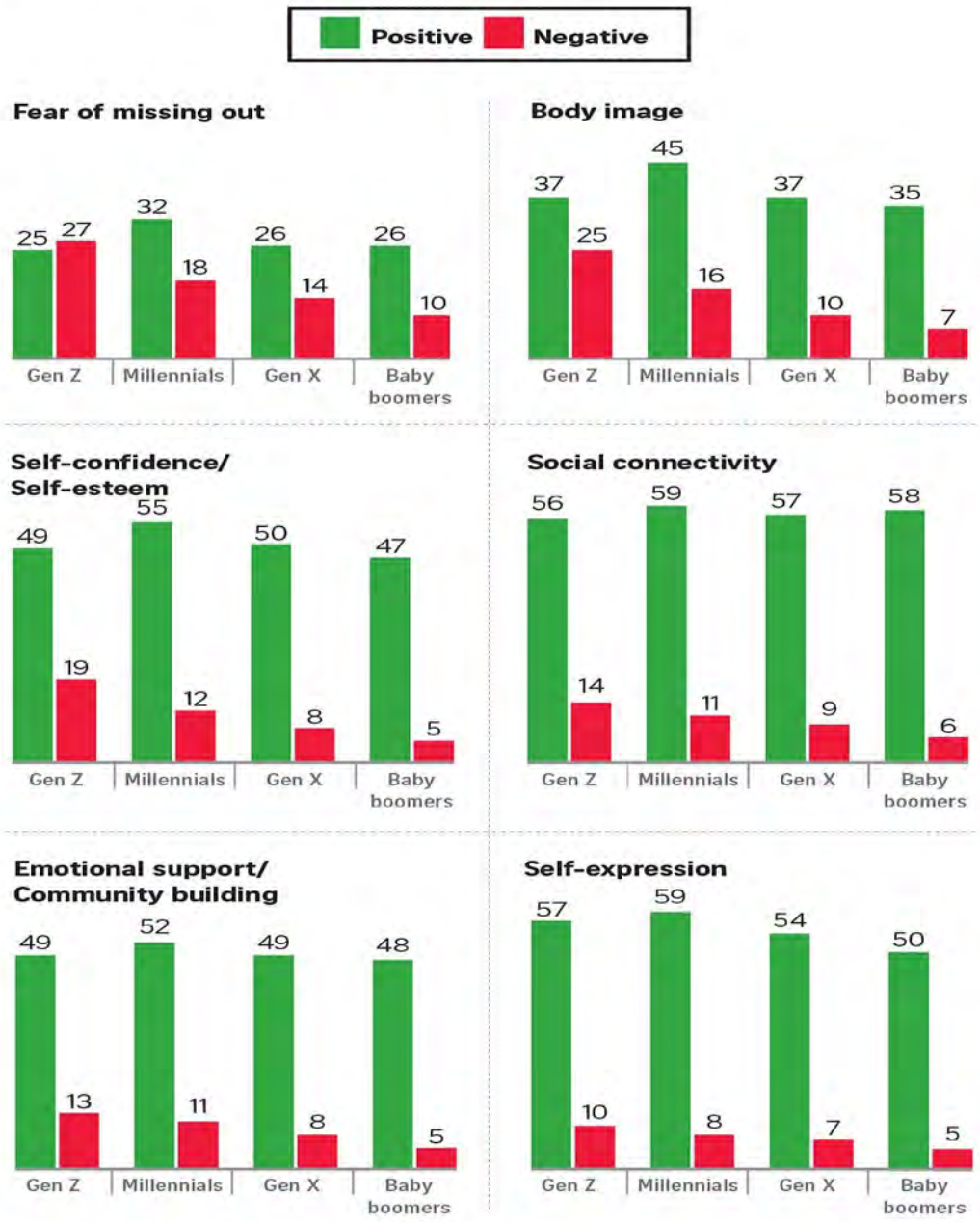
SOCIAL MEDIA GIVES UPLIFTING FEELING TO SOME, HURTS MENTAL HEALTH FOR MANY

(Reported impact of social media on aspects of respondents' lives, % of those who use social media)



NOTE: Respondents who answered "no effect" not shown.

NOTE: The survey collected responses from 42,083 people in 26 countries across continents. The respondents included 16,824 Gen Z individuals, 13,080 millennials, 6,937 Gen Xers, 5,119 baby boomers, and 123 from the silent generation (aged 76 to 93).

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Here's a table outlining the **harms** and **benefits** of social media for youth:

Aspect	Harms	Benefits
Mental Health	Exposure to cyberbullying, harassment, or hateful comments.	Access to mental health resources and peer support.
	Risk of developing anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem due to comparison with others.	Provides a platform to discuss mental health openly, reducing stigma.
	Fear of missing out (FOMO) leading to stress or feelings of inadequacy.	Helps youth feel connected to others, reducing loneliness.
Education	Distraction from schoolwork and studies.	Access to educational content, tutorials, and eLearning platforms.
	Propagation of misinformation, affecting critical thinking.	Opportunities for learning new skills, such as coding, art, or languages.
Social Interaction	Overreliance on online interactions can hinder face-to-face communication skills.	Builds and maintains relationships across distances.
	Risk of exposure to predators or inappropriate content.	Enables networking and connecting with likeminded communities.
Self-Image	Unrealistic beauty standards promoted by influencers and filters.	Encourages self-expression through art, writing, and videos.
	Pressure to conform to trends, leading to loss of individuality.	Can boost self-confidence when receiving positive feedback on posts or creations.
Addiction	Excessive screen time can lead to addiction, reducing physical activity and sleep quality.	Encourages technological literacy, which is a valuable skill in the digital age.
Activism and Awareness	Slacktivism: superficial involvement in causes without real action.	Raises awareness of important issues and empowers youth to advocate for change.
	May expose youth to controversial or polarizing content.	Facilitates participation in global and local movements, e.g., climate action or charity.
Privacy and Security	Risk of personal data theft or hacking.	Teaches responsibility in managing online presence and digital footprints.
	Sharing sensitive information that could be misused.	

This table shows that while social media offers many advantages for youth, it also presents significant risks. Awareness and guided usage can help minimize the harms and maximize the benefits.

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Social Media Knowledge Quiz

1. **Which of the following is the most accurate description of a benefit social media offers to youth?**
   a) It guarantees a safe space for all users to express themselves.
   b) It provides instant access to diverse educational resources and peer networks.
   c) It reduces stress by limiting exposure to global news.
   d) It eliminates the risk of misinformation.

2. **What is one of the *least obvious* risks of social media addiction?**
   a) Increased likelihood of cyberbullying.
   b) Decreased ability to concentrate on tasks over long periods.
   c) Poor eyesight.
   d) Reduced exposure to current events.

3. **Which of these scenarios best illustrates the concept of "slacktivism"?**
   a) Participating in a school-organized beach cleanup after sharing a related post.
   b) Signing an online petition and then volunteering for a cause.
   c) Sharing a hashtag about climate change but not making any personal lifestyle changes.
   d) Donating to a relief fund through a campaign shared on social media.

4. **Which of the following is a *hidden harm* associated with unrealistic beauty standards on social media?**
   a) Encouraging self-expression through fashion and makeup.
   b) Promoting fitness challenges and healthy eating habits.
   c) Creating a constant need for validation through likes and comments.
   d) Offering platforms for body positivity campaigns.

5. **How does social media pose a unique challenge to youth compared to traditional forms of communication?**
   a) It allows only one-way communication, limiting feedback.
   b) It blurs the lines between public and private spheres, increasing vulnerability.
   c) It restricts youth from accessing real-time news updates.
   d) It replaces face-to-face communication with no long-term consequences.

6. **What is a *potential contradiction* in the relationship between social media and mental health?**
   a) Social media worsens anxiety but has no impact on depression.
   b) Social media can improve connection but also cause isolation.
   c) Social media fosters open discussions about mental health but suppresses resources.
   d) Social media increases awareness about mental health but reduces professional support.

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7. **Which of these strategies is the most effective way to minimize privacy risks for youth on social media?**
   a) Avoid using any hashtags on posts.
   b) Regularly update privacy settings and limit personal information shared.
   c) Block anyone who comments on their posts.
   d) Avoid posting anything online after 10 p.m.

8. **How does social media potentially benefit youth in understanding global issues?**
   a) It provides access to accurate news from reliable sources only.
   b) It connects them to diverse perspectives and firsthand experiences from affected communities.
   c) It eliminates bias in the presentation of global news.
   d) It prevents overexposure to polarizing topics by controlling content.

9. **Why might social media make activism more appealing to youth?**
   a) It requires no significant time or energy investment.
   b) It allows them to contribute anonymously and avoid responsibility.
   c) It offers an accessible platform to reach large audiences and collaborate with others.
   d) It limits activism to online spaces, removing the need for in-person involvement.

10. **What is a *hidden drawback* of the educational benefits of social media?**
    a) Youth may become over-reliant on digital resources, reducing critical thinking.
    b) Educational content is often free and widely accessible.
    c) Tutorials and e-learning platforms are available for niche interests.
    d) It encourages multitasking, improving productivity.

One of the harms of social media in Singapore

- **Social Media can radicalize youth**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exWIXc-3qWM&t=42s

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Discussion Questions

a. What are some characteristics of social media that have drawn users to it?

- **The ability to connect with friends and like-minded individuals**
- **Pervasiveness and global reach**
- **Anonymity of social media**
- **The ability to bypass government censorship**
- **Real-time interactivity**

b. What are some positive impacts that have arisen from the use of social media today?

- People are **more socially aware of global happenings and current affairs**, as well as different perspectives on issues and this has created **a more vibrant community**.
- The use of social media has also allowed consumers to **shop more conveniently,** compare prices and increase the selection of products to choose from, boosting **e-commerce and consumer welfare** today.
- Social media has also allowed **youths to gain public support for the social causes** they believe in, and start movements to initiate positive reforms and policies that have changed lives for the better.
- The connectivity of social media has also meant that people are able to **connect more frequently and in more interactive ways** through games, shared videos and posts - and this has helped to improve relationships.

c. What do you think are some of the curses arising from the use of social media? (Note that a curse is more extreme and intense than 'negative impact')

- Social media has **allowed terrorist groups to radicalise youths to extreme ideologies** and this has culminated in more terrorist attacks to destabilise society.
- Social media has also allowed **more sexual predators and cyber-bullies** to prey on teenagers, often causing physical and mental distress to the victims.
- Social media has also **encouraged narcissism in more people**, as they engage in superficial exploits and curate their profiles to gain their followers' attention.
- Social media has also caused the **loss of privacy,** as people put up more personal information and social media companies collect data on their media use to sell to businesses.

Student Activity

Write 1 paragraph on foolscap paper on either how social media is a blessing or a curse.

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HOME READING

Social media in general

1. Article 1: What is the big picture?

It is understandable there is concern about young people's **safety and health on social media**. The massive uptake of social media over the past decade has **seen human interactions change drastically.** This is because it puts us in contact with a huge range of people. It creates **new relationships and connections with others and reshapes existing ones**.

At the same time, **depression and anxiety have reached unprecedented levels among young people. So it is often assumed social media is the sole cause**.

Underpinning calls for a social media ban is the idea young people are "not able to control themselves" and need adult intervention. But we forget platforms are run by corporate giants who use aggressive approaches and algorithms to keep users, both young and old, engaged.

In theory, algorithms only present content a user may be interested in. What actually happens is content is shaped to encourage longer time on the app, consumer spending, extreme reactions and sharing.

What is working?
So there is "good" and "bad" use of social media and it is important to be able to differentiate this in our discussions.

We know it can help young people by providing connection and support. A 2022 research review showed social media platforms can provide LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) young people with their own space, potentially helping mental health and well-being. It can help young people connect with their peers and support marginalised identities. Studies also show social media interventions (or programmes run through these platforms) can significantly decrease the severity of anxiety and depression in young people.

But it needs to be the right platform and quality content (based on evidence) and delivered in ways young people will respond to. Just because it is on TikTok does not mean it will automatically be meaningful for them.

What's not working
But some things are not helping young people on social media at the moment.

A 2022 study, based on interviews with teenagers, found **young people see the need to respond quickly to notifications as a significant stressor**. But they also noted **being**

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constantly available is often seen as a key part of friendship. They said leaving an online interaction is hard and it is less stressful to just stay on it.

The teenagers also said that while social media **can help their well-being by providing information, entertainment, inspiration and social connection, it was not all positive**. They also felt worried about their passive, "meaningless" scrolling. As the study notes: One participant spoke of feeling **trapped by passively scrolling** through images on Instagram, conveying a sense of regret at failing to spend her time more wisely.

Young people in this study also talked about being exposed to **stressful and harmful content via social media**. This includes expectations of perfection, threatening chain-mail posts and others talking about self-harm. The difficulty is young people have very little control over what goes into their feed and neither do we.

So, what can we do?

We are at a crossroads with social media. There is a lot of community concern, but some of our responses are not based on evidence.

While there are obvious risks associated with social media, it is essential to understand its value and guide young people to use it positively. By banning it or dismissing the benefits, we risk driving young people "underground" in their use of social media. This makes it less likely they will seek help from adults if they need it.

This means we need targeted digital literacy education, covering multiple issues, including:

- Algorithms and why content is posted online. The more a teen understands why they see the content they see, the more control they will have;
- How young people can identify and can respond if they come across harmful content;
- How to identify reliable, evidence-based groups if they are looking for support online; and
- How we understand and define friendship in the digital age.
- A ban seems simple, but to really keep our kids safe online we need to do more complex work to reclaim control of social media. This is something the entire community needs to contribute to: schools, parents, governments and industry.

Beyond educating kids (and their parents and teachers), the next step is to exert more control over what content is shown to us via algorithms. This requires new collaborations between governments and the community to challenge social media companies. Young people need to be part of this approach, so the responses are meaningful for them, not just us.

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INDIGO

1. Articles on Harms

1.1. Social Media can radicalize youth

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exWIXc-3qWM&t=42s

1.2. Social media fueling youth radicalization in Australia, with AI set to worsen problem

25 Oct 2024
Jonathan Pearlman
For The Straits Times

SYDNEY – A string of terror attacks or plots have been conducted or exposed in Australia in 2024 and all had one thing in common: The attacker or alleged plotter was a young man aged between 14 and 21 whose online activities were crucial to his decision to carry out an attack.

1.3. The making of a smartphone zombie generation

Updated Mar 31, 2024,
The Straits Times

Imagine that a James Bond villain decided to achieve world domination not with armies or drones but through our brains. They might manipulate our minds to get us addicted to fantasy worlds, turn us against one another, and reduce our ability to concentrate.

Inventing the smartphone would do it. Then persuading us to give it to our children.

Until now, parents who fear that these omnipresent devices have made children sedentary, distracted and depressed have been cowed by powerful companies, naive teachers and peer pressure.

- Mothers who beg schools not to set homework online, undermining screen time limits, have been told technology is a "life skill".
- Fathers who fear phones mean their children can be targeted by predators and bullies in their own homes are met with the response that their GPS tracking keeps children "safe".
- Families who see how online gaming disrupts learning are told that it improves problem-solving. And, of course, some of this is true.

But it is impossible to ignore the exponential rise in teenage mental illness that has coincided with the smartphone becoming ubiquitous since the early 2010s.

In a new book, The Anxious Generation, social psychologist Jonathan Haidt argues that smart devices and overprotective parents have **"deformed" the developmental processes of childhood.** He is demanding that smartphones be banned for children under 14, and social media until 16.

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Until recently, this would have been regarded as extreme and unenforceable. But the fightback is beginning. Florida's Governor Ron DeSantis last week signed a Bill to ban under-14s in the state from social media accounts and make platforms erase any already created. This follows evidence of dramatically improved behaviour in schools after a total smartphone ban was imposed in 2023 in Orange County.

1.4. Curbing social media usage among children: The view in countries around Asia
24 Nov 2024
The Straits Times
(Edited Summary version)

Australia is set to implement a ban on social media usage by under-16s, seeking to curb instances of cyber bullying, harmful content and pressure over body image, as well as deter online predators.

- **Australia**

The proposed ban – which would be a world first in aiming to prevent the use of social media by children – is likely to be studied by other countries that are also combating a rise in screen addiction among the youth.

The article discusses global efforts to protect children from the negative impacts of social media, such as cyberbullying, online predators, and addiction, focusing on Australia's proposal to ban social media for under-16s and measures taken in five Asian countries:

- **China**

In 2023, the country – which has the most internet users in the world at nearly 1.1 billion by the first half of 2024 – announced plans to **limit the amount of time minors spend online on their smartphones to no more than two hours a day.** It was but the latest in a series of moves to protect the young from harms caused by internet and video game addiction.

In 2019, Beijing capped children's daily online game time on weekdays at 90 minutes, and banned them from playing between 10pm and 8am. This playtime was reduced in 2021 to just an hour per day on Fridays, weekends and holidays.

New rules continue to be rolled out. On Nov 15, 2024, the country's cyber watchdog launched guidelines clarifying the "minor mode" features that it had mandated companies to implement since January. Apart from capping screen time for most internet services to between one and two hours, the "minor mode" features should also prevent youngsters from using their mobile gadgets between 10pm and 6am.

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Video and live-streaming apps in China have similar **anti-addiction systems**. Douyin, the Chinese equivalent of TikTok, has limited users below the age of 14 to 40 minutes a day on the app. The moves mirror growing concerns about **internet addiction among the young**.

Young people, especially adolescents, are often portrayed in the media as being vulnerable to harm caused by the internet, **resulting in ills such as family conflicts, crime and death from online gaming marathons**.

- **Japan**

Japan grapples with **crimes targeting minors on social media, including child pornography and exploitation.**

A high school student was so charmed by the online persona of Tatsuya Yasuzumi, 29, that she met him for a date in Tokyo in October 2023. Her dreams of a fairytale romance, however, ended with her being sexually assaulted and murdered, and her body dumped in a rental car in a remote town two hours north of the Japanese capital.

She was among 1,665 Japanese minors who **fell victim to crimes connected to social media** in 2023, according to National Police Agency data. The figure peaked at **2,082 in 2019,** before a decline that the authorities posit could be due to greater awareness.

The most common scourge in 2023 was child pornography and prostitution, which affected 882 minors, according to police data.

In Tokyo, a metropolitan government survey found **that three in 10 elementary school children had sent images or videos of their faces or bodies to strangers through social media**. This poses the obvious risk of them – or their likeness, given the proliferation of generative artificial intelligence – being abused for child pornography or to create deepfakes. While mandatory restrictions are unlikely due to constitutional freedoms, the focus is on promoting internet literacy and parental vigilance.

- **India**

India faces a surge in **social media addiction**, fueled by cheap internet and smartphones.

At a clinic promoting healthy use of devices at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (Nimhans) in Bengaluru, the number of cases of screen addiction has risen dramatically since the Covid-19 pandemic.

While no outright bans are proposed, regulations like age verification and awareness campaigns for children and parents are emphasized to curb screen addiction and its tragic consequences.

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- **Indonesia**

Social media exposes Indonesian children to risks like gambling and exploitation. The pervasive use of social media among Indonesian children, coupled with a lack of digital literacy, makes for a dangerous mix, making them **vulnerable to digital crimes such as online gambling and sexual exploitation,** activists say.

Mr Andy Ardian, national coordinator of Ecpat Indonesia – a national network of organisations and individuals in 11 Indonesian provinces that works to eliminate prostitution, pornography and sex trafficking of children – told ST that social media is too often a **platform for children to exchange pornographic content. Child trafficking networks** may also use it to reach out to their victims, he added. Such exploitation occurs because of ignorance.

Activists urge integrating digital literacy into school curricula and stricter regulations to limit screen time and inappropriate content.

- **Philippines**

Known as the "social media capital of the world," the Philippines has struggled with proposals to limit minors' social media access due to concerns over constitutional rights. Efforts focus on addressing online abuse while balancing freedom of information and speech.

In a Bill introduced in Congress in 2022, parliament raised concerns about **cyber bullying, privacy violations and the negative impact of excessive screen time.** President Ferdinand Marcos Jr's government has tried to crack down on the **online sexual abuse of children**, as the country has long been dubbed a hot spot for child pornography.

1.5 Social media use can trigger feelings of inferiority or inadequacy among young

Ang Qing and Cha Hae Won
Published Aug 1, 2021
The Straits Times

SINGAPORE - With nearly 200,000 followers, 22-year-old TikTok influencer Tan Yeo Shi Lee is sometimes subjected to more scrutiny than his peers when he expresses himself on social media. The second-year Singapore Management University student said: "It can be as simple as 'this is not funny' or 'you're ugly' and you start wondering whether what they say is true."

Mr Tan said: "Sadly, it can really make you more insecure, though for me, I try not to let it affect me too much and I trust the words of those close to me much more."
Seeing picture-perfect people on social media has also made him more conscious about how he represents himself online.

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The Sunday Times spoke to 23 people including social workers, counsellors, psychologists and parents, who said the **impact of social media on the mental health** of the young in Singapore is concerning. And not just in terms of **cyber bullying.**

Mr Cho Ming Xiu, founder and executive director of mental advocacy non-profit Campus PSY, said most young people find it difficult not to check on their **friends on social media and compare their lives.**

Psychologists say the deluge of attractive posts can **trigger feelings of inferiority or inadequacy,** especially among young people with less experience to differentiate the social media world from real life.

Education Minister Chan Chun Sing highlighted the challenges young people face, including the **social pressure of the online world** in encouraging constant comparison. He noted that young people are already dealing with family and peer relationships, expectations of themselves and their parents, and the difficulties of coping with the rigours of Singapore's education system.

Mental health advocates and social agencies say **young people are vulnerable to relying on social media for self-worth and self-image, even as they try to forge their own identity**. Said assistant director of Touch Mental Wellness Andrea Chan: "Seeing good things can draw much envy and comparison, while identification with bad things can lead to a negative spiral."

Ms Lee Yi Ping, principal case manager and programme lead of Community Health Assessment Team, said: "In the event a young person feels disappointed or rejected by the responses received, the distress is often left unnoticed unless the young person openly talks about it with another trusted person."

The experts say if these pressures are left unchecked, **negative thoughts and feelings from social media can contribute to depression, anxiety and eating disorders**.

Senior counsellor at Jurong Pioneer Junior College Elaine Tay said she had young people tell her that **they sought help after an influencer shared that they were seeing a therapist or seeking help for their mental health issues.**

She said: "I have students who say 'I was following this influencer and he shared that he's going through depression and I would like to get help to get better as well'."

Meanwhile, more mental health advocacy groups and agencies like Re: Mind Singapore have taken to social media in the past five years to provide bite-sized information to **educate the public about mental health and how to seek help.**

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In a dialogue on July 30 between the Education Minister and students from secondary schools and junior colleges, three young people shared that **social media had helped sensitise them to mental health issues.**

Mr Steve Loh, founder of e-buddy Myloh, an app which provides evidence-based psychological advice, self-care strategies and helps tracks mood changes, note that many young people often need support in the middle of the night when they may not have access to immediate human care. He said: "From our focus group discussions with young people, we find that there are those who wake up at 2am, with a panic attack, and all they need to do is talk and find something that can help them."

The bottom line is that social media can be used healthily, experts said, if young people are taught how to navigate the pressures of the online world.

Mr Tan said that social media has been a **great way to stay connected with people and make new friends.** The TikTok influencer added that the platform has also allowed him to have an outlet to **express his creativity**.

1.6 Social media is facilitating Islamic radicalism in Indonesia

More young Indonesian Muslims are going online for their religious education. In a landscape where rage and inflammation are rewarded, these young Muslims are facing an increased risk of radicalisation.

ASEAN TODAY
Editorial
9 Aug 2019

Indonesians are some of the most active social media users in the world**. 150 million Indonesians spend more than three hours a day trawling social media sites**, with Facebook, Instagram and YouTube garnering the most visitors. With a captive audience, Islamist groups are making **inroads** using social media outlets to radicalise young Muslims.

A 2017 study by the Syarif Hidayatullah Islamic State University (UIN) in collaboration with the UN Development Program (UNDP) found that **young Indonesian Muslims who use the internet have more radical and intolerant views compared to those who rarely go online**. 88.5% of the 1,859 respondents believed that the government should ban religious minority groups. Additionally, a similar study revealed that 10% of young Indonesians supported the establishment of an Islamic State and would accept the use of violence as a means of defending the religion.

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Millennials are seeking religious knowledge through social media

Irfan Abubakar, a researcher from UIN, described how young people are increasingly turning to the internet as their primary source of religious information. As the next generation of young, digital-savvy Muslims abandon mosques and take their spiritual and religious studies online, there is the danger of absolutism, where the individual regards their own beliefs as the absolute truth and refuses to acknowledge the validity of other religious teachings. "Absolutism is a threat to the country's **pluralistic** society," Irfan said.

Many of the most popular online preachers often express **radical** narratives such as Indian Ulema, Zakir Naik and Indonesian preacher, Khalid Basalamah, who has been rejected at several Nahdlatul Ulama mosques for his attitudes.

Social media is a catalyst for terrorism

Dr. Solahudin, a terrorism expert from the **University of Indonesia, interviewed 75 convicted terrorists and found that social media played a catalytic role in the radicalisation process**. In 85% of cases, the convicted terrorists said that it took them less than a year from the time they were exposed to radical ideology to commit an act of terrorism.

"Before the widespread use of social media, it would take between five and 10 years for a newly radicalised individual to take part in a terror attack," he added.

Muslim figures who promote moderate teachings don't interest young Muslims

Young Muslims are eschewing the two largest Islamic organisations in the country, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammudiyah. On social media, where rage and **inflammatory** comment is rewarded with likes, comments and shares, their moderate content is struggling to compete with more radical groups. Their regular posts on Facebook only receive hundreds of likes at most, while more radical accounts frequently hit more than 1,400 likes on a single post.

The government and other stakeholders must intensify efforts to stop the spread of radical content

The government and social media players such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter also have a central role in preventing radical messages from spreading online. Social media giants like Facebook use machine learning to automatically detect images and videos that are extremist in nature. This is reducing the length of time radical content remains online. In the first quarter of last year, it took an average of 43 hours to remove dangerous content. By the third quarter, this was slashed to 18 hours.

Facebook has acknowledged its limitations and the work that needs to be done. But so far, extremist groups are winning the digital battle, and without improvements in the detection technology, **the country will continue to struggle to keep young people safe online.**

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INDIGO

POSITIVE

1. Doing advocacy the Gen Z way – via social media and with quiet determination

Updated Aug 10, 2024,
FacebookTelegram

SINGAPORE – Signs and placards are but a small part in Gen Z's arsenal for activism.
An increasing number of young adults aged 22 to 27 is taking to social media to champion causes such as climate change, mental wellness and minority rights.

By using infographics, art and dialogues to do so, these young advocates take a gentle but determined approach, posting as often as daily, to show that activism need not be shrill to be impactful.

These Gen Z activists are paving the way for change with their artistic, PowerPoint-styled digital footprints, showing a softer side to advocacy that still gets the job done.

LepakConversations: Lepak, talk, change
Its Instagram handle challenges the stereotype of a screaming activist.

@LepakConversations on Instagram aims to bring Malay/Muslim issues to the fore through conducting dialogues online and offline. Tackling issues such as stereotypes against Malays, migrant worker rights and allyship beyond the Malay community, the organisation was co-founded by freelance social media consultant Yulianna Frederika in 2020.

Singapore Youth For Climate Action: A climate of change
To appeal to more people, Singapore Youth For Climate Action (SYCA) uses infographics to spice up dry information on climate and the environment.

Its Instagram page of the same name explains terms such as carbon tax and Singapore's role in global environmental treaties. Started in 2015, the SYCA describes itself as a network of young people with the common goal of fighting climate change.

The main aims of the organisation include engaging youth on topics of sustainability and empowering them to advocate for equitable climate policies. It also partners stakeholders such as the National University of Singapore (NUS) to educate the public on climate matters.

Future of social media advocacy
According to Dr Zhang Renwen, assistant professor in the department of communications and new media at NUS, social media advocacy goes back longer than many realise.

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“Between 2004 – when Facebook launched – and the present, social media has democratised the ability to advocate for causes,” says the avid social media and online community researcher. Citing the #MeToo movement as an example, Dr Zhang notes that social media amplified the impact and reach of advocacy efforts, reaching 19 million retweets in its first year worldwide.

The younger generation is particularly adept at harnessing social media “to voice their opinions and rally support globally”, she notes.

Online marketing agency X10 Media’s regional business director Sky Lim agrees with this sentiment, adding: “Because of the ease of accessibility, social media platforms have a higher penetration and allow for like-minded people to connect with one another, resulting in active micro-communities.”

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Sample Essay

Introduction

"Previously, in the physical world, if you make customers unhappy, they might each tell 6 friends. But with social media, if you make customers unhappy, they can each tell 6,000 friends online." Jeff Bezos, the CEO at Amazon.com said. The 21st century is marked with unprecedented advancements in digital and new media. The growth of social media has undoubtedly changed the world we live in today and its impact is unquestionable. In fact, it is hard to imagine life without it now. While social media could bring about many benefits **such as the increase in the pace of information transfer and increased connectivity,** it could also bring about **adverse impacts on the vulnerable and impressionable groups, especially without government regulation and education.** Personally, I believe that social media is a double-edged sword which could bring about both benefits and disadvantages, and the extent of the benefits depends more on the responsible and discerning use of social media rather than the platform itself.

The Introduction

- What strategy was used as a hook?
- How effective was the hook?
- Was it relevant? Did it make you interested to read on?

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Social media is a blessing in modern day life

(Remember the function of a Topic Sentence – Answers the Question and gives you the reason / rationale).

1. Social media is a blessing as it provides a platform for the oppressed to articulate their grievances, thereby garnering mass support to alleviate their plight.

- With its great extent of reach and pervasiveness, social media can serve as an effective medium to connect to the masses and organise mass rallies or protests, especially in politically oppressive societies.
- Minorities have leveraged on the reach of social media to expose the systemic discrimination they faced and pressure the government to implement safeguards to prevent such abuse. This can be seen when the killing of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Rayshard Brooks by police officers sparked a wave of public outrage on social media and this resulted in demonstration in more than 2000 cities in the US and around the world.
- The Black Lives Matter Movement catalysed by social media successfully pushed the Minneapolis City Council to take action and ban chokeholds, requiring police officers to intervene against the use of excessive force by other officers, and voted an intent to replace the police department with a new community-based system of public safety.
- In Singapore, social media activism manifests most commonly in the form of Instagram or Facebook pages dedicated to raising awareness around specific socio-political causes. The Twain Have Met (@thetwainhavemet) is a site that aims to bring up social justice issues and has amassed more than 10,000 followers. In August 2020, a series of allegations regarding local influencer Dee Kosh and his sexual advances on minors gained traction on both Twitter and Instagram, prompting individuals to come forward with their experiences online. According to Nicole, the nameless, faceless nature of The Twain Have Met aided in their efforts in reaching out to people who were sexually abused by the influencer. “Dee Kosh is an online personality—the only real way to stop his influence and help [the survivors] get justice would be to raise awareness about what he’s done.” Former radio disc jockey Dee Kosh, 33, was sentenced to 32 weeks' jail for sexual offences involving teenage boys.

➢ All these social media-led demonstrations serve to highlight political and societal issues simmering amongst the citizenry. The massive public support gained from the Arab Spring uprisings led to a mass overthrowing of tyrannical dictators like Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and Muammar Gadaffi in Libya, bringing about a glimmer of hope and the envisioned political freedom in previously oppressed societies.

➢ Thus, it can be seen that social media is a blessing that empowers the oppressed to create positive changes within their societies and collectively build a brighter future.

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2. Furthermore, social media serves as a medium for information exchange and discussion amongst users, thus developing an informed and articulate population.

- Apart from entertainment, social media sites like Facebook and Twitter also serve as an avenue for users to share their thoughts about major events in their home country or even around the world. They can also simultaneously hear alternate perspectives from others.
- The relative anonymity aspect of social media also encourages introverted users to be more willing and confident to share their thoughts on online forums.
- During the 2020 General Elections in Singapore, many took to the social media to actively discuss their thoughts about various political parties and candidates, contributing to a vibrant online political discourse. It was reported that the Worker's Party's stronger presence in social media as compared to the PAP helped influence younger and first time voter.
- Beyond domestic affairs, many users, especially the younger generation have utilised social media to discuss and debate global issues like Climate Change and LGBT issues.

➢ It could be seen that the relative anonymity of social media indirectly helps to boost the confidence of introverted people in articulating their thoughts more openly in a public domain. In Singapore, this has resulted in a less apathetic electorate compared to that of the past.

➢ Social media has also empowered individuals to be active contributors to world affairs beyond physical and geographical boundaries, leading to more robust discussions with an international flavour amongst citizens of the world.

➢ Thus, it is evident that the intellectual discourse enabled by social media allows for the development of a well-informed, knowledgeable and confident generation, which is vital in today's modern and rapidly changing world.

Social media is a curse in modern day life

3. However, that being said, the unfettered nature of social media is a curse as it could also cause the young to be vulnerable to cyber-bullying and be preyed upon by online sexual predators.

- This is especially true in the case of the younger generation whom, due to their tender age, may be highly impressionable, and they may be subject to cyber-bullying or manipulation by online sexual predators.
- Many of these youths may be spurred by curiosity and may not be mature enough to understand the risks that they take when they engage with these sexual predators. The unfettered nature of the social media also makes it hard for parents to supervise their online activities and chats.

➢ Grooming is the act of building up a trusting and emotional relationship with a minor, usually with the purpose of sexual exploitation, gratification or abuse, said TOUCH Cyber Wellness's senior coach Joanne Wong. More teenagers and children are being sexually groomed on Instagram and Facebook. The organisation has seen few counselling cases

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related to online sexual grooming, and there are no official statistics in Singapore on the number of child sexual abuse cases involving digital communication.

- But a 2018 report by digital education think tank DQ Institute found that 54 per cent of Singapore children aged between eight and 12 are exposed to at least one cyber-risk, which includes cyberbullying, video game addiction, offline meetings and online sexual behaviour.
- Among those who were exposed to these risks, 16 per cent have been involved in online sexual behaviours such as having searched for, and/or visited websites with sexual content, and/or having had sexual conversations online with strangers.
- Police in England and Wales have recorded more than 5,000 cases of online grooming since having sexual communications with a child became a crime in 2017 in the UK. The number of cases on Instagram that police dealt with rose by 200% in the space of a year.
- Research by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and O2, a telecomm company, in 2016 revealed that of nearly eight out of 10 children aged 11 to 17 broke the rules of social media sites such as Facebook and signed up for an account when they were too young. These children are hence vulnerable to online sexual predators who often make use of social media sites to find their victims.
- Some of these youths may also fall prey to cyber-bullying where they are being harassed by comments and verbal attacks that may crumble their self-esteem. Cases of Internet trolling and cyberstalking can cause such significant emotional distress to youths that they may entertain suicidal thoughts.
- There are known cases of youths who have committed suicide due to depression brought on by cyberbullying.
- Thus, it would be fair to argue that social media, if not utilised with a discerning mind, may lead to emotional and physical harm on the young.

4. Moreover, social media could be exploited by terrorist organisations to radicalise and indoctrinate credulous individuals with warped religious ideologies, resulting in nefarious acts of terror to destabilise societies.

- Social media serves as a conducive platform for terrorist organisations to propagate their insidious teachings and even discuss weapon-making procedures. Young people are especially vulnerable as many are impressionable and easily manipulated. All these have led to an increased number of self-radicalised individuals and an ensuing number of terror acts in various countries.
- A radicalised Singaporean teenager who was detained for terrorism-related conduct under the Internal Security Act (ISA) when he was just 17 in January 2020. He was first investigated by the ISD in September 2017, when he was 15 years old. He had posted on social media defaced images of President Halimah Yacob and called for militant group Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to behead her.
- ISD learnt that he was introduced to pro-ISIS social media groups by a foreign online contact. Despite undergoing counselling, he remained staunchly supportive of ISIS and

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was discovered by the ISD to be willing to help the terror group's online propaganda efforts. He was even ready to undertake other activities if called upon to do so.

- In December 20240, another teenager (16 years old), was detained in December under Singapore's Internal Security Act (ISA) after making "detailed plans and preparations to conduct terrorist attacks" against Muslims. He planned to use a machete to attack Muslims at two mosques in the Woodlands area on Mar 15, the second anniversary of New Zealand's Christchurch attacks.

- More recently, in August 2024 another self-radicalised youth was arrested by the ISD for planning to attack non-Muslims in a crowded area in Tampines.
- Thus, it is arguable that social media has indeed culminated in the rise of the "lone wolf" phenomenon as even individuals with no prior affiliations with terrorist organisations can easily become radicalised today.
- The loss of numerous innocent lives only serves to underscore the indiscriminate nature of such terror acts, leading many to question the deep-seated issues in their respective society and how these might be mitigated to arrest some of the root causes of self-radicalisation.
- When abused as a tool for radicalisation, social media has indeed morphed into a curse, which indirectly results in unthinkable number of deaths, injuries and devastation to societies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while it seems that social media could lead to severe disadvantages, its contributions in developing and benefitting individuals in terms of increased empowerment of their future and in nurturing a well-informed and knowledgeable generation should not go unnoticed. Like many other things, social media is a double-edged sword. If used aptly, it could bring about tremendous blessings, however, if used without a clear discerning mind, it could morph into a terrible curse. Thus, to claim either of the above outcomes without taking into account the involvement of individuals and users would be ultimately parochial. That being said, **the importance of educating the younger generation to use social media to their advantage cannot be understated as this is ultimately the key to whether social media would be a blessing or a curse in modern day life.**

Essay Extension

'Nowadays teenagers' behaviour is influenced more by the media than by their parents.' What is your view?

Student Activity: Plan an outline for this question. You must come up with topic sentences as part of your planning.

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Here are some ideas:

Points in Agreement with the Statement:

- Pervasive Media Exposure that significantly shape their beliefs, values, and behaviors.
- Teenagers may feel pressure to conform to their peers, who are also influenced by the media.
- Celebrity Influence the behavior of young people.
- Turn to media outlets for information, guidance, and inspiration, sometimes more than they do to their parents.

Points Against the Statement:

- Parental Guidance can have a lasting impact on teenagers.
- Family Values can counterbalance media influences.
- Parents have some influence over their children's choice of friends, indirectly impacting their behavior.
- Critical Thinking: Many teenagers are taught critical thinking skills by their parents.

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CURRENT AFFAIRS	HAWKER CULTURE

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTb9sj_In2A
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzMJRtpM6Ts
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5FeuX7VvwvE

Hawker Centres: Our Shared Heritage

To the uninitiated, heritage, which refers to the cumulation of a community's memories, experiences, records, and traditions inherited from the past, can seem like an antiquarian indulgence. Yet heritage remains highly relevant in the present as it helps shape the future of international relations, community identity, and economic development. Today, heritage officially encompasses old buildings and intangible cultural heritage: long-standing 'practices, representations, knowledge and skills' that straddle borders, defy convenient categorisation, and are easily commodified. In Singapore, hawker culture is an indelible part of our intangible cultural heritage and is intrinsic to our national identity.

What is Singaporean hawker culture?

History of hawker centres

Street hawking in Singapore can be traced back to the mid-1800s, when street hawkers sold a variety of foods along the streets. In the 1970s, various policies by the government resettled all street hawkers to hawker centres, giving them a clean and sanitised environment for them to hawk food. Resettlement of street hawkers from the city to Housing Development Board (HDB) estates popularised hawker centres as 'community dining rooms' in an urban setting, evolving into a key characteristic of food culture in Singapore.

Why is hawker culture so important and valuable?

1. **Hawker culture is a significant part of the Singaporean identity, regardless of individual income or social status.**

- A Singapore without hawker centres is unimaginable. Hawker centres and hawker food are an integral part of our daily lives, our psyche and also the soul of this Little Red Dot.

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- Hawker food, trade and culture can be found elsewhere in the world and is not a cultural practice native to Singapore. However, its significance to Singaporeans cannot be understated, as the humble communal experience is a source of warmth and comfort to all Singaporeans equally, regardless of social status and income level.
- Singapore's nomination of its hawker culture for recognition by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 2018 was thus not about staking ownership over hawker culture, nor did it aim to prove that Singapore's hawker food is better than other countries' street food.
- Instead, the submission was a milestone in Singapore's journey to paying tribute to and protecting our intangible cultural heritage.

- On 16 December 2020, the Intergovernmental Committee (IGC) announced the successful inscription of Hawker Culture in Singapore on the UNESCO Representative List. The successful nomination would hence give our hawkers the recognition they deserve and show our commitment as a nation to safeguard our hawker culture for generations to come.
- Above all, it was a sign of the government's commitment to preserving our hawker culture, proof of its cultural importance to the community and country.
- Singapore's love for hawker food also transcends socio-economic barriers. Popular hawker drinks such as the ubiquitous Milo Dinosaur have been embraced as a common denominator that everyone can enjoy, regardless of age or income level.
- In 2016, swimmer Joseph Schooling celebrated winning Singapore's first-ever Olympic gold medal with a Milo Dinosaur at his favourite hawker stall during his victory parade.
  - The method in which Schooling celebrated like a Singaporean endeared him to the nation and reflected an authentic sense of citizenship. Despite his newly elevated status of Olympic champion, his adoration for greasy black *chye tow kueh* (fried carrot cake) and Milo dinosaur connected him with all Singaporeans who shared the humble past-time of feasting at hawker centres.
  - To Singapore, hawker culture is so much more than an open-air eatery for communal dining. Over and above flavour and texture, it represents a part of what it means to be 'Singaporean'—so much so that some hawker centres, such as Newton Food Centre, which was featured in the movie *Crazy Rich Asians*, have become tourist attractions.
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqtYZBCa_N0&t=75s

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- Amid Singapore's extension of the circuit breaker period in 2020, the implementation of stricter measures, and the overall economic strain caused by the pandemic, online users pulled together as a community to support local beloved hawkers. The Facebook group Hawkers United—Dabao 2020 was created to support the vulnerable group of hawkers who now offers islandwide delivery services. Hundreds of thousands of people have joined in to support local businesses.
- The celebration of our hawker culture is exactly what it represents to locals: a shared national hobby with a significance that transcends race, language and religion. While the notion of hawker centres is not a concept exclusive to Singapore, our rich historical narrative and complex relationship with it certainly is.

2. As pillar of Singapore's rich culture, a resurgence of appreciation for hawker culture amongst the public is essential to preserving tradition.

- Conveniently located, affordable and ubiquitous in the Singapore landscape, hawker centres are one of the most recognisable pillars of Singapore's food culture.
- These innocuous food hubs have come under the spotlight recently, following the Prime Minister's announcement of the bid to list Singapore's hawker culture under the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity at the 2018 National Day Rally.

- Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said that this effort hopes to "safeguard and promote this unique culture for future generations," as well as "let the rest of the world know about our local food and multicultural heritage".
- To keep members of the public updated, the National Heritage Board (NHB), who is leading the bid, set up a website with relevant information that also allows people to pledge their support to the bid. The NHB started a travelling exhibition called 'Our SG Hawker Culture' showcasing hawker culture in Singapore.
- However, it is important for hawkers and diners alike to accept the fact that in order to preserve our hawker culture, there is ironically a need to modernise the way hawker centres are run and the type of food they sell, in order to cater to the younger generation which has developed a taste for less traditional flavours, and has come to appreciate cuisines from other countries due to modern day globalisation.
- Timbre+ which opened in 2016 was dubbed a 'hipster hawker centre'. The establishment preserves the traditional aspects of a hawker centre, such as communal non-air-conditioned dining spaces and a multiplicity of stalls, but also has stalls selling fusion food

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dishes. Additionally, the presence of a live band helps to make the overall atmosphere a lively and attractive one.

- New hawkers with modern takes on hawker fare have also joined the hawking scene, even in older, more traditional hawker centres. For example, Seafood Pirates is a hawker stall that was founded by a 29-year-old. It sells Japanese-inspired seafood soup instead of the usual hawker fare.

➢ While the government works together with Singaporeans to preserve and promote our hawker culture, perhaps Singaporeans should also be prepared to see changes in our hawker culture that enable it to keep up with the times.

➢ Although purists may scorn the arrival of new establishments and food that diverge from our traditional impressions of hawker centres, such changes may be necessary for hawker culture to survive and cater to the demands of our ever-evolving society.

➢ The use of novel ingredients and concepts that one would not normally associate with hawker centres may also help the hawker culture appeal to more Singaporeans, creating a resurgence in appreciation for it while helping to maintain its cultural roots.

<u>Issues and challenges surrounding the hawker culture in Singapore</u>

1. A healthy balance must be struck between affording hawkers business autonomy and regulatory compliance.

- A situation that has raised much displeasure amongst hawkers are the contracts they must sign to lease a stall. In 2018, the terms of these contracts came to light when food critic K.F. Seetoh claimed that not-for-profit hawker centres were being run like commercial enterprises.
- Some of these contracts contain intrusive terms, including stipulations on the number of calories in the dishes stallholders sell, and the 'fines' payable for each day a stallholder closes if he or she does not give a week's notice approved by the managing agent.
- These non-essential terms often add to the hardship of stallholders. For example, a previous requirement to include healthier dining options by dictating the number of calories in dishes restricts hawkers' freedom in deciding what dishes to serve, while the requirement to provide a week's notice for stall closure restricts the hawkers' freedom to decide how they wish to operate.
- Unfair clauses should be removed entirely, with business decisions left to individual stallholders. The running of the business can then be left to the stallholders who will be empowered to respond to market forces of demand and supply. In this manner, if customers want healthier dining options, stallholders will be incentivised to provide such options based on increased demand, rather than because it is a regulation determining whether they can continue operations.

➢ Decision making and future plans for Singapore's hawker scene should always centre around hawkers' interests and how they can be meaningfully supported and engaged. While we may only see hawker centres as a means of obtaining our daily meals, these decisions ultimately concern hawkers' livelihoods, passions and dreams.

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- This would also let the not-for-profit 'social enterprise hawker centre' model, which is supposed to have a socially conscious mission, live up to its moniker, encouraging more Singaporeans to join the hawker scene and keep our hawker culture alive.

2. The sustainability of the hawker culture is called into question as passing on the hawker culture to the younger generations is a challenge.

- The future of the quintessential hawker culture is also dependent on the proper implementation of government policies and incentives.
- In light of issues such as changing expectations, manpower challenges and an ageing workforce facing Singapore's economy, the sustainability of hawker culture is in direct competition with scarce resources.
- The challenge of sustaining hawker culture and attracting more people to the hawker trade is an issue of growing national concern.
- Suggestions to transform our hawker centres to meet changing expectations and provide conducive, vibrant spaces for community bonding must be closely examined and carefully implemented.
- The average age of our hawkers is 59, edging ever closer to the official age of retirement at 62 years. The job of a hawker does not typically attract younger Singaporeans, due to the long hours, uncomfortable setting and perceived income instability.
- The government has shown a keen awareness of this, seen from its establishment of the Hawker Centre 3.0 Committee in 2017. The vision of the Committee reflects an ambitious goal: to turn hawker centres into a hub where patrons can go for delicious meals, while at the same time remaining a hive of community activity and a place where patrons are clean and considerate.
- The committee's suggestions included having the government set aside incubation stalls at hawker centres, allowing for a six to twelve month try-out period for aspiring hawkers to learn the ropes and decide on the feasibility of continuing the hawker trade. As the stalls would be pre-fitted with basic equipment, startup costs would be reduced.
- In September 2019, the government announced further rebates on stall rental, resulting in more than 50% discount on stall rental per month, for 15 months, for new stallholders. Such a move would be beneficial in attracting potential stallholders who are hesitant to start their hawker business for fear of being unable to cover costs while being fresh on the hawker scene.

- While hawker culture is an intrinsic part of the Singaporean identity, the job of a hawker does not necessarily appeal to Singaporeans, especially the younger generation. The government thus plays a crucial role in lowering the barriers to entry for potential hawkers and reducing the difficulties faced on the job, thereby incentivising them to take up hawking as a career.
- Apart from the government providing infrastructure in the form of subsidies and training, there is, therefore, a need for the community to change their mindsets towards pursuing hawking as a job. If we want to preserve Singapore's hawker culture, it is imperative that the community and government come together to find an optimal solution.

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Efforts to safeguard and boost the succession of hawker culture

Hawker Succession Scheme (HSS)

Previously, non-subsidised hawkers cannot assign their stalls to non-relatives. However, with the launch of this new scheme in 2020, all hawkers are able to pass their stalls to non-relatives. This scheme aims to assist veteran hawkers in finding their successors to pass down their brand and recipes and carry on the trade.

Hawkers' Development Programme

The Hawkers' Development Programme was also launched in 2020 to help aspirants who want to step into the hawker industry. Under this scheme, training fees is subsidised, apprenticeship is paid and a subsidised stall will be allocated to the new aspiring hawker.

How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the Hawker Culture?

1. **COVID-19 has pushed hawkers to go digital.**

- During circuit breaker, Singaporeans were not allowed to dine in hawker centres and only takeaways were allowed. This has caused the business of many hawkers to plummet.
- Hawker delivery platforms like WhyQ and social enterprises like MakanGuru and Bungkus SG then came together to provide affordable delivery and tried to get people to support the hawkers using social media platforms to advertise.
- In a bid to boost their ailing business, many hawkers were forced to turn to options like delivery. Many also started accepting cashless and contactless payment to reduce the risks of covid transmission.
- Many programmes such as "Hawkers Go Digital" were also launched during the pandemic to support hawkers who are trying to go digital in order to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic and the post-covid world.
- As of July 2020, about one-third of the hawker stalls have gone digital.

Conclusion

As Singapore's hawker culture is now inscribed under the UNESCO Heritage List, it is indubitable that Singapore hawker culture is appreciated, celebrated and recognised. While the inscription of Hawker Culture did boost the hawker scene, it is important to realise the inscription alone is not the panacea to save the hawker scene. There are still many challenges that have to be tackled with great and sustained efforts to effectively safeguard the hawker culture and ensure its sustainability.

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