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| 1. Should we cheat ageing? **Analysis**  Ageing is typically seen in a negative light. It is assumed to be an unpleasant, debilitating and undesirable process that is to be avoided and delayed for as long as possible. The answer should explore if the experience of ageing can be of value, be appreciated as a natural process that brings some positive input for the individual and society.    **Clarification of Terms**  **Cheat:** avoid, escape, dodge, skip or do away with something unpleasant or undesirable  **Ageing:** The process of growing old that involves a deterioration of one’s physical, mental and cognitive, etc. abilities.  **Possible Perspectives/Stand**  Yes, we should cheat ageing   1. **Because it allows the elderly to feel more secure about their place in the world and more confident about being able to cope and function in a fast-changing world**   The modern world with its fast-paced lifestyle and digital environment has led to the diminished relevance and standing of the elderly in society and the work place. People often question their abilities and skills and think they need skills upgrading to be useful. The most proactive manager or line worker with their years of experience will not remain relevant if new skills are not learnt. Adaptability and flexibility are needed to get and process information quickly and physical (fingers/visual) dexterity to access information is necessary. Ageing workers face digital ageism and being marginalised if they simply accept ageing without trying to stem its effects. They will face demotion, retrenchment and dismissal if they do nothing to help themselves cheat ageing. With much of the wealth, power, and prestige being held by younger and younger corporate executives (age 59 in 1980 and age 54 and younger in 2008), older workers need to remain youthful, energetic and competitive if they want respect and to remain relevant.   1. **Because then the elderly can remain youthful and attractive and be able to fit into the image-conscious society more comfortably without feeling out of place.**     It is unfortunate that society views ageing as an unfulfilling decline of one’s life while glorifying youth and physical beauty. Youth is associated with speed, strength and attractiveness. Old age is seen as a problem associated with passivity, weakness and declining energy. The elderly are associated with grumpiness or hostility, or are seen as isolated and lonely- unless ageing is delayed, avoided and denied. And so, older people cheat age by trying to appear more youthful, e.g. dying their grey hair or dressing more fashionably, it allows them to fit in and not stand out like sore thumbs because they are old. Many elderly try to keep their brain active by learning new skills in order to postpone the onset of diseases such as dementia and Alzheimer’s. At work, older-looking people may not be able to keep their jobs if they are not well-groomed or look too ‘grey’. They will need to keep up, at least minimally, with the latest fads and trends, and be responsive to youthful activities, like maintain social networks and connections.   1. **Because then the elderly can continue working and earning more income for the longer lives and retirement they will live.**   In order to survive the increasing costs of living, the elderly would want to continue working for as long as they can, rather than be forced to retire, at say, 62, in Singapore. The elderly would choose to be financially independent and not burden their children, and so would want to work to provide for their daily expenses, or have something put aside for their health needs or vacation plans. Today’s older parents may also have to help support their children’s higher education aspirations, etc. and so to cheat ageing by having a longer work life would be helpful. Re-employment age in Singapore has been extended, allowing the elderly to continue working if they so choose.   1. **Because an older population that stay young, healthy can contribute and help the economy stay competitive.**   The more developed countries will face the burden of higher taxes and a smaller population in the future and if there are fewer workers and consumers, the economy may slow down. Between 1965 and 2017, Singapore’s population grew from 1.9 million to 5.5 million. However, the number of citizens aged 65 and above has increased rapidly even as population growth slows. The size of older citizens doubled from 220,000 in 2000 to 440,000 today, and is expected to increase to 900,000 by 2030. In recent years, population growth was barely 1.3 per cent — the slowest since 2005. Many developed countries will face a labour shortage. Singapore is one such country that depends on foreign labour for its service industry where the jobs can often be done by the older population, as seen in many of the fast-food outlets here. To avoid burdening the ‘sandwich’ generation, where the middle-age group support both the younger and older generation, the latter should be encouraged to stay young and active, both physically and mentally.  No, we should not cheat ageing   1. **But appreciate it as an accumulation of life experiences, skills and abilities that allows for better choices to be made in an increasingly difficult world.**   There are essential life skills that are still required today that can only be developed with time, experience and maturity. While the qualities of youth are precious, the qualities grown and the experiences accumulated through years by the elderly may be even of even greater value in today’s world. Scientists who study the effects of aging on the brain report the following, e.g. even as certain mental skills decline with age, scientists are finding the mind gets sharper at a number of vitally important abilities.  In a University of Illinois study, older air traffic controllers excelled at their cognitively-taxing jobs, despite some losses in short-term memory and visual spatial processing. They were expert at navigating, juggling multiple aircraft simultaneously and avoiding collisions. Brain scans have shown that while young people often use only one side of their brain for a specific task, middle age and older adults are more likely to activate both hemispheres at the same time—a pattern known as bi-lateralization or synced hemispheres. This process allows mature individuals to use the full power of their reasoning and problem-solving skills when faced with problems or situations. . In yet another project, ‘Big Picture’, Allison Sekuler’s 2005 PhD study noted that younger brains seemed better able at focusing on details to the exclusion of their surroundings while more mature brains could take in the entire scene. In a 2010 study, researchers at the University of Michigan presented “Dear Abby” letters to 200 people and asked what advice they would give. Subjects in their 60s were better than younger ones at imagining different points of view, thinking of multiple resolutions and suggesting compromises. In general, the elderly are better at spatial orientation, language and verbal memory. The accumulation of this range of knowledge or “crystallised intelligence” can be put to good use to help society if only we recognise it.   1. **Because older people are emotionally stable and mentally stronger, and can play an important role in mediating open conflict and crises in today’s individualistic world.**   Managing emotions is a skill that takes many decades to master. In a study published in 2017, German researchers had people play a gambling game meant to induce regret. Unlike 20-somethings, those in their 60s did not agonize over losing, and were less likely to try to try to make up for their loss by later taking big risks. In 2010, researchers at Stony Brook University analyzed a telephone survey of hundreds of thousands of Americans and found that people over 50 were happier overall, with anger declining steadily from the 20s through the 70s and stress falling in the 50s. Laura Carstensen, a psychologist at Stanford, led a study that followed people ages 18 to 94 for a decade and found that the elderly increased their levels of happiness and emotional stability. It revealed that negative emotions such as sadness, anger and fear become less pronounced than in the drama-filled younger years. The American poet May Sarton was asked why it was good to be old, she replied: "Because I am more myself than I have ever been." Older subjects interviewed said that they had learned to live life more fully, to savour it, and were better able to weather crises. The influence of the elderly could benefit the young, especially when hot-headedness and impulse rule.   1. **As we no longer fear it. The elderly are assured of longer, healthier lives and a more fruitful, better quality life as a result of the policies and initiatives that support healthy ageing.**   There are so many older people today, especially in the developed world, and their needs and voices cannot be ignored, e.g. Brexit votes. The world has to, and is becoming more “age-friendly”. Cities through the World Health Organisation’s ‘Age-Friendly Cities’ global programme are adapting to meet the needs of older adults. New forms of retail, education, transportation, care and housing are emerging to keep them involved and engaged. Businesses are creating age-friendly campuses and workplaces. In Singapore, the elderly have credits that can be used in the Skills Future programme. The culture and mind-set of people are changing and there is greater hope of the elderly living a rich and abundant life. Aging is no longer seen as a one-way ticket to the grave and in Singapore, we have the Pioneer and now Merdeka generation to help with the rising healthcare costs of the older population. The HDB lease buy-back home-ownership scheme also helps allay the worries of having sufficient funds for a longer life. Homes are also equipped with age-friendly washrooms and kitchens that make it easy for them to function safely on their home. Mixed-use, integrated housing is now the thing to do where child-care centres and amenities are all within easy access of the elderly. Other policies such as the Central Provident Fund and Silver Support Scheme, which provide permanent handouts to eligible seniors are also in place to provide them with a good foundation for retirement.   1. **As one should accept graciously the process of ageing, especially from a religious or philosophical point of view.**   It is unseemly to be continuously fighting a natural process that everyone will go through. It is better to live a good life and let go when the time comes than to battle to remove all signs of ageing in a desperate game that one cannot ultimately win. From a religious point of view, acceptance of one’s end has to do with trust in God and the higher being one subscribes to. Far from seeing the elderly as a a burden on their families, the community and the economy, we should see them as net contributors. Even when one is old, and especially when one is old and has all the qualities of patience, care and empathy for others, it makes one better at some tasks. Besides helping out domestically as carers of grandchildren, retirees often volunteer at religious and charitable organisations and hospitals to bring comfort and relief to their less able counterparts. Older workers also bring their experiences to bear in some industries where mentoring and coaching of younger colleagues is valued such as trade apprenticeships.  Research for UK volunteer charity Royal Volunteers Society quantified the role of the past 65 older generation, taking into consideration their tax payments, spending power, caring responsibilities and volunteering efforts, and calculated their contribution at almost £40bn more to the UK economy than they receive in state pensions, welfare and health services. This benefit will only increase in coming years as the "baby boomers" enter retirement. By 2030, it is projected, their net contribution will be worth some £75bn.The WRVS co-ordinates the efforts of some 50,000 volunteers who deliver meals-on-wheels, staff community clubs, run shops and cafes in hospitals. It estimates that older people benefit the economy to a total of £175.9bn, including delivering social care worth £34bn and volunteering worth at least £10bn, compared to welfare costs of £136.3bn. In Singapore, many of the religious and social welfare programmes are actively run and implemented by the older generation who have seen hard times with their own eyes, and volunteer to help relieve societal ills, e.g. Dover Park Hospice and Alexandra Hospitals where ther go on ward rounds to bring music and company to the residents, in Touch Therapy and even just to sit with the dying who have no family. |
| 2. Is any work really better than no work? **Analysis of Question**  At a basal level, the question is asking for a **comparison** between two states of employment: employment versus unemployment. The phrasing of the question suggests that there is some **doubt** to the idea that unemployment is worse than employment all the time.  It will be worthwhile to also note that the question requires students to approach the concept of ‘work’ in the modern times rather than just conventional ideas of work / jobs.  **Clarification of Terms**  Work: Employment, having an occupation, or the exchange of goods, services, time and/or effort in return for some sort of result. OR any kind of structured…that fulfils a purpose.  **Possible Perspectives:**  Having work is better than no work.   1. **Today, it is extremely difficult to even just get by without any form of work.**   Aside from self-touted welfare or communistic states, most countries today are capitalistic in nature. This means that in order to get anything – be it basic necessities like food, shelter, water, or luxury items like cars, etc. – an individual would need capital or money. Since work is the predominant way in which we earn or get money, it is therefore indispensable for us even if all we want is to get by in our lives.   * The extent to which money is needed for survival goes to such an extent that, in some instances, we even have to pay for ‘trash’ for survival. This can be seen in the Philippines where, in recent times, ‘pagpag’ has begun to gain prominence in the world. As reported by the BBC, pagpag is a ‘style of cooking’ where chefs would source for their ingredients from landfills. These chefs are essentially selling food that was thrown away by restaurants and other eateries to low income individuals who cannot afford food otherwise. Without work – even the most menial of work – one would not be able to sustain life in this case. This is even if we consider literally eating what most in society will consider trash. As such, it is evident that in today’s world, it is extremely difficult to get by without work, and thus, having work is better than no work. * Over the recent decades China has opened its economy up to the world – slowly infusing elements of the capital market into their communist state. Capitalism – at its worst – seemed to have devastating spill over impacts there, however. When smog levels in Beijing begin choking citizens there, many were forced to buying canisters of fresh air – purportedly canned from New Zealand and Canada. Simple arithmetic found that for the average person, a breath of ‘fresh air’ would have cost them 1.2 yuan. In an era where even breathing – a basic bodily function – would cost money, it is quite evident that having work is a necessity for living, and is hence better than not having work.  1. **It is better to have some kind of work as there is a tendency in most countries to look down upon those who are not pulling their own weight in society.**   In most meritocratic societies, an individual’s value in society – and, by some odd corollary, success in life – is reflected by the work they do and contribution that they make to society. This may lead to the unfortunate situation where if one were to be unemployed – or does not have productive work to do – they become seen as dead-weights in society who are living off of others. This is also the reason for arguments that blame those mired in poverty for their plights: “you must be poor because of your incompetence or laziness”.   * This has especially been pertinent in countries such as the United States. Riding off the belief of ‘rugged individualism’, millionaires and billionaires have always been celebrated in the USA as they are seen as individuals who exemplified what it meant to be active and contributing members of society. The flipside of this celebration, however, is the denigration of the poor in society. As wealth inequality increased in the USA over the 20th century, there was little governmental impetus to provide support for the vulnerable and struggling as governments were afraid that any welfare or support would lead to ‘overdependence’ of the poor on the rest of society. In effect, they believed that if support were given, the ‘hardworking people of society’ would be bailing out those who are just ‘awaiting handouts’. The same decision-making process has also surfaced in the United Kingdom, Australia, and several other countries all around the world. The significance of this is most striking when we consider that even the government – whose main job is to advance the country and protect the welfare of its citizens – can show such contempt for those without work in society. Thus, it does seem that any work may be better than no work since no work gets you shunned by society.  1. **Being productive and contributing – in one way or another – to society is pertinent to one’s self-esteem.**   On top of public perception of the individual, the development of a working culture since Industrialisation in the late 19th century has made it a social norm – and expectation – that one derives a large proportion of their self-worth from the work that they do. From a young age, most individuals in modern societies will be put through school, or the fields to work – there is very little room for rest in the world today. As such, the routine and expectation of work has been drilled into individuals since they were young. Furthermore, the education system in most countries tend to sink individuals into the belief that their self-worth is derived from something they produce – good grades, conduct, etc. in schools. In light of this, the lack of work in one’s life may lead to declines in an individual’s self-worth. This is especially so for individuals who are without work after many years of living a life where they had to constantly do something.   * When Finland first ran a 2-year Universal Basic Income experiment back in 2017. Its aim was to find out if giving people basic income would encourage them to not only find jobs – but to find jobs that are of interest to them, or that relates to their passions. This was to put to test the controversies surrounding UBI – that it will encourage individuals to be lazy or dependent on government handouts. Fortunately, many people in the experiment – the vast majority – were actively seeking employment during the 2 years that they were given monthly stipends just for the fact that they were citizens of Finland. What stands out, however, was the kinds of jobs that some individuals eventually ended up with. While most were quite optimistic at the beginning of the experiment, and tried repeatedly to get the jobs that they had hoped for, they eventually gave up after as little as half a year – eventually taking up any job that they could get. This was largely explained by the fact that even if they could not get the jobs they wanted, they still wished to do something with their lives, and not just keep getting turned down from their dreams.  1. **Having work is beneficial to our health.**   There is an intricate relationship between our health and the work that we do. Good work is often tied to an individual’s identity, social role and status. Having good work therefore accords on with greater existential certainties. This is especially pertinent in today’s age where work is the norm – as described earlier. The insecurity that comes with work – as a result of loss of identity or fear of being unable to survive – can also lead to adverse effects on our health. This is due to the mental fatigue that one may undergo in the periods of uncertainty and insecurities.   * Research – commissioned by the UK government – that was published early in the 21st century found that good work was the most effective way to improve the wellbeing of individuals. Aside from this, it was also found that prolonged periods of having no work can actually harm a person’s physical and mental health. Furthermore, the report highlighted that there have been several studies that reflected increased overall mortality rate as well as greater susceptibility to respiratory infections for individuals who are not working. While there is no overt causal-relationship between work and health, the numerous studies done by separate and independent researchers have established strong correlations between having work with being healthier. This clearly establishes that having work is better than not having work.   No, any work is not necessarily better than no work   1. **Sometimes, it might be better to stay unemployed in the short-run, than being stuck in a job that we do not like.**   While ultimately, having work to sustain our lives and lifestyles is still pertinent, this does not necessarily mean that we should shun any idea of unemployment at different stages in our working lives. Modern jobs – while slowly changing in their natures over time – tend to be contractual in nature. This means that when one takes on a job, they are usually tied to their job for a particular period of time. If we succumb to the constant need to have work – and accept any work that comes by – we therefore potentially subject ourselves to life in an occupation that we may not have intended to end our careers in. This is especially pertinent in some Asian societies where job-hopping is generally looked down upon. In these instances, it might be better for the individual, in the long run, to remain unemployed while they explore their interests before they take on any work.   * Many youths today are pushed through an assembly line cookie cutter education system. A drawback of this is that many youths are academically certified, but have little drive or aspiration for their lives beyond school. As a result of this, many are unsure of what field of knowledge they should specialise in for their University education. This – alongside other reasons – has led to the trend of students taking gap-years from their own further education. The respite from work and studies, provides them with the clarity of mind. The adventure and sense of exploration they get broadens their horizons and enriches them with experiences. The respite and broadening of minds then help them make better decisions on the kinds of work and education they prefer to embark on. The same phenomenon can be seen in adults who – after periods of work – opt to go on long-breaks or sabbaticals to ‘find themselves’. In these instances, it is therefore not necessarily always better for us to have any work – rather, sometimes having no work would allow us to make clearer and more beneficial long-term trends. * According to a Forbes report from 2016, being stuck in a job that we do not like can lead to negative health impacts such as weight gain due to a lack of energy to exercise or stress eating. Furthermore, the deterioration of our mental health from the stress of daily work can adversely affect our immune systems, making us more susceptible to illnesses. A study cited by Forbes also suggests that being stuck can result in increased risks of heart diseases.  1. **The remuneration and rewards derived from some forms of work are not worth the dehumanising aspects. In these instances, having no work may actually be better than having it.**   Being in the wrong environment or having the wrong expectations at work may sometimes be much worse than having no work at all. While being unemployed or non-productive may make it difficult for us to cope with our capitalist markets, this does not outweigh the possibilities – and increasing incidences – where our work environments actually directly inflict harm on our physical and psychological well-being.   * Japan has in recent times been mired in numerous cases of ‘karoshi’ – death by overwork. The strong work ethic that most Japanese have as well as the high expectations societies have on individuals – especially at work – have led to a string of deaths that have been tied to work. Incidences of karoshi have surfaced since the period after World War II and still plagues the society today with Miwa Sado dying of heart failure after having allegedly logged in over 159 hours of overtime in just one month. More recently, on Christmas of 2015, Matsuri Takahashi committed suicide after being pushed to work extensive overtime at her work place as well. This is not unique to Japan, and can be seen in many places, S. Korea. Even western countries such as the UK have been plagued by similar problems. In 2013, Moritz Erhardt, who was just 21, passed away after having to endure a 7-week *internship* at a well-known financial institution. He was found dead by his flatmates after having worked till 6 am on 3 consecutive days. Erhardt’s death brought greater scrutiny to the firm and industry which uncovered that other interns at the same firm had to suffer through similarly long hours of work. In cases where work begins to strip us of our civil liberties or is overly demanding, it can be argued that having no work is better than the work that we have got. * The recent #MeToo movement has highlighted the dehumanising conditions under which some women had to work in the past. Regardless of the remuneration gained, the objectification and harassment suffered by some of these individuals – such as the victims of Harvey Weinstein – strikes at the very heart and pride of those women as human beings. No amount of pay or reward should have been worth it. In cases where work begins to strip us of our civil liberties or is overly demanding, it can be argued that having no work is better than the work that we have got.   *Further Reading:*   1. *Dame Carol Black, 2012, Work Health and Wellbeing, Saf Health Work 2012 Dec; 3(4): 241—242. Published online 30 Nov 2012. Available:* [*https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3521922/*](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3521922/) 2. *Hackman, D., 2012, Shift work linked to increased risk of heart attack and stroke, The BMJ. Available:* [*https://www.bmj.com/press-releases/2012/07/26/shift-work-linked-increased-risk-heart-attack-and-stroke*](https://www.bmj.com/press-releases/2012/07/26/shift-work-linked-increased-risk-heart-attack-and-stroke) 3. *Waddell, G., and Burton, A.K., 2006, Is Work Good for your Health and Well-Being? (Executive Summary), The Stationery Office, UK. 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| 3. Do you agree that popular culture degrades women? **Analysis**  The question assumes women feature heavily in pop culture and that the depiction and coverage of women may not be wholesome. The implication is that it harms and damages women in various ways, e.g. their self-worth, self-esteem and self-confidence. It also hints at how it may negatively affect the way others see them which may lead to callous, biased treatment or abuse.  **Clarification of terms**  Popular culture or pop culture:   * + [Ideas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idea), perspectives, [attitudes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attitude_(psychology)), [images](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image), and other [phenomena](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phenomenon) that are within the mainstream of a given [culture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_anthropology), especially [Western culture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_culture).   + Reflects and influences the way in which society value women.   Degrades:treats/regards someone with disrespect; demeans or lowers the status of women.  **Stand/Possible Points & Examples**  Popular culture degrades women because   1. **It perpetuates stereotypes that women are less valuable and contribute less to society.**   Pop culture portrays outdated stereotypes of women, resulting in negative attitudes towards women and persisting inequality.  Print and electronic media do not provide a balanced picture of women’s diverse lives and contribution to society. Women are not usually the main actors but continue to play secondary roles or are shown as weak, passive ‘props’, etc., in film and television. Compared to men who are featured in news media, women are also far more likely to be shown as domestic characters or victims and to be referred to in terms of their age and physical appearance. In reality shows, women are often judged for being irrational or hysterical, while bad behaviour in men is accepted as ‘boys will be boys’. This serves to reinforce the low value of women in society. The Centre for the Study of Women in Television and Film at San Diego State University found that females comprised a paltry 12% of protagonists in the top-grossing films of 2014. In addition, a larger percentage of male (59%) to female characters (41%) were shown in the workplace while 85% of men had identifiable jobs, compared to 75% of women. In contrast, only 31% of men were identified by their role of father while 58% of females were identified as wives or mothers.   1. **It desensitizes society, causing it to think that it is normal to demean women**   Popular culture’s constant objectification of women results in society marginalising women as second class citizens.  Most audience from patriarchal Asian societies are so used to seeing women in lowly positions and roles that they are not aware of how it normalises what is humiliating to women and should not be socially unacceptable. The music industry perpetuates outdated gender expectations and stereotypes. It objectifies women, such that gender is sexualised into a commodity that “invites” a rape culture. “Blurred Lines” by Robin Thicke won numerous awards despite depicting women in an extremely demeaning manner. Bollywood films and tabloids often show bosomy women in questionable poses, depicting them as victims of abuse and rape. Advertisements too are party to the demeaning of women, often portraying them as dumb, hysterical or helpless beings in domestic roles or sexual beings in revealing clothes and inviting poses. This shows how pop culture sets the stage for male dominance and violence against women and how women have been forced into being objects of sexual gratification. The recent K-Pop sex scandal is proof of this. Popular culture as such actively desensitises society, normalising the view that women are cheap, to be used and disposed of.   1. **It causes society to disrespect women by disregarding their competence in various fields.**   Pop culture looks at women and judges them based on their age and physical appearances, rather than celebrate women for their inner beauty, skills and competence whatever age they may be. This unconsciously encourages many to ignore or devalue the whole women while focusing only on the specific parts of the whole.  Entertainment news often conduct interviews with women actors and musicians and almost solely probe into their make-up, diet or exercise regimen. They rarely focus on their talent or if they do, it i just with a passing interest. In the K-Pop and K-Drama world, it has gotten so bad that cosmetic surgery and enhancement is the norm and often stars suffer from insecurity, low self-esteem and constant worry over whether their looks will last and they will remain popular. Rumors and scandals that go viral on the social media, whether fake or otherwise, can destroy careers and families of entertainment figures too.  Female CEOs and politicians are fair game for the media too, especially when they are spied at social functions and galas. Tabloids like the National Enquirer pick on the appearance rather than on the work done by female politicians, e.g. what they wear, their clothes, their hair, etc. The American media used to focus on the hairstyles and clothes of Hillary Clinton (First Lady-Senator-Secretary of State-Presidential candidate) rather than her credentials and career. The New York Times is known to feature the handbags and purses of female politicians and CEOs. Other media agencies zoom in on single female CEOs and politicians’ relationship status (former Australian PM Julia Gillard and NZ PM Jacinda Arden) and partners while poking their noses into married CEOs’ domestic arrangements, and whether they can juggle their work and family commitments (e.g. former Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer). Male politicians and CEOs are rarely if ever subjected to such news features. This bias can shape how readers view female politicians and CEOs. It confirms the stereotype that women, even those in the most powerful leadership positions, are not serious, probably incompetent and are just ‘playing (dressing up) at work’. It is no wonder they are also paid much less than males in similar positions.  Competent, notable leaders such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel may be respected but are also portrayed as frumpy, matronly and schoolmarmish, their lack of fashion sense typically overshadowing their leadership and success.  Popular culture does not degrade women but   1. **Inspires women to challenge unfair stereotypes and break out of demeaning social conventions.**   Popular artists and productions can have a positive influence on how women view themselves and ultimately how society views them  Many female artistes have heeded the call for gender equality and often lent their voice, image and presence as well as money, in support of such causes. Their celebrity status gives them a wide reach to their fan base in helping create awareness and the call to action. Beyonce has shed positive light on women and feminism through her track *Run the World (Girls)* from her album *4.* The song is a feminist anthem which goes against how women used to be seen and reflects how far women have come. Taylor Swift has a strong female following who admire her courage and outspoken ways against unfair and poor treatment of women. In Singapore, popular local blogger Wendy Cheng Xiaxue had in the past taken on male critics and called them out, exposing their misogyny. We are seeing some positive shifts in popular culture where women are seen as strong contributors to a better society.   1. **Simply echoes a view of women that has been around for centuries but does not actively devalue women as the audience (and women) today are more educated and discerning.**   Society’s attitude towards women is rooted in history, tradition and the patriarchal culture. Popular culture reflects this but is not a cause of it. As such, it does not degrade women.  Tradition and culture subjugate women, denying women the power, leadership and status that they deserve. In some less developed, conservative societies where pop culture does not even feature, the most terrible crimes (rape, murder, honour killing and mutilation) are committed without help from pop culture. An estimated 130 million girls in Yemen and the African continent have suffered from FGM (female genital mutilation) that has led to death and sterility issues. In India, female infanticide is rampant and bride burning due to insufficient dowry afflict women. Sex-selective abortion occur in India and China where girls are murdered, simply because they are girls. All this occurs without the influence of pop culture.   1. **Can be used educate people, speak out against discrimination and empower women/masses.**   Popular culture can be used to target masses and positively influence their perceptions, behaviours and attitudes towards women.  Under the UN initiative, HeForShe has captured the imagination of the public and the masses. Many celebrities, both male and female, have come on board to support, speak up and out on gender rights, especially rights for the female. The solidarity campaign for the advancement of gender equality encourages all genders to partake as agents of change and take action against negative stereotypes and behaviour.  Government leaders have also spoke up against pop culture that treat women poorly as commodities to be exploited and discarded. The South Korean President has allowed for a reinvestigation of a 2009 suicide of a star who accused her agency of prostituting her. This was partially a result of a women’s movement in the country (part of the #MeToo movement)that culminated in a massive protest of 22,000 women who took to the streets against ‘spycams’ used against women, secret videos on social media and harmful images on pop culture that women have had to put up with. Similarly, the African Women’s Development Fund (AWDF) aims to reclaim popular culture to raise awareness of gender discrimination in order to shape societies to value women more. As such, it supported the reproduction of two films, ‘The White Handkerchief’ and ‘The Narrow Path’, which highlight the suffering that women go through and how cultures and traditions trap women in poor conditions.  Popular culture is evolving and socialising the public to view women as independent and valuable individuals. Disney is transforming its damsels in distress to courageous and independent heroines who overcome obstacles in their own ways, e.g. *Brave, Frozen and Mulan*.  The International Fashion Council of Milan banned the size zero figure for catwalks this year in 2017, a clear indicator of the shift to a healthy body image, empowering women to love themselves regardless of their physical shape and size. Once the most glamorous and over-the-top display of female flesh, Victoria Secret is now facing a backlash against its impossible-to-achieve perfect “angels”. |
| 4. Governments today have it tougher than ever. How far do you agree? **Analysis**  This question requires students to discuss the challenges that governments face and do a past and present comparison. Students should consider the various roles of the government in their discussion (e.g. to implement policies, maintain their position, protect a nation’s sovereignty, or manage its people).  **Clarification of terms**  Tougher: harder or more difficult. It is a comparative term, and students can either make an explicit comparison (e.g. in the past…. But today…), or present today’s characteristics using comparative terms (with today’s *rising*…).  **Stand/ possible points and examples**  Governments today have it tougher   1. **There is rising public disillusionment with democracy, and democratic governments are struggling to tackle the huge crisis of confidence amongst the electorate.** There may be many reasons why democratic countries are under criticism today – the higher levels of education of its electorate which makes them more critical, the higher expectations of citizens today, and the ability to compare more readily with how other countries’ leaders are doing. Citizens in the past were concerned with survival and attaining materially comfortable lives – something which liberal democracies were able to deliver and therefore people had faith and optimism in the government. That optimism is gone as there is rising income inequality, stagnating of incomes for average citizens, and increased competition. Once voters looked to the government for reassurance and trusted that they knew what they were doing and had faith in their ability to weigh risks and move forward by accepting rational counter-arguments. Voters now see parties that are ideologically polarised, [internally incoherent](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/dec/20/brexit-andrea-leadsom-amber-rudd-second-referendum) and unreasonably oppositional. Governments are consequently mistrusted and have a much tougher job rallying the support of its citizens.  * E.g. The failure of Theresa May’s government to anticipate and then adequately address the political crisis caused by the result of the vote to leave the EU in June 2016 is vaporising trust in her government. * E.g. Some 54 percent of citizens in democracies believe their voice doesn't have an impact on political decisions, and 64 percent think their government doesn't act in their interest, Democracy Perception Index 2018 — a survey conducted by [Dalia Research](https://daliaresearch.com/home/), [Alliance of Democracies](http://www.allianceofdemocracies.org/) and [Rasmussen Global](https://rasmussenglobal.com/) — found. * E.g. The generational differences are striking. When the World Values Survey asked Americans how important it was for them to live in a democracy, citizens born before World War II were the most adamant. On a scale of one to ten, 72 percent assigned living in a democracy a ten, the highest possible value. Among many of their children and grandchildren, however, democracy no longer commands the same devotion. A little over half of Americans born in the postwar boom gave maximum importance to living in a democracy. Among those born since the 1980s, less than 30 percent did.  1. **The rise of multi-national corporations, many of which rake in more yearly revenue that certain nation-states, has now displaced the power of government.** This is especially true for developing countries. MNCs do not just possess knowledge of production; they also have an increasingly complex understanding of how take advantage of changing political situations in the international system as well as how to influence state policy in order to gain legitimacy. Of course, all of this is done in the name of efficiency and profits. By gaining access to more markets corporations are able to take advantage of uncertainty in world events and enhance wealth acquisition. A change in costs shifts production from high costs states to low cost states, usually to the consternation of the latter. MNCs are then able to play states off of each other, forcing states to compete with each other in order to secure investment which brings jobs and tax revenue. This clearly gives MNCs significant power as it allows MNCs to dictate to countries what they want, and if a country does not respond favorably a corporation can simply pull out and invest in the state with the next lowest opportunity cost. While states still have power de jure in the international system, and within their own country, MNCs have power de facto both in the international system and in individual states.    * E.g. Exxon's annual sales, which totalled $350 billion in 2011, were almost equal to Sweden's GDP. Exxon spent more money on political lobbying than Sweden did on its foreign policy in 2010.    * E.g. Food retailer Walmart often exerts influence on political processes through lobbying, contributions to campaigns, and threats of market withdrawal. For instance, it controls 34% of the entire Chilean market, determining the price of many basic products. Withdrawal of Walmart would severely dampen the Chilean economy.    * E.g. Oil giant Shell accounts for 50% of Nigeria’s oil production and has successfully infiltrated into the government. According to Wikileaks reports, Shell has inserted staff into all the main ministries of the Nigerian government, giving it access to politicians' every move in the oil-rich nation, exerting influence in political decisions. 2. **The rise of a more consultative brand of politics in the 21st century places more power in the hands of citizens as compared to the more iron-fisted rule that characterised the 20th century.** The tumultuous period of the 20th century saw societies favouring strong, iron-fisted political leaders in the likes of Margaret Thatcher and Lee Kuan Yew who bulldozed their way in politics and implemented decisive state policies. However, as the world’s socio-political climate changed and democracy evolved, governments in the 21st century adopted a more consultative governing style that placed greater power in the hands of citizens, by directly taking into consideration their views and preferences.    * E.g. Liberal democracies like Switzerland give power to the people through the referendum system, where ordinary citizens can put any issue to a referendum if 100,000 signatures are attained. Under this system, citizens are able to determine the outcome of many key areas of society, from employment leave to gambling revenue, rather than solely adhering to decisions made by the government. More importantly, people are given the power to make constitutional amendments themselves if they deem fit.    * E.g. Singapore, once noted to be a quasi-democracy or a soft-authoritarian state under PM Lee Kuan Yew, has adopted a more consultative stance under its new generation of leaders, as seen through national dialogue sessions and feedback channels via social media platforms. Giving people the ‘power’ to influence policy ensures a more robust democracy and a participative citizenry. However, this also makes the government’s job less efficient as it has to consistently take into account the people’s voices as opposed to making decisions as they deem fit. 3. **The rise of new media grants people unprecedented power to raise grievances against the government on online platforms, reducing the stranglehold of government power.** The availability of new media platforms such as blogs, forums, facebook and twitter not only undermine the monopoly that governments used to have on the media, but also and empower people to criticise government’s misdeeds, holding them accountable for their actions.  * E.g. In spite of the heavy censorship in China, Chinese citizens are able to take to their microblogs and criticise the government for its negligence and corruption, from the Wenzhou train collision of 2011 to the Shanghai Fire of 2010, placing a dent on the government’s power in shaping public opinion and limiting free speech. Instead, the people are given the power to force governments to justify their actions and re-examine their policies.  1. **Extremist governments might find it harder because of the international outcry and outrage that their actions incite.** As human rights conventions are increasingly universal, disregard and contempt for human rights will outrage the conscience of the vocal majority across the world and it is harder for extremist governments to continue their tyranny and oppression.    * E.g. Brunei introduced strict Islamic laws in April 2019 that make gay sex punishable by stoning to death. The laws have drawn condemnation from across the globe (in as far as London and Brisbane) and sparked protests and the call to boycott the Sultan’s hotels. Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said he had expressed "deep UK opposition" to the new laws to Brunei's government. The U.N. slammed Brunei’s Islamic laws as violation of human rights. The United States criticised Brunei and urged it to ratify and implement the United Nations Convention Against Torture.   Governments today have it easier   1. **Social media and technology has made it easier for increased government surveillance, a tool for governments to further consolidate their power and to solve problems.** Social media is a platform for governments to clandestinely detect public discontent against the government, tracking and pre-empting potential uprisings and keeping tabs on the private communication between its citizens.  * E.g. “Lamppost-as-a-Platform” in Singapore is the plan to install cameras on lampposts, which will be linked to facial recognition software, to “perform crowd analytics” and support anti-terror operations. Such technology is already commonplace in Chinese cities like Beijing and Shanghai. * E.g. The US government is looking to develop a system of social media data mining so as to predict and control any from of activity from the masses, from terrorist attacks to foreign uprisings, limiting the privacy and rights of individuals even further in the future. The fact that the US Director of National Intelligence is actively looking for ways to automate the process of identifying emerging threats and upheavals using the billions of posts people around the world share every day via social media shows that governments still retain a firm hold over its people through information that could be used against the latter. * E.g. The Australian government has spent a total of $4.3m commissioning private research companies to trawl its citizens’ social media accounts. While these actions were done ostensibly to track citizens’ responses to different policies, commentators have argued that the “confidential” nature of these research firms’ work highlights the underestimated power of the government in monitoring its people’s actions, limiting civil liberties and the power of the people. Be that as it may, it does make the government’s job infinitely easier.  1. **As the world becomes increasingly globalised and interconnected, there is a greater call for the richer nations to help its poorer counterparts, thus making the job of governments in many developing nations easier.** Our increasing inter-connectedness has made the problems of the poor our problems, and hence a problem that can no longer be ignored. Already, transnational problems like terrorism, pollution, crime and unstable economies find their roots in poverty. Whilst done in self-interest, it has the undeniable benefit of providing help to governments in the poorer nations. They no longer need to struggle to tackle these problems on their own.  * E.g. There are many organisations (International Non-governmental Organisations - INGOs) that are formed in rich countries whose main focus for is to provide relief and developmental aid to developing countries. These organizations’ projects in health, like HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, clean water, and malaria prevention, and in education, like schools for girls and providing books to developing countries, help to provide the social services that the country’s government is unable or unwilling to provide at the time. INGOs are also some of the first responders to natural disasters, like hurricanes and floods, or crises that need emergency relief. These organisations give very specific help to the people in poor nation - Food aid, cure glaucoma, reduce specific disease, give free operations, provided artificial limbs, provide clean water, medicine for Aids, condoms to prevent aids. Some organisations are like Oxfam, Catholic Relief, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, World Vision, Care International. Altogether $17.9 billion have been given out with no strings attached.  1. **International bodies such as the EU and ASEAN provide necessary support for its member states and makes the government’s job easier.**  * For example, the 10 member states in ASEAN are engaged in a process to transform ASEAN into a real economic community and is a diplomatic organisation that manages regional issues. Some ways it helps the government are in terms of: * Economic cooperation: elimination of tariffs helps ease the flow of goods and services in the region. The ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) regulates the removal of tarriffs on 8000 items. Entreprises have more access to neighbouring markets, and consumers benefit from cheaper prices of good, therefore generating higher exports and imports. * Investment boost: the ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Area (ACIA) encourage free flow of capital over the region. National treatment would be granted immediately to Asean investors, and streamlining of investment processes and protocols are taken. * Greater political role: Since the end of the Cold War, ASEAN has played the role of a regional conductor in negotiations. This helps governments resolve tensions and conflicts. It also conducts regular meetings and summits to discuss key regional issues.   One need not be a member state to benefit from such international organisations. The European Union plays important roles in diplomacy, the promotion of human rights, trade, development and humanitarian aid and working with multilateral organisations. The role of the EEAS is to try and bring coherence and coordinating to the European Union's international role. Here are a few examples of the roles the EU plays beyond its borders:   * In July 2015, following years of EU-led diplomacy, a [historic international agreement was reached on Iran’s nuclear programme](http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/150714_01_en.htm). The EU, together with China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States, brokered the agreement. Iran pledged that under no circumstances would it ever seek, develop or acquire nuclear weapons. The EU now chairs the Committee overseeing the implementation of this agreement. * In Colombia, the EU is supporting peace talks between the Government and the FARC movement to end decades of civil war through the appointment of a special peace envoy -former Irish Foreign Minister Eamon Gilmore. * In Mali, the EU has been helping the country emerge from a profound political crisis through co-mediated the the Malian Peace agreement which was signed in June 2015. The EU is also helping to train the Malian armed forces to fight terrorism and through substantial development aid. This is an example of the EU's comprehensive approach which uses all its tools - diplomatic, security, financial and with development cooperation . * Through its political, practical and economic support, the EU has played a crucial role in building peace in the Western Balkans since the Yugoslav wars. One example is the dialogue facilitated by the European Union between Serbia and Kosovo, which led to a landmark deal in April 2013 and which is currently being implemented with the support of the EU. * The EU is the largest single donor of development aid. Together, the EU and its member states provide more than half of official development assistance (ODA) globally. This contribution makes a huge difference to millions of people's livelihoods around the world. Against this background, the EU has been a major supporter of the new UN Sustainable Development Goals agreed in 2015 and is committed to their implementation. |
| 5. ‘There is no value in silence.’ How far is this true in your society? **Analysis**  In our modern world where the majority of people live in cities, we are born to having noises surrounding us. From the soft drone of the air conditioners to the incessant cacophony of traffic, we have gotten so used to noises that they have been termed white noises, a background of ambient sounds, creating an indistinct commotion, so seamless that no single specific sound can be isolated. Silence become so jarring that we show signs of discomfort to be in stillness. Singaporeans are not unfamiliar with this. Yet silence serves its many useful purposes, and it is often underrated. This questions allows students to contend with its value, if any.  **Clarifications of Terms**  No value – useless, impractical, ineffective, worthless, futile, …  Silence – quiet, calm, stillness, peace, …, and silence could be literal or metaphorical  **Stand / Possible Points & Examples**  There is no value in silence in Singapore  1. **The noises that you hear as you go around Singapore are the sounds of our well-oiled economic machine buzzing efficiently, and without the dins, Singapore would not have grown from a third world to a first world country within one generation.** One simply cannot escape from noises when travelling around Singapore. The rackets are the sounds of our economic vibrancy. The construction of new spanking skyscrapers like the addition of a new fourth tower to extend the iconic Marina Bay Sands Hotel by Safdie Architects; the excavations to complete the last three MRT stations of the Circle Line by 2025; roadworks to repair street surfaces; the building of new HDB flats in new precincts such as Tengah and Paya Lebar; the expansion of the upcoming new Tuas mega-port terminal, a centrepiece of Singapore’s New Generation Port vision; then there is the development of the much anticipated new passenger Changi Airport Terminal 5 to enhance the airport’s capacity to meet predicted growth, and the list goes on. Singapore is a constant cacophony of noises everyone one goes. Without any resources and a hinterland, Singapore cannot afford to stand still, to even slow down. We are constantly reinventing ourselves to make ourselves relevant to the world. The day Singapore becomes silent would spell the demise of Singapore economically.  2. **It would be politically disastrous if, due to Singapore’s puny size which disadvantages us, we do not so-called “make noises”, speak up and make our views known.** Both Indonesia and Malaysia always perceive us to be in an “abang-adek” (older brother and younger brother) relationship. In addition, they are known to use Singapore as a whipping boy whenever they need some external distractions from their domestic problems, stirring up nationalism and targeting Singapore as their common enemy. In the recent farce regarding the 1962 Water Agreement, Dr Mahathir recklessly commented how wealthy Singapore has been benefitting unfairly from poor Malaysia. Also, Singapore and Malaysia were embroiled in a maritime dispute after the latter unilaterally extended its Johor Bahru port limits that encroached into Singapore’s territorial waters off Tuas. Such uncalled for provocations made Singapore resolute in speaking up in defence of our rights and sovereignty legally. Time and again, we would face similar challenges, including the infamous Michael Fay vandalism case where the then President Bill Clinton personally intervened and tried to pressure Singapore not to cane Fay, but to no avail. So had Singapore not “made noises” by standing up to defend ourselves, our political existence and leaders’ credibility could have been threatened as other bigger countries would think they could push us around.  3. **Socially, in a multi-racial country like Singapore, minority groups cannot remain silent and not make known their needs.**  The history of mankind is replete with uncountable instances of ethnic discrimination of the minorities. The bumiputra policy in Malaysia is a typical example where the indigenous Malays are blatantly favoured over the other races in education, businesses and socially. And with a majority Chinese in Singapore, the Chinese citizens could very easily lord it over the other minority racial groups. To curtail this, Singapore carve into her Constitution, the equal rights of each racial group. These minority groups are also socially represented by ministers of their own race. In group representation constituencies, at least one of the candidates must be from a minority race. This ensures that socially, the needs of these minority groups are made known and addressed adequately. Not just the minority groups, but the majority Chinese citizens must also help to speak up when they see other minority races being bullied or discriminated against. By not keeping silent that way, Singapore could remain a harmonious society.  There is value in silence in Singapore  1. **The health benefits from keeping quiet are indisputable, especially in busy Singapore.** In the hustle and bustle of life in busy Singapore, many people live a hurried and pressured life to earn a decent wage to support their families. According to the Willis Towers Watson 2017/18 Global Benefits Attitudes Survey, 60% of Singaporean employees revealed that they experienced an average to high level of stress, and only 27% of employers were actually taking actions to alleviate work stress. According to the Mayo Clinic, stress, if left unchecked, can contribute to many health problems, such as high blood pressure, heart diseases, obesity and diabetes. Such dire needs have driven Singaporeans to seek solace in silence. Singaporeans frequent spas, both locally and abroad. World-renown Japanese onsens are one of Singaporeans’ favourite destinations to be divorced from life’s noises in order to be focused to relax, meditate and recharge in order to maintain their health and mental sanity. Likewise, there is a local movement to help Singaporean maintain sanity, and there are many organisations in support of this; they include the Brahm Centre, Centre for Mindfulness and the SoulCentre, all of which hold conferences and workshops to teach Singaporeans the value of silence and relaxation.  2. **Singaporean religious devotees use silence to learn to hear the voice of God.** Nearly 85% of Singaporeans believe in a religion. In the process of achieving the Singaporean dream of 5C’s – cash, credit card, car, condominium and country club – Singaporeans have been known to become distracted from their own spiritual needs and even lose sight of them. The Kingsmead Centre for Ignatian Spirituality and Counseling is an ideal space that offers silent retreats. According to its spiritual directors, living in a very busy society, Singaporeans are often overwhelmed by a culture of doing, and noise prevails, causing them to lose focus and get confused about who they are and their purpose in life. Therefore, the centre’s quiet and privacy, enhanced by its spacious and well-tendered garden with many shady spaces, allow people to feel an intimate closeness to God, and the silence facilitates encounters with God within. Many Singaporean believers go abroad for spiritual retreats too, e.g. the fame Prayer Mountain in Gyeonggi-do, South Korea. Those who have attended the retreats said that only in the silence could they listen to what was truly going on in themselves and began to learn to listen to the gentle whisper of God, thereby addressing their often-neglected spiritual needs. Locally, individual Christians practise having quiet time to have a focused devotional time with God, and the Buddhists also have meditation sessions, while the Hindus perform yoga, all of which aim to cause the devotees to draw closer to God in quiet contemplations.  3. **Tranquillity could facilitate Singaporeans to be more creativity.** According to Thomas Oppong, contributing writer to Inc. Magazine, Business Insider, Forbes, etc., spending time unplugged, disconnected and in silence can improve one’s focus, productivity and creativity. Disruptions and noise only interrupt the creative process. Neuroscientist, Marcus Raichle, eloquently depicts silence as the shorthand for thoughtful solitude. According to Ester Buchholz, psychologist and psychoanalyst, solitude is essential for the best creative work. So for busy and overworked Singaporeans, to be innovative, like how the Government is seriously promoting, carving out time to be silent, to be in repose and reflection will allow them to be more creative. It is by taking a step back that we could quietly become better observers and listeners instead of being reactive which defeats mindfulness, that we will be able to better contribute from a fresh perspective to existing problems around us. |
| 6. ‘Modern living comes at the expense of the environment.’ To what extent is this true? **Analysis**  The ways we live our lives today have impacted our environment in a drastically negative way. Humans consume more than necessary, and this results in gross wastage of (say) food, merchandise, and even perfectly fine products because we throw away things that could be cluttering up our homes as we buy in excess and accumulate unnecessarily. All these have a dire impact on Mother Earth, e.g. a warming Earth, violent weather, animal extinctions, etc. Nevertheless, there is also now an increasing number of different types of activists who are fighting back to protect the Earth, and ultimately, our future generations. Much have been done already, especially changing our lifestyle and ways of living. So, have we done enough by changing our modern lifestyle to mitigate the ill effects of environmental degradation? Are we or are we not living our lives at the expense of the environment?  **Clarifications of Terms**  Modern living – The phenomenon of living in the present day. Students are expected to highlight the various characteristics of modern day living that impact the environment in a negative way or that will ameliorate existing environmental challenges that we are facing today. Examples would include our consumeristic society and tendency to waste things on one hand, and increased in recycling, living simply on the other, etc.  At the expense of – The neglect of or to cause harm to.  The environment – The natural world, as a whole or in a particular geographical area, especially as affected by human activities  **Stand / Possible Points & Examples**  Yes, modern living comes at the expense of the environment  1. **Many people today live a very consumeristic lifestyle which leads to the pollution of the environment and the depletion of natural resources.**  With technology and the economies of scale, products have been made affordable to many. Therefore, the manufacturing of many products in large volume means that more natural resources are consumed, with some not to be replaced at all. This could lead to the depletion of these natural resources. In Cambodia, efforts to protect forests come crashing down as locals see gold in destroying them. The Cambodian rosewood had stood for hundreds of years, but its value finally proved too hard to resist and the giant trees were illegally bulldozed inside a protected forest. This set off a series of events which culminated in hundreds of villagers rejecting their community forests in favour of cutting more trees. Last year, the journal Science Advances confirmed that Cambodia has among the highest deforestation rates in the world as it lost 1.6 million hectares between 2001 and 2014, and none of them has been recovered. In addition, the easy availability of goods and services has caused people to have a tendency to buy more than what is necessary. The more products are churned out, the more carbon emissions there are. Toxic air pollution kills seven million people worldwide annually, according to World Health Organisation. We are indeed literally living at the expense of our poor environment.  2. **Our modern lifestyle includes an extremely high level of wastage that degrades the environment.**  Today, the society that we live in has been described as having a throw-away culture. This term describes a critical view of excessive production of short-lived or disposable items over durable goods that can be repaired. So, when a product breaks down, often it is easier to just throw it away and replace it as it is cheaper and more convenient than sending it for repairs. This has resulted in extreme high wastage and the disposal of such waste has become emblematic of modern day living. There are millions of tonnes of waste generated throughout the United States annually, and a large percentage is improperly disposed. Unfortunately this has become one of the main causes of pollution and is a growing concern for both government and environmentalists as it poses serious threats to the environment and human health. For example, the illegal dumping of toxic wastes into rivers has contaminated the water with harmful pathogens and toxic chemicals. This has led to users of such water contracting cholera, dysentery and leptospirosis, cuasing serious health epidemics in countries like India, China and Vietnam. Soil contamination by such illegal toxic waste disposal also means that the chemicals are absorbed by plants which are later consumed by other organisms, including humans, which could result in deaths. Societies today are also becoming more affluent. Every year, our over-consumption of goods has led to more than 500 billion plastic bags being used as people find it more convenient to ask for disposable plastic bags than to remember to bring recyclable bags when shopping. Less than 3% of those bags are recycled. Made up of polyethylene, most of these plastic bags end up in landfills, harming the environment because it can take up t o1,000 years before they start to biodegrade. Thus, the convenient lifestyle that we have adopted has led to dire environmental problems.  3. **Human actions risk making a million species extinct within decades.**  Modern countries are highly urbanised. As late as 1950, only around 30 percent of the total world population lived in urban areas. Over the next 50 years, the number had grown by 17% by the dawn of the new millennium. The trend continues still, with the percentage of the world’s population living in urban areas projected to touch the 60% mark by 2025 per current estimates. This means the clearing of forests and nature to build new cities and expand existing ones. Unfortunately, this modern lifestyle is causing the demise of flora and fauna. An apocalyptic warning was pronounced by the United Nations Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services report in April 2019. According to Professor Robert Watson, chair of the UN-mandated body that compiled the report, one of the main drivers of biodiversity loss is humans’ ability to consume. The will directly lead to species loss, in order of importance: shrinking habitat and land-use change, hunting for food or illicit trade in body parts, climate change, pollution, and alien species such as rats, mosquitoes and snakes that hitch rides on ships or planes. Scientists estimate that the earth is today home to about eight million distinct species, a majority of them insects. A quarter of catalogued anima and plant species are already being crowded, eaten or poisoned out of existence. Half-a-million to a million species are projected to be threatened with extinction, many within decades. Our modern lifestyle is harming the environment in more ways than one such that even the existence of animals and insects are being threatened.  Modern living does not come at the expense of the environment  1. **Individually, many people around the world have adopted a more sustainable lifestyle to save Gaia.**  Today, individuals are no longer waiting for their governments to spearhead national movements to mitigate the ill effects of environmental degradations. Instead, people realise that although each individual will not make a significant difference to improve the health of Mother Nature, but the concerted efforts by individuals from all over the world could make a positive impact. So, people from Madrid to New York to Seoul and Cape Town are actively recycling, saving water, switching to electric cars and LED lightings, buying things only when it is necessary, telecommuting, carpooling, using biodegradable products, increasing their participation in the sharing economy, and even timing how long they take to shower, etc., in order to play their parts to adopt a more earth-friendly lifestyle. In addition, many individuals are actively participating in self-styled movements such as Zero Waste, Repurposing and Upcycling. In a turn of events, even young people, like Greta Thunberg, are banding together to demand adults and politicians to preserve the world for them. Individual companies are also fulfilling their social responsibility by going green. From their methods of production to using green sources, they understand that if their ways of doing business are detrimental to the environment, their business will not sustain in the long run. So, with individuals trying their best to pursue a green lifestyle, modern living is no longer at the expense of the environment.  2. **Today, governments, recognising the dire need to save the environment, have designed laws and embarked on projects that are environmentally friendly – at the state, national and international levels – to start healing Mother Nature.**  Today, it has been scientifically proven beyond doubt that the cause of global warming and the more deadly and violent weather patterns we are experiencing today is human. While there are still people who think that climate change is a hoax, they are but the minority. The majority of people today are personally experiencing the dire effects of global warming, for example, Australia is seeing the demise of the Great Barrier Rift which is a result of the warm sea killing off the corals. As such, many governments are now also convinced of the correlation, and they have crafted state and national policies and laws to combat environmental dilapidations. Although Donald Trump has withdrawn USA from the Paris Agreement, other states such as New York have been creating greener spaces by installing more solar panels and creating 'green building' which mitigate pollution in an effort to make New York city 'cleaner'. Governments have also come together at an international level to reduce the effects of climate change. Under the Paris Agreement, parties put forward their pledges towards a common goal of mitigating climate change, while recognising countries' differing situations and national circumstances. To date, out of 197 countries that are signatories to this Convention, 185 have already ratified it, a better achievement than previous agreements, such as the Kyoto Protocol. In addition, for China’s Belt and Road Initiative – an ambitious programme to connect Asia with Africa and Europe via land and maritime networks along six corridors with the aim of improving regional integration, increasing trade and stimulating economic growth – President Xi Jinping has pledged in April 2019 that this mammoth project will clean, green and sustainable. With the majority of governments now leading numerous green movements, modern living does help to sustain the environment.  3. **Modern day technology is healing the bleeding environment.**  Technologies have been advancing in leaps and bounds. Technological innovations have been used to develop sustainable ideas to help solve the ecological problems we have created. Technology may not be the lone answer to climate change, but it is an important part of the solution. Some of the most important eco-friendly technological advancements in recent years have been in the clean energy sector. Renewable sources of energy like solar, wind and hydroelectric power have become much more widespread, as well as cheaper. Such technology is advancing as well, making renewables more efficient. Products like Tesla’s solar panels large hideous blocks meant for industrial uses only; instead, they look just like regular roofing tiles, have made them more accessible and appealing to consumers. People and businesses are also going paperless with the help of technology. Many companies communicate with their clients through the e-mails. Files are stored in the cloud, which are much easily accessible from anywhere, rather than in physical filing cabinets. People are more frequently taking notes and managing their schedules on their smartphones rather than using physical notebooks and calendars. All these add up of a new normal that has lessened our dependence on the world’s tree population and helped to reduce deforestation. In addition, the sharing economy is a recent development that reduces our environmental impact by enabling individuals to purchase less and use fewer materials. Companies like Uber make it easier to get around without owning a car. Airbnb helps homeowners and travellers take advantage of spaces that are not being used, which consolidates the area and resources needed to travel. Services such as Netflix have reduced the number of DVD rentals in favour of online streaming, which is reducing the need for postage, transporting the items and creating physical copies of movies. Indeed, modern day technologies have been utilised to improve the health of Mother Nature. |
| 7. ‘Our quality of thought is being destroyed by social media.’ Discuss. **Analysis**  This question requires students to focus of the impact of social media on our quality of thought. Students cannot bring in other negative impacts/ advantages of social media in our lives; they have to focus on unpacking what “quality of thought” is and discuss social media’s impact on it. Better scripts might be able to see the various conditions involved in the question – for example that the statement’s validity depends on the individual’s existing quality of thought, or on the level of government censorship in the country.  **Clarification of terms**  Quality of thought: a critical and reasonable mind, insight, enlightened, ability to make wise choices  **Stand/ possible points and examples**    Our quality of thought is destroyed by social media  **1. Social media and the conflicting deluge of news has caused us to be misinformed and confused. We are unable to sift through the diverse opinions as we are inundated by them, and this impairs our ability to form informed opinions.** [User-generated content]  Much of the content on social media is user-generated, and there is often too much information and too many conflicting ideas on personal websites, diaries, journals and blogs. With the proliferation of user-generated content empowered by social media, the media landscape has come to be populated with a noisy and unregulated melange of voices and opinions that can obscure truth. Contributors assume they are experts in many areas, like health and politics when they are really just part of the rumour mill, spreading misinformation and opinions masked as facts. While social media has given greater voice to the common man, this has also meant that consumers of media have to sift through the subjective accounts of events and experiences that populate our social media feeds. Citizen journalists have been criticised for reporting on “news” without proper journalistic training or without being held to journalistic codes of conduct which affect the objectivity and quality of their reporting. Their poor reporting has destroyed our ability to think critically about issues. Just last month (April 2019), Sri Lanka blocked Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Viber, Snapchat and Facebook Messenger following the Easter bombings targeting churches and hotels. Sri Lanka's move was the second time it has blocked social networks, following a similar action after an outbreak of violence in 2018. These moves highlight the troubled reputation of social media in spreading falsehoods and instigating social unrest.  **2. Social media has also encouraged a mindset that values fast news rather than reliable news, and we are often misinformed by untrustworthy information because of that. The virality of news today has led to the rise of fake news, which impairs our critical thinking abilities.** [Valuing speed and virality over accuracy]  Now popular content or fast-breaking news have been rapidly shared and reshared by a huge number of uses as many social media sites provide a specific functionality to help users reshare content, such as Twitter's retweet button, Pinterest's pin function, Facebook's share option or Tumblr's reblog function. With such ease of sharing information, people today tend to retweet an astonishing update and spread new updates to others without first verifying facts with other media outlets and reliable sources – leading to the rise of fake news.  The public consciousness of the problem of misleading social-media-news is at an especially fervent period after the Russian misinformation campaign, resulting in hundreds of millions of shared Russian [posts](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2017/10/05/russian-propaganda-may-have-been-shared-hundreds-of-millions-of-times-new-research-says/?utm_term=.b48b83fd9738). Facebook accounts purposely aimed at posting the sensational, mixing core views with more biting, controversial ones, gained mass followings on both sides of the political spectrum. Among them were Blacktivists, Being Patriotic, Secured Borders, and LGBT United. What was shocking was their ability to mimic the tones of existing activists, although elevated them to somewhat more extreme levels. Many posts, while sensational, felt so genuine that when the accounts injected more flagrant, divisive views, followers had lost the distinction between their own agreement and acquiescence. A supporter for equality blindly became a preacher of vitriol, in attempt to maintain his alliances. The fact that Russian agents were so able to manipulate our social media to leverage virality is a signal of the shortcomings of our social tools, and the ways in which we use them.  **3. The allure of social media is so powerful and potentially addictive that it distracts us from the harsh realities of everyday life, reducing our ability to think critically about pressing domestic or world issues as we are caught up in frivolous matters on social media.** [Entertainment value blinding us to news that really matters]  Entertainment media has always functioned as a form of escapism for people, shifting their attention toward an alternate reality. However, social media is so addictive that it has become an inseparable part of our everyday lives. E.g. American adults spend more than 11 hours per day watching, reading, listening to or simply interacting with media, according to a new study by market-research group Nielsen conducted in 2018. That's up from nine hours, 32 minutes just four years ago.  The nature of content on social media is that they are mainly visual – with twitter limiting posts to 280 characters, and Instagram and snapchat focusing mainly on the images posted. This leaves very little room to develop any kind of critical thinking. Critic Nicholas G. Carr in "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" questions how technology affects cognition and memory. "The kind of deep reading that a sequence of printed pages promotes is valuable not just for the knowledge we acquire from the author's words but for the intellectual vibrations those words set off within our own minds. In the quiet spaces opened up by the sustained, undistracted reading of a book, or by any other act of contemplation, for that matter, we make our own associations, draw our own inferences and analogies, foster our own ideas... If we lose those quiet spaces, or fill them up with "content," we will sacrifice something important not only in ourselves but in our culture."  **4. Social media is particularly insidious as much of the user-generated content appears to be an individual’s sincere opinion but are actually directly by social media content companies and advertisers.** [Unwarranted faith in social media]  Because much of social media is based on social relationships and a “genuine” look into the lives of others, we tend not to be as critical of it as traditional forms of advertisements. In other words, we blindly believe and accept what we see on social media and we tend not to question their intentions. Everyone is aware of the biases of the advertising industry and the unhealthy beauty standards it perpetuates, but not many are aware of how highly curated social media posts are and hence do not view it critically. This causes us to easily fall prey to influencers.  Our quality of thought is not destroyed by social media  **1. Our world is now occupied by a new generation of digital natives who are more discerning and equipped to navigate the complex media landscape.** Media users and consumers who are educated and discerning can mitigate any power exerted by social media. [A more discerning generation of social media users]  Media literacy is something that is more intuitive to the current generation, and they are able to parse the various media messages – those that are truth and those that are manipulated/hoaxes. It is, after all, an integral part of the curricula for many schools around the world, and young people are increasingly learning to read media messages with maturity and greater understanding. This means that while social media can excite a viewer or consumer in some new-fangled ideas or interesting products, the viewer is not necessarily compelled to behave in a way that is dictated by the media. For example, there are media literacy councils and associations being set up in countries like Singapore (Media Literacy Council) and the US (National Association for Media Literacy Education), highlighting the increased efforts being taken to coordinate media literacy education. Ultimately, man is able to harness the advantage of the media appropriately to improve his life.  **2. Social media is one of the most convenient sources of mass communication of information for society to stay in touch with what is happening in the world and in our society. This easy access to information allows us to weigh the diverse opinions, form judgements and make informed decisions.** [Source of knowledge and information]  Much of the knowledge and information we receive today is shaped by social media. Information gleaned from books, dusty Reference Sections of libraries or oral tradition are deemed less significant as it lacks immediacy and currency that people look for when seeking information. Though not always reliable, the media satisfies these roles in that it shapes the way people receive news, understand the world and communicate, which hones our thinking skills instead of destroy it. Social media informs the public, provides information and amusement, generates political ideas, mobilizes political and social action groups, and generally helps to shape today’s public policy agenda and priorities. The easy sharing and re-sharing function of social media allows it to serve as a main source of information, without which people have no way of knowing about the happenings both locally and globally.  **3. Social media is also a mouthpiece for the minorities and can help raise awareness of the plight they suffer, leading to societal change and a more enlightened society.** [Social media raising awareness for social advocacy]  Media plays a very important role in our daily life as it is an important socialisation agent and helps form our social values. Social media is lauded for its ability to fuel social change and protest movement, influence the powerful, and empower the marginalised. It is fast becoming an essential component of NGO activity for all these reasons. For example, partnering with private sector organizations, UN Women has been promoting the use of media, especially social media, as a powerful tool to advocate for elimination of violence against women and promote gender equality.   * E.g. Implemented by Eastern Campus, a PR firm, one project engaged young university men in the prevention of violence against women through social media and campus-based activities in 2011. The “Zero-violence, let’s do it together 17-MAN” online campaign attracted over 49,000 followers on various Weibo sites. More than 3,500 signatures were collected from youth both online and on campus during the EVAW Day campaign. * E.g. UN Women supported the Hong Kong-based NGO Half to Sky to develop two Public Service Announcements (PSA) as part of a Chinese “Ring the Bell” campaign. Following the successful Ring the Bell campaign in India, the PSAs encourage the public to knock on a neighbour’s door when they overhear domestic violence in order to stop the violence with a face-saving excuse.   **4. As the media is increasingly shaped by users themselves, the ethos of the media has evolved to become more investigative in nature rather than solely driven by political and economic interests. Thus there is a greater likelihood for truer and more realistic content.** [Investigative user-generated content]  Traditional media outlets are often bound by bureaucracy and have their agendas shaped by the people who control them. Co-opting news from various user-generated sources like Twitter can also make the content reported by the media even more comprehensive and objective, allowing us to gain insight into the current realities of the world. The prominence of ‘whistle-blower’ platforms such as Wikileaks implies that the media has increasingly become a means of exposing confidential information which concealed truth from the public, such as government and corporate misconduct. The rise of citizen journalism spearheaded not just from the grassroots but from media outlets themselves speaks to the growing base of user-generated content that is aimed at helping the media enhance its news stories. GuardianWitness, the citizen journalism section of UK-based newspaper The Guardian lets users contribute content via “Assignments” (based on topics given weekly by the editor), “Live News Tie-Ins” (where readers can contribute videos and commentary on breaking stories and events) and “Open Suggestions” (where users suggest newsworthy topics and ideas for stories). These not only democratizes the news-making process, but it also takes place in a regulated framework of the traditional news media which keeps in check the range of contributions from the public. |
| 8. Is globalisation drawing us together or tearing us apart? **Analysis**  Question is asking about the **impacts** **of globalisation**, in particular pertaining to the **relationships** and **connectedness** of people.  The use of present continuous tense in the question suggests the need to identify **modern** **trends** that can be related to globalisation to address the contention of the question.  **Clarification of terms**  Globalisation: The increased interconnectedness between states, countries, and peoples as a result of improvements made in information and communication technologies as well as transport technologies. A spill-over effect of globalisation is the increased interdependence of individuals, communities, and countries in modern times.  Drawing us together: The increased ‘sameness’ or ‘acceptance’ of different stakeholders in the world. This would suggest a decrease in conflict, and trends in cooperation, or improved equality between different stakeholders in society.  Tearing us apart: Increasing polarisation between different stakeholders in society that might lead to an increase in incidences of violence/conflict, as well as worsened inequalities. (basically, antithetical of drawing us together.)  **Stand/Possible Points & Examples**  Globalisation is drawing us together…   1. **The increased interconnectivity enjoyed today has made countries more dependent on one another for growth and development**. As the global economy develops, businesses and governments are increasingly working hand in hand towards mutual gain and growth. This is mostly done by shifting production lines, research and development units, and other work processes to other countries that may be better equipped and have more relevantly skilled labour. This spread of work processes all over the world makes countries increasingly reliant and dependent on one another – drawing them closer together.    1. For example, the specialisation of industries that ensued due to the proliferation of globalisation has led to some regions in Europe – such as Bordeaux and Champagne in France – being dependent on other countries for essential equipment to their own work, or daily life. Aside from some very small exception businesses, Bordeaux and Champagne’s economy are mostly driven by agriculture, food production, and tourism. However, they are not entirely self-sustaining. Businesses there work closely with engineers in Italy and Germany to develop and build the equipment needed to store and process their products while close ties are maintained with Japan and Germany – again – to ensure that field machinery are well maintained and updated. This collaboration highlights the gross dependence one country has with another and it goes far beyond just the industries in these 2 French regions. *It is also part of the reason that intergovernmental organisations such as the European Union and ASEAN – or more recently, the Asian Development Bank – are set up: to further formalise, streamline, regulate, and maintain strong ties of interdependence between these nations.* 2. **The proliferation of ideas has led to a greater convergence of ideals, and values in the world.** Globalisation has helped in the development of technologies that helped us share our ideals, values. The greater movement of individuals between borders has also encouraged this sharing. While there may be a myriad of ideals held by different cultures all around the world, this sharing has also led to a convergence of values in the world today.    1. For example, the ideals of democracy and values which societies attribute to personal freedom was once primarily practised in Western democracies. East European, Asian, and African societies tended to look upon these ideals and values with suspicion, especially since they placed greater value on the community than the individual. However, the proliferation of ideas has led to more and more individuals – primarily younger adults – to subscribe to similar values all around the world. This is evident in the riots that toppled autocratic and dictatorial regimes in the Middle East – now known as the Arab Springs – or more recently, the toppling of the long-time president of Algeria. In the latter, civilian protests backed by the military were staged to impeach President Bouteflika. Thereafter, however, civilian protests continued to pressure the military into allowing a full democratic election for the country’s new leadership. *These episodes evidently suggest a convergence of ideals and values in our society today.* 3. **Greater connectedness between nations has, as a corollary of the above points, led to the development and sustenance of a closer and more unified global system of governance in many different areas of our lives.** Many organisations and systems of global governance were developed through the years to help facilitate globalisation efforts during the late 20th century. As a result of these developments, the world is much closer today due to our mutual adherences to similar legal obligations, regulations of international spaces, as well as things as seemingly mundane as the lingua franca of business dealings.    1. The development of intergovernmental institutions and international law to regulate interactions between countries and provide neutral grounds for the mediation of conflict between nations has – for instance – created an environment where multiple agents do not mind working together to defuse conflicts peacefully to allow progress and growth to continue. The WTO and ICJ, for instance, do not just lay out streamlined frameworks for countries to interact with one another in trade or legal disputes, they also manage any disputes these nations have. When Singapore and Malaysia had disputed claims over Horsburgh Lighthouse and the Middle Rocks, for instance, it was our deference to global systems of governance that motivated both parties to settle their disputes via the ICJ. Actions taken by President Trump of the USA – unilaterally raising tariffs on traded goods from the EU and China – on the other hand lead to galvanised cries of outrage not just in the EU and China, but also in the rest of the world and his own countries. This is primarily a result of the increased importance of respecting and sustaining our current global system of governance. *These actions of countries deferring to and respecting global systems of governance do not just highlight the importance of these systems and organisations, but also highlight the increased closeness of our world today.*    2. The development of global systems has led to the increased prominence of a lingua franca for different industries all across the world. This alignment of languages across the world does not just facilitate business and communication, but also boosts cultural exchange and cooperation between individuals in different countries – bring us closer to one another. This can be seen in how all staff working in the aviation and maritime industry have to pick up some level of English language in order to ensure a clear line of communication in their work.   Globalisation is tearing us apart…   1. **Globalisation has led to increased inequality all around the world, exacerbating the gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’**. While it is readily observed that the global economy has vastly developed and improved thanks to globalisation, it has also exacerbated the wealth / income inequality between and within countries. The benefits that came with globalisation did not have an equal or equitable impact on its participants.    1. Vanguards of globalisation and first-movers in capitalism were able to develop much faster, and get much richer than most other countries. This distinction was especially apparent in the late 20th century when there was a North-South wealth divide in the world. Within countries, this disparity is shown by the increasing Gini coefficients (a measurement for income inequality). While this has especially been the case for modern, developed countries, it is also increasingly true of developing countries.    2. According to Oxfam in 2019, the 26 richest people in the world own as much wealth as the poorest 50% of the world’s population combined. To put things in clearer perspective, according to The Guardian in 2019, Jeff Bezos, who should attribute his accumulation of wealth to his successful navigation of business in a globalised society, has a fortune that is 100 times that of Ethiopia’s entire health budget. This means that just 1% of his fortune is all Ethiopia – a nation of 105 million people – is able to budget for healthcare services. The upsetting piece of information, however, is that these are not isolated statistics or occurrences. Between the 1980 and 2014 – riding on waves of globalisation and increased international trade – the share of national income claimed by top 1% earners in the USA rose from 11% to 20%, with similar trends in the UK, Germany, and France. The same trend can be seen in developing economies such as Brazil – where the top 1% earns 25% of national income – and Russia, where the share for the top earners rose from 4% in 1980 to 20% in 2015. These statistics – alongside a slew of other studies – clearly show that the fruits of globalisation are not equally enjoyed by everyone. Rather, they have been concentrated in the hands of a few in the world, increasing disparities within countries all around the world. Therefore, it seems clear that globalisation is driving us further from one another. 2. **The increased interconnectedness of the world – whether via traveling technology or information and communications technology – has created a fertile ground for the creation and sharing of information. This creates more ideologically polarised societies in the world today.** The rapid development of networks between countries has allowed like-minded individuals in different countries rally together, develop their personal ideals, and ultimately create more polarised societies.While allowing individuals to reach out and find like-minded peers is a good thing in most cases, the same cannot be said when it allows those with extreme ideals to find a place of refuge and belonging. This interconnectedness has helped fringe groups from different societies come together – emboldening them – and given them an outlet to share their ideals with the world. The way social networks on the internet have been structured has also created conducive echo chamber that do not just bring like-minded peers together, but also provide continuous affirmation for their biases without balance. This has bred increased polarisation in our societies.    1. Advances in ICT that has not only made it easier to create and share content, but made this content more easily accessible by a large audience has allowed fringe communities in different countries come together and find solidarity in spite of their being social pariahs in their own hometowns. A study done in 2017 by researchers from several European universities and Telefonica found that social media platforms such as Twitter, Reddit, and 4chan were used largely by fringe groups for their discussions – regardless of geographical constraints. Using these conduits for information exchange, their ideologies were slowly nurtured and refined such that they would come to seem more acceptable by the mainstream community. This not only helps fringe groups find support for their ideologies, but allows them to pool their resources together to spread extreme beliefs to the public. All this would not have been possible without vast improvements in ICT, that is on one hand necessary for and on the other a product of rapid globalisation. Therefore, rather than draw us together, the vast increase in interconnectedness of our societies has made societies more segregated.    2. *Other examples that can be included: The rise of anti-vaxxers around the world, the increased prominence of flat-earthers in recent years, as well as increased support of climate change deniers.* 3. **The rapid proliferation of globalization has threatened the traditions, customs, and ways of life of many individuals. This has given rise to a wave of anti-globalisation movements around the world.** Aside from merely exacerbating wealth gaps, globalisation has also driven a wedge between culture and progress unlike anything before. The rapid pace at which globalisation is spreading severely limits the abilities of individuals – globalization laggards – to adapt and thrive in the ‘new world’. This has led to much resentment against globalization, leading to strong resistances to globalization around the world.    1. Populist movements have been sweeping across much of the world, including Western countries such as Hungary, France, Germany and even the USA – all countries that were once considered bastions of globalisation. Many far-right political parties have been gaining popularity and foothold in governments on the back of promises to stem the spread of globalisation. Viktor Orban of Hungary, and the Five Star Movement party in Italy, for example, were able to make successful forays into their respective democratic governments by running campaigns that denounced the free movement of individuals – more specifically refugees – seeking refuge in their countries. Similar progress was seen in Marine Le Pen’s rise to prominence in European politics in recent years. Even within countries that are considered bastions of liberal ideals, that kickstarted globalisation, there is a growing split between those who support and those who oppose the modern wave of globalisation. Clearly, globalisation has not done much to draw us together and is instead tearing us apart.   *Suggested Essay Structure: Intro, CA, R, CA, R, A, Conclusion* |
| 9. ‘Youth today are unable to deal with an unpredictable world.’ Comment. **Analysis**  Students should be able to show an understanding of the characteristics of youth and link these to the unpredictability of the world today in the social, economic, political or environmental aspects. Students should also be able to show an awareness of the differing circumstances in various countries which make some youths more able to deal with an uncertain world as opposed to others, instead of simply providing in a youth-bashing essay.  **Clarification of Terms**  Youth 🡪 characteristics associated with youth (sheltered, protected, weak, sense of entitlement, lacking independence, materialistic, unable to take risks, stressed, equipped with relevant skills, thrive in uncertainty, bright, courageous, willing to adopt new strategies)  Deal with 🡪 handle, cope, take action, overcome difficulties presented with, be in charge of, succeed in.  Unpredictable world 🡪 uncertainty in the economic, political, social, environmental aspects, VUCA world, constant changes  **Stand / possible points**  Yes, the youth today are unable to deal with an unpredictable world  1. **The ‘Generation stress’ of today are unable to cope with the greater uncertainty in the labour market, where professions and occupations are giving way to the changing nature of jobs.** It is thus harder for youth to construct a narrative. With this overwhelming insecurity and stress, it is not surprising that many millennials are finding it challenging to deal with the increasing income inequality and find themselves without jobs.   * In a study conducted by the American Psychological Association, millennials encounter greater levels of stress compared to any other generations. The pressures and expectations to do well in schools, pursue big dreams, carve out successful careers and make their mark in the world has led to greater levels of anxiety and depression. In the US itself, there are more than 5million College students battling mental health issues. Such problems are also very common in Asian societies such as Singapore, South Korea, Hong Kong and Japan. * In Hong Kong, a lack of job security leading to a worthwhile career is a major cause of young people's angst, leaving them feeling unprepared to assume their adult responsibilities. This vicious cycle has increased their stress levels and in turn makes them put off facing the uncertain reality. Today's economy is very different from that of their parents. Over the past few decades, there has been an expansion of "precarious jobs", which provide relatively low wages and offer no hope of security or advancement. Driven by the competitive global economy and technological development, such non-standard work (which include those in the informal sector, and temporary, part-time jobs and casual labour) threatens them and caused them to put off several adult responsibilities such as marriage or buying homes. * The impact of artificial intelligence and automation has been profound and it is estimated that millions of people will lose their jobs. A two-year study from McKinsey Global Institute (2018) suggests that by 2030, intelligent agents and robots could replace as much as 30 percent of the world’s current human labour. Automation will displace between 400 and 800 million jobs by 2030, requiring as many as 375 million people to switch job categories entirely. Such a shift is bound to cause fear and concern, especially for the world’s vulnerable and already stressed youth.   2. **Youth of well-to-do backgrounds have been seen to be pampered and sheltered and thus unprepared for the complexities of the changing world.** Such youth today have been seen to be entitled and disinterested in world issues. ‘Generation ME’, has placed self-interest above that of world issues, making them unable to deal with the uncertainty in politics, economy, environment and even their own relationships.   * Increased narcissism has led to troubled relationships and unhappy lives, making it harder for these pampered youths to deal with the complexities in relationships. Articles written by relationship gurus highlight that modern day relationships are increasingly failing as youth today are unprepared for sacrifices, compromises, ever-lasting and unconditional love. The young tend to only want excitement and thrill and are not prepared for the investment and commitment needed to make relationships, which are becoming more complex today, work. * Increasing narcissism also correlates with materialism and a greater focus on money, fame and image. Such attributes call into question the ability of youths to take action for world issues such as the collapsing environment or even voting for their leaders – which is an essential worry of the unpredictable world we live in today. * Many youths are unaware of the rebirth of the Russian influence or the troubling climate changes. They lack interest in issues outside their sheltered world. Many are glued to their phones and are more interested in the British Royal family’s pregnancy and Kim Kardashian’s major fashion moment. It is truly doubtful if such youths will be capable of being ready for an uncertain world that lies ahead.   **3. Youth today have been said to lack the necessary exposure, wisdom and knowledge as the education system does not prepare them well enough** to deal with real world complexities such as changing natures of jobs or even deal with the rising inequalities in the world today.   * In Singapore, 7 in 10 young people are unsure or do not think the tertiary education they receive in Singapore prepares them sufficiently to join the workforce, according to an online poll (April 2019). Most agreed they have to continually acquire new skills and knowledge to keep up with rapid changes in industries but they worry they may not have enough time or energy to pick up new skills through the current education system, which does not give enough emphasis to practical, knowledge-based skills. * Career consultants from the UK have analysed that schools lack the necessary resources and time to effectively prepare students to handle real life issues. Moreover, schools are under immense pressure to obtain the grades to place them high in the league table and to be able to boast that X per cent of their pupils make it to elite universities. Similarly, the students are under pressure to get the grades. This method fails to genuinely prepare students enough in a complex VUCA world, when all they know is how to study for grades. * South Africa’s schools face considerable challenges. The national average of 27 percent functional illiteracy masks significant and entrenched wealth and race-linked inequalities in what is effectively a bifurcated education system. Unpacking that 27 percent national average shows that almost 60 percent of students in the poorest economic quartile are functionally illiterate, compared with just 4 percent of the richest quartile.   **4. In an increasingly complex world with moral ambiguity, there are fewer ethical guidelines for youth. This is exacerbated with the advancement in media and technology.** Moral values have undergone subtle changes with modernity. Morals keep changing today and there seems to be no concrete foundation or moral understanding of the world as it is, especially when religion (the moral bastion) itself is being questioned. What was seemingly immoral some decades ago are inconspicuous today. Youth today are thus grappling with a morally ambiguous world and find it harder to know the right from the wrong.   * This is not hard to understand why, given the nature of modern messages perpetuated by the media today. Series like Game of Thrones, openly encourage sex and violence. It is not uncommon for youth of 18-19 years of age to have many sexual partners, often even partners that share the same friendship group. Many want to live life to the fullest and engage in activities because of the YOLO mentality. This includes escapades with drugs, smoking, gambling and even having one off sexual flings. * According to the Pew Research Centre in 2018, young adults around the world are less religious by several measures. Out of 106 countries surveyed, young adults are significantly less likely to be affiliated with a religious group in 41, as opposed to the older groups. This is especially true in North America, where in both the U.S. and Canada younger people are less likely to claim a religious identity. * In Brazil, especially in the last thirty years subjects like moral, ethics and civics were abolished the curriculum and this resulted in freedoms that today cause harm to society itself. In higher education, work with it and it is difficult to instil in young people the constant practice of moral and ethical principles.   **5. Today, due to globalization, interdependence and rapid economic and technological change, which reach, to some extent, every country, most societies have undergone a complex process of cultural change.** This involves value changes, which people who hold traditional values, may perceive as a ‘moral crisis’. Youth today are thus grappling with a culturally changed world and find it harder to deal with a world that is not accepting of their differences.   * Today youth have to deal with the ambiguous social and cultural norms brought abought by a more liberal world. Gender identity issues are by far the most taxing for adolescents. In many schools, young students are conflicted as to which toilet to use even. Cumberland High School, a sprawling establishment with nearly 1,500 pupils in east London, is one of hundreds of schools around Britain that is taking steps to break down the binary division between male and female. It has adopted a more liberal uniform policy that blurs gender boundaries and is adapting its infrastructure - with gender-neutral gym changing rooms that anyone can use - in an effort to be more accepting. However, many schools are still not open to such changes. In some parts of the world still unreceptive to change, many youngsters are forced to hide their sexual orientation for fear of persecution and this is harder for them to deal with when they see others around them being able to openly declare their preferences.   **6**. In many cases, it is the **lack of support and opportunities and weak, corrupt governments which make youth vulnerable to changing economies and an uncertain future**. Almost 87% of the young (aged between 15-29) are concentrated in many developing countries and are faced with a growing sense of trepidation as such countries do not have the means to help their people. Poverty or the lack of money and a stable life can be a debilitating factor in addressing many of life’s concerns. Even in some developed countries, weak governments are the main cause of the young being unable to handle many unpredictable trends.   * In India, her 600 million young people are seen to be highly motivated. Yet, secure work is hard to find and many resort to low class work such as sweeping roads. Corruption and nepotism is rife and only a few are given the means to expand their potential. There is no job guarantee and there is no written contract protected by the law. Besides, most of the money provided is black and is liable to scrutiny. Once you go into it, you also have to play according to the rules of politics and the rules keep on changing based on the situation. With such odds stacked against them, the youth are unable to have the skills or opportunities to deal with many of the more complex problems of their own country, let alone the world. * In Brazil, millions of young Brazilians are unemployed in a country suffering from an economic hangover that followed its worst recession in recorded history. Among those aged 18-24 the jobless rate leaps to 26.6 percent. The government's inability to provide for the people an agenda for education or navigate through the crisis has left her youth helpless as well. * In Greece, various issues such as nepotism, corruption, and weak EU support make it harder for Greek youth to recover from the debilitating economic crisis which saw over 1 million youth unemployed. * Across Europe, youth unemployment is 25 percent, not just because of a sluggish economy but because many young Europeans do not have the skills for the jobs available, from electricians to home health aides. In the United States, nearly 17 percent of those between the ages of 16 and 29 are neither in school nor working. Countries are just not doing enough for the young to equip them with the necessary skill for jobs.   No, the youth today are able to deal with an unpredictable world  **1**. There have been **increasing international efforts worldwide to empower youth with the critical thinking skills they need to overcome the challenges and uncertainty** they face in today’s world. In this way, youth are being trained to critically evaluate and analyse media information, increase resilience to fake news and make informed choices to address unpredictability.   * The United Nations is working to listen to youth and respond to their concerns. It has launched the “Guiding Principles on Young People’s Participation in Peacebuilding” and was developing a comprehensive Plan of Action to prevent violent extremism that would seek to engage and empower youth. The UN office of Counter Terrorism is engaged in a number of initiatives related to youth engagement such as, Project on Preventing Violent Extremism through Youth Empowerment in Jordan, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. There are also partnerships with youth-focused NGOs, such as Silatech in Qatar. These aim at increasing resilience of youth communities against radicalization and hate speech and provide a balanced discourse for a greater understanding of what a Muslim identity means. * Greta Thunberg, a Swedish schoolgirl who, at age 15, began protesting about the need for immediate action to combat climate change outside the Swedish parliament, has since become an outspoken climate activist. On 15 March 2019, an estimated 1.4 million students in 112 countries around the world joined her call in striking and protesting. Another event was scheduled for 24 May 2019.   **2**. **National education systems have also started revamping their educational systems to help students make better choices.** Given the various difficult choices youth today have when they come out, for example choosing political leaders (Trump), voting in referendums (Brexit) or finding jobs, the direction of many schools today will enable students to deal with the various choices they are faced with when they enter the unpredictable world in the future.   * Colleges have been adjusting their curriculum to better simulate real-world conditions. Many middle schools in the US have simulated projects as part of their curriculum. These include GlobeEd 2 Project, The World Affairs Challenge, the ICONS project and the Model United Nations Conference. Simulations have proven to be an important tool to developing many aspects of global competence. They motivate students through real-world, relevant events. These simulations also compel students to combine content knowledge with critical thinking and reasoning skills. * Finnish schools have also transformed their education system to embrace the challenges the country is facing. Traditional Finnish industries such as paper manufacturing have declined because of an increased preference for digital media. Furthermore, technology trends are changing rapidly, and failure to innovate resulted in the collapse of industry giants such as Nokia. Automation and digitalisation will also render many more traditional jobs redundant - a development that the government is trying to stave off by equipping the next generation with skills they will need for the future through their remodelled system.   **3**. **Youth today are in fact brave and courageous and are willing to fight for their cause despite the uncertainties they face**. It is thus not the youth who are unable to deal with the new world.   * Britain stands at a societal crossroads with uncertainty over its political and economic future. Brexit showed that that young people are overwhelmingly more likely to support staying in the European Union. Many young people have spoken out in protest of the decision, with some even mobilizing to push for political change. It is the young who will inherit the post-Brexit world and bear the responsibility of making it work to best degree that is possible. Their fearlessness and passion in this issue shows that they are able to deal with the uncertain. * In US politics, the overwhelming support for Obama was the most any young cohort has leaned toward a Democrat since 1972. The young who are about to vote for the next upcoming elections are also the most liberal in the US. Several polls have found young white men and women are more liberal than their parents, particularly on three social issues—gay rights, immigration, and marijuana—and generally on their willingness to accept more government involvement in income redistribution and universal health care. The youth have thus shown the ability to embrace change and deal with the unpredictable. * Young people’s sense that the world needs a moral rebirth is not just economic. The Black Lives Matter movement has done for racism and police brutality what Occupy did for financial realities—not discover a fresh injustice, but rather expose a long-festering moral blight. The words “Black Lives Matter” are a clear expression of the movement: identifying a historical ugliness that has lived in the shadows and is finally being dragged into the national light. In the bigger picture, young people feel that they are revolutionaries for urgent social rights, particularly for black and gay couples. |
| 10. To what extent does your society value individual choice **Analysis**  The question asks for the extent to which a society prioritises and gives due credit for the choices that individuals make **freely**. Each paragraph needs to deal with the value of personal freedom and how much of it is cherished. Students should be able to explain how choice can be valued and look at the different levels at which it is valued (by the government, family, peers). In societies like Singapore, which values the society over the individual, and which has its own set of restrictions, a lot of individual freedom has not been valued.  **Clarification of Terms**  Individual choice**:** individual rights and autonomy to choose to do whatever he wishes without interference of control by others (includes freedom of action, speech, religious freedom, civil rights)  Valued**:** prioritised, cherished, highly regarded, seen as significant, given due credit, given recognition  **Stand / possible points**  Individual choice is valued.  **1. At the societal level, a change from a traditional mindset to a more liberal one has allowed society to accept individual choices and given recognition to individuals as their right to choose their life.** With changing norms, the Singapore society is moving towards a less sticky and freer society, where many older ways of life are now seen as restrictions which hinder true happiness. Society has thus become a lot more open to individual choices and values people who want to live their live in the way they want to.   * Society today is also increasingly accepting of LGBTQs and their choices. The wedding of Lee Hsien Yang’s son is seen to be a watershed moment in Singapore’s recognition of individual choice as both families supported their decision and the public were also extremely supportive. Moreover, the Pink Dot movement has been increasingly gaining strength and support from its inception. This is further supported by The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), which released a working paper on May 2, 2019, stating that young people are becoming more open to the rights of the LGBT community. 58.4 percent of respondents between the age of 18 and 25 said gay marriages were “not wrong at all” and 65 percent of respondents with ages of 18-25, said that homosexual sex was “not always wrong”. Thus, it is clear that LGBTQ rights are increasingly supported by the society. * More people are also accepting of individual choices when it comes to divorce cases, staying single or mixed marriages. In February 2019, an online Prudential survey showed that 1 in 4 people were considering divorce. Statistics also show that divorces cases have been on the rise in Singapore. This is also true of the number of people choosing to stay single in Singapore due to the high cost of married life. The number of married couples who called it quits continued to rise for the second consecutive year ending in 2017, while fewer people tied the knot over the same period according to the latest official statistics of 2018. Likewise, society has become more accepting of mixed marriages. In 2018, 22% of marriages between people of different races was double the proportion in 1997. * Parents today are more accepting of individual career choices and do allow their children to explore careers which are not the typical mainstream ones heavily supported by the government. These include careers in the Arts and sports fields. Industry experts and veterans say the arts scene has improved over the last decade, with more opportunities for artists to sustain themselves. Whether it is dance, theatre, music, film or art, more people here are pursuing their passions and exploring various career paths in the arts. * Singaporean families have been increasingly supportive of their children’s choices. Many have long been dispassionate about the country and families now see the value in their children moving abroad. Many have realised that there is no point in living in Singapore with its many restrictions on individual choice just for the sake of the betterment of many, when there is no love for the country. This is especially when the betterment of many comes at a far greater restriction of individual choice compared to other countries. Many Gen Y and X Singaporeans favour moves overseas and have the support of their families. They choose to stay on in countries after finishing their tertiary education. Countries such as the UK, US, Australia and Canada appeal to many who prefer the greater freedom they have there.   **2. Individual expression, is valued and encouraged in an attempt to bring about greater social and political progress.** The Singapore government has recently been encouraging feedback through a host of channels to look into public concerns and seems genuine about acting on this feedback. Public views on how to improve things around them are seen as essential to making a real change to policies. There is value to individual expression as it enables there to be checks and balances in a democratic government to ensure that all views are taken into consideration regardless of one’s status in society. Errors can be confronted, while individuals have given the opportunity to voice concerns. Prioritising freedom of expression of ensures that groups are able actively and meaningful participation in political process and have a stake in the progress of wider society. For marginalised groups where individuals face discrimination and the infringement of basic rights, freedom of speech is an essential tool wielded to fight the status quo and bring about social change for a country.   * Government channels such as MOF, gov.sg, and a new interactive chatbox (reach.gov.sg) provide the people with ample spaced to voice their concerns and provide feedback to improve on the current issues. Singaporeans can participate in a virtual listening point by engaging with an interactive chatbot on Reach's website and Facebook page to share their views. A WhatsApp chat group will also be started by Reach, and those who sign up to be in the group can then exchange views with one another there. * There are also various meet the MP sessions organised for residents at HDBs. MPs also organise various public forums to engage the public. Through this, several individuals have been assisted with their needs. * There are also ample channels for people to voice their concerns, (such as through WhatsApp groups, ST forum pages and apps) on transport issues, rising water and electricity prices and many other issues. * Hong Lim Park is the only place where protests are allowed in the city-state and it has become a focal point for cultural activism. The White Paper Protests of 2013 brought the largest political gathering since independence when the government moved to bring in more foreigners to sustain economic growth. Since then, the government has taken into account public feedback and reduced the number of foreigners coming in. * There is also a greater maturity seen in Singaporeans as voices of the public are heard and people are allowed to bring out their differing views. From a record turnout at the annual Pink Dot rally and the rise of a counter Wear White movement, to protests against the National Library Board’s (NLB) initial decision to pulp three children’s titles after complaints that they did not promote family values, many Singaporeans were not only unafraid of making themselves heard, but also proactively pushing their views.   Individual choice is not valued**.**  **1.** **Individuals who choose to follow through with their passions are not well regarded or credited as the government dictates what is seen as important careers for the development of her economy and does not give recognition to other careers which are not aligned to their interests.** In Singapore’s case, individuals are usually not given much recognition if they choose careers that are not aligned with the interests of the state. As a capitalist society, most individuals will choose instead, science – related careers to get the maximum returns. Individuals who choose to leave the mainstream are in many instances, side-lined or forced to leave the country. Even families end up criticising their children who choose to follow a career path that is not mainstream. This can be seen in individuals who choose careers from the Arts or sports scene.   * Singapore clearly depends on her people to generate wealth for her economy. These include careers in IT, Infotech, business management, accountancy and computer engineering, which are the most popular courses for NUS, SMU and NTU. (Most from the science fields as these are seen as being able the best monetary rewards). Recognition in the Arts is limited as many Singaporeans do not know of artists who have great talent. * Artists such as Taufik Batisah, Inch Chua, JJ Lin and Stephanie Sun have left Singapore due to a lack of support and recognition. Musician Inch Chua was not given any support from the government, and was even judged by her friends and family that she was making bad decisions. She had applied for various grants from the National Arts Council but was not given any reply. * According to a ST report, artistic millennials face struggles to receive funding as the administrative and bureaucratic process imposed on artists to account for huge amounts of funding could be a daunting task. * Sports is another industry which lacks support and value from the society and the government. Joseph Schooling needed the financial support of his parents, who funded him with 1 million dollars, and gave up the Singapore education system to allow him to learn in the US. * Most sports athletes are unable to make a career out of sports and have to instead have a part time job to fund their sports dreams. * The pay is also rather low for sports people. An average S-League footballer earns less than $3000 a month. This, compared to British footballers who are paid anywhere between $100, 000 – $1.5 million a month is seen as placing almost no value to sportsmen, who place their health and lives on the line and have only a very limited period of time to have a career in sports.   **2. In the pursuit to ensure a greater sense of belonging and growth of a society as a whole, the collective is valued over individual choice, rendering individual choice quite irrelevant.** In Singapore’s case, in order to ensure that everyone in the country can prosper together, the government prioritises the greatest amount of good that can benefit the greatest number of people when making decisions. Singapore has focussed on building a civil and inclusive society and takes measures through social interventions because she understands the need for a harmonious society in order to achieve any form of progress. As such, a lot of individual choice and freedom has to be given up to achieve this.   * Smoking – Jan 1 2019 onwards, individuals have to be 19 to be able to smoke. This is to be raised progressively every January till smokers become at least 21 by 2012. Orchard road is now a smoke free zone. * Housing – The most far-reaching of Singapore’s social interventions over individual choice is the Ethnic Integration Policy, which leaves nothing to chance. It ensures that each neighbourhood and block is racially mixed by stipulating racial quotas that correspond to the ethnic composition at the national level. Individual choice in the matter is thus compromised. This is especially discriminatory to the minority who are not given much choice in their housing options. * Tudung – Female Muslim students are not allowed to wear their head scarves to school as it claimed that it will threaten their inclusivity with other races. * CPF – In the government’s attempt to ensure that society is self-sufficient at old age, Singaporeans have no choice or control over their CPF and have to give in to what the government deems is necessary amounts to be put aside. We are not given then freedom to retrieve our CPF until retirement and that too, only in small payouts as sanctioned by the government or as a lump sum. * Casino – In the government’s attempt to ensure that we do not become a gambling nation, the government has recently increased the fees for Singapore citizens and PRS who go into casinos. Casino entry fees are to be raised $50 from $100 to $150. * Drug laws – Singapore also has one of the toughest drug laws internationally. We are not given the freedom like in the Netherlands or the US (10 states have legalized marijuana) where drugs are legalized.   **3. An individual’s freedom of choice is also given up for the collective safety, security and stability for the whole society.** In today’s climate of fear and instability, it is a community effort to help strengthen a nation’s security and this can come at the costs of individual privacy or freedom of speech. After all, the individual is part of the society and how well-defended the society is direct affects the individual. This is especially so in Singapore, which follows the principle of collectivism.   * In Singapore, there are out of bounds (OB) markers that denote what topics are permissible for public discussion. These quietly draw the line between what can be discussed and what cannot. These include Singapore’s Internal Security Act that states that “Any police officer may without warrant arrest any person suspected of the commission of an offence under this Part” and the United States of America’s Patriot Act Section 206 allows the government to tap every device a person uses — landline, cell phone, laptop, etc. — with just one approval from the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court. This shows how surveillance is prioritised over individual rights to privacy in the name of protecting the greater good. * Recently, Singapore has plans in place to install cameras equipped with facial recognition technology to all 110,000 lamp posts around the city, making it easier than ever for the country to keep tabs on its citizens and visitors. * Laws such as the Sedition Act, restrict freedom of speech, yet keep the country safe from instability that can arise from inflammatory comments about other races. Any acts, tendencies, or statements which can be construed as a threat to the government, such as inciting criticism, rioting, or an affront against the multiracial and multi-ethnic Singaporean population, are punishable under the Sedition act. With its history of race riots and political turbulence, it is easy to see why such an act could be considered necessary to give up individual freedom of speech for political stability. * National Service is compulsory for boys aged 17 as it is seen as a necessary means of creating a society that is ready to fight for Singapore in times of trouble.   **4. An individual’s choice to express themselves is sometimes not valued in a very conventional society which does not know how to appreciate creativity or things which are different.** It is not uncommon for Singaporeans to stare at people who do not fit into the society’s idea of the norm. Singaporeans are generally quite closed and would rather not express themselves in a non-conventional manner for fear of being seen as different. This is in contrast to several freer, more open societies where individuals wear outrageous attire, or even sing and dance in public without fear of reprisal. The Singapore society is also not as open to taboo topics and the government quickly bans plays or writing that touches on such topics.   * People who dress differently, or in an erratic manner are taken videos of and put on STOMP. Men who dress up or put on make-up are also viewed as effeminate and are stared at. * Sticker lady, Samantha Lo, divided the nation. Although she had thousands of supporters, many saw her act as one of vandalism and not creative art. * Many art plays have been shut down by the government as they feel that the Singapore society is not ready for such brazen shows. Josef Ng’s Brother Cane was one of the most controversial performances in Singapore’s contemporary art history. Josef was banned from future public performances and signaled the end of his career. * Some books touching on controversial topics were also banned. These include ‘Sex. Violence. Family Values’ (2012) by Ken Kwek, ‘To Singapore, With Love’ (2013) by Tan Pin Pin and  ‘And Tango Makes Three’ by Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson**.**   **5. In many cases, the government makes us believe that it does value our individual choice, yet this is mostly a false choice we have.**   * In the recent anti fake news law, Singaporeans were encouraged to provide feedback, Yet, the law was still approved and despite public feedback, it will come into effect in the second half of 2019. * The government also asked for feedback for the casinos and despite heavy criticism, it has increased the levy for the entrance fee. |
| 11. Does our obsession with taking photographs limit our view of the world? **Analysis**  From analogue cameras to high-quality built-in cameras on our smartphones, the digital photography revolution has made it progressively easier to take photographs. In 2017 alone, it was estimated that a whopping 1.2 trillion photos were taken, with 3 billion photos uploaded on social media. The word obsession indicates the troubling extent to which the need to document every event has limit our perception of reality, causing us to be ignorant of cultural sensitivities and even unaware of danger. Students need to provide concrete arguments explaining the impact of our obsession with taking photographs, instead of merely describing it.  **Clarification of Terms**  obsession: excessive, sometimes even subconscious, need to constantly do something; constantly preoccupied to a troubling extent  limits our view of the world: causes individuals to be myopic, narrows our perception of reality, restricts our understanding of the world; makes us ignorant of existing differences  **Stand / Possible Points and Examples**  Our obsession with taking photographs limits our view of the world   1. **As it encourages superficiality and normalises narcissism, having a profound impact on one’s identity.** As self-identity is a product of one’s life experiences, constant photographic documentation limits how we see ourselves and others. The lack of spontaneity in selfies reflect our narcissistic tendency to portray ourselves in an unnatural light, mimicking poses and facial expressions of models and social media influencers, rather than being true expressions of our selves and emotions at any given point of time. Social media platforms are flooded with selfies and unglam photographs capturing even the most banal moments, which reflects the superficial nature of photographs taken today. Furthermore, photographs are no longer confined to one’s personal life. They have become public displays of specific attitudes, intentions and stances. As such, they do not truly reflect who people are, but instead promotes the “self” people want to portray to others at that moment of time, presenting a distorted image to others. 2. **It subconsciously controls our choices, affecting the quality of our lives and experiences.** Instead of pursuing authentic and unique experiences, we live each moment looking out for moments to capture, or plan our lives around “instagrammable” experiences. This significantly impedes real life as our obsession with photography influences our day-to-day decisions – from the minute decisions such as our #ootd (outfit of the day) to significant ones such as how “instagram-worthy” weddings are. Furthermore, our view of the world has become commercialised and materialistic as we focus on acquiring the latest products just to appear to be keeping up with the trends on our social media feeds. This has fuelled consumerism and resulted in a lack of individuality. Even in concerts and live performances, individuals scramble to document such once in a lifetime experience through the lens of their personal cameras instead of being immersed in the moment to the extent that some artistes including Alicia Keys, Dave Chapelle and Jack White have banned the use of camera-equipped devices in their shows. Sadly, we often find ourselves appreciating life and its joys through the lens of our built-in cameras instead of fully immersing ourselves in the moment, simply because of our insatiable need to capture and document every moment on our phones. 3. **It makes us ignorant of its dangers.** Our preoccupation with capturing the most picture perfect moments has caused us to neglect our physical surroundings. In our bid to capture a unique perspective that will set our photograph apart from hundreds, we have gone to great lengths and even put ourselves in physical danger. The disturbing increase in selfie deaths or “killfies” which has taken more than 250 lives in 2018 alone, reflect how our lack of awareness is becoming habitual. Individuals have become so fixated on the camera and composing the perfect shot that we unknowingly engage in risky behaviour. Besides physical dangers, we have also turned a blind eye to the ethical concerns involved in taking and sharing photographs of the people closest to us. Particularly, parents who openly snap and share pictures of their children, “sharenting” for short, make them vulnerable to the possible infringements of their privacy. 4. **It impairs our ability to remember.** Ubiquitous smartphones have enabled us to easily take photographs, relying on our phones as memory repositories instead of committing finer details of our experiences to memory. Though we may be visually engaged in capturing the moment, we tend to miss out on crucial sensory information. A 2018 study confirmed that an intensive social media habit impairs of ability to store memories. Known as the “photo-taking impairment effect”, participants were less likely to remember objects photographed than objects they simply observed. Moreover, knowing we can easily access photographs to help us recall information or past experiences also leads to cognitive offloading, as we rely on the digital memory instead. It is no wonder that taking pictures of presentation slides in lectures or conferences do little to help us internalise information. Even recalling where a specific photograph has been stored, amongst thousands others we have scrambled to take, sometimes becomes a challenge in itself.   Our obsession with taking photographs does not limit our view of the world   1. **It enables us to recall significant milestones in life.** Uncannily, despite the deluge of photographs that are taken today, moments captured are similar to the days of traditional photography, reflecting the same desire humans have to remember significant life events. The obsession reflects our desire to retain and concretise memories and experiences which are often fleeting and ephemeral. Photographs continue to convey messages, our feelings and emotions in a way that no words can. In the book ‘The Social Photo’, Jurgenson writes that the temporary photo “inspires memory because it welcomes the possibility of forgetting.” The ephemeral nature of photographs in our digital age such as snaps and Instagram stories which disappear twenty-four hours after they are posted now become something that is more prized than photographs that have come before as we seize these moments to make them meaningful. 2. **It allows us to live vicariously through the array of images that are presented, broadening our view of the world.** The proliferation of high quality smartphone cameras and social networks have democratised photography, making it increasingly accessible to all. Unlike in the past, where techical expertise was essential in capturing high quality images, advances in digital photography, such as user-friend photo-editing applications and even filters on social networks, have enhanced one’s ability to capture their own experiences and discoveries on camera. The works of avid and budding photographers are often posted on their social media accounts and shared with literally anyone around the world in a matter of seconds. Individuals who choose to travel off the beaten track to far flung, remote places are able to document their discoveries, present a snapshot (both literally and metaphorically) of the distinctive features of different places and cultures, which others may never have been able to see otherwise. These images are available at our fingertips – an easy search of a geotag or hashtag would present the whole array of photographs taken of a topic or place of interest. Photographs reveal the naunces and intracacies of different cultures and places, making it possible for us to experience them even from miles away. 3. **It raises public consciousness about controversial events.** Despite the superficiality and over-saturation of photographs in today’s age, there are notable images that have left a deep impression on viewers. These photographs cast the spotlight on controversial social issues that are often hidden in the shadows, raising the public’s awareness and sometimes, inspiring action. War photography, for instance, gives us insights into the realities of war. Often times, these images are a stark contrast to the heroic and rosy picture of war painted by governments through photographs, revealing the injustices and suffering faced by innocent victims. These photographers willingly put themselves in the line of fire to keep people truly informed, revealing the complexities of the world we live in. Photojournalists, particularly, use their work to surface social injustices and advocate for social change. Specifically, the image of baby Alan Kurdi, washed ashore after a vessel carrying migrants from Syria capsized off the Turkish Coast, was one of the defining photographs of the Europe migrant crisis. It evoked emotions that catalysed action, compelling governments to open their borders to grant migrants refuge. |
| 12. How effective is international cooperation in tackling global challenges today? **Analysis**  International cooperation between states and international organisations are essential in addressing some of the most pressing challenges in today’s day and age. The nature of global challenges require each nation to pull its weight to address these issues, as the impacts are felt both within its home borders and beyond its shores. Students need to evaluate the degree of effectiveness of international cooperation, providing reasons why it is / is not effective, instead of merely providing a laundry list of measures that have been taken.  **Clarification of terms**  Global challenges: issues of concern that affect countries around the world and cannot be solved by countries independently. These include the global economy, global power shifts, resource security, tension and conflict, war and terrorism, humanitarian crises, global pandemics, climate change, etc.  International cooperation: cooperation between countries and non-state actors (NGOs, corporations, etc.) in the political, economic, legal, social and cultural spheres.  **Stand/Possible Points & Examples**  International cooperation is largely effective in tackling global challenges   1. **Countries have committed to sharing resources and expertise to address pressing global challenges.** Countries are at different stages of development and have very varied resources, placing some in a better position to contribute to resolving global challenges. Notably, significant progress has been made in the area of climate change as states and international organisations cooperate with one another. For example, the 2018 Paris Agreement which aims to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change includes provisions for enhanced support for developing countries who might not have the finances, capacity or technology to contribute to the fight. The Paris Agreement emphasises the UN principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibility and Respective Capabilities (CBDR) when dealing with climate change – despite all countries sharing an obligation to address environmental degradation, more developed (and thus more industrialised) countries have a greater responsibility to contribute to the solution. Richer countries have pledged climate aid of US$100 billion per year, starting in 2020. This will fund developing nations’ costly shift to clean energy to mitigate climate impacts. Furthermore, advances have also been made in preparedness and response to global pandemics because of the ability of countries to share expertise. The crippling 2014 Ebola crisis in West Africa prompted an international response, as countries recognised the need for cooperation to combat what could have become a global public health crisis. That international organisations stepped in to pledge millions of dollars, and humanitarian organisations like Doctors without Borders were at the frontlines setting up treatment centres very early on in the epidemic made a huge difference in a region with weak public health infrastructure, government and public institutions. 2. **Conflicts have been reduced as countries work together for mutual benefit rather than protecting their self-interest.** Given the global, cross-border nature of many security challenges today, countries have found that it is more productive to work together rather than against each other to stamp out global threats. Since the 1980s, states have become less belligerent and less reactive which signals that international efforts to ensure peace have been successful. This is also in large part due to a strong global economy where greater economic interdependence between countries have bolstered relations and deterred conflict. Regional blocs like the European Union and ASEAN have not seen conflict between member states since their inception. The global challenge that religious extremism and terrorism has presented also has been successfully tackled by countries working together. The US-led Defeat ISIS Coalition, comprising of 74 countries, has made critical and tangible advancements in tackling the threats posed by ISIS. Since its inception in 2014, the coalition and US military has successfully liberated more than 20,000 square miles of ISIS-held territory, freed more than 3 million innocent civilians from ISIS’ barbaric rule, and since 2018 eliminated 36 high value targets and placed more than 700 foreign terrorist fighters from over 40 countries in Syrian Democratic Forces custody. 3. **When there is accountability to others there will be an obligation and global pressure to conform to common shared values such as protecting human rights.** The increasing inter-connectedness and inter-dependence of countries not only brings economic benefits, but also can act as a check and balance to ensure countries comply with internationally-recognised standards of ethics. Countries that contravene these standards often face censure and sanctions from other nations, helping to ensure that what are perceived to be universally harmful practices are stopped. For example, South Africa’s discriminatory apartheid rule in the 1970s came under intense international scrutiny, leading to most of the international community isolating the country from a variety of spheres of multinational life. Economic and military sanctions were imposed, along with cultural and sporting boycotts. South Africa was barred from the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo after the pressure was exerted on the IOC in protest of South Africa’s racist sporting policies, and they were only re-admitted to the 1968 Mexico Games when they fielded a multiracial team. Measures like these were said to have awakened South Africans to the opinions of other countries and highlighted the lack of tolerance for racial discrimination. International cooperation has also proven to be a useful tool against the challenge of nuclear proliferation. International sanctions levied against countries pursuing illicit nuclear activities like Iran and North Korea have largely been effective in containing the threat they pose. The sanctions against Iran had severe impacts on its economy – their oil exports and revenues plummeted, the value of its currency eroded and trade disruptions caused businesses to close and made inflation worse than ever before. This coordinated international pressure resulted in Iran electing a moderate new president in 2013 and paved the way for the diplomatic resolution of the nuclear crisis through the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.   International cooperation is effective to a limited degree in tackling global challenges   1. **Countries are increasingly prioritising national interests over global challenges.** Nations, like individuals, are primarily concerned with their own survival. Regardless of efforts to promote peace and diplomacy for all nations to work together for the common good, nations still see their own survival as the most important agenda. In recent years, rising nationalism across the globe, from the United States, to Brexit, to the nationalist policies of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan and Narendra Modi of India, have diverted attention away from global challenges as countries focus on protecting domestic interests. Specifically, President Trump announced the withdrawal of the United States of America from the Paris Accords in January 2017, claiming it would undermine the US economy and put the country at a permanent disadvantage. International response to this announcement was overwhelmingly negative as the withdrawal of the United States posed a huge set-back to the long-term goals of global sustainable development. On the economic front, tariffs imposed as part of President Donald Trump’s economic policy on the European Union, Canada, Mexico and most notably China has hurt the global economy and crippled domestic industries, all in a bid to protect manufacturing industries and cut the country’s trade deficit. 2. **It is too time consuming and inefficient to resolve global challenges on the international scale.** The scale of negotiations and difficulty in reaching agreements while safeguarding the interests of countries makes the process an extremely long and tedious process. Even after international agreements are successfully reached, bureaucratic processes and delicate relationships involving stakeholders make these frameworks extremely difficult to implement. For instance, despite the urgent need to tackle terrorism on the international stage, a legal framework is still pending. The international dimension of the recent attack in Sri Lanka which killed more than 350 people was a sobering reminder that coordinated global action is necessary to prevent such violent acts. However, countries are still unable to come to an agreement due to differences in opinion on issues as such how these frameworks impact the sovereignty of independent nations. To compound the issue further, the effectiveness of these agreements is limited by the fact that most are not legally binding, resulting in a lack of political commitment. On top of the Paris Agreement, the United States withdrew from a 1955 friendship treaty with Iran and an International Court of Justice protocol, criticising United Nations triburnal for being politicised and ineffective. The Philippines withdrew from the Rome Statutes in 2018, a move made by President Rodrigo Duterte in response to investigations into Mr Duterte’s controversial war on drugs which was perceived by the international community as a gross violation of human rights. The fact that countries can choose to withdraw on their own accord without any ramifications has rendered these efforts largely ineffective in addressing global challenges. 3. **Countries and international organisations do not have equal say in how global challenges should be tackled.** Developing countries are often at the mercy of developed ones, who use platforms for international cooperation as a means to secure their domestic interests. As developing countries have significantly less resources, they are usually at a disadvantage in negotiations, resulting in their basic needs often being side-lined. Though extreme poverty has fallen drastically, inequality continues to remain a serious threat to the future. Particularly, international organisations such as the United Nations, World Bank and International Monetary Fund are often targets of harsh criticism in their efforts to stamp out inequality, especially in the way these institutions render development aid to developing countries. For example, the World Bank’s Structural Adjustment Programmes which promote trade liberalisation, fiscal austerity and privatisation have been implemented at the expense of poor in many developing countries and raised ethical concerns. In the past decade alone, projects funded by the World Bank have resulted in as many as 3.4 million people being physically or economically displaced. As opposed to eliminating extreme poverty, such international efforts further hamper the progress of developing nations. |