

2025 EJC General Paper
Preliminary Examinations Paper 1
Examiners' Report

OVERALL COMMENTS FOR CONTENT

The overall quality of responses was commendable. There were few instances where question analysis was lacking, such that the majority of the responses were able to answer the question requirements with some success. There were a number of strong scripts that demonstrated all the hallmarks of a good essay like strong content knowledge, an in-depth understanding of current realities and nuanced evaluation. Most responses showed at least a basic understanding of essay writing skills though the quality of writing varies quite widely.

Question Analysis

Most scripts showed competence in basic question analysis skills. The majority of the scripts were able to competently identify the point of contention and were able to explain clearly the point of contention in the paragraph development. However, examiners noted that candidates were still struggling when the essay questions came with more conditions or qualifiers that required students to deal with more complex ideas in their arguments (e.g. Q4 and Q6). Candidates also had difficulties with abstract ideas like 'offence' (Q7) and 'trust' (Q8).

Content knowledge

The quality of content knowledge displayed in the scripts varied widely. The majority of the scripts demonstrated basic competence in content knowledge, showing that the majority of the students have taken their tutors' advice to go through the Resource Packages prior to the examination. However, the scope of knowledge remained limited especially for questions that require specific content knowledge (e.g. Q4, Q5, Q7 and Q8). For such questions, students' understanding was limited to a few countries (e.g. USA and Singapore) or common examples (e.g. Social media featured heavily in all questions, regardless of the topic). Due to the limited examples, many arguments were over-generalised from these limited examples when students over-extended the examples beyond what these examples logically represented. It did not help when the cited examples were also limited to extreme situations.

Conceptual understanding featured in many of the scripts. The majority of candidates made deliberate efforts to weave in trends, context, connections or implications into their arguments. These efforts gave depth and nuance to the arguments. However, some candidates did this in a mechanical manner by 'name-dropping' some standard terms associated with trends, context, connections or implications **without** any due consideration if these terms were appropriate or relevant to the overall argument (e.g. the description of Singapore as a 'small, sleepy fishing village' was a standard contextual statement made in many essays regardless if it was relevant to the point being made). This should be avoided as it distracts the reader from the point and reduces the accuracy of the argument being made.

Balanced discussion

The majority of the scripts were able to demonstrate basic competence in showing balance. The majority of the scripts demonstrated the basic competence of constructing a counter-argument paragraph with the standard distancing phrases, followed up by a considered rebuttal paragraph and supported with relevant examples and evaluation. However, students are strongly advised to avoid constructing strawman arguments (a logical fallacy that occurs when someone misrepresents or distorted the opposing argument to make it seem weaker or more extreme, and then argues against this distorted version instead of the real situation) as a rebuttal. Also, students should avoid constructing a balanced paragraph containing both the opposing argument and the rebuttal in a single paragraph. Examiners noted that such paragraphs were often poorly written as the opposing argument (i.e. the view that opposed the essay's stand) consisted of a single sentence and was followed up by an equally short rebuttal that quickly dismissed such views as 'myopic', 'extreme' or 'failing to consider' **without** any detailed explanation why it was so or providing any supporting example.

OVERALL COMMENTS FOR LANGUAGE

Linguistic Ability

A number of stronger scripts demonstrated **clarity of expression**, evident through:

- Clear paragraphing
- Apt and effective signposting
- Strong command of sentence structure
- Appropriate use of **hedging words** and **conceptual terms** (i.e. effective vocabulary)
- Distancing themselves from arguments they do not endorse (e.g. using “some might say”) or concession (e.g. “I acknowledge that” / “Undeniably....”)
- Indicating a change in argument direction (e.g. using contrastive words like “however”)
- Use of **nuanced language** to hedge claims, such as “in general” or “on the whole” as opposed to making broad, sweeping claims

Weaker responses commonly featured:

- High frequency of **run-on sentences** or **fractured sentence structure**. In particular, the wrong construction ‘with x, it resulted in y’, rather than the correct “x resulted in y”, was all too common.
- Incorrect or inappropriate vocabulary usage
- Inappropriate distancing terms such as “detractors / critics / dissidents” of my stand
- Invention of words (e.g. enstrangulation of media, trustable/untrustable, irregardless)
- **Tone and style** issues in some responses included:
 - A lapse into **conversational tone**
 - **Inappropriate or excessive use of rhetorical questions**, which weakened argumentative clarity
- **Grammar** errors, in particular subject-verb agreement errors.
- Vocabulary / expression errors i.e. “since young” instead of “from a young age”, “elderlies” instead of “the elderly”. Candidates should also be aware of the difference between “oppression” and “suppression”. While they are related, “oppression” is used to refer to an environment / action against a group of people i.e. “oppression of a people group” / “an oppressive political system” while “suppression” refers to the act of preventing something i.e. “the suppression of opposing views.” They cannot be used interchangeably. Apart from that, candidates should take note that ‘which’ is used for non-human entities i.e. “countries which (not who) are small”, and “artists who (not which) wish to make a point.”

Organisation of Ideas

Most candidates had clear, structured arguments with paragraphs that focused on one key idea per paragraph. Weaker responses had unfocused, rambling paragraphs with no clear direction. Many paragraphs were excessively long, covering more than one page - such paragraphs could probably have been split up. This would also have made the argument easier to follow.

Handwriting

In the 2024 Promotional Examinations, examiners commented that “While most students have lovely and perfectly legible handwriting, having to decipher poor handwriting only to find that the content it was obscuring was not relevant has been an exercise in patience. Please work on legibility to ensure that your hard work and thoughtful ideas can be fully appreciated.” Some students have evidently taken the advice to heart. However, handwriting still remains an issue for a significant number of scripts. Students are reminded once again that Cambridge examiners “**could only award credit for material that they could read**” (from 2024 GCE A’level Examiner Report).

1 Assess the view that in today’s world, migration is essential for countries to thrive.

Terms and Scope of the Question

- Migration – the movement of people from one country to settle in another. To ‘settle’ is to live in another country for an extended period of time, therefore tourism is excluded. Migration refers to both emigration and immigration and could be evaluated from the viewpoint of both the sending and receiving countries.

- Essential – something that is integral to, necessary for, or intrinsic to something else
- Thrive – to succeed and prosper
- Today's world – The current context – conditions of the world today

Question Requirements

- Assess whether migration is necessary for and integral to the success and prosperity of countries, in the context of today's highly globalised and interconnected world, which enables migration on an unprecedented scale.
- In the context of a burgeoning global population, consider the forces in today's world that drive migration, ranging from war and economic pressure to repressive governments.
- A strong response would consider the various types of migrants (ranging from war refugees or economic migrants with limited opportunities, to the globalised, highly skilled and educated migrants whom many countries would welcome).

Issue and Context of the Question

- Migration has always been fraught with tension, with natives unhappy at newcomers due to competition for existing resources – in particular, job opportunities and infrastructure needs like housing and healthcare. These tensions are often exacerbated by racial and cultural divides. Given unprecedented global flows of migration, generally from the global South to more developed countries, these tensions have reached boiling point in many countries that have historically been receptive to immigrants, resulting in a backlash against immigration and the rise of far-right, nativist political parties.
- Despite the backlash, many countries still remain committed to a degree of controlled immigration. Amidst the tensions, countries need to decide on the extent to which they are willing to accept refugees, recognising that a closed society will be hampered, and the socio-economic and cultural exchanges brought about by migration do have the potential to contribute to the success and prosperity of both sending and receiving countries.

Possible Arguments

In today's world, migration is essential for countries to thrive because:

- In our globalized, highly competitive world, talent and capital are in demand. Skilled and/or wealthy immigrants bring their abilities and assets to their destination countries, providing a key source of these resources and giving these countries an edge to remain competitive.
- Many developed countries today are faced with falling birthrates; immigration is an essential source of new citizens and labour leading to economic and societal renewal.
- Even as birthrates are falling world-wide many countries still face current population pressure, and a number of developing countries still have very high fertility rates. Emigration is a critical means for overpopulated countries to relieve some population pressure, which helps the country to do better economically.
- Conflict and crime have created large flows of migrants in recent years. Receiving immigrants such as refugees with no particular skills or assets, is part of the ethos of some countries, particularly those in the Western world. It is integral to these societies (culturally and even legally) to accept immigrants. A 'thriving society' in their conception is one that accords dignity and care to all people who need it, especially immigrant refugees.
- Economic migrants often send remittances to their country of origin; for countries that send out many migrant workers, it is a key source of funds for home countries' economies. Together with the release of population pressure, this can help countries sending migrants to do better economically.

In today's world, migration is non-essential for countries to thrive, and can even be detrimental for some because:

- While much of the world today is highly connected and multicultural, a few insular and homogenous countries still remain. These countries have thrived for centuries with minimal emigration and immigration. Citizens of these countries do not perceive themselves as needing immigrants, and most do not see a need to settle outside their home country.
- With advancements in Internet-based communications, remote work, transportation technology and artificial intelligence, it is possible for countries to be able to gain access to expertise from around the world to develop themselves in a range of areas without necessarily having to entertain the prospect of migration.
- Some countries (e.g. New Zealand and Australia) already have the necessary population levels and expertise needed for their local industries to do well, having developed them on their own over the years, and so are well-placed to thrive even without having to turn to migration.
- In order to thrive, countries need to ensure that they have domestic stability as well as a strong base of local talent and resources across a range of areas, which may not materialise if they become reliant on foreigners. Excessive immigration of competitors which smothers local talent is not essential for countries to thrive especially in a time when the ease of migration means that such foreign talent can easily migrate again for greater economic incentives.
- As previously stated, the world today is facing large flows of refugees fleeing conflict and crime. Uncontrolled migration, particularly that of large numbers of refugees, overwhelms the abilities of host countries to care for and assimilate them. This type of migration is not only not essential for countries to thrive, but may even destabilise them.

Conceptual Understanding (Trends, Implications, Connections, Context):

- The modern context is critical to addressing the question well, as the arguments made ought to be informed by trends and happenings in the modern era, rather than making generic arguments about migration (which is a phenomenon that has existed for a vast span of time).
- Countries should not be treated as homogenous. Instead, the contexts of various types of nations provide insight into the degree of necessity of migration, as it surely depends on countries' particular circumstances.
- The implications of migration and migrants to both host and origin countries are likely to be relevant. Connections can be made between different implications on various aspects that a society can thrive in (e.g. economically, socially), as well as between different stakeholders that make up countries (e.g. majority vs minority groups, well-educated vs poorly educated)

Examiner's comments:

This was not a popular question. Most responses were able to state clearly why migration is essential (as opposed to merely helpful or important) for countries to thrive, with reference to various contexts and specific examples. China for instance was cited as a relatively self-sufficient country due to its size and large population, which made migration less essential for the country to thrive. Stronger scripts were also able to address the idea of a country "thriving" - advancing scientifically, prospering economically, and being socially harmonious. Some were also able to give the perspective of emigrant (migrant-sending) countries, pointing out that fund remittance is essential to the home country, and that the only way for some of these emigrants to acquire skills and capital that they can bring back to their home country would be through emigration.

Weaker responses merely listed functions and benefits of migration, as well as some of its drawbacks, which entailed a general discussion of the topic of migration rather than a response to the question. In particular, stating the drawbacks of migration does not mean that it is not essential - after all, something essential can still have negative impacts (i.e. just because immigrants compete for jobs does not render them somehow non-essential in a labour scarce country.) A stronger argument would be that the presence of these immigrants not only fails to enhance the country but is actually so strongly detrimental that they hinder rather than help the

country, which would make them non-essential. For instance, large flows of immigrants who are poorly skilled and refuse to assimilate can be a drain on the country's economy, and can hardly be considered essential.

2 Consider the view that buildings in your society should be beautiful and not merely functional.

Terms and Scope of the Question

- 'Beautiful' – having a pleasing or aesthetic appearance
- 'Functional' – Serving a utilitarian purpose
- 'Should be' – Key point of contention – justifying why something should or should not be the case, using normativity (morality, tradition, and social norms), desirability (whether something helps or hurts us, or pleases or displeases), and effectiveness.
- 'Your society' – Singapore's pragmatic, utilitarian culture, and its historical context of going 'from Third World to First' in a very short span of time

Question Requirements

- Assess the underlying beliefs surrounding the construction and appearance of buildings in Singapore, showing awareness of why buildings in Singapore are the way they are.
- Argue whether there needs to be an increasing emphasis on the aesthetic appeal of local buildings, based on normativity, desirability, and effectiveness, as well as any other relevant bases of justification.

Issue and Context of the Question

Given Singapore's historical rush to industrialise and house its population, and its cultural traits of pragmatism, industrial, residential and commercial buildings in Singapore are generally functional – fulfilling their basic purposes, rather than built to a visually pleasing design. However, Singapore today is wealthy and perhaps has more room to consider if its buildings can and should look better, reflecting its status as one of the foremost cities of the world, and the increasing aspirations of its population.

Possible Arguments

Buildings in my society need to be functional but need not be beautiful because:

- Given that effort to make buildings beautiful takes more time and money, the need for residential, commercial and industrial buildings to be built quickly and cheaply must take precedence. Particularly for residential buildings, function must take precedence over form due to the political and demographic pressures of Singapore's post-Covid era, where couples moving quickly into their delayed dwellings can impact the popular vote as well as fertility rates.
- The vast majority of buildings in my society have been built based on a pragmatic design philosophy that governs the character of most public buildings in Singapore. 'Housing and Development Board', (or HDB flats) and office buildings have a utilitarian focus. Furthermore, since they have already been built, it is impractical to try to alter them to become 'beautiful' and it is futile to even consider that idea.
- We should not go out of our way to pursue beauty in our buildings. A functional building can be seen as a beautiful one, and with beauty being in the eye of the beholder, it seems antithetical and wasteful in efficient Singapore to actively pursue beauty in our buildings. Many functional elements in many of our apartment buildings (high ceilings / air wells and courtyards / balconies are aesthetically pleasing to some degree without having beauty as their primary purpose).

Buildings in my society should be beautiful as well as functional because:

- An increasingly wealthy and educated populace has cultivated more refined tastes. Its apartment buildings – HDB flats and condominiums that house much of the population – should keep pace with the tastes of the population, going beyond the merely functional.

- The aesthetic quality of a building reflects the aspirations and dignity of its users and inhabitants. While it may not be possible to make every functional building more beautiful, it is being done where possible, as a more attractive environment enhances the quality of life of the population. For instance, many educational institutions – such as the Institutes of Technical Education and many Junior Colleges – were or are being rebuilt to be aesthetically pleasing as well as being fully functional, dignifying the location as well as its staff, students, and visitors.
- Buildings must possess an aesthetic in keeping with their purpose. While the vast majority of buildings in Singapore are functional rather than beautiful, key buildings – those that of historic import, key government buildings and those that make up the iconic city skyline, for instance, must possess a beauty befitting their functional significance.

Conceptual Understanding (Trends, Implications, Connections, Context):

- The context of the candidate's society should feature heavily in the reasoning. The implications of the society's context and how these characteristics affect building design and perceptions of whether buildings should be merely functional should be addressed. Trends in this context can also demonstrate depth of awareness of how there have been shifts in how buildings are perceived and valued.
- Connections can be made between the concepts of functionality and aesthetics – for instance, how building functionality may or may not be enhanced by their design and beauty, and whether aesthetics might be central to function in some cases.

Examiner's comments:

This was not a popular question. Most responses ended up being more descriptive than argumentative by discussing *what* makes certain buildings beautiful in Singapore rather than looking at *why* buildings should or should not be beautiful (beyond serving its existing function). This lack of engagement with the point of contention of the question resulted in less relevance for such responses.

Stronger responses were able to recognise that this question required them to use Singapore characteristics to assess the compatibility of prioritising aesthetics on top of practicality. They were able to cite Singapore's focus on tourism and desire to establish a unique global identity as some reasons for why beauty should be a focus, while those who disagreed frequently tied their arguments to Singapore's pragmatism. The most effective arguments not only discussed the value of beauty in buildings here, but also tied this beauty to the functionality of the buildings, rather than taking the functionality for granted. For example, by considering the brutalist style of architecture seen in buildings like the State Courts, in which the beauty stems from the raw and honest display of functionality.

Weaker responses, on the other hand, tended to focus more on the examples rather than the explanations. While this did not result in an invalid response, it did limit their scope for demonstrating conceptual understanding. A handful of candidates also seemed to misinterpret the question as one that required them to weigh beauty vs practicality. This often resulted in a response that did not address the question directly, thus affecting their overall relevance.

3 'A lot of talk and very little action.' To what extent is this true of international organisations?

Terms and Scope of the Question

- 'A lot of talk and very little action' – quotation should be understood in its entirety; represents the idea that international organisations do not actually create any meaningful outcomes beyond dialogues or posturing.
- To what extent – looking at the reach, the limits, the area of influence
- True – the point of contention (perception of reality), examining the accuracy of the observation regarding international organisations

- International organisations - institutions drawing membership from at least three states, having activities in several states, and whose members are held together by a formal agreement (Encyclopedia Britannica); organisations that exist based on common international interests or agendas

Question Requirements

- Candidates need to successfully evaluate the functions of international organisations and consider if and how far the organisation can achieve its mission
- Candidates need to consider the multi-faceted role of international organisations and how some of these organisations, while they may not seem to offer any concrete actions, still have some value in today's world by providing other intangible benefits to member states.
- Candidates should demonstrate awareness of the domain of international relations and how it complicates the 'talk' and 'action' carried out by international organisations

Issue and Context of the Question

While international organisations have been the mainstay of global politics after WW2, their efficacy in resolving global tensions are increasingly called into question due to various competing interests among global superpowers. The seeming inaction of international organisations in preserving global order has contributed to a lack of action on various pressing issues like conflicts and climate change.

Possible Arguments

It is true that international organisations are 'a lot of talk and very little action' because:

- Most of these international organisations lack real enforcement power that can effectively hold member nations accountable. This means that unless the actions of certain nations are so heinous that they demand a global response, by and large most nations know that any wrong doings are unlikely to invite real repercussions beyond just admonishments from the global community.
- Most international organisations' authority and influence come from the participation and the will of the largest member states. Hence, if it is not in their interests to act, most large states will hinder or prevent any action from international organisations on any issues that these organisations are originally supposed to be responsible for. international organisations' influence to enact any meaningful changes to global order is largely dependent on the actions of their largest or most powerful member state. If the largest or most powerful member state does not believe in the value of any action, the international organisation's influence will be diminished unless other member states are willing to band together and veto the largest or most powerful member state's decisions.
- Most international organisations today are mired in bureaucracy and competing interests among member countries which slow down any form of effective global response during a crisis.

It is not true that international organisations are 'a lot of talk and very little action' because:

- The dialogues, or the 'talk' that takes place, are the action that is required for further action (implementation of agreed-upon measures that can only be arrived at through dialogue.) International organisations remain the best venue for global dialogues to take place as they offer a neutral platform where every member state, regardless of size, has equal opportunities to participate and engage on issues with other member states on equal footing. Even if these dialogues may not result in actual agreements or solutions, the fact that dialogues have happened ensures that member states' concerns are heard and cannot be ignored by the world, especially by the superpowers.
- When dialogues occur within international organisations, it allows nations' leaders to build stronger bilateral ties with other leaders on the sidelines, away from the global media's spotlight. This allows for leaders to build a more personal relationship with other leaders, which may encourage future actions beneficial to their countries even if it does not solve the problem now.

- International organisations can offer a venue for global experts to consolidate and share their experiences with influential people. By bringing research and development out of the laboratories to a global audience, it may inspire others to do further research. Or, by sharing knowledge, it can spur future technological developments for the benefit of mankind. So even if multiple international conferences seem inconsequential currently, future actions may well be seeded and inspired by the talk that takes place, even if they cannot be traced immediately to a single conference.

Conceptual Understanding (Trends, Implications, Connections, Context):

- **Trends:** While smaller nations have depended on the stabilising influence of international organisations in the past especially in managing global politics in a bipolar world, today the influence of international organisations seem to be waning in a multipolar world.
- **Implications:** While international organisations today are imperfect, we have no other viable alternatives where every nation regardless of size or influence can have a voice on the global stage. Without these international organisations, there will be no formal occasions where nations' leaders can gather and have conversations.
- **Connections:** Candidates need to show a general awareness of the roles and functions of international organisations in today's world. These organisations are central places where resources and expertise gather and distributed to places where they are needed. International organisations also represent a neutral third party, representing the interests of a group of nations rather than a single nation. This provides a cover of objectivity when pursuing a global solution to the various issues facing other nations.
- **Context:** Candidates need to recognise that international organisations' influence to enact any meaningful changes to global order is largely dependent on the actions of their largest or most powerful member state. If the largest or most powerful member state does not believe in the value of any action, the international organisation's influence will be diminished unless other member states are willing to band together and veto the largest or most powerful member state's decisions. The context of the issues being addressed by international organisations may also play a part in determining the judgement.

Examiner's comments:

This was not a popular question. While some of the responses were strong, most of them suffered from some shortcomings that limited the effectiveness of the writing. This happened to varying degrees.

Better scripts were able to make consistent links to and between the ideas of 'talk' and 'action'. They often analysed the 'talk' by making connections to the established goals, policies, and communiqués put out by the international organisations. They showed conceptual understanding by analysing the context of the international organisation and the reasons for why these organisations were able to go beyond dialogue and stand-taking to the implementation of initiatives that were discussed or promised (e.g. the history of the organisation, structure, degree of commitment by member states, whether the members were passionate volunteers from across the world vs being self-interested entities, whether they were based on alliances arising from common interest, etc).

Weaker scripts at times described international agreements without linking the analysis to the international organisation behind the agreements. Some other weak scripts organised their ideas according to types of international organisations (e.g. military, economic, international crime) and ended up with very descriptive essays. Often, the range of illustration in weaker scripts was limited (e.g. examples being UN-dominated, or one or two issues such as climate change). Some problematic scripts veered off into discussing the extent of benefits that international organisations provide to nations, rather than the question of whether international organisations go beyond mere talk to take concrete action.

4 Evaluate the claim that modern technology has only made inequality worse.

Terms and Scope of the Question

- Technology – the practical application of scientific knowledge
- Only – absolute; used to show that there are no other effects, or that this effect (of making inequality worse) overwhelms all other effects (Cambridge Dictionary)
- Made ... worse – to degrade, to exacerbate, to decrease in quality
- Inequality – the unfair situation in society when some people have more opportunities, money, etc. than other people (Cambridge Dictionary)

Question Requirements

- Candidates need to evaluate if technology has made the existing problem of inequality worse over a period. The question assumes that inequality exists, and that technology has caused the existing problem to grow over time.
- Candidates need to explain how access to technology differs for different groups and how it may or may not make the problem of inequality worse over a period. Access to technology is mediated not only by cost issues but also training and mindsets (i.e. resistance to technology stemming from cultural or religious beliefs.)

Issue and Context of the Question

There is a general belief about the power of modern technology to improve the standard of living throughout human history. However, the reality is that every new technology has further widened the divides within a nation and between nations. This division has accelerated in recent years due to the pace of technological developments. Also, the amount of resources needed to make significant technological leaps meant only a selected few will benefit.

Possible Arguments

Technology has only made the problem of inequality worse because:

- Societies have traditionally been divided along the haves and the have-nots. Regardless of the benefits that technology can bring to societies, access to the latest or best technologies is confined to the wealthy. Since the benefits cannot be equally distributed across societies, those who have access to the latest or the best will have an advantage over those who do not as those who have it can afford to do things faster or better than those who do not. This will further exacerbate the divides within societies as those who have access to the best technologies will pull further ahead over time.
- In recent years, technologies have been increasingly concentrated on meeting the needs of the privileged in societies while largely neglecting the needs of the marginalized. For instance, it is unsurprising that many of the modern advances made in medical technology focus on the needs of the developed countries and on what is classified as lifestyle diseases (diseases caused by lifestyle choices, not due to infectious agents). Yet, research and development into many communicable diseases that afflict developing countries is minimal. The same focus on the needs of the developed world also applies in areas like AI (much of the data used to train AI is drawn from the Western developed world, resulting in narrow and incomplete world representation).
- The rapid advances in technology require high levels of training and expertise to keep up with them and successfully utilise them. Poorer nations and marginalised groups have fewer resources to keep pace with the developments, and hence the gap in terms of ability to utilise new technologies grows ever wider. For instance, new jobs that are created require very high levels of skill and knowledge which only a few can truly master. This will further end up dividing society as only a privileged few are able to benefit from the new opportunities presented by new technologies, while the vast majority will see a rapid decline in their standard of living as they are unable to take advantage of the new opportunities presented by technology.

Technology has helped to reduce the issue of inequality because:

- While technology can increase the social divide by polarizing societies through the impact of social media, it can also empower the marginalized by giving them a platform to speak out and to ensure that their voices are not ignored. The global reach of social media has ensured that such voices can gain a global following, making it harder for those in power to ignore.
- While it is true that technology can hasten the economic divide between people, we must also credit technology for helping the poor to gain access to resources and knowledge beyond what their local communities can offer. Technology has made such tools affordable and accessible virtually to everyone, which empowers them to have the ability to tap on the global community for help

Conceptual Understanding (Trends, Implications, Connections, Context):

- Trends: Historically, mankind depended on technology to help to improve mankind. Yet in recent decades, the cost of technology has effectively priced it out of reach for many. This has increased the social divide between different groups of people around the world as those with access to the latest technologies will progress much faster than those who do not have access. Over time, this will continue to grow.
- Implications: While technology has no doubt helped us to overcome many of the issues that endanger mankind, increasingly the focus of new developments in technology is driven by market forces. Hence, most developments are funded by those who have the means, and these developments are designed to meet their needs. Those who are unable to fund such developments will have their needs ignored which may prolong their sufferings.
- Connections: Technology has bridged the information gap because it has empowered the disenfranchised by giving them a platform to publicise their cause. Technology provides visibility to their issues that the global community cannot ignore. While it is not perfect, technology has helped to reduce this gap between those in power and those who are not.
- Context: We live in a technologically driven world today. There is a need to be aware of the divisive influence of modern technology if we are to avoid worsening existing social and economic divides. The various contexts of the modern technology and the ways in which it is used can be examined to produce more refined analysis - e.g. how the current wellspring of AI development is causing companies to compete by offering free usage to draw users in.

Examiner's comments:

This was a very popular question which drew a large number of responses. Most candidates were able to furnish relevant arguments about modern technology's impact on inequality. However, these usually had some combination of the following shortcomings that limited the overall quality of the response:

- 1) not acknowledging or responding to the keyword 'only',
- 2) writing about technology in general or vaguely, rather than 'modern' technology,
- 3) example- or domain-driven arguments,
- 4) assertive arguments, where the impact on inequality was asserted rather than illustrated, and
- 5) focusing on specific technologies rather than a broader understanding of modern technology, such that the discussion did not occur at a conceptual level.

On top of these common issues, weaker responses presented a few more shortcomings. The question's keywords and requirements tended to be poorly understood and addressed: some demonstrated a loose understanding of inequality as any sort of unevenness between groups (e.g. ageism need not necessarily lead to inequality). Even more egregiously, some candidates made arguments about the general pros and cons of technology, rather than focusing on the impact on inequality, or hijacked the question by writing about other things that affect inequality instead.

The much smaller number of stronger responses rigorously traced the effects of modern technology on

pre-existing inequalities. They successfully did this by showing the implications on the actual level of inequality through concrete illustration. Such responses were also often able to discuss modern technology more conceptually, by considering its nature/purpose, or characteristics such as its continued rapid development and ownership by profit-oriented companies and nations. By conducting more analysis and evaluation of the ideas and illustrations, they were more able to demonstrate the implications and trends relevant to the question, in all, showing more explicit conceptual engagement.

Many candidates were seen to aspire to greater depth, and did make some attempts at further analysis. It was particularly common to divide the impact on inequality based on developed vs less developed countries. While this could produce a nuanced response, it was more commonly sweeping and ineffective, with the surfacing of problematic stereotypes about poorer countries not having access to technology, the naming of random African countries to play the role of a less developed country without any further understanding of the country, and also the occasional - and very misinformed - 'countries such as Africa'.

5 To what extent should individuals be concerned with world affairs, when they have little ability to influence them?

Terms and Scope of the Question

- Individuals – ordinary, average people, as opposed to the highly influential (such as political leaders, celebrities, or the extremely wealthy)
- Be concerned with – take an interest in, study, learn about
- World affairs – the socio-economic and geo-political happenings around the world as mediated through mass and social media, such as wars, elections, diplomatic and trade negotiations, natural disasters, etc...
- Little ability to influence – very limited power to cause any appreciable change

Question Requirements

- Show understanding of what 'world affairs' are, and the degree to which an individual can influence the course of these events.
- Argue for and against the need to take an interest in world affairs, as opposed to focusing on personal issues. The strongest responses would show understanding that at some level, world affairs are actually the sum of many personal and local issues, and therefore cannot simply be dismissed as being too distant to be concerned about, while recognising the practical limits of what we can do to control distant events, and therefore the desirability of knowing too much about them.

Issue and Context of the Question

The global news cycle and educational rat race, combined with increased volatility, have caused the 'annihilation of distance' – events that take place far away geographically now appear on our screens with startling immediacy. While some react by being glued to the 24/7 news feeds, others react by turning away from the glut of information about what is happening halfway around the world. The tension in this question centres on how much to focus on these distant events – focusing too much on them is probably pointless and can lead to neglect of more immediate and pressing personal and local (family / community) issues, while total ignorance of the wider world could lead to one being overtaken by unpleasant surprises and caught totally unprepared, and a self-fulfilling prophecy of growing apathy and powerlessness.

Possible Arguments

Individuals have minimal reason to be concerned with world affairs when they have little ability to influence them because:

- Given the infinitely complex web of causes and effects inherent in world affairs, we cannot even begin to understand them, let alone influence them. It is therefore futile to be concerned about them.

- There is little need to know about world affairs because the vast majority of world affairs do not impact us. Even for those that do impact us, we are able to rely on government efforts to cushion us on the impact of these events.
- Given that individuals have limited ability to influence world affairs, it would make more of a difference in their own lives if they focused on more immediate concerns such as their studies or jobs, as well as the lives of those around them.
- *It is possible to argue that some individuals have immense ability to influence world affairs i.e. POTUS, but the question clearly intends for 'individuals' to refer to the average person, and not those in high office or with vast amounts of wealth. Most of the analysis should therefore be concerned with the characteristics and nature of the everyman.

Individuals should be concerned with world affairs because they actually have some ability to influence them / even when they have little ability to influence them because:

- In a highly interconnected world, major world events have global impacts. While we may not be able to influence these events, being concerned about them enables us to gain the information and knowledge necessary to respond to them in a timely and effective manner.
- Individuals have more ability to influence world affairs than we might think. Ordinary individuals acting alone have by their actions played a key role in historic events. Furthermore, individuals acting as a collective can have an appreciable impact on world affairs.
- World affairs reveal a lot about current trends and about the human condition, which are intrinsically interesting. Individuals ought to be concerned therefore for their own knowledge, rather than being limited by what can presumably be achieved with it.
- *It is possible to argue that some individuals have immense ability to influence world affairs i.e. POTUS, but the question clearly intends for 'individuals' to refer to the average person, and not those in high office or with vast amounts of wealth.

Conceptual Understanding (Trends, Implications, Connections, Context):

- Today's context – the trends of increasing complexity, information overload, and pressures of daily living are among the forces that impact individual perceptions of how much one can influence world affairs, and hence the implication of whether to be concerned with them.
- Connections can be made across various fields – politics, science, and culture, for instance, to show how across space and time, courageous individuals deeply concerned about the issues of their time can and have made a difference. They may not have started out as prominent individuals, but rose to prominence because of their continued engagement in affairs beyond the personal realm, and the actions they have taken to gain the influence needed over such affairs.

Examiner's comments:

This was not a popular question, though candidates who did attempt the question crafted largely thoughtful responses to address the issue of why concern for world affairs should remain important, despite the inability of individuals to influence the trajectory of world affairs, especially from a policy standpoint. It was encouraging to note that almost no candidate disagreed that concern for world affairs is important.

Stronger responses demonstrated a good grasp of the key question requirements, and defined 'influence' and 'concern with world affairs' in the context of the global arena well. This demonstration of conceptual understanding, together with developed links between the key terms set the essay off on a good start in the introduction. These responses ably juxtaposed the individual's motivations for this concern against strong reasons for why, on the surface, such concern (and ensuing efforts) might have little real influence on global affairs. Such responses often followed through with the crafting of clear topic sentences that offered relevant

ideas for why concern for global affairs should be merited (or not). Such an approach enabled candidates to consistently make measured and nuanced observations throughout the essay.

For example, stronger responses recognised that while individual action can be circumvented by political and legal barriers, this did not then mean that individuals cannot exert influence over global affairs, as some individuals can hold more power than others and can harness this power to drive tangible change. This showed a sophisticated understanding of the 'individual' - that they are not just separate persons per se, but they range from the common man to those who can wield more power. Typically, these responses developed their arguments with a wide range of concrete illustrations that supported their points well. Such examples included wealthy individuals who set up foundations to address global issues and passionate individuals who rally other individuals around critical global crises - as a way to demonstrate how some groups of individuals can still exert levels of influence over global affairs.

Weaker responses tended to raise a narrow range of ideas with regard to 'world affairs', or paid token attention to the reasons for why (or why not) individuals should continue to pay attention to world affairs but then went on to an extended discussion of the problems of world affairs without answering the question as set. These responses also had a narrow understanding of 'influence' and bandied the key word about, with little attempt to unpack what it means in the context of world affairs. As such, these responses focused on overly convenient reasons such as 'one cannot be ignorant about the world' but were unable to develop the argument with much depth and focused on describing the dangers of unpredictable world affairs, in general. Other weaker responses confused humanitarian or emergency crises with world affairs, and suggested a singular understanding of world affairs as these crises. As such, these responses offered a weaker range of ideas in response to the question.

6 'Competition does more harm than good.' How true is this of your society?

Terms and Scope of the Question

- Competition – a contest between two or more parties seeking to secure limited resources or opportunities, or to prove superiority of some sort
- Harm – being unhealthy on an individual or societal level
- Good – Enabling individuals and societies to function more efficiently or effectively, and contributing to individual and overall health and happiness, or 'well-being'
- Your society – Singapore's characteristics

Question Requirements

- Evaluate the benefits and harms of competition in Singapore, and assess which, on balance, outweighs the other.

Issue and Context of the Question

- Competition permeates Singapore's culture and context – its meritocratic education and political systems as well as capitalist market structure mean that practically from birth, Singaporeans are inducted into a system of relentless, unending competition. These pressures are exacerbated by Singapore's tiny size, which exposes it to the pressures of global competition. Hence, Singapore and Singapore residents face intense competition at all times, which places immense pressure on its population.
- The pressure of competition can both energise or deplete, for different groups of people, and sometimes even the same individual at different points in their life (or even during the same day!) Given that competition is the air we breathe, an objective assessment of its costs and benefits can help us come to terms with it, and possibly evaluate our own place in such a system.

Possible Arguments

Competition does more good than harm in my society because:

- In Singapore's open, globalized and wealthy free market economy, competition drives providers of goods and services to innovate to provide these goods more efficiently, which enables consumers to access better goods and services more quickly and at a lower cost. Affluent Singapore consumers benefit the most from this.
- Competition enables the best to emerge. In theory, this should contribute to overall societal welfare – the most efficient and popular companies get to make more profits while providing superior goods and services, while in a meritocracy, the best leaders emerge to serve their organisations / country. This is especially pertinent for Singapore, which unlike larger countries has much less margin for failure. This makes it imperative that its political, civil service, and corporate leaders are of sufficient calibre to helm institutions vital to the country's survival.
- Competition prevents complacency and stagnation – the pressure of competition causes many types of growth - countries and organisations innovate while individuals develop their strengths and skills. Singapore lacks commodities and land and is especially reliant on its human capital development for its survival and prosperity. Competition which fosters human capital development is therefore critical for Singapore, which has few alternatives it can rely on.

Competition does more harm than good in my society because:

- Excessive competition can lead to several undesirable scenarios, including unfair competition where companies and countries use unscrupulous and even violent methods to undermine their rivals. This may not be highly visible in squeaky-clean Singapore where overtly underhanded methods of getting ahead are frowned upon, let alone illegal, but in a winner-takes-all high-stakes business or academic contest which is common in Singapore, the temptation to do so is common.
- Competition in Singapore results in pressure, which can lead to overwork and exhaustion as individuals attempt to get ahead of the competition or merely keep up. The emotional and physical toll includes stress and stress-related illnesses, as well as possible breakdowns in familial relationships as in a competitive environment, work and studies are prioritised over time with family. This is particularly true in Singapore where competition is a key part of the system and imbued in every individual from a young age, creating huge amounts of pressure.
- In any competition, there are winners and losers. The winners may develop a false sense of superiority (believing that they are more worthy of dignity and respect than others by virtue of having more possessions / higher social status) or an inferiority complex (falsely believing that they lack dignity and worth due to being lower in social status or having fewer possessions). This is especially evident in a hierarchical and increasingly socially stratified society like Singapore's, where elitism is rampant and displays of status are expected.
- In a small market like Singapore's, competition may be inefficient for sectors that require economies of scale. Rail transport, for instance, is monopolistic on individual routes.

Conceptual Understanding (Trends, Implications, Connections, Context):

- The candidate's societal context – cultural, systemic, and economic aspects of their society, for instance, would greatly influence their view of competition's harms and benefits, and which is greater on balance.
- Connections: comparisons can be drawn between the candidate's society and other societies, in order to put into perspective how healthy/unhealthy the impacts of competition in their society are, compared to other societies, given that the benefits and drawbacks of differing levels of competition are present in all societies to varying degrees.

Examiner's comments:

This was a highly popular question and most responses were focused on Singapore, although a few overlooked the need to contextualise the discussion to 'your society' and discussed the world in general. There was great

variance in the quality of the responses. Stronger responses engaged fully with the comparison and offered insights into Singapore society while weaker responses merely stated platitudes, motherhood statements or overgeneralisations about competition and Singapore.

Many candidates began their Introduction by outlining key characteristics of Singapore society, with Singapore's small land area, resource scarcity and vulnerability to global forces being the most common observations. This approach was acceptable as long as logical links could be made to the evaluation of the desirability of competition in Singapore. The strongest Introductions were even able to immediately address why this essay question was asked in the first place, insightfully connecting recent pertinent trends in Singapore (for example, rising levels of reported mental health concerns, particularly among young adults) to why the issue of whether competition does more harm than good arose. A far less successful approach was to regurgitate a stream of Singapore characteristics and trends with little regard to their relevance to the question as set.

In examining why competition could bring harm to Singapore, many candidates made observations about stress levels in the education system as well as income inequality. These were also often mistakenly conflated with 'meritocracy'. Observations of why competition could be good for Singapore tended to focus on its benefits in spurring innovation as well as in motivating people to improve.

While these points could possibly be relevant, the onus is on the candidate to make explicit connections to competition and its implications. For example, the stress from academic studies need not be from competition – it could just as well be from one's own expectations for oneself, or from having to live up to others' expectations. Similarly, the problems that arise from income inequality should not be simply characterised as a problem of 'competition'.

Weaker responses tended to hijack the question and engage in protracted descriptions of 'meritocracy', inequality, education or various crises (for example, the COVID-19 pandemic was mischaracterised as a competition for resources). Alternatively, some weaker essays limited the discussion to education or to literal competitions such as sporting competitions. The problem was compounded if there was inadequate knowledge of Singapore society, which resulted in assertions, overgeneralised statements and claims that were not supported by apt illustration (for example, citing extreme outliers rather than significant trends). Such approaches did not lend themselves well to the demonstration of conceptual understanding.

Stronger responses made a clear attempt to compare good and harm, and even provided convincing reasons (for example, the harm outweighs the good as pressure from competition has now become excessive and threatens to undermine the benefits Singapore has previously enjoyed). This made the response more evaluative rather than descriptive. Such responses also referred to a good range of concrete examples and developed these to support their claims about the implications of competition. This demonstrated the ability to make connections.

The strongest responses ably dealt with the complexity of the role that competition played in Singapore. There was some subtlety in recognising that competition could be healthy or unhealthy, that different areas of society might not benefit from similar levels of competition, or that the assessment of the harm and good that resulted from competition could be dependent on the perspectives of the stakeholders involved. These thoughtful responses also noted that there could be unintended consequences and included these in their considerations. Nuanced and measured observations were made throughout such essays.

7 'Artists should ensure that their works do not cause offence.' How far do you agree?

Terms and Scope of the Question

- 'Artists' – practitioners of art forms (painting, dance etc...)
- 'should' – the idea of obligation based (in this question) on societal benefit, social norms, and moral codes
- 'ensure' – to make something certain to happen (Cambridge Dictionary)

- 'cause offence' – to anger, to enrage, to cause people to have divisive feelings and actions

Question Requirements

- Candidates need to be able to distinguish and realise the purpose and intention of art works, and how artists have a larger responsibility to the community they exist and practice in.
- Candidates need to be able to distinguish and realise that there is a fine balance between artists' original intentions for their works and how others' perceptions of their art works may not always match the original intentions.

Issue and Context of the Question

The arts and artists are central to the development of communities, either as preservers of cultural memory, as entertainment or as the social conscience. Artists need to recognise their power and influence over the societies they exist in. The issue is that today, many artists like to claim artistic freedom while ignoring the impact their works can have on the communities. This becomes problematic especially if the artists receive financial support from the communities they practice their art in.

Possible Arguments

Artists should ensure that as far as possible, their works should not cause offence because:

- Artworks that are deliberately offensive may be illegal (and artists, as with all citizens, are bound to obey the law)
- Even if they are not illegal, works of art that are designed to offend can cause unnecessary hurt to large groups of people. These feelings could in turn result in resentment and societal unrest.
- Offensive artworks can perpetuate existing stereotypes of marginalised groups, deepening societal fault lines.
- Especially if artworks are publicly funded, artists need to be mindful of the extensive public reach of their artworks and acknowledge their duty to serve societal interests since their works are funded with tax dollars.

Artists should not be too concerned about their works causing offence because:

- In an increasingly polarized world, it is virtually impossible to predict people's reactions to art works, regardless of how benign they may appear. Artists cannot live in fear that their work will offend people as there will inevitably be people who are offended. Such fear may hinder the expression of creativity or lead to uniformly bland art works.
- Art has a role in challenging existing mindsets and social injustices. Artists who fear offending people are potentially ignoring their important social responsibility to use their art to challenge society and promote good social changes.
- A fundamental tenet of Western societies is the right to freedom of expression. In such societies, no beliefs or groups of people are seen as above criticism, even in the form of offensive art works. Being concerned about their works causing offence hence becomes an act of self-censorship and a silencing of this freedom, which is an unfair expectation.

Conceptual Understanding (Trends, Implications, Connections, Context):

- Trends: Throughout human history, the arts have played a pivotal role in the development of societies. Many traditional art works have sort to inspire, provoke thought or wonder, and encourage conversations. Artists worked under the patronage of the rich and the powerful, which meant that artists were beholden to their desires. Today, this patronage has evolved to include help from governments and other organisations. In this attention economy, artists also find themselves doing more outrageous and offensive things in order to be noticed. Yet, what has not changed is that artists need to remember their responsibility to those who support them in their artistic pursuits.

- Implications: While it is true that the interpretations of artworks lie with the viewer and that artists cannot control how others might interpret their works, it is dangerous to hide behind this excuse. If artists continue to ignore their social responsibility under the guise of artistic freedom and integrity, the outcome is that societies will be further polarized.
- Connections: There is a need for societies to find a balance between allowing artists to have the artistic license to create art works, and people need to have the discernment and wisdom to interpret art works. Viewers should not impose their preconceptions and biases on artworks and attribute meanings, to the point of silencing, censoring, or otherwise causing harm to them or their reputations.
- Context: We live in an age where polarization of societies is deep. Artists need to be aware that they have a larger social responsibility to use their influence with much care and wisdom. Artists should not be hiding behind the excuse that they cannot control how people interpret their artworks.

Examiner's comments:

This was not a popular question. Stronger responses displayed deep insights and understanding regarding the role of artists and their relationship and responsibilities to the societies they existed in. Such scripts were able to explain clearly with strong conceptual understanding the delicate balance between the artistic desires of an artist, such as the need for creativity or their role as the social conscience, against the desires of the community, such as the need for stability. These scripts were also able to distinguish between the different forms of art (e.g. high vs popular art, commercial or commissioned art vs pure art) and the interpretation of these artworks largely depended on their purposes. These scripts also acknowledged that, while interpretation of the artists' works are usually based on the prevailing beliefs of the community, artists did have control over how their works could be interpreted by the way the artists chose to present their works. Therefore, there was a limit to the extent that artists could absolve their responsibility regarding how people interpret their works.

Weaker scripts tend to focus on the various roles of art without a clear link to how these functions of art were relevant to the question requirements. These scripts largely ignored the various social, political and economic contexts that gave art their meaning. While the question did require students to have a familiarity with the function of the arts, it also required students to be able to contextualise these functions in a particular context before an evaluation can be made regarding the extent that artists should be responsible for their works.

A significant number of scripts did go beyond the functions of art into a discussion of the necessity of offence in art, which partially answered the question without going into the broader role of the artist's responsibility. These responses focused on the argument that since offence was inevitable given the socio-political nature of art, and the subjectivity of audiences, artists need not concern themselves with whether offence was caused. These were valid arguments but only focused on the nature of offence. A broader and more effective argument would have made the connections between offence and the idea of the artist's responsibility - for instance, whether they have a duty stemming from moral care, civic responsibility or artistic integrity, that requires an artist to cause offence or take reasonable care to avoid crossing some boundaries.

The quality of examples was an important consideration in the assessment of this question. Stronger scripts showed a vast knowledge of various art forms and were able to cite specific and relevant examples from all the various genres of art. Weaker scripts confined themselves to a specific art form, usually paintings, and showed limited understanding about the history and purpose behind the cited example. Some scripts confused art with the academic subjects of the humanities. Where examples were specific, it was sometimes unclear whether they were offensive as opposed to merely thought-provoking or disturbing, as in the case of Van Gogh's *Starry Night* - illustrations should be developed to show readers how they support the points being made.

8 How far can we trust what we see in the media today?

Terms and Scope of the Question

- How far – the extent or the limits of

- We – refers to the various individuals of today; the different groups of individuals that make up societies
- Trust – to believe that someone is good and honest and will not harm you, or that something is safe and reliable (Cambridge Dictionary)
- See – to view, to watch, what we consume (on media)
- The media – refers to the means of communication; the collection of the different ways information can be relayed to consumers. This includes anything we might encounter in print or online, such as mainstream media, influencer content, and random internet comments.

Question Requirements

- Candidates need to examine and evaluate the extent to which we can rely on the media to convey information to us without distortion or biases.
- Candidates need to show understanding of the impact of technology and consolidated ownership of media companies on information that is presented to us, and how this can impact the veracity of the information presented.
- Candidates need to understand how far consumers can verify what they see in the media, which affects how far they perceive it as being trustworthy.

Issue and Context of the Question

With the development of new technologies like AI, it is increasingly becoming difficult to trust what we see or read today in the media. We cannot ignore the reality that modern societies can only function if there is access to reliable sources of information, but we are increasingly calling this access into question. If we cannot have access to reliable sources of information, this will only further divide societies and encourage unhealthy skepticism and cynicism.

Possible Arguments

To a large degree, we can trust what we see in the media today because:

- Mainstream media companies are expected to adhere to journalistic standards. It is in their interest to follow these rules to preserve their reputation. Especially in today's context where things can go viral in an instant, reputable media companies would not want their reputation to suffer if they are caught in a lie.
- Given generally higher levels of education worldwide, people have developed a degree of analytical skill and discernment. The media is forced to be more reliable to retain credibility.
- Given the ability to triangulate information from multiple sources, the media is forced to be truthful as it is easier to discern when the media is lying.

To some degree, we cannot fully trust what we see in the media today because:

- Technology has made it too easy for anyone to generate content that is virtually indistinguishable from reality, unless a person is trained to recognize the signs of fake content. For the lay person, even with some degree of education, it is challenging for anyone without training to recognize fake content from real today.
- Virtually all the media industry today is consolidated under the control of a few major corporations. This means that it is almost impossible to get an accurate and objective view of the world today as facts can be clouded due to biases in reporting as these corporations may make decisions to protect their profits.
- Apart from the media industry, a plethora of media content producers exist, such as influencers, marketing professionals, and regular citizens with a social media page. Given the sheer number of content producers who are answerable only to their corporate or specific goals (such as profit or engagement statistics), it is impossible for any entity to ensure that what they produce is accurate and reasonably objective, let alone expect that these content producers would hold themselves to high standards of accuracy and fairness.

- We live in a world of information overload. Hence, it is highly likely that people are selective in the information they consume. Unless we recognize the impact of echo chambers and the power of social media algorithms, it is very likely that most of us will have our perspective of the world clouded by content producers as they prioritise showing us information that suits our worldview.

Conceptual Understanding (Trends, Implications, Connections, Context):

- Trends: We have traditionally relied on the media to convey information to us as it is impossible for us to be omnipresent and omniscient. While it was possible for the media to lie in the past, the slow spread of information and the limited means for the transmission of information meant that the impact of falsehoods was limited in scale and slower. Unfortunately, with technology today, this is no longer the situation.
- Implications: Information is now freely available to almost everyone, and technology has allowed almost everyone to be both the producer and consumer of information. This means that the traditional controls we used to have on the media to ensure truthfulness and objectivity are no longer as effective.
- Connections: With the affordability and pervasive use of modern communication technologies, we are constantly consuming information through our devices. Without a strong belief in the veracity of the information we receive, it is easy for societies to slide into tribalism and echo chambers, where people turn towards information that feeds a particular narrative. This is inevitable as people must make sense of the world around them. This is becoming a challenge without a trustworthy source of information.
- Context: Advances in technology (such as AI deepfakes, algorithmic manipulation, troll armies and bots) that allow us to manipulate information have raised serious concerns as we have reached the stage that, unless we are trained, it is almost impossible to differentiate truth from error. This creates a sense of distrust and affects societal function if it is harder to believe what we consume in the media. The consolidation of the global media industry under a few major corporations means that it is difficult to get objective information without biases. This consolidation increases the risks of partisan media and makes it difficult for consumers to have access to multiple sources of information to corroborate the information from the media.

Examiner's comments:

This was a popular question among students. The key focus of this question lies in the definition of *trust*. Stronger scripts provided a clear definition and understanding of what trust meant, and how societies evaluate and determine the extent to which something can be depended on. These stronger responses also showed a firm grasp of modern realities and the various threats that undermine the role and function of the media in presenting information to consumers.

Stronger scripts demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the relationship between media and the societies they serve, explaining how the level of trust consumers have in media depends on factors such as the purpose of the information (entertainment vs information) and the form of media (regulated traditional mass media vs largely unregulated new media). These responses were also able to evaluate how trust in media is shaped by external factors, such as the purpose of government regulation (e.g. censorship to maintain law and order vs censorship for oppression) and the prevailing social situation (e.g. the acknowledgement that in times of crisis, people may need to place more trust in official, regulated media than in unregulated sources).

Weaker scripts, however, merely repeated the various roles and functions of media without applying clear contextual knowledge of the modern realities facing today's media industry. These responses often glossed over how societies evaluate trust, reducing the concept to simplistic assumptions such as "trust equals truth," without defining what "truth" meant. Many weaker scripts equated media solely with social media, leading to over-generalisations and simplistic arguments (e.g. broad claims that Western media, especially US media, is heavily biased towards political parties; that Singapore media is trustworthy because it is government-regulated and protected by POFMA; or that social media is inherently untrustworthy because it is unregulated).

Some weaker responses also relied almost entirely on limited examples from the US and Singapore, which represent only a small fraction of the global media landscape. Others frequently cited North Korea and China as examples of untrustworthy media. While such examples were not inaccurate, building entire arguments around these extreme and limited cases was not a strong strategy.

The concept of the “Fourth Estate” or the “watchdog role” of media was commonly mentioned across many responses. However, candidates should update their content knowledge by recognising that many media experts now consider this an outdated term (<https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-the-fourth-estate-3368058>). While the media still report on the wrongdoings of the rich and powerful, experts increasingly question the intentions behind such reporting, whether it is to expose wrongdoing in the public interest or to serve as a political weapon against those individuals.