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## GP Comprehension SAQ – Social Media

### Passage 1: The influence of Internet in our Solitude

*Deresiewicz discusses solitude in relation to networking sites.*

#### Paragraph 1

What does the contemporary self want? The camera has created a culture of celebrity; the computer is creating a culture of connectivity. As the two technologies converge — broadband tipping the Web from text to image, social-networking sites spreading the mesh of interconnection ever wider — the two cultures reveal a common impulse. Celebrity and connectivity are both ways of becoming known. This is what the contemporary self wants. It wants to be recognised, wants to be connected: It wants to be visible. If not to the millions, on Survivor or Oprah, then to the hundreds, on Twitter or Facebook. This is the quality that validates us, this is how we become real to ourselves — by being seen by others. So we live exclusively in relation to others, and what disappears from our lives is solitude. Technology is taking away our privacy and our concentration, but it is also taking away our ability to be alone (though I shouldn't say taking away). We are doing this to ourselves; we are discarding these riches as fast as we can.

#### Paragraph 2

Our great fear today is not submersion by the mass but isolation from the herd. Under those circumstances, the Internet arrived as an incalculable blessing. We should never forget that. It has allowed isolated people to communicate with one another and marginalised people to find one another. The busy parent can stay in touch with far-flung friends. The nerdy teenager no longer has to feel like a freak. But as the Internet's dimensionality has grown, it has quickly become too much of a good thing. Ten years ago we were writing e-mail messages on desktop computers and transmitting them over dial-up connections. Now we are sending text messages on our cellphones, posting pictures on our Facebook pages, and following complete strangers on Twitter. A constant stream of mediated contact, virtual, notional, or simulated, keeps us wired in to the electronic hive — though contact, or at least two-way contact, seems increasingly beside the point. The goal now, it seems, is simply to become known, to turn oneself into a sort of miniature celebrity. How many friends do I have on Facebook? How many people are reading my blog? How many Google hits does my name generate? Visibility secures our self-esteem, becoming a substitute, for genuine connection. Not long ago, it was easy to feel lonely. Now, it is impossible to be alone.

### Paragraph 3

Young people say that they have little time for intimacy. And of course, they have no time at all for solitude. They seem to have no desire for solitude, have never heard of it, can't imagine why it would be worth having. In fact, their use of technology — or to be fair, our use of technology — seems to involve a constant effort to stave off the possibility of solitude, a continuous attempt, as we sit alone at our computers, to maintain the imaginative presence of others.

### Paragraph 4

So it is with the current generation's experience of being alone. That is precisely the recognition implicit in the idea of solitude, which is to loneliness what idleness is to boredom. Loneliness is not the absence of company; it is grief over that absence. The lost sheep is lonely; the shepherd is not lonely. But the Internet is as powerful a machine for the production of loneliness as television is for the manufacture of boredom. If six hours of television a day creates the aptitude for boredom, the inability to sit still, a hundred text messages a day creates the aptitude for loneliness, the inability to be by yourself. Some degree of boredom and loneliness is to be expected, especially among young people, given the way our human environment has been attenuated. But technology amplifies those tendencies. If boredom is the great emotion of the TV generation, loneliness is the great emotion of the Web generation. We lost the ability to be still, our capacity for idleness. They have lost the ability to be alone, their capacity for solitude.

### Paragraph 5

Solitude isn't easy, and isn't for everyone. It has undoubtedly never been the province of more than a few. But if solitude disappears as a social value and social idea, will even the exceptions remain possible? Still, one is powerless to reverse the drift of the culture. One can only save oneself — and whatever else happens, one can still always do that. But it takes a willingness to be unpopular. Those who would find solitude must not be afraid to stand alone.

Adapted from William Deresiewicz, *The End of Solitude*

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## Passage 2: Social Media and Sharing

*Maria Konnikova discusses the need for online sharing.*

### Paragraph 1

That irresistible impulse to post, to tweet, to "like" has evolutionary roots that far precede the advent of social media. Consider something that's known as the "communal sharing" norm. In an environment of scarce resources (i.e., the one that prevailed for most of our history), every existing resource has to be shared with others. In this environment, what I find out isn't my exclusive prerogative – it's actually common property, in case it can be beneficial to someone else. There's a bear in that cave; these berries may kill you; I found a stream of water in that direction. All important information to pass on and the quicker the better. After all, the bear may wake up or the berries may end up in someone's mouth before we've had a chance to share our wisdom. The facts may have changed, but the immediacy seems just as real now. It's hard to shake off the feeling that people are somehow missing out or worse off if we don't communicate what we've seen –*and* communicate it at once. Is it really so far from: "There's a bear in the cave" to: "Look at that adorable bear playing with the berries in that YouTube video"?

### Paragraph 2

Social media have tapped into something quite fundamental and the sharing urge in human nature may stem from something more basic than anything else: simple arousal and the fight-or-flight response that we share with our distant ancestors. In scientific terms, this means the activation of our autonomic nervous system; in simpler terms, that extra boost of energy, the quickened heartbeat, that tingling of nerves that says something in the environment has caught my attention. We don't just passively take in information. We want *actively* to pass it on to others. We share emotions; we share thoughts; we share opinions; we share objects. We share because we're happy, angry, perplexed, upset. Or experiencing any strong emotion. We also share to express identity – what I contribute defines a part of who I am; if I share funny stuff, I'm a funny gal; if I share useful information, I'm a helpful, altruistic person; if I share masterful, profound links, well, draw your own conclusions. And we share to build community – sharing with others can help us identify common interests and ideas. Seeing how others respond has been shown to help define how we ourselves think and feel.

### Paragraph 3

According to University of Pennsylvania psychologist Jonah Berger, arousal puts all other explanations for sharing to shame. In a 2011 study, Berger invited students to watch a video clip: either a "neutral" segment or one of several "emotional" segments. Berger found that feeling scared or enraged or amused provokes us to send on clips or information. It's the emotions characterised by high arousal that drive us to act. "If something makes you angry as opposed to sad, for example, you're more likely to share

it because you're fired up," wrote Berger. And while the sharing urges aren't new they are now activated on a near-constant basis. One need only look at the proliferation of sites that are devoted to sharing exclusively – *Reddit*, *Digg*, *Stumbleupon* – to see the phenomenon in action. I see, I react, I share. I become part of a community and your "likes" validate me. I feel rewarded with every retweet and endorsement, while conversely I feel sad if something just kind of plops into a virtual neverland. Was it something I said? In fact, being virtually rejected actually activates the same brain areas that are associated with physical distress, the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex and the anterior insula.

#### Paragraph 4

Social media make sharing easier than ever before. And they make it addictive. I have gone from Twitter neophyte less than a year ago – I tweeted my first tweet on 20 August 2011 – to compulsive sharer. Do I really have that much to share? Almost certainly not, but I certainly feel like I do. And in that, I am far from alone. Or perhaps I'm more alone than I think. Twitter is a great example of what Piaget<sup>1</sup> called 'collective monologues'. Lots of people chattering away with no attention to each other.

#### Paragraph 5

According to unpublished results by Eva Buechel, now at the University of Miami, online sharing can actually make us *feel* better, serving as a very real form of emotional therapy. It's as if every tweet that gets passed on, every link that is re-shared activates our brains' pleasure centres, releasing endorphins in much the same way as physical pleasure, exercise, excitement or strong sensory stimulation.

Adapted from Maria Konnikova, *Now For the Good News – Sharing can make you happy. Pass it on.*

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Piaget was a developmental psychologist and philosopher.

*Read the passages in the Insert and then answer **all** the questions. Note that up to fifteen marks will be given for the quality and accuracy of your use of English throughout this Paper.*

*NOTE: When a question asks for an answer **IN YOUR OWN WORDS AS FAR AS POSSIBLE** and you select the appropriate material from the passages for your answer, you must still use your own words to express it. Little credit can be given to answers which only copy words or phrases from the passages.*

1. Why does the 'contemporary self' want to be 'recognised', 'connected' and 'visible' (passage 1, paragraph 1)? **Use your own words as far as possible** (2)

**(grade 2 - GP - language application)**

Answer: The 'contemporary self' seeks for a celebrity status which needs the benefits of connectivity from the internet to promote the fame that individuals crave for in modern society. This explains why the individuals need to be prominent and known by others in modern society.

2. According to the writer, why did the writer think that we have 'an incalculable blessing' from the internet (passage 1, paragraph 2). **Use your own words as far as possible** (2)

**(grade 2 - factual Explanation)**

Answer: it has improved the social lives of those who are alienated to make it easier for them to find friends. It has also allowed older people to stay connected to their social circles and make it less awkward for youths to overcome their shyness to find friends.

3. Why does the writer use the phrase 'or to be fair'? (passage 1, paragraph 3) (1)

**(grade 2 - inference)**

Answer: The writer is showing that the criticism on the use of technology as the cause of individuals being unable to find time to be alone applies not only to youth but adults too.

4. In what way is it paradoxical when the writer depicts that 'we sit alone at our computers, to maintain the imaginative presence of others'. (passage 1, paragraph 3) (2)

**(grade 2 - language application)**

Answer: It is paradoxical as it is real that we are alone when we are using the internet to communicate with others but we are also not alone as we are communicating in this process. Hence, it is contradictory and correct to state that we are alone and not alone when we use the internet to communicate with others.

5. How does the writer illustrate the idea that the state of loneliness is 'grief over that absence' with the analogy of the 'lost sheep' and the 'shepherd' to explain his notion of loneliness? (passage 1, paragraph 4) (3)

**(grade 2 - inference)**

Answer: The writer uses the state of feeling of being alone and feeling of being lonely through the lost sheep as it is unable to find others and felt a sense of loss in this state of being alone. The shepherd does not feel alone as he has chosen to be alone and knows that he is alone but not lonely. Through this analogy, the writer has shown that the state of loneliness is felt when he did not choose to be alone but entrapped in this feeling due to circumstances.

6. What does the writer imply when he states that "Those who find solitude must not be afraid to stand alone"? (passage 1, paragraph 5) (2)

**(grade 2 - Language application)**

Answer: The writer is implying that the individuals who embrace and appreciate being alone should have the courage to withstand criticism against the notion of being alone and continue to embrace it.

7. What are the reasons for justifying the writer's view that our society has a 'communal sharing' norm? (passage 2, paragraph 1) (2)

**(grade 2 - factual explanation)**

Answer: The writer justifies his view by stating that we need to share as we have scarce resources and have to share the information about how to attain

resources. We also share information to evade dangers and provide directions. However, we are also sharing now as we want to communicate and provide information about things which are interesting.

8. Why does the writer italicise the word 'actively' when we want to share information with others? (passage 2, paragraph 2) (2)

(grade 2 - language application)

Answer: The writer is implying that our action to share information that we have this compulsive need to share information as it is part of our emotional aspect of thinking to reflect and feel.

9. Based on passage 2, from paragraph 2 to 5, summarise what the writer has stated on the reasons for sharing information online.

Write your answer in **no more than 120 words** not counting the part of words in the opening sentence. **Use your own words as much as possible.**

People in modern society share information online as.....

Answer:

**People in modern society share information online as** the impulse to pass information to others originates from basic stimulation and physical reaction to stress dating back to our pre-human predecessors. Today, this impulse is triggered almost continuously with the flourishing of social networking sites. Sharing is an outlet for intense feelings. It tells others who we are, establishes group bonding and determines shared concerns and notions. Others' reaction determines our reasoning and emotions and their approval confirms our self-worth. We are honoured when others acknowledge our posts and miserable when they do not. Social media further facilitate this activity, making sharing compulsive as many think they have plenty to tell others. Finally, sharing cheers us up, triggering a feeling of happiness, and is a genuine psychological treatment.