Phones and Public Life

Weigh the benefits and costs of new ways to share information.

9-12.US2.44 "Evaluate how the rise of alternative media, social media, and technology, including smartphones, have affected United States culture, society, and politics."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one benefit and circle one drawback in each paragraph. Label one effect in each paragraph C for culture, S for society, or P for politics to help you weigh the changes.

From a Phone to a Public Debate

1. In 2020, a bystander's smartphone video of the police killing of George Floyd spread rapidly across social media. Millions of people could see evidence that might once have reached them only through a television report. Users shared the video alongside personal stories about policing and racism. Independent podcasts and online news outlets, often called alternative media, gave activists and local residents space to explain their views at length. This wider range of voices changed public conversation: people encountered firsthand accounts and argued over which stories deserved attention. Yet a widely shared post could travel farther than a careful investigation.

2. The same phones that delivered news also helped people act on it. In many U.S. cities, organizers posted protest times, safety updates, and links to local mutual aid efforts. A message could reach thousands within minutes, making it easier for strangers to join a common cause. But speed brought costs. An old protest photo could be reposted as if it showed a new event, and a short clip could leave out important context. People without reliable internet access, or those who avoided the platforms, might miss updates and have less influence over the online conversation.

3. Online attention also entered politics. Protesters used hashtags and phone calls to press officials for changes in policing, while candidates and elected leaders posted their responses on social media. These channels allowed residents to question leaders publicly without waiting for a newspaper to print a letter. At the same time, platform feeds often showed users material similar to what they had already watched or liked. That pattern could make competing arguments less visible. Technology did not determine any single law or election result. It did reshape who could speak quickly, how people organized, and what officials felt pressure to address.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the video and alternative media change the public conversation, and what drawback does the passage identify?

2. How did phone-based updates make collective action easier but leave some people out?

3. How did social media change residents' ability to press political leaders, and what could limit informed debate?

4. Overall, did these technologies only give people more power, or did they also create obstacles? Support your judgment with a benefit and an obstacle from different paragraphs.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine students want the school board to change a local policy. In 75 to 95 words, propose how they could use a smartphone and an alternative media outlet to build support, then weigh one benefit, one risk, and a practical way to limit that risk.

ANSWER KEY

Phones and Public Life

HIGH SCHOOL · 9-12.US2.44

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one benefit and circle one drawback in each paragraph. Label one effect in each paragraph C for culture, S for society, or P for politics to help you weigh the changes. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the video and alternative media change the public conversation, and what drawback does the passage identify?	**The video brought evidence to a large audience, while independent outlets gave activists and residents room to explain their views. A widely shared post could still receive more attention than a careful investigation.**
2	How did phone-based updates make collective action easier but leave some people out?	**Organizers could quickly share protest and safety information with thousands of people. Those without reliable internet access or who avoided the platforms might miss the updates.**
3	How did social media change residents' ability to press political leaders, and what could limit informed debate?	**Residents could question leaders publicly and press them for changes. Feeds showing users material similar to what they already liked could make competing arguments less visible.**
4	Overall, did these technologies only give people more power, or did they also create obstacles? Support your judgment with a benefit and an obstacle from different paragraphs.	**They did both. For example, independent outlets gave local residents a place to explain their views, but people without reliable internet access could miss organizing updates.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Students seeking later school start times could record short interviews on smartphones and share them through a campaign account. They could also ask an independent local podcast to air longer conversations with students and families. Fast posts could bring people to a board meeting, while the podcast could add perspectives that short clips miss. However, a clipped interview might misrepresent a speaker. Students should publish full interviews and check claims before sharing them. These tools could widen participation, but online attention alone would not prove that the proposal is sound.

Accept other passage-supported benefits and drawbacks when students explain the connection. For Part 3, look for a specific use of each medium, a plausible benefit and risk, and a response that addresses the stated risk.