

Midterm Exam * Sample Student Response

Grade Received: A

With the increase in the use of technology, it is rare to come across restaurants, cafes, or coffee shops that do not offer their customers free Wi-Fi. Recently, there has been an increase in coffee shops purposely not allowing their customers Wi-Fi access. The introduction of these kind of establishments is a response to society's deep immersion into all things digital that leads people to choose technology over social interaction. However, ever-present connectivity has increased our ability to have meaningful interactions by making information easier to access, creating a pleasurable workspace, and providing comfort in social situations.

When an individual visits a coffee shop where they do not know anyone, access to information online provides some comfort. If you see someone you would like to talk to but don't have a conversation starter, you can look one up online. The last time I visited a coffee shop, I wore a T-shirt with my favorite musician's name on it. 5 minutes later, I was approached by a stranger who said they loved my shirt. We became friends and I learned a few days later that my new friend didn't listen to that musician. They had googled the name in order to find out enough information to have a conversation with me. If the coffee shop where we met did not have Wi-Fi, we wouldn't have had much to talk about and we wouldn't be friends.

Though some people may not talk to those around them at a coffee shop with Wi-Fi, they can find pleasure in being in the presence of others. Before coffee shops had Wi-Fi, these people would go to a library to do their work. Libraries may discourage socialization because of how quiet they are. In cases like this, we can see that the only types of 'meaningful interactions' between humans are not only verbal. "This indicated that there is a social reason for people to go to coffee shops that does not involve direct interaction with others" (Mele 2). Some people just enjoy being around others to being alone, even if they do not want to talk to them.

In the case of those who get nervous being around strangers, having access to Wi-Fi can serve as a source of comfort. Especially for those with social anxiety, it can be hard to imagine going to a coffee shop and having nothing to do but talk to people they do not know. Having the option of reading the news online, doing work, or playing a game can ease worries in uncomfortable social situations. There is no longer the expectation to be social, but just by being around others, it becomes an option and possibility. "It is not quite an essential amenity or legally required to open, but it's nice. It makes customers happy, and makes your space feel more like their space" (Mele 1). For many, Wi-Fi at coffee shops encourages them to leave their house, thus increasing the likelihood of meaningful interaction.

Though the introduction of coffee shops without Wi-Fi was meant to be a response to society's deep immersion into all things digital, it is not an appropriate one. The introduction of Wi-Fi into coffee shops is what allows our ability to have meaningful interactions to grow and keep up with a significant part of our lives. Through making information easier to access, creating a pleasurable workspace, and providing comfort in social situations, our devices have actually brought us closer to the people around us.