

Register Number:

Date:

**ST. JOSEPH’S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), BANGALORE-27**

**IV SEMESTER BSc END SEMESTER EXAMINATION: APRIL 2020**

**GE 412 – GENERAL ENGLISH- PSA SPECIAL COURSE  
(For students of PCM, PMC, PEM, MEC and EMS who have opted for the special course)**

**Time: 2 ½ hours Max. marks: 70**

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

1. This booklet contains **FOUR** printed sides and **THREE** sections.

2. Please write **PSA Special** on the front page of your answer booklet.

3. You will lose marks for exceeding word limits.

4. You are allowed to use a dictionary, during the examination.

**I. Read this excerpt by Rachel Botsman from her article ‘Big Data meets Big Brother as China moves to rate its citizen’ from the American magazine Wired (October 21, 2017):**

On June 14, 2014, the State Council of China published an ominous-sounding document called "Planning Outline for the Construction of a [Social Credit System](https://www.wired.co.uk/article/china-social-credit-system-explained)". In the way of Chinese policy documents, it was a lengthy and rather dry affair, but it contained a radical idea. What if there was a national trust score that rated the kind of citizen you were?

Imagine a world where many of your daily activities were constantly monitored and evaluated: what you buy at the shops and online; where you are at any given time; who your friends are and how you interact with them; how many hours you spend watching content or playing video games; and what bills and taxes you pay (or not). It's not hard to picture, because most of that already happens, thanks to all those data-collecting behemoths like Google, Facebook and Instagram or health-tracking apps such as Fitbit. But now imagine a system where all these behaviours are rated as either positive or negative and distilled into a single number, according to rules set by the government. That would create your Citizen Score and it would tell everyone whether or not you were trustworthy.

A futuristic vision of Big Brother out of control? No, it's already getting underway in China, where the government is developing the Social Credit System (SCS) to rate the trustworthiness of its 1.3 billion citizens. The Chinese government is pitching the system as a desirable way to measure and enhance "trust" nationwide and to build a culture of "sincerity". As the policy states, "It will forge a public opinion environment where keeping trust is glorious. It will strengthen sincerity in government affairs, commercial sincerity, social sincerity and the construction of judicial credibility."

The government has given a licence to eight private companies to come up with systems and algorithms for social credit scores.

The first is with China Rapid Finance, the other is Sesame Credit. However, the real star of Ant is AliPay, its payments arm that people use not only to buy things online, but also for restaurants, taxis, school fees, cinema tickets and even to transfer money to each other.

Sesame Credit has also teamed up with other data-generating platforms, such as Didi Chuxing, the ride-hailing company that was Uber's main competitor in China before it acquired the American company's Chinese operations in 2016, and Baihe, the country's largest online matchmaking service. It's not hard to see how that all adds up to gargantuan amounts of big data that Sesame Credit can tap into to assess how people behave and rate them accordingly.

So just how are people rated? Individuals on Sesame Credit are measured by a score ranging between 350 and 950 points. Alibaba does not divulge the "complex algorithm" it uses to calculate the number but they do reveal the five factors taken into account. The first is credit history. For example, does the citizen pay their electricity or phone bill on time? Next is fulfilment capacity, which it defines in its guidelines as "a user's ability to fulfil his/her contract obligations". The third factor is personal characteristics, verifying personal information such as someone's mobile phone number and address. But the fourth category, behaviour and preference, is where it gets interesting.

Under this system, something as innocuous as a person's shopping habits become a measure of character. Alibaba admits it judges people by the types of products they buy. "Someone who plays video games for ten hours a day, for example, would be considered an idle person," says Li Yingyun, Sesame's Technology Director. "Someone who frequently buys diapers would be considered as probably a parent, who on balance is more likely to have a sense of responsibility." So the system not only investigates behaviour - it shapes it. It "nudges" citizens away from purchases and behaviours the government does not like.

The fifth category is interpersonal relationships. What does their choice of online friends and their interactions say about the person being assessed? Sharing what Sesame Credit refers to as "positive energy" online, nice messages about the government or how well the country's economy is doing, will make your score go up.

So why have millions of people already signed up to what amounts to a trial run for a publicly endorsed government surveillance system? There may be darker, unstated reasons - fear of reprisals, for instance, for those who don't put their hand up - but there is also a lure, in the form of rewards and "special privileges" for those citizens who prove themselves to be "trustworthy" on Sesame Credit.

If their score reaches 600, they can take out a Just Spend loan of up to 5,000 yuan (around £565) to use to shop online, as long as it's on an Alibaba site. Reach 650 points, they may rent a car without leaving a deposit. They are also entitled to faster check-in at hotels and use of the VIP check-in at Beijing Capital International Airport. Those with more than 666 points can get a cash loan of up to 50,000 yuan (£5,700), obviously from Ant Financial Services. Get above 700 and they can apply for Singapore travel without supporting documents such as an employee letter. And at 750, they get fast-tracked application to a coveted pan-European Schengen visa.

Higher scores have already become a status symbol, with almost 100,000 people bragging about their scores on Weibo (the Chinese equivalent of Twitter) within months of launch. A citizen's score can even affect their odds of getting a date, or a marriage partner, because the higher their Sesame rating, the more prominent their dating profile is on Baihe.

We're also bound to see the birth of reputation black markets selling under-the-counter ways to boost trustworthiness. In the same way that Facebook Likes and Twitter followers can be bought, individuals will pay to manipulate their score.

T**he** government is attempting to make obedience feel like gaming. It is a method of social control dressed up in some points-reward system. It's gamified obedience.

Penalties are set to change dramatically when the government system becomes mandatory in 2020. For instance, people with low ratings will have slower internet speeds; restricted access to restaurants, nightclubs or golf courses; and the removal of the right to travel freely abroad. Scores will influence a person's rental applications, their ability to get insurance or a loan and even social-security benefits. Citizens with low scores will not be hired by certain employers and will be forbidden from obtaining some jobs, including in the civil service, journalism and legal fields, where of course you must be deemed trustworthy. Low-rating citizens will also be restricted when it comes to enrolling themselves or their children in high-paying private schools.

According to Luciano Floridi, a professor of philosophy and ethics of information at the University of Oxford and the director of research at the Oxford Internet Institute, we are now entering an important shift, as what we do online and offline merge into an onlife. He asserts that, as our society increasingly becomes an infosphere, a mixture of physical and virtual experiences, we are acquiring an onlife personality - different from who we innately are in the "real world" alone. We see this writ large on Facebook, where people present an edited or idealised portrait of their lives. Think about your Uber experiences. Are you just a little bit nicer to the driver because you know you will be rated?

China's trust system might be voluntary as yet, but it's already having consequences. In February 2017, the country's Supreme People's Court announced that 6.15 million of its citizens had been banned from taking flights over the past four years for social misdeeds. Another 1.65 million blacklisted people cannot take trains.

Where these systems really descend into nightmarish territory is that the trust algorithms used are unfairly reductive. They don't take into account context. For instance, one person might miss paying a bill or a fine because they were in hospital; another may simply be a freeloader. And therein lies the challenge facing all of us in the digital world, and not just the Chinese. If life-determining algorithms are here to stay, we need to figure out how they can embrace the nuances, inconsistencies and contradictions inherent in human beings and how they can reflect real life.

**I.A. Answer ANY FOUR of the following in about 150 words each: (4x10=40)**

1. Look up the word Dystopia in your dictionary. Do you think this word aptly describes the above piece? Explain why or why not.

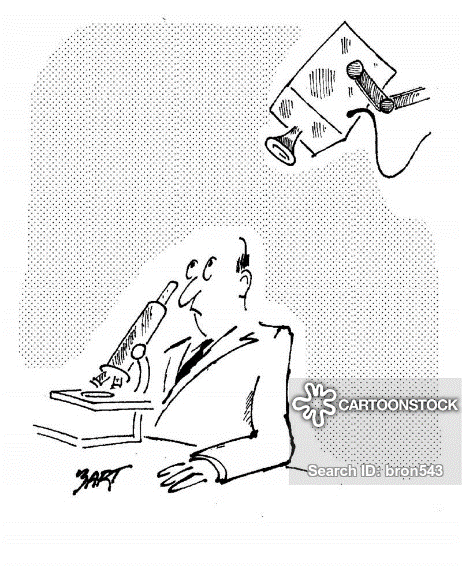
2. What according to you is the scariest thing about such a ‘Social Credit System’? Discuss.

3. Do you think we are already experiencing something similar to what has been described in the piece? In this context discuss the relationship you have with your devices.

4. It is often argued that such a surveillance system would ensure safety and will help keep illegal activities in check. Are these good enough reasons for an all pervasive surveillance system like this to be set up in our society? Explain using examples.

5. “So the system not only investigates behaviour - it shapes it. It *nudges* citizens away from purchases and behaviours the government does not like.” Do you agree with the writer when she says this? How does Science and Technology make this possible? Use examples to explain.  
  
 **II. Answer the following in about 200 words: (1x20=20)**

6. Science and Technology is supposed to help us understand our world better, make our lives easier, help us answer questions about life. Contrasting this with a surveillance system like the one mentioned in the piece what in your view are the pros and cons of the use of science and technology by governments and corporations? Discuss using examples from your general awareness of this issue.

1. **Examine the following cartoon:**

**III.A. Answer the following questions in about 5-8 sentences each: (2x5=10)**

7. Look up the word ‘Irony’ in your dictionary. Do you find the above cartoon ironic? Explain why or why not?

8. If the scientist and camera could talk, what do you think they might say to each other?