Computers In Society Essay, Research Paper

Computers in Society

Over the past decade, computers and modern technology have played an integral part in the way our society operates. Everywhere we turn there is indication of the advancement and innovation streaming in today s society. The composition of the world surrounding us solely depends on the emulation of the world around us, in order to keep up with the ever-changing way we operate as a whole. The entire world is dependent upon that which we created from our own minds and hands, whose sole purpose is to mimic the way we act, yet do it more effectively and more efficiently. What are the major factors in advancing our society far beyond the comprehension of the public mind? Time, and money. We live in a society where the only key elements in succeeding are making or doing more of what we do, in less time than we do it. End result: Greater profits.

But is this really the way we should be living our lives? We place all of our dependence in machines, which we have developed to take the place of us, the people who developed them.

During the next few pages, we will examine the effects of computers in our society. Their positive and detrimental effects on people, and the way they operate within a given community.

Thanks to the growth in computer capability and capacity, television and computers are merging into digital streams of sounds, images, and text that make it possible to become absolutely brilliant with information. The advancement in technology allows for the awareness and continued public support. Messages and ideas are carried in a far more efficient way, meaning people choose to listen to them more readily. In 1438 Johannes Gutenberg wanted a cheaper way to produce handwritten Bibles. His moveable type fostered a spread in literacy, and advance of scientific knowledge, and the emergence of the industrial revolution . Although most of the time technology changes at far too gradual a rate, slipping past our fingers, causing us to move on, and carry this new technology with us, seemingly in the same form as the former. Technological advancement has been know in the past to trigger a more in depth look at things, and a brighter, better way to see things in a different light, although what has it done socially for us?

We as a society have become so incredibly spoiled with our ever-advancing technology, that we too have immersed ourselves in it as well. Slowly we have been cutting ourselves off from our peers, friends, relatives, and the world around us.

It began with the telephone. A new and innovative way that we could talk to our friends and loved ones from great distances, while the calling and receiving parties were both in their own homes. Then came the radio. A new and innovative way to listen to the sounds of other cultures, and those tunes we loved, that we could now hear from our own homes. Then came television, a new and innovative way to experience the sights and sounds of the world from our very own homes. And finally the computer. A new and ever-changing innovative way to experience everything the world has to offer, from shopping, to banking, to television and radio from our very own homes. Slowly but surely we have enclosed ourselves in this little hermit-like shelter we call our homes . This excuse for bringing us closer to the world around us has only entirely isolated us from it. We think we are getting closer, but with each step forward into the future, we take two steps backwards.

Let us look at one aspect of change that has been slowly occurring over the past decade or so, and will probably take another decade to complete, the transfer of data and products. Up until the present time products, and shipments have been calculated in mass. A product would travel miles and miles clear across the world, documents, CDs, music, information, books etc. to reach its final destination. Its cost would be calculated in how much it weighed. However, with our drastic change in technological advances more mediums are transferred through the computer, and the Internet than ever before. The world is getting smaller by the minute. The change of exchange from atoms to bits is irrevocable, and unstoppable.

Why now? Because the change is also exponential small differences of yesterday can have suddenly shocking consequences tomorrow.

You have probably heard that if you payed an employee a penny a day, and doubled it every day, your employee would be making $10 million by the end of the month. Although if the month were only three days shorter, your employee would only be making $1.3 million. When an effect is exponential, those last three days mean a whole lot. We are now approaching the last three days in the spread of computing and digital telecommunications.

In the same fashion 35% of American and Canadian families, and 50%of American and Canadian teenagers have a personal computer at home; 30 million people are estimated to be on the Internet; 65 percent of new computers sold worldwide in 1994 were for the home; and 90 percent of those to be sold in 1995 are expected to have modems or CD-ROM drives. These numbers do not even include the 50 microprocessors in the average 1995 automobile, or the microprocessors in your toaster, thermostat, answering machine, CD player, and greeting cards . And if I am wrong about any of the numbers above, wait a minute.

And the rate at which these numbers are growing is astonishing. The population of the Internet itself is increasing at a rate of 10 percent per month. If this rate of growth were to continue (quite possibly), the total number of Internet users would exceed the population of the world by 2003 .

Using a computer is not about computers anymore. It is about living. The giant central computer has almost universally been replaced by the personal computer. We have seen computers move out of giant air-conditioned rooms, to closets, then onto desktops, and now into our laps and pockets. But this is not the end.

Early into the new millennium we could be communicating with devices smaller than a finger nail, and more powerful than a top-notch personal computer today. Your telephone will not ring indiscriminately; it will receive, sort, and perhaps auto-respond to calls.

As we interconnect ourselves, many of the values of a nation-state will give way to those of both larger and smaller electronic communities. We will socialize in digital neighborhoods in which physical space will be irrelevant and time will play a different role. Twenty years from now, when you look out a window, what you see may be five thousand miles and six time zones away. When you watch an hour of television, it may have been delivered to your home in less than a second.

In the wake of the information revolution (now four decades old), people are now working harder and longer (with compulsory overtime), under worsening working conditions with greater anxiety, stress, and accidents, with less skills, less security, less autonomy, less power, less benefits, and less pay. Without question the technology has been developed and used to de-skill and discipline the workforce in a global speed-up of unprecedented proportions. And those still working are the lucky ones. For the technology has been designed above all to displace.

Structural unemployment in Canada and the United States has increased with each decade of the Information Age. With the increasing deployment of so-called labor saving technology, official average unemployment has jumped from 4 percent in the 1950s, 5.1 percent in the 1960s, 6.7 percent in the 1970s, and 9.3 percent in the 1980s, to 11 percent so far in the 1990s .

In 1993 an economist with the Canadian manufacturers Association estimated that between 1989 and 1993, 200,000 manufacturing jobs were eliminated through the use of technology another conservative estimate. And that was only in manufacturing, and before the latest waves of information highway technology, which will make past developments seem quaint in comparison.

Thus as the ranks of the permanently marginalized and impoverished swell, the gap between rich and poor widens to nineteenth-century dimensions, it is no mere coincidence that we see a greater concentration of military, political, financial, and corporate power than ever before in our history. In the hands of such self-serving peoples and it is now more than ever in their hands the information highway, the latest incarnation of the information revolution, will only be used to compound the crime.

In this report we have dealt with the three major factors in our society s technological advancement: time, money, and lifestyle. Each has greatly affected us, whether it is for the positive, or the negative is a totally opinionated discussion. Only time can determine where we will be in five, ten, or a hundred years. Is our society so caught up in it s own covetousness that we must keep advancing ourselves to such a point that we destroy each other, or are we merely competing with the demands that we create for ourselves; perfection and buoyancy. Is there turning back, or have we so thoroughly immersed ourselves within our own virtual environment that the only thing we can do is delve further into it with hopes to exit on the other side? These questions can be very easily answered. Just turn on your computer, log on to the Internet, and the world is at your disposal.