

The effects of technology on society



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The term technology is derived from the Greek word ‘ technologia’ which means “ the practical application of knowledge, particularly in a specific discipline of study.” It is worthwhile to note that technology is an abstract term that lacks a single universally acceptable concrete definition.

Nevertheless, it can be defined as the usage and application of knowledge concerning tools, crafts, techniques, methods or systems of organization, or a material end product of these things, such as clothing. It is a word that is used collectively to portray or describe the advancements, undertakings, creations, abilities, views and knowledge of a distinct group of people (Basalla 14-15).

On the other hand, a human society can be defined as a group of people who are delineated by their cultural identity, functional interdependence and social solidarity. A comprehensive definition of this term also takes into account the social status and roles of the people within society. By extension, a society may be taken to mean a group of people within a given region or country, or even the whole world in totality. As such, the meaning of society is closely linked to what is deemed to be social. It is also worth to note that members of any given society share some common characteristics, such as a common goal and a common interest or mutual concern (Jenkins 18-20).

Throughout history, technologies have significantly affected human beings and other species of animals in their ability to control and acclimatize to their natural environment. Historically, human beings started applying the use of technology with the improvisation of the existing natural resources into

simple tools and equipment. For instance, the realization of the capacity to control fire augmented the existing sources of food, while the invention of the wheel helped human beings to control their environment and enhance transport. On the other hand, modern technological advancements such as the telephone, the printing press and the internet have minimized physical hurdles of communication. They have also enabled human beings to interact rapidly and freely on a global scale by transforming the world into a global village. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that not all technologies have been used by human beings for peaceful purposes. For instance, technology has been used to construct destructive weapons that range from clubs to nuclear weapons (Basalla 20-25).

Human beings are divided in their opinions about the general impact of technology on society. Some people believe that technology has really helped human societies while others disagree with this claim. Nevertheless, technology has influenced different societies both positively and negatively in various ways. For instance, technology has helped many societies, especially in the contemporary world to improve their economies as well as allowing for the creation of a leisure class. In addition, technological processes have often led to pollution of the environment and exhaustion of natural resources, thus harming the earth and its environment. Different modes of technological implementation also influence the values of different societies and in many cases, arrival of new technologies often raise new ethical questions. For instance, technological advancements have led to an increase in the idea of efficiency with regard to human production, a term which was in the past only applied to machines, and the challenge of

conventional customs. This paper looks at how the use of machines has impacted on the capacity of workers, the effects of computer and the cell phone on society, and the general impacts of technology to the environment.

In the contemporary world, machines continue to automate most of the critical industrial and household processes. For instance, machines have taken up, and are continuing to substitute human workers in most of the mundane jobs in industries. This is because of the evolvement of technology such that machines can even perform tasks which cannot be done by man. The application of advanced technologies, like artificial intelligence and robotics has proved to be more effective in performing life-threatening tasks such as space exploration and mining. Nevertheless, there is an increasing concern in many countries about the deteriorating position of the semi-skilled and unskilled workers due to improved technology. It is argued that technological advancements have made many of these menial jobs obsolete or poorly paid. This situation has been mainly augmented by the growing modern computing technologies. Technological advancements have also impacted greatly on the value of the skills of workers. Old workers usually find it very difficult to adapt to new and complex technologies, while young workers rapidly and readily acquire and employ skills that are tailored towards new technologies. As a result, such technologies increase the value of young workers, while they reduce the productivity of the old workers (Edward 53-65).

Needless to say that computer technology has transformed the face of the world today (Edward 66). Computers are capable of storing, processing, managing and organizing large quantities of information and data. They

have also given birth to the software industry, which is one of the most developed industries in the world. Internet technology seeded from the concepts of computer networking and has grown to be the most effective platform of communication in the world, with the largest information base that exists in the modern world. The internet infrastructure, through the worldwide web has made it possible for people to communicate through email, websites, downloads, media and file sharing, so transforming the world into a global village. The internet infrastructure has also made it possible for researchers, scholars and other people to share information across the globe almost instantly. The internet has also given rise to significant positive changes in the advertising and entertainment industries. Advertisements can therefore reach out to the populations within very few seconds and consequently, this has promoted the entertainment industry which relies heavily on advertisement. Simply stated, the internet has made it possible for societies in modern times to link up and promote the sharing of information and globalization (Edward 67-70).

Cellular communication has also transformed the communication industry and the larger society as a whole to a very great extent. One of the earliest technological advancements in communication was the invention of the conventional telephone which was followed by the telegraph. Mobile phones have expanded the horizons of communication in the modern world through their capacity to allow for expedient long distance communication. They have enhanced the communication process in society because they provide different ways through which people can use to communicate to others, such as through calling and sending text messages. Therefore, important

information or message can reach the receiver in a few seconds. Mobile phones also help to develop and support communication, contact and communication processes within society. In spite of all of their advantages, they can also impact negatively on society. For instance, some teenagers share pornographic information and photos by sending them using their mobile phones and this has created a very serious concern. In general, inappropriate use of the internet and mobile phones for purposes such as pornography has really polluted the social culture of the modern world (Fox 89-92).

Most of the modern technological processes lead to the production of excessive waste products commonly referred to as industrial waste, and pollution. These wastes can be classified as either toxic wastes, electronic wastes or radioactive wastes. Even though some of the produced material waste is recycled and used in other industrial processes, much of it is released to the environment and the result is environmental pollution, degradation and lack of sustainability. Very few technologies in the modern world are designed with the contemplation of the environment in mind. Most of the technological advancements are directed towards economic gain rather than on environmental sustainability and this has caused a lot of direct detrimental effect on the environment, such as the depreciation of the ozone layer which has led to global warming. Historically, many societies sought to maintain their environments since they were the sources of wealth for the people. However, in the contemporary world, societies have failed to maintain and manage their environments and this has greatly affected the whole universe. The more delicate and obvious impacts of technology on the

environment include the exhaustion of the world's non-renewable natural resources such as coal, ores and petroleum, and the pollution of water, air and land mostly by industrial wastes and disposal. Effects of these impacts include global warming, loss of coastal wetlands, destruction of natural habitats and deforestation. While organisms are capable of recycling the wastes of other organisms naturally, there is no such mechanism of recycling for technological wastes and therefore they remain harmful to the environment for long periods of time (Fox 98-102).

In conclusion, the aforementioned are only but a few fields that can be influenced by technology. It is indeed not possible to enlist all the effects (both positive and negative) of technology on society. Even though technology is in overall beneficial to world societies, it is relatively clear that technological advancement may be accompanied by negative side effects and drawbacks. In fact, every new technology is accompanied by unwanted or unexpected side effects. Therefore, it is necessary for societies to adapt to technological advancements that have minimal side effects on them, the environment and future generations.

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