

Another look back,
and a look ahead



Imagine the impact technological innovations have had on society? How much did technology influence society a decade ago, and how much does it influence society now? Technology was created from humans to become a more efficient specie. Although technology has advanced society with respect to technology and efficiency, it has also created problems not previously seen because of the use of technology. Edward Tenner, a writer and technology consultant, wrote an article titled “ Another Look Back, and a Look Ahead” published in 1996.

In his article Tenner argues, through the use of the rhetorical appeal ethos, compare and contrast, and cause and effect, that society is advancing at an alarming rate and suggests a “ retreating from intensity” (Tenner 78) in order to allow society to slow its progression and accustom itself to new technology. Tenner uses his credibility as an exceptional writer to appeal to audiences and inform them about the subject in his article. Throughout the article, Tenner uses an extensive vocabulary and shows fluency in his writing.

In the sentence, “ The prognosis for revenge effects is hopeful...by replacing brute force with finesse” (Tenner 60), Tenner shows his expertise by using collegial writing skills and even introduces a term he created, “ revenge effects”. He is well informed about what he is talking about and never leaves the reader guessing what he is trying to say. The fact that he was formerly employed as the science editor at the Princeton University Press makes him an even more credible source.

When Tenner talks about “ the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588” (Tenner 63), it demonstrates to the reader he is educated and increases ethos. By the end of the article, Tenner has effectively made his case for society to slow its technological progression. Aside from using ethos in his article, Tenner uses compare and contrast to show his audience how technology has changed over time. Tenner provides many examples to show how they compare and contrast from now and the past.

He talks about the sinking of the Titanic becoming a signal event, “ one that reveals an ominous and previously underestimated kind of danger” (Tenner 64). At the time the Titanic was the biggest technological innovation to start the twentieth century. Ship engineers have become more aware of the dangers the ocean presents ships. Although in comparison ships might be of the same size and provide the same transportation over waters, its comparison shows they have evolved. “ The higher potential speed of steamships requires more rather than less care.

The larger number of passengers and crew required more careful drills and inspection of equipment” (Tenner 65). The speed of ships has significantly changed over time as well as the technology of ship engines which allow for them to reach significant speeds. Through these advances one could argue it has created an efficiency of allowing people to travel much faster, however Tenner reminds them of the “ revenge effects” these innovations create. Today much more safety regulations are used than in the past, this is due to the new dangers technology creates.

Another example Tenner uses is the comparison and contrast of transportation over time. Humans created the automobile to become more efficient and make travel and transportation much faster throughout the world. “ Nearly every passenger journey or freight shipment began and ended with a horse-drawn vehicle or a horse” (Tenner 67). Due to technological innovations and Henry Ford’s assembly line, motor vehicles were created not only to suit the rich but for all society to enjoy. Through this progression people were not limited to where they could travel and the time it took to get there.

People could take regular jobs that were far from home rather than having to move to accommodate their needs. Roads and freeways soon followed with the increase of automobile use. “ The greatest surprise of motoring was the speed at which traffic clogged the roads, including freeways and other limited-access highways built to relieve congestion” (Tenner 70). Tenner compares the use of transportation over time, demonstrating that although it has made transportation much faster, it has created “ revenge effects” such as traffic and congestion, things that before the technological innovation were never seen.

Examples such as these have led Tenner to advise society to fix problems that new technologies bring not by creating new technologies to solve the problem, but by slowing down and addressing the problem itself, not a quick fix. Comparing and contrasting the impact technology has had on society effectively illustrate Tenner’s main argument, but through the use of cause and effect the audience can relate and understand how Tenner formed his thesis. In the text Tenner provides many cause and effect examples.

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An example Tenner uses is the effects that are created because of industrial carbon dioxide emissions. Industries that create carbon dioxide allow for many benefits such as electricity and transportation, but they are also responsible for warming the earth's temperatures, " global warming". " The increasing cultivation of the earth would bring about higher temperatures and eventually a melting of the polar icecap" (Tenner 76). Another cause/effect example Tenner uses is " strict directives on meat radiation after the Chernobyl meltdown of 1986 destroyed the Lapp reindeer-meat economy" (Tenner 76).

A catastrophic event in Chernobyl created a lasting effect on the economy. Tenner argues that these technologies have many lasting effects, known as " revenge effects". From beginning to end, Tenner's article urges the reader to draw back from such a rapid progression of technology. Tenner argues, through the use of the rhetorical appeal ethos, compare and contrast, and cause and effect, technological innovation instead of creating efficiency create " revenge effects" which create more problems for society.

Tenner suggests that society recoil its progression of technology, not forever, but until accustomed to the use of new technologies. Tenner's argument in the article opens many readers eyes as to the real problems they choose to ignore due to technological innovation. This issue is relevant and provides a subject that all people can identify with. Technologies are all around society and the impact it has is colossal. Whatever your side of the argument for technologies and society may be, the reality Tenner presents reveal a need to retreat from intensive technological progression.