

The effects of digital technologies essay sample

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Digital Technologies have radically changed the way people act, think, learn, play, and socialize, such that traditional views on literacy need to be redefined and reexamined in terms of technology. In a time where, digital, wireless, broadband, and satellite technologies are expanding and accelerating the means of communicating; where coming of age in a world where computers, the Internet, video games, and mobile phones are common; and where expressing ideas through these tools is the norm, it is not hard to fathom that the social dynamics of communication have taken a dramatic change in meaning.

Literacy, more particularly reading and writing, is just two of the many areas where research has provided evidence of the potential impact of new technologies. Literacy is a measure of the ability of an individual to read and write. In modern context, the word means reading and writing at a level adequate for written communication (“Multimedia Literacy”).

The way that people are using the Internet and the sheer numbers of people writing on and with the web is having significant social and cultural impact. Pew Internet & American Life study reported that 44% of U. S. Internet users have contributed their thoughts and their files to the online world through posting written and visual material on web sites, contributing to newsgroups, writing in blogs, conversing in chat spaces (such as instant messaging), and via other digital means (Pew Internet & American Life)

Although many reading and writing technologies have streamlined the reading and writing process in the past, only a few reading and writing technologies have had truly dramatic social impact (DigiRhet). Much like the

way the printing press revolutionized the way people read and write decades ago, the development of the networked computer and the internet provide an individual access to the public in ways traditional media cannot do. The change that these digital technologies bring is not just a revolution of machines but is akin to a socio-cultural revolution and the advent of these new digital technologies inevitably affect and provide challenges in the way people read and write.

One significant challenge that digital technologies pose is how writing with networked computers changes the contexts for writing in a number of ways. Reading from a computer screen is very different from the experience of flipping the pages of a book. It is therefore a challenge for writers to design their writing by creating documents and interactive presentations for an audience who will read and work with that writing at the computer interface. Thus, the use of space, the color scheme, and the interactive elements in a screen becomes a very important consideration to improve an argument or message, an aspect not present in traditional writing and reading.

Computer technologies have also allowed writers to be not just mere writers but become publishers and distributors of their writing and also allow immediate feedback from readers, providing a more interactive relationship for audiences and writers. (DeVoss & Annette Rosati 19, 191-203) This allows a writer and reader to collaborate with each other. One example is the idea of an online peer review community of writers, a process of subjecting an author's scholarly work or ideas to the scrutiny of others who are experts in the field who give feedback.

At the most basic level, digital technologies affect the way writers compose their work. According to the Writing in Digital Environments Research Center Collective (WIDE Research Center), “ Digital writing,” refers to a changed writing environment, which is writing produced on the computer and distributed via the Internet and World Wide Web (“ Introduction: Why Teach Digital Writing?”).

This connectivity allows writers to access and participate more seamlessly and instantaneously within web spaces and to distribute writing to large and widely dispersed audiences (“ How Technology Changes Writing Practices: Why Teach Digital Writing?”). Since the dynamics between writers and readers change when text moves online and armed with a knowledge that the use of digital technology can enhance a reader or audience’s comprehension of a message, writers are more careful about their production choices.

The accesibility of various digital elements, such as charts, graphs, and diagrams in web search change the way writers do research, the way they produce their work and the way we deliver their writing. Certainly, new emerging digital information technologies such as text messaging, blogs, online journals, and wikis are reshaping research paths related to interfaces of writing.

However, these revolutionary steps toward changing the cultural landscape of traditional reading and writing through the the use of digital technologies have also raised issues regarding intellectual property and copyright.

According to the WIDE Research Center, “ Concerns develop when

composing with multiple media that are borrowed, reformed, and recast into compositions... Fair use policies are continually tested when composing with multiple media given the ease of access to media, the ease of manipulating and reforming media, and the ease of redistributing compositions.” (“Changed Context for Writing: Why Teach Digital Writing?”)

Not only does digital media, by its inherent interactive nature increase the pace of information dissemination, it also makes enforcing rights created under copyright rights under existing laws harder to enforce, necessitating a change in the way we define and look at reading and writing vis-à-vis the ownership of intellectual property. According to openware advocate Dr. Michael Rappa, “[t]he binary reality of digital media poses vexing problems for how works are used (and reused), and the rights and responsibilities of producers and consumers under existing law. One of the virtues of the Web is its reach: the ability to widely distribute digital works faster and less expensively than ever before.” (Rappa)

This ability to compose documents with multiple media, to publish this writing quickly, to distribute it to mass audiences, and to allow audiences to interact with their writing challenges many of the traditional principles and practices of composition, which are implicitly based on the print view of writing.

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