

Digital Impact

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Abstract

The computer is one of the most pervasive human technologies ever. Computers impact every aspect of our lives. This paper takes a critical look at a few ways in which computers and the Internet infrastructure that brings computing technology together has impacted society.

Introduction

Computers and the Internet impact the lives of almost everyone in the world either actively or passively. Thousands of years ago ships enabled people and things to travel at greater distances. The access to these ships, however, was limited to the merchant class, the wealthy, and military. Even though the proletariat may not have had direct access to these vessels they were impacted by them. For some it meant a loss of a job as the items they made were produced elsewhere at better quality and cost, for others it meant items once limited to the gentry were now available to them. Neither of these two groups needed to step on a ship to see the impacts. Computers have much of the same impact.

To illustrate both the passive and active impacts of Computer and the Internet I will use a fictional case study of a person named Albert. In this example Albert was first impacted passively by computer technology by the loss of his job, he also does not have the skills in the digital age to get a new job in his area of expertise. In essence Albert finds himself a victim of the digital divide.

Fortunately through a community program at his local library Albert is able to learn how to use a computer and subscribes to an Internet based course to learn how to do his job with computers.

A Serious Passive Impact: Job Loss

Like sea travel, computers have provided economically favorable ways of obtaining resources. One of the natural outcomes is that those who produce these resources lose their occupations. Structural unemployment is generated by computers as those who have access to them can do their work much more efficiently than those without them.

Albert designs hinges and other small parts for the shipping industry. He feels he is very efficient at what he does and delivers quality designs to his company's clients. One day he is notified that he no longer is needed. The company has hired a recent college graduate who will be replacing Albert and a couple of his coworkers. This new college student brings with her computer skills that allow her to produce the work of both Albert and his coworker in much less time.

Until this point Albert dismissed computers as a tool used by mathematicians and accountants. They were generally devices only found in large corporations and companies such as his previous employer could not afford such technology. Now he and many people like him find themselves replaced by those who are highly skilled in computer technology.

Information Access: Libraries

One area that has been impacted by computers directly is libraries. In a 1998 survey by the American Library Association all public libraries that responded to the survey have computers. 83.6% were connected to the Internet.[1] These numbers most likely have risen in recent years. Many libraries now have their catalog of books and reference materials on computers and often on the Internet. These improvements save librarians time and effort in the maintenance of large card catalogs and increase the effectiveness of patrons' search for information.[2]

Many years before when Albert searched for new jobs or skills he did so at his local library. He quickly discovered that many of the familiar resources at his local library had been computerized. This included a terminal set up by the county's department of commerce for career information. Having no computer experience at all Albert was afraid to use the terminal as he might make some

sort of mistake. Again he was a victim of the digital divide. Those who have access and knowledge of computers had a better chance of finding a job than he did.

Albert then discovered a sign-up sheet for computer fundamentals classes. He signed up and went to the classes for a few weeks and quickly became comfortable with the technology.

Benefits of Something New

When the people in a society learn to use new tools they are able to become much more productive. Computers may only be in the hands of a small percentage of the population. Ships eventually allowed many people to travel and make new discoveries. Through training and proliferation of computer technology people will be able to obtain and process information at a much faster rate.

Albert found the computer enjoyable and fairly easy to use once he conquered his original fears. It became a tool for him to discover information about his own area of interest. During his search for information on the Internet he found a web based training class that taught the skills of his previous job through computer programs that had replaced him. Once he completes this web based training he can then look for a job in the field he enjoys with fresh skills and do so much more efficiently than before.

Conclusion

Computers and the Internet have had huge impacts on society. Through these few examples the impact it has been shown that effects can be both favorable and unfavorable. Like most technologies of the past, however, computers will eventually benefit everyone. Those who do not interact with them directly will still reap the benefits of the efficiency they provide. Some may temporarily find themselves unemployed, but benefit by the ease of finding new job on computer job search engines and training facilities. Computers and the Internet are here to stay and they will shape the future of everyone in an increasingly positive manor.

References

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