Long Report #1

Modern Technology: Convenience of Burden?

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The people of this country and other parts of the world reflect what it means to live and operate in a modern society. A modern society can be generally defined as one utilizing recent techniques, technologies, methods, or ideas (Merriam). It is with this definition that the significance of technology in our lives is acknowledged. The way in which we function and operate on a daily basis is greatly affected by the technologies available to us. In a sense, we inspire technological changes in our lives, while being influenced by the technology currently at our disposal. The human race has a reputation of focusing on ways to accomplish tasks in shorter amounts of time. Time is a commodity to us; a thing of value to most in a modern society. We will gladly welcome technologies that serve to maximize our usage of time for both work and leisure. It can be said that the widespread use and embracing of such technologies has hastened the pace of life. Now, the work day does not have to end when one leaves the office; business can be conducted nearly anywhere at any time. The sacred Sabbath is now a day to acquire extra cash or overtime for some people. The point is that certain technologies praised as modern conveniences, carry burdens which coexist alongside them. Technology can be a double-edged sword where the society ultimately decides if the positives outweigh the presence of the drawbacks; thus determining the success of it. The following material will highlight two modern technologies that are currently in use today, were implemented to improve communication, and promote the fast-paced; time–maximizing lifestyle. The

benefits and burdens of each technology will be explored along with its effects on society.

How many times have you been driving around and noticed an erratic driver? These days it is likely that someone driving careless could be immersed in a conversation; not with a passenger, but someone far away. These long-distance discussions are all possible because of technological devices known as cell phones. Modern cell phones are communication devices that convert sound into transmitted electromagnetic waves. These waves are in turn directed to various towers which relay the signals to their appropriate receiver. Cell phones have become an integral part of modern society; mostly in the last decade.

The premise behind cell phones has been present for a long time. More than a century ago people were contemplating the idea and benefits of vocal communication beyond what that era offered. It was not until 1947 when the FCC allocated a small range of frequencies for cellular research, did cell phone beginnings take root (Mobile Communicator). Efforts by many since then have taken cell phone technology to where it is today. Dr. Martin Cooper is considered the inventor of the first cell phone, and the Cellular Technology Industry Association (CTIA) is credited with laying the foundation of practical goal for cell phone providers (Cellphonecarriers.com).

Considering the period before we possessed this technology, cell phones seem wonderful and amazing. The number of advantages and conveniences that came with cell phones keeps some people wondering how they ever managed without them.

The most obvious advantage that cell phones brought to communication was the distance factor. It was most certainly exciting when receiving Morse code signals in the 1850s, and hearing another person's voice from afar on a telephone in the early 1900's. Cell phones, however, took distance far beyond anything previously observed. Conversation can now be initiated and conducted in real time from around the world with a click of a button. One can talk to a friend who is in another country, or have a chat with somebody down the street. The cellular signals travel at the speed of light from one phone to another making for seamless contact with another individual. This primary feature of cell phones has, in a sense, brought the world closer together.

There are also many other notable strengths to cell phone technology. Forget about phone booths and land lines, because cell phones are portable. As well as having an incredible range, cell phones of today are small, lightweight, and easily transported. They can be taken in the car, hidden in a pocket, and even slid into a wallet. Their dimensions continue to get smaller as their shapes and designs seem limitless. The versatility of cell phones goes beyond just their size. The multimedia capabilities being offered with these "pocket pcs" are amazing. Cell phones can be purchased with such integrated features as a camera, mp3 music player, full keyboard, and customizable rings.

The phone numbers of your family and one hundred of your friends can be stored and accessed with a few clicks.

With all of the capabilities, versatility, and customization possibilities, it is plain to see why so many rely on cell phones to function daily. However, if one is to regard a certain technology as a necessity, they must also accept the responsibilities, burdens, and negative aspects inherent to it. The first significant drawback that comes to mind is one that all cell phone users will encounter; the price. On top of the initial cost of the phones themselves, people must enter contracts that define the cost of everything from local calls, long distances calls, and even text messages. These contracts favor the cell phone service provider in two ways. First, customers are required to enter a contract lasting, in most cases, from one to two years. This gives the provider guaranteed revenue and if the customer should wish to end the contract prematurely, an early termination fee is charged. Second, if the customer should exceed the monthly usage limits stated in the contract, the rates there after are significantly higher. Essentially, without strict discipline, many can find themselves liable for a surprisingly large bill.

As well as the costs involved, an owner of a cell phone must accept that anyone who possesses their number can contact them in a number of ways. This can mean a text message, page, voice mail message, or repeated calls. In many instances, this can generate annoyance, leading the user to shut the phone off. However, simply turning the phone off does not stop the invisible bombardments. Turning the phone back on, at a more convenient time, reveals stockpiles of missed calls, messages, and other

communication contraband. This unhindered connectivity allows new responsibilities, tasks, and obligations to be assigned at anytime.

Last on the list of cell phone drawbacks are those hideous towers. To facilitate the vast cell phone networks and expansive user base, an increasing number of signal towers must be constructed. These towers are far from subtle, and anyone with an appreciation for aesthetics cringes at their awkward appearance and conspicuous placement. A golf course, dense forest, and back lot of a bowling alley are all considered viable areas for one of these towers (personal references). But, just as the societies of the past tolerated the sight of telephone lines, power wires, and sky scrapers, our modern society will recognize it as a sign of the times.

There is no doubt that computers are a crucial aspect of our society. However, it is the existence of many compliment technologies that have made our dependence on computers even stronger. Following the rapid advances of computers, there emerged an amazing technology that would forever change the nature of communication. This technology is, of course, the internet. The word "internet" is known the world around and is generally defined as an interconnected system of networks that connects computers around the world via the TCP/IP protocol (Yahoo). Put simply, it is a method by which multiple computers can transmit data back and forth. The advent of the practical internet concept dates back to the 1960's when the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) began work on ARPANET, the world's first operation packet-switching network

(Hobbes'). Since that time, what had started out as a handful of networks, became the global, expansive internet of today.

Being that the internet is such a broad topic, the following discussion will focus on two more specific components. The first of these is electronic mail (E-mail). E-mail is digital data, usually text or images, sent in letter format to someone's e-mail account. This ties in to the first advantage of this communication method. Because the letters are entirely digital, they have no physical embodiment and are transferred almost instantaneous. This means that they do not take up physical space, require no postage, and they can be retained without degradation for years. Also, as with cell phones, e-mail can be used to contact people from nearly anywhere around the world in no time flat. E-mail is versatile in the sense that most digital data can be attached and sent along with a text message. This digital data can include pictures, movies, songs, nearly any file on one's computer. The presence of this high-speed, global, multimedia capable communication platform has caused traditional text based mail to become obsolete.

However, do not think for a second that e-mail is without its share of flaws. Even though e-mail may seem light years ahead of traditional mail, there are burdensome commonalities that they share. "Spam," as it has become known, is unwanted e-mail sent to a user's e-mail account; similar to junk mail in the traditional sense. This "spam" mail can become annoying, especially since it can be repeatedly sent from anywhere in the world almost instantly. In a matter of days, a person's valuable, important mail can become lost in a flood of useless messages boasting advertisements, false claims, and

solicitations. This could be compared to having a house payment bill sitting on the counter, buried under a stack of credit card applications.

Most people can recognize spam messages and there are e-mail filters which automatically delete them. However, some e-mails are more dangerous than spam and are designed to look legitimate; important. These misleading messages have received the term, "spoofs." Spoofs are e-mail messages resembling one sent from a company, bank, or any other institution of credibility. Typically these mailings request such things as: account numbers, personal information, anything that can be used maliciously to scam people out of money. This requires thorough examination of all e-mails and picking out the fakes; a cumbersome process at times.

The next communication-based facet of the internet experience is the online marketplace. The online marketplace can best be described as the collection of internet sites dealing in the purchasing and selling of various goods. These sites can be, part of a global company, an independent retailer, or a collection of private individuals. Any exchange of goods using the internet as the communication medium fall within this classification. The largest and most recognized online marketplace site is Ebay. Ebay is a website listing millions of goods being sold by both retailers and private individuals.

There are many notable advantages to using this technology. First and foremost is price and convenience. If one was to search for the best price in their area on a certain good, they would have to drive around to a number of stores comparing. This is time

consuming and a real headache during busy shopping seasons. However, by using the internet, people can search for the best prices from the vast inventories which constitute the online marketplace. Not only can a comparatively cheap price be found, but the time required locating the product and purchasing it are noticeably less than driving to your favorite store. It is like having the inventory of millions of stores at your fingertips from the secure comfort of the home. Second, depending on where you decide to shop can determine the level of communication you must engage in. Some sites are automated so that items can be purchased for a set price with no direct discussion with the seller. Others involve e-mail based negations to determine what price the seller is willing to sell his/her good for. The online marketplace is such a dynamic and exciting phenomenon that it is clear as to why many will go there first when looking for that special something.

The problems with engaging in the online marketplace can range from annoying to being quite serious. To receive a good, one must pay for it. To take advantage of the speed and convenience of buying on the internet requires the use of electronic funds. These funds can come from the use of credit cards, checking accounts, and other such instant transfer methods. When this personal account information is being processed, it can be acquired by hackers or left vulnerable by other website mishaps. This can, at times, put your valuable information at risk. Also, since the location that you ordered the product from might be on the other side of the country, you still have to wait for shipping. Finally, if the item gets to you and is wrong, or defective, it must be shipped back. At least when shopping locally, a problem can be addressed on an eye-to-eye basis that same day.

Reflecting on the various technologies of today, their advantages seem to get most of the focus; that is what secures their place in society. We must never become so immersed in technology that we become blind to the disadvantages. It is difficult to say whether we affect technology or technology affects us. Presumably, it is a point somewhere in the middle. Many technologies are released that strive to coincide with our wishes to maximize time and bring us all closer together. Realistically, they may be holding us back; just redistributing our responsibilities and burdens. I think it is important to find a level of connection with the world that is comfortable and unique to one's own preferences.

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