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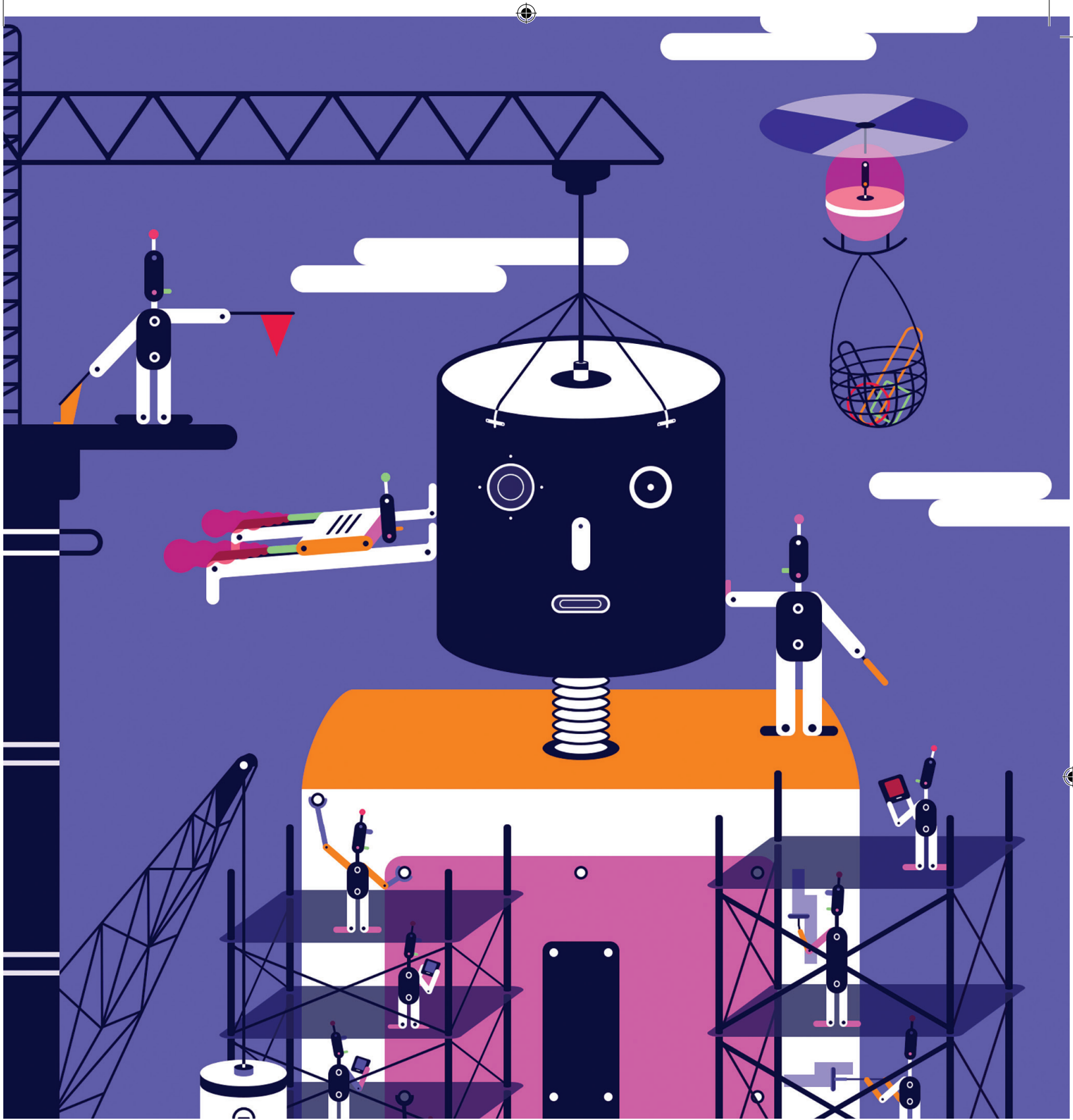


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The New York Times

Digital Disruption
**Asia-Pacific Writing
Competition 2018**



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Secondary Schools

Winner

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United World College of South East Asia, Singapore

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Winner

How Information Technology Poses a Threat to Democracy

Hong Kong International School, Hong Kong

Natalia T. Chu

It wasn't long ago that social media was being hailed as a force crucial to the cause of global democracy. After the central roles that Twitter and Facebook played in Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring in the early 2010s, social media seemed poised to drive the next waves of activism and democratization. And though we're a far cry from those days now, for a time, it really felt like a tweet could change the world for the better.

Today, social media is as much a platform for authoritarianism as it is for democracy. After many activist uprisings failed to establish effective, lasting leadership, the targets of their criticism began to use social media to reconsolidate power. Whether it's the Chinese government censoring its citizens or an American media personality promoting conspiracy theories online, social media has quickly become one of democracy's most pressing threats.

By now, we are all well acquainted with the accusations that Russia used social media to covertly influence electoral outcomes in the United States. Facebook has estimated that Russian content on its network reached 126 million Americans, around 40 percent of the nation's population, before the election of Donald Trump in 2016. If one of the most technologically advanced countries cannot protect its electoral process, what's to come of countries with fewer resources and less oversight?

In the absence of facts and data, the mere possibility of manipulation undermines faith in democracy at a time when public trust is already low. Social media's ideological "echo chambers" exacerbate people's natural biases and diminish opportunities for healthy debate. This has real-world effects, fostering political polarization and eroding leaders' capacity to forge compromises. Likewise, online hate speech, terroristic appeals, and racial and sexual harassment can lead to real-world violence.

At the same time, social media is hardly the first communication revolution to challenge political systems. The printing press, radio, and television were all revolutionary in their day. And they were all gradually regulated, even in the most liberal democracies. We must now consider how to submit social media to the same rules of transparency, accountability, and taxation as conventional media. Recently, a group of US senators introduced the “Honest Ads Act,” which would extend the rules that apply to print, radio, and television to social media. As useful as these measures may be, national laws may not be adequate to regulate online political activity without infringing on freedom of expression. Though these measures seem like steps in the right direction, we must remain vigilant of their potential to overstep their bounds.

Technology does not stand still, and nor should democracy. Who should own and have access to the data harvested from our phones and smart devices? What speech is acceptable on social media? How much should the internet be regulated? Answering these thorny questions will likely depend on bridging the divisions that social media has introduced into our contemporary moment. Only then will we be able to make social media a force for democracy again.

Runner-Up

Digitalization Is Not Disruption – It’s Evolution

United World College of South East Asia, Singapore

Aashna Singh

It is not flying cars, not teleportation, not time travel that have characterized our society’s place in human history – when we think technology, we think digital. Through the upward trajectory of human evolution, modernity has become synonymous with the digital culture that is increasingly saturating our society today. In doing so, it has become, in many ways, a definition of the modern human race.

It’s not hard to experience this change. In 2016, around 45% of the world’s population was connected to the internet, and over 60% already owned a mobile phone. This past January, a Silicon Valley entrepreneur opened a technology-driven school in Melbourne, claiming it would reform traditional education systems that worked like “homogenous factories”; it is not the first of its kind, nor will it be the last. Pop culture itself, so integral to cultural identity, is intrinsically tied to social media and digital connectivity. The world, quantitatively and qualitatively, has transformed from what it was just a generation ago.

Many opponents of digital developments criticize them as corrosive towards wholesome community values – an argument which is dichotomous in its very nature. All it takes is a closer look to see that by disrupting our traditional ways of living, modern technology has acted as a facilitator of evolution, not destroying but proliferating society’s ability to act on its values. Since the birth of civilization, human beings have been social creatures, building webs of complex communities to appease pattern-loving brains, and with every new age, the nature of these communities has evolved in some way. The emergence of digital technology is merely another shift on the continuum of human development. Today’s communities are still based on shared values, but our neighborhoods have gone from spanning over a couple of blocks to a couple of countries, and our friends could be right next to us or a thousand miles away. Digital technology, rather than robbing us of our community values, has allowed them to develop and evolve onto the world’s stage.

Therein lies the antithesis to the argument that digitalization will be the end of humanity. How can it, when it is driven by the same human desire to improve that has brought us from caves and sticks to where we are now? It is in human nature to progress, to evolve, and to then adapt – it was precisely the inability to do so that cost our hominid relatives their survival into the modern age. Digitalization is little less than evidence of humankind evolving. The ultimate goal remains the same – to live as fully as possible – but the efficiency, the productivity, the feasibility with which we can approach this goal has transformed, has evolved. Now the matter remains of whether we as individuals can adapt to these new ways of living. The key to doing so is trusting in the process – our environment is changing, and we have to change with it.

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Fact-checking claims.
Listening to unheard voices.
Triple-vetting sources.
Braving intimidation.
Reporting from multiple angles.
Ensuring the numbers add up.
Asking the right questions.
Going an extra 1,000 miles.
Following the full story.
Understanding the world.

The truth is worth it.

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Tertiary

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Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines

Shireen Gopaldas

Winner

Ignore the Fluff, Technology Hasn't Failed Us and Here's Why

Singapore Management University, Singapore

Victoria Ivory Birrell

How has technology improved our lives and values? Political Scientist Lance Bennett argues that “Connective action helps large national and transnational publics discuss important issues, discover their voices and take action”. This perfectly encapsulates how technology is a potent force for driving social change. Technology emboldens societal values by creating improved ways of living.

To solely view technology as a Pandora's box would be utterly delusional.

Technology ignited my passion for learning. When I was 13, two classmates and I co-founded a technology conference named “TechLIFE” for students across Asia featuring student-led workshops and a 30-minute Skype call with Apple Co-Founder, Steve Wozniak. The energy in the room was electric as Wozniak answered questions posed by attendees. Without digital tools, our student-led conference would not have existed. Without technology's new means of learning, I would have been deprived of this invaluable opportunity to receive knowledge from Wozniak. Technology enabled me to provide an unconventional education for others in a deeply engaging manner.

Beyond my personal experience, this year, eight elderly Singaporean residents of St John's Home raised SGD200,000 through a self-made video that was posted on a crowdfunding site for its redevelopment. Technology helped senior residents to increase their donation rate fivefold. This proves how technology enabled senior citizens equipped with grit and creativity.

Beyond Singapore, technology has united people based on shared values to improve the lives of others. Social media was crucial to helping teenagers mobilize a powerful fervor of support for their “March for Our Lives” movement fighting for stricter gun laws. Additionally, the #MeToo movement's hashtag (used 19 million times as of October 2018) gave a voice to sexual assault victims worldwide, exposing their seemingly indestructible perpetrators. Viral digital movements resonate with us and activate our primordial yearning to help our fellow man. Hence, our digital ecosystem provides a platform for anybody to garner support towards meaningful issues.

While technology's positive impact has been felt, the rise of malicious disinformation remains an enormous issue. The key to conquering disinformation is increased digital competence. In Sweden, all first-grade children are taught coding and how to identify fake news. Additionally, programmers are developing algorithms to create digital fact-checkers that verify information.

Paradoxically, greater education about technology is the solution to technology's pitfalls. Thus, government support towards cultivating a technologically sophisticated populace and consistent investment in computer programs aiming to eliminate unsubstantiated information is crucial to the preservation of truth.

In an ever-changing technological landscape, there will always be disruptions. Nonetheless, we must not disregard social media's accessibility. It empowers people to speak up for the silenced and hold those in power accountable. Our willingness to actively reap technology's benefits demonstrated by calls to positive action and eliminate its adverse effects like misinformation will define our resilience as a human race.

Whether it be turning a home-grown tech conference into a reality, raising funds for a dilapidated home or an attempt to drastically shift attitudes towards sexual assault victims, technology's capabilities are clear: it makes the once imagined, possible.

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Runner-Up

Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Bot?

Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines

Shireen Gopaldas

In the movies, the robots always take over.

Almost instantly, the moment you see any form of A.I., you know that things are going to end badly for the humans. Now, I'm not saying that these movies hold any predictive power, but they certainly tell us something about the way we see technological advancements.

Ever since history can remember, people have feared technology. Socrates once preached about the horrors of writing (as opposed to preserving oral tradition), saying that it would "create forgetfulness" as people wouldn't be using their memories anymore (Bell). In the show "Mad Men", set from the '60s to the '70s, a recurring character goes, well, mad, because he is terrified that a giant computer that was recently moved into their office would soon take over (Stahler). This may be an exaggerated example, but it speaks volumes.

We are now several years into the future. Can you imagine having to find somebody in a crowd without having your phone, or having to get to someone's house without your GPS? Can you imagine going through page after page of an encyclopedia instead of simply typing something into the Google search bar? It's a little hard to, if not a little horrifying. Yet funnily enough, time and time again, when faced with new technology, we react with fear, as if forgetting that the things we are currently using were once new, too.

Technology has served us well over the years. Just recently, Google launched its in-ear, real-time translators called Pixel Buds, drastically improving how people from all over the globe communicate with one another (Rosenbloom). Lives have been saved with the invention of the AngioVac, a vacuum that efficiently removes blood clots from the damaged veins of heart attack victims (Orlando Health).

However, it would be naïve to argue that technology does not pose any negative threats. Off the top of my head I am able to name several—identity theft, catfishing, cyberbullying, phishing, and hacking—some of which I have either been exposed to or experienced personally. And yet all things considered, I would much rather encounter both the risks and benefits of technology than have everyone living stagnant in mud huts without electricity.

Yes, technology creates change, but that is to be expected with innovation. Nobody wants to stay stuck in the same place for too long, where nothing gets better. We all seek a better way of life. We all seek improvement, and that is why we create.

There will always be fear that comes with change, and not all that fear is unfounded—Socrates does have a point, we do tend to have serious cases of historical myopia (Chappatte). However, I'd like to think that those fears can be assuaged over time, and that the negative effects that may come with the creation of new technology can be mitigated by basic human decency, self-awareness, and compassion.

After all, as the creators, we still hold the reins, and we still push the button. For now, anyway.

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Shortlist of Entrants:

Secondary Schools

G3NER4TION Y: The New Language

Bina Tunas Bangsa School, Indonesia

Bianca Razenda

“I spilled coffee all over my laptop, big RIP. I’m so salty now, BRB getting a new one.”

Were you able to comprehend such language without shaking your head in confusion? Chances are, you don’t – unless you are a millennial of this generation. English has always evolved – that’s what it means to be a living language – and now the internet plays a pivotal role in driving this evolution. We have reached a peak where speaking in “LOL” or “OMG” is no longer outside the norm, in fact, we have expanded from abbreviations to different internet expressions and phrases that we use in our daily lives. Although one would argue that we may have reached a new low.

The question of how slang spreads has occupied linguists and anthropologists for decades. When it comes to the mechanics of new word distribution, it’s been tough to measure with any precision – that is, until the advent of public social media networks. It is without a doubt that we spend most of our time on our phones scrolling and typing away from reality. Internet and social media have become a necessity for most people on a daily basis, be it a source of entertainment or to promote a business. According to We Are Social and Hootsuite’s “Digital In 2018 Growth Overview” report, the amount of time that people spend on the internet has surged over the past year. The average internet user now spends around six hours each day. Consequently, it is evident how greatly influenced we are, not excluding our use of language.

With the gradual increase of internet usage and its impacts on this generation, it is without a doubt that a large barrier has materialized like cracks in a frozen lake, further separating humanity into their respective age groups. There are many factors affecting this generation gap, the most obvious being miscommunication. A popular phrase being used currently is “let’s get this bread”, a slang expression for earning money. Online, people use the expression ironically to mock the sincere desire to earn lots of money and work hard, but to the older generation, they might misinterpret it as purchasing a loaf of literal bread. It was hard enough to connect with our elders back then, and now it’s even harder especially with the emergence of this sublanguage.

Icons of smiley faces, cats and hearts are a more 21st-century form of expression. More than 90% of social networking users communicate through these symbols and more than 6 billion emojis are exchanged every day. The birth of new forms of expression and new acronyms can completely alter the meaning of a message. It can help convey tone or explain situations and help represent your feelings and thoughts better, but understanding this ‘new’ language takes time and experience. Some phrases may fall out and others take its place. The older generation, the baby boomers, who already cannot keep up with the advancement in technology, can only hope to understand a sliver of slang. It’s survival of the fittest, and the youth are winning.

Digital Technology, a Blessing or a Curse?

Cheongna Dalton School, South Korea

Ethan Hong

As a citizen of a technology-dependent country, I, as well as my fellow countrymen, have reaped some of the benefits of living in a technosociety. One substantial benefit is economic growth. It's obvious that digital technology can create new ways of living. However, we mustn't let this overshadow the fact that it's also deleterious since it takes away economic opportunities and makes a nation's military more vulnerable if it's technology dependent.

Many would say that digital technology has led to economic growth. Digital technology creates new jobs and allows for newer, tech-based industries to thrive. Although it may allow for economic growth, it doesn't change the hard fact that not everyone benefits from it. For example, the rise of e-commerce has had adverse effects on traditional retailers. The truth is brick-and-mortar stores are struggling, with many being unprofitable and going out of business. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, as well as the Institute of International Finance, traditional retailers lost upwards of 32,000 jobs. In addition, bankruptcies were up from 2016 to 2017, in large part due to the reduction in retail sales. One need only look at stores such as Toys "R" Us, Sears, and Macy's, once behemoths in retail, to see how vulnerable traditional stores are.

These days, digital technology is seeing heavy use in militaries such as the US military. What many don't know is that this leaves it vulnerable. Lieutenant Colonel Keven Coyle states in his report, "U.S. Military Technology Dependence: The Hidden Vulnerability to National Security", that "...the US military has become technology dependent. This dependence has made the military more vulnerable..." The military is perhaps the most important aspect of national security. A nation's national security protects the interests of the nation and its people, thus protecting people's way of life. If

the military's cyber capabilities were to be sabotaged in any way, it would be unable to perform adequately. This is supported by Captain Keith Nordquist, author of "The New Matrix of War: Digital Dependence in Contested Environments". In his journal, he points out that the effects of disrupting the military's cyber domain can result in strategic shock, which hinders the military's organization and directing capabilities. Furthermore, he states that digital-dependent weapons systems are susceptible to cyber intrusion which can "...[cause] the [Department of Defense] to lose potency when projecting power and lethality." Because of how digitally dependent the US military has become, it has become more vulnerable, leaving opportunities for cyber threats to easily prevent it from executing its job of protecting the nation and its citizens.

Digital technology may create new ways of living, but it leaves a lot to be desired. It takes away economic opportunities and makes a nation's military more vulnerable if it's technology dependent. Industries collapsing is inevitable, but the military should be a lot more secure. One is not suggesting we get rid of technology, but rather to have a more cautious approach in our wholesale adoption of it.

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Technology in Academia: Catalyst for Good?

Concordian International School, Thailand

Finn Muller

Like any advancements in human history, technology has disrupted the traditional sense of how we live but in turn, has improved and created different academic approaches for future generations in a fast-developing world.

We as 21st-century students learn to become part of a world where soft skills like emotional intelligence and out-of-the-box vision is increasingly sought after by employers, but rarely taught in school. Generally schools are conventional – textbooks, lectures, and class material taught for the purpose of routine examination.

Concocting a magical blend of sleepless nights and tons of homework, the traditional schooling system that cranks up the pressure to do well in standardized tests can be harmful to students. Test anxiety and a mind-set that if you fail an important test (or heaven forbid two), screwing up your life is just a side effect. The stigma of failure in academia has gone so far that teens believe the outcome of their entire future rests on the test scores society deems determine success in life.

This restrictive environment leaves little room for innovative creativity and lacks the interactive elements that teach students how to improve interpersonal skills, which Susan Wu, a founder of a school in Australia believes to be imperative for the modern world. As an influential woman in technology, her experience in business has allowed her to integrate the cognition of successful tech businesses into her classrooms for students to enjoy the freedom of exploring a tech-savvy world. Similar to the case of Javier Aguera, who joined the new trend of teen entrepreneurship born and fueled in the midst of technology with several of his own tech start-ups—teaching himself web programming and co-founding the Blackphone before the age of 25.

Technology is improving creative mind-sets in school by becoming personalized – now referred to as ‘adaptive learning software’ – where the different learning styles of each child is analyzed and enables students to engage in their interests, giving them a ‘voice’ in their education. Technology is embraced as experimental and interactive by critically assessing fundamentals to enhance personal learning experiences with the use of software. For instance, Quizlet encourages students to take charge of their own learning growth by recognizing what they already know, and learn at their own pace.

Students gain independence through software instead of the teacher regurgitating the information to them, a common occurrence in traditional schools. The byproduct of this phenomenon causes students to rarely inquire beyond the answer, becoming discouraged when faced with complex problems. However, through technology students can acquire knowledge beyond basic understanding and engage in self-directed learning that will prevent them from merely watching as the world advances without looking back at the ones left behind in the dust.

Although criticism of how technology is changing education and how reliant our classrooms are on software is understandable, when we look at how technology has improved education to prepare students to thrive in a 21st-century world, it is indisputable that technology has the ability to revolutionize every aspect of our lives, and to forge a fascinating future ahead—especially for 21st-century students on the fast track to change the world.

Why Is a Phone Bad for Teenagers?

Daegu International School, South Korea

June Kong

Most of us are greatly dependent on electronic devices. In fact, those born in the 21st century are most likely exposed to electronic devices from birth. It is not uncommon to see a child who can barely walk play with an iPad or cell phone. There is little doubt that electronic devices have made our lives so much more convenient. We can make reservations for all kinds of things, shop, keep in touch with friends, banking and almost anything we can think of. However, while electronic devices are beneficial, I believe that depends mostly on the age group. For some age groups, specifically teenagers, the distractions caused by electronic devices often outweigh the benefits offered by them.

If you ask a teenager what their most prized possession is, most will say either their phone or laptop. Most of my friends stay in constant touch with each other through Facebook, KakaoTalk, Instagram or other forms of social networking service (SNS). We meet in online games and group chats. It's not all about entertainment; we do internet research for school or stay in touch with school activities as well. This all sounds great but there is a serious side effect. Addiction to SNS and online games can take away valuable time from young people who need to concentrate in school. There are reasons for serious concern because according to a 2016 survey from Common Sense Media, half of the students surveyed felt they were addicted to their devices and a quarter of them stated that they were online "almost constantly." (Homayoun) This shows that kids feel social pressure to respond to text messages and stay in touch with other kids constantly because they feel afraid of being left out. In addition, there are other problems such as cyber bullying, decreased physical activities and difficulty in dealing with real-world problems. This is partially why younger people are more at risk of addiction to electronic devices compared to older generations.

There is also another very interesting problem with electronic technology, especially social media. People use slang and textspeak like BTW (by the way) IDK (I don't know) and many more. This is not only done in English but in other languages as well like Korean. Terry Wood, a foreign language teacher, "has seen dramatic decline in the writing abilities of her students due to Tweeting, Facebook, and texting" (Lytle). Students don't use punctuation and don't capitalize correctly when using social media and this is shown in their school work. A survey done by the Pew Internet & American Life Project of 700 students between the age of 12 to 17 shows that 85% reported that they use a form of electronic communication (Lytle). It may be that students are so used to using electronic communication

that they don't realize that they are using similar language in school. It is also true that many of the older generation have difficulty decoding shortened words and slang used by younger people. This creates a communication barrier between parents and their teen children.

In addition, watching YouTube is another major activity that consumes hours of students' lives. Although watching YouTube can be helpful, there are many inappropriate materials for kids. Some people argue that kids today grow up too fast and it is hard not to agree with them. "Martin Vassilev makes a good living selling fake views on YouTube videos" (Keller). It is very easy to upload and download information using YouTube and other forms of social media. So anyone can upload almost anything. Because young kids have more of a difficult time distinguishing false information from truth, this can hurt young kids. YouTube and other social media are also very profitable. "5 million views so far this year, putting him on track to bring in more than \$200,000, records show" (Keller). There is a lot of money to be made in social media, and in order to attract more views, people are willing to share shocking and provocative materials even if they are not all true or appropriate. This is not to say that all videos are bad. There are many positive and helpful videos but since anybody can easily upload information or videos on YouTube, viewers need to be selective and careful.

Without a doubt, smart electronic devices have made our lives so easy. It is a great device that can bring people together. We can stay in touch with old friends and family who live far away. We can research diverse topics and learn almost anything on the internet. I can't imagine my life without smart electronic devices. To many people, smart devices are necessary for work and study. However, it is also true that smart devices can be a serious problem if used inappropriately. I believe this problem often depends on the age of users. Young people like teenagers have less control over their behavior and so they are more likely to become addicted to smart electronic devices.

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The Dark Side of Digital Technology

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Elizabeth Ryu

Through the advancement of technology, we have made a huge breakthrough in our lives. For instance, the use of A.I. has increased, and we have created doctor super bots such as “IBM Watson”. Nevertheless, it has been evident that we are playing with fire. The influence of social media and the internet is growing out of hand.

First, digital technology stops us from viewing life as it is. To clarify, we are too focused on posting good pictures on the internet, and are losing opportunities for great experiences. For instance, when people look at the “Mona Lisa”, the camera lenses are the “eyes” that observe the painting. Eyes that are too busy taking pictures to fully appreciate the “Mona Lisa”. Moreover, other paintings are left forgotten in favor of everyone seeing and taking pictures of the “Mona Lisa”. As John Berger reports, that religion “has become the substitute for what paintings lost when the camera made them reproducible”(Reyburn 1). In other words, now due to digital technology paintings or any other artwork are only attractive when they are famous, or expensive enough to post on our social media accounts.

Second, this new digital technology is too addictive. People are all over their online technologies such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and more. Cal Newport, an associate professor of computer science at Georgetown University, explains that “We’re past the stage where they’re novel, but not to the point where they’re stable” (Cochrane 1). Through him (and his blog), many people tried to limit their online pleasantries. At first the participants were enthusiastic about their attempt; however, many have also replied that cutting out the internet also makes them lonely and unsettled. Previously, they had been receiving a lot of information from social media or the internet. Once that was cut off, it was enough to make a person think as if one was isolated from society. This appeal of feeling involved is quite contagious, one of the reasons why it is so addictive.

Thirdly, digital media is also harmful for the producers. Now, social media has become a job. The more followers you have the more money you earn. This indicates that those “superstars” of social media have to come up with novel and innovative ways every day to attract followers. Therefore, some of the content they are posting on the internet has become desperate and questionable. Case in point, in Los Angeles there is an apartment complex named 1600 Vine which houses numerous influencers of social media. Nevertheless, some had to be kicked out, like Logan Paul, when their actions became extreme (Wakabayashi 1). This is not the only problem. Greg Martin, a young actor with 44,000 Instagram followers, explained that he feels as if other successful influencers are looking down on him and his number of followers (Wakabayashi 1). Mr. Martin explains that in 1600 Vine, “people kind of look at you and just see numbers”(Wakabayashi 1). This shows digital technology turns human values to numbers.

In short, digital technologies came with consequences – transforming valuable artworks into photo booths and addiction.

Life Taken Away by a Thief Named 'Technology'

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Lydia Ryu

People always have to open a black window to connect with the world nowadays. No matter what device they use, a black screen is always waiting for them to push a power button for colorful adventure. While their eyes are being fascinated by the colors that the screen provides, the window in their real life slowly closes. They don't get to feel the fresh breeze, hear people talking, smell the sweet scent from flowers, and watch the clouds gently passing by from the real window in their room. People from modern days can easily access technologies, but also can easily be addicted to them, never being able to escape. Digital disruption is a backlash of technologies that people thought would benefit them. People's lives are being drowned by the flow of digital disruptions, therefore they should be aware of them to protect their values of life.

People's time is being taken away by digital disruption. In an experiment aimed at stopping the use of technologies, one claims that "it felt like a vacation and she slept better in the first week" (Cochrane 1). Time flies by so fast when people start to stare at the phone because there are so many things that entertain people. But sadly, they don't get to use the time for themselves; time to develop their own hobbies, time to take a sleep, and even time to rest flies away. The importance of time and experiences you gain through using that time is lost, making people chase instant entertainment rather than entertainment that you achieve through goals and effort.

Places on Earth are also losing their importance due to this development. After being unimpressed by the first sight of "Mona Lisa," one said, "I can see it better in a book or on the internet" (Reyburn 1). Technology made people lose the desire to visit the Louvre museum, and it is true that using technology, it is way easier to deeply observe drawings. However, going to visit other places is important and meaningful in a different way. The process of going elsewhere involves talking with others, looking at the beautiful view while traveling, making a special plan, and every other thing that you can find a small happiness in. Just taking a glimpse at the screen of the phone makes people lose all those experiences, and only value the outcome. Places are losing their importance to processes, and being devalued by people's characteristics of utilitarianism and technologies.

As members of modern society, we all realize that technological development is very fast, and it surely has benefits to humans. However, it is as important to know another side of technologies as we prioritize them. If we know the weaknesses and dangers that can impact our usage of time and places, we get to prevent and develop them for people's happiness. We have to remember this - true development only comes by facing the dark parts.

Lost in a Sea of Emotions

Dulwich College Shanghai, China

Fredric Kong

With one of the world's busiest subways, one could easily be lost in Shanghai, if not in the swarms of people during peak hour, then in the small stalls, bakeries, and local vendors. What caught my eye on one of my morning excursions was a still figure, occluded by the masses of people flowing through the stations, crouching solemnly on the floor.

In front of her, she had a piece of cardboard with her unfortunate story laid out for our sympathy and donations. As my eyes absorbed the chilling twists and turns this human's life has taken, they arrived at two QR codes for mobile payment: Alipay or WeChat. So, technology had come this far.

There is the evident disruption of human interaction, but one wonders: has technology fundamentally altered our psychology and perception? We pride ourselves on empathy and altruism. We call those qualities human.

Surely though, if these qualities were altered, that would be the greatest disruption to humanity we have seen. It transforms who we think we are. Unfortunately, it seems that technology is fueling a state of emotional exhaustion.

Surely though, if donations could be treated as quick, on-the-fly transactions, that would deprive the act of its purpose and the evanescent connection of two souls. Cash can be a monetary, spiritual, and emotional medium of exchange too. It is not a sentimental archaism. It is backed by, of all important human emotions, trust. Trust in the central bank. Trust that the child with the bluest eyes down the road selling lemonade will be able to receive your notes and purchase clothes for the homeless, veterans, or migrant children.

Surely though, if money were replaced wholly by numbers stored on a server, it introduces a superficiality to what we describe as the mental burden of waking up in the morning to an alarm clock, putting on clothes, going to work, and returning home to start the cycle again too. Mobile payment will push us further towards "friction-free spending" than credit cards, making self-control more difficult.

Little did I know, until told by another, there was another presence in the station while I observed the beggar. Cameras scanned the volume of people passing through the entrances and exits and waiting for the next train to arrive, so stations downstream could predict the arrival of the train to the second. There, on the screen suspended in the air, was the reassuring counting of time, of trains that arrived, are arriving, and yet to arrive.

Could the story of my life be occluded in the mass of data collected on consumers? Will I disappear like the time traveler in H.G. Wells's "The Time Machine"? Now that our relationship with time and emotions is evolving, we have to ask ourselves how to make our actions meaningful again.

At least, that day, I offered what I could. I sat down beside her and smiled and so did she.

Then, I heard the whole story she had to tell me.

The Data Generation

Dulwich College Shanghai, China

Jay Yu

Today's tumultuous political landscape has transformed the debate around the merits of technology into a partisan issue, with support and dissent usually falling along ideological lines. Is social media destroying traditional family values or positively changing them? Is Twitter a platform for political protest or government surveillance? It is only once biases have been set aside that the heart of these issues can be addressed.

Undoubtedly, social media has forever changed the way humans interact and conduct business, allowing us to communicate over global distances while increasing productivity and economic growth. These technologies have also greatly improved our access to information, with research that once took hours only requiring the time to type a sentence into a search bar. With the advent of free online schools like the Khan Academy, utopian dreams like universal education may soon become a reality.

And yet, despite the many reasons to be optimistic about technology, its darkest potential looms larger than ever. Whereas our friends and family used to know us best, it's software companies like Google, Tencent, and Facebook that now boast access to our most personal information.

Of course, the applications developed by these software giants are anything but "free" – they harvest our consumer data to sell to advertisers, corporations, and political campaigns. In 2012, the estimated "digital footprint" of the average individual was 500MB per day. That figure is estimated to grow to a staggering 65GB by 2025, with the power of these corporations set to grow with it.

That statistic becomes even more alarming when we consider the small amount of data needed for artificial intelligence to predict and shape our choices. As the research of Stanford professor Michael Kosinski has shown, a mere 100 likes on Facebook would allow an A.I. to predict the personality of individuals with the same accuracy as a close friend or roommate. With 250 likes, the A.I.'s predictions would be as accurate as a spouse's, accounting for everything from sexual orientation to music tastes with astounding accuracy.

At first glance, these may seem like minor consequences in the grand scheme. But in many countries, especially in the Middle East, sensitive data such as sexual orientation could be a matter of life or death. Regardless of their stated intentions, Google and Facebook remain profit-seeking corporations, not philanthropic organizations. As the Cambridge Analytica scandal has shown, the sensitive data these companies harvest can easily end up in the hands of the ill-intentioned.

The advent of digital technologies has ushered us all into a new, post-privacy world, but accepting this new normal must not come at the cost of our human rights and civil liberties. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights upholds that "A common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge." It is only through a bipartisan, multilateral effort amongst human rights organizations, software companies, individual citizens and national governments that we can protect our freedoms in this data-driven generation.

Through the Glass Bulb: How Digital Technology Shatters Consistency

Garden International School, Malaysia

Ng Su Fey

Technology has long wielded a scythe of disruption on society, leaving stains of irreversible change. For better or for worse, humans have always quickly adapted to these long-term effects as memories of the initial uproar fade over generations.

The invention of the thermometer can help illustrate the integration of disruptive technology into society. Many contemporary physicians feared their roles would diminish if the traditional practice of using hands to 'feel for the illness' was proven inferior. From a modern perspective, that fear can be judged irrational. Thermometers, while groundbreaking for that period, are dumb devices. They can display accurate readings, but are worthless without human expertise to interpret that data to form a diagnosis. Logically, there was no reason to worry; emotionally, those physicians feared the unknown - a sentiment that lingers in human hearts three hundred years later.

Technology isn't dumb anymore.

We live in a digital age. Automation, coding, and computers have led to whirlwind industries where each advancement triggers dozens more. In a world where technology explodes into existence in an exponential stream of 0s and 1s, where Sundar Pichai proclaims A.I. is more significant than electricity or fire, the future of humanity appears to be one of redundancy.

Only time will tell if machines will replace human roles, but we have as much to gain from digital technology as we stand to lose. From a medical perspective, advancements are rapid and breathtaking: think successful trials for A.I.-assisted surgery. In addition, 3-D printing shows promise as a 'hardware store' for the body, offering low cost, customizable wares ranging from prosthetics to artificial organs and skin cell tissue. This snapshot of one industry is evidence that digital technology has the potential to propel us beyond our wildest dreams.

However, controversies surrounding current technology are prevalent. A heated debate rages over the boundaries of ethically contentious technology such as CRISPR, cryogenic preservation, and nanotechnology, which blur the lines between treatment and transhumanism. Some religious communities have condemned these developments as 'unnatural', but should the views of one group dictate the rights of others?

Deciding what technology should be authorized is highly subjective, and may take years of debate. With technological advancements occurring each day, it may be more efficient to devise a moral framework which new developments can be weighed against. Humanity birthed technology to solve problems and increase efficiency, therefore our values dictate its limits and subsequent effects on society. Therefore, despite its association with digital technology, could it not be argued that humans are the actual source of disruption?

Disruption is merely a consequence of the human desire to improve quality of life. In fact, the term 'disruption' can be deemed synonymous with 'change that we fear'. It is an essential step in the evolution of society, a revolutionary process that should be regarded as natural. Rather than remain rooted in our desire for consistency, we should embrace the unknown and realize that digital technology disrupts our lives and values in order to create new ways of living.

Is Digital Technology Disrupting Our Life and Values, or Is It Creating New Ways of Living?

Garden International School, Malaysia

Shee Yi Rong

What kind of havoc is the digital age exacting upon our lives?

As distressing as it may be, humanity is inevitably succumbing to the dystopian world in disguise that we call home. Yet we sugarcoat digital disruption, optimistically terming it “modern living”, foolishly believing we can live in satisfaction alongside technology when our online identities are consuming us whole.

But in reality, we continue to suffer from the turmoil it causes, do we not?

As of 2018, there exists 3.03 billion active social media users. Realize, that this means nearly half of the global population are sharing their lives through digital means instead of real, tangible contact. Life no longer revolves around talking in the corridors after school or spending quality time with our friends; instead, we’re fixated on acquiring followers on social media so that we can be more popular. Having a social media account these days seems paramount in order to be accepted, but yet social media is, in retrospect, annihilating our true selves. “How can one still do something that harms them?” is the very same question we ask those smoke addicts that people actively condemn.

Yet, why are we inhaling nicotine of our own?

I believe that life is more than just garnering popularity. The internet exists as a form of social media—perhaps you might say, “but what about informative online articles?” But upon closer inspection, one would realize that every website, every article has a “Follow us on Twitter” or “Share to Facebook” link, testimonial evidence of what we have fallen prey to. But pray, consider this: if all of us are interlinked together on the internet, why are we still so detached from our real personas?

The answer is but simple: we crave attention.

We do! Scroll through Instagram and you’ll find a myriad of photos depicting our lives – where we are, what we’re doing, how we’re getting on. We feel a great need to be acknowledged by other humans, so we rely on letting the world know about us to boost our self-esteem. But one might find, it leads to devastation: social media has transmogrified into something so ubiquitous that the things dubbed “real” in life have become no more than the most recent posts on our Facebook feed.

Atrocity in abundance, frauds strutting in daylight...

Social gatherings, holidays abroad—checkboxes on a list to prove you have “a life” even if it lacks quality experience. People get hyped about the prospect of “going places and doing things” to share it with the world instead of the actual occurrence, if only because faking happiness equates popularity. People crowd around the “Mona Lisa” daily not to appreciate the artwork, but to take photos that are useless other than to be looked at once before being posted on social media, lost in a whirlwind of unknown, unseen stories.

Do we really need this masquerade any longer?

No, no indeed.

Technology: What Is the Impact on Our Lifestyle?

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Dilme Uduwara Arachchi

Digital technology's role in society is slowly increasing as it develops further into realms that would have been unimaginable if we look back 50 years ago. As it continues to develop, we can see that technology is slowly immersing itself more and more into our lifestyle. Now, it seems like we cannot escape it as every day we are involved in technology in some shape or form. Whether it is searching something on the internet for a school project, to taking leftovers from the refrigerator and heating it in the microwave, technology is surrounding us and sliding into our world. But is this reliance on technology giving us opportunities or ruining us as the days progress?

One of the largest ways in which technology has changed our lifestyle is through social media. Now, whenever we want to meet people and communicate, we can easily access their social media accounts and get to know them. Social media helps us to stay in contact with the people we know ... but also the people we don't know. Although social media provides many pros, it still has its cons such as promoting catfishing, forming a method of committing crime through the internet. It is exceptionally hard to catch these "cybercriminals" seeing as anyone can hide behind the mask of their profile, as they can create a new identity with a click of a button. Another disadvantage of social media is that it can pose as a distraction to many users. How many times have you seen someone check their phones per day? It's amazing to see how someone's attention can be easily diverted when they check their phone. This can lead to effects such as unfocused driving and having the inability to gain a person's full attention.

One of the most vital ways in which technology has helped us is through medicine. Without technology, we wouldn't be able to have intricate surgeries such as heart transplants, brain surgery and more. Operations can be completed with the upmost precision, which is required if the surgery is to be successful, by using state-of-the-art equipment. Surgery can even be performed by robots, reducing the chances of human errors. The field of medicine would not be as advanced as it is today without the use of technology.

Technology has also made places around the world more accessible by providing us with a means of transport that can take us around the world in just days. With inventions such as airplanes and even spaceships, we can reach places that used to be unimaginable. We can even travel to places that are out of this world, like the moon. It is thanks to technology that traveling is easy, fast and cost-effective. You have the ability to go anywhere in the biosphere and immerse yourself into their culture.

As we can see, although technology has its many disadvantages, it has provided many more benefits and has provided aid to many by making our lifestyle more convenient and has given us many opportunities to change the world and make it a better place.

Hashtag Activism: How Digital Technology Paved the Road for Social Change

German Swiss International School, Hong Kong
Rachel Wan

From #MeToo to #NeverAgain, from the Women's March to Parkland, digital media has allowed culturally significant information to circulate faster than ever before. Today, meaningful social change is never more than a tweet away, and some of the most prominent activist movements of the 21st century can trace their origins to social media. All Alicia Garza needed was a single Facebook message, as Emma González only needed one tweet. Due to its pervasiveness and accessibility, platforms like Twitter have provided the infrastructure to many activist movements, especially those arising out of oppressed communities.

In 2014, research conducted by McKinley and Baker showed that 43% of black and Hispanic Americans believed that digital technology had given them a voice to speak out on issues such as racial inequality, criminal justice, and police violence. In the #BlackLivesMatter movement, people from New York to Denver took to social media to organize carpools to Ferguson, Missouri. Minutes after Alyssa Milano tweeted the first #MeToo in 2017, a woman halfway across the world, in Hong Kong, tweeted in response that she also had experienced sexual assault. In these examples, social media has allowed the disparate peoples of the world to express solidarity and agitate in the name of social change.

While digital technology may have catalyzed activism and brought about social momentum, the role of these platforms in our politics and discourse is far from perfect. Sociologists have long credited digital technology for the rise of "slacktivism," a disingenuous form of activism that promotes the individual, not the collective movement. Slacktivism both disrupts the flow of successful social mobilization and promotes superficial gestures instead of political action. For some, liking a post on Facebook is more than enough. What happened to going out on the streets to fight for real social change? Taking the next flight to Washington to shout Never Again in solidarity? Before digital technology, the suffragettes persevered, Rosa Parks fought against injustice, and the Little Rock Nine challenged deep-rooted traditions of segregation. Before it was easier to tweet, activists actually acted.

The success of social movements can be credited to digital technology, but media can also contribute to its failure, as was the case with #BringBackOurGirls. That movement was founded with the noble intention of raising awareness of the Chibok schoolgirls kidnapping. But as Michelle Obama and Malala Yousafzai posted their support on digital platforms, the terrorist group Boko Haram took notice and tightened their control on the girls in captivity. As sociologist Zeynep Tufekci puts it, "Why wouldn't a hashtag about a Nigerian tragedy start in Nigeria?"

In regards to activism, digital technology is a double-edged sword. It has undeniably brought about sustained social change, yet it sometimes distorts the intentions of the movement and disrupts the flow of discourse. Digital media has seemingly turned us all into activists, pundits, and political commentators. If we truly want a better society, we must use these platforms to do more than tweet.

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Living in the Moment: Is Digital Technology Disrupting Our Life and Values, or Is It Creating New Ways of Living?

NSS Hill Spring International School, India

Rushabh Shah

Technology, like art, is a soaring of the human imagination.

-Daniel Bell

It is hard to argue that technology hasn't created new ways of living. With robot-powered hotels, driverless cars and artificial intelligence, technology has broadened our horizons. However, is it disrupting our life and values? To answer that, I study the bizarre relationship between technology and art. One grounded in logic, while the other blossoms in imagination.

One of the most glaring effects of technology is its modification of our perception of space and time. In simple words, the internet has made the world feel like a smaller place. In today's world, New York and New Delhi seem only a few seconds apart. This blur in our understanding of the world gives rise to the parallel nature of life. Technology has made our grasp of reality so weak that in the new fast-paced world, we forget our original world. This digitally created illusion, that we live in a perfect world, despite the real, flawed yet beautiful world staring us in the face tells me that we might be physically present in the real world, but our minds are in the digital world we have co-created with technology.

Technology seems to have robbed humans of one of its greatest pleasures: living in the moment. Once, in a bid to capture 'proof' that I had actually been there, I missed out on a beautiful sight: a cheetah, chasing down a gazelle. They say it is an amazing sight to witness, but I missed it. It is ironic, how technology stores data for years, yet, we don't learn to live in the moment. There will always be videos, yet we worry about our next Instagram post instead of just being in the moment. Simply living is underrated. Why, you ask? Because living in the moment cannot be stored...

'And in that moment, I swear, we were infinite.'

This is one of my favorite quotes and honestly, I never really understood what it meant, but I loved it. And that is what is amazing about humans. We see beauty, even when we don't understand it. It truly is an amazing gift, the lens with which we can see our world. The real world. However, technology is harming that lens, not allowing us to see through it clearly, creating the illusion of a different world.

The human mind has limitless possibilities, and that is the difference between technology and art. One strives to find an answer, and one is simply infinite. Both have massive potential, but one is restricted by logic, and the other freed by imagination. Technology might change the way we are living, but let it not change who we are, because what makes humans human is our ability to feel and imagine, something artificial intelligence can never replicate. Let technology simply be a useful tool to guide us into the future, as we honor God's greatest gift to man... life itself. How, you ask? Live in the moment.

The Dystopian Future That Technology Brings

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Is modern technology a blessing or a curse? Today, thanks to exponential improvements in processing power, digital storage, R&D, and bandwidth capacities, the constructive and destructive potentials of technology are greater than at any previous point in history. As is the case with stem-cell technology and social media, advancements in technology often lead to increasingly gray ethical areas, and nowhere are the technological ethics more gray than the debate around drone warfare.

Over the past decade, the use of unmanned drones, particularly by the United States military, has given rise to widespread controversy and criticism. While drones protect pilots from potentially harmful conflicts while reducing the cost of surveillance operations, there is minimal legislation in place to regulate their deployment. As a result, numerous deadly drone strikes have been carried out against incorrect or harmless targets, with essentially zero repercussions for the parties responsible. And this problem only stands to worsen as drone technology continues to rapidly advance.

For example, the U.S. Air Force is currently developing a micro-drone the size of a fly, a surveillance device capable of infiltrating any space or, in large numbers, a weapon able to assail an enemy soldier like a swarm of bees. Soon, these micro-drones will be equippable with nanosyringes that can harvest a DNA sample from a target in seconds, the pain no greater than a mosquito bite. After that, how long will it take before militaries begin spreading toxins and chemical weapons with micro-drones? When will this kind of warfare become the norm, not the exception?

As of this writing, France, the Netherlands, Israel, and a handful of other countries are in the process of developing micro-drones of their own, with the technology poised to trickle down to police forces and private security firms. Presumably, it's only a matter of time before these weapons end up in the hands of the very same individuals who national militaries are attempting to combat, the terrorists and insurgents whose perceived threat gave rise to the technology in the first place.

Given the dystopian implications of technologies like micro-drones, it's easy to overlook the incredible positive impacts of nanotechnology. Right now, there are thousands of formerly deaf individuals who are able to hear thanks to cochlear implants, millions of underprivileged students who now have access to information and education thanks to the internet. Ensuring that technology like micro-drones is put toward constructive ends begins with collective action on the part of the citizenry, a demand that those who use this powerful technology in our name be held accountable.

Technology has already transformed our everyday life in countless ways, but if we truly intend to create a better, more humane society, we cannot allow technology to alienate ourselves from one another. Whether our countries are trade partners or bitter enemies locked in a geopolitical conflict, humanity as a whole must focus on the long-term implications of our technologies, the blessings and curses that will persist long after temporary allegiances have fallen away.

How Technology Took Away My Culture

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Abrar B. Tohid

“Modern technology has become a total phenomenon for civilization, the defining force for a new social order in which efficiency is no longer an option but a necessity imposed on all human activity.” – Jacques Ellul.

From the invention of electricity by Edison to Steve Jobs' iPhone, technology was not only meant to make our lives easier but also to make the world around us revolve faster. It's commonly understood that as generations go by, we become smarter, our bar for greatness keeps rising and much of it has perhaps been aided by technological development. The world that we have entered now is the single country of the internet, of which we are netizens and in that, we form an anarchy of ideas and self-expression. We tread in the era of globalization, where technology links us in a very artificial, yet real way. But the question is, where are we headed and, are we aware of our past? The internet has, in a sense, become the melting pot for ideas and cultures. While the propagation of ideas is necessary for discursive dialogue, the blending of cultures is an issue that is rather fickle, which has given way to the birthing of an unholy child of lost identity.

The idea of linguistic determinism largely revolves around how our thinking processes are based on the culture in which we were raised and what we accept as our first language. Despite coming from Bengali parents and living my entire life in Bangladesh, I have never really 'thought' like a Bengali. Colonialism might have ended in the last century, but English simply decided to switch power structures and in symbiosis with technology continued its stronghold on our lives. The internet has exposed us so much to Western culture that we hold it in much higher regard than our own. Somehow, our own cultures became backdated and we started worshipping the form of self-expression and

love that Western cultures propagate. The renaissance happened both in the West and in Bengal but somehow Western ideas of art became more important because of Tumblr aesthetics and its obsession with Van Gogh. Technology has made ideas so one dimensional, we drew the conclusion that movements as personal as feminism should have only one voice. We disregard the fact that things such as 'Free the Nipple' may be culturally inappropriate in many cases, but that doesn't undermine feminism in those cultures – because we are one nation, under the internet. What technology did, was strip cultures down to their bare nudity and dress it in a mesh that would appeal to a future generation of no barriers. We have lost our sense of cultural identity. Unity in diversity used to be a thousand words in just three, but somehow diversity fell off of the tricycle along the way.

Technology has reduced our generation to Snapchat filters and Instagram likes and amplified human stupidity stupendously. To Jacques Ellul, Voltaire would perhaps say *“A witty saying proves nothing.”*

Digital Dystopia

Korea International School, South Korea
Yoora Do

Carolyn Stritch, a 32-year-old blogger, pulled off a hoax. Photoshopping herself in front of Sleeping Beauty's castle, she deceived more than 190,000 Instagram followers to believe that she went to Disneyland when, in fact, she had been at home the whole time.

This seemingly harmless experiment bespeaks how digital technology quixotically paints our lives: an ability to distort reality and shove it into the eyes of many. By nature, we humans are prone to turn our eyes to visually pleasing objects, and digital technologies brilliantly satiate this need. And to our satisfaction, the digital sphere is flooded with such carefully curated images.

The digital world inherently differs from our physical realm; thus, its ability to represent the complexities of our lives is limited at best. A world governed by simplicity sounds appealing; however, complexity is undeniably ours to embrace. Digital technology, which grows simpler each day, benumbs our senses about our reality.

Behind ordinary people devouring information online is a flood of misconception. As we set foot into this new realm, we grow susceptible to external influences and lose the ability to make choices for ourselves and to see things as they really are. Many users know little: like a man mindlessly filling his shopping cart with rotten vegetables and fruits, users unknowingly swill down toxic information that dissolves their shrewdness.

Facebook depression is one such evidence. Social media outlets correlate to low self-esteem and unhappiness. The more we expose ourselves to positive milestones of others, the more we normalize an "all-high" life. Comparing the entirety of our lives to the pinnacle of others, we are complicit in our own misery.

Another proof of such intoxication is found in social media standardizing unrealistic beauty amongst us. The advent of digital tools like Photoshop or Lightroom permits people to magically contort body shapes, erase blemishes, and straighten out wrinkles.

Tools that expunge every flaw leave no room for imperfection, molding us into a cookie-cutter model of beauty. Though hardly anyone, in reality, looks like the typical airbrushed model, the newly stationed beauty standard has become an asymptote that is coveted by many, yet impossible to truly reach.

The ability to fantasize and defeat reality is a human blessing. With science, this ability has been a driving force behind human civilization. However, new venues of digital technology have encroached reality in ways we had never expected. By narrowing our vision to perceive only perfection and simplicity, we are growing more insecure than ever before and even losing touch with the world we've come from.

In the past, we owned our fantasy. Now, with flourishing digital technology, we are losing our footing amid the overwhelmingly fictional world that we have created. Perhaps complexity is our gift in life and simplicity is the foe. We must take back control over the devices we invented, peer into our raw selves, and rediscover the authenticity of our lives and complexion all without the swing of a cure-all wand.

Digital Technology Disruption: Education

Marymount Secondary School, Hong Kong

Vinci Tam

Nowadays, digital technology is developing faster than we could ever imagine. However, have we ever imagined how digital technology impacts our lives and values? Education is the fundamental base of our lives and values which affects our future such as employment chances. In fact, digital disruption of education and employment are examples of how digital technology disrupts our life and values.

Digital disruption occurs when new digital technologies or business models affect our fundamental values and behavior. In the educational sector, lectures and textbooks are giving way to innovative new teaching tools such as coordinating the use of live videos and digital devices; in terms of employment, employers tend to treasure those who attain transferable skills with the assistance of online learning.

With the development of digital technology, new forms of learning practice have triggered the development of massive open online courses (MOOC). Online learning platforms provide a more diverse set of pedagogical approaches to support their learners. The free flow of information and knowledge also increases the learning opportunities for everyone. With the help of distance education, we, at least those in the more developed areas of the globe, have no more excuses for being uneducated or untrained. However, as knowledge and academic degrees become so easily accessible at the tip of our fingers, we are facing the problem of credential inflation. Next, how about those on the less fortunate side of the globe? Think about those who are still struggling to make ends meet, how can they afford a digital device or internet bill, not to mention the expensive distance course fee? As a result, the education gap between the rich and the poor grows wider, the disadvantaged ones are prone to be pushed out of the job market.

Living in the age of innovative technology, people with a university degree under traditional education are devalued. In order to cope with the changing business model and environment, employers, especially employers at forward-thinking companies such as Apple Inc., value people who are able to change and learn new skills as well as employees who are proficient at working with others to create innovations (collaboration skills). However, in traditional education students have no say in deciding what they learn, a set curriculum of knowledge is assigned by the authority. Instead, online courses and degrees encourage self-directed learning. Personalized learning allows learners to explore and encourages students to coordinate their project work and assesses them on solutions they have discovered together by online learning exchange. Therefore, students with online degrees may obtain more skills which students under traditional education may lack. Thus, the competitiveness of students under traditional education declines.

Not only education, but advancement in digital technology has also impacted the trends in employment. It is necessary for traditional education institutions to promote a new teaching style which best fits the principle of 21st-century competencies to maintain its students' competency.

Mankind's Latest Drug Addiction: Technology

No.2 High School of East China Normal University, China

Rachel Yan

This year, the World Health Organization will add “gaming disorder” to the International Classification of Diseases, acknowledging the millions of gamers incapable of setting down their controllers, tablets, and devices. The increasingly serious problem of technological addiction is being recognized by other major institutions, too, with Google recently announcing a company-wide initiative to promote “digital well-being” amongst its employees and customers. For the manufacturer of the Android and Alexa, the establishment of such a program is just a tad ironic. How can Google combat the problem of digital addiction when its hardware and software are some of the main causes of the problem?

With symptoms including insomnia, combativeness, and mood modification, digital addiction bears a striking resemblance to other kinds of behavioral addiction, if the two aren't one in the same. Often, even casual users of everyday technology will engage with their devices when it is inappropriate, dangerous, or even life-threatening – look no further than those who text and drive in full knowledge of the inherent risks. And for true tech addicts, the feeling of being disconnected from or missing out on the latest news or message can be tortuous, a withdrawal as intense as quitting smoking or hard drugs. Consequently, debates over the best treatment strategies for digital addicts have become direly important and contentious.

According to the United Kingdom's communications regulator Ofcom, more than 15 million British internet users have tried a “digital detox” at some point in their lives. And after being offline for a set amount of time, 33% of participants reported feeling an increase in productivity, 27% felt a sense of liberation, and 25% enjoyed life to a greater extent. But the report also highlighted the draw that our devices still hold, showing that 16% of participants experienced the fear of missing out, 15% felt lost, and 14% considered themselves “cut-off.” Based on these figures, many users would prefer to spend less time online, but most of them need serious help to do so.

Currently, the tools that enable people to regulate their own online experience are extremely primitive. Once someone agrees to participate in a specific game or social media platform, the pressure to continue using can be immense. However, unlike other forms of addiction, like alcohol, the source of the issue, technology, can actually play a role in encouraging more informed and conscious usage patterns. Successful intervention programs already exist for online gambling addicts, and soon software will be able to self-detect when someone is using a phone or video game at harmful frequencies.

In terms of technology, the borders between immersion and addiction, delight and dependency, remain frustratingly hard to locate, even for experts. If we ever intend to find where the real boundaries lie, it's up to us, the users of technology, to search for them on our own, without the aid of followers or devices. No Googling allowed.

Virtual Living in the 21st Century

Raffles Girls' School, Singapore

Er Kay Lynn

Every day on my way home from school, I check my Instagram feed. Scrolling through my feed, I am made aware of everything happening in the lives of my friends, even those I have not seen in years. Social media is, to many people living in the 21st century, a means of virtual social networking. One does not need to meet up with friends as often to catch up because you can be caught up by scrolling through their recent posts. One does not need to have met a celebrity to have a conversation with them, you simply need to send them a message through social media, proclaiming your admiration for them. Similarly, one does not need to have grown wings or climbed a mountain to experience a bird's eye view because you could just purchase a pair of virtual reality goggles. With the emergence of such technologies, do we need to experience life by leaving our homes? We are living in an increasingly virtual world, but these technologies can also be balanced with real-life experiences to benefit our society.

Studies have shown that virtual social interactions on social media do not equate to actual social interactions like face-to-face conversations with someone. It has been shown that depending on social media to have virtual social interactions with others may trigger more negative feelings like sadness or loneliness, instead of the happiness that is associated with real-life social interaction. In an article published by CNN, it is stated that research has also shown that violent virtual reality content can have a negative effect on a person's mental state, making them uncomfortable or anxious.

However, it has been shown that virtual reality experiences can be used to educate the public. In many European museums, virtual reality is being integrated into exhibitions to provide visitors with more authentic and immersive means of learning about the museums' artefacts. In the same CNN article mentioned above, it is also stated that "research shows that adults can be taught to recycle, increase their physical activity or become more empathetic to those of different races if they see themselves doing so virtually." With the correct content, virtual reality can be used as a tool to educate the public and enforce better habits and attitudes in our society. While social media has been viewed in a generally negative light, it is a useful tool for the spreading of awareness and the expression of one's perspectives and views. The use of social media by nongovernmental organizations and celebrities like Emma Watson to spread awareness of social causes like the accessibility of education has proven to be useful in the 21st century.

Virtual reality and virtual social networking may seem like negative influences on our society, but if used consciously, they can be turned into useful means of educating people and creating new, better and more sustainable ways of living.

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Digital Disruption and Power

Raffles Institution, Singapore

Travis Tan Gene

Digital technology is arguably mankind's greatest invention ever. The digital age we live in has introduced new ways of living and revolutionized the status quo. The enhanced and unprecedented capacity to store and transmit information is the fundamental characteristic that allows digital technology to create new ways of living.

Gone are the days when information had to be procured through cumbersome means such as thumbing through pages of a book. Modern society is now peppered with multiple digital platforms which allow for the rapid dissemination of information through a virtual medium. Social media platforms such as Facebook allow opinions to be broadcast within a few seconds, and search engines such as Google grant users access to a vast wealth of online information with a simple online search.

We live in a world where digital disruption has made online information nigh-omnipresent. But does this necessarily mean that the online world is borderless, and that unencumbered access to information is guaranteed?

Not necessarily.

Digital technology by itself is not autonomous. Human organizations presiding over popular digital platforms and services oversee the circulation of online information. Thus, the digital world which an internet user is exposed to depends heavily on the big tech companies or governments who wield control over the platforms he uses.

But this leaves a netizen's online world subject to these organizations. Digital technology increases the impact that these organizations can have over longstanding societal values. Control over voluminous amounts of digital data grants these organizations immense power over millions of internet users - power which is easily misused.

Big tech companies, especially GAFAs, are powerful purveyors of digital disruption to daily life, and they hold a monopolistic control over digital data and online information. Pew Research found that in 2017, 45% of adult Americans obtain news from Facebook. This gives Facebook the power to control the online information reaching tons of users. Its digital algorithm, designed to pander to users, analyses their search history and curates the content they see, effectively turning a user's feed into an echo chamber continuously validating his preferences. As a result, Facebook has received

opprobrium for sowing fertile ground for disinformation campaigns and failing to effectively mitigate them, after its algorithm facilitated efforts by far-right groups and cadres of overseas hackers to sow discord in the last democratic American election.

The East is not spared either. China is a prime example in which digital technology is bended to the will of the party in charge of it. "The Great Firewall of China" is the epitome of internet censorship - a series of legislative actions and technologies which sanitize online information based on the interests of the Chinese Communist Party, via blocking certain websites or selectively erasing specific online content. In place of Western digital platforms, facsimiles such as Baidu and WeChat, which are obligated to surrender server data to the government upon request, are used to regulate the online world Chinese netizens are exposed to. In this case, digital technology and the power it grants the Chinese authorities bolsters their efforts to circumvent antigovernment information and further undermine democracy.

I do not contend the indubitable beneficial change that digital disruption brings. However, the resultant dramatic increase in society's dependence on digital technology, coupled with the absence of a universal system to manage online data, creates an environment where power over the digital world is concentrated amongst the few parties with jurisdiction over digital technology and data circulation. This consequently means digital technology is an effective tool to amplify efforts by those intent on subverting important values and traditional ways of life.

Digital disruption isn't the impetus behind the undermining of our values and ways of life, but it certainly is a powerful facilitator. Unless a truly unbiased, unfiltered, and unvarnished digital world is universally available for all netizens, the overwhelming power that digital technology grants to the few presiding over it will continue to boost efforts to tamp down on the legitimacy of crucial societal tenets, norms, and values that deserve to be maintained.

Samburu Butterflies Spread Their Digital Wings

Renaissance International School Saigon, Vietnam

Juliet Bao Ngoc Doling

All around the world, more than 1 billion adults and children slave away, confined to a cycle of poverty and repression. They live their lives the same way as their parents, grandparents, and ancestors would have lived theirs before them. As the rest of the world continues to advance, they toil on, hamstrung by illiteracy and ignorance. They are bound, not by iron locks and chains, but by a lack of education.

The bucolic northern plains of Kenya are home to the Maa-speaking Samburu people, a warrior race of cattle-owning pastoralists known locally as the “butterfly dancing tribe.” For a great period of time, the Samburu people have been isolated and cut off from the momentous changes of the outside world. Even today, the Samburu land remains remote, unspoiled and unchanged, whilst neighboring peoples have been strongly influenced by the West and its mass tourism. Though in the past, the Samburu have tended to avoid the adoption of any aspect of a modern lifestyle, a digital connection project by the company BRCK has recently struck a chord with the Samburu people.

Since its establishment in 2013, the company BRCK has evolved from a small team of Nairobi developers, technologists and engineers into an award-winning technological connecting brand which aims to bring devices to all Africans, whatever their background. In 2015, the company launched the Kio tablet, a device preloaded with tailor-made content for both local and international curricula.

As their first outreach project, the company chose a Samburu reserve located a few hours' drive away from Nairobi. When they first arrived, Kiltamany Primary School was a run-down building with a single blackboard and only a handful of benches, struggling to offer an adequate education to the hundreds of students from the surrounding villages. However, within just a few months, the school had become a shining role model, a glimpse into a future in which both women and children can learn, side by side. The women, most of whom would have traditionally stayed at home, had decided to join their children in order to encourage them to learn and understand the importance of education. The children, hitherto largely made up of boys, had not only increased in number but also become more gender balanced.

For the Samburu women and children, technology has allowed them to expand their skills and knowledge, increasing the general view and value of education in this traditional nomadic tribe. It also plants strong evidence that everyone, whatever their background, wants an education.

Every journey starts with a first step. For Kenya and many other developing countries, this journey started with the people's connection to broadband internet and technology. Even in the most isolated areas, the world is experiencing a global digital awakening. It is fascinating to see how even in the remotest and most culturally isolated communities, technology can find a place through our common human desire to learn and be educated. Technology truly is the stepping stone to prepare all future generations for a global competitive landscape.

Is Digital Technology Disrupting Our Life and Values, or Is It Creating New Ways of Living?

Roots Ivy International School, Pakistan

Amna Asif

Years ago, viral tweets brought you into my Twitter inbox, blonde hair and similar insecurities, wrenching me out of my tenth-grade purgatory. You stood next to your bedroom window while smoking your last cigarette, and held your phone in the air, crying out: “*Why can’t I get any signals here!*” over the din and music in smoky Portugal apartments. We tiptoed through our everyday lives, stood in the corner of school grounds, nervously eyeing the bullies that were inching closer and closer. On a particularly intense classroom discussion about sexualities, you swore out loud, and I heard you from miles away—all the way from Pakistan, I shared the same experience, and your lone voice weaved its way into my own cyber subculture: a safe harbor.

Before, I had to drag myself out of bed at 8 a.m., so I could take a rickety bus to a class alone where eyes are dull and shoulders are slumped—ignorance in the air—but now, with you in my back pocket, I embark on the same journey, your presence in my heart: my phone turned on, wishing class would end just a little bit earlier so I can laugh-react to your new Facebook update.

The way my online friend and I interact exemplifies how the digital world has completely changed the way teenagers make friends, and as a result, social media has become a major part of their identity. But in a world of hyperconnectivity driven by technology that knows no bounds, people wonder, what is happening to true friendship? Is it dying away? Or are the various social media “platforms,” such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, simply redefining or transforming our modern-day notion of friendship?

For me—and millions of other teenagers—initially just outlets for our fascination with pop culture, social media has become something more. On these online spaces, individuals can curate their community, and because real names and profile photos aren’t required, there is anonymity and freeness. Struggles with anxiety, confusion about sexuality, or any other issue, led teenagers to seek an outlet in the form of social media. Because of all the common ground among their friends and them, it became easy to vent about personal issues, without the fear of their parents or bullies from school ever finding out.

Indeed, for some L.G.B.T.Q. people, they were not even aware their identity existed until they encountered it online, buried like treasure in threads and discussions and private messages. And as technology continues to evolve, safe queer digital spaces do, too.

Friendships are continuing to transcend countries, time zones, races, and physical circumstances. The digital world has created new ways of living for people who would potentially never see each other to develop, grow and nurture friendships that would have been almost impossible before. There are so many negative and positive things that the internet has facilitated. Friendships, by far is one of the best positives. Had it not been for social media, Marta, my friend from Portugal and I perhaps would have never crossed paths, connected, and created a beautiful friendship.

What We Are, What We See

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Letian Huang

Earlier this year, Apple introduced “Screen Time,” an app that tracks and analyzes how – and how much – consumers use their iPhones. For even the most disciplined of users, the app promised to reveal the disconcerting numbers behind our dependence on technology, the massive amounts of time we dedicate to political coverage, celebrity gossip, sports scores, and Facebook updates. What would the data reveal about our reliance on technology? And how would we change our behavior in response, if we changed it at all?

According to a recent study, children between the ages of five and sixteen spend an average of six and a half hours a day staring at a screen. These “digital natives” have never known a life free from the influence of technology, and the internet’s constant flood of content has had a profound impact on how they form and preserve their opinions and identities. Of course, an increase in the amount of available information doesn’t correspond with better critical thinking, especially in the era of the “influencer.” Today, we know only the opinions of the individuals and news sources that we follow, adopting their views as our own, their enemies as our enemies.

With this increased polarization comes greater volatility in our politics and our markets, as recent elections and referendums in the United States, the UK, and Brazil have shown. In 2006, the legal scholar Cass R. Sunstein coined the term “information cocoon” to explain our present relationship to digital media, with each of us incapable of looking past the thick, self-spun web of content that surrounds us. Today, a single click on a cute dog video can lead to an onslaught of advertisements for similar videos and dog-related products. A click on a misinformation campaign works by the same logic, bombarding those innocent enough to explore with an onslaught of fake news and hidden agendas.

The effects of these targeted misinformation campaigns are as potentially dangerous as they are hard to define. Major tech companies like Facebook and Amazon control what we see and read to alarming degrees, but how much does that determine how we think, speak, and act? If children are spending as much time sleeping as they are looking at their phones, that influence may be even more pronounced than we want to admit, standing only to worsen as technology advances. As violence and instability escalate around the world, we need to look past what our phones are showing us, an enormous problem when we spend most of our time looking at our phones.

Last month, I downloaded the iPhone update with the “Screen Time” app, but I haven’t opened it yet. It’s not because I’m afraid of what it will tell me – already know that I need to rely on my phone less, as most of us do. For me, Screen Time is the last thing I need: one more reason to stare at my phone.

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OSEC: Slipping Through the Net

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Samuel Cobb

The technological era has granted us many opportunities like easy access to information; however, the exponential growth of the internet has not left any time for safeguards to be put in place, leaving a black hole that any computer user can disappear into using Virtual Proxy Networks (VPNs) or the dark net. How does the lack of security affect us? It seems the most negatively affected are our children.

OSEC, online sexual exploitation of children, is running rampant due to a lack of digital restraints. A report by End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism (ECPAT) claims that the accessibility to commodities such as mobile technology, cheap travel and easy connection to the internet, even in poverty-stricken areas, has benefited everyone, but has opened new doors to sexual offenders and created a new form of slavery.

On the 29 of January 2018, the Visayan Daily Star interviewed Catherine Noveda, International Justice Mission (IJM) Community Mobilization Manager, who said that OSEC is a multibillion dollar industry. Their statistics show that there are about 100,000 commercial websites offering pornographic images of children. Its prevalence in the Philippines (and other countries) is also increasing. The US State department website (www.state.gov) states, "Children have been reported to be victims of this crime in Colombia, India, Mexico, the Philippines, Thailand, and the United States. Many countries, including Australia, Britain, Canada, the Netherlands, the Philippines, and the United States, have prosecuted perpetrators—both paying clients and offenders who facilitate the exploitation of the child." Abhorrent crimes can take place anywhere due to the ease of access to live streaming applications. As a citizen of the Philippines, this is worryingly close to home.

According to IJM victims of OSEC are slaves, who are held captive and abused against their will. IJM is an organization whose mission is to end all slavery around the world. Their website (www.ijm.org) mentions that the traffickers are sometimes close family members who exploit their children to earn money. Previously, these traffickers would have to coerce children into performing in bars or clubs, but now, with access to the internet, predators and paedophiles can contact traffickers effortlessly. IJM, with the government of the Philippines, has helped reduce the amount of minors being trafficked, saving 1,275 children and reducing the number of trafficked children by up to 86% over the past 18 years in the cities where they have worked.

The pervasiveness of technology in the current era has given us many opportunities, making communication easier, increasing productivity and democratizing access to information. Most people use technology for good; however, predators and paedophiles are taking advantage of the technology and this generation. I believe that the security of policing of the internet must be bolstered to ensure the protection of children. By increasing the amount of internet surveillance, governments could stop abuse over the internet. People can also help by reporting any suspicious activity. The internet has facilitated OSEC, one of the cruelest forms of slavery. We must act now if we want to save the next generation from this barbaric form of digital bondage.

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Sleep and the Media

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How many hours do you usually sleep in a day? I sleep for about eight hours on days without homework and the required amount of sleep for teens is nine hours. The average amount of time that teenagers spend on social media is nine hours. That's the amount of time they should spend sleeping, so if they have nine hours of sleep and nine hours of social media usage, you have six hours of school, studying, extracurricular activities and exercise, and spending time with your peers. But this is usually not the case; most students stay in class for six to seven hours and with the additional need for human interaction, there is no possible way that teenagers are sleeping nine hours a day with the inclusion of nine hours of social media. Per Keith Willmore, medical director of the BYU Student Health Clinic, cognitive functions are worsened due to sleep deprivation. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, a Pew survey conducted during 2014 and 2015 states that 94% of teens who go online using their mobile devices use social media daily.

Social media cuts up our lives and gives us expectations and standards on what to post and what not to post. Your best and happiest bits are given to the internet to get lost in the ocean of pixels, profiles and posts, just like the famous quote in the poem "Solitude" by Ella Wheeler Wilcox, "Laugh, and the world laughs with you." A small study conducted by UCLA's Brain Mapping Center found that acquiring a high number of likes on the net showed increasing activity in the dopamine pathways, which is the part of the brain that motivates, causes euphoria, perseverance, etc. So not being able to get many likes on social media can affect teenager's moods and mental status.

The people who meet you online may know where you went the day before, but they don't know how you got there; they know your success but not the process and hurdles you went through to get to the other side. Meeting people online is dangerous, and the potential for scams, false information, cyberbullying, profanity, hacking, identity theft and more are high especially in group chats, social networking sites, video-sharing websites, etc.

Social media is dangerous, scary and distracting but there are multiple ways to solve these problems, like being careful on the net or having a time limit on using the media. You could also easily raise awareness by spreading the word or even using social media, for example the poem "Look Up" by Gary Turk. You may say this is hypocritical but it is true. As long as social media is not overused or abused everyone can stay safe and happy. For there are ways to use a dangerous weapon for brilliant and beneficial uses without hurting anybody; a knife is infamous for its use as a weapon to kill but its smart purpose is to cut and slice vegetables, meat, etc. Everything can be dangerous but as long as it's used properly it can be called safe.

The Creative Destructivity of Technology

SJI International, Singapore

Tara Kripalani

“The urge to destroy is also a creative urge” – Picasso

When Banksy posted a photo of his painting being shredded seconds after it was sold at auction on his Instagram account this month, he captioned it with this quote. Reading about the artist’s stunt made me desperate to watch the event. While technology still doesn’t allow us to travel back in time, it does now enable us to instantaneously look at a clip on the internet. Yet the same technology also keeps me from fully enjoying many real-life experiences. Without knowing it, I think Picasso has left us with the best description of digital technology - a force that can destroy as much as it creates.

The convenience of having all the information you need at your fingertips is so overwhelming, that sometimes we forget what life was like before. Not so long ago questions were answered by delving into a fat encyclopedia or by combing through volumes in a library. Now, thanks to the internet, it only takes a mouse click.

Technology has introduced a new dimension to learning, making education more accessible and freely available, while also modernizing ways of teaching. We are able to pick up new skills, languages - even complete most of a university degree online. Ultimately, each nation only goes as far as the creative drive of its people. And technology has opened new avenues to express creativity.

The brain’s hippocampus - the centre for memory - is at the core of our consciousness, one of the many intricately complex creations that forms part of our biology. Yet constant exposure to screens emitting blue light does it no favors. Nor does the use of a device that can actually impede mental capacity by reducing the attention span. So while technology can rebuild a classroom, it’s important not to forget all the dark corners it creates too.

A picture speaks a thousand words, but an experience speaks a million. While photos keep memories alive, they hold less meaning if all you remember is trying to get that perfect “Instagrammable” snapshot. I saw “Starry Night” at MoMA last December. After waiting for ages behind throngs of people to get a glimpse of the renowned painting, all I left with was a misaligned photo instead of a vivid impression. Technology has stolen our ability to live in the moment.

Digital technology has been instrumental in connecting people but has also made the world more divided than ever by allowing all of us to live in thought bubbles, oblivious to anything beyond our sphere of interest. Social media has created a facade of building connections in a globalized world, when often it has only cultivated a fake sense of intimacy.

Ultimately, technology is like a game of tug of war. For each push forward, there is a pull back. But where does the rope come to rest? I think technology gives new meaning to the old saying “Fire is a good servant but a bad master”. We are now at a tipping point. Will we let technology take over and disrupt our lives, or will we learn to master it and create new ways of living?

Digital Technology Has Changed the Way We Live, but Not Necessarily in a Bad Way

St. Joseph's Institution, Singapore

Nguyen Cao Duy

QN: Is digital technology disrupting our life and values, or is it creating new ways of living?

Thanks to our human innovation and ingenuity, our lives have been constantly improving over the years. Today the words “digital” and “technology” are deeply ingrained in our everyday life where computers and mobile phones are always around us. Some people seem to be concerned about the impact of digital technology that it is eroding our traditions and values. However, if we consider it carefully, the advantages actually outweigh the disadvantages and I strongly believe that digital technology is creating new ways of living.

The advent of social media has significantly changed the way we interact with others. Well-known social networking communities such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Pinterest are bringing us close despite geographical distance. Today the majority of us are using these platforms not only to keep connected with others but also to expand our social circles by meeting people who share common interests. Just imagine how powerful Facebook is in enabling people to finally unite with their loved ones after years of losing contact and separation. As such, digital technology has enabled us to close the geographical gap and bring people closer.

Another way in which digital technology is transforming our lives is giving us faster services. With thousands of technology companies around the globe, there have been numerous apps for us to use for different purposes. For example, instead of going to different stores to look for something, we can spend just a few minutes on our phones on popular shopping platforms such as Amazon or eBay with various options and receive the ordered package at our homes in the shortest time. Besides shopping, there are also numerous apps for different services such as health care, transportation, entertainment or even education and business. The most well-known multifunctional app today is probably WeChat in which one can order services from trivial jobs like getting your dog cleaned to even business matters like investing in the stock market. It is undeniably true that the power of digital technology has made our lives much more convenient.

With the invention of artificial intelligence (A.I.), humans have succeeded in using digital technology to create art. Taking music as an example, do you know that in 2017, a company built an electronic composer called AIVA which is capable of creating high-quality and personalized soundtracks? Using an enormous database of thousands of pieces from famous composers of humankind, the A.I. can recognize their pattern and meaning and create a new piece from them with different emotion based on listeners' preferences. Moreover, A.I.s have also been able to assist journalists and designers nowadays by providing them with some ideas and insights using machine learning, the process by which A.I.s can “learn” the pattern and ideas from a database. Therefore, we can be confident that the future in which we can enjoy art not only created by human beings but also by machines is not far away.

From the way we interact with each other through Facebook to how efficient we order services today through WeChat and listen to the music created by an artificial intelligence AIVA, it is true that digital technology is creating new ways of living. The technology itself is an essential key for us to explore more amazing possibilities. It is our responsibility to know how to utilize it to create new and endless outcomes in our lives.

A Balance Is Necessary in Evaluating Technology Today

St. Joseph's Institution, Singapore

Kang Jie Ng

With the swift improvement of technology today, and more people getting internet with every passing day, it is more important than ever before to be able to evaluate its effects rationally. What technology has done in the past decade is to bind everyone in the world together more closely than before; socially, culturally and economically. This has brought much discussion over whether this impact is for better or worse.

As always, many lament (as they do whenever a new technology changes society), that technology is destroying the old way of living and the old values. However, this inevitably means that new ways of living are being accepted in favor of older ones. Digital technology has all but replaced cash in China, the birthplace of paper money. Yet, you will hardly find a Chinese citizen bemoaning the disappearance of cash from daily transactions. Many Chinese people still remember the days when counterfeit checking machines were at every cashier and bank in the country.

Similarly, for all the complaints that social media receives for causing the face-to-face interaction skills of the youth of today to deteriorate, and all the condemnation it has received for being the platform for fake news and hate speech, no one is calling for people to stop using it. We find it inconceivable, simply because we have chosen to accept this technology as a part of our daily lives. While it may be technically correct to say that technology has disrupted our lives, it is fairer to say that we have chosen to use technology to change our lives and values.

Many entrepreneurs have latched onto this digital technology in a bid to launch new businesses. Aside from social media, online shopping is another example of a platform that has disrupted old cultures and values, but also created new ways of living. For a very long time, transactions were considered safe only if the goods could be seen with your own eyes, and payment and the receipt of goods happened simultaneously. However, the propensity of online shopping now suggests that people have changed their minds. This happened for many reasons, but convenience is the most obvious factor. This has allowed us to shop from the comfort of our homes, and changed our consumer habits and weekend plans irrevocably.

Now, this and a whole host of other internet technologies have also allowed us to engage in new ways of living that are not entirely healthy. Currently, more people than ever are living ever more sedentary lives, devoid of face-to-face interaction with real human beings. A very prominent example is the Hikikomori of Japan, whose numbers have skyrocketed in recent years. Once again, digital technology allows people to indulge in their own desires to a far greater extent than was possible in the past.

Digital technology is a double-edged sword. Currently, we're cutting ourselves by choice, not by compulsion.

Everyone's a Filmmaker: Deprofessionalization in the Era of Smartphones

St. Paul's Co-Educational College, Hong Kong

Justin Donohugh

Last summer, I traveled to Myanmar to film a documentary about the country's endangered rhino population, whose numbers have gotten so low that the species now faces extinction. In years past, a project of this scale would have required substantial funding, a full crew, equipment, editors, and distributors. Not so anymore. I boarded my plane in Hong Kong outfitted with nothing more than an iPhone, my financial support and distribution covered before I captured the first second of footage in the jungle.

Today, thanks to mammoth advancements in visual and audio technology, aspiring filmmakers like me have it far, far easier than directors of the past. With nothing more than the smartphone in our pockets, we can technically record, edit, and circulate a feature-length movie to a global audience online. No studios required. In many ways, filmmakers have never been freer to focus on their stories, vision, and craft; the film industry's barriers to entry have never been so low. And yet, these radical advances bring with them an increased reliance on technology, our expertise – and potentially our humanity – outsourced to our devices.

Of course, this process of deprofessionalization isn't limited to the film industry, and its pace has only accelerated in recent decades. With improved technology comes an expectation of greater productivity from individuals, and a greater likelihood of becoming overworked. A machine can reduce the number of humans needed to complete a film from 20 to one, but that one person must now perform considerably more work than before. Meanwhile, the exponential proliferation of content makes it extremely difficult for your voice to be heard amongst all the surrounding noise. Underlying all of this is the question of who owns contemporary art, the creators behind it or the tech companies that host it?

In "The Knowledge," the author Lewis Dartnell highlights the downsides of our overdependence on devices and technology, drawing a delightfully frightening portrait of a post-apocalyptic society struggling to survive with flawed tech from before the fall. To cite just one example, sailors in the book have returned to navigating by sextants because cyber attacks have become so prevalent. While true self-reliance seems increasingly impossible in our digitized world, we must ask ourselves how much self we're willing to sacrifice in exchange for comfort. How much of our own knowledge should reside on our hard drives?

Individually and collectively, technology has made us more productive and connected, but it has also weakened how we retain and apply what we know. Going forward, we must remain skeptical about the growing presence of tech in our lives, planning well in advance for the inevitable moment when, God forbid, the world's Wi-Fi goes out. Based on the film I made in Myanmar, it's increasingly unlikely that the rhinoceros will still be around when that happens. Good thing I backed up the footage before uploading it to YouTube.

What the “Mona Lisa” Tells Us About

St. Rose of Lima’s College, Hong Kong

Stephanie Hung

What will you do if you are in the Louvre and right in front of the masterpiece, “Mona Lisa”? Will you take a selfie with it and go away or really read the information detailly and appreciate the artwork? I believe that the former one will be the majority. In fact, digital technology is disrupting our life and values in many various ways.

Digital technology reduces communications. In the past when we were having family gatherings, we all sat together and chatted. We seldom saw people playing with their phones during meals as we valued family union a lot. However, in recent days, we can see people finish their meal quickly, head down and start phubbing their phones, some even phub their phones when they are having their meal! They may WhatsApp people at the same table without really face-to-face communicating. In a big family gathering, using your phone while eating was treated as impolite and disrespectful, and it was not allowed. But nowadays many parents set wrong role models for their children to follow, by using their phones at an inappropriate time and venue. Therefore, more and more youngsters do so. Even though some may scold their kids for using their phones, they won’t listen, and it worsens their parent-child relationship. Therefore, in the digital era, people are addicted to using mobile phones and unwilling to communicate with others.

Moreover, digital technology prohibits people from knowing the profoundest meaning of different things and appreciating it. The “Mona Lisa” case exemplifies how people focus on taking photos instead of knowing the profound meaning, history and culture of it. Nowadays when we go to historical places and museums, how many people will really do research on it and appreciate the beauty? If without digital technology, I believe people will be appreciative of the arts and daily life.

Lastly, digital technology causes great disturbance to our lives. When people are walking on the streets, many of them just focus on their phones without paying attention to the road situation. Even when they are crossing the road, they may not check whether there are cars passing by. Accidents may happen if drivers cannot stop their cars immediately. When accidents happen, should the one who phubs their phone also take responsibility? Moreover, when people are having a meal together in some high-class restaurant, the dishes may look attractive in how they are decorated and designed. Some people may try to take lots of photos from different angles, and then post them on social media to show off. After they have finished taking photos, the dishes may already be cold or not as fresh as when they were served. This causes disturbance to the one who really wants to appreciate the taste.

The digital era may be good for human beings as it improves our lives. However, as we are not in control of the digital tools that claim to improve the quality of our lives, it will cause disruption of values and life.

From now on, just be JOMO (joy of missing out) and enjoy your life!

Technology Can Help Us Become More Human, if We Let It

Taipei American School, Taiwan

Shereen Lee

Throughout pre-19th-century history, being a woman in the Western hemisphere typically meant either having a maid, or being one. Typically cut off from education and most careers, 52% of women in 1870 worked in domestic or personal service. Now, that percentage has shrunk massively: live-in servants are most commonly reserved for the ultra-elite, and maid outfits are seen more commonly in the house on Halloween than they are on a day-to-day basis.

Machines were a major trigger for this vast transformation. Over the past century, gadgets from washing machines to Siri have largely supplanted the domestic duties that took up much of a woman's time. Capitalism has neatly packaged centuries-old traditions of domestic labor, from secretarial work to housekeeping, into technologies with concrete monetary value. In a world where women consistently do more domestic labor than their male counterparts — much of it unpaid household work — automation can subvert the norm of women doing household work.

As digital technology takes the place of humans in domestic duties, this transformation could result in a revolution in how we see women in the household and in the workplace. When rote “women's work” like secretarial jobs and domestic work become completely obsolete, women will be freer from dated cultural expectations. When chores become increasingly associated with paid work through automation, domestic partnerships will no longer revolve around maintenance and unpaid labor. Evolving technology creates a third entity that renders the feminine-masculine split of labor irrelevant, allowing for a revolution in traditional gender roles globally.

Yet, the tasks that technologies have begun to take over do not stop at tools for the workforce. Beyond physical labor and office work, communications-based technologies are also tackling increasingly abstract tasks: remembering, engaging, and caring. Facebook puts birthday reminders in notifications. Gmail tells you in bold orange text if you've taken too long to respond to an email. Instagram provides a row of emojis with which you can respond to comments on all of your posts.

Technology is additionally a new proxy for communication, an invisible shepherd that prods us into basic proprieties. Put simply, tech does not just monetize physical labor. It also puts us on the path to viewing emotional investment as something that can be bought. And this goes against a fundamental purpose of technology: to allow us more time and ability to engage with each other emotionally and intellectually.

Of course, going back to Rolodex card-filing is a far cry from the answer. Yes, digital technology is creating positive ways of living, hopefully closing gender gaps and creating alternatives to unpaid labor in the future. But technology should be a tool, not a personal lifestyle. In making the active decision to choose to limit our use of technology when it comes to emotional labor, we make the decision to make ourselves more human, not less.

Digital Technology: Questioning Assumptions About Human Nature

Taipei American School, Taiwan

Seung Hyun Lee

You will not find a lot of Americans who have not come across “The Berenstain Bears” during their youth. Many, in fact, grew up learning how to read through the popular children’s book. However, named after the creators Stan and Jan Berenstain, “The Berenstain Bears” is remembered by most as “The Berenstein Bears.” While a typical explanation for this minute error may simply be attributed to flaws in our memories, this common “coincidence” may be a case of the “Mandela effect.”

The Mandela effect originates from the phenomena in which many incorrectly believed Nelson Mandela had passed away in prison during the 1980s, when in fact he was alive until 2013. This theory suggests that our shared false memories are evidence of another parallel universe. Today, the advancement of digital technology has brought this once marginal philosophy into the mainstream, disrupting our lives and values by challenging traditional beliefs.

The game of Pac-Man appears deceptively simple, but it was the beginning of a more complex simulation technology. Toru Iwatani, the creator, claims that “each of the enemies has its own character” as the ghosts are programmed to have distinct personalities defined by different algorithms. This technology has continued to evolve, with a new generation of programmers and economists utilizing digital technology to experiment with different artificial intelligence-based strategies to reduce financial risks in stock markets. Today, the evolution of digital technology leaves many experts speculating a future in which the virtual becomes indistinguishable from the reality.

In his academic paper, “Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?”, Nick Bostrom addresses his Simulation Argument, suggesting our universe is no more than a digital simulation. This is now not only possible, but also mathematically probable. The probability that our version of reality is “base reality” declines with each simulation, which demonstrates we may be living in a computer simulation. This realm of possibility brings the demise of religion as God becomes nothing but the gamemaster behind the computer controlling our world, and humanity becomes nothing but the ghosts in Pac-Man.

But could the human brain be so easily fooled?

In the rubber hand illusion, participants cringed when a knife was used to threaten a prosthetic hand placed above their real hand. Similarly, mirror therapy is used to ease pain from amputated limbs by using a mirror to reflect the uninjured side and tricking the brain into believing both limbs coexist. In simulations, specific variables are often changed to collect the various responses. Our brain’s capacity to quickly adapt to new environments allows it to be disposed to simulated worlds as we easily perceive the change to be a new reality.

Digital technology is disrupting more than family dinners and a peaceful night’s sleep; it is questioning the fundamentals of our existence. While remembering “The Berenstain Bears” as “The Berenstein Bears” may simply be a memory issue, it is also an implication of something more. Digital technology holds the disruptive potential to shake the very certainty that underlies the assumptions that make us human.

Nostalgia: How Digital Technology Revives Unexpected Childhood Memories

Taipei American School, Taiwan

Charlotte Lee

There is nothing as puzzling as when my mother realized that I had been using her old film camera two summers ago. I had unearthed this '90s relic from the dusty shelves of my grandmother's bedroom. Intrigued by the clunky piece of metal, I carried it around with me, until I had finally collected enough photos to develop.

To my disdain, the lady at the photo store told me it would cost me USD \$10 to print the photos out. So being the tech-savvy Generation Z kid I was, I popped a microSD out of my phone and asked her to upload the photos digitally instead.

Three days later, I scrolled through my camera roll and showed my mom the photos. "You used my camera to take film and then ended up with them on your phone?" she said, shaking her head, then proceeding to reminisce out loud about the how she used to develop her own film in her school's darkroom.

Digital technology has made itself prevalent in almost every aspect of life, creating a culture often criticized by older generations, who scream "addiction" like a battle cry and claim that these days, kids' heads are permanently tilted towards tiny screens. But these criticisms overlook the fact that technology has created a unique culture that allows for communication that only those who grew up in it can truly understand.

A generation of older observers sees a train full of young commuters with eyes glued onto the phones in their laps. My cousin can't eat dinner without an iPad in front of him. These, admittedly, are not aspects of today's culture that I am proud of. But these qualities aren't new. We have always been creatures with obsessive tendencies—addiction and consumerism existed long before Candy Crush and Snapchat, so perhaps, we need to reconsider who is really at fault. More importantly, technology has helped develop a web of connections between people where it was never possible before.

When my brother left Taipei to attend college in America, he experienced a huge culture shock. Though he studied in international schools his whole life, I doubt that anything really prepared him for waking up everyday and seeing white students as a regular occurrence. Perhaps a little intimidated by the unfamiliar, he joined a Facebook group called "Subtle Asian Traits" that specializes in posting hilarious memes about the peculiarities of an Asian-American upbringing. From 12,000 kilometers away, my brother tagged me in posts reminding me about how our very Asian parents ruthlessly forced us to learn piano.

In an age of increasing diversity and immigration, it was a Facebook meme group that bonded 300,000 Asian-Americans who, like me, have difficulty putting into words what it feels like to grow up in the strange overlap between Chinese and Western culture. It was a Facebook meme group that made me laugh with my brother halfway across the globe.

While there are aspects of digital technology that are unproductive, this generation shouldn't feel guilty into resisting their own culture. If our parents are allowed to take pride in the good old days of film photography, there is no reason why in 20 years, we shouldn't be able to think fondly upon meme groups that connected distraught third culture siblings. The internet may seem like daunting place—but there is something very innocent about its ability to momentarily revive our long forgotten childhood laughs.

Democracy, Disrupted

Taipei American School, Taiwan

Catherine Lin

Soon after George Zimmerman, a white man, shot Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teenager, 17-year-old Dylann Roof, curious about the case, typed “black-on-white crime” into his Google search bar. The first link he clicked on was the website of a white supremacist organization, the Council of Conservative Citizens. The savage black-on-white murders the website detailed horrified him. Roof later walked into the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Carolina, took out his handgun, and opened fire.

An enigmatic algorithm brought Roof to misleading information, with real-world consequences. While he was put on trial and sentenced to life in prison without parole, no one could ever truly call Google to account for contributing to the deaths of nine innocent African-Americans.

Search engines and social media networks have opened up opportunities for unprecedented global information flows. We are not in control — corporations are.

New digital technologies have concentrated power into irresponsible, undemocratic corporate hands. Arab Spring demonstrators and Russian propagandists alike are all subject to the same organizations’ opaque and haphazard governance. Public opinion is the only court that can hold companies accountable.

Corporate control has been deeper and more disastrous in vulnerable countries with poor internet infrastructure. A Facebook initiative to offer free, basic internet services has granted the company such a far-reaching monopoly on internet use in some developing countries that Facebook is sometimes confused with the internet itself. In the Philippines, where nearly everyone with internet access is on Facebook, President Rodrigo Duterte’s regime used Facebook to spread misinformation undermining opposition to its human rights abuses. In Myanmar, military leaders employed a systematic Facebook campaign to incite hatred toward the Rohingya minority group, fueling a genocide.

Some may argue that these corporations merely provide blank slates for individuals to write upon, and thus bear no culpability for evil perpetrated on their platforms. Such reasoning ignores the ways technology companies regularly tinker with their algorithms to manipulate user behavior. They create and enforce community guidelines, deciding what kinds of content are welcome. During the 2018 Irish referendum on abortion, Google and Facebook cracked down on foreign advertisements, taking responsibility for safeguarding the integrity of the vote.

Technology corporations are not neutral. They are political actors with outsize influence in our civic life. They are responsible for search engines that routinely turn up racist results. They are responsible for spreading fake news. They were responsible for leading Dylann Roof to the Council of Conservative Citizens website that sparked his radicalization.

Multinational corporations have the power to affect the fortunes of media organizations, decide elections, start and stop genocide, and mold the realities millions of people around the world experience. Digital technologies have provided corporations the tools for building political communities and the responsibility to regulate them, even though their interests do not align perfectly with the public good. Whether we can trust companies to do so is an open question, but we have little choice.

Dangers of the Digital World

Taipei American School, Taiwan

Maxwell Chen

Four years ago, on a calm spring afternoon in Taipei, Taiwan, a young man stalks the Taipei Metro platforms, silently observing the people around him. He paces up and down the platform, trying to see if anyone will look back up at him and acknowledge his presence. In his bright red shirt and shining white helmet, the man is somehow invisible to other commuters. After carefully calculating his attack, he slips out a 30cm-long knife. Within five minutes, Cheng Chieh manages to stab 28 people.

It would be rather obvious and terrifying to witness someone weaving through a crowd, stabbing and slashing people. However, no one noticed the attack until Cheng Chieh was nearly finished with his massacre. The lack of awareness was no accident: Cheng Chieh purposely targeted people who had earphones on and were staring down on their phone screens, oblivious to the outside world.

Digital technology has advanced the human race to such a high level. From launching rockets to posting selfies, humans have accomplished so much because of such powerful technology. However, digital technology has also made us oblivious to our physical surroundings. Thanks to the development of smartphones and social media, people tend to obsess about what's happening on the internet, rather than their environment.

Because digital technology constantly distracts people from the real world, it creates a fake online world through the internet. Because people, especially teenagers and young adults, are so engaged in their own digital world, they are often surrounded by photoshopped models, fake celebrity drama, and even fake online relationships. As a result, digital media platforms, such as Instagram and Snapchat, cause people to make a fake online identity, so that people feel like they fit in and meet others' expectations. While online profiles and posts may not be entirely fake, a lot of what teenagers choose to share online may simply just be to impress their peers. Constantly switching between the digital and real world is detrimental for young people, as this is the time for them to find their identity and discover their passions. Digital technology only twists the process, making it harder for people to be genuine.

Ultimately, it is not that digital technology is hurting society because it is holding us back from achieving goals. Instead, it creates a fake world which absorbs too many people, leaving them vulnerable and unaware of their physical surroundings. Cheng Chieh's victims are an extreme example of the detrimental impacts digital technology has on humans, but perhaps that is what it takes for us to wake up from our digital lives.

How the Internet Is Affecting People's Awareness and Mental Health

The International School @ Park City, Malaysia

Isabelle Galvin

Technology and media are a big part of everyday life. Most people have a phone glued to their hand constantly and if they have to put it down, you better hope you have a lot of time because it will take a minimum of 20 minutes to persuade them to leave it. Personally, I don't agree with how obsessed people are with devices. However, I do think social media positively affects our communities and cultural awareness more than it affects them negatively. In addition, it can also make people feel more accepted for who they are.

A huge way social media positively affects our lives is through more people being more culturally aware. In the past, some people had fixed opinions on religious groups or just different races without ever have coming into contact with a member of that group; they didn't have any way of learning about the authentic beliefs and what the people involved are really like, or they haven't had the privilege or opportunity to travel and meet people in different countries. Of course this still happens today but on a smaller scale and if they would like to, they can learn about different cultures. Having a wider knowledge about different countries, cultures and religion can affect people's social views, political views and their personal outlook on the world and the inhabitants of it.

In my opinion, one of the most positive attributes the internet has to offer is support. Online there are millions of different people, all in a varying situations. For instance, if someone feels they are an outsider in their community (because of their race, sexual orientation, gender they identify as, their financial situation etc.) they can find someone online who is going through the same situation as they are or is just there to offer support through a tough time, that could help them so much. The online community could show them that it's okay and they can do what they want to do and be who they are without people judging them.

Articles often focus on the negative impact of social media on body image and I agree that being told you have to look a certain way won't boost someone's self-esteem. But recently there has been a big increase in diverse body types being shown off online. This will also help people feel accepted and beautiful within their own skin. What more could you want than someone to love themselves?

Social media has its ups and downs (as does everything) but overall I think it is a great thing that can do wonders for the world if people treat it and other people right. Social media is helping people understand and love others but also feel like it's ok to be themselves. I believe it's creating a more diverse and happy mind-set for a lot of people.

Digital Dilemma

Ullens School, Nepal

Nisab Shrestha

During a school trip to a rural Nepalese village that lasted almost a week, we were tasked with interviewing some of its residents and asking about their average life in the village. For the most part, we were given very monotonous answers, like it's been a great harvest season, the government has been ignoring us over the past few years, and so on. But I clearly remember entering the house of a successful farmer, Asaam, whose house was made out of concrete and solid brick, and whose roof was made out of aluminum panels, which was pretty rare thing in his village. There, he sat with his two children, who were both immersed in their father's smartphone. While almost everyone in the village critiqued the government for their negligence, he was the only one to thank them, for introducing him and his family to the internet.

The internet is a digital technology that has been heavily debated, and which has come under fire from different social media platforms. Even though the advantages that come along with the internet, or just about any digital technology, are imminent, making our everyday work get easier little by little, critics still nitpick on the small flaws and present users with a great dilemma; is the advancement of digital technology making our lives more efficient, or is it leading us towards a dystopian society?

With the earlier case of Asaam, we were astonished from the fact that he actually thanked the government, for a small thing such as the internet. When we asked him why he's showing such endearment towards the government, he laughed and told us "My children have to walk over five kilometers every day in order for them to reach their school. With the internet on our side, they will not have to walk so much to get the same, if not better education than they get in school."

The advancement of the internet has not enriched the life of Asaam only; hundreds, if not thousands of people have benefited with the introduction of the internet in villages. With that being said, some people may have other thoughts regarding the advantages that come with the internet. While it is true that the internet plays a protagonist's role in rural areas, the same cannot be said of the people living in a rural environment. Nepal is home to dozens, if not hundreds of indigenous groups, with the Newari caste being one of them. I am a Newar, but the fact that I can only understand bits of the language and yet I can fully engage in a conversation in another language is truly sad. The internet and the world around us creates this environment where languages such as English, Spanish, Cantonese, etc are prioritized ahead of other languages. As such, from the need to become one with the times and to modernize, one may disregard the need to learn their indigenous language, which may lead to language death, a very crucial issue in Nepal at the moment. Even though the internet and digital technology have posed problems regarding cybersecurity and anonymity, one cannot disregard the conveniences that come with this technology. Is digital technology disrupting our lives? Is it making it better? The answer, is open to interpretation.

Misinformation! The Deep Trenches of Misinformation in the Digital Age

United World College of South East Asia, Singapore

Jason Hausenloy

Ping! That is the recurring sound that plagues homes up and down the country and imprisons children in their bedrooms when they should be outside playing. Instead, lightning reflexes spring into action, hands reach into pockets to retrieve smartphones just to check the latest “juice” (to use the typical teenage term). Whether it be news of the 2018 Nobel Prize winners or “the largest audience to ever witness an inauguration, period,” the paragon of the misinformation campaign is in the now.

According to a survey of teenagers conducted by Common Sense Media, 31% of teenagers had shared a news story that they discovered was fake afterwards. It is appalling that the puppet masters who pull the strings of the digital world allow such misinformation to occur, and worse, outdated laws lack the power to punish those responsible. Infowars is a distinct example of this spreading of lies and it was only recently barred from major social networks.

Scariest still, our privacy is being taken advantage of. Being a human right, it is quite hard to believe the dampened approach taken by world governments in response to the gross invasions of privacy that continue today. Cambridge Analytica (a now-defunct British consultancy firm) is an elucidating example of this, it collected the information of 87 million Facebook users for the political gains of their clients. A study published in International Journal of Advertising found that teenage students have fewer privacy concerns than the generation before them. In the face of personalized, targeted campaigns, barriers that filter the spurious begin to erode.

Of course, we can always rely on the mainstream media, can't we? In a world where the majority of children get their news from social media, it would seem as if the honesty of the media pales in comparison to the truthfulness of social media. It turns out that the tech-savvy generation has not abandoned traditional media, with 46% of those who read news still relying upon mainstream media outlets to provide their window to the outside world. Teenagers are frequently blinded by a world where objectivity is subjective, and those with an agenda will put a negative or positive spin rooted in their opinion. Facts established in the adumbration of opinion inevitably create bias but subtle media bias is not the most striking problem at hand but rather propaganda-like “mainstream news stories.” The cunningness of mixing both real and fake news stories warrants a new level of infiltration or rather, manipulation.

Each zone of misinformation corrodes our ability to make informed decisions based on evidence rather than facts. The submarine of our minds explores obvious deception, the twilight zone, where the issue is bathed in light and attention. Compare this to infiltration and manipulation, the abyss, which receives no light and is shrouded in darkness, away from the eye of the public. All in all, it is our job to illuminate an increasingly dark world and to unwrap the fading gift of truth.

Technology Isn't Just a Tool

United World College of South East Asia, Singapore

Isabelle Lean

"Code blue! Code blue!" The last words, before a swarm of panicked nurses rush into the ICU ward. Mere hours later, the patient awakes with a tracheostomy tube strapped firmly into his trachea. A literal lifeline.

"It was luck," the exhausted caregiver conceded later, "heaven's work, perhaps."

We live on the cusp of society's reinvention where innovative technology transcends our grasp to flirt with God-like powers. For certain individuals, medical technology can solve death. It creates new ways of moving forward, where otherwise there would be none.

Technology takes many forms; digging its roots deep into how we communicate, our modus operandi in business, transportation, manufacturing, and our education system.

The ubiquitous nature of technology makes it very difficult to imagine a world without it. Certainly, people don't see technology as novel anymore, but technology has not reached the point where it can be considered unstable. It's dynamic and alive to the public's burgeoning demand for technology.

The 21st century oversaw humanity's momentous one-way crossing from the traditional Industrial Age to the Information Age. Besides forming the bedrock of the information age, the rapid advancement of technology permeates the fabric of the future.

The internet has become a global prosthesis or a crutch that is used to make up for human shortfalls, a collective memory. A network so powerful will surely consolidate societal conventions, accelerate the economy in a way that is unparalleled.

Significantly, the rise of social media has led to the domination of the lives of young people by social platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, and Twitter.

As of 2018, 94% of young people in the US from the 18-24 age bracket use YouTube, 78% are Snapchat users and 51% say that it would be very hard to give up social media.

So what's causing the addiction?

For one, many of us have a need for social validation, which is why reaffirmation of social connections like a 'Like' on Facebook or a 'Favourite' on Twitter brings that smug, bubbly feeling to our chest. Self-obsession sits at the helm of our decision making, and showcasing our ego on a platform is a major priority.

Most of us have an innate desire for communication, or to be social. Social media amplifies this need and creates an environment where there is no time and no space. Some see social media as a virtual extension of themselves.

Humans already have a natural proclivity for distracting themselves. Social media drives many to distraction, resulting in inefficiencies in task performance because of the mental readjustment needed to return to the task.

Technology is not a tool, by the same token, it can't be classified as additive change; more so ecological. Technology is deeply ingrained in today's society and has the ability to transform society radically, given our inexorable dependence upon it. The innumerable facets of technology can each be controlled in malicious or harmless ways, but mostly, we must be careful not to lose our control over technology – lest technology ends up controlling us instead.

One Day in the Life of Ivan OnScreenovich

United World College of South East Asia, Singapore

Erik Herbert Lohmus

At six o'clock the alarm on Ivan OnScreenovich's phone went off, making that god-awful sound that everybody in the boarding house had come to hate. But Ivan didn't seem to care that it was time to wake, he just quickly hit the snooze button, falling back into a beautiful, blue light-disrupted slumber for another nine minutes. The truth was, Ivan wasn't feeling that well, as the night before he had stayed up until three o'clock in the morning watching BuzzFeed videos on YouTube. Ivan knew the fact that staying up long into the night staring at an artificial light would result in a tough and groggy morning due to distorted sleep, but he did it anyway and so do many other young people diagnosed with a psychosomatic disease of smartphone addiction.

I like to look at the influence of gizmos from an economist point of view and thus I have come to see digital technology, in the life of modern people, following the simple law of diminishing returns. We have reached a point in the usage of these once revered technological wonders, where the benefits gained from them are less than the energy and time we invest. It is just so simple to get sidetracked in the age of information and virtual presence by acute satisfaction-inducing diversion. "Oh, somebody just followed me," "You have quintillion new messages," "Hey Google: what's the average size of a male capybara?" These type of examples hit so close to home that it hurts. We have entered an age where spectatoritis has become the most diagnosed disease. But why is that?

It's my firm belief that the search for simplicity is the answer. Why bother myself with the work that I am required to do if it is much more satisfying to surf hours on Amazon to buy that that perfect llama onesie, that I am probably never going to wear? It's the way out from this forever accelerating restlessness of modern life. The order from chaos that these utopian inventions were supposed to provide, seem to act in reverse - creating chaos from order. But I truly believe that these technological advances were not created with the intention of socially engineering us to be slaves to the system, but rather it's humankind's weak nature itself. We are always seeking the easiest way out and modern technology is so adept at helping us do just that. Sadly there are consequences of this.

Perhaps the most sad example of this is the rising levels of depression and suicide rates. As our virtual presence has become one of the defining parts of personal identity the susceptibility to critique, affecting self-esteem, is also elevated, as there is greater access to our personal lives from the people connected to us through the screen, than there is from the bonds we form in our real life. Thus Ivan OnScreenovich, before going to sleep, doesn't worry that much about whether he still has breadcrumbs to eat for lunch the next day, but rather about the presence he has on the World Wide Web.

You Won't Believe This One Simple Trick to Understanding Clickbait!

Clickbait: The Rise of Misinformation in the Digital Age

United World College of South East Asia, Singapore
Saransh Malik

Did that headline catch your eye? Did you see the headline and suddenly think of websites that want your clicks for advertising money, or to spread ransomware? It's likely. After years of these scams stealing hundreds of dollars from vulnerable users, most people who spend time online can differentiate between legitimate news websites and those that just want clicks. But why do these unsophisticated hacks still work?

It's all to do with communication and the sharing of news in the information age. Through the rapid-fire sharing of pictures, ideas and news through social media, it has become extremely simple to manipulate people's thoughts with misinformation. The large volume of information and data to which we are constantly exposed online brings up a need for something to stand out or catch people's eye. This is one of the core reasons behind clickbait, and is essential in understanding the issue and its workings.

With many websites like Twitter and Facebook only displaying the headline of an article when posted, many users absorb only what is shown in that one line. After all, Twitter is all about quick updates in 280 characters or less. With quotes that could be taken out of context, or clickbait headlines meant to misinform users, people often quickly form opinions about issues which actually have a lot more depth to them. As Alexander Pope once said: "A little learning is a dangerous thing." This often leads to consequences outside the digital realm, such as the alleged large wave of false news that flooded social media during the American presidential elections of 2016.

To make matters related to clickbait and misinformation worse, there has been massive outrage online relating to new laws in the EU regarding copyright. Article 11 of the EU Copyright Directive states that any company that aggregates and shares news must pay taxes to the companies where the articles are written. This is also expected to apply to social media websites like Twitter, which would have detrimental effects on this issue. Unreputable news organizations that want to spread false information would be likely to waive the tax on their articles, leading to their articles being shared more on the internet. This proves the disruption and perils that could be brought with modern technology and communication methods.

Clickbait is by no means a sophisticated way to change people's minds. People or organizations that resort to these techniques often only do so to pry on the minds of those who aren't able to distinguish between what is true and what is not. Although technology has made the world more interconnected than ever before, it also undoubtedly has significant consequences. These issues aren't due to the workings of the technology itself, but rather, the way we as digital citizens use it. It is up to us to work towards a world with overhauled laws that make the spreading of false information harder, while also protecting the freedom of speech of all people, regardless of their political or social affiliation.

The Need for Taking a Step Back

United World College of South East Asia, Singapore

ChaeYeon Ryu

Technology is accompanied by two components, promise, and unintended consequences. By all means, the current generations of the “tech-savviest” kids are most well adapted; yet they are enclosed by barriers of ignorance and unawareness. More communities express concerns about its pervasive and borderless nature. These superficial expansions are catalysts, having accelerated the pathway of our society to a climax of innovation, while drastically altering the metronomic stability of life’s rhythm.

In 2007, to an interviewer’s amazement, Bill Gates, Microsoft’s founder, revealed that he did not permit his children to use mobile phones until the age of 14. Among those “tech titans” who established similar limits are Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg. Notably the very creators of technology - are also those who find ways to minimize it.

The human mind grows increasingly susceptible to external manipulation; this extends to the branch of new development. It is controversial whether its universal availability makes us more connected, or more connected to our devices. The degradation of social skills severely influences the purity of human interactions. For instance, many regret spending more time looking at screens than talking to friends. Parents use online entertainment sources as a last resort to pacify their short-tempered children; this becomes the only deterrent to the deterioration of parent-child relations.

Furthermore, these also mainly occupy most of our personal time; spaces reserved for hobbies, relationships, and personal reflection. Adam Alter, a psychology professor, explores ideas in his TED Talk about the lack of “stopping cues” in the 21st century. When you finish a book, you close it and move on. But today, nothing prompts one to stop; the endless stream of information only draws one in further. He describes our daily consumption of these as “driving down a really fast, long road, where the accelerator is mashed to the floor”.

Currently, communities have started to notice technology’s invasive and perilous nature. The internet leaks disturbing content and inappropriate language; the resulting psychological adversities: aggressiveness and anxiety should not be underestimated.

Furthermore, the ease of acquiring information from our fingertips without the need of memorization leads to the reshaping and decline of our cognitive abilities. Physical inactivity is also a huge risk from overusing these technological devices, resulting in chronic health complications, such as diabetes and obesity, which are responsible for 71% of deaths worldwide.

Technology allows firms to profit from mass production by performing tasks from the most mundane to the most dangerous. With a downward spiral in firms’ demand for human resources, unemployment rates will reach a new peak. Much of the workforce will be replaced by lifeless gadgets in the occupation they devoted the most time and energy to. The outcome extends to relevant families and communities, all affected in various ways.

Do technology’s benefits justify the occasions when it has caused more harm? Supposedly being the “fundamental building blocks of society”, its rapid progression not only marks the extinction of our pre-existing beliefs; it is equivalent to a rising action to an unknown climax. At the moment we are wildly unprepared - more steps have to be taken to ready ourselves for a safer long-term relationship with the emerging field of science.

Is Digital Technology Disrupting Our Life and Values, or Is It Creating New Ways of Living?

United World College of South East Asia, Singapore

Anika Sen

Digital technology is a blazing comet in this century. It is all moving too fast. One year we have the first iPhone entering this world from Apple and the next thing you know we have the latest update iOS 12.01 on any of the latest iPhones, where we can use our phones to measure our heights. Waterproof phones, better camera technology, more and more social media apps are just some of the thousands of digital technologies rising today, but the question is, whether all this innovation is for the better or instead disrupting our daily lives.

Taking it personally, just the other day I was sitting together with my friends in the library, all of us gathered around. With everyone looking at our phones. Each and every single one of us was looking at Instagram or Snapchat. Even when we had a perfect opportunity to just spend time talking to each other but we didn't. I didn't even realize it, as I was too absorbed in looking at my Instagram feed. So, looking at the social situation of digital technology, it is clearly disrupting our lives and surely distorting some values. Sure, the internet gives us a lot more friends, but the internet gives us mutual friends or even strangers who just follow us for the sake of it. Those aren't real friends. Those people aren't even real people in our life, as we don't know them. In fact, bringing them closer to us by the means of the internet and social media is putting ourselves in danger. Plus, this is just looking at social media.

However, I can also argue that the internet is a haven where everyone in the world can express their thoughts, opinions, suggestions, and feelings over everything. There is YouTube where people can post videos about anything and everything and on the other side, there is Twitter where everyone can express their thoughts, their actions, and their opinions and suggestions. We can use the internet to find something new, to learn, to teach, to relax, to know. Another plus point is that the digitization of businesses is also helping to improve our lives in many diverse ways.

The only thing is, to what extent will all these positives of the current rising digital technology make up for all the consequences that the same digital technology beholds over us socially? Will the idea of being a source of exploration be able to push through the idea that the same source can be a source of the dark web? Can chatting online overcome the idea that physical social interactions are diminishing? Will more convenient transportation even be needed when we come to a stage where jobs and any social interaction whatsoever can be done digitally, which is basically our world in the making?

Digital technology is all about profit and helping to make our lives more effective. However, is digital technology really doing that? Or is it instead disrupting our lives and our values? It started disrupting with social interactions, a very important part of everyone's lives. What's next?

Moving Into the Digitally Enhanced World

Victoria Junior College, Singapore

Terese Anne Hui Shan Teoh

Aesop's fable of the tortoise and the hare is outdated today. Say the hare and the tortoise are both tasked to deliver news from Singapore to Indonesia. The hare utilizes WhatsApp; the tortoise uses snail mail. Speed is productivity. Everybody loves the hare; but the tortoise? Forgotten.

We learn more tricks from the hare. By pushing buttons we can call not just our contact list - but also the postman to bring our parcel from RedMart; the delivery man to bring laksa from Foodpanda; a Grab driver for transportation. Even more, located online is a suite of tools to materialize dreams and address deep-rooted social issues. We can start a business on Carousell. Or a petition to fund girls' education. Or raise awareness about autism. Everything you need, or want to do, is just a tap away.

Everyone you need is but a tap away, too. We can travel the world and still be at home. Snapchat's 'streaks' are gratifying because they are a quantified indication of how long friends have kept in touch; scrolling through one's feed on Instagram is akin to listening to those from our past and present share their life events. No wonder we love updates: they confer a feeling of closeness. However whether this feeling reflects reality, depends.

Perhaps it is because everyone is entitled to own a publicized scrapbook that cyberspace is romanticized with snapshots capturing the perfect life. Tossed into a hurricane of 'paradise', we are pressured to keep in tempo with the winds, lest we be swept away as detritus. Or perhaps we already see ourselves as a speck of dust thrown inside, envying friends who seem to soar in gales. I have five hundred followers and one hundred likes; she has five hundred followers but why two hundred likes? If others notice - they will look down on me! The next post must be carefully calibrated. Sadly, rather than showcasing our personality, the online profile is largely calculated for public approval.

But if human relationships turn fragile, technologists conjure a deus ex machina for that too - robots. As unfeeling machines, sociable robots promise lifelong 'love', such as Aibo and Furby. Simulation is no longer second best. The direction of our life is in our rein. No, it is robots reigning by binding people next to them. The most powerful technology can put one under illusion that they are loved, when in fact they are stuck in a one-man relationship. More manufactured interaction snowballs into narcissistic behavior and extinguishes empathy. Ultimately they never make friends - just lose the few they have left.

Distinctions between the real and the virtual have blurred. Robot or human. Digital or real-life friend. Glossy avatar or real-life representation. To many, the faceless 'me' is a boon rather than bane. We have founded a generation too focused on the superficial.

But we have also founded a generation who use technology to bridge longstanding social divides. A generation that tries to make life better for the next.

What do we live for?

The Apes That Hold the Smartphone: Realizing How Digital Technology Has Disrupted Our Lives

Victoria Junior College, Singapore

Dustin Theofilus

We used to have our handwritten letters manually delivered, across many days and nights, through blazing heat and thunderous storm. But we wanted a fast and reliable method of transmitting information across long distance. Could we have that? Yes, and the answer was: telegraph. After some time, even telegraph could not accommodate the increasing demand for faster communication. The answer came: wireless connection. This shows that information technology is indispensable in assisting human interaction and it co-evolves along the line of modern society. However, realizing that our digital technology evolves faster than its user, I would argue that digital technology has disrupted the certainty in our lives more than it creates a stable lifestyle.

Our society is built upon the idea that all individual interactions follow certain general norms. Out of countless interactions emerges a societal landscape of many hierarchies, each creating its specific regulations. These rules made possible the existence of a stable society as each can anticipate one another's behavior and establish social order. But, digital technology has radically transformed the landscape such that it invalidates the application of older rules in a different structure. We are treading precariously inside the digital space of emerging hierarchies with traditional norms. Furthermore, we have not come up with new rules for interactions within the hierarchies or how to deal with the foreign features of the digital landscape.

For example, education used to be restricted by tuition fees and the walls of a classroom. With online education platforms such as Khan Academy on the internet, where do student social interactions take place considering the physical school compound is no longer relevant?

Social communications used to mean private correspondence or published opinion in print. Now that online social media lends everyone the status of anonymity, it creates the illusion that their users need not answer for their utterances. For instance, the antifa and neo-Nazi groups repeatedly incite violence against each other and have yet to suffer serious repercussions. Have we come up with any appropriate measures against this dangerously irresponsible behavior?

Employment used to mean all kinds of jobs from industrial workers to computer scientists. In the light of automation, super-intelligent machines that perform certain tasks such as manufacturing cars or computing possible simulations with high efficiency and low cost can easily displace human workers. Carl Benedikt Frey and Michael Osborne from Oxford University pointed out that about 47 percent of jobs in America are at risk from automation. Have we thought about where we will relocate retrenched human workers and how are we going to handle its robotic counterparts?

Ultimately, while it is evident that digital technologies enable more efficient communication and information sharing in many sectors, we should not forget the latent danger of uncontrolled disruptions. Our cultural and economic norms may be obsolete and we have not conceived a new framework to suit current technological progress, but there is no denying that we have come up with one.

Rising Above Digital Disruption

West Island School, Hong Kong

Eugenie Ho

With the latest artificial intelligence, apps and software such as Siri, WeChat and YouTube, we are spending life at its finest. As of 2017, 51% of the world's population has internet service. The majority of us have access to the internet, where netizens can learn, watch TV, chat on social media. The past generations survived without any electronic devices, but why do we hear teenagers telling other that they "can't survive without their phones"? Are we genuinely unable to survive without any mobile devices in the future?

In some cities in China, citizens don't need real money - all they need is a smartphone. With Alipay, they can pay for everything. Using a Chinese app called WeChat, they can book appointments, order food and read just by swiping right inside the app. On the downside, the Chinese government has data on everyone inside the country. Tech companies such as Facebook, Google and Instagram also have access to our data, such as everything we search and the websites and accounts we go on. What will the future be? Will prominent companies control the future?

People on average spend 24 hours a week on their mobile devices. New problems are surfacing such as "text neck": neck pain from looking at mobile devices too long, and "nomophobia", the irrational fear of being without your mobile device phone or being unable to use it. Nomophobic people may also feel phantom rings or vibrations, which is feeling their mobile phone vibrating or their phone ringing when it's not.

Because some of us are so reliant on our phones, entrepreneurs are taking advantage of this and creating apps such as those that sell fake followers for Instagram, track Twitter followers and other functions for social media users. Social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and Twitter mainly gain money through advertisements.

Having mobile devices around us is good - if you know how to limit phone usage and only use it for educational or work purposes. Some apps, such as Wattpad and Kindle, are informative and can help students improve their reading and writing skills. Another app offers a full course on IGCSE subjects. Even social media has its uses. There are accounts on Twitter and Instagram that promote self-care, studying tips and STEM-based facts.

50 years ago, people didn't have the internet, and the only way they could learn was through going to school and reading books, which are bulky, heavy, and somewhat inconvenient. Nowadays, we have a small pocket device literally right at your fingertips where you can learn, read, buy and sell goods, order a taxi and chat with friends all in one place. There is no such thing as "digital disruption", only rising above the "disruption" and making good use of it, whether you are part of an advertising company, a banker or a student.

An Era of Digital Addictions

West Island School, Hong Kong

Jia Shuo Christina Zhao

A student is studying late at night. She is revising for her exam.

Then, her phone blinks.

She glances over at her phone, biting her lips as if she was going through a major debate. No, tests are more important right now. She shakes her head, trying to concentrate. Nevertheless, she can no longer sit still; her mind is disturbed. Well, it is just a short ten-minute break! She grabs her phone and slouches on the couch.

The clock is ticking. An hour has passed. She rushes back to her table—panicking, as the test is only a few hours away.

This is the 21st century, where human lives revolve around the digital world: news spread easily, payments can be issued, and even intimate relationships can be achieved. The list goes on and on; online platforms are advancing, taking over the offline industries.

Unfortunately, the emerging 'netizens' are becoming dictated by digital advancements.

For online users, digital technologies are a new method for communications. The ones who are not engaged are thereby perceived as being isolated from society. When everyone else relies heavily on their screens, it is tempting to do the same.

Users share their personal lives with popular social media platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram: the sense of privacy is lost as information can be stolen and hacked easily. Teenagers also encounter a greater sense of insecurity. They want to blend into their friend groups by mimicking each other's accounts, posting similar photos and eventually becoming copies of each other. Sadly, they lose their authenticities and originalities since they strive to create a facade of themselves with the internet.

Likewise, digital tools have also created a phenomenon whereby the general population lacks the spirit of exploring. When the internet did not exist, people needed to collect analysis, draw conclusions and make decisions themselves. This is a systemic approach that gives distinctive personalities, individualities and creativities. Yet, such learning styles are now fading away because information can be gained effortlessly. With just one click on Google, people have access to all the information they want to know. With such convenience, nobody is willing to explore knowledge in a deeper manner or go through complicated thinking processes anymore.

Digital development is a double-edged sword: while knowledge can spread simultaneously around the world, so can unverified news. False information can be publicized widely and mislead audiences. It is tough for people to distinguish the differences between verified and unreliable sources, as we live in an era where irresponsible online behaviors are rampant and interest in continuing a systemic thinking process is lost.

The positive influences that modern technologies have brought are massive and undeniable. Nonetheless, it is essential for us to become aware of our digital addictions and that our lives are not completely based on the imagined world. Instead of looking down at the screens, why not look up, to celebrate the glamorous reality in front of us?

Nostalgia 2.0

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Yuwen Wu

When Uncle Joshua, a character in Peter De Vries's 1959 novel "The Tents of Wickedness," says that nostalgia "ain't what it used to be," the line is meant to be read as humor – for those stuck in the past, not even our memories stand the test of time. And yet, despite being widely misattributed to Yogi Berra, Uncle Joshua's words have aged rather well. In its ceaseless drive toward the future, technology has forever transformed our view of the past, all while distracting us from the problems of the present. Now we move blindly forward at a breakneck pace, gazing back at a past that may never have existed at all.

Nostalgia, the sentimental longing for a bygone time, has been redefined in relationship to technology since as early as 1888, when Kodak released the first mass-produced camera for consumers. Soon, advertisements were positioning personal cameras as the best and only way to capture and preserve our memories. As Nancy Martha West wrote in "Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia," the camera "allowed people ... to arrange their lives in such a way that painful or unpleasant aspects were systematically erased."

Once again, technology is poised to revolutionize how we recall and value the past. Not so long ago, nostalgia triggers were mostly spontaneous and passive: catching a prom song on the radio, rifling through photo albums with a presumptuous grandparent. Today, however, we can summon up potent doses of nostalgia on demand. A website known as the Nostalgia Machine will play songs from any year of your choice. Timehop and Facebook's On This Day feature aggregate your posts from the distant past, while the Museum of Endangered Sounds collects noises of discontinued products, like the chime of a landline phone or the chirp of a pager.

While these apps and websites provide fun, mostly innocuous glimpses of our past, technologies like VR and augmented reality could soon place us inside of it. And although psychologists believe that nostalgia is crucial for creating meaning and combating loneliness, a constant perceptual immersion in nostalgia could have seriously negative, even dystopian, effects. How long is it until we start to yearn for a time when it was still possible to forget things?

Even if "total recall" becomes a reality, a constant replay of our memories hopefully won't become the norm, given the threats it poses to our mental health and the state of our society in the present. To a lesser degree, the same goes for clicking from one nostalgia app to another. As Clay Routledge, a psychology professor at North Dakota State University, wrote in his influential book on nostalgia, "too much time focusing on the past could jeopardize your ability to engage in other opportunities that will form the basis for future nostalgic memories." Nostalgia really isn't what it used to be, and it may cease to be nostalgia entirely, especially if the only memories we have left are of us swiping through our phones.



Shortlist of Entrants:

Tertiary

Were We Asleep The Whole Time? An Opinion Piece on Digital Disruption

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Anna Katrina R. Ignacio

If we were to describe humanity from what we perceive, it is somewhat expected that they are words filled with negativity. Probably the words 'helpless', 'selfish' or even 'lost'. On the other hand, when it is about technology, we often praise the effect it has had in society; for technology is heavily anchored in identifying our social norms.

But why is that? Are not we the ones accountable for creating technology that made us progress further in answering our peculiar but fascinating curiosities? Being the pioneers, are we not technically also the ones who have had the right mind-set by involving ourselves in what is out there and what can be done to the world?

Many questions like these may come up again and again, never-ending thoughts that have tried to understand the confusion, the guilt, the pain we may or may not feel from the actions we have done. Through technology, it has acted as a vessel for us dealing with our past. It gives clarity on what steps are to be taken when presented with a problem or a scenario. It also gives us a mask to hide the flaws we dare not to bare to ourselves and to others.

It is evident in our present time how it has paved the way to explore ways of building relationships, gaining new information and even tackling social issues. Having all that in the palm of our hands is astounding yet overwhelming. Because of this, we get too caught up in our heads, relying on the idea of controlling the world. Our dependency has made us forget our responsibilities, that ignorance became too blissful to wonder why we are really here. Because of our fear of making mistakes, we never try to acknowledge that we sometimes are the perpetrators of destruction. History really does repeat itself because of our impulse to ruin ourselves, slowly blurring the disfigured and fragmented reality.

H.G. Wells, the father of science fiction, delves into how technology and humanity coincide with the unforeseen nature of society. In his book, "The Sleeper Awakes" it is about a man called the 'Sleeper' who wakes up after 203 years, who just knew that he owns most of the world's richness. However, during those years, others have taken advantage of his wealth to create a government called the 'White Council' to control industries and maltreat workers. Inventions like television and moving picture players were prophesied, but Wells knows more than that. He explored how humans are influenced by power, no matter how technology has helped in making their lives better.

In one line from the book, Wells digs deep into the human psyche with this gut-wrenching reality, that "fact takes no heed of human hopes". It shows how no matter what good intentions we may have, we are enthralled in our hidden insecurities as beautiful flawed beings. Even if technology holds the expansion of knowledge, humans will sleep through the causes of the world's descent to destruction.

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Changing Era of Digitalization

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Digital technology has influenced almost each and every aspect of human life in the present world. From solving one's smallest problems of daily life to helping him or her in completing great professional chores, it wouldn't be wrong to say that electronic equipment or gadgets have directly or indirectly become imperative personal assistants for today's generation. Digital technology has undoubtedly achieved several milestones in various fields like communication, education, science, commerce, security, etc. and has evidently made technical devices more versatile, handy and compact and user friendly. It has not only made our lives easier and less tiresome than ever before but it has also superseded the previous technologies by overcoming their limitations in every sense. It has completely transformed our standards of living and has taken us into a whole new dimension of technological implications.

But one thing which must be kept in mind is that this disruption doesn't necessarily imply that changing time with changing technology is an indication of only something good and desirable. Since there are two sides to every coin, digital technology also has certain well-observed disadvantages. Due to their addiction towards electronic gadgets, people today, especially children and youth, have become less energetic and lazier which is having negative health impacts on their lifestyle. And since these gadgets such as smart phones, tablets, laptops etc. act as great sources of entertainment and provide nice leisure time, there is a growing tendency to procrastinate among people as they cannot get their eyes off their cell phone's screen or just get rid of their tablets for a little while. The situation today is that people can't keep their gadgets away from them even for a considerably short period of time. Now and again, I sincerely think that these "personal assistants" have rather become personal masters who are indirectly controlling us. After all, it is very rightly said, "Technology is a good slave but a bad master". Instead of being truly 'social' and spending recreation time with their real friends, people nowadays are busy making virtual friends on social networking sites and spend long hours just hanging out with them online. Each and every second, there is either a notification or mail or a message or even if there is nothing like this, we have already become so habituated to looking at our gadget's screen over and over again without any reason that we are unable to stop ourselves and yearn to switch it on. We do this unintentionally and never realize this.

Though it cannot be overlooked that a certain minimum level of knowledge of applications and current technology is a prerequisite for one's basic and fundamental progress in the present time, but this doesn't at all mean that one should take undue advantage of this fact and start using it in the wrong direction. I personally feel that digitization has hindered the further development of humanity in many ways rather than providing suitable direction to people to lead a contented and rewarding life.

Digital Technology – A Marriage of the Millennium

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Chi Trinh

It is the year 2018 and we are now in a lifetime marriage with digital technology - our relationship with smart devices and the internet started out with feverish excitement about the enormous possibilities waiting for us, but has slowly spawned new anxieties of misuse and unintended effects as this marriage progresses.

The digital disruption of this century has granted us access to an unprecedented wealth of information and means to greater productivity, leading to the mass adoption of digital technology, especially in more affluent countries. Over time, as mobile devices and computers become less of a novelty and more of a necessity in our daily life, they also transform into an extension of our bodies. The growing need for convenience is fueling our dependence on digital technology, as it morphs into a filter between us and the outside world, an ecosystem in which all of our life experiences reside.

Digital technology has indeed introduced us to a new era of exciting gizmos at our fingertips, but at what cost?

Our children are growing up not knowing of a time before smartphones and iPads. Playing outdoors is no longer a norm, and neither is flipping a page of a storybook instead of swiping their finger on a screen. They are growing up with anxiety and a myriad of ailments unimaginable among children two decades ago. We live in an age where we value our experiences by the number of likes on our photos, where cyberbullying, social isolation and privacy concerns become the new vices, at the expense of being more connected. Would our continued missteps with digital technology pan out like a saga akin to the dystopia of “Black Mirror”?

While digital technology undergoes mounting scrutiny in more privileged communities who have grown accustomed to its presence, in other corners of the world, it remains a much-needed tool that enables individuals to change their lives and perhaps the fate of their entire nations.

Online education has provided many youths around the world with employment opportunities, which could be their lifeline to escape poverty. The recent use of blockchain technology by the World Food Program has also provided humanitarian aid to 500,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan who have lost their legal identification. Even in less dire situations, digital technology has empowered the collective to make a change in the world; social media has time and again taken center stage as a rally ground for the underdogs from all around the world to come together and speak up against injustice and abuse – from the Arab Spring revolution against dictatorship to the #MeToo movement against sexual harassment, these impactful causes have all been testaments to this. These cases can serve as a reminder to many of us that digital technology has not always been a threat to our way of life, but a powerful tool that allows our humanity to shine through.

But as every powerful tool is a double-edged sword, it is up to us to wield it with wisdom and build a lasting marriage between humanity and digital technology for generations to come.

The Internet is Not a Utopia

The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Jasmine Poon

To be a functional individual in our hyperconnected society is to possess multiple identities and exist in multiple realities. It's not that complicated, really. Be it millennials or Gen Z, our Instagram feeds and social media accounts may even be truer representations of our identities than who we are in real life. We're constantly touching our phones, we now communicate and interact on the internet more than we do in person. We're so hopelessly addicted to our phones and social media because of its promises of being a better reality. It is a reality that mimics physical space and its interactions, all the while removing the undesirable ones. A rude Instagram message from a stranger? Just trash it. No more annoying ads before YouTube videos? Thanks, Adblock. The internet is more addictive than any drug, taking away the boring banalities of life, while ironically reflecting just how ugly reality is.

Social media is digital technology that has not only transformed our identities, but most importantly, transformed our idea of space. The internet is not a utopia. It is a heterotopia, an alternate, 'other' space that exists beyond tangible reality; and it is one that we have already settled in. The internet is a disruption of reality that has enabled us to build an alternate space outside of the physical realm, and therefore, new identities, where users have been promised the illusion of living in new ways. Online chat for example, takes place in the virtual space of a chatroom, detached from physical reality, mentally in a created space with another person. Avatars or profile pictures are representative images of ourselves. Instagram accounts have become 'personal brands'. Now that we've left our real bodies behind, we have infinite opportunities for self-recreation and agency. And that's where we've been so incredibly delusional, specifically with our concepts of privacy on the internet.

The internet is a public space: the concept of ownership was made fragile, with our ease of copying files, and exchanging pirated intellectual property, ownership is no longer exclusive. As it was once called, 'cyberspace' was charted as a discovery zone, merely putting forth the illusion of absolute freedom for its users by presenting itself as a discoverable frontier, where users are world explorers. The terms, "surfing the web", the name of everyone's favorite browser: the internet Explorer, and Safari, with a compass as its logo, all allude to the myth of convincing every internet user as anonymous explorers that leave no traces while observing. Spinning globes and buffering dots distract users from what goes on behind the screens, and conceal the marked exchange of data. No user is truly anonymous in a public space.

What are our rights to privacy and the limits to censorship in the internet heterotopia? Data privacy concerns continue because of our delusions of privacy in a public space. Evidently, carrying forth policies and regulations on public spaces and applying them to online spaces will only meet with resistance. We coexist in a blurry dimension where the fine line between public and private does not exist, and thus, lead to the conflation of free expression and hate speech.

Welcome to the New World

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Kristine Ella Baduria

I remember that it was a typical humid day when my friends and I decided to eat lunch outside. Upon sitting on our respective chairs, we came across a seemingly normal interaction between a mother and child almost fading into the blurry background until my friend blurted out, "So will you ever let gadgets babysit your children?" This caught us off guard and I looked back onto the pair before shrugging, "No. Of course not." And my friends vented their own sentiments ending with "No. Of course not," as if it was the most natural phrase in the world.

But perhaps reality is a little bit more complicated than a resolute denial when one lives in a world caught under the spell of technology. I look back into that certain conversation as I hear the faint noise of "Johnny, Johnny, Yes Papa" coming out from the room of my nephew who, at the tender age of 15 months, has been exposed to technology through the convenience and efficiency of YouTube in babysitting children with its huge database of videos.

Indeed, the world is changing faster than we ever imagined and is becoming more and more inclusive at such a frightening scale that it now includes children. Now, we are not only using technology but we're nurtured and raised under it. And to all unfamiliar things, we will always ask the question, "What will happen?" This has spurred thousands of arguments proving and disproving each other. In attempts to understand the unknown, we sometimes forget the established ideas, especially regarding children.

According to Hourcade, children's development emphasizes the idea of 'embodiment' where learning and development occur by the integration of the brain, body and the environment (people included). This means that a child must interact with the world around him, but technological exposure greatly limits a child's world. Instead they are being confined into a virtual world guised as something visually appealing that they cannot fathom being without. From thereon, a child ages capable of wielding technology ubiquitous around him.

Of course, being technologically savvy does have its benefits in a digital world. However, whether this skill is more important than relationships is another uncharted territory and one that would take many more years to argue about, leaving the children and future new generations under the hands of technology as their caretaker.

Technology is creating new way of living and shattering our traditional values along with it, but one cannot argue that this is a good nor a bad thing. Inherently, everything is neutral, but perhaps the biggest danger technology poses is that we are not aware of its definite danger. We are still experiencing everything for the first time. We could even call our era the 'trial period' – experimenting until we hit the expiration date to see if we would avail for further service. But in the new world, nothing could be undone. Digital marks remain forever.

From Placards to Hashtags: The Drawbacks of Woke Twitter on Contemporary Activism

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In today's context, it's easy to imagine that a tweet, retweet, and like can emancipate a society. With the incessant wave of technologization, society has welcomed the shift of activism from placards to hashtags. The advent of 'woke Twitter' has enforced a culture on the platform which fosters political consciousness and social involvement among users. They are those who criticize wrongful views, advocate social justice, and initiate discourse about political issues online. Yet, a change of means does not automatically equate to innovation. This thereupon poses the question: has woke Twitter already surpassed traditional activists in terms of initiating societal change?

As woke Twitter outnumbers on-the-ground activist groups, the definition of activism is reduced to merely being aware and polemical. Discourses and advocacies are presented online for the acquisition of public incentive and feel-good acknowledgement of the participants, instead of the achievement of genuine political change (Morozov).

This sequentially builds weak ties. As a case in point, ties among virtual collectives are easily disrupted because they are devoid of physical connection. Members are neutralized especially once it is necessary to move from 'online' to 'offline' platforms, especially when there's a threat of physical violence. Dissident voices on Twitter vanish with the aid of the deactivate, mute, and block features. These weak ties are instrumental to high-risk activism (Gladwell). As posited by Van Laer, the rapid growth in support for protests enabled by the internet is followed by an even faster decline in commitment.

Some researches have signified that Twitter is actually strengthening gaps and polarization by enabling echo chambers¹. A study conducted by Garimella et al. assessing the activities of woke Twitter which created 2.7 billion tweets between 2009 and 2016, found that users are often exposed to ideas in line with their political leanings (6).

The accessibility of Twitter gives an illusion of a purely independent and liberal market of ideas, while hiding its deliberate propaganda and surveillance. Political tools in cyberspace deceive individuals into thinking that they are empowered. However, reliance on these tools relate to also being reliant on the few elites that control them.

Make no mistake: woke Twitter has revealed remarkable movements. Still it is wrong to idealize Twitter as a medium that elevated the efficacy of social movements. Cyberactivism is too premature to be considered a better alternative to traditional means.

Even so, we must note that online and offline activism are not necessarily mutually exclusive. At best, cyber tools may help spread political awareness in these increasingly technological times, with the goal of mobilizing them beyond the virtual space.

Since the goal of activism is to make itself obsolete, all means including the virtual ones must be exhausted.

Therefore, they can go tweet about social issues and make political hashtags trend as much as they want, as long as they do not forget the importance of collectively asserting it in the physical world, where it must manifest.

Notes

¹ An echo chamber is where a group of individuals opt to connect with people of the same views and opinions with them, to the exclusion of outsiders (Bruns 3).

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Music Education: Technology's Latest Conquest

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Technology has been slowly creeping into various industries, seeking to swallow them whole. The communication industry is now heavily reliant on technology, with handwritten letters losing their touch in today's digitally disrupted world. However, one subsector has yet to completely fall prey to technology's colonization: music education.

Yes, the advent of technology has brought with it changes in the way people learn, and music is no exception. While there are still many who enrol in private music lessons, the number of students that turn to the internet and various online music education platforms to hone their musical abilities is steadily increasing. These platforms have transformed the learning process of musicians by offering interactive ways of engaging with music, which include video tutorials and exercises for practice, while allowing progress tracking through audio and video input.

These types of lessons assist students in better identifying and correcting their errors, with a focus on eventually mastering the technique. In addition to being incredibly accessible because of widespread access to the internet, most of these online educational platforms are also free of charge. However, despite their strengths in allowing students to advance in some areas, these media still have their fair share of shortcomings.

Whilst being able to deliver the same approach as traditional music lessons that is mentioned in Colwell and Richardson's "The New Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning," online music education platforms lack the capability to teach students to understand and interpret music, express emotion, and engage with others through sound. These are key indicators of musical aptitude that determine a musician, as stated in Susan Hallam's study entitled "21st Century Conceptions of Musical Ability."

These platforms also lack the supervision of a teacher – someone who can provide personalized, real-time feedback, which could significantly boost a student's progress. In their book, Colwell and Richardson state that music lessons are ideally flexible so that students can learn efficiently, but the online educational platforms present on the internet today cannot satisfy each student's specific needs. The presence of an instructor also helps the learner avoid developing poor technique and playing habits.

Granted, researchers have been developing better interactive platforms such as the Music Paint Machine, AMIR, and Practice Space systems, as mentioned in Nijs and Leman's study. These have video cameras and motion sensors, enabling online platforms to educate students without the need for a professional instructor. However, they are still under testing and have yet to be made available to the public.

Technological advancements have made it possible for people to learn music, but they are not able to provide a complete musical education package unlike traditional lessons. Music education has, and can still thrive, without the need for online platforms – as a student can develop more holistically as a musician relying on a mentor, compared with one who relies on these platforms alone. Technology is music education's latest conquest, and it is furthering the reach of music education without replacing it – a rarity in this digitally disrupted world.

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Knowledge in Piracy: Power in Copyright

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Picture someone involved in online piracy. There's his crusty keyboard, there's the face overcome by shadows, and the malicious glint in his eyes as he deprives several million people of their fair wages—for making free (and public) what should have been sold at a fair price.

The thing is, that's wrong. Sometimes they're a group of students falling in line to have their too-expensive textbook photocopied, sometimes it's someone else in that line—scanning the book and uploading the file to be accessed by everyone. And I do mean everyone. Piracy can't be reduced to a criminal activity; when contextualized in a knowledge ecosystem, it's a product of its environment (especially for pre-industrial countries).

There are many factors behind the stereotyped picture of people involved with piracy. Stemming from the problematic way the debate between copyright and piracy is reduced to the moral aspects of the issue. But that's a liberal insult to the world audience of this debate. Here's what you're missing.

Many others more eloquent than I have argued¹ that copyright law, instead of being true to the spirit of its making, is now being used to protect corporate interests. This is most prevalent in the lobbying efforts to enact copyright extensions; which materialized in the Digital Millennium Copyright Act.

What has faded into the background of this debate is its involvement as part of a knowledge economy. Copyright law was supposed to strike a balance between incentivizing creators to create, innovate and produce intellectual property to benefit society while enabling them to live off the act of creating by giving the creators—for a certain time—exclusive rights to their work. But copyright laws only worked so long as they can effectively police the knowledge ecosystem of society. James Joyce didn't get royalties from the sales of "Ulysses" in the New World², and that was a knowledge ecosystem only an ocean away, comprising a singular country. Now we have the internet.

The reason why modern-day piracy is so different to its forebears is because of the sheer ease and scale of today's pirating operations. There are more than nine million books³ illegally made available for download on the internet, and this was only in 2010. Is this necessarily bad? Supporters of digital piracy believe that digital goods are supposed to be 'technologically neutral.' I think current copyright law is too outdated to catch up.

Those who have interests at stake—who want to keep the piracy debate dumbed down to simple caricatures—are afraid of how knowledge is so much easier to disseminate with the advent of peer-to-peer file sharing. But those in pre-industrial countries who cannot afford the cost of information (be it cultural or academic) have no choice but to resort to available means of obtaining information until they can 'catch up.' It seems, to answer the question of digital disruption, it's more that the old laws failed to account for the unprecedented scale of the new ways to pirate and its struggling to catch up.

Footnotes:

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The New York Times

Digital Disruption

Asia-Pacific Writing Competition 2018

Thank You

We would like to give special thanks to all the teachers, students and judges who took part in this year's competition. Without your support, the competition would not have been such a success.

The Judges:

Philip Traynor – Staff Editor

Joe Ritchie – Staff Editor

Thank You

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Beijing International Bilingual
Academy
Chengdu Shude High School
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International School of Beijing
No.2 High School of East China
Normal University
Shanghai American School
Shanghai Pinghe School
Shanghai Shangde Experimental
School
Shanghai United International
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Shenzhen College of International
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Sri Emas International School
Sri Kuala Lumpur Secondary
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Hamilton Girls' High School
Manurewa High School
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Credo College
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Lahore Grammar School
Islamabad
Roots Ivy International School
Sadiq Public School

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Philippines

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Science High School
Baguio City National High School
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Anglo-Chinese (Independent)
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Cedar Girls' Secondary School
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