

Social, moral and cultural implications of ICT

The increase in development of ICT has had large impact on the society that we live in. Each new development in information technology raises new social, economic, ethical and moral issues. Worldwide developments in communication technology via mobile, satellite, wireless and cable will continue to enhance Internet access and change many aspects of our lives.

For example, advancements in technology have made huge changes in the way shops are run. Most large shops now have Electronic Point of Sale (EPOS) terminals, which are cash registers that also act as terminals to a main computer system and till receipts are produced. Bar codes on a product are scanned to record the sale, identify the item being sold and can automatically update the shop's stock list. Electronic Funds Transfer at Point of Sale (EFTPOS) are similar to EPOS and allow transfers of funds directly from a customers bank account to the shops' bank account when a credit or debit card is used by the customer. This technology acts as a simpler way of transferring funds and prevents errors in calculating stock and payments. There is less chance of theft because no cash is used and it is more secure for transferring large amounts of money.

Online shopping has also changed the way many people buy and sell products, allowing customers to shop at the convenience of their own home. It saves travelling time and makes it easier for customers to purchase from shops which are not local to them. There is an infinite variety of products available online and it is much faster and easier to search for and find information about the desired product, allowing the customer to compare prices of similar products. With the online tools that enable product comparison, consumers can compare product prices and features to make a better decision with less effort. Popularity in online shopping has increased, however some feel that online shopping does not enable the customer to accurately assess the product as they can only see an image and description and that it increases the chances of fraud and a higher exposure of credit card security.

Developments in ICT have also affected the way that people can communicate. Since inventions of mobile phones and online communications it is much easier for people to contact each other at any time. Instant messaging and chat functions such as MSN allow users to talk to friends or join in discussions online. Social networking websites on the internet such as Facebook mean that users can keep in contact with friends and meet new people online that have similar interests as themselves. The internet is also increasingly used for entertainment purposes such as keeping an online blog or watching videos online.

ICT has made changes in many areas of commerce. Businesses can now operate online, enabling them to contact their customers to offer support or advertise products through email. New services on the internet such as search engines increase ease of access for the user, online banking allows internet access to your bank account allowing people to check balances, transfer between accounts and launch international wires from anywhere in the world. New inventions such as computer gaming create opportunities for making money and new industries create jobs, however the increase in the abilities of technology can also put people out of work if employees are replaced by computer systems.

ICT has also had a moral impact on the society we live in, as new technology results in new crimes.

Internet fraud is an increasing problem in today's society, as computer technology makes it easier for people to hide their identity and con people out of money, although governments are setting up special units to deal with internet crime. The interception of credit card details and transactions online can be achieved through stealing information from retailers, or using phishing, where emails made to look like a genuine company or bank, requesting personal details from users. Identity fraud is also a common internet crime, where personal details are stolen to con someone out of money, for example if a fraudster obtained your address and bank details they could use them to borrow money. It is also possible for spam emails to be sent unwillingly to a large number of email accounts, containing things such as advertisements of illegal product, pornography or scams, and these are difficult to trace making it difficult to enforce the law. It is hard to assess the trustworthiness of what you see online, therefore rogue traders can advertise goods that don't exist online, or make untrue statements about the products they are selling.

There are many controversial issues concerning use of the internet in today's society, and there is a great debate as to whether or not censorship is a necessity in order to maintain a particular moral standard. The capacity of the internet makes censorship difficult therefore things such as pornographic material and websites endorsing racist hatred are accessible to anyone online. Censoring the internet could be seen as challenging freedom of speech. There is also controversy over such issues as internet gambling; high speed internet gambling games can cause addiction and make it easy for individuals to lose large sums of money. Chat rooms can make it easy for people to hide their true identity and users could be manipulated into giving out personal details such as address and telephone number.

Improvements in ICT offer several direct and the internet allows a user a range of practical applications such as the ability to conduct research, make business transactions, buy online and so forth. However issues concerning changes in society and moral impact affect how people feel about the advancements in ICT.