

# The Internet and its Implications

The world's most popular computer network, commonly known as the "Internet", is a technology that has fundamentally transformed the way of life for humans. Used by over 3.5 billion users, it is a universal platform that permeates almost all aspects of our lives today (Statista, 2017). It enables us to realize a multitude of diverse tasks including but not limited to chatting with a friend, ordering food, watching live news, finding a job, and even running a business. Nowadays, the Internet has become an integral constituent of our existence to the extent that is hard to imagine a life without it. As a result, many believe it to be the man-made necessity of the 21st century. Alternatively, there are also those who discourage its use and believe it to be more harmful than beneficial. In the subsequent paragraphs, I will discuss the implications of the Internet, shedding light on both the positives and negatives of this technology, and eventually reveal my final thoughts.

To begin, the Internet grants us access to an immense repository of information that is constantly growing. In 2016 alone, the annual global IP traffic was measured at 1.2 Zettabytes and is predicted to reach 3.3 Zettabytes by 2021 (Cisco, 2017). To put in it context, the sheer volume of data supplied by the Internet is so unprecedented that it holds more data than every single library on this planet combined. Moreover, the Internet has made the overall process of information discovery more efficient. Prior to the Internet, one would have to visit their nearest library, walkthrough several aisles of shelves before eventually finding the material they were looking for. In the worst case, one would go through all that effort only to realize that the book they were looking for is checked out or missing altogether. But now thanks to sites like Google, Quora and Wikipedia, information access is simply a matter of a few keyboard strokes.

Another huge advantage of the Internet is that everyone has access to the same information regardless of their nationality, gender, education or socio-economic background. Thus, as a platform the Internet has democratized information. In 2016, The global e-learning market was worth \$165.36 billion and is projected to surpass \$243 billion by 2022 (Statista, 2017). From an educational standpoint this is extremely valuable for individuals, especially in 2nd and 3rd world countries, who are unable access formal schooling because of poor infrastructure or financial inability. On a personal note, it is thanks to the Internet that I was able to learn the piano by watching tutorial videos on YouTube.

Apart from accessing information, the Internet has also made it easier and faster to distribute information globally. Consequently, the speed and range of communication has significantly increased. We no longer

must wait weeks before receiving a telegram, nor do we need a human to securely deliver our messages. With email and instant messaging, we can not only send texts but also audio and video files to any part of the globe in a matter of seconds. In fact, within just one second there are 54,907 Google searches, 7,252 tweets, 125,406 YouTube views, and 2,501,018 emails sent on the Internet (Dailymail, 2016). Communication at such rapid pace and scale has certainly made the world a “smaller place”, making it easier to form new connections and maintain existing ones regardless of your location. Furthermore, widescale distribution via the Internet has created a new channel for businesses to market and sell their products. It has even given birth to completely new business models like those of Uber, Shopify, Airbnb, and Netflix.

On the other hand, the Internet also has some drawbacks. Easy access to information also means exclusive copyrighted content such as music and movies can be illegally retrieved and shared. In addition, content that is traditionally restricted or meant for older audiences like pornography can be easily viewed by minors.

While the Internet’s distribution capabilities can make local news international, it can also make personal news public. Being the largest connected network of computers, it facilitates widespread dispersion of viruses by cyber criminals. Subsequently, as more and more services are offered online, there is a greater vulnerability to the privacy and security of data collected by these services. In 2016, U.S. companies and government agencies suffered a record 1,093 data breaches (Bloomberg, 2017). Moreover, with social media applications collecting massive amounts of user data, identity theft becomes probable. In fact, users may be completely unaware if their information is ever compromised by their service provider. What’s worse is that even if users become aware of an information breach, in most cases they are at the mercy of the service provider’s data management and security controls.

To summarize, the Internet is a tool like many others with its own advantages and disadvantages. Thus, its true potential is ultimately dependent on the user and their objective for using it. In my opinion, the Internet has proven to be a promising tool that has benefitted more than it has harmed us. Despite its shortcomings, I am hopeful that the platform will continue to evolve for the better and minimize its weaknesses along the way. Overall, I consider the Internet to be a revolutionary piece of technology that is definitely here to stay!

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