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The Internet: A Powerful Tool that Must be Used Responsibly

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Only several decades after the Internet became popularly used by people in North America, the United Nations declared the ability for people to express themselves online as a basic human right. The Internet is a powerful tool that empowers the spread of culture, and has connected a global community of people who are now able to share interests and help one another. The Internet has also crossed cultural boundaries to foster education in society ranging from casual instructional videos to collaborative tools designed for the exchange of scientific research. Although the Internet continues to have a positive impact on the global community, like any tool it is often abused. Society's reliance on the Internet has created new concerns such as social media addiction, which have only begun to be examined. Additionally, people's increasing online presence is making it easier for users to accidentally release sensitive information to members of the relentless media or malicious users. While the Internet predominantly has a positive effect on society, people need to make sure that they understand the consequences of their online interactions in order to use it responsibly.

The Internet gives people from different cultures the opportunity to unite over shared interests and concerns. At the time this was written, the phrase "send help to" in the popular search engine Google returns explanations of the crises in Nepal, the Philippines and Gaza. The ease with which global citizens can investigate international problems and help one another is a powerful example of how the Internet brings people together. The Internet also facilitates the spread of culture through online education. Courses that used to be taught on art, math or history by a professor to a small group of students can now reach millions online and the rise in popularity of resources like Khan Academy, Stanford Online Learning and TED talks are spreading thousands of informative videos across cultural boundaries to anyone with an Internet connection and a desire to learn. In the scientific community, apps like "DreamLab" by the Garvan Institute of Medical Research in Australia allow smartphon users worldwide to contribute to cancer research by picking a cause and donating their phone's resources to perform data analysis overnight (Vodafone Hutchison Australia Pty Ltd, 2016). This sort of scientific

collaboration is one of the ways that the Internet fosters education and research and these initiatives will only improve as the limits of Internet access and speed are expanded.

While frequent use of the Internet has many advantages, it can also have a negative effect on society when its ease of use becomes an obsession. The latest version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders by the American Psychiatric Association lists Internet Gaming Disorder as a condition to be further studied (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). When they are not gaming, many adolescents find themselves turning to social media as a potentially dangerous way to combat stress and depression. Research shows that the excessive use of social media has many of the same traits as substance addictions, including mood modification, symptoms of withdrawl, and low barriers to relapse (Griffiths, 2013). Society is only beginning to understand the long-term effects the Internet is having on the the latest generation of Internet users and it is important that it is used in moderation. People's increasing online presence poses a dangerous problem when users and developers fail to consider the privacy and security implications of their applications. The Identity Theft Resource Center estimates that 2015 had approximately 780 recorded leaks of nearly 170 million individual records (Identify Theft Resource Center, 2016). These security breaches can lead to losses of large amounts of valuable information such as banking data, health records, and private messages by malicious entities who, as a result of the Internet, can now execute these attacks thousands of miles away with a single exploit. In addition to unintentional privacy breaches, many users are choosing to reveal this sensitive data without fully understanding the consequences. Recently "#NationalSendANudeDay" was trending on twitter and while many people likely took advantage of this opportunity, the sensitive pictures and hasty comments left on social media sites like Twitter are available long after they are sent and these actions can have a negative impact on people's future jobs and relationships.

The Internet is a tool that has the ability to bring together foreign cultures and foster education

and scientific discovery. It is necessary, however, that it is used in moderation and it is up to users and developers to consider the importance of privacy and security when accessing and designing applications online. The Internet is ultimately one of humanity's newest and most powerful creations and it is exciting to see how it will be used in the years to come.

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