Community in Cyberspace

Baase (A Gift of Fire) - Chapter 9

1. Some Observations

Internet Use:

- May create isolation from family, in-person friends, and neighbors. p 366
- Creates long-distance associations focused on special interests.
- Reduces or eliminates direct contact with customers and clients.
- Contributes to the formation of electronic relationships.
- Allows for teleworking from almost any location.
- May lead to Internet “addiction” (see COLA)

Q: In your opinion, does Internet usage have more of a negative or positive impact on community?

2. The Issue of Access – Information Haves and Have-nots

Commonly known as the “Digital Divide”.

Factors contributing to access (or lack thereof) to computers and information systems:

- Developed country.
- Individual wealth.
- Age.
- Race (see handout: Technology versus African-Americans)
- Gender, p 372
- Ethnic background.
- Politics.
- Geography

Q: Where in your community can someone who doesn’t own a computer access the Internet?
Community in Cyberspace

3. Universal Service Guarantee

Universal Access to the Telephone
- The Communications Act of 1934 requires telephone companies to provide telephone service to the poor.
- In the 1930s, access to the telephone was deemed necessary in order to function in society.

Q: Should universal access to the Net be a liberty or claim-right?

Universal Access to the Net
- Advocates stress that access to the Net is necessary in order to function in today’s society.
- Critics argue that the cost to supply universal access to the Net for the poor is an unfair and unnecessary burden.

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4. Trends In Computer Access

- Declining costs for hardware, software, and connectivity contribute to greater access.
- Easier to use and understand.
- Gender gap has vanished.
- Age gap is narrowing.
- Some businesses offer home access as a benefit.
- Public-access becoming more common.
- Families perceive Web access to be important.
- Non-white households trail in access.
- Rural, isolated, or remote regions often have limited access.
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5. **Abdicating Responsibility**

People may rely too much on computers for decisions that were once made by a community:
- Approval of loans or insurance coverage.
- Assessment of student, teacher, and school administrator progress.
- Air traffic control
- The arrest of certain individuals.
- How to make a particular business decision.
- Using computer modeling in science and tech.

**Effect:** Overbureaucratization
- Creation of a *Technocracy* (Postman)

**Q:** Recall a time when you did what the computer said, rather than exercise your judgment.

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6. **The Neo-Luddite View**

Criticisms of Computer Technology:
- Causes massive unemployment and deskilling of jobs.
- We use them because they are there.
- Causes social inequality (see Digital Divide).
- Source of social disintegration; they are dehumanizing.
- Separates humans from nature and destroys the environment.
- Benefits big business and big government.
- Thwarts development of social skills in children.
- Solves no real human problems.

**Q:** How would technology enthusiasts counter each criticism?
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7. Ultimately it is a choice of Values

Technology Advocates
- People can choose to use a technology for good or ill.
- Influenced by society, technology does more than it was designed to do.
- People adopt technologies that give us more choices for action and relationships.

Technology Critics
- Technology is not "neutral."
- Big business and governments make decisions about technology.
- Once created, technology drives itself.

Q: Is it possible for society to prohibit certain technologies?