
EPISODE

Scientific Revolution

SUB CATEGORY

Social

TITLE

Social Transformation of Mankind

EXCERPT

As technology augments our ability to communicate and interact with one another, it has also given rise to adverse social implications, such as the loss of interpersonal skills. Find out what are the consequences of the digital revolution in today's world.

CONTENT

Over the past two centuries, scientific discoveries and technological advancements have changed the way we lived our lives. Apart from the commonly-described emergence of fast and accessible transportation and communication means, technology has also affected our social behaviour.

No man is an island: Social isolation

While technology has made the world a little closer, some perceive that they are drifting apart in their relationships. In particular, technological advancements may have contributed to the deterioration of social interaction skills. In modern societies, online social engagements have replaced face-to-face interactions as the new norm. This trend can be explained by the ease and convenience of online interactions as users can transmit verbal or written messages almost instantaneously without being hindered by the obstacles of time and space. As a result, users became habituated in discarding the need for physical interaction and adjusting their behaviour towards digital communication.

The digital revolution has given rise to numerous methods of communication, such as Skype, WhatsApp and Telegram, as well as social media platforms, like Facebook and Instagram. However, the expansion of virtual communities has hindered the development of meaningful and resilient relationships as individuals are increasingly accustomed to multi-tasking. While being connected, users can communicate with their peers and loved ones while partaking in other activities on the digital device. The downside is that individuals tend to lose focus and become desensitised in the identification of non-verbal cues, thus increasing the likelihood of misunderstandings and social conflicts.

A 2014 Pew Research report demonstrates the anti-social effects of technology. 20% of adult users admitted that their internet usage had negative impact on their marriage as partners were

distracted by their digital devices during social interactions. Clinical psychologist Susan Heitler pointed out that physical cues, such as eye-to-eye contact and smiling, are essential factors that strengthen intimate relationships. By being tuned into their devices, individuals become socially isolated, disrupting or even destroying their relationships. Hence, it is a worrying trend that should be addressed, given the pervasiveness of communications technology.

Dangers of the digital world: Cyber bullying

On a separate note, the misuse of technology has led to the problem of cyber bullying. Although the advent of the technological revolution has improved communication, it has also opened up many pathways for malicious users to exploit its expansive functions and prey on unsuspecting victims. Online and anonymous harassment is becoming more prevalent as perpetrators can send distressing messages, such as publishing incriminating images and cyberstalking, that undermine the psychological well-being of their victims.

In Singapore, a 2014 survey by the Singapore Children's Society and the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) reported that one in nine adolescents were affected by cyberbullying. Founder of Coalition Against Bullying for Children and Youth Esther Ng commented that the lack of supervision for the children's use of the Internet has made them vulnerable to online harassment. In fact, 89% of the victims chose not to take action against the bullies, even though some suffered from adverse psychological effects, like the loss of self-esteem. In more extreme cases, A 2018 research study by the University of Oxford, Swansea and Birmingham reported that cyberbullying increased the risk of suicidal behaviour by twofold. Also, victims of online harassment were found to be less inclined to seek treatment than those affected by offline bullying. As such, it is critical for the relevant authorities to educate online users on the importance of Internet etiquette to tackle the problem of cyberbullying and other inappropriate social behaviour, such as the organization of Safer Internet Day (SID) which advocates responsible internet usage.

In a nutshell, while technology has its merits, it is important for individuals as well as organizations to harness the features in moderation to minimize the negative implications, like the deterioration of interpersonal communication skills.