

Internet, Smartphones, Technology

A Christian view

The aim of this article

There has never been a time in history when technology advanced as rapidly as it does today. It aims at making life easier and providing things not possible before. Multimedia and Internet have already become commonplace. More and more people have their personal smartphones and computers. In spite of all its benefits we are also faced with some negative effects that could influence our lives and the way we interact with each other. One might ask: How should we relate to these devices and services? What does an old book like the Bible tell us about using technology in our modern age? What are its dangers? Since we are also faced with questions like these, we gave them some thought, and would like to share them with you in this article.

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⚓ **1 What's going on today?**

⚓ **1.1 Digital addiction**

We live in the age of Internet, smartphones, tablet PCs and home theaters. You could spend hours on these devices for entertainment everyday.

- Many television programmes and videos feed the **craving for excitement and lust for the sensual**, exposing viewers' eyes to violence, sexual sins, immorality, vanity—just to name a few of the regular things which attract their consumers.
- Computer games captivate their players by opening up doors to **fantasy worlds** and rewarding them with virtual success. In some games, you even have the license to kill or to vent your aggression and frustration on your enemies.
- The vast amount of information in the Internet engrosses its users as they find **pleasure in knowing more and more**, and become proud of what they can find out through search engines. It is also easy to overcome boredom and kill time by exploring the latest videos, music, apps, news, or even conspiracy theories—there is an inexhaustible amount of them available.
- Through the Internet, you have easy access to **pornography**, which arouses an insatiable lust for more. It destroys the pure heart needed for building natural and loving relationships. People's minds

are led to focus on self-seeking desires and to regard the opposite sex (or even the same) as objects of lust. This could damage your life forever[1] .

On top of all this, smartphones have made these things available at the touch of a finger at any time and any place.

Exposing ourselves to things like these will deprave our minds. It's serious: you might get that far that you lose all willpower to get away from it all!

Those who become addicted to such things tend to neglect their duties and relationships in life. There is a danger of becoming incapable of coping with reality, preferring to flee to your own world where you feel as if you have more control. This is now considered a new problem in our society by experts alongside alcohol, drugs and tobacco, a problem which may sometimes even require professional therapy.

Being able to do things more quickly and effortlessly through technology may also be a trap for those who are **ambitious**. It could absorb you into doing your own things and not care about what is going on with other people as you find your satisfaction in feeling proud, self-important and self-sufficient. But we shouldn't forget the one who gave us our creativity and made our work possible in the first place. The problem of self-centredness, which has been around for ages, is not solved through technology.

1.2 Cyber-friendship

Some claim to have gained **more friends through the Internet**, as communication becomes quicker, more affordable and convenient. Distance is no longer a barrier thanks to e-mails, instant messaging, Internet telephony and video calls. With social networking websites like Facebook, a new friend is just a click away.

Internet indeed makes it possible to get to know new people. If used in the right way, it can certainly be beneficial. It also enables us to maintain relationships with those we are not able to meet because of long distances, although anyone interested in a deep relationship would consider it only a temporary and less-than-ideal alternative, as John the disciple of Jesus expressed in one of his letters, writing in the setting of his time:

Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete. *(2 John 12)*

Friendships built through social networking or in chat rooms are often not based on care and commitment to each other, but on **fun and excitement**. They are often shallow. Since it is not always possible to know who is really behind the user name, you could even pretend to be someone else or take on a character that is more attractive and admirable to gain more friends. Some enjoy playing a special role to impress an anonymous audience which would otherwise be impossible in real life. There is plenty of room for empty talk and irresponsible words. Trustful relationships are difficult here. But strangely, you could get so entangled in this digital environment that it becomes difficult to concentrate on anything else while waiting for the next instant message on your smartphone or computer.

Even with gadgets that bridge long distances in communication, you might find yourself more distanced from the people around you because you spend more time with your gadgets than you do with them. It is **no remedy to counter loneliness** by living in the illusion of having many good friends at the other side of the screen whom you have never even met personally. We should invest time in building real relationships instead.

A good relationship is about trust. And trust is based on honesty and sincere care for each other. It is about the readiness to open up ourselves to let others take part in our lives, showing who we really are and yet bearing each other's weaknesses and shortcomings. It is about committing ourselves to seek the best for each other and about walking the path of life together to reach the eternal aim—God, who is love^[2], from whom we receive love and through whom we learn to love. God offers us such a relationship and also teaches us the way to build such relationships among ourselves.

⚓ 2 Why do we get entangled in such things?

What drives us to do the things we do, is what we believe is valuable. The **values in this world** without God are largely based on sensual pleasure, selfish desire and pride. The Bible warns us not to give in to the ways of this world, which lead to the destruction of our souls.

For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. *(1 John 2:16-17)*

Without God, the values that someone has are also often determined by what others think. They are as changeable as the wind of fashion. If we submit to them, we will feel the pressure to conform to the norms of others in order to gain their acceptance, fearing that others might look down on us if we don't keep up with the latest fad. They want to outdo each other by being the first to have the best and know the latest. Pride, envy and scorn become part of their lives and take away the peace of heart and room for goodwill.

But our value does not depend on what others think about us. Nor does it depend on what we have or how we appear. We are valuable because our Creator made us and loves us, with perfect love. He wants to crown us with dignity and help us stand on firm ground in Him in this volatile world. Jesus said:

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. *(Matthew 7:24-25)*

We can easily be drawn to things like those mentioned before if we don't find the real fulfilment in our lives. **Man's real fulfilment, security and help is to be found in God**—this is how God created man to be. Having rejected God and being separated from Him, man is left alone to look for a substitute. Throughout history many people have been striving for this. They try to gratify themselves with all kinds of things, going from excessive consumption of food and alcohol, to entertainment, to sexual impurity, ecstasy, money, possessions... Though always coming up with new ideas, they are never satisfied. It is important to stop and realize what is going wrong, and to take time to look for the real solution, instead of resorting to what distracts us from it. Shallow joy and quick thrills only relieve the inner longing of man for an instant, and soon after lead to the deep despair of emptiness—this is the very character of sin. Without God, people need to hold on to things that seem to give them a certain value in life, though when seen with an open heart, they in fact have no lasting value at all.

But we can and should say “no” to the attitude of this world. These things not only deprave the hearts and minds but also lead us to eternal separation from God. Our Creator wants to help us out of it by calling us to change our hearts, our minds and our lives.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age... (*Titus 2:11-12*)

⚓ 3 Is it affecting you?

If the wrong use of technology already has an influence on your life as described earlier, we want to urge you not to be deceived or enslaved by the things which seem exciting for the moment. They actually rob you of your freedom and dignity, leading you to emptiness. Rather, look for what remains for eternity.

Take some time and log off your virtual ID, turn off your gadgets, switch off your computer, pull out your earphones and open yourself to discover the reality around you. Fleeing from the real to the virtual world can never solve problems. The solution can only be found if you face reality and take responsibility for your own life and the lives of others, even if it might be painful sometimes. Instead of hiding yourself in virtual forums, look for real relationships in true love, especially with the One who is the source of reality, who knows what is best for us.

⚓ 4 It sounds like Christians are against technology

That's not true. Some think of Christianity as old-fashioned and therefore think that Christians are unwilling to embrace technological advancements. Let us clear up this misconception by considering an example in history.

When speaking about technology, people probably think primarily of modern inventions like computers and spaceships. However, we should not forget that such achievements would never have been possible without the stepping stones laid in the past, which were in those days—in the broader sense of the term—modern technology. Christians too made use of the technological achievements of their day to serve God's kingdom. As the words of Jesus and the Apostles were put into written form, they were copied onto papyrus and parchment, and later on paper. For a long time, it was a special privilege to own a personal Bible since it was mainly only available to clerics and the rich. In the last few centuries, the printing press made it possible to duplicate the Bible in a less costly and strenuous way, making it more accessible and affordable to the common people. In spite of initial attempts by pseudo-religious authorities to forbid the masses from possessing their own Bibles, these attempts finally failed—fortunately—and many people since then have the possibility to read and examine the Bible at home.

So technology has been beneficial for Christians as well. We are not hesitant to use it for the right aim. Nevertheless, there is a need for careful consideration, especially from the moral and spiritual point of view. To understand this more, let us first look at what the Bible says about God's plan for mankind in Genesis, the biblical account of the origin.

⚓ 5 God's original plan

God has made everything good and set man to rule over, cultivate and take care of His creation according to His purpose.

And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every

living thing that moves on the earth.” And God said, ‘Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.’ And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (*Genesis 1:28-31*)

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. (*Genesis 2:15*)

God showed His love to man by entrusting him with the responsibility of using and administering what he received, not for selfish aims, but for the benefit of the whole of mankind. For this purpose, God has equipped man with abilities to organize, govern, understand, assess, and innovate. However, His aim is not that man should work independently of Him, but that man should cooperate with Him. Man’s proper response to God’s love is to faithfully do what is good, honouring Him and respecting His creation. So it is also part of God’s plan that man uses his creativity for good things.

However, **man’s decision for sin has brought the world into a fallen state**, where God is no longer given the position He ought to have. Egotistic and evil intentions, which were formerly absent in God’s creation, have become part of this world. People prefer to act selfishly than to seek the will of the righteous God. This does not mean that man has become incapable of doing anything good. Man is still free to decide according to his conscience to do good deeds, even in a world formed by godlessness.

Because of this, judging whether an invention is good or bad may sometimes seem complex. It may not always be easy to see a clear dividing line if we only consider the invention itself. Let us take the example of a knife: it could be used to prepare a meal or to injure someone. We see that the **intentions and attitude of man play a great role** in this matter. They are the very things that count, the things of timeless importance. And this is just what the Bible speaks about.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (*Hebrews 4:12*)

If God is given the central place in our lives, He can help us distinguish good from evil according to the circumstances so that we may know how and whether to use what the world offers in order to serve the real aim in life. He shows us real, eternal values we can hold on to, and helps us resist the temptations and wickedness of this world. If we obey Him, He sets us free from the slavery and pressure of the world which is driven by its selfish aims. He wants to forgive us by casting our sins far away if we come to Him with sincerity. **God can do what technology cannot do:** He can purify our hearts and restore us to a life of love and peace with deep, long-lasting relationships. Our minds will then be no longer focused on temporary things.

...test everything; hold fast to what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. (*1 Thessalonians 5:21-22*)

6 Other things happening...

The examples we gave focus on communication and multimedia devices. We should bear in mind that there

are many other products of man's innovation that bring about negative effects on mankind, products which have become part of peoples' lives. There are still other important aspects we have not considered such as the effects on the environment, health and human rights, which are beyond the scope of this article.

Nevertheless, the following points are worth mentioning: some neuroscientists like Manfred Spitzer^[3] and Adam Gazzaley^[4] think that the current use of these modern devices hampers children's and young adults' learning progress because they encourage multitasking and discourage deep thought and concentration. The younger generation have increasingly less regard for their teachers' and parents' authority since they can easily become "wiser" and more "knowledgeable" through search engines.

As for human rights, in many cases these electronic devices which we may buy at relatively low prices have been manufactured under harsh or even inhumane working conditions. Being greedy for profit, manufacturers have no scruples in taking advantage of poor people in developing countries. Those desperate to earn their daily bread are ready to submit to the demands of their unjust employers who pressurize them for more performance in exchange for little pay and humiliating treatment^[5].

📌 7 Get to know how we overcame

Some of us were addicted to things mentioned above in the past and have found the way out through Jesus. We would like to invite you to contact us to speak about how we can overcome them and share our experience and thoughts on this matter.

Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (*Matthew 11:28-30*)

Your Email*

Your Message*

Send

Footnotes

1. You may be interested in reading more about the value of purity in another article of ours in "[The Value of Purity](#)"
2. More on this in our article "[God is love](#)"
3. EHRENSTEIN, Claudia. Does The Internet Make You Dumb? Top German Neuroscientist Says Yes — And Forever. In: DIE WELT/Worldcrunch [online]. Published on 2012-09-12 14:01:16 [cited 2013-07-16]. The original article published in German. Available from [SBS News: Does internet make you dumb?](#).
4. GAZZALEY, Adam. How mobile tech can influence our brain. In: CNN Our mobile society [online]. September 23, 2012; Updated 1720 GMT (0120 HKT) [cited 2013-07-16]. Available from: [CNN: How mobile tech can influence our brain](#).
5. Testimony to this can be found on the Internet, e.g. in: [China Labor Watch](#)

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