

Informatics and Society

What do the new trends have to offer different groups of individuals?

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I. The new trends of informatics offer individuals multiple advantages and few of them are mentioned here below:

1. The internet is a major research tool, without geographic or time barriers, since it:
 - provides new offerings on entertainment such as new ways to get information;
 - has become a mean to get and give advice through discussion forums, chat rooms, etc;
 - is a source of new ideas without geographic or time barriers; and
 - is a great tool for distributing technical and scientific information.

The Networked Interactive Multimedia offers applications such as design, learning, marketing, consumer services, news and information, education, health care, entertainment, etc.

2. Area: e-Society: individuals have gained a powerful tool to keep in touch with family and friends while traveling around the world for study, work, or simply pleasure.
 - International phone calls done through the Internet have replaced the fixed telephone line services: it is now possible to login to programs such as www.skype.com and get in touch with anyone in the world having access to a computer and logged to the same voice communication tool. Today, long-distance relationships, friendships can last longer than before!
 - Net meeting, msn and yahoo messenger and groups, and any other tool letting individuals exchange voice over IP (VoIP), sound, video, images and written messages virtually have eased our lives.

II. The new trends of informatics offer groups multiple advantages. These groups are individuals specialized in different areas like education, health, employment, government and tourism, and liberal professions. It also benefits groups of individuals such as consumers, businesses, students, job-seekers and tourists.

1. Area: e-Education
 - Students are discovering a huge quantity of data via the Internet;
 - There is a huge amount of data diffused on the Internet, including online training and courses;

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- The Internet is at the center of a learning revolution that is being adopted by many business entities. (e.g. online training, self-study courses at a supplier's website, and online classrooms);
- The computer based training programs provide flexibility in skills acquisitions and are more affordable than traditional seminars.

2. Area: e-Health

- Improved health conditions and access to health information contribute significantly to economic growth (e.g. healthier workers are more productive);
- Government policies that promote health education help people lead healthier lives by increasing their access to relevant information;
- Doctors are using telemedicine to administer off-site diagnoses to patients in need;
- IT and e-commerce health care applications reduce costs;
- Access to these services, in some cases, is extended also to disadvantaged societies.

3. Area: Consumers online: the Internet is revolutionizing retail and direct marketing.

- Consumers are able to shop at home for a wide variety of products from manufacturers and retailers all over the world;
- Research of prices, quality, delivery schedules, and products content is located on the Internet;
- Buyers can more easily and at lower cost compare prices and services from suppliers worldwide;
- E-Commerce provides consumers with considerable benefits in the form of increased choice, access and goods and services and a new medium for interaction with suppliers;
- Physically disable people can also play their role as consumers with IT and e-commerce tools from home.

4. Area: e-Tourism: this service not only benefits all type of travel operators involved in tourism; consumers are also taking profit of it.

- Virtual travel agencies which combine price advantages with ready access to a server available 24 hours a day are accessible through the Internet;

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- It is possible to book and buy online train/boat/airline tickets, hotel accommodation, and car rental without the need to contact your travel agent and pay reservation fees to the intermediaries.

5. Area: e-Employment

- E-commerce strategic window of opportunities to promote job creation and entrepreneurship;
- Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), international trade, and product market competition have had an impact on the labor market;
- The labor market has been also affected by the international competition battle due to the falling cost of telecommunications and increased availability of ICT;
- Employment is not anymore concentrated in firms, it is diffused on the Internet: the patterns of work move away from fixed time slots and locations, offices and factories;
- The demand for skills (IT professionals and computer engineers that shall be combined with strong business application skills) has been affected by the spread of Internet, the growth of e-commerce, and on-line activities;
- A need for a multi skilled work force has been created since the boom of the Internet. e-Commerce needs people with a vast range of skills;
- ICT has been able to reduce unnecessary business travels;
- The Net encourages unique products, flexible working arrangements, and the easy entry of competitors from the world over into an equal market, even though the results are not visible;
- Certain disabled people could benefit from IT and e-commerce and can work from home;
- Job-seekers use Internet as their major source of looking for new opportunities;
- Freelance consultants use Internet mostly as their unique mean of research tool and work dispatching.

6. Area: Businesses in general

- E-Commerce advertise in more markets at less expenses, obtain feedback from costumers, use e-mail as marketing and costumer and communication tool, offer paperless documentation, conduct foreign market research, promote products and services, provide services out of normal working hours;

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- Producers sell products directly to consumers eliminating intermediaries and reducing time. In this case, intermediaries perform the transportation, wholesaling and retailing services;
- Internet allows delivery of many kinds of information in a digital format and reduces transport and distribution costs e.g. distribution costs are reduced for digital products which are important e-commerce segments;
- All the goods that can be ordered via Internet such as books, CDs, flowers, groceries, computers face a problem regarding shipping costs and custom duties;
- There are huge savings compared to the traditional distribution (e.g. songs that can be downloaded from producers on Internet and news that can also be obtained directly from the journalist on Internet). Downloading products avoids shipping costs, which is a strong stimulus to trade and, in particular, to Small and Medium Enterprises.

7. Area: Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) online

- E-Commerce over the Internet is a new way of doing business. It is creating markets and new products and is forging new and more direct relationships between and among enterprises, individuals and governments;
- Technology offers small businesses significant advantages and added value. E-commerce can expand business opportunities, increases efficiency, improves the quality of life and facilitates the greater participation of small businesses in the economy;
- e-Commerce lowers costs e.g. entrepreneurs are able to start new businesses more easily, with smaller up-front investment requirements by accessing the Internet;
- SMEs can now gain access to many support services, which were historically too expensive or difficult to obtain. The Customer support can also be transferred to the Net, reducing the costs and improving the quality of services;
- Another important service online is the one that allows customers to customize their order or select from different choices. This will reduce inventory costs and the seller will be aware of the customer's preferences. This will allow sellers to respond more efficiently to demands. The seller can also pass the information to its partners, its suppliers, lowering costs and even the price of the product;
- Virtual enterprises are reaching customers faster for a small fraction of the cost of physical stores & salespeople, since it is less expensive to maintain an online storefront. It is always

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- “open”; it can be accessed by anybody around the world. This avoids duplicate inventory costs and multiple stores in different zones or countries. Products that must be sold quickly because of a daily loss such as computers, are sold on the Net to reduce inventory costs;
- The transaction costs are transferred to consumers when publishing on the Net the merchants' information (e.g. products information, etc.);
 - Advertising is cheaper than in other medias (e.g. TV, newspapers, magazines, and spots in the streets).
8. Area: e-Governments (e-Voting, e-Procurement, e-Administration)
- Governments can take profit of e-commerce in terms of the services it delivers and its relationship with the citizens;
 - The Internet has become a new tool for personal and political expression for citizens.