Influences On Society- Essay, Research Paper

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Michael Novak stated that there were three influences on any

society: Political influences, Economic influences, and Moral\Cultural

influences. The political influences consist of the governmental body

of that society and the laws and regulations set by this governing

group. The moral\cultural influences consist of the “voluntary

associations” of a society: the churches, media, education systems,

the people in this society. The final influence being the economic

influence, which is the rate of employment, GDP, incidence of poverty,

and structure of economic activity. Novak made this theory into an

object, a “triangle” of sorts, with each influence being a point on

this “triangle.” Novak goes on later in his theory to deal with other

influences, but as other dimensions. What Novak appears to have missed

in his theory is another very important influence on society that

influences, and is influenced by the other points of this “triangle,”

technology. The Middle Ages did come up with a few inventions, such as

windmills and horseshoes, but technological process was imperceptible

compared with what is happening now. Very soon, a fiber the diameter

of a human hair will be able to transmit, in less than a second, the

contents of every issue of The Economist magazine that was ever

printed (Economy Survey 4). Since Adam Smith, economists have

recognized that technology is important for growth, but only in the

past two decades have they been studying this subject in earnest (7).

There pioneer was Joseph Schumpeter, one of the few economists who

tried to explain growth mainly in terms of technological innovation.

In the 1930’s, he presented a model that postulated growth through the

interaction of bursts of technological development and competition

between companies (8). His evidence pointed to history. First, the

1780s to the 1840s, which brought the steam power and drove the

industrial revolution. Second, the 1850s to 1890! s introducing the

railways. Third, the 1890s to 1930s with electrical power. The fourth,

the 1930s to 1980s with cheap oil and the car. Now, today it is argued

that Schumpeterians’ would label this period of history as being

powered by technology in all areas (9). Then there was “new” growth

theory, hatched in the mid 1980’s by the work of Paul Romer, an

economists at Stanford University. His theory attempted to incorporate

technology directly into models of economic growth by explaining how

knowledge in the shape of both technology and human capital is created

and spread through the economy (8). This essay will attempt to use

evidence created by economic research and show how technology is

influencing and influenced by political, economic, and social/moral

issues; creating a fourth point on Novak’s triangle. Technology

throughout history has been a major influence on governments in many

different societies. It has caused wars, and prevented them too. The

invention of the cotton gin played a major factor in leading to the

Civil War. Because of the cotton gin, production of cotton rose and

the export of cotton from the United States to other countries rose

too. The need for more workers, slaves at the time, rose too. This

influenced the government by pushing the need for slavery, and look

what happened as a result. Sputnik help lead a governmental race

between two countries to see who could reach the Moon first. The

invention of the A-bomb led to the end of a real war and the start of

a cold one. Just recently, technology has been a major factor in the

fall of several Communist governments. With the invention of the

television and satellite dishes, as well as the Internet, many people

could have access to media, propaganda, and information not available

in their own society! and learn how their governments really were not

all that great, leading to a fall for those governments. Just

recently, the Chinese government was influenced by technology and

decided that many Western ideas could cause the same result of

government failure via the Internet. They banned over 100 sites or

links on the Internet to prevent this (Chen 1). The idea of terrorism

has been around for many years, but the idea of cyber-terrorism has

not. With the technological advances in communication lines overseas.

Terrorist hackers could cause more damage on a governmental body’s

computer system than could a nuclear missile and at a cheaper price.

This has forced many governments to spend money and create protection

from these types of attacks. Technology has also been influenced by

governments as well. With the railroad movement in the late 1800s,

governmental rules and regulations helped technology to be used as a

catalyst for competition. Technology, in the form of television and

radio, are both heavily regulated in the United States and in other

countries. Currently, the Supreme Court is making the decision if

cable systems must carry all the local channels. During the “Great

Leap Forward,” Mao’s government helped stop technological process by

making the Chinese do nothing but farm or make iron of no value.

Government’s also influence technology by imposing restrictions on

what can be invented to better society (or so they say). For example,

if it wasn’t for government restrictions on environmental issues and

car technology over the past decade, the car could be as cheap as $100

and get 100,000 miles per a gallon (tempting, isn’t it) because of

less money spent on regulations and more on research. Other ! policies

have prevented the continuation of genetic cloning and other “black”

medical projects. Without adequate funding from a governmental agency,

new technologies can not be invented or even thought up. With the

technological influence and governmental responses to these

technologies, economies can get stronger or weaker. This leads to the

other point on Novak’s “triangle,” economics. Falling prices, one of

the best measures of the speed of technological progress, confirms the

impression that the pace of changes has accelerated. The rapid decline

in price also encourages more people to buy more technology, allowing

it to be distributed more widely (Economy Survey 10). Technology has

greatly influenced many economic systems of the world. Japan is a

prime example. One of the many great boosts to its economy after

W.W.II, was the innovation of new technologies that other countries

would like. With these new technologies, Japan has become one of the

strongest economies of the world. A look back at American history can

show that technology was a great influence on the economy. During the

Industrial Revolution, trains helped pave the way for small business

in towns formed by these railroads, and trade among cities and other

countries increased at a rate of almost 40% a year. With the help of

Henry Ford, the idea of the production line (which is still cons!

idered a technology), helped lead to production of thousands instead

of hundreds of automobiles. The PC and communication revolution of

recent years has caused almost every company small, and large, to

incorporate the use of computers in order to make these companies’

goals more feasible. One advantage of technology’s influence on

economies is that it reduces communications and transaction costs,

helping markets to work more efficiently (10). Technology also follows

Says Law of supply creating its own demand. VCR’s, PC’s, contact

lenses, Super Nintendo’s, etc., are good examples of creating markets

out of thin air and in turn, helping the economy. At the same time,

rapid technological change is confusing and rapid forecasts are easily

hyped, which can cause some negatives for the economy too and

adversely, affect technological progress. Technology is greatly

influenced by economics in the form of funding and demand for new

technologies. Imagine what would have happened if the PC was invented

during the Great Depression. There would not have been any “PC

Revolution” during this time period because of the state of the

economy, as no one had the money to afford to create or buy PCs. The

same is true for many countries today. Africa’s economies have never

been that strong and technology has not been much help to these

countries because of the economic situation. Until recently, India was

pretty much the same way. With a stronger economy, there is now more

money being spent on R&D, resulting in more technological progress

for the future in India. How much money is placed in R&D (Research

and Development) greatly influences how technology will evolve. The

stronger the economy, the more technology that comes out of this

economy. Of course the economy is also strongly based on the people

and their desire for! this technology, which leads to the final point:

moral\cultural influences on technology. What would life be without

TV? Automobiles? Nintendo? Ask any kid these questions in a developed

country and they would respond very negatively. Most people know what

these technologies are because their society has been influenced by

technology. Imagine what life would be like without the invention of

the boat or airplane! These are just some of the technological

innovations that have influenced society. American history can tell

many stories of how technology has influenced society, but most people

can just look around and see it’s affects (both positive and

negative). Some of the positive influences of technologies on a

society’s social/morality can be seen by the medical advances and

healthcare. Some negative influences are the increase in violence and

illiteracy. Before the TV and Radio, many children read classic novels

and their homework. Now, the overall education of these children is

pathetic. One advantage to the new technology is the vast amount of

informa! tion available to people that was usually not available.

China’s governments actions can show how much these technologies have

influenced its society in a “negative” way for a Communist government.

The best way to see technology influencing societies is looking at

other societies that are not as developed as the West is. For example,

India’s society has just recently been greatly influenced by

technology in the form of cable television and consumer durables, such

as washing and dryer machines. Their society now has machines that can

do the work of what many had to pay someone else to do or do

themselves. The idea of a machine doing the work of a human scares

many societies and causes a backlash against technology. This leads to

the influence of societies’ moral and cultural standards upon the

pursuit of technological growth. Unemployment due to machines has been

the greatest fear of many societies. Since the beginning of the

Industrial Revolution, people have predicted that machines would

destroy their jobs and their lives as well. The book, Frankenstein was

the result of a technology gone astray. The author wrote the story to

keep people from inventing all these new technologies. Karl Marx

himself said that, by investing in machinery, factory owners would

create a vast army of the unemployed. In the late 1940s, Nobert

Weiner, a pioneer of computing, forecast that this new technology

would destroy enough jobs to make the depression of the 1930s looks

like a picnic. With all the negative publicity of new technologies,

many societies choose not to invest in some technology and without a

demand or the ideas for technology, progress is slowed. Unemployment

is not the only driving force behind the influence of society on

technology. There are many groups against technological progress.

These g! roups help stop a technology by petition, debating, and by

any means necessary (as did farmers with burning the cotton gins in

1840s). Technology can not progress unless there is someone that

thinks up an idea, but that idea can be stopped very quickly by a

societies’ view of that idea. John F. Kennedy was quoted as saying:

“If men have the talent to invent new machines that put people out of

jobs, then they certainly have the talent to put these people back to

work.” (Unemployment 21) Kennedy’s speech was based on the idea of

creative destruction: new jobs are created, while others are rendered

obsolete. Societies must learn that to complain is human; to adjust

essential. Either way, technology is influenced by this point. Michael

Novak stated that there were three influences on any society:

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influences. As seen by this essay, there are many reasons that there

should be a fourth point added to this “triangle.” Throughout history,

technology has seen to influence and be influenced by political

decisions. These technologies also have helped build economies and

destroy those that chose not to use technology. Society has also been

greatly influenced by technology in positive and negative ways, and

society has greatly influenced technology as well. Technology as the

fourth point of a triangle? How about a square or trapezoid?

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