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The IT Revolution Reassessed Part One: Literature Review and Key Issues

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Mass surveillance is fundamental threat to human rights says European report (Harding, 2015).

Millions stolen as hackers hit banks (Yadron & Glazer, 2015).

We are moving into an era when 'smart' machines will have more and more influence on our lives (but) the moral economy of machines is not subject to oversight in the way that human bureaucracies are (Penny, 2017).

Introduction

Headlines such as those above demonstrate as well as any that the IT revolution brings with it a series of challenges that societies are ill prepared to face. While surprisingly large numbers of people unthinkingly renounce such of their privacy as remains for trifles, the idealistic hopes of early pioneers and freedom-loving 'netizens' remain largely unfulfilled. Benign notions such as 'cyber democracy' and the 'information superhighway' have all but disappeared. In place of these optimistic hopes and projections there's a growing sense of uncertainty, disillusion and, in some cases, fear. One reason for this is that for many the digital realm is an elusive and obscure 'nowhere place' whose shadowy operations lie beyond the boundaries of human perception. Another is that a few vast corporations, and those with privileged access to their services, appear to have almost unlimited influence both for good and for ill. What is striking, however, is that in order to capture attention and encourage wide immediate usage it's the presumed *utility* of emerging technologies that's highlighted rather than the *radical ambiguity* that attends their longer-term use. The implications of this gulf or fracture need to be more thoroughly understood if positive measures to reduce or eliminate them are to be undertaken.

Those driving various components of the IT revolution claim new benefits and highlight examples of successful implementation - email, tablets, health innovations and so on. Yet, despite these obvious successes, it's hard to avoid the fact that many IT practices are powerfully disposed in favour of the interests of corporations, innovators and entrepreneurs. Equally, there's little evidence that these actors are motivated by positive values that promote the public interest. So concerns that the overall effect the IT revolution may be to herald the onset of a

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