The Digital Economy Lights Up

Editorial

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Abstract: The effect of the COVID-19 crisis on the digital economy has been profound. How and whether the widespread adoption of teleworking, telehealth and remote learning will continue after the crisis subsides is a matter for policy debate. Digital inclusion will, in any case, be important. This issue of the *Journal* publishes four public policy papers, two of which arise from the NBN Futures Forum in February 2020. The other two provide contrasting views on the rising influence of China on the Internet. The issue also contains five more technical papers and a historical reprint. The *Journal* welcomes contributions on telecommunications and the digital economy.

The Digital Economy in a Time of Crisis

The COVID-19 crisis has brought change to the digital economy like never before. What was unusual in February was commonplace by April. Teleworking and telehealth – two of the economically most important broadband services (Süßspeck, 2017) – have seen the barriers to their adoption fall away. Thousands of children – and their parents – have experienced the mixed pleasures of remote learning (tele-education) at home. Will our society ever be the same again?

We in the telecommunications industry tend to think that these changes are long overdue. Telework and telehealth have been discussed for many decades and have attracted significant R&D attention, mostly without much ongoing effect. The economic benefits through greater efficiency are well understood and, in recent years, the reduced carbon footprint (Süßspeck, 2017) has been quantified. Now that millions of people have experienced the new ways of working, many will not want to return fulltime to the previous arrangements.

While we may see only benefits, others are less sure, Naomi Klein, the Canadian writer and activist, for one. She (Klein, 2020) sees a more mixed picture for telehealth and remote learning. Although her main concern is the growing influence on government of large technology companies, she makes a specific point about enhancing education (p. 39):

> [O]vercrowded classrooms present a health risk, at least until we have a vaccine. So how about hiring double the number of teachers and cutting class size in half?

As she says: "That would create jobs in a depression-level unemployment crisis". It is well worth remembering that the future must create jobs to replace all those lost through the economic restructuring caused by the pandemic crisis. A policy of encouraging new employment in high-value areas while also investing in the newly popular tools of the digital economy will be most beneficial.

Klein is also concerned with digital inclusion. She asks rhetorically (p. 39): "If the internet is essential for so much in our lives, as it clearly is, should it be treated as a nonprofit public utility?" In Australia, we have approached this issue in a slightly different way, through the National Broadband Network, but there is still work to be done to achieve universal adoption of internet access. For more details on the transition from a universal service regime to a universal access regime, see Gregory (2015).

The COVID-19 crisis has made the need for digital inclusion for everyone more urgent, particularly for remote learning but also in telehealth for the less technologically savvy. The NBN Futures Group, which has been organizing public forums hosted by TelSoc,[i] has had a focus on the issues around digital inclusion and will be making recommendations in its final report on a way forward to encourage greater participation.

In This Issue

In this issue of the *Journal*, we publish four papers related to Public Policy. Two papers, by Richard Ferrers (p. 1) and Murray Milner (p. 31), expand on their talks at the NBN Futures Forum on Learning from International Experience, held in February 2020. Two other papers describe contrasting views on the influence of China. One, by David Soldani (p. 146), looks at using 5G and advanced technologies for helping to control pandemics, based largely on experience from China. The other, by Alan Dupont (p. 159), expresses concern about the growing influence of China on the development of the Internet.

The Internet is central to two technical papers. Al-Musawi, Hassan & Alturfi (p. 18) describe a tool for detecting Internet routing disruptions in real time. Le, Nguyen & Tran (p. 56) provide an overview of progress towards the "tactile internet" and haptics.

Other papers are concerned with how telecommunications is used. Kim & Lee (p. 94) analyse survey results from Korea to identify a "digital trust gap". Hidayat & Mahardiko (p. 110) consider the effect of a new law in Indonesia regulating social media content and the dissemination of "fake news". Esquivias *et al.* (p. 123) discern the relationship between financial inclusion and the use of mobile technologies from a survey in Indonesia.

The historical reprint (p. 167) describes Army communications in 1983.

The *Journal,* Looking Forward

The *Journal* welcomes papers on telecommunications and the digital economy, including, theory, public policy, and case studies. We encourage papers that reflect on where the global telecommunications market is now, how it got to where it is, and what is going to happen next.

Papers are invited for upcoming issues. With your contributions, the *Journal* will continue to provide readers with exciting and informative papers covering a range of local and international topics. The Editorial Advisory Board also values input from our readership, so please let us know what themes you would like to see in the coming year.

All papers related to telecommunications and the digital economy are welcome and will be considered for publication after the double-blind peer-review process.

Leith H. Campbell

References

Gregory, M. A. (2015). The Rationale for Universal Access to Digital Services. *Journal of Telecommunications and the Digital Economy*, *3*(4), 166-184. https://doi.org/10.18080/jtde.v3n4.45

Klein, N. (2020). Click for access. *The Guardian Weekly*, Australia edition, *202*(24), 34-39. 29 May.

Süßspeck, S. (2017). *Energy and carbon footprint of ubiquitous broadband*. PhD Thesis, University of Melbourne. https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/handle/11343/208820

Endnote

[i] TelSoc, the Telecommunications Association, is the publisher of this *Journal*.