Part IV.

The Personal Dimension
of Information Technology

Chapter XIII

Personal Computers, Mass Media, and Other Uses of Free Time

John P. Robinson and Meyer Kestnbaum
University of Maryland, USA

Andrew Kohut
Pew Center, Washington, D.C., USA

One measure of the impact of the personal computer is in terms of its time displacement of other activities; mass media generally are considered a prime candidate given the on-line profusion of information and entertainment services. This article compares the daily mass media habits and other leisure activities of heavy, light and non users of personal computers and on-line services based on 1994-95 and 1997 national surveys.

No significant or consistent evidence of time displacement of mass media was found. Indeed, heavier computer usage was associated with significantly greater use of print media and other cultural uses of free time, even after multivariate adjustment. It was concluded that at this early stage of diffusion, personal computers may have more in common with "time enhancing" home appliances (like the telephone, automobile and washing machine) than with television. Nonetheless, more complete time-diary studies are needed to identify the full temporal effects of the personal computer, much as they did for television.

Perhaps the major factor expected to change everyday life in the 21st Century is the personal computer.[1] The rapidity of that change is reflected in the recent spurt in the diffusion of computers into the home, from about 20% of homes having one as the U.S. entered the 1990s to nearly 50% by some estimates at the end of 1999. One of the major factors behind that growth was the increased popularity and diffusion of on-line information services.

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