

Could it be a bit less? ICT, the environment and social accountability

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Abstract: The impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) on the environment is gaining more attention. In this contribution I propose a three-layered model to study the impact of ICTs: first-order or direct effects of ICTs themselves; second-order effects or the impact of ICTs on other domains; and third-order effects or rebound effects that may nullify potential benefits because people and organisations change their behaviour, thereby introducing additional impacts on the environment. First-order effects are pretty well understood. Second-order effects have been inventoried but the analysis still falls short on account of methodological problems. Third-order effects are still very difficult to quantify. By using new perspectives from innovation theory and especially the role that users, consumers or citizens can play in spreading and adopting beneficial behaviour, the third-order effects might be countered. This brings to the fore the need for new research as well.

Keywords: Slacktivism, Social accountability, Sustainable ICT, User awareness, User empowerment.