

Understanding Motivations for IT Donations Through ACCESS Tech

SUSTAIN 4S06 – Leadership in Sustainability

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A volunteer overlooks a toolkit to fix technology donations at an ACCESS Tech event.

Photo credit: Matt Clarke



Overview

In an era marked by rampant consumerism and waste, electronic waste is highly concerning [1]. E-waste raises ethical concerns and has implications for resource management. Improper disposal pollutes the environment and causes health risks through the ingestion of heavy metals and exposure to hazardous byproducts [2]. ACCESS Tech is a sustainability initiative involving the collection of used technology, redistribution, and appropriate disposal if needed. This initiative is organized by McMaster's Academic Sustainability Program, Facility Services, University Technology Services, and local non-profit Empowerment Squared. This initiative is integral to responsibly managing e-waste through refurbishment and reuse. To ensure devices are viable for reuse, individuals must choose to donate rather than store or improperly dispose of their unused technology. The goal of our project was to better understand donor motivations to encourage donor awareness, participation, and donation to leverage the fullest potential of donated devices and improve technology access for those in need.

Objectives

1. Interview ACCESS Tech donors about their motivations to donate.
2. Analyze interview data and synthesize findings into primary themes.
3. Develop recommendations built off literature and interview data

Reporting

To achieve our first objective, we actively participated in the ACCESS Tech donation event, held on October 20, 2023. We conducted 18 interviews with diverse event donors, consisting of McMaster students, staff, and community members.

To achieve our second objective, we transcribed and analyzed our interview data and identified two key themes: convenience and sustainability. Convenience included a desire to declutter one's workspace and the ease of donating during the community event. As one participant described, "We always have a lot of extra computers and monitors ... we kind of just have them sitting around and we don't know what to do with them.". The theme of sustainability included an environmental consciousness and a pursuit of altruism. One participant shared, "I know that it's really bad to throw away tech especially when it's functional, it's incredibly wasteful".

To achieve our third objective, we leveraged our findings and existing literature [3] on encouraging pro-environmental behaviour to create four strategic recommendations to increase awareness and promote timely donations during ACCESS Tech Events: (1) maintain an incentive to recognize donor contributions and incentivize donations, (2) publicize donor testimonials to increase intrinsic motivation and leverage social influence, (3) introduce a fun, competitive element to again leverage the power of social influence, and (4) prioritize overall event convenience to 'nudge' donors to participate. We encourage continued research and analysis to determine if these strategies are effective and propose future enhancements to further reduce e-waste and enhance access to technology on campus and in Hamilton communities.

Collaborators

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