

Upcycled Technology: Breaking Barriers for Post-Secondary Students

SUSTAIN 4S06 - Leadership in Sustainability

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Preparing Tech for Donation at Upcycling Event
Photo credit: Matt Clarke



Overview

Students experience various stress factors affecting the quality of their education, including academic [1] and financial [2] stress. Obtaining appropriate technology can exacerbate both and be a barrier to students' education. A possible solution is the utilization of refurbished technology. The ACCESS Tech initiative at McMaster University collects used technology and offers it to Hamiltonians in need, including McMaster students.³ Our goal was to understand the potential impact that receiving free, second-hand technology can have on students' lives, and recommend strategies to further ACCESS Tech's impact at McMaster and promote similar initiatives at other institutions.

Objectives

1. Interview students on the impact of access to free, second-hand technology
2. Analyze the data and identify common themes
3. Recommend program enhancements to increase ACCESS Tech's impact and reach

Reporting

To achieve our first objective, we attended an ACCESS Tech Student Reuse Event on October 27, 2023, and interviewed 20 students to understand the perceived value of receiving free, second-hand technology.

To achieve our second objective, we analyzed our interview data and identified three key themes: saving time, alleviating financial pressure, and improving performance as a post-secondary student. Interviewees described beneficial timesaving through avoided shopping, product comparisons, and travel time. One interviewee described, "I [normally] take my sweet time to find the right price and specifications". Interviewees also shared the significant financial pressure they experience managing the costs associated with university life. One interviewee stated, "it's difficult paying tuition and other costs while only working part-time because of school, so it's hard to afford a lot of technology". Participants also expressed how access to technology allows them to develop skills in their academics, extracurriculars, and/or personal hobbies, ultimately improving their performance. One interviewee shared, "it's very important for me because it's a tool I have for communicating and personal growth as well. If I do any personal courses online, I need a platform to practice that on".

To achieve our third objective, we consolidated our findings into both a research report and summary presentation, complete with actionable suggestions. We shared our findings with the McMaster Sustainability Advisory Council (MSAC), including our recommendations, such as hosting more frequent ACCESS Tech events and improving pre-event communication with students, sharing what technology items will be available.

Collaborators

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