

Spero – a bit of background

Mobile digital technology may be getting smaller but the impact on our lives and environment is enormous, and getting bigger.



It might seem farfetched to link the use of mobile phones and cloud-based services to global environmental pollution and destruction – but it is real and happening now. And it is not the first time human development has massively impacted the world around us.

In as little as four decades, digital technology has advanced at a faster pace than anything else in human history. By contrast, it took more than 300 years for the printing press to have global impact. It caused an enormous change in society and also impacted the local environment. But the scale was much smaller, it was slower, and it tended to be local to the production processes.

The UK Industrial Revolution began in about 1750 and accelerated during the reign of Queen Victoria from the 1830s to the early twentieth century. Manual labour was mechanised and people moved from the countryside to work in factories and live in rapidly growing cities. Railways boomed and daily life and behaviours were changed forever. We are still seeing the impact of this today in the loss of ancient woodland. There is a lack of very old trees that provide a unique habitat for plant and animal life because so many were cut down during this time, so many years ago. This was also the start of the global warming process as factories churned out greenhouse gases.

The changes that are happening now, thanks to digitisation and AI technology, are causing a modern industrial revolution with a global impact. It is sometimes referred to as the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

In a similar way to the historical examples mentioned, our lives, habits and the global environment are changing but at a much faster pace to that seen before.
If we are still being impacted today by events hundreds of years ago, what impact will our current actions have on the planet in the decades and centuries to come?



Spero experiences just two examples of how modern advances in technology are impacting the environment both for us and the animals and plants we share the world with us. There are many, many more.



Children are involved in the mining of rare earth metals used to create the circuit boards, chips and batteries used in our mobile phones and devices. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in Africa provides most of the cobalt needed world-wide and children as young as seven are involved in the extraction and sorting process. Child labour is being exploited just as it was in Victorian England. They climb down dangerous, hand-dug mine shafts or sort hazardous waste to try to support their families.

In parts of India, families, including young children, sort imported waste from huge dumps by hand to find electronics and batteries that they strip apart to sell. Much of this 'e-waste' comes from the US and China who both export huge quantities, fuelled by consumer demand for the latest devices which often have limited lifespans .

Next time you tap a quick search online or ask AI a simple question, think about what is allowing this to work. Who or what has been impacted to produce the device you are using? How much water or energy has it taken to process your search and where in the world is the impact felt most?



All over the world, children are being affected by the digital revolution in many different ways, from the impacts on their mental health and wellbeing to the physical and environmental impact on the world they live in.

Spero has been written to help children and young people explore and understand some of these issues in a meaningful, but also gentle and hopeful way, in the knowledge that the decisions we all make today will impact them most of all.

