

Ethical Issues and Information Communication Technology (ICT) Use in the New Era

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ABSTRACT

The new age is characterised by information communication technology, where computers, laptops, mobile gadgets such as palmtops, tablets, mobile phones and the internet have made their way to every sphere of life from our domestic environments such as homes, small retail shops, banks to large industries and the world at large. Over time, so many questions about the ethical use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have emerged on who has access to what technology and the use of it and like every other technological invention. This paper will look at the morality involved in making use of ICT to promote ethical use of data or information in a virtual environment. ICT also possesses both positive and negative impacts; the questions that these impacts raise are what this piece attempts to answer, providing global scrutiny to these ethical issues, situations and questions; and providing recommendations in line with global best practices.

1. Introduction

The steps towards ethical considerations for issues concerning ICT first featured under the theme information ethics in 1992 during the Annual Review of Information Science and Technology. (Ugbogbo & Atu, 2016). This discussion on communication ethics would not be complete without a brief checkup of the broader definition of ethics. Ethics for Kallman and Grillo (1996), is the “practice of making a principle-based choice between competing alternatives”. This therefore allows the topic of ethics and communication in the new age to rest comfortably under this umbrella. Traditionally, one of the main goals of professional ethics is to pursue explicitly defined values and norms and discourage inappropriate behavior by professionals to develop public trust in services delivered by certain institutions (Stexhe & Verstraeten, 2000). This why to begin with, we must establish that for someone to possess ethical values in communication especially in the new age, the person would first of all require to have proper ethical values needed for surviving normally. This is why today, it is a common sight that many people who claim to be ethical in their day-to-day dealing, have little or no strict values once it comes to communication in the new age especially

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when it comes to the use of new-age communication apparatus (Solomon & O'Brien, 1990; Cohen & Cornwell, 1989).

There are a few misconceptions people hold concerning ethics in communication, and for this paper, it is important to state such beliefs at this introductory part of this work. A lot of people really see nothing wrong in the illegal or unethical use of the computer, for many, the wrong use of the computer is really nothing and so raises no guilt in the way stealing or lying would make one feel. For some other people, the belief is that communication ethics is only concerned with matters that revolve around software piracy or the infringing of someone's computer system without authorized access. Sadly, all of these notions are wrong, for all unethical use of the computer are as grievous and weighty. This is why Wood (1993) stated that many studies carried out on information communication ethics have been relegated only to matters relating to subjects cover problems such as software piracy, instead of a comprehensive conceptualization of information and communication ethics.

Hence, Malone (1993) strongly held that matters that should be of ethical concern must rise above only such things as we would want to call illegal and this is why he added software reliability, privacy and matching, employee displacement, and artificial intelligence. While talking about this subject, Kallman and Grillo (1996) identified a group of other issues that also fit into this including social and economic issues. We can see that there are actually so many issues summed under the umbrella of information communication ethics and that it affects a wide range of people. For today, almost everyone is touched by the ICT in one way or the other. This is why we need a widespread creation of awareness if only we want to address this. From all that we have stated, we can comfortably infer that there is no real distinction between information communication ethics and what others would want to refer to as normal ethics since issues of ICT ethics also fall under the umbrella of ordinary ethics.

Yet, as Kallman and Grillo (1996) stated that, people who appear to be unethical about ICT do not usually see anything wrong in their actions, hence the easy misuse, this explains why the one who goes through someone's messages in their inbox and those who easily open the files in another's computer indiscriminately, do so without feeling any guilty about it. A major reason why many of those who are hackers and those who employ software to break into the computers of others may appear horrified when they are called thieves.

Neumann (1991) mentions that, the new age which is characterized by the use of computers and technologically advanced communications equipment has over time changed the method in which people connect. Communications that used to be face to face has been reduced to the web-space, making decision making swifter and less thoughtful, and like anything that is rushed and not carefully done, Lately there has been a hike in the number of new web sites, these sites being created by people who, though, are computer literates, often have zero concerns as to what ethical standards or values they are to uphold concerning the use of the ICT. The unavoidable result of all of these is an increasingly large amount of inevitable abuse.

Today, it is a fact that the internet has the power to inform, possessing more potential outreach than the traditional media, say the television and the radio, People today use the Web for many and diverse purposes and people have the ability to access billions of other people easily, then

of course issues of ethical concern would be inevitable. Hence, the problems described above leads to a considerable need for writing this paper, the author decided to check the current situation on computer ethics in with the of goal of critically examining the rules, procedures which apply in fields such as: computer use in work places, respect for ownership of software, licenses, patents, privacy and anonymity, computer crime, and to check for the ethical standards in the implementation the use of information technology, and at the end providing relevant recommendations.

2. Literature Review

The new age has brought about extraordinary developments in technology which has transformed the way most people obtain and use information. The emergence of electronic library resources as a medium of information storage and delivery has become an essential component in academic institutions as it plays a critical role in meeting academic needs of staff and students (Usman, 2016). Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been eased by providing the Internet to satisfy the everyday academic and research life of students (Apuke & Iyendo, 2018). We see that, Ternenge and Kashimana (2019), Ugwu and Orsu (2017), Adeyoyin, Idowu, and Sowole (2016) have all together agreed that challenges like lack of necessary knowledge of electronic information resources (EIR), hardware operations, lack of ethical browsing skills, financial problems to procure EIR gadgets, unethical information overload, funding, inconsistent electricity supply, poor ICT infrastructure, as insufficient knowledge of software applications usage were faced by the students when using the internet. Notwithstanding, whenever there is a mention of ethics, there is usually a drawn expectation concerning the way and manner by which people must conduct their actions be it written or verbal, consistent with generally accepted standards for those whom it may concern. Notwithstanding, there exist different views on the concept of ethics. Fisher (2004), ethics is the concept of an individual's personal belief showing what is right or wrong, good or bad. Equally, Miner (2002) sees it as the judgments of actions as right or wrong which comes from the beliefs of a people. This is why Mintz and Morris (2007) explained it to mean standards that are acceptable when referring to human behaviors, behaviors that show how people ought or ought not to act how as against how people act.

Nevertheless, sociologically speaking, Scott and Lyman (1986) states that ethics "prevent conflicts from arising by bridging the gap between action and expectation". Ward (2011), explained in his book, "Ethics and the Media: An Introduction" showed that the concept ethics originates from the Greek word "ethos" which means charisma, nature or disposition. This position of ethics is closed to the common belief that ethics is internally concerned with being virtuous, that which moves the people towards correct acts. This etymology of ethics proposes ethics to be both distinctive as well as collective. Ethics is distinctive simply because those who do likewise, ethics is collective is social because no one can seat frame rules of conduct as regards rightness of wrongness for themselves without putting them into consideration with the rules or fair societal interaction. Erondu, Sharland, and Okpara (2004) believe that the study of "ethics" has as its focus issues that concern

the act of making a practical decision, revolving values which people hold in order to survive, the lens through which the rightness or wrongness of human actions can be judged. Hence ethics implies those schemes of moral values or principles, Adenubi (1999). Making ethics that term employed to mean moral beliefs and ethical theory governing human conduct. (Beauchamp & Bowie, 2001). What this makes Ethics is a reflection on morality, meaning the principles of making choices by individuals is them right or wrong). Thus, ethics is the guide for both human and societal behavior; this is why Capurro (2006) could easily hold that ethics is an endless search for the unambiguous and implied usage of codes especially moral codes.

3. Discussion

Media ethics according to Pavlik (2008), states that media ethics implies a set of practices, a code of things that media professionals such as journalists ought or ought not to do. This is the normative concept that prescribes helpful codes on how media professionals should or should not do. Ethics is the branch of philosophy that is concerned with the arranging, guarding, and prescribing of concepts on the right and wrong thing to do; it is also known as moral philosophy.

While carrying out their responsibilities, library and information professionals have certain moral codes that guide their actions just like as obtainable in every other profession. These codes are responsible for prompting actions at every given time. There are certain theories of ethics which have over time have shown their importance in guiding professionals of information technology. These theories provide benchmarks for striking the difference between what is right and what is wrong.

Fallis (2007) there are four such theories as they affect information ethics and they include those of consequence, duty, rights and virtue. According to those of consequence, the distinguishing factor separating right actions from wrong ones is that they have better outcomes. Thus, in attempting to do the right thing, we should do things that have good outcomes. For the duty-based theory, the main position is that human beings have ethical duties they must obey and that the outcome of actions should not be the guiding principle in checking for the right and wrong action. For example, humans debatably possess the duty of preservation of life and not to kill innocent people, this is even if killing would have very good outcomes. While for the rights-based theory he explains that this position argues that, in determining the right thing to do, it should be done in light of the rights that human beings possess. These theories are consistent with information ethics since talks like these often fall in line with talks corresponding to those of human rights, such as we have in the American Library Association where there is the Library Bill of Rights. Finally, ethical theorists who hold the virtue-based theory believe that, in determining the right thing to do, human virtues ought to consider. So much so that, the right thing to do in any given situation is what a virtuous person would do in the same situation.

In every profession, people desire to perform their responsibility in a professional ethical way, and library and information professionals are not left out on this, but in the course of carrying out these activities, they often are greeted with dilemmas regarding the handling, protection and

propagation of information. One of these dilemmas is in knowing for instance, if we are to place some forms of restriction on how computers are used in public libraries or if we should keep certain things in the library say a book that might adversely affect the sentiments of some users religiously or morally all stand as ethical dilemmas for the library staff. Hoq (2012) stated that, other ethical dilemmas that library staff face include the thoughts of charging users when special services are rendered knowing it is a public library or say allowing users to making photocopies in the library, another dilemma is in the restriction of persons with suspicious looks or those not properly dressed from entering into the public library. One thing underlying all these instances is that the library professional is faced with the need to take an ethical stand. The simple way of providing information for users has over time become complicated with the emergence of so many sophisticated ICT facilities and especially as libraries have become more digitalized, making user demands global, the task of providing information has become challenging. More so, information divide inequalities that exists between rich and poor nations caused by wealth creation and use wealth has further affects how much information a nation can access or control. (Hoq, 2012)

Thus, Masmoudi (1979) cites in his seminal paper “The New World Information Order” that, this aforementioned growing inequality exists amongst nations of the world when it comes to accessing, controlling, and disseminating information. The paper showed about seven forms of these inequalities that exists in the world of information amongst nations

1. *The deliberate quantitative imbalance that exists between the North and South;*
2. *The inequality in resources of information;*
3. *The de facto supremacy and a will to dominate;*
4. *The privation of information on developing countries;*
5. *Survival of the colonial era;*
a separating influence in the economic, social, and cultural spheres;
6. *Dissemination of ill-suited messages.*

Authorities such as Smith (1980), Morehouse (1981), Haywood (1995) and Buchannan (1999), have shown similar concerns, pointing out that, the developed countries have over time continue to lead the world when it comes to enjoying assets in material and knowledge; questioning the ethics of new age and the supposed free flow of information and related commodities which is supposed to be its hallmark. Thus, library and information professionals as custodians and organizers of information in the new age crossroads especially when it comes to knowing how to offer best services to users of the library, in the most ethical possible manner. Again mention must be made here that, trying to find a way that is generally accepted by all or the majority of those seeking information, and those who generate theses information may be difficult since there is no one universally accepted idea of “good” and “bad” as it may differ from person to person and from society to society.

3.1 Ethics and communication in the new age

We live in an age characterized by rapid advanced technological changes, and with the ease with which technology has made things flow. Ethical issues are simply on the increase requiring urgent attention at handling them. Of particular interest are the ethical issues that arise in the communication space. This rapid growth has over time had tremendous impacts on human society thus, raising some ethical questions for the people as well as for organizations. These issues have in fact over time reason to a surprising level affecting the society in various ways areas such as those of employment, and working conditions as these technological advancements have made the invasion of person's and corporate body's privacy very possible, and also affecting rights of intellectual property, of individual and societal, of preservation of values and accountability, etc. Many aspects of human living have with time been saddled with carrying of these burdens amongst human actions that have suffered and these are, employment working conditions and individuality. Sadly, only little progress has been made in this respect.

Fielden (2004), stated that Information Communication Technology (ICT) has with time occupied a very crucial position in the society at large for as one moves from commerce to industries government, medicine, education and entertainment. Its social and economic are hardly required that have come off as being problematic, posing some negative ethical impacts on our society.

These impacts can be reduced to three and they include the following:

- (a) Personal privacy
- (b) Access right
- (c) Harmful actions

In terms of personal privacy, the ICT has made large scale data exchange of information from anybody, irrespective of the person's location in any part of the world at any time. What this implies is that there is an increased probability for disclosing personal information and or of groups and in turn, violating the privacy of such person and or groups of people due to the ease with which there is widespread dissemination globally. Thus, it remains our duty and responsibility to ensure that the confidentiality and integrity of data regarding persons and groups are well kept. This therefore, involves taking precautions to ensure that there is accuracy in disseminating data, and also in protecting it from unapproved access that is, unintentional exposure to wrong persons.

On the aspect of ethical issues in computing systems is the access right. This has actually over time become a subject of high priority for cooperate bodies and government agencies. This is so because of the current popularity of commerce on the Internet especially international commerce. This interest became heightened due to break-ins that occurred as sophisticated places like Los Alamos National Laboratories and NASA in the US. Many of such illegal attempts access to the United States government and military computers have been reported. Thus, without putting in place proper security for the computer, there would be no assurance that network connections on the Internet would be secured from illegal accesses (Grimes, Fleischman, & Jaeger, 2009)

And finally, for the harmful actions, Grimes, Fleischman, and Jaeger (2009) note that in computer ethics, harmful action implies damage or negative consequences, which include the undesired loss of information, loss of property, damage of property, or unwanted environmental impacts. Harmful actions, thus, include intentional destruction or modification of files and programs that result in severe loss of assets or needless spending of human resources such as the time and effort that would be needed in cleaning the system. Now, we shall discuss some specific ethical issues that come up in communication in the new age.

3.2 Plagiarism

This is the term used to mean that the work of others is copied, by an author who presents it as his or her work. This translates as stealing and it is a highly unethical practice even in religion. Sadly, this action happens quite regularly, and it is much easier to do so with all the information available on the internet making its occurrence more frequent. Basically, plagiarism on the internet come in two was as identified by Ugbogbo and Atu (2012). First, with the ease with which electronic texts have made cut and paste. It is now very simple for students to copy published sources say articles that appear on the encyclopedia as their papers. Second, although it is not tough for students to get someone who writes their papers for them, it is now very much easier for people to find and buy unidentified papers at Web sites that specialize in such sales and to even charge original term papers and sell for an agreed price. Unluckily, the Internet takes away what gives, since teachers can now access the databases of their students papers once it is submitted electronically. Hence they can easily relate these students' paper knowing where even a simple line originally appeared.

3.3 Hacking

This is the term used in referring to the action of an individual who has enough knowledge to gain access to computer systems to identify security flaws without authorization. These individuals are known as hackers. They break into, or hack a system. There are various reasons why hacking is done and it includes the malicious desire to spoil a system or to understanding how a system works, in the bid of making money from it. Furthermore, some people argue that there are hacker ethics which has used in alerting people that their system is insecure and needs improving. This is why reformed hacking could pose a moral dilemma. The “reformed hackers” sometimes use their expertise in helping organization in protecting themselves from other hackers. Hacking unlike breaking into a closed-door requires a lot of skills. With this skill, hackers can show that a system is not secure and needs refining. Thus, arguments can be made that hackers play a valuable role. For some others, the argument is that hacking might lead to some improvements. (McCarthy, Halawi, & Aronson, 2005)

3.4 Piracy

This is how software is illegally copied. White (2002) makes us understand this to be a very serious problem since about 50% of all programs on computers are pirated copies. Using elaborate code, programmers spend hours together in designing programs. Hence, these programs surely need to be protected. Although this being a very serious issue, that significantly damages the profit level for the programmers, some people still argue that some forms of pirating should at least be permitted since it helps in the creation of a more computer literate population.

4. Summary and Conclusions

In the end, I believe that an accurate conclusion for this piece is that ethics in its use for communication in the new age, especially in the context of Internet use, has not gone viral enough. There are so many matters for concern as the number of people touched and affected by the ICT is large and this is so majorly because of the increased availability of the Internet as it has not stopped growing. This, therefore, makes seeking a target audience difficult to define and even more is the trying to reach them. Ethical issues in themselves are also difficult to define, progressively compound and diverse, and they keep growing rapidly with the technology. More so, the attitudes, perceptions and behavior of the users of the ICT leave are not encouraging. Again, is the fact that there are no generally accepted code of ethics and conduct for professional varies from one professional organization to the next. Sadly, too is the fact that when classes are organized in computer ethics, that is when ethics appears part of the ICT curriculum, little impact is made since only a minor number of students use it. The importance of communication ethics in the new age cannot be over-emphasized as there are way too many people involved in the use for us to be negligent. It is probably not possible to develop comprehensive ethical guidelines to cover every possible situation of IT misuse. Realizing the universality and the enormosity of this problem formulate ethical guidelines continually, in other to keep pace with constant changes revolving around these issues. Finally, it is paramount that these guidelines after being formulated be made a part of the curricula of all schools and colleges rather than just relegating it to ICT related disciplines.

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