Ethical Guidelines for Cyber-related Services Aimed at the Younger Generations

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Abstract

Ethics together with the law should be able to govern the tendencies of cyber users in order to create a virtual world with disciplined users. One of the major challenges in achieving such outcomes is the lack of a solid ethical base, specifically with the Younger Generation. The way in which the Internet is used by this generation not only affects them personally but also in their professional capacities. This paper argues towards and suggests a set of ethical guidelines that will assist in eradicating unethical behavior. It furthermore provides questions that a person should ask themselves, to evaluate whether or not they have applied the guidelines.

Keywords

Younger generation, Internet, Ethics, Law, Unethical Behaviors, Cyber usage

1 Introduction

Technology has always had the sole purpose of enhancing the means of living (Ermann *et al*. 1997). One of these enhancements is the invention of the Internet. The Internet has had an extraordinary influence on the way in which human beings do things (Hauptman, 1996). It is evident that the Internet has become part of how the world functions, specifically in communication (Kiesler and Sproull, 1992). Therefore, online activities are nowadays second nature to many people spanning different generations. These generations can be divided into various age groups, as listed in Table 1.

Generation name	**Ages in 2010**
Teens	Ages 12-17
Millenials (Gen-Y)	Ages 18-33
Gen-X	Ages 34-45
Younger Boomers	Ages 46-55
Older Boomers	Ages 56-64
Silent Generation	Ages 65-73
G.I Generation	Ages 74+

Table 1: Generation Distinctions (PEW Internet, 2010)

For the purposes of this paper the focus will be the Teens and/or Millenials generation groupings which will jointly be referred to as the Younger Generation. As reported in PEW Internet the Younger Generation uses the Internet the most (PEW Internet, 2010). The problem is in the behaviour exhibited of this generation, while using the Internet. The behaviour of this generation definitely poses some ethical concerns. Berdik (2007) suggests that this is due to the abstract nature of the Internet and the inability of users to align their behavior in the real world and the virtual world experienced on the Internet. The objective of this paper is not to address legal issues, but merely to attempt to put legality in context with ethics. The aim of this paper therefore, is to formulate guidelines that will assist in addressing these ethical implications of the Younger Generation whilst communicating online. These guidelines will be extended by a series of easy questions that a person should ask him/herself, to evaluate whether or not he/she has applied the proposed guidelines and therefore communicated in an ethical manner.

The upcoming sections will elaborate on the influence that the Internet has on the Younger Generation. A clear definition of ethics and the law, the relationship between these two concepts as well as their role in cyber usage will be provided. Behaviours that are considered ethically questionable and illegal will be cited. Furthermore, the proposed ethical guidelines will be revealed and followed by concluding clarifications.

2 The Internet in the Society

The Internet is widely used for many purposes by individuals today. These users of the Internet span various generations with each generation favoring certain services and functions. How these services and functions are used is determined by many factors including: what it is used for, who it is supposed to influence and how responsible the user is. Thus, this section will study the impact that the Internet has on individual and also in a wider sense on the society.

Each generation in society utilizes the Internet in a unique manner. The difference of the generations regarding Internet usage has been highlighted by PEW Internet (2010). These statistics point out that each generation does in fact utilize different Internet services. Moreover, the Millenials prove to be using the Internet the most and the G.I Generation use it the least.

The way in which the Internet is used can either construct or destruct, depending on who uses it, how it is used and the reasons thereof. One of the ways in which the Internet destructs is how it manifests criminals. The Internet has not only simplified the good things, it has also given criminals a platform to grow and proliferate. The lack of security and control over cyber usage is also an advantage to criminals as it permits criminals new ways to commit old crimes (Cyberethics - Ethics in the Age of the Internet, n.d.). As a result, the Internet is dubbed as the Wide Wild West of the information age. This is mainly because of its lack of control and restraints. Thus, the Internet serves as a potential threat to society (Cyberethics - Ethics in the Age of the Internet, n.d.).Except for the fact that potential criminals flourish on the Internet,

Gaungrong (1998), states that the Internet corrupts people's minds, influences and changes people's moral perspectives and ethical values and therefore can have a negative effect on the individual (Gaungrong, 1998). It has also affected different generation groupings in different ways. Sir Burton (2008), states that the Younger Generation mainly uses the Internet to "share" information, while the older generation prefers to use the Internet to "know" and therefore to find information (Burton, 2008). When using the Internet, individuals mostly remain anonymous making it easy for one to partake in atypical Internet behaviour (Freestone and Mitchell, 2004). Thus the Internet definitely has a 'dark side'.

On the other hand, while the Internet is used for many wrong and negative reasons, for responsible people it is indeed a very useful technology. *"Responsible people want to use the Web for research, communication, and instruction"* (Berdik, 2007). Taking into consideration what inadequate control exists on the Internet, it is up to the individual to oversee how to behave in cyber space. Moreover, to reflect the implications of such behavior against what is socially and professionally acceptable. Therefore, it is important that one continuously be alerted to proper behavioral norms while online.

From this section it is clear that different generation groupings use the Internet for different purposes. Further, the positive as well negative sides of the Internet has briefly been highlighted. With this in mind, the following section will introduce the law and ethics, together with how they can assist in attending to this questionable behaviour. It will also focus on defining the law and ethics, together with how they relate.

3 A transparency on the Law and Ethics

The importance of the law and ethics in relation to cyber usage is very important, as these should dictate the way in which an individual communicates in cyberspace. It is important to note that defining the law is solely attempted to put legality in context with ethics. This section will provide clarity on how ethics and the law are related and furthermore stipulate the role they play in cyber usage. The term "cyber usage" will be used to its optimum, referring to how the Internet is used.

3.1 Defining the Law

The law, as defined by Fuchs, Bichler and Raffl (2009) is "*social norms defined by the government. Norms that are sanctioned with the help of the state-monopoly of the means of compulsion organized in the form of the executive system. They consist of the police system, the military system, and the prison system and the judiciary system*". Alternatively, the law has also been defined by Curzon (1986) as the "*written and unwritten body of rules. These rules are largely derived from custom and formal enactment. They are recognized as binding among people who constitute a community or state, so that they will be imposed upon and enforce among those parsons by appropriate sanctions"*. There are other classifications of the law but

they all share the same notions, which are rules, monitoring, compliance and control. Following are some descriptions of ethics.

3.2 Defining Ethics

Elaboration on the law is achieved and following is an expansion on ethics. Brockett and Heimstra (2004) defines ethics as simply being the study of right and wrong, of good and evil, in human conduct. Adeola (n.d.) also explains ethics as a principal branch of philosophy in the study of value or quality. Ethics further incorporate the analysis of concepts such as right, wrong, good, evil, justice and responsibility. They help members of a society to know what to do and what is not to be done. With ethics forming part of the Internet era, the term "cyberethics" has developed. For Richard Spinello, cyberethics is about norms that guide "*acting well in this new realm of cyberspace*" (Spinello, 2003). It is rather easy to extract the commonality of these definitions, which are right and wrong in human conduct. While the law is not left to any individual to decide, ethics allow people the choice to decide what is acceptable or not to the society. With the law and ethics defined it is only rational to move on to explaining how they relate.

3.3 The Relationship between the Law and Ethics

Adeola (n.d.) elaborates on the relationship between ethics and the law, suggesting that indeed they do relate. In areas where law is silent or permits, ethics come in and raise the standard to a level where everyone is content. Each generation applies ethics according to its own context, background and area of influence. Not complying with those ethics though does not necessarily bring about punishment. Ethics, together with the law, should mold the behavior of an individual to what is legally and socially acceptable.

Hauptman (1996) believes that the traditional base of ethics is enough to withstand any technology inventions. He views the nature of the Internet as rebellious and suggests that its presence should call for ethics rather than netiquette. On the contrary, it has to be acknowledged that the Internet is not responsible for this rebellious nature, but rather makes it easier for users to act in such a manner. Despite the fact that the role of ethics in cyber usage of the Younger Generation is still uncertain, the law has been visibly implemented in directing cyber usage. One of the ways in which the law is implemented is through copyright laws (Harris and Dumas, 2009). These laws should ideally prohibit illegal behavior of the Younger Generation towards intellectual property. But, it seems to be ineffective as plagiarism and illegal downloading of music and/or software are becoming common practice amongst the generation of today (Harris and Dumas, 2009). The inadequacy of the law affirms the need for ethic intervention.

Sensitizing ethics and the law is now achieved, together with how these concepts relate to one another. Moreover the role they play in cyber usage is now realized. According to the above mentioned descriptions of ethics, it is safe to argue that for ethics to be effective people should be convinced that some behaviour is in fact not

acceptable to other people. To accomplish this, perhaps some form of awareness and education is required. Once that is accomplished then individuals might treat online unethical behaviours as thoughtful as physical unethical behaviours. Subsequent is an exploration of some unethical behaviors and illegal behaviors on the Internet.

4 Unethical and Illegal behaviors on cyberspace

Individuals have different views of what is regarded right or wrong as well as what is ethical or unethical. With the law and ethics defined in the prior section, this section will cover a few examples of typical unethical behaviours. It will be done in comparison to some examples of illegal behaviours. It will explore the extant in which the Younger Generation is deemed to act in an ethical manner when active in cyberspace. It will furthermore provide facts from literature on how this generation is affected by its behaviour personally and professionally.

According to Du Plooy (2010) this generation shares inappropriate information and it also makes undesirable statements that are regarded as "hate speech". McMasters (1999) defines "hate speech" as that which offends, threatens, or insults groups based on race, colour, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, disability or a number of other traits. Although "hate speech" is in most cases not unlawful it is unethical. It is present in any form of communication online, such as in emails, social networks, status updates, chat rooms and blogs. This generation portrays no shame in speaking their minds online without considering the implications (Du Plooy, 2010). That is promoted by the intangible nature of the Internet (Du Plooy, 2010; Baum, 2005). The lack of fear of punishment encourages people to act in an indecent manner and Freestone and Mitchell (2004) credits the Internet for paving the way for many new forms of aberrant behaviour. The Internet is the "new environment for unethical behaviour" and it allows the Younger Generations to misbehave (Freestone and Mitchell, 2004). It can be concluded that the Younger Generation is prone to unethical behaviour while active on the Internet.

The Younger Generation not only behaves unethically but is often victim to such behaviour (Brown *et al*. 2006). This transpires in a form of cyber bullying and cyber stalking. Meloy and Gothard (1995) define stalking as "*the wilful, malicious and repeated following and harassing of another person that threatens his or her safety*". Tokunaga (2010) reports on cyber bullying as "*the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group that is intended to harm others*". Dehue, Bolman and Vollink (2008) delimits three conditions that must be met for a situation to be considered cyber bullying. The first condition is that the behaviours must be repeated. The second is the bullying should involve psychological torment, and third is that it must be carried out with intent. These definitions purposely state the expression "repeated" suggesting that if the acts are repeated, they move away from unethical to being illegal. For example, if one is sent one malicious email they cannot claim that they are being cyber stalked. Likewise, if one is harmed in any form of way electronically only once, one cannot claim that one is cyber bullied. From a legal point of view, limited states and countries have cyber bullying acts that assist in

combating this offense. One of which is Nevada in the USA (Hinduja, Patchin, 2011). However, such a law is not defined in South Africa (South African Law Reform Commission, 2006).

Unethical behaviour affects the Younger Generation personally, typically through cyber bullying and cyber stalking and it also affects this generation professionally. This behaviour not only negatively impacts the society but includes the corporate world (Freestone and Mitchell, 2004). Alverson (1999) claims that every generation in American history has separate personality traits and that applies even for today's generation. Filipczak (1994) also states that the older generation complains about the Younger Generation's work ethic, and considers it as the lack of a work ethic. At work place the Younger Generation has a different ethical stance from the older generation (Govitvatana, 2001). The negligence of this generation regarding information affects the way in which they should appreciate information at work.

In the UK, on January 9th 2008, the theft of a Ministry of Defence (MOD) laptop from a naval recruiter's car led to an intense investigation (Burton, 2008). This investigation was conducted by Sir Edmund Burton. He reported on the impact that personal behaviour has on the professional behaviour. One of the issues that were identified in the Burton Report (2008) is that the Younger Generation adds to a culture of information security ignorance. Sir Burton (2008) states that the Younger Generation of MOD staff is not inculcated with the same culture of protecting information as their counterparts from previous generations. This poses as a major consequence of the unethical behaviour of today's generation in general.

From what has been recited, the following can be concluded:

1. The Younger Generation struggles to align their virtual lives to their real lives.
2. The Younger Generation is prone to be unethical while active online.
3. On occasion the Younger Generation is unaware of the consequences of their unethical behaviour.
4. Often the actions that are labelled unethical have negative impact.
5. The Younger Generation might be dubbed as the weakest link when it comes to information security.

The above statements will be addressed by some ethical guidelines in the following section. The guidelines are applicable when one is to communicate online.

5 Ethical Guidelines

The Younger Generation has been dubbed as acting unethically to a large extent in the previous section. Its behavior online has affirmed the necessity of ethical intervention. This section will introduce ethical guidelines that will address the five statements that were made in the aforementioned section. These guidelines are listed and explained below in Table 2. This section will furthermore provide questions that a person should ask themselves before posting or communicating online, to evaluate whether or not they have applied the proposed guidelines.

Guideline	Justification
1. A person should be fully aware of what they are about to do online as well as the consequence of that action.	It is visible that in some instances people act without considering the implications of those actions (Du Plooy, 2010). It would help if people took time to evaluate their actions, and to know entirely what they are about to do before doing it.
2. The intention that one has while communicating online, should be positive.	If a person's intention is positive, then hate speech and cyber bullying can be mitigated. Since both of these offences require the intension to harm people (Dehue *et al.* 2008; McMasters, 1999).
3. If the content of the information that one is to post online might be deemed as defamatory other people, one should have the consent of every person that is involved.	Since society at large has different views of what is regarded ethical and unethical (Baum, 2005). It is important that before sharing information that seems appropriate to you, to consult everyone involved. This is to avoid conflict of values.
4. Before one posts information through the Internet, one should check whether or not they are giving too much information, specifically private information that might cause harm.	Information security is everybody's responsibility (von Solms and von Solms, 2009). Therefore it is up to every individual to ensure that they are not giving too much information that is potentially harmful to them.
5. An individual should be in their right state of mind while posting something online. This is to avoid being driven by anger and posting something one might regret.	Anger or any other emotion can cause one to act abnormally (Loewenstein and Lerner, 2003). One should be in a clear state of mind when active online, so as to enable conscious decision making.
6. A person must be certain that what they do online aligns with what they would do in physical life.	The abstract nature of the Internet promotes "two-faced" personalities (Berdik, 2007). If one would attempt to act as they would in real life, then some uncalled for behaviors would be eliminated.
7. While online, one should attempt to say things that they would also appreciate receiving.	It is reported that the Younger Generation fails to consider the implications and consequences of their actions online (du Plooy, 2010).Taking that into account, assessing how one would accept a behavior if it was directed to them can assist this generation in taking responsibility for its actions.

Table 2: Ethical Guidelines

Based on the proposed guidelines, it is important that Internet users are able to evaluate themselves. Below as Figure 1 is a flowchart with five easy questions to evaluate whether one has applied the above mentioned guidelines. The decisions made by users must lead to "Ethical – Go Ahead" in the flowchart below. If so, what the user is about to communicate should be free of any unethical content. If not, the user has to reconsider the content of the information they are about to communicate.

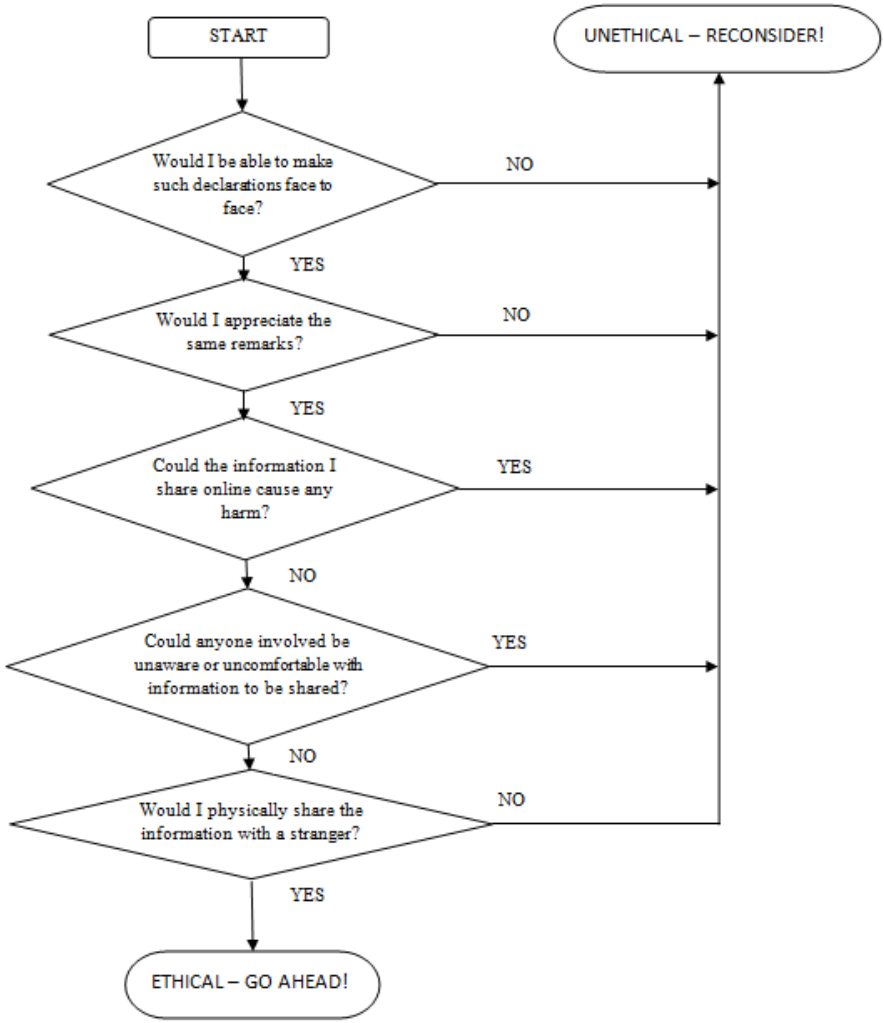

Figure 1: Five Point Self-Evaluation Flowchart

The notion is to apply the proposed guidelines, aiming at eliminating the chance of being unethical. Once that is done, one is to go through the self-evaluation flowchart to ensure that the guidelines are appropriately implemented. With the guidelines and flowchart established, the prospect for an ethical tomorrow is imaginable.

6 Conclusion

Having the Internet as a common resource has impacted on how the world operates. This resource has affected various generation groupings differently. It has affected the Younger Generation in a rather negative manner personally and professionally. The way in which the Internet is used today renders it destructive. It has contributed to the increase of cyber criminals. In addition, it continues to serve as a platform where people deviate from what they truly are in actual reality. The law has become inadequate in regulating the behaviors of users while active online. That lack of control calls for ethics. The proposed ethical guidelines aim to adjust the cases of unethical behavior of the Younger Generation in a positive sense. They aim to arouse the sense of responsibility amongst cyber users and also to contribute to a tomorrow with responsible users.

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