

Ethics and the Internet

The focus of ethics and the Internet (E&I) research is directed on peoples' actions rather than mere technology itself. At great human and economic cost, resources drawn from governments, industry and the academic communities have been assembled into a collection of interconnected networks called the Internet. Begun as a vehicle for experimental network research in the mid-1970's, the Internet has become an important national infrastructure supporting an increasingly widespread, multi-disciplinary community of researchers ranging from computer scientists and electrical engineers to mathematicians, medical researchers, astronomers and space scientists.

As is true of other common infrastructures (e.g., roads, water reservoirs and delivery systems, and the power generation and distribution network), there is widespread dependence on the Internet by its users for the support of day-to-day activities. The reliable operation of the Internet, and the responsible use of its resources, is of common interest and concern for its users, operators and sponsors. Network infrastructures underscore the need to reiterate the professional responsibility every Internet user bears to colleagues and to the sponsors of the system. Abuse of the system thus, becomes a matter above and beyond simple professional ethics.

Different articles focus on the dilemma various groups of people share, when they identify a misdoing that a firm has performed. Internet risk takers who feel the need of greed commit the actions mainly illustrated as unethical behavior. For example, CEOs and founders sell their stock early making sure they get their cut of the bonanza -no matter what signal that sends to their public-market investors.

Today, everyone admits that information is power. This old maxim has become more and more pertinent in our modern information society. The development of information technology has been dashing and, if future predictions are anything to go by, the pace of change will only increase. Ethical and moral issues in computer ethics are among the most vital social aspects of information technology. Currently, there are two major problems in the area. First, inconsistent moral behavior has been documented, which leads to immoral acts such as virus creation and capital theft. Second, lack of awareness concerning information technology's security has created a variety of IT-related crimes. Not even IT experts have an adequate knowledge of computer ethics, though there is every indication that ethics should be a part of their professional baggage. As for the development of ethical skills, it is not just a matter of education; rather, it is an on-going process that every professional should be aware of.

Educational institutions play an important role in this respect. In addition to imparting technical knowledge, they should also teach computer ethics. Educational issues and ethical awareness are important as they provide the motivation for complying with learned ethical principles. Ethical decision-making formulas and applicable theories are helpful for sharing information about the application of ethics. This information can then be disseminated by educational institutions. The volume of research in the area is constantly increasing, supplying up-to-date information about ethical and moral 'traps' and prescriptive codes for dealing with new dilemmas. Professionals must have the capability to make broad-minded, objective ethical decisions. They also have to do their best to create a working environment and foster an atmosphere where ethical dilemmas can be discussed openly, objectively and constructively.

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