



Topic 5: Digital Etiquette. Introduction

Definition: *Digital etiquette is the electronic standards of conduct or procedure*

Digital technologies offer many benefits to individuals and society. Yet the abrupt change brought by the evolution and take-up of these technologies mitigates, or even endangers these benefits. The speed and complexity of change seems to lead to a dilution of ethical and social consciousness and a sweeping away of accountability and responsibility for personal behaviour and its results (“it is the system’s fault”). The web as a quality-neutral platform for information and communication offers little in the way of social role models or culture-based norms.

Despite the legislative and regulatory effort being devoted to these issues, there is an urgent need for individuals and society as a whole to properly and dynamically frame ‘digital ethics’ so as to aid and complement what is achieved within the regulatory sphere. In addition, any digital ethics framework will increasingly have to accommodate decisions made by autonomous systems (robots, profiling systems, embedded and connected systems, remote control systems, etc.), which are still managed by legal persons.

What is Digital Ethics?

A natural starting point is to ask what we mean by digital ethics. Is it ethics that have gone digital? Is it an ethics for digital systems – with or without humans ‘in the loop’? Or are we talking about an ethics for these systems themselves.

‘Ethos’, the Greek word from which ethics is derived, meant a habit or custom. At its most elementary level, ethics provides a framework for our actions in terms of what’s ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. Such terms are always subjective, however, and of little value in this debate. Instead we have to try to find some meta-perspective for formulating the role of a digitalised ethics in a digital society.

One interpretation of the problems facing us is that the digital era challenges our core understanding of what it means to be human. In the modern world, the notion of autonomy and of respect for norms of equality, fairness, justice and democratic practices are under fire from all directions. Nation states, which traditionally have been the defenders of such agents

and rights, are being weakened by neo-liberalism and globalisation. Increasingly their power is being passed to international institutions, such as the European Court of Justice and the World Trade Organisation, over which there are few democratic controls. In turn, these institutions struggle against the collective power of multinational corporations, such as Google, Apple, Microsoft and Facebook, which increasingly dominate the internet space. The citizen gets caught in the middle here, becoming radically disempowered. Citizen activists and NGOs can occasionally counter the drifts towards 'digital feudalism', sometimes in collaboration with the rule of law and the nation state, but they lack an effective voice.

Technology is not neutral but embedded with certain values. The imbalance in power between individuals/users and service providers (both commercial and public) is leading to a loss of agency. Technology is available but we may not be controlling it to the extent that we thought we were. A crucial question is whether we can design systems that empower users, and so restore human agency, and what this means in reality.

Some observers saw the issue in terms of a crisis in human rights. Taking an analogy from mathematics: at the beginning of the 20th century mathematicians thought that their field was fully mapped and understood, and that there was nothing more to be discovered. However, pioneers such as Dirac and Schrödinger showed this not to be the case. Their research not only opened new avenues, it challenged the very foundations on which mathematics was based, leading to totally new perspectives. Arguably, we face a similar situation today in relation to human rights. In the digital era, we need to redefine how we think about human rights based on new foundations. Fundamental rights to security, to privacy and human dignity, and to freedom of expression and information contain inherent conflicts and contradictions. It is not simply a matter of 'balancing' one right against another, but rather of fundamentally rethinking human rights to fit our situation.

Unwrapping these issues further, it is clear that there is no such thing as 'total security'. We should abandon the binary logic which says we are either secure or not. Rather we should think more in terms of a continuum and thresholds, with appropriate checks and balances.

Privacy, too, is an evolving concept. The notion of privacy is deeply rooted in social, historical and cultural factors and behaviours which are themselves changing. Through digital technologies, increasingly we see an overlap between private and public spaces and selves. What does privacy mean in a society characterised by massive data sharing? The idea that 'we have nothing to fear if we have nothing to hide' must be refuted. Society must allow people to do things in secret and in a private way if it is to function harmoniously. Privacy is contextual and directional: for example, we expect and adopt different levels of privacy with our doctor than with our family.

Digital etiquette, or netiquette as its sometimes called, is a basic set of rules you should follow in order to make the internet better for others, and better for you. It's just as important to treat people with courtesy and respect online as it is in real life. When you instant message, chat, or email someone over the Internet, they can't see your face to tell if you're teasing them or saying something in jest. How do you practice good Netiquette? It's simple – just treat others as you want to be treated – with courtesy and respect. People know these rules but usually do not follow when using the Internet. This includes hacking others computer, downloading illegally, plagiarism and using bad language on the Internet. Not a lot of schools teach students how important it is to follow these rules that everyone knows. If all of us follow this it could make the Internet a better space to share and use.

Techdirt did a study that showed that many people purposely responded to emails late at work, because replying to quickly implies that they do not have enough work to do. However, it appears the situation may be somewhat different when it comes to instant messaging and SMS (txt) messages. A study in the UK among office workers found that many consider it to be rude if you don't reply to IM or SMS messages quickly. That's the difference between synchronous and asynchronous communication. Even if email and text messaging may seem similar, it appears people have different expectations of different types of messaging.

It seems today that most students do not know what digital etiquette is and they are offended on the Internet. According to these results teenagers are badly influenced on the Internet by inappropriate language and bullying or offending others for fun. They do not know how big the consequences can get. Today it is important that students learn and know about digital etiquette because it will be more and more important.

Responsible digital behavior makes every user a role model for students. Students watch how others use a technology and assume if others can use it in that manner, so can they. The problem with teaching digital technology is that few rules have been established for the proper use of these devices. The proliferation of new technologies has created a steep learning curve for all users. Some users are more adept and in tune than others, and those who lag behind often do not understand the subtle rules that have emerged among early adopters.

Essential questions

Are students aware of others when they use technology?

Do students realize how their use of technology affects others?

In the past, it was up to parents and families to teach basic etiquette to their children before they reached school. The problem with the new technologies is that parents have not been informed about what is appropriate and what is not. Very often, parents and students alike are learning these technologies from their peers or by watching others use the technology. School technology teams are in a better position to teach kids appropriate digital etiquette.

This can be a difficult process for both students and their parents. Behavior that may be considered poor digital etiquette by older users may be viewed very differently by students. According to a Cingular Wireless survey on mobile phone etiquette, 39% of users said they would answer a ringing phone while having a face-to-face conversation (Greenspan, 2003). In the past, it was polite to excuse oneself from a conversation before doing something else, but today those rules have been bent almost to the breaking point. And with new uses of the technologies (such as texting and social networking) it makes the process even more difficult.

When students see adults using technologies inappropriately, they assume that this is how they should act. This leads to more inappropriate technology behavior. This cycle must be broken soon, as more technologies are coming along and making this process even more difficult. The new technology tools can be seen on TV and in movies, and their use has become mainstreamed. With the lens of digital citizenship, people can evaluate their own technology use, as well as technology use by others. A good digital citizen seeks out feedback from others to evaluate their use of technology, and then makes personal adjustments based on this feedback.

As members of a digital society, we are asked to do what is best for the larger group. To do this, we must think about how our technology use affects others. Good digital citizens respect others and learn ways to use technology courteously and effectively.

But not one will develop the perfect solution to the ethical dilemmas that we are facing today. And we should not look for perfect solutions. We need to see these as what they are and we need to acknowledge the context they are evolving in. They are experiments and we are in an age of experimentation where laws, technology and not the least our limits as individuals are tested and negotiated on a daily basis. It's the sum of all the efforts in the name of "ethics", "privacy" and "human dignity" that will pave the way into an ethical technological future.

The following **Netiquette** information came from <https://tech.blorge.com/>

1. Keep e-mails short and to the point

Office e-mail has a specific business purpose such as getting results, communicating an important fact or getting a response. The chances of quickly accomplishing that purpose increase when your e-mail is short, easy to understand and gets to the point.

2. Write the action you are requesting and topic in the 'subject' line

Describe what you need the recipient to do and the topic in the "subject" line. Something short and to the point. For instance: "Please review Jones proposal letter;" or "Need blueprint for Jones project." By clearly identifying the purpose of your e-mail in the subject line, the recipient will quickly know what you are writing about; it's easy to find; and it separates your e-mail from spam.

3. Check your grammar and spelling

Grammar and spelling are often overlooked, but remember that your e-mail may be going out to a client, a prospective client, your employees or maybe your boss. You want to look smart, not sloppy. Use any built-in spell check before sending an e-mail.

4. Be cautious. Think before you send an e-mail

It's so easy to hit the "reply" button and write a message. This can be a problem if you act spontaneously. Temper and tone matter. In most instances, once an e-mail is sent, it's gone. You cannot take it back. So if you have written any harsh words or forwarded an inappropriate e-mail to several colleagues and inadvertently added your boss's name to the distribution list, once you hit "send" they will be reading it shortly.

5. Remember that e-mail is not private

When you send an e-mail to someone, it goes through many networks before it reaches your recipient and may even leave copies of your e-mail on a server, which can be accessed. It may seem as though you are communicating only with that person (and in most instances you are); however, your e-mail can be forwarded by the recipient to others. A number of companies, including Verizon, offer e-mail encryption products, which encrypt a sender's e-mail message and digitally sign it. The services also verify and authenticate that the message has not been altered and prevent it from being opened by anyone except the intended recipient. Additionally, users can lock e-mails so that they cannot be viewed by others.

6. Use out of office response, if available, to alert others of your absence

Many e-mail systems and services let you set up an automatic reply advising senders that you are not available. For efficiency of communications, trigger this auto-reply tool when you are away so senders know not to expect a timely response.

7. Keep it strictly business

It is best not to use the business e-mail systems for personal communication. Use your personal e-mail instead.

8. Be courteous, considerate and responsible when writing an e-mail message

Communication via e-mail is often considered informal, but you shouldn't treat it that way. Remember, your e-mail may be going to your boss, your clients, your prospective clients, your colleagues. Be courteous and reply in a timely manner. It's good to have a signature in your e-mail so the recipient can easily contact you. Additionally, it clearly identifies you and your company. Before e-mailing a large file, it's wise to alert the recipients to be sure they want the file and in case they need to make room for it.

9. Keep your computer virus free

Lastly, make sure your computer is virus-free because you don't want to be the person sending everyone a virus.

10. Use technology in ways that minimize negative effects on others

Technology is a great way to connect us all, but can also be used to cause harm onto others. Harm isn't necessarily talking about physical harm, it can also mean losing a person's files on the computer, or actual possessions, like money or property. Just like in actual society, you should not be trying to harm others, and others should not be trying to harm you. For example, hackers do this all the time. Watch out for them.

11. Use technology when it is appropriate

Sometimes, it's not a good idea to use technology. For example, say person A (we'll call him Bob) is sitting near to person B (we'll call him Joe.) Joe and Bob are having a disagreement over something such as messing up an assignment, etc. Joe decides to write a long, grueling and very inflammatory email. STOP. Person C (Mr. Jorb, the teacher) suggests that instead of writing an email to someone sitting near you, you can discuss it in a civilized manner after class. Should Joe have written the email, they may get into a larger argument, and someone could get hurt. However, if they discuss it after the said class, then they can be civilized and maybe become friends again.

12. Respect others online: no cyber bullying, flaming, inflammatory language, etc.

You should not abuse other people online example sending them a message insulting their weight or size, you should also not curse at people online and you should not send spam messages because every time they check their message they will think they have a real message (and this wastes their time). You should also not repeat E-mails because every time someone checks their E-mail they will get loads of the same E-mail and that wastes their time because they think each E-mail they get is different and it is not. You should also not download programs onto public computers. You should not get addicted to being on computers or gaming consoles because you might lose your friends. You should be on an appropriate amount about 2-5 hours a day. Don't let electronics take over your life example they become so addicted that they can't get off and when they can't play they try to hurt themselves just to get back on, and they cry for a few days if they lose something like a game or item in a game. You should not send inappropriate messages.

13. The last but most important rule is "respect others as you want to be respected."

Don't change someone's account if you know their password and don't change someone's computer background if they are not looking. You should not try to send viruses to other people.

computers, because it does not really help you and it annoys other people. Don't hack electronic devices such as ipods, computers, etc.

Digital Etiquette Issues

- Using technology in ways that minimize the negative effects on others
- Using technology when it is contextually appropriate
- Respecting others online: not engaging in cyberbullying, flaming, inflammatory language, and so forth

Digital Etiquette Keywords

- technology etiquette
- netiquette
- Acceptable Use Policies (AUP)
- digital ethics
- cyberethics

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