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# A Framework for Addressing Ethics in the Digital Age

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## Abstract

The networked society is impacting all aspects of our lives and changing the way that information is obtained and used. For students this impact is changing how information is shared and tasks are performed just as in the workplace. This research will develop a measurement scale for digital ethics and begin to propose approaches to leverage this knowledge sharing.

**Keywords:** Digital ethics, pedagogy, digital culture, and digital code of ethics

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The focus of this paper is to address the culture of the networked society. As Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, and Sanders (1990, p. 291) note manifestations of culture can range from "shallow to deep" inclusive of symbols, heroes, rituals which become practices that in turn form values. The objective of this paper is to apply this framework for assessing culture to the ethical values of the networked society and particularly how the networked aspect of technology and media shape values to form a "Digital Ethics".

As Takenouchi (2006) notes we live in an age of digital reductionism where processes, social interactions, and humans are represented by digital patterns and artificial intelligence. The underlying assumption here is that these humans, social interactions, and processes can be represented and replicated digitally. Accepting this digital reductionism view of society has crept into values of the network society. This is particularly the case for those tightly networked by their smart phones and other handheld devices.

Takenouchi (2006) extended Frankl's contrast of homo sapiens who achieve fulfillment in the

meaning of life even in the face of suffering while the homo sapiens are rational focused on efficiency and effectiveness. Takenouchi (2006) noted that the current educational focus on information literacy can lead to a reductionism of the mechanical view of humans and these information literacy skills are then prized for obtaining jobs. Takenouchi (2006) extends his argument that those high in information literacy are in many cases devoid of fulfillment where they have fewer and less deep relationships with others.

The paradox of the Takenouchi argument is that this age is intensively connected and networked. Vast groups can organize and carry out collective action whether it is an overthrow of a government or a flash party. Yet the connectedness seems the converse of Grannovetter's (1973) work on the strength of weak ties. In this networked age the ties are so numerous and so easily connected (friended) using social media, that the very meaning of "friends" has changed. Those tightly tethered to their hand held devices are in many cases experiencing connectedness overload. As the nature of media expanded from written, computer based to electronic mail, voice mail, etc. there was much written regarding information overload. Now the issue of overload

has morphed into connectedness overload. Day to day activities are disjointed with little time for deep thinking as the networked homo luden is tracking every movement via tweets of friends and others, responding to text messaging so that the homo luden is living in the moment with immediate feedback and entertainment from the very accessible handheld. What happened to deep thinking in moments of uninterrupted solitude?

## 2. Digital Ethics Model Evolution

As Hofstede et al (1990) notes values develop from shallow to deep. These values constitute what the culture views as good or evil. The digital culture continues to evolve where the symbols for this culture are the latest smart phone with fancy covers and personalization added. Other symbols include the branding of Twitter and Facebook on the smart phone content. A symbol of the engaged homo luden is anyone with a spare moment staring at the device – browsing or texting. This behavior occurs in classes, meetings, social gatherings - seemingly an involuntary behavior of the homo luden.

Another aspect of culture noted by Hofstede (1990) are heroes who possess characteristics that are highly prized. For the digital culture these heroes can be gaming masters, a person on Twitter with many followers, a person on Facebook with many friends, a blogger who attracts a large following, or a Youtube personality who reviews new consumer products.

From this engagement with the handheld and the constant exposure to the heroes of the Digital Culture, the homo luden develops rituals of digital engagement. As Hofstede (1990) observed these rituals can be observed but the cultural means of these rituals evolved from the network interaction of the homo luden.

From the symbols, heroes, and rituals practices of behavior and interaction result that then inform the values of the Digital Culture. As those that embrace this Digital Culture grow in size then these cultural norms become more prevalent. The purpose of this research is to examine how this expanding Digital Culture impacts the ethics of those immersed in this culture. The digital technology itself opens up opportunities for ethical norms to be extended

as a result of the widespread adoption of those changed ethical norms.

## 3. Digital Culture and the Changing Ethical Landscape

When the Internet was just coming of age for the general public and email was being adopted and some of the early web browsers using the World Wide Web were finding their footing, Mason (1986) anticipated ethical issues of the information age: privacy, accuracy, property, and accessibility. With privacy the issues dealt with what must a person reveal to others and what are the safeguards. Then accuracy is with respect to who enforces that the data maintained is authentic and accurate – a case in point are the data aggregators. In property the issue is ownership of the channels of distribution of the data and that issue is under debate with the Internet Service Providers wanting to charge based on the data downloaded. Accessibility pertains to the information that a person or organization can obtain and what are the safeguards. To Mason's (1986) point about accessibility, I would add that a current issue is that the data and intellectual capital is so accessible that this has created ethical issues of copying and plagiarism. But Mason's PAPA has stood the test of time and technological innovation to still serve as the underpinning of the dimensions of digital ethics.

The availability of networked smart phones and the collaborative engagement of students who are encouraged to work in teams and to embrace open source intellectual property is creating a new ethical landscape. Harkins and Kubik (2010, p. 138) introduced the term "ethical cheating" as emerging from this new educational landscape that encourages the sharing of "ideas, knowledge, and information". Further Harkins and Kubik (2010) argue that to be a successful knowledge worker in the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires these collaborative skills along with the development of associated information search skills. These collaborative skills honed in social networking and in gaming sites are artifacts that are changing the ethical landscape.

Through these artifacts and practices the values of what constitutes cheating is being reformed. Educating these aptus homo ludens (connected individuals engaged in fun) is a challenge. As Huizinga(1995) notes, play is a critical part of culture development. These aptus homo ludens can engage in collective action whether it is

problem solving, parties, or changing political systems. The challenge for educators in the classroom of these apus homo ludens is how to engage these students and to use the technology in which they are engaged to allow them to discover learning and infer from those discoveries. Traditional approaches to education will not result in the critical thinking and inference needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Educational approaches that while covering a body of knowledge do not require memorization of the students but enable synthesis and integration of that knowledge are needed. Traditional pedagogical approaches will need to be changed and extended for the aptus homo luden.

Harkins and Kubik (2010, p. 140) further note that to compete in the global intertwined economy necessitates that "workers and students overcome the deficiencies of their respective human capital development system". This is making the argument that this shift in the norms of cheating is preparing these students for the global competitive space and Harkins and Kubik (2010) refer to this as "ethical cheating". The learning and team work needed in online gaming prepare students to share to accomplish an objective and to compete.

Another aspect of the digital culture noted by Harkins and Kubik (2010) is the ability to participate in that culture in anonymity or at least not identifiable by demographic characteristics. The definition of culture from Hofstede (1977, p. 4) is "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" and the digital culture of this paper is certainly characterized by this interconnected collective space in which the participants share common patterns of interaction. There is even a short hand for text communication to enrich communication in a short text exchange in this shared digital culture.

Floridi (1999) in his discussion of information ethics that the moral law driving this information space is to achieve what is good for the information entity and the infosphere in general. The infosphere consists of interconnected information entities where Floridi discusses that the infosphere is driven by moral laws to prevent and remove the loss of information through random variation known as entropy and to promote the welfare of the infosphere by

sufficient quantity and quality of information that of a rich variety.

#### **4. DIGITAL CODE OF ETHICS**

The purpose of this research is to develop a Digital Code of Ethics that will span the cultures of difference areas of the world and be applicable given the level of technology and adoption in that part of the work. Mason's (1986) ethical dimensions of privacy, accuracy, property, and accessibility will be used in the development of the Digital Code of Ethics.

##### *Privacy Issues:*

To what extent do you put your personal information on the Internet using the social media such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.?

To what extent do your friends put personal information on the Internet using the social media such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.?

##### *Accuracy Issues:*

To what extent do you monitor personal information about you on the web?

To what extent do your friends monitor their personal information on the web?

##### *Property Issues:*

To what extent do you give credit (reference) to material that you obtained from a web source?

To what extent do your friends give credit (reference) to material that they obtained from a web source?

To what extent are you concerned about the quantity of data you use via the Internet?

To what extent are your friends concerned about the quantity of data they use via the Internet?

##### *Accessibility Issues:*

To what extent are satisfied with the extent to which you can access information on the Internet?

To what extent are your friends satisfied with the extent to which they can access information on the Internet?

To what extent are hand held cell phones used by you for access to the Internet?

To what extent does the cost of accessing the Internet reduce your use of the Internet?

Using these items the goal is to assess the validity and reliability of these items in determining the impact of the handheld media in different cultural contexts.

These smart devices are changing not only how we communicate with each other but the pedagogies used in the classroom to reach the aptus homo ludens in face-to-face and online classrooms (Table 1).

**Table 1. Pedagogies to Use in the Digital Age**

<b>Tradition Pedagogies</b>	<b>Teaching Pedagogies for the Digital Age</b>
Lecture	Engagement using active learning
Testing based on recall of facts and synthesis	Testing where student can use networked resources
Student teams to work on a specific project with meetings	Virtual students teams to work on a specific project but no face to face meetings
Lecture	Record class discussion and make available via podcats
Team presentations	Teams prepare Youtube video of their project presentation for presentation to class

Students as aptus homo ludens present a challenge and opportunity for educators. Not only do presentations of materials need to be adapted to incorporate new media but the ability of the aptus homo ludens to engage in collective activity provide collaborative context in which these groups can share knowledge, think critically in developing innovative solutions to critical thinking problems. The age of memorization is over – students can find facts/descriptions on the web as needed in assignments enabling higher order thinking using the resources at their fingertips. The aptus homo ludens need to be clearly versed in intellectual property ownership and the need for

citations as they develop higher level critical thinking solutions to complex problems.

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