Chapter 2
Social Networks and Students' Ethical Behavior

Lori N. K. Leonard
University of Tulsa, USA

Tracy S. Manly
University of Tulsa, USA

ABSTRACT

Social networking sites are prevalent among young adults. College students in particular are utilizing these sites to keep in contact with friends and to make new friends. However, with the positives of social networking, there are also negatives. Students can provide too much personal information online, engage in inappropriate conversations, scrutinize other students, ridicule peers, and so forth. Because of the impersonal environment that technology creates, an individual's normal behavior can change which leads to a change in his/her basic ethical structure. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a discussion of the changing ethical structure of students, as well as an examination of the ways to teach ethics, given those changes. The chapter also includes a discussion of four classical ethical theories that should be considered when discussing or teaching social networking. Future research directions are also given.

INTRODUCTION

The ethical choices made by individuals are strongly influenced by the person's environment. What one decides to wear to class or eat in the cafeteria is influenced by roommates and peers. Whether one gossips is influenced by friendships and acquaintances. Wanting to belong and have

friendships is a part of student life. This need for belonging is even more intent when social networking environments are considered (Dwyer, Hiltz, & Passerini, 2007). The social environment encountered by current traditional college students (that have been termed, "wired from birth") differs vastly from that faced by those in previous generations. The ability to be connected at all times blurs the line between professional and personal time, given that every moment in time can be captured

and recorded on the network (Kumar, Novak, & Tomkins, 2006) and that those connections can extend beyond geographical boundaries (Maran, 2009). In some significant ways, this phenomenon also affects the ethical decisions and behaviors of students in the current generation (Gross & Acquisti, 2005). Universities, especially business colleges, are amplifying ethics coverage in the curriculum. Ethics is often integrated into existing business discipline courses, such as accounting, finance, management information systems, and marketing. Additionally, Universities are being to develop stand-alone courses. Many of the current stand-alone courses are being offered at the graduate level. Regardless of the course, the approach to teaching business ethics may also need to be modified to address the current social environment facing students. For example, many younger adults will post virtually any personal information or photo to Facebook (Barnes, 2006), including phone number and address as well as indecent photos. Students willingly watch the misfortunes of others on a YouTube video when they would be unlikely to tolerate similar behavior if witnessed personally. Given these changes in the environment, how ethics is addressed in the curriculum must change.

The concern is that a student's basic ethical structure is being altered by technological advancements. This can be explained by looking at the six components of one's basic ethical structure: consequences, likelihood of effect, relatedness, reach of result, society's opinion, and time to consequences. Each of these categories needs to be addressed to examine the effect of readily available online applications on them. This chapter examines how the environment of social networks and constant connectedness influences the components of a student's basic ethical structure. It also proposes ways to teach in this changing ethical environment by presenting four ethical theories (utilitarianism, distributive justice, rights theory, and virtue ethics) that should be considered when teaching ethics to students. In many cases, just making students aware of the ethical concerns is enough. In other cases, specific steps have to be taken to modify the students' intended actions by making them aware of the consequences of the action or the effect on others. The chapter will, therefore, provide a discussion of the changing ethical structure of students and an examination of the ways to teach ethics given those changes.

BACKGROUND

Fifty-five percent of online Americans between the ages of 12-17 use at least one online social networking site (Lenhart & Madden, 2007), and seventy-five percent of online young adults between the ages of 18-24 have a profile on a social networking site (Lenhart, 2009) and this number is increasing every day. Social networking sites, such as Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn and Twitter, allow individuals to build relationships with other individuals who share a common interest, whether it is personal or professional (DiMicco, et al, 2008). Users can create a profile and build a personal network, while breaking down barriers of time, distance, and culture (Maran, 2009; Reynolds, 2010). The common interest is often the simple desire to interact with other individuals. For teens, girls primarily use social networking sites to reinforce existing relationships, where as boys use social networking sites to flirt and make new friends (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). Teens and young adults utilize social networking sites to keep up with friends, make plans with friends, make new friends, and so forth (Lenhart, 2009). Regardless of the reason, social networking has become an integral part of young adults' daily lives. For example, when the author's morning business class was asked how many of them had checked their MySpace or Facebook prior to attending class, nearly all raised their hand. Yet, when asked whether they had checked their email before class, only a third raised their hand. Twenty-two percent of American youths visit so-

Related Content

Open Project Planner
Kenneth David Strang (2012). *International Journal of Risk and Contingency Management (pp. 58-61).*
www.irma-international.org/article/open-project-planner/67376

A Survey of Security Models Using Effective Moving Target Defenses
B S Kiruthika Devi, T. Subbulakshmiand KV Mahesh Babu (2018). *International Journal of Information Security and Privacy (pp. 123-140).*
www.irma-international.org/article/survey-security-models-using-effective/208129

Cybercafés and Prevention of Terrorist Activities
Esharenana E. Adomiand Williams P. Akpochafo (2008). *Security and Software for Cybercafes (pp. 270-282).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/cybercafés-prevention-terrorist-activities/28542

Motivational Influences on Project Risk Management and Team Performance
James Williams Akpan (2015). *International Journal of Risk and Contingency Management (pp. 34-48).*
www.irma-international.org/article/motivational-influences-on-project-risk-management-and-team-performance/133546

Information Technology Leadership and Change in Higher Education
Joseph Ezale Cobbinah (2020). *IT Issues in Higher Education: Emerging Research and Opportunities (pp. 36-54).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/information-technology-leadership-and-change-in-higher-education/237664