Chapter 6
Ethical Decision Making with Information Systems Students:
An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

Information Technology (IT) is a new tool in education that continually changes and offers new opportunities for teaching and learning. In general, the effects of IT are complex and depend upon people's decisions about development and use. This study investigates the ethical issues in education in terms of Information Systems students' attitudes at Saudi universities towards digital piracy. The differences in the ethical decision-making process, ethical awareness, and intention to perform questionable acts is examined. The authors tested for differences in attitudes toward eighteen different questionable actions by using three different factors (gender, age, and university level). The measures of awareness capture the extent to which respondents felt that a particular action was unethical according to each of several ethical criteria. This work explored information technology ethics in several ways. The work analyzed whether information technology use is viewed by individuals as an ethical topic and demographic differences were explored. Significant differences were found in many cases between demographic groups based on ethical issues. These findings can be used to target and address ethical issues and enforcement in information systems curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Online information is widely available and the Internet opens up an apparently infinite cyberspace of information. Extensive possession of Information Technology (IT) and information access via the Internet becomes easier and new generations of people have eagerly accepted computer technology as a natural window on the information world (Hannabuss, 1998).

With the advent of intensive telecommunications capabilities and sophisticated databases, widespread distribution of information security breaches, viruses or other questionable behavior on the Internet have recently become a concern. The misuse of and unethical behavior toward Information Systems (IS) have caused significant losses to businesses and society (Leonard & Cronan, 2005). Organizations have invested in the development and implementation of security measures, but computer misuse continues to be a problem. Cross-cultural comparison of ethics has recently gained significant abundance of research conducted over the past years, devoted to ethics in a business perspective due to the globalization, economic integration and internationalization of businesses (Gbadamosi, 2004) However, the research concentration on digital piracy in Information Systems (IS) has only recently been raised due to the illegal copying/downloading of copyrighted software, media files, and other digital media such as MP3s, and DVD movies (Al-Rafee & Cronan, 2006).

In 2008, fifty-seven percent of all personal computer software was pirated. The worldwide PC software piracy rate rose from 38 percent to 41 percent, because PC shipments grew fastest in high-piracy countries such as China and India caused a loss of t $53 billion to the software industry world-wide (Business Software Alliance, 2008).

- The lowest-piracy countries are the United States, Japan, New Zealand, and Luxembourg, all near 20 percent. The highest-piracy countries are Armenia, Bangladesh, Georgia, and Zimbabwe, all over 90 percent.
- The highest-piracy regions are Central/Eastern Europe (67 percent) and Latin America (65 percent). The lowest regions are North America (21 percent) and the European Union (35 percent).
- More than 1 of every 3 copies of software installed worldwide is pirated. Worldwide losses grew by 11 percent to $53.0 billion (BSA/SPA, 2008).

Information Systems (IS) students must not only learn about information technology and its uses, but must address the relevant social and ethical issues that continually occur. Information Systems undergraduates, with little real-world experience, have difficulty comprehending the relevance of these issues. Since many undergraduate students are computer knowledgeable, it is time to raise the students' level of consciousness concerning ethical behavior and technology.

This study is a current review of information technology issues both new and old changed to understand how these issues are commonly viewed by today's students. In some ways, it is an update of prior studies (Harris & Weaver, 1994) used a similar approach of obtaining student "respondents' attitudes toward various ethical situations". It is intended to provide insight into the current state of IT student ethics today. It is hoped that understanding can lead to an informed discussion and improvement in educational efforts to improve IT ethics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

When individuals are faced with ethical dilemmas they conventionally try to solve them by calling on moral principles and moral analysis which can be introduced at an organizational or individual

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