

The Crisis Due to the Dearth of Network Ethics Education in Japan

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The majority of teenagers in Japan go to college without having been taught how to engage in Internet society in a morally responsible manner. Those bereft of rectitude engage in various problematic behaviors on campus. In order to provide a hint of how to solve these problems, this paper will give an overview of the history of network/information ethics education in Japan and clarify issues and prospects with regard to Japanese network/information ethics education. To clearly delineate the path to our current impasse we have divided the history of Japanese network/information ethics education into roughly three periods: the late 1990s, the early 2000s and the late 2000s. An analysis of the salience of certain terms that have been used in network /information ethics for each of the three periods is provided. This examination is intended to clarify the aims of Japanese network/information ethics education; what little has been achieved and the crucial issues that remain to be resolved.

KEYWORDS : network/information ethics education, netiquette, strengthening regulations

1. Introduction

This paper provides an overview of the history of network/information ethics education in Japan to clarify issues and prospects with regard to Japanese network/information ethics education.

I divide the history of Japanese network/information ethics education into roughly three periods —the late 1990s (from 1995 to 1999), the early 2000s (from 2000 to 2005), and the late 2000s (from 2006 to present) — and analyze the language that has been used to disseminate network/information ethics in each of the three periods. Essentially, this overview will clarify what Japanese network/information ethics education has aimed to achieve as well as the issues it has failed to resolve.

I will utilize research reports of the ‘Construction of Information Ethics’ project, the development of which was entrusted to

Chiba University, Kyoto University, and Hiroshima University by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, between 1998 and 2002. Some parts of the research project lack cohesion because it was conducted during a period when ethical issues in regard to information had become a social problem in Japan. Nonetheless, the research project’s copious materials offer a pertinent historical record of network/information ethics education since its inception in the nineties.

Hiroshima University was in charge of project research on network/information ethics education, a project in which I was able to play one of central roles. To date, no other research into information ethics exceeds the scale of this project.

2. The Coining of the Terms ‘Information Ethics’ and ‘Network Ethics’

Before starting my main analysis, I should define the following two words:

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‘information ethics’ and ‘network ethics.’

‘Information ethics’ derives from ‘computer ethics.’ It was in the 1980s when ethical issues specific to the computer became apparent. One of the oldest publications that discussed computer ethics is Deborah G. Johnson’s *Computer Ethics*¹⁾ published in the U.S. in 1985. In the paper entitled “*What is Computer Ethics?*” a pioneering discourse on the subject published in 1985, the author James. H. Moor described the relevant issues as follows: “The analysis of the nature of [the] social impact of computer technology and the corresponding formulation and justification of policies for the ethical use of such a technology,”²⁾. As this comment shows, ethical issues discussed in this period targeted mainly computer specialists. Even in Japan, two ethicists published an analysis of ethical issues for professional computer specialists in the late 1980s.³⁾

However, computer amateurs instead of computer specialists contributed to morality problems as use of the Internet spread dramatically in the mid-1990s, and the term ‘information ethics’ replaced the term ‘computer ethics’. The Japanese term ‘*Joho-Rinri*’ was coined as a translation of the English term ‘information ethics.’

Moreover, Japanese information ethics (*Joho-Rinri*) encompassed greater variety and a wider meaning than the original concept of ‘information Ethics’ in English.

Researchers involved in the above project sought to uncover hidden ethical problems by questioning values embedded in the use of technology rather than just ending the project after seeking solutions to the existing ethical problems. In this sense, information ethics is not merely computer ethics; it is the basic study of every field of applied ethics in the age of the advanced information society.

Consequently, issues of information ethics require a clear definition of the ethical problems posed by the computerization and informatization of contemporary society, the

construction of a framework for finding solutions to the identified problems with actual descriptions of those solutions to the problems. The term ‘network ethics’ generally refers to something related to ‘ethics of the Internet society’ which was called ‘computer ethics’ about 15 years ago in Japan. For this paper ‘network/information ethics,’ is synonymous with ‘ethics of the Internet society’. The term ‘information ethics’ was used as a term that represented present ‘network ethics’ in Japan until middle of the 2000s.

3. The Late 1990s (from 1995 to 1999)

The Etymology of Netiquette

The late 1990s (from 1995 to 1999) saw the rapid development of the Internet society, which created the problem of people not used to the rules of the Internet society inconveniencing others. Those who set out to educate the unwashed were said to be teaching netiquette or network/information ethics education.

Netiquette means the dos and don’ts when using cyber communication such as e-mail.⁴⁾ Netiquette guidelines are proffered by organizations and individuals when inviting new users to participate in the Internet culture. “Their objective is to minimize the complexity of interactions when using the Internet via optimization of netiquette,”⁵⁾. Simply put, the veteran recommends the neophyte to do as the Romans do. However, rules constantly change, and so today’s netiquette is likely to be updated with the technology driving the changes in the Internet culture.

Concrete examples of the foregoing include instructions such as “Files sent via e-mail should be less than 50 KB,” “The name of the sender should be mentioned at the beginning of an e-mail,”⁶⁾ and “write a subject using the phonetic alphabet.”⁷⁾

Issues with Netiquette Education

Netiquette accomplishes the same objective as

vehicle traffic manners. It serves to prevent problems on the electronic network and to enhance the smooth management of the network.⁸⁾ Ostensibly, it ensures moral security.

With regard to the nature of moral security, the conscience of the performer is not in question, only the outcome of his behavior. In addition, in this researcher's experience, when the network environment is highly regulated, internal deterrents such as self-respect are weakened as the popularity of the electronic network grows; external deterrents also do not work well because of characteristics specific to the network environment, such as its impersonal character and anonymity. Therefore, netiquette education is expected to be effective to a certain degree in combating improper usage due to ignorance and negligence and in preventing rudimentary errors, but it is ineffective in controlling those who make unacceptable violation with full knowledge of the illegality of their actions.⁹⁾

In this sense, netiquette education in schools is merely "guidance for daily living without the use of reasoning" rather than "the development of value judgments in the usage of the computer and the Internet based on rational thought by the students themselves."¹⁰⁾

4. The Early 2000s (from 2000 to 2005)

Information Ethics Education to Replace Netiquette Education

The early 2000s (from 2000 to 2005) saw a dramatic increase in hackers inflicting serious damage with the proliferation of computer viruses. This is why information ethics education in this period meant education to prevent the spawning of wrongdoers in the network society who inflict serious damage because of ignorance or negligence.

The definition of 'information ethics' by the Japanese Universities Association for Computer Education is the "minimum set of rules that each individual needs to observe to

avoid conflict with the rights of others in social life in the information society"¹¹⁾ and the "code of conduct to utilize the network system and the information network system when observed by the users' sound social normative consciousness, the observation of which is mandatory by the law and code of the school."¹²⁾

By this definition, information ethics education is nothing else but the education for sound development of the information society through deterrence and prevention of violation of privacy and intellectual property, or destruction of the information system, in particular, unauthorized utilization of information and its conveyance media, and illegal duplication of information.¹³⁾ 'Good net-walkers,' which information ethics education seeks to create, are no more than the "users who have the knowledge to secure their own and others' safety and who can avoid behavior that deviates from such knowledge regardless of their internal inclinations."¹⁴⁾

Issues of Information Ethics Education

It can be said that, 'information ethics education' is merely education ensuring security on the electronic network. In other words, this is 'netiquette education.' The following five characteristics of information ethics clearly reinforce this point.

- (1) Ethics of behavior
Behavior instead of humanity is questioned.
- (2) Passive ethics
It orders users not to interfere with others instead of helping them. Essentially, exhibiting good behavior is emphasized instead of not exhibiting bad behavior.
- (3) Ethics of results acquisition
Only the outcome is questioned, and no motive behind the behavior is questioned.
- (4) Ethics of knowledge procurement

Behavior based on knowledge and rules instead of moral fiber being questioned.

- (5) Ethics of safety maintenance
Safety of systems and users is the goal.

In this information ethics education, however, the rules to be observed are well understood, but they neither determine the selection of behavior, nor do they prevent clever egoists (rational egoists) from running amuck.¹⁵⁾ Besides hackers and crackers, students who write a report by copying and pasting information from the Internet without modification and those who repeatedly post malicious messages on blogs can be deemed 'rational egoists.' Information ethics education, that is the 'education in security on the electronic network,' cannot prevent misconduct by these kinds of people.

Information Morality Education to Replace Information Ethics Education

The limits and possibilities of 'information morality education' for the discussion of network ethics education in Japan have generated much controversy.

Information morality education was established to overcome the limits of information ethics education and develop net-walkers with good 'moral fiber.' Simply stated, it assumes that those who are compassionate and kind (according to the government course guidelines for elementary schools) can exhibit good behavior, even in the Internet society.

Information morality education is defined as the underlying ideas and attitudes that encourage appropriate activities in the information society.¹⁶⁾ At the same time, developing information morality education is defined as developing ideas and attitudes that lead people to take the right action in a new situation while enabling them to acquire rules for coping and enabling them to know what they should not do.¹⁷⁾ That is, the word

'attitudes' is used to move information morality education beyond merely teaching rules. In this sense, the purpose of information—morality education is to inculcate attitudes instead of rules.

This means that information morality education is humanity education, which has a different aim from teaching the minimum rules for civil behavior; it is education designed for those who do not knowingly violate principles and who are compassionate.

5. The Late 2000s (from 2006 to present)

The Limits of Information Morality Education

The late 2000s (from 2006 to present) saw the occurrence of serious incidents involving cell phone terminals as a result of the devices' sophistication and the improvement of the mobile network. The incidents included plagiarism of information on the Internet for use in reports and papers, and the posting of radical and extreme messages on the Internet bulletin boards.

Because many of the incidents that have occurred are serious and require a prompt response, the trend toward adopting a policy of strengthening legal and technological regulations instead of time-consuming education is growing as a means to resolve problems with the network.

Among the issues behind this trend, there are two that should be discussed: the 'failure to construct a methodology for information morality education as attitude education in the early 2000s' and an 'increased number of youth, cell phone owners.'

To deal with the first issue, "the failure to construct a methodology for information morality education as attitude education," steps were taken to actively introduce appropriate seminars in information technology classes in high schools (information technology classes as specified by the Government Course Guidelines for the High Schools). Each teacher was

entrusted with the task of delivering information morality education in the seminar. However, what teachers in the field wanted most was a concrete method to implement the seminar.¹⁸⁾

Morality education that is the predecessor of attitude education is deficient and, in fact, no reference exists for information morality education in Japan. The objective of morality education focuses on “nurturing morality through moral feeling, judgment, will to implement, and attitude to implement” (according to the Government Course Guidelines for Middle High School). It is regarded as the education of intellect and attitude that precedes teaching rules as standards for behavior. However, a revival of morality education is now urgently needed, indicating that attitude education in morality classes is not always successful.¹⁹⁾

As for the second issue, ‘the increased rate of youth who own a cell phone,’ it should be noted that 97% of high school students in Tokyo, own a cell and browse cell phone websites for 78 minutes a day on average.²⁰⁾ It is also noteworthy that as much as 9.4% of high school students have the experience of being bullied on Internet bulletin boards, 90.5% of them trade e-mails using a cell phone, and 70.2% of them use mobile websites.²¹⁾

Despite the above facts, no ‘information morality education’ concerning cell phone terminal use has been conducted in schools. It may be more precise to say that education has not been able to keep up with the explosive spread of cell phones.

Strengthening Regulations to Enhance Information Morality Education

The only the measure taken to deal with the above situation has been to strengthen regulations. For example, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) published guidelines prohibiting carrying cell phones into elementary and middle high schools in January 2009.

Indeed, a survey conducted by the MEXT

indicates that as much as 94.2% of elementary schools and 98.9% of middle high schools prohibit, in principle, carrying a cell phone.²²⁾ In addition, the ‘Internet Environment Improvement Act for Youth’ was enacted in April 2009,²³⁾ and PC software programs to check copying and pasting of open information on the Internet have been developed.²⁴⁾

6. Conclusion

There are ample examples of technology being instituted instead of a proper education fostering good moral judgment. We are asked to adjust our cell phones to a quiet mode when we are in public in Japan rather than turn the power off completely. On the face of things, this might be good. However, this only circumvents the moral responsibility when the technology called ‘Manner mode’ can be relied on. Actually, the electric waves of a cell phone might threaten the life of a person who is using a pacemaker.

In principle, initially, all passengers are informed that, “There is a possibility that a cell phone will interfere with a pacemaker if you bring your cell phone within 22 centimeters of a pacemaker user.” Accordingly, many passengers usually turn off their cell phones. This is an example of an intrinsic flow. However, the tendency not to acquire morality in an interpersonal relationship, by reverting to a dependence on technologies becomes even stronger.

Other examples where we get away with a lack of consideration for others because we can rely on technology to cover for us include: the flow of water automatically ceasing after using the restroom, the faucet from which water flows automatically stopping and in a music hall where waves jam the phone circuit lines thereby, preventing us from using our cell phones.

Satoru Ikeuchi, one famous Japanese scientist, calls this situation the spread of

“abandonment of self-judgment”²⁵⁾. He also points out that the number of people behaving this way will increase: persons who are buckpassers are those who lack a conscience, or persons who do not consider what kind of reaction their disruptive behavior may produce.

It is necessary to revisit the network/information ethics education now because simply maintaining the status quo is unacceptable and to the detriment of civil society.

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[受理年月日 2010 年 9 月 24 日]