Net neutrality in alleviating the widespread digital divide essays examples

Technology, Internet

Abstract

People continuously thrive in making their lives easier; thereby inventing different kinds of technology to suffice what is needed for different kinds of human work. The Internet emerges as the greatest invention yet in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as it transcends the barriers of communication. However, ethical issues arise in its use, one of which is seen in the rampant inequality in the access of cyberspace as not everyone is privileged enough to use it as freely as they want. Issues concerning intellectual property are also common, especially in the entertainment industry, which falls victim to online piracy. This paper discusses these issues and explores the proper actions that should be taken in dealing with them based on ethical theories and philosophies.

Introduction

In striving to make our daily lives easier, engineers have invented different kinds of technology, which aim to aid the work of human beings. In the past, people solved mathematical problems manually but they saw that numbers

greater than the digits covered by the human fingers demanded more than just a set of human hand and foot; thus, the abacus was created. However, the abacus was not sufficient enough to solve greater and more complex problems. People thought of better ways to make computing as easy as writing numbers on paper, thus, the calculator was made. As problems became more and more complicated, engineers continuously tweaked the calculator to adjust the utility of the device (Quinn, 2012).

The invention of technology did not just end in aiding the problems of the scholars. People needed to make their daily lives easier; ergo inventing appropriate kinds of technology. They were intended to make work as well as communication seem effortless.

Ethical Issues in Information Technology

With the emergence of Information Technology (IT), communication became convenient for people, making it seem like breathing the same air as people from another time and place. Snail mails turned into electronic mails, allowing free communication between two people who separated by distance. Research, at the same time, became simpler in the advent of the Internet as references became easier to access through virtual archives. Scholars need not to browse through hundreds of books in the library to get the information they needed because Google – where millions of data are stored and uploaded – exists and in just a click, all the related keywords appear in a matter of seconds.

However, not everyone receives the benefit of Information Technology because not all people are given equal access to cyberspace; thus, creating

a division among societies – a division, which discriminates the rich from the poor on the basis of access to new information and technology. This in turn creates a division between the ' information rich' and ' information poor' (Foley & Pastore, 2002).

Another ethical issue is that which concerns intellectual property. With the ease of distributing information via the Internet, it has become so easy to copy and share media files online without giving the owner due compensation for their work. Examples include music, movie, and book files, which are easily downloaded over the Internet and shared among users without the artists getting paid for them. However, not only does this deprive the artists and other creators of such work from being duly compensated for their work, but it also has an impact on the economy. For example, the U. S. entertainment industry is made of 2. 4 million employees (Scholes, 2014). This industry also contributes around $80 billion every year to the country's economy (Scholes, 2014). However, it has been reported that because of online piracy, 750, 000 jobs have been lost (Scholes, 2014).

Ethical Case Study in IT

A case study related to ethics in information technology is the case of the Electronic Mall Bodensee (EMB) (Bynum & Schubert, 1997). It was a project launched in January 1995 for the development and implementation of a regional electronic marketplace in the area that surrounded Lake Constance in Europe (Bynum & Schubert, 1997). It aimed to use the potential of new telecommunication infrastructure and to improve the region's economy.

The ethical issue raised in this project was one concerning the privacy of the

customers' information. While various protocols and data encryption systems are implemented and used by ecommerce websites, EMB's ordering process is not yet fully integrated into the merchant's ordering system. As such, the order form is sent via FAX to the merchant's local shop. In this case, though, the confidentiality of the customer's information would rely on the merchant and on the EMB provider. However, with such information being passed through so many people and computers, its confidentiality may be compromised.

In this case, the theory of utilitarianism was applied. This theory states that " an action must be judged based on " its consequences on the happiness of the largest number" (" Utilitarian Philosophy," 2010). For this, the implementation of adequate security policies, as proposed by the authors Bynum and Schubert (1997), would ensure the security of EMB's customers. While it may be quite costly for EMB, it would still be the right action to take as it would lead to the benefit of more people. In this regard, I would have made the same decision.

IT Laws

In 2011, Sen. Cantwell and Sen. Franken introduced a pro-net neutrality bill – S. 74, The Internet Freedom, Broadband Promotion, and Consumer Protection Act of 2011 – which prohibits " paid-prioritization for prioritized delivery of Internet Protocols (IP) packets" (American Library Association, 2014).

In the 113th Congress, Sen. Patrick Leahy also introduced a parallel legislation to Sen. Cantwell and Sen. Franken's pro-net neutrality bill calledS.

2476, The Online Competition and Consumer Choice Act of 2014. This bill states that Internet service providers (ISPs) should remain impartial in the traffic of online content, applications, services and devices (American Library Association, 2014).

Basically, these two laws enforce John Rawl's principles of justice by maintaining the claims of rights and liberty consistent as well as the equality of services among the Internet users. This will result to a domino effect in which information infrastructures will follow the supposed unbiased services of the ISPs to its clients. It will also provide increased capability for the less privileged to access newer technologies in order to connect to the virtual world. In turn, this will help reduce the inequality among people regarding the use of Information Technology; thus, resulting to a major increase of happiness in the society. In the Act Utilitarianism approach, it is a positive effect of the action taken by the legislators (Quinn, 2012).

On the other hand, the copyright law protects the value of creative work (RIAA, 2014). In this regard, the Federal law imposes severe criminal and civil penalties for the unauthorized rental or digital transmission, distribution, and reproduction of copyrighted material (RIAA, 2014).

These laws would affect the way I make decisions and conduct my business in that if I do decide to start an online business or should I go into ecommerce, then I should ensure that I implement the system with consideration of the standard Internet access made available to users. I should not develop my online business with the thought that I might be able to gain favor from my Internet Service Provider and obtain better access to the Internet than what is normally provided to customers. Also, with regards

to the copyright law, I will make sure that I use only licensed software in my business and that I don't engage in online piracy.

Cultural Differences in the Use of IT

IT conduct varies from one culture to another as laws in IT are not as universal as it should be. For example, downloading of files is acceptable in Canada but illegal in the US unless it is paid for (Quinn, 2012). This difference protects the downloaded material from being pirated and used for own profit.

Another common circumstance is web blocking whereby the availability of the website varies from region to region (Cannella et al., 2013). This, on the other hand, protects a culture from adopting unwanted behavior.

If I would be in business with countries that do not allow downloading, I would either penetrate websites or create my own website that will help me put up the full document online for free or I would have to sell the document to such countries.

If I want to adopt the system of online shopping in social network such as Facebook but countries like China prohibits its people from accessing the website, I would have to look for social networking sites similar to Facebook but is made available solely for the use of the Chinese. This will allow me to open an online social networking business with China despite its heavy blocking of the more universal social networking sites.

Conclusion

Technology, especially information technology, has indeed brought many benefits for people. It has made access to information easier and faster.

However, as with anything, its use can be abused and misused; hence, giving rise to ethical issues such as the equality of access to the Internet and online piracy or the protection of intellectual property rights. As ethical issues often present " gray areas" where no exact solutions exist, ethical theories such as the Utilitarianism and Kant's theory may be applied. Moreover, with globalization becoming the trend among businesses, it is important to also consider cultural differences when conducting businesses in information technology.

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