Perceptions of Productivity and Digital Ethics in Smart Phone Use in a Chinese Context

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ABSTRACT

The networked society is impacting all aspects of people’s 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. A digital enabled culture is resulting in changed norms on collaboration and providing more opportunities for teams to collaborate on a moment’s notice. The digital ethics code of the 1980s is addressed in the current digital culture. This research will develop a measurement scale for digital ethics and assess this scale in the context using students from China.

Keywords: Control, Coordination, Digital Code of Ethics, Digital Culture, Digital Ethics, Productivity

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 with respect to the ethical values of the networked society and particularly how the networked aspect of technology and media shape values to form the cultural landscape for “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. Human interaction in many cases involves text messages while lacking in the richness of face-to-face interaction theory this mode of interaction does enable rapid feedback and
the ability to communicate over distances and time zones. Accepting this digital reductionism view of society has crept into values of the networked society where there is less use of face-to-face and telephone, particularly for those having been born into this age of digital reductionism. 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 patiens 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. In this study the impact of this high information literacy on those immersed as efficient and effective homo sapiens of the digital culture will be examined.

The paradox of the Takenouchi argument is while the members of the digital reductionism age are intensively connected and networked yet this connectedness lacks the richness of face-to-face communication. Vast digitally connected 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 Granovetter’s (1973) work on the strength of weak ties. Granovetter (1973) showed in his network analysis that individuals were more likely to hear about a job from contact outside of their usual circle of friends. 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 Hofsteded 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 in 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. In this constant scanning for texts is this a symbol of connectedness or is it a symbol of the digital native’s isolation seeking connection through digital means?

Another aspect of culture noted by Hofsteded (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. These heroes develop a following and can earn a living from associated advertising and product endorsements.

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 Hofsteded (1990) observed these rituals can be observed but the
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