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 reduction-
ism 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 con-
trast 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
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 ac-
tion whether it is an overthrow of a government
or a flash party. Yet the connectedness seems
the converse of Grannovetter’s (1973) work on
the strength of weak ties. Grannovetter (1973)
showed in his network analysis that individu-
als 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 me-
dia 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 Hof-
steted (1990) are heroes who possess charac-
teristics that are highly prized. For the digital
culture these heroes can be gaming masters, a
person on Twitter with many followers, a per-
son on Facebook with many friends, a blogger
who attracts a large following, or a Youtube
personality who reviews new consumer prod-
ucts. 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 ritu-
als of digital engagement. As Hofsteded (1990)
observed these rituals can be observed but the
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