Chapter 7
Students' Intentions on Cyber Ethics Issues

Isaac Wiafe
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1149-3309
University of Ghana, Ghana

Winfred Yaokumah
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7756-1832
University of Ghana, Ghana

Felicia Amanfo Kissi
Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration, Ghana

ABSTRACT

Cyber ethical decisions have grave moral, legal, and social consequences on individuals, organizations, and societies at large. This chapter examines the extent of cyber unethical intentions among students on cyber piracy, cyber plagiarism, computer crime and abuses, and cyber privacy infringement. Using frequency analysis and the t-test of independent samples, the results showed that almost 24% of the respondents have intentions to engage in cyber piracy and about 13% would infringe on others privacy in cyberspace. More respondents have intentions to commit cyber piracy as compared to other cyber ethic issues, while cyber privacy infringement was the least observed. Almost 30% of respondents had intentions to commit software piracy, and 18.6% would engage in hacking activities. Also, cybercrime and computer abuse were more common among males than females. Cyber plagiarism was significantly higher among foreign students when compared to local students. Cyber piracy, cyber plagiarism, computer crime, and cyber privacy infringement were significantly higher in public universities.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3149-5.ch007

INTRODUCTION

Along with the benefits of the cyberspace comes ethical, legal, and moral challenges (Jamal, Ferdoos, Zaman, & Hussain, 2015). Individuals face multiple decisions in the cyberspace daily and resolve ethical dilemmas with or without conscious consideration of ethics. Ethics in the cyberspace (cyber ethics), examines the moral, legal, and social issues relating to the development and use of cybertechnology. While society is increasingly becoming concerned with ethical problems of the use of computers and the Internet (Onyancha, 2015), questions on "what is" or "what is not" ethical within the cyberspace is a dilemma. Ethical standards seek to guide or govern proper behaviours of employees in organizations or for professionals belonging to professional associations. Though the importance of professional ethics is acknowledged by researchers and practitioner (Bustard, 2018), the universal application of ethical codes is impracticable. What is ethical, legal and moral, varies among different cultures, organizations and countries (Tilley, Fredricks, & Hornett, 2012; Weaver, 2016).

Within the cyberspace, ethics deal with how individuals use the space in the context of their attitude's assumptions, beliefs, values, and knowledge (Da Veiga, 2016). This may be intentional or unintentional. While knowledge in ethics may enhance attitudes for dealing with ethical issues (Monteverde, 2014), and ethical culture is well appreciated (Gcaza, Von Solms, & Van Vuuren, 2015), research focusing on cyber ethics is limited. Thus, more studies are needed to explore ethical behaviour intentions and perceptions among cyber users. This will provide guidelines for encouraging appropriate ethical behaviour within the cyberspace (Burmeister, 2013). This chapter, therefore, seeks to (a) ascertain students' intentions on cyber ethical choices with regard to cyber piracy, plagiarism, computer crime and abuse, and cyberprivacy infringement and to (b) determine the different levels of such intentions between genders, nationalities, and universities. The remainder of the chapter is presented as follows; the next section presents a discussion on existing ethical guidelines, this is followed by the methods used for the study, then the findings, discussions, recommendations and conclusions are drawn.

BACKGROUND

Theories of Ethical Guidelines

Ethics seek to address questions on how humankind must live. Its guidelines are derived from theories including Deontology, Consequentialism, and Virtue ethics. Ethical theories provide perspectives for assessing and resolving ethical situations (Yaokumah, 2020). Deontology argues that to act ethically, one ought to follow the appropriate rules needed to perform his or her duty (Kant, 1998). This suggests that right actions are those that are performed out of duty, or in reverence to moral laws.

Consequentialism is the rightness or wrongness of actions, and it depends on an action's consequence (Scheffler, 1988; Sinnott-Armstrong, 2003; Stocker, 1969). Character ethics, also referred to as virtue ethics seek to answer, "what kind of person ought I to be". It focuses on character, with the underlying belief that a person of good character will take actions that are considered to morally best. Thus, a person with good character would not want to do things that might hurt others. Right actions are those that are performed by virtuous persons. In other words, character ethics is the moral character and habits of the person acting it.