

Chapter 9

Ethics and Social Issues Related to Information Communication Technology (ICT)

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ABSTRACT

Information Communication Technology (ICT) has raised new ethical concerns about the protection of personal privacy, protection of intellectual property, user responsibility, acceptable access and use of information, software licenses and piracy. A good ICT policy must be able to adequately consider these, and many other associated issues. This chapter therefore describes these ethical issues and how to deal with them as an individual or an organization. It provides information on the concept of ethics and the technological advancements responsible for the ethical concern. It discusses privacy, information rights, and intellectual property rights and ethics policy. The Nigerian national intellectual property right laws were examined in line with World Trade Organization/Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (WTO/TRIP) compliance.

INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly changing technological environment in which we live; ethical issues are increasingly been raised, demanding attention and efforts towards resolution. Of particular interest for us and the information society are those related to information communication technologies (ICTs). The explosive growth of ICT and the use of its enabling technologies have had major impacts on

society and thus raise serious ethical questions for individuals and organisations. These issues have been raised to a new and often perplexing level which has greatly affected the society in various ways. The pressing issues raised by ICT include the invasion of individual and corporate privacy, intellectual property rights, individual and societal rights, values preservation and accountability for the consequences arising from the use of ICT, etc.

These issues have thrown up important challenges in the area of employment; working conditions and individuality. However, not much

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progress has been made in addressing these issues and challenges associated with ICT. This is because of lack of clear understanding of the issues involved.

In this chapter, we will explore ethical and social issues/challenges that surround the use of ICT. Specifically, the chapter sets out to:

- Identify ethical issues/challenges and how the use of ICT has greatly invaded individual privacy and the protection of intellectual property.
- Analyze principles that can serve as the basis for ethical conduct by users of ICT.
- Identify ethics policy structure and framework for ICT use.
- Evaluate the impact of ICT on the protection of individual and collective privacy, information rights and intellectual property rights.
- Evaluate intellectual property rights protection laws in Nigeria with respect to WTO/TRIPS compliance.
- Research and apply a range of transferable knowledge required for ethical decision making and strategy.

BACKGROUND

Ethics is a reflection on morality. It refers to the principles of right and wrong in making choices by individuals. It has been described as the art and science that seeks to bring sensitivity and methods to the discernment of moral values (Carbo, 2006). Thus, ethics guide human and societal behavior. Capuro (2006) had no difficulty in asserting that ethics is an unending quest on explicit and implicit use of the moral code.

The subject of social and ethical implications of Information and Communication technology has been addressed in the literature. As noted by Carbo (2006) ethical considerations for ICT related issues first appeared under the topic “information

ethics” in the Annual Review of Information Science and Technology in 1992. This suggests that there is an ethical agenda associated with the use of ICT. Individuals and organisations therefore need to be ethically sensitive as they deploy ICT on their operations. The impact of ICT on human relationship has been tremendous. ICT has helped to enhance family relationship (e.g. mobile phones, palmtops, laptops, virtual conferencing and so on), as well help to separate family and friends from each other. ICT has enabled new friendship and relationships in virtual communities. How genuine are such relationship? What does it portend for individual satisfaction? In the workplace for instance, new kinds of jobs are being created such as data miners, web-counselors etc, but these opportunities are also endangered by problems of unemployment from computer replacing humans. A wide range of new laws, regulations, rules and practices are therefore needed if society is to manage these workplace and other changes and development brought about by ICT. Thus the society need to consider the following ethical and social challenges related to ICT use:

- Recognition for personal and corporate ethics associated with ICT.
- Striking a balance between ethical, economic and technological (Rogerson, 2008) as well as political considerations.
- Intellectual property rights issue (trade-marks, patents, copyright and trade secrets).
- Non violation of privacy and associated rights amidst electronic information data mining.
- The opportunity to commit crime with ICT (computer crime).
- Legal issues and limitations.
- Consequence of using ICT.
- Professional responsibilities (Kallman and Grillo, 1996).

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