

Exploring the Relationship between Individual Information Technology Ethics and Netizenship Behaviors

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Abstract: In the digital age, information technology (IT) ethics plays a critical role in shaping netizenship behavior within online communities. This concept paper examines the relationship between individual IT ethics and netizenship behavior and emphasizes how ethical principles guide responsible and constructive participation in digital spaces. Based on theoretical frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Digital Citizenship, the article examines the influence of ethical IT practices on positive netizenship, including factors such as digital literacy, hierarchical influence and cultural or religious values. The review shows that people with strong IT ethics are more likely to engage in responsible online behavior, promoting healthier digital environments. By identifying gaps in the existing literature, the paper proposes a conceptual model to guide future empirical research on how ethical IT use influences digital citizenship. The findings highlight the importance of promoting IT ethics and digital literacy to improve online interactions and contribute to more engaged, respectful and responsible digital communities.

Keywords: *Information technology, Netiquette, Netizenship, Islamic work ethics.*

1. Introduction and Background

In the rapidly advancing digital age, the proliferation of information technology (IT) has fundamentally reshaped how individuals interact, communicate, and engage with each other globally. Digital platforms such as social media, forums, and collaborative online tools have become essential in the personal, professional, and educational spheres. This shift has led to the emergence of "netizenship," a term denoting individuals' roles as citizens of the internet. Much like traditional citizenship, netizenship comes with responsibilities, where individuals are expected to adhere to ethical norms that ensure the well-being and functionality of digital communities (Floridi, 2019).

As online interaction expands, new ethical challenges emerge. These challenges include privacy breaches, cyberbullying, the dissemination of misinformation, and violations of intellectual property rights, all of which have become increasingly prevalent. Such issues raise serious concerns about how individuals navigate the ethical complexities of digital spaces (Dahlberg, 2020). Information technology ethics (IT ethics) offers a framework that guides individuals in responsibly interacting with technology. These ethical guidelines cover various dimensions, including protecting personal privacy, ensuring data security, respecting intellectual property, and maintaining respectful online behavior (Floridi, 2019). The implementation of IT ethics is crucial for establishing a digital environment that fosters trust, safety, and positive engagement (Gomes, 2021).

Despite increasing recognition of IT ethics, the specific ways in which adherence to these principles influences netizenship behavior are not yet fully understood. Netizenship behavior encompasses how individuals contribute to and interact within online communities, often shaped by their ethical stances. Positive netizenship behavior is marked by actions such as respectful dialogue, active participation, and the responsible sharing of information (Zhu, 2021). Conversely, unethical behaviors—such as cyber harassment, trolling, and the spread of misinformation—undermine the integrity of online spaces, damaging trust and weakening community bonds (Ma et al., 2020).

Previous studies have explored various dimensions of digital citizenship and online behavior, yet the relationship between IT ethics and netizenship behavior remains underexplored. Furthermore, factors like digital literacy, hierarchical influences, and cultural or religious values are likely to mediate how individuals

apply ethical principles in their online interactions. For example, hierarchical structures within organizations or communities often influence ethical behavior, where leadership sets ethical norms for digital conduct (Ma et al., 2020). Additionally, digital literacy plays a critical role in understanding and implementing ethical practices online, with those who possess higher digital literacy exhibiting more responsible online behavior (Gomes, 2021). Cultural and religious values, particularly in communities where ethical frameworks like Islamic work ethics are prominent, also shape individuals' ethical engagement in digital spaces (Asif et al., 2020).

Given these factors, this study aims to explore the relationship between individual IT ethics and netizenship behavior. It will also examine how mediating factors—such as digital literacy, hierarchical influence, and cultural or religious values—affect this relationship. By addressing these aspects, the research will provide insights into how IT ethics can be leveraged to promote responsible online conduct, ultimately contributing to the development of ethical digital communities.

2. Literature Review

Netizenship refers to the behavior of individuals as members of the online community, encompassing how they interact, contribute, and consume information on digital platforms. Netizenship behavior is shaped by various factors such as cultural values, online social norms, and individual attitudes toward technology. It includes aspects such as digital civic engagement, respectful communication, information sharing, and collaboration. According to recent studies, ethical netizenship is critical for sustaining positive online ecosystems, especially in mitigating cyberbullying, fake news, and other forms of digital misconduct (Zhu, 2021). Hauben (1998) captured the emergence of “citizen of the Net” citizens who carry invigorated rights and obligations, care about Usenet and the bigger Net, and work toward building a corporative and collective nature that benefits the larger world (Yigit, 2014).

Information Technology Ethics (IT Ethics) refers to the set of moral principles that guide individuals' actions when using technology. These principles include privacy, intellectual property rights, digital literacy, and the responsible use of online platforms. As users navigate the digital landscape, their ethical stance influences decisions ranging from sharing personal information to interacting with others in online spaces. Ethical behavior in IT is crucial to maintaining trust, ensuring data security, and promoting fairness in digital interactions (Floridi, 2019).

In other terms, IT ethics also called netiquette is a combination of the words network and etiquette and is defined as a set of rules for acceptable online behavior. According to (Fauzan, 2013) *akhlaq* should be highlighted as the most important element in all phases of human life. Other studies, mentioned that ethics is the study of what constitutes right and wrong behavior (Laudon, 2006). According to Salam (2010), computer and information ethics (IE) is an emerging field that continues to define new theories exploring our moral and human nature in the context of changing technologies and prevalent globalization.

According to Norshidah et al (2012), in a survey of information systems professionals (as cited in Cappel and Windsor, 1998) those with religious affiliation differ significantly in attitudes toward computer use in selected cases. The strong values and set of beliefs also lead to stronger opinions and perceptions of the observed unethical behavior. As Doucette et al. (2012) mention, we can respect a particular individual as a great thinker, as an occupant of a position of authority, as a threat, or just as a person, and to do so is to pay them a different kind of respect in each case.

Several theoretical models can be applied to understand the intersection between IT ethics and netizenship behavior. A relevant framework is the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which postulates that individuals' intentions to engage in a specific behavior are influenced by their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). When applied to the digital context, TPB suggests that ethical attitudes toward IT (e.g., respecting privacy) and the perceived social pressure to adhere to ethical online norms (e.g., discouraging hate speech) shape individuals' netizenship behaviors.

Additionally, the concept of Digital Citizenship provides a basis for understanding how individuals' ethical

orientations in the digital space align with responsible netizenship. Digital citizenship encompasses norms of appropriate, responsible behavior about technology use, such as respecting the rights of others and promoting digital inclusion (Ribble, 2017). By applying these frameworks, we can better analyze how ethical IT usage correlates with active and positive netizenship behavior.

The Relationship Between IT Ethics and Netizenship Behavior

Research has shown a growing awareness of the ethical challenges posed by digital technologies, particularly regarding issues of data privacy, cyber harassment, and misinformation. Studies suggest that individuals who adhere to strong IT ethics are more likely to engage in responsible netizenship behaviors (Dahlberg, 2020). For instance, those who prioritize privacy and data security tend to exercise more caution in sharing information online, contributing to safer digital spaces.

Moreover, Islamic work ethics and cultural values have also been examined as mediators in this relationship, particularly in regions with strong religious values (Asif et al., 2020). For example, Islamic principles of fairness, respect, and accountability are often reflected in online interactions, fostering a more ethical digital environment. Digital Literacy plays a crucial role in shaping ethical behavior. Individuals who are more digitally literate tend to understand the ethical implications of their online actions and, as a result, are more likely to demonstrate positive netizenship behaviors (Gomes, 2021). Digital literacy encompasses not only the technical skills to navigate digital platforms but also the critical thinking skills needed to evaluate information, engage in respectful dialogue, and recognize ethical dilemmas.

Factors Influencing IT Ethics and Netizenship Behavior

The influence of an individual's hierarchical level in an organization or community on IT ethics and netizenship behavior is significant. Studies show that individuals in higher positions often set ethical norms and standards for their subordinates, and this can extend to digital conduct (Ma et al., 2020). Ethical leadership in digital spaces can promote responsible netizenship by modelling appropriate behavior and setting expectations for others.

Generational differences also play a role in how individuals approach IT ethics and netizenship. Younger generations, especially Generation Z, have grown up immersed in technology and tend to have different perspectives on privacy, online interaction, and the ethical use of digital platforms compared to older generations (Turner & Reinsch, 2021). Gen Z's approach to netizenship is often more fluid, emphasizing open communication and collaborative efforts in online communities. Cultural values and religious beliefs can significantly influence an individual's ethical perspective in digital spaces. For example, ethical constructs derived from **Islamic work ethics** can lead to the adoption of specific digital behaviors aligned with respect, community welfare, and responsibility (Al-Kwafi & Hammoud, 2019).

Implications for Digital Society

The interplay between IT ethics and netizenship behavior has far-reaching implications for the digital society. Promoting ethical IT usage through digital literacy programs, ethical leadership, and policy development can foster healthier online environments. Governments, educators, and industry leaders must work together to embed ethical considerations into the design and use of digital technologies, ensuring that individuals are equipped to navigate the digital landscape responsibly. By aligning IT ethics with netizenship behavior, we can create online communities that promote inclusivity, trust, and positive engagement.

3. Research Methodology

This study will adopt a quantitative research design using a survey instrument to gather data on the relationship between individual IT ethics and netizenship behaviors. The survey will include structured questions to measure respondents' attitudes and behaviors concerning IT ethics and their engagement in online communities. This approach is suitable for capturing large-scale patterns and associations between the variables. The target population for this study will include individuals who actively engage in online platforms such as social media, discussion forums, and digital communication tools.

The sample will be drawn from university students, professionals, and digital users in Selangor, as they represent a diverse group of netizens with varying levels of digital literacy and exposure to technology. A stratified sampling technique will be used to ensure representation from different demographics such as age, education level, and occupation. A sample size of approximately 300-400 respondents will be targeted to ensure statistical validity. This size is appropriate for conducting multiple regression analyses to test the proposed relationships between IT ethics and netizenship behavior. Respondents must be over the age of 18, regularly use the Internet for communication and information-sharing purposes and have access to digital platforms.

The survey instrument will be divided into three main sections consisting of demographic information, IT ethics and netizenship behaviors. A Likert-scale questionnaire will be used to measure the ethical attitudes of respondents toward IT usage. This section will include items on privacy concerns, data security, intellectual property respect, and responsible digital behavior. Items will be adapted from established IT ethics scales (Floridi, 2019). A second set of Likert-scale questions will measure respondents' netizenship behavior, focusing on aspects like digital civic engagement, respectful communication, and participation in online communities. Items will be adapted from netizenship behavior studies (Zhu, 2021).

Data will be collected via an online survey platform to ensure ease of access and reach for respondents. The survey link will be distributed through university mailing lists, social media platforms, and professional networks to attract a diverse respondent pool. The survey will be open for responses over one month. The collected data will be analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics will be used to summarize the demographic profile of the respondents and their overall responses to IT ethics and netizenship behavior. To explore the relationship between the two constructs, multiple regression analysis will be conducted to determine the strength and direction of associations.

Informed consent will be obtained from all participants before they proceed with the survey, ensuring that their participation is voluntary and that their responses will be kept confidential. The study will also comply with university ethics approval processes and national regulations on data protection. This methodology ensures a comprehensive and systematic approach to investigating the relationship between IT ethics and netizenship behavior using a reliable and valid survey instrument.

4. Conclusion

This research emphasizes how critical it is to comprehend how netiquette—or the ethical behavior of online users—relates to information technology (IT) ethics. There is a growing need for ethical digital conduct as people interact with online platforms more and more. Promoting responsible online conduct requires a strong foundation in IT ethics which includes ideas like data security privacy protection and respect for intellectual property. Following these moral principles encourages good netizenship practices such as courteous communication engaged participation and responsible information sharing all of which are necessary to build secure and reliable online communities.

This research highlights the importance of digital literacy in helping people navigate moral conundrums when navigating the internet in addition to IT ethics. Digital literacy is a crucial element of ethical online engagement because individuals with higher levels of digital literacy are better able to comprehend and apply ethical principles. Hierarchical influence also plays a significant role, particularly in organizational or structured settings. A culture of ethical participation can be fostered in the digital community by leaders setting an example of ethical behavior and encouraging others to follow suit. Furthermore how people approach making moral decisions in digital spaces is influenced by cultural and religious values such as Islamic work ethics. In contexts with a diversity of cultural backgrounds in particular these values offer a moral compass that influences behavior online.

Future studies should confirm the relationships between IT ethics and netizenship behavior through empirical research emphasizing the roles that digital literacy leadership and cultural values play as mediators in these relationships. To promote moral behavior online and enhance digital citizenship IT ethics must be promoted through leadership and educational programs. This research contributes to the development of more

responsible and healthy online communities by offering insightful guidance on how to improve ethical behavior in digital settings.

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