Investigation of University Students' Online Unethical Behaviors

Mustafa Tevfik Hebebci
Ph.D.-Necmettin Erbakan University, Turkey

Yasemin Bertiz
Kırklareli University, Turkey, yasemin.bertiz@klu.edu.tr

Selahattin Alan
Selçuk University, Turkey

Abstract: Ethics is a philosophical discipline that has a very long history and deals with the compliance of individuals or avoidance behaviors entirely and has many subheadings. Ethical problems created by computer technologies are examined under computer or informatics ethics. Computer ethics is defined as a dynamic and complex field of study that analyzes the relationship between facts, conceptualizations, policies, values and instantly developing computer technologies. Computer ethics are generally categorized under the ownership, accuracy, access and privacy topics. This study aims to investigate the relationship between university students' online unethical behavior and their gender, educational status, and ethics course experience. A total of 530 university students, 269 female and 261 male, constitute the study group of the research conducted with the correlational study model. Research data were collected through the "Online Unethical Behaviors Scale." Independent samples t-test were used in the analysis of the data. The t-tests revealed a significant correlation between gender and online unethical behavior. It was also concluded that there was no significant correlation between online unethical behavior and ethics course experience and educational status. The findings were discussed within the framework of the literature, and suggestions were presented.

Keywords: online ethics, unethical behaviors, university students

Introduction

Rapid development in technology and the increase in information in online environments have led to a number of problems, as well as conveniences such as access to information independent of time and space. One of the most important of these problems is that the internet is not used safely and consciously within the framework of ethical rules. Especially with the widespread use of the internet, ethical behavior in online environments has begun to gain importance within the scope of information security (Erdoğdu, Gökoğlu, & Çakıroğlu, 2019). Therefore, it is seen that concepts such as computer ethics, information ethics, or technological ethics have been used in our lives since the 90s when computer technology began to be a part of our daily lives (Dedeoglu, 2006).

Ethics is a philosophy branch that examines and investigates what is good and right, what is bad and wrong, focusing on which elements a moral and virtuous life contains (Cevizci, 2008), and it has not only a theoretical but also a practical dimension (Buckinghans, 2012). Ethical rules related to the field are developed and attempted to be applied based on who or what are affected by these actions (Tosun, Geçer, & Kaşıkçı, 2016). The internet environment, which has a broad audience of users and data, is also an area with its own unique code of ethics. These rules are mainly about respecting other people in a virtual environment and reducing the negative aspects of the internet (MoNE, 2004).

Moor (1985) stated that the problems encountered as information ethics stem from the failure to determine the necessary principles regarding how computer technology should be used, and defined the informatics as "*Analysis of the nature and social impact of computer technology and the appropriate establishment and justification of the relevant principles for the ethical use of this technology.*" Mason (1986) stated that there were many problems to be solved in computer ethics, but identified privacy, accuracy, intellectual property, and accessibility issues as a particular concern.

When the literature was reviewed, it was seen that although the number of studies on online ethics is increasing every day, it is not sufficient. Ercan (2009), in their study, suggested that ethical problems were mostly caused by individuals using the internet. In another study, Söylemez and Balaman (2015) argued said that especially young people could easily express words that they cannot express face-to-face in a virtual environment. Yüce (2010) also stated that when it comes to informatics ethics and rules of behavior on the network, the young population can easily break these rules on the internet. Akyazı, Dilmen, and Kara (2008) expressed in their study that the subject of informatics ethics is a subject that should be emphasized insistently.

Purpose of the Research

In this study, the relationship between university students' online unethical behaviors and their gender, educational status, and ethics course experience was investigated. Information ethics is important in terms of issues such as the fact that information becomes more vulnerable to virtual attacks with the rapid advances in technology, the world has become an open market as a result of globalization, and the increase in the number of users of websites and web pages (Söylemez & Balaman, 2015). In this context, this study was conducted with the variables that can be examined in studies in the field of informatics ethics with the participation of the young generation called today's digital natives. In this context, the study seeks answers to the question, "Do university students' online unethical behaviors differ by their gender, educational status, and ethics course experience?"

Method

This study is descriptive research conducted in the correlational survey model that aims to determine the existence and/or degree of significance between two or more variables (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

Study Group

The study group of this research includes a total of 530 university students, 269 female and 261 male, studying at the associate degree and undergraduate level. The applicable sampling method, as one of the random sampling methods, was used in the selection of the study group. The mean age of the study group is around 21.

Data Collection Tools

The individual information collection form developed by researchers to obtain demographic information such as age, gender, educational status of participants and the "Online Unethical Behaviors Scale" developed by Genç, Kazez and Fidan (2013), were used to determine the participants' online unethical behavior levels.

Data Analysis

Data obtained in this study, which examined university students' online unethical behaviors, were analyzed by means of the trial version of SPSS 21 statistical package software. Besides, whether online unethical behavior varies based on demographic information was investigated using the t-test.

Findings

Demographic Characteristics of the Study Group

The percentage and frequency values of the study group for gender, educational status, ethics course experience, and demographic data for the purpose of using the internet are given in Table 1.

	International Conference on		istes
iconses	Social and Education Sciences		Organization
www.iconses.net	October 15-18, 2020	Chicago, IL, USA	www.istes.org

Table 1. Demographic Data of the Study Group

	Variable	N	%
Gender	Male	261	49.2
	Female	269	50.8
Educational Status	Associate Degree	292	55.1
	Undergraduate Degree	238	44.9
Ethics Course Experience	Yes	248	46.8
	No	282	53.2
	Total	**530**	**100**

Based on the figures in Table 1, it is understood that the number of female (n=269; 50.8%) and male (n=261; 49.2%) participants in the study are close to each other. The number of students at the associate degree (n=292; 55.1%) is higher in terms of the distribution of the educational status. Additionally, it is seen that the number of students who have not previously taken an ethics course is higher (n=282; 53.2%).

Online Unethical Behaviors by Gender, Educational Status, and Ethics Course Experience

T-test results regarding the gender, educational status, and ethics course experience with regards to university students' online unethical behaviors are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. t-test Results of Online Unethical Behavior Scores Based on Gender, Educational Status, and Ethics Course Experience

Variables		N	$\bar{X}$	S	sd	t	p
Gender	Male	269	54.51	21.31	528	3.86	<.001*
	Female	261	62.18	24.29			
Educational Status	Associate Degree	292	57.43	26.33	528	.945	.345
	Undergraduate Degree	238	59.34	18.46			
Ethics Course Experience	Yes	248	57.29	20.31	495	.579	.563
	No	282	58.48	23.86			

p<0.05

Table 2 suggests that university students' online unethical behavior scores are significant in terms of gender ($t_{(528)}$=3.86, p<.05). It is also deduced that the scores of male students ($\bar{X}$=62.18) are significantly higher than female students ($\bar{X}$=54.51). This finding can be interpreted as online unethical behaviors differ by gender. According to the results of the analysis conducted in terms of the educational status, no significant difference is found between online non-ethical behaviors of students with an undergraduate degree ($t_{(528)}$=.094, p>.05). Similarly, the mean scores of the students who have previously taken the ethics course ($\bar{X}$=58.48) did not differ significantly from the mean scores ($\bar{X}$=57.29) of the students who have not previously taken ethics courses ($t_{(495)}$=0.57, p>.05).

Discussion

In this study, which analyzed the relationship between university students' online unethical behavior and their gender, educational status, and ethics course experience, it was found out that gender and unethical behavior differ significantly. According to the results of this study, male students are more likely to engage in unethical behavior online than female students. The reason for this can be explained in the form of the roles given to women in social terms and the expectations from them. In addition, it can be said that this result can also be

related to the time spent by male on the internet and computer. In the literature, there are different studies that conclude that men use computers and the internet more than women (Kelleci et al., 2009; Kulu, 2012). Salman (2019) also expresses that increasing internet usage time could lead to facing more unethical behavior and exhibiting more unethical behavior. In other studies carried out by Kiere and Cronan (1998), Lau and Yuen (2014), Virtue (2008), Sarikoc (2018), and Torun (2007), it was similarly concluded that male students exhibited more unethical behaviors than female students.

Considering the relationship between university students' online unethical behaviors and their educational status and ethics course experience, it was concluded that there was no significant difference between these variables. The reason for the lack of a significant difference regarding the unethical behavior at the associate degree and undergraduate degree may be due to the fact that the mean age of the study group is approximately the same. In the literature, it was stated that the unethical behaviors of individuals might differ based on their age since their cognitive levels change as they age (Salman, 2019). In this study, the close age of the study group can be considered as the reason for the lack of a significant result in relation to the educational status. Different conclusions can be drawn by repeating the study with different age groups. Erdem (2008) and Çelen (2012) also concluded in their study that unethical behavior does not differ by educational status.

The reason why there is no significant difference between ethics course experience and online unethical behavior might be because of the fact that the study group is a young population and the young population is also prone to computer and internet use, or the education provided is not efficient due to the lack of a theoretical framework. Zeybek and Beyhan (2014) underlined in their study that students who use the internet at a very good level show more unethical behavior than those who use it at a lower level. Genç, Kazez, and Fidan (2013) similarly concluded that there is no significant difference between ethics course experience and online unethical behavior.

Conclusions

This study was conducted with 530 students who are studying at different grade levels in different universities in Turkey. According to the results of the study, it was found that university students' online unethical behaviors differ significantly by gender as well as that there was no significant difference based on the educational status and ethics course experience. It should be kept in mind that the research findings are shaped in line with the opinions and preferences of the university students who constitute the research sample. Based on the results obtained, considering today's technological developments, it is seen that the issue of online ethics is an important point that should be primarily focused on. Therefore, internet users should be more informed about ethics. It can be ensured that the contents of the ethics course, which is given to teaching ethical behavior, are transformed into a theoretical framework, added to the curriculum as a compulsory course, and the content is redesigned in accordance with different educational levels. The study findings can be analyzed with different age groups and different variables and compared with the findings of this study. By conducting different studies with qualitative data, future studies can examine online unethical behavior and different demographics more deeply.

References

Akyazı, E., Dilmen, N. E., & Kara, T. (2008). Türkiye Bilişim Derneği, *2. İstanbul Bilişim Kongresi 3-4 Haziran 2008,* 31-39.

Buckinghan, W. (2012). *Felsefe kitabı.* (E. Lakşe, Çevirmen). İstanbul: Alfa Kitap.

Çelen, F. K. (2012). *Bilgi ve iletişim teknolojilerinin kullanımında ilköğretim öğrencilerinin etik olmayan davranışlara ilişkin görüşlerinin incelenmesi.* Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi. Hacettepe Üniversitesi Bilgisayar ve Öğretim Teknolojileri Eğitimi Anabilim Dalı, Ankara.

Cevizci, A. (2008). *Etiğe giriş.* (İkinci Baskı), İstanbul: Paradigma Yayıncılık.

Dedeoglu, G. (2006). *Bilişim toplumu ve etik sorunlar.* Bursa: Alfa Aktüel Yayınları.

Ercan, C. (2009). İnternet kullanımında etik kaygılar ve etik kaygıların giderilmesi yönünde organizasyonların sorumlulukları. *Mevzuat Dergisi*, *11*(141), 1-11.

Erdem, Z. (2008). *Öğretmen adaylarının bilişim teknolojilerini kullanımlarının etik açıdan değerlendirilmesi.* (Yayımlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi). Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Enstitüsü, İzmir.

Erdoğdu, F., Gökoğlu, S., & Çakıroğlu, Ü. (2017). Bilişim teknolojileri öğretmen adayları çevrimiçi ortamlarda ne kadar etik davranabiliyor?. 5. International Instructional Technologies & Teacher Education Symposium. İzmir, Turkey.

Fraenkel, J. R., & Wallen, N. E. (2009). *How to design and evaluate research in education* (7th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

Genç, Z., Kazez, H., & Fidan, A. (2013). Üniversite öğrencilerinin çevrimiçi etik dışı davranışlarının belirlenmesi. *Akademik Bilişim '2013.* Antalya, Turkey.

Kelleci M., Güler N., Sezer H., & Gölbaşı Z. (2009). Lise öğrencilerinde internet kullanma süresinin cinsiyet ve psikiyatrik belirtiler ile ilişkisi. *TAF Prev Med Bull, 8*(3), 223-30

Kiere, J., & Cronan, T. P. (1998). How men and women view ethics. *Communications of the ACM, 41*(9), 70-76.

Kulu, M. (2012). *Öğrencilerin internet kullanımına yönelik görüşleri ve okul başarısı ile ilişkisi (Şişli Teknik Ve Endüstri Meslek Lisesi Örneği),* Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Bahçeşehir Üniversitesi Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü, İstanbul.

Lau, W. W., & Yuen, A. H. (2014). Internet ethics of adolescents: Understanding demographic differences. *Computers & Education, 72*, 378–385.

MEB (2004). *İnternet etiği.* http://www.meb.gov.tr/duyurular/duyurularinternetEtigi/intEtikustyazi.htm

Moor, J. H. (1985). What is computer ethics?. *Journal of Metaphilosopy, 16*(4), 266-275.

Salman, E. (2019). *Ortaokul öğrencilerinin internetteki etik ihlallerine yönelik algılarının incelenmesi,* Yüksek Lisans Tezi. Necmettin Erbakan Üniversitesi, Eğitim Bilimleri enstitüsü, Konya.

Sarıkoç, Z. (2018). *Öğretmenlerin etik olmayan bilgisayar kullanım davranışları ile bilgisayar öz yeterlilik algıları arasındaki ilişkinin incelenmesi*, Yüksek Lisans Tezi. Ankara Üniversitesi, Eğitim Bilimleri Enstitüsü, Ankara.

Söylemez, M., & Balaban, F. (2015) Bilişimin etik olarak kullanımının çeşitli değişkenler açısından incelenmesi. *Elektronik Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi, 14*(54), 115128.

Torun, Ö. (2007). *Resmî ortaöğretim kurumlarında öğrenim gören öğrencilerin internet etiğine ilişkin algılarının incelenmesi*. (Yayımlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi). Marmara Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Enstitüsü, İstanbul.

Tosun, N., Geçer, A., & Kaşıkçı, D. N. (2016). Öğretmen adaylarının internet etiği algıları ve kontrol odağı algıları arasındaki ilişkinin incelenmesi. *Açık öğretim Uygulamaları ve Araştırmaları Dergisi, 2*(4), 82-103.

Yüce, H. (2010). *Dönüşüm sürecinde bilişim toplumunun etik sorunları: Türkiye'de üniversiteler üzerine bir araştırma*. Marmara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi.

Zeybek, G., & Beyhan, Ö. (2014). Bilgisayar Meslek Dersi Alan Ortaöğretim Öğrencilerinin Bilişim Teknolojilerini Kullanımlarının Etik Açıdan Değerlendirilmesi. *Uludağ Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi, 27*(2), 307-324.