
What network computing does to communication. A retrospective analysis of early debates confronting and inventing online communication ethics

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Abstract

Our proposition aims at interrogating the effects of network and digital technologies on norms of communication. The objective is thus to reflect on the meeting of computer ethics (defined as " malleability " by Moor) and the socio-technical (both in discursive and instrumental terms) in computer networks mediated human communication. We will analyze networked communication ethics on the basis of two theories : the ethics of communication and discourse (Habermas) and recognition theory (Honneth). In order to do so, we will focus on online exchanges in french early electronic forums (Usenet) in the first half of the 1990's. With this retrospective analysis of debates about online communication, we study how traditional norms for group communication meet the technical arguments ruling the new netiquettes of computer mediated communication. For discourse analysis, we use qualitative and quantitative methods adapted for network forum studies (including a software tool called Calico). We supplement the analysis of themes related to ethics with a close study of the affordances and appropriation of forum tools into enunciation by users from the point of view of the semiotics of technical communication.

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