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Homework 4: The ACM Code

The 2018 update to the ACM Code addressed a significant number of relevant ethical technology issues. Since the publication of the last ACM Code in 1992, technology had advanced in virtually all aspects of the field, so naturally, ethical concerns evolved with them. This new version of the ACM Code was intended to address these issues.

One significant change to the Code was in section 1.6, the addition of a privacy clause. In this clause, the Code states “a computing professional should become conversant in the various definitions and forms of privacy and should understand the rights and responsibilities associated with the collection and use of personal information” [1]. This clause places emphasis on the responsibility of computing professionals to respect individual’s privacy. This idea is especially relevant because it aligns with modern concerns regarding data privacy and personal information.

While in earlier years, businesses would always make money directly from the consumer, with modern business models, it is becoming increasingly common for businesses to leverage its user’s data in order to make a profit. As such, in the digital age personal data is collected and shared extensively. This new section of the Code realizes this and states that it is the responsibility of computing professionals to handle this process responsibly while being respectful to the users right to privacy. These types of concerns are popular among social media platforms, IoT devices, and other data-driven technologies. If these devices are proven to break the user’s trust in them, then it will become much harder to regain such trust, as user’s won’t want to engage with technology that is invading their privacy.

Another important change that came with the 2018 version of the ACM Code was the issue of bias in computing. In section 1.4 of the ACM Code, it states “Computing professionals should foster fair participation of all people, including those of underrepresented groups. Prejudicial discrimination on the basis of age, color, disability, ethnicity, […] or any other inappropriate factor is an explicit violation of the Code” [1]. These changes come at a time where the advancement and use of machine learning and artificial intelligence is on the rise. Given the tendencies of these types of algorithms to amplify any existing biases in society, using them can lead to unfair technologies that systemically discriminate against certain groups of people.

As such, this section encourages computing professionals to be proactive in their development of such technologies and take the necessary steps to identify and address any bias in them. In doing so, technology can be more inclusive and adhere to ethical guidelines. Furthermore, technologies that don’t adhere to these guidelines can have adverse consequences on society, reinforcing negative stereotypes and discrimination.

Overall, the ACM code has taken several steps towards addressing more relevant ethical concerns regarding current technologies. This goes to show that regardless of how technology may change in the future, the ACM will be committed to holding ongoing discussions regarding the proper ethical guidelines that technologies should follow. There are many other aspects discussed in the ACM code, but privacy and bias were just two examples.

Works Referenced

[1] “ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct,” ACM Ethics - The Official Site of the Association for Computing Machinery’s Committee on Professional Ethics, https://ethics.acm.org/ (accessed Oct. 1, 2023).