Research Article

Digital ethics in higher education: Modernizing moral values for effective communication in cyberspace

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The digitalization of education is critical to transforming the education system in the face of the challenges of the post-pandemic technologized world. This research aims to determine the content of digital ethics and its role as a tool of effective communication in the cyberspace of each college, suitable for the practical solution of the assigned educational tasks. The data come from a questionnaire of 150 students and 60 faculty members in bachelor's and master's degree programs, conducted in April-May 2021 as part of a distance learning program. In addition, 30 administrators and 20 graduates were interviewed. The research results show that traditional moral values are undergoing significant change and must be modernized and codified. Relationships in the digital environment should be based on moral norms: duty, the self-discipline of the actors involved, mutual responsibility, and respect. The moral qualities displayed by individuals in the digital environment using digital technologies are the leading indicators of their professional suitability. The article mentions the main problems faced by the actors: digital literacy, personal image, place of implementation of pedagogical interaction, and rules of remote dialog. The study will contribute to further analysis and evaluation of the adequacy of specific measures taken by higher education institutions to develop and implement programs for ethical modernization of the educational process within the tasks of state educational reforms. **Keywords:** digital ethics, digitalization of education, communication, distance learning, educational process, virtual space, competence

INTRODUCTION

The main question which became a severe intellectual challenge for researchers of a wide range of issues was "How to change education so that it becomes not just one of the areas of social obligations of the state, but the engine of social and economic development of the country?" Such a demand for education requires theoretical approaches and a careful, practical study of the sphere of education itself, its achievements, and the issues of internal and external functioning. No strategy can be built without a theoretical model of the future, without determining the place of education in the In 2018, as part of the discussion on the strategy of socio-economic development of Russia until 2024 and with a perspective until 2035 to achieve the goals and implement the tasks in the field of education, referred to in the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation "On national goals and strategic objectives for the development of the Russian Federation for the period until 2024", the Center for Strategic Research began to develop proposals to accelerate the growth of the wealth of Russian citizens and concluded that the key input to accelerate the economy could only be human capital. This fact determined the crucial role of the sphere in which this capital is formed, namely the sphere of education. The main question, which became a severe intellectual challenge for researchers of a wide range of subjects, was: "How to change education so that it becomes not only one of the areas of social obligations of the state but the engine of social and economic development of the country?" Such a demand for education requires theoretical approaches and a careful, practical examination of the field of education itself, its achievements, and the issues of internal and external functioning. No strategy can be developed

without a theoretical model of the future, without determining the place of education in the totality of social development. However, it cannot be created without data, without an evidence-based view of education.

In 2005, Russia began the gradual digitization of the national education system. The construction of a digital economy and digital education are essential priorities of state policy, which are set out in the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 09.05.2017 No. 203, "On the Strategy for the Development of the Information Society in the Russian Federation for 2017 - 2030", the Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of 28. July 2017 No. 1632-r "On Approval of the Program "Digital Economy of the Russian Federation" (Section 2 - "Academic brainpower and Education"); Priority Project in the field of "Education" "Modern Digital Educational Environment in the Russian Federation" (Protocol of 25.10.2016 No. 9). The target model of the digital education environment has also been approved (Decree of the Ministry dated December 2, 2019, No. 649). The primary vector of the development of the modern education system - the implementation of the educational process in the digital education environment - was highlighted. More than 120 higher education institutions participate in the "Modern digital educational environment in the Russian Federation" project. The aggregator online.edu.ru was created within its framework, uniting more than 40 educational platforms (Kommersant, 2019). According to a questionnaire conducted by the VTsIOM think tank, "87% of college and vocational school students and 76% of teachers have a positive attitude toward online technologies" (Strelkova, 2021). In 2020, the innovative processes in education implemented in the Russian Federation were facing a new reality. The unprecedented pandemic of COVID-19 has changed the whole life of people (Tarman, 2020). "We had no precedents to refer to and found ourselves searching for innovative solutions using the technologies, skills, resources, and methodological approaches we already had. This situation was extremely challenging" (Radiç et al., 2021). The pandemic became a virus that attacked the bodies and changed the social, economic, political, and psychological order, creating a new category that combines biological and social origins, a "syndemic" (Lolas Stepke, 2020).

The European Commission (2006) proposed digital competence as one of the key competencies for lifelong learning and identified it as one of the eight key competencies for life, along with mother tongue communication, foreign language communication, mathematical competence, and basic competencies in science and technology, learning to learn, social and civic competence, initiative and entrepreneurship. Education policy documents in various European countries highlight the importance of technology and digital skills. In parallel, the European Commission has developed the European Digital Competence Framework, which provides an updated list of 21 competencies and different levels of competence. It serves as a reference framework to explain what it means to be "digitally competent" (Carretero et al., 2017). The ongoing global pandemic has turned education upside down around the globe. At the same time, education has proven to be one of the few critical areas of human activity that can function effectively during emergencies. Scholars have consistently advocated the role of technology in various areas of education (Bayanova et al., 2022; Kryukova et al., 2022; Kuzembayeva et al., 2022; Platonova et al., 2022; Soltovets et al., 2020; Strielkowski & Chigisheva, 2019; Tarman et al., 2019; Uzunboylu et al., 2022). Technology plays a central role as the entire globe sails into the storm. Technological development and the internet have radically transformed education and science (Chigisheva et al., 2021; Nadikattu, 2020; Sekyere-Asiedu et al., 2022). Scholars argue that during COVID-19, the digitization of education during COVID-19 could help bridge the gap between academia and industry by providing more comprehensive learning delivery tools and faster communication and networking (Márquez-Ramos, 2021). Like other universities around the world (Marinoni et al., 2020), Russian universities needed to improve their digital environment for education. During this time, research appeared that examined various aspects of how distance education functions during a pandemic (Abdelhafez, 2021; Atabekova et al., 2021; Atieku-Boateng, 2021; Basford, 2021; Charbaji El-Kassem et al., 2021; Gordon, 2021; Kubalkova, 2021; McCarty, 2021; Qarkaxhja et al., 2021; Peters et al., 2020; Soltovets et al., 2021; Toufique, 2021) and others. Education might help bridge the gap between academia and industry regarding more comprehensive tools for learning content delivery and faster communication and networking (Márquez-Ramos, 2021). Like other universities worldwide (Marinoni et al., 2020), Russian higher education institutions had to enhance their digital environment for training. During this period, research began to appear that studied various aspects of the functioning of remote education during a pandemic (Abdelhafez, 2021; Atabekova et al., 2021; Atieku-Boateng, 2021; Basford, 2021; Charbaji El-Kassem et al., 2021; Gordon, 2021; Kubalkova, 2021; McCarty, 2021; Peters et al., 2020; Soltovets et al., 2021; Toufique, 2021).

The Law Institute of the Peoples' Friendship College of Russia, whose educational activities are the focus of this article, did not interrupt the educational process for a single day during the pandemic. The college created a unique website on its proprietary digital platform on the topics of COVID-19 (Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, 2022). The oral activities used the video recording tool Microsoft Teams, officially introduced at the college as a learning platform for online distance learning (Atabekova, 2021, p. 410). The landscape of modern education is forming under the influence of information technologies, forming new facets of relationships and interactions between participants in educational processes. Today's educational sphere is developing into a digital society model where information and knowledge ownership are core values. Like any well-established and entrenched field, the virtual education model must define norms and regulate online educational activities.

Meanwhile, traditional moral values are transforming as the digital space expands. Questions arise about the criteria for building effective and enjoyable relationships in a new environment that positively influences the achievement of educational goals. On the other hand, the digital space is changing rapidly, forcing us to look for universal regulatory tools. Society recognizes the need to use the existing classical foundations for moral and ethical behavior in the new virtual space, as the human factor is preserved in a new dimension. However, this foundation is proving outdated due to the dynamic development of technology. At the current stage of the development of the digital educational environment, the issue of developing ethical regulatory mechanisms in the digital space, revising traditional ethical approaches to assessing the situation, and forming new digital educational ethics is particularly relevant. However, we have not found any systematic research publications on the content of digital ethics and its role as a tool for effective communication in the virtual educational space. In this regard, we consider it particularly relevant for universities and law school graduates. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the impact of digital ethics on the learning effectiveness and the psychological state of teachers and students. The selection of law students refers to the author's academic affiliation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In our study, we posed two research questions to guide the research procedure:

RQ1: What problems related to digital ethics arise in the digital space of the university, and what are the possible ways to overcome them?

RQ2: Is there feasibility of creating a code of digital ethics?

This research question implies the analysis of interviewees' themes in their answers to the questionnaire on the respective issues.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In 2021, Harvard University initiated "Digital Ethics in Times of Crisis: COVID-19 and Access to Education and Learning Spaces," in which participants, teachers, and students from 21 countries focused on discussions of privacy, surveillance, and security, i.e., the ethical issues they faced that intensified during the pandemic. This dialogue prompted queries about new social relations and the reconfiguration of social contracts between the private sector, civil society, academia, and communities. Students and experts reiterated the importance of social and emotional learning and personal well-being when physical and mental health threats are elevated (Participants in an Ethics of Digitalization Research Sprint, 2021).

In Russia, the ethical problems of the development of the information society were studied by different researchers, including Avdeev (2014), Dedyulina (2016), Manzhueva (2014), and Otyutsky and Shchipunov (2016), Baeva (2019, 2020), and others. For example, Mamina (2020) reviewed digital etiquette (Digital etiquette) and Mamina and Pirainen (2020). To parallel these studies, researchers from other countries have studied the problems of the interaction of technology and ethical principles and considered various approaches to implement this combination in the education system (Lezama, 2008; Lolas Stepke, 2020; Martinez-Negrete, 2014; Martinez-Ruiz, 2015; Meeroff & Candioti, 1996; Mitcham, 2011; Olcott at al., 2015; Piña & Padrón-Nieves, 2020; Regalado-Espinoza, 2011; Rivera-Piraguata & Minelli, 2017).

The issue of ethics in the information environment and understanding electronic culture has several approaches, particularly in communication, including social phenomena and processes that have emerged based on internet communication (Ivanova et al., 2022). In this context, electronic culture also includes the form of communication between people via computers and mobile systems, their values, principles, accepted norms, and language (Avdeeva, 2014; Klyueva, 2014). In contrast, electronic culture includes a variety of information society phenomena, such as e-business, education, medicine, media, services, and the like (Silver, 2004). Marey states that "digitization is less about technology and more about culture, change, and a model of interaction" (BCG, 2020). The digital space is currently unique within its boundaries, and established moral values are transformed to society without any ethical evaluation. The information and educational space have three components: civilizational - that is, introducing a person to the basics of an information civilization; communicational - providing educational activities based on the use of information and communication technologies; active - enabling educational actions by creating known agreements (Shilova, 2020). For example, Malkova (2001) believes that "the need to create virtual ethics is obvious - as a field of applied ethics whose tasks should include moral and philosophical reflection and moral evaluation of the processes of virtual communication, theoretical substantiation of ethical norms and principles regulating behavior in this sphere, and, finally, the creation of mechanisms to ensure compliance with these norms and principles" (p. 113).

The term "digital ethics" is currently discussed by many researchers using concepts including cyber, computer, network, and net ethics (Ivanov, 2020; Habr, 2020). The most common equivalent of the discussed concept is "information ethics". According to Baeva (2019), information ethics is a field of ethics to study moral and ethical problems in the development of information technology, regulation of ethical aspects of social life, and relationships among "human-human," "human-computer," and "human-artificial intelligence" in social life (Baeva, 2019, p. 37).

Parra et al. (2020, p. 48) indicated that "digital ethics is an essential 21st-century skill, along with metacognition, adaptability, creative observation, and the ability to multitask." At the same time, the researchers emphasize that higher education institutions are responsible for forming critical thinking and ethical approaches in students for educational interaction. Martínez (2015, 2017) considers digital ethics a fundamental educational system element. Hortal (2000) emphasized that the educational system must train a person to perceive the culture of the society in which that person lives. He pointed out the primacy of the moral aspect, calling it the "bioethical principle of charity," where charity is understood as the obligation to act in the interest of others and to respect their rights (Hortal, 2000). In a non-virtual setting, many universities create specific codes of ethical behavior. For example, Martínez Negrete (2014) considers several Spanish and Latin American university codes that establish honesty, camaraderie, and respect as the critical norms for academic behavior. Rivera-Piragua and Minelli (2017) interpret the relationship between ethics and virtual education in the context of the concept of digital anthropology, which focuses research on the study of humans under the influence of technology. The authors propose a new human identity, a new virtual "I" realized through email, social networks, and educational platforms. This gives rise to formulate the dilemma of two "I's": "I am real" and "I am virtual" and to conclude that there are two identities of a person. We believe that a person simultaneously feels the boundary between the real and virtual worlds and consciously "puts on" a virtual mask to his identity, which allows him to hide his essential personal characteristics. Some authors talk about the contradiction in the virtual education model, which implies greater student autonomy and independence compared to the traditional model (Ramírez, 2016). This fact also makes universities need to form such a quality as social responsibility, which is only possible within an ethical approach (Zapata-Ríos, 2018). Some researchers consider the introduction of digital ethical prescriptions inappropriate, calling this approach unproductive (Sanromán et al., 2015; Shaidullina, 2018) since every human being is a priori bearer of morality; Cifuentes-Muñoz (2019) calls digital ethics in the educational system "the hope from the field of philosophy." The information above reveals the need for ethical control of the virtual space at a given college, presented in the form of an ethical code based on the moral norms of behavior of the classical system of human values.

METHOD

Research Design

This study focused on the influence of ethical standards in the digital learning environment on the effectiveness of learning efficiency at RUDN College Law Institute. The concepts of ethics and quality of virtual education do not contradict each other but, on the contrary, form a unity: quality of education is not an option but an ethical and integral commitment assumed in the virtual space by managers, staff, and teachers. Ethical standards respected by all involved in the educational process are a prerequisite for successfully implementing educational programs. The methodology is based on a hybrid approach that includes the analysis of theoretical and empirical research. It involves the process of quantitative and qualitative interpretation, description, generalization, and statistical processing of data obtained through questionnaires and interviews. The article adopts a descriptive approach to data collection and analysis. Researchers confirm this is the right choice when the study aims to identify characteristics, features, and trends without a systemic conceptual background (Sarka, 2021). This approach describes individual facts and variables naturally (Siedlecki, 2020). Concerning the research questions, the data distribution was reviewed using descriptive statistics. It should be emphasized that this is a comparative study. According to Díaz (2014), mixed methods combine the concepts and methods of the quantitative and qualitative paradigms, increase the potential of both approaches, compensate for their shortcomings and, above all, provide the most complete and integral understanding of the problem. The article is dedicated to qualitative methods because "they imply a direct and constant contact with the participants of the process and with the phenomena under study, allowing the understanding of the situation through the prism of the observation of their actions and the interpretation of their discourse" (Galeano, 2004, p. 19). In addition, the researchers used a phenomenological-interpretive framework to examine respondents' perceptions, as phenomenological studies are interested in how people perceive and talk about objects and events. Phenomenological studies require the researcher's full participation in the phenomenon under study. Therefore, the researcher acted as a participant and observer (Moustakas, 1994).

Participants

The participants were 160 students and 60 RUDN University Law Institute of Law of RUDN College involved in bachelor's (N = 100) and master's (N = 50) programs from January to May 2021. In addition, 30 administrative staff and 20 graduates were interviewed. In total, 270 individuals were the participants in the research. Students and graduates had a similar age distribution (18-25).

Data Collection Instrument

The present study also used a questionnaire design using a quantitative approach to analyze the data. Previously, the opinions of the scientific community presented in previous studies on this topic were analyzed. The experiences of several higher education institutions in Spain, France, and Latin America were examined. In the next phase, questionnaires were developed and offered to five reference groups: undergraduate students, graduate students, and graduates who had undergone some mixed training in the sense that the first two or more years of study were full-time and part of years that coincided with the period of pandemic lockdown was spent in distance education, then faculty and administrative staff. In the first phase, conceptual questions were asked about the level of satisfaction with virtual learning as a pedagogical method of knowledge transfer. In the next stage, the questionnaire focused on issues of academic digital ethics and the relevance of developing a digital ethics code based on the acquired experience of virtual learning about ethical issues and expectations of students' educational and administrative community. The authors developed the questionnaire and inventory. Their responses were statistically analyzed, and additional comments were subjected to coding-based thematic content analysis.

Data Collection

Permission to perform the present study was granted by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Law of Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (Document No: 0091/12-386). The committee approved permission to collect data for this research on April 30, 2022. One month before the questionnaire, all participants were

informed in writing that they could voluntarily participate in the research project. It was also indicated that the processing of responses would be strictly under the principles of confidentiality and that anonymity would be maintained at the time of the results. To collect data, we used the email addresses of students, faculty, and other staff from the official RUDN College website and alums emails. Responses to the questions were obtained with the consent of all respondents. Google Forms information service was used to automate data collection. We exported responses we received from students from Google Forms to the SPSS program. Almost all faculty, students, alums, and staff responded to the questionnaire. Such a high percentage of responses received is due to the respondents' high motivation and interest in improving the quality of virtual education. During the questionnaire, the privacy and confidentiality of the data were not violated. In the study, a questionnaire was used to determine the range of topics related to the influence of the ethical factor in the virtual education space on the quality of education. Researchers point to the potential of such a questionnaire format to measure attitudes and identify essential issues with modeling and clustering tendencies (Baburajan et al., 2020).

Therefore, a questionnaire was offered to all respondents. First, they were asked to answer questions and give theirs why? Comments on the following items:

- Did you experience problems with adherence to ethical standards during virtual instruction? (yes/no, why?)
- What ethical issues did you encounter during virtual learning?
- Who should be responsible for adherence to ethical standards in digital education?
- Does non-compliance with digital ethics and etiquette affect the quality and outcomes of instruction? (yes/no, why?)
- Has the pandemic exacerbated these problems? (yes/no, why?)
- Do you think creating an intra-university digital code of ethics is necessary? (yes/no, why?)

The researcher also used open-ended questions/prompts to encourage participants to share details about their learning experiences and perceptions (Giorgi, 2012). Respondents were allowed to keep their answers anonymous. Although they did not exercise this permission, they agreed to provide their region, origin, gender, and work experience for the study. The elements mentioned above of personal data were then considered as distinguishing factors that could form the theme and respective clusters of respondents' perceptions regarding the relationship between ethical standards and the quality of education. First, respondents answered the questions in a separate questionnaire uploaded through the MT forms that automatically calculated responses. In addition, respondents were asked to submit comments on the "Why?" subsection via a link to a separate electronic text comment form within the MT One Drive tool.

Data Analysis

Data analysis relies on researchers' interpretive description approach to evaluate emerging trends and perceptions in relevant contexts (Gariepy, 2021). Statistical research methods were used to analyze the data obtained. Quantitative data were systematically categorized according to student responses. The participants' answers to the questions in the questionnaire were analyzed using the SPSS program. The interview data were analyzed by two researchers using thematic analysis. The researchers determined themes and codes during the qualitative data analysis after reading the transcripts and later discussing discrepancies during the data analysis. The reliability score between coders was found as 89%.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the COVID-19 pandemic, digital ethics and etiquette became essential tools for educational interaction. However, transitioning to a distance learning format presented several problems, including technical, psychological, communication, methodological, legal, and ideological issues. What should be the norms of behavior in the digital education space? Where is the line between destructive and good behavior? These questions have led to the creation of a set of recommendations that can make the learning process more effective.

Table 1. Results on the violation of ethical norms in the virtual educational space

	The number of participants	% of the respondents' replies
Bachelor students	84	67, 2 %
Master's students	28	60,87%
2020 Alumni	6	30%
Teachers	57	95%
Administration staff	14	58, 33

Problems with Adherence to Ethical Standards

We asked the participants whether they had problems with adherence to ethical standards during virtual classes. The results regarding their responses are given in **Table 1**. **Table 1** shows that an overwhelming number of teachers (95%) note the unethical behavior of the participants in the educational interaction. In comparison, the number of administrators who noted this fact (58.33%) is also relatively high, suggesting that students are not subject to the influence of hierarchical norms. They do not consider administrative staff as leading employers, indicating the high internal freedom of modern students. Only 30% of graduates pay attention to ethical problems in the network, although they are the first students "affected" by the pandemic and on whom distance education was "tested". The questionnaire results of undergraduates and graduates are close to (67.2%) and (60.87%), respectively. Based on the data, we can see a relatively high tendency for ethical problems in the virtual network.

Next, respondents were asked to provide freestyle comments and name the main ethical issues they faced. Their themes were specified during the content analysis. Answers can be grouped into some blocks:

i) Technical. As a technical component of behavioral culture, digital literacy was named an ethical competence necessary to safely and effectively use computer technologies and internet resources. According to the respondents, the lack of these competencies leads directly to the educational process's disruption and distortion since digitalization is already an integral part of it. For example, a teacher may be late for a lesson (online conference) due to a lack of internet resources skills. The student will not answer in the lesson because he does not know how to "share the screen." The use of a webcam and microphone should also be determined by the requirements for a particular conference, depending on the role of its participants. Occasionally, listeners can only interfere and are visually distracting; therefore, these participants are advised to keep the camera and microphone off and air only during the discussion. Speakers, on the contrary, should occupy a key position in video chat and be fully accessible to observers and listeners to perceive information.

We should note that the opinion on modern students being a "digital native" generation and having all the "innate" technical competencies "by default" is erroneous. Our teaching experience proves that many students lack the ICT knowledge required to master knowledge successfully. At the same time, "technical competencies are considered standard and mandatory for all participants in the educational process," says a report to UNESCO presented by the Pontificia Universidad Chile (UNESCO, 2016). Of the 270 respondents, 224 stressed the importance of this aspect as an ethical norm (87.84%).

ii) Organizational. The respondents mentioned the ethical role of the correct organization of the educational process and each lesson. The ability of a teacher to structure the educational material so as not to lose the audience's attention was named since distance communication increases the mental load, and the person gets tired faster. As a result, communication becomes ineffective. Similar recommendations apply to the students, especially in preparing text messages intended for public speaking, due to interaction's psychological and communicative characteristics in a digital environment. P. Soper notes that an experienced speaker, student, or teacher knows how important capturing the entire group's attention is. If it can arouse the audience's interest, then the natural "infectiousness of the mood" will help maintain it (Soper, 1995, p. 170-172). In digital reality, interaction with the audience is characterized by the lack of a collective "we" and the effect of "infectiousness." The speaker presents to the target audience, which is atomic, dramatically complicates interactive communication on the Web. Disruption of communication also occurs in terms of feedback through the channel of non-verbal communication language, which is present in video conferencing format in a significantly minimized volume. In this regard, such a psychological component of etiquette as controlling one's emotions, speech, and behavioral reactions are essential. The organizational component should be etiquette because the correct process organization will ensure participants' comfortable and

effective interaction, which is especially important during a pandemic when the impact of virtual stress on mental health is so significant (Gagliardi, 2020). Student's mental health should be taken into consideration, and various suitable measures should be taken by educators to relieve their mental stress and anxieties during the COVID-19 crisis to ensure that the students can regularly, effectively, and actively participate in their online learning sessions (Brooks et al., 2020). The respondents believe that the role of the teacher, empathy, and enthusiasm are crucial (Regalado-Espinoza, 2011), which should create a positive effect in the virtual classroom. "Today more than ever, it is necessary to organize responsible education, where life itself must become the ethics teacher" (Novoa & Pirela, 2020). At the same time, the self-discipline of the learner should remain extremely important: they should not be carried away by the excessive freedom provided by virtual learning (Rugeles et al., 2015). This trend presents a challenge for modern education. Our experience allows us to conclude that infantilization is the primary socio-psychological trend for the new generation of students. Students are less responsible, less executive, not ready to admit their behavioral faults and inadequate performance of assignments, do not give in to criticism, and are incapable of self-criticism.

Of the 270 respondents, 182 named this component an ethical norm (71.37%). The image of teachers and students appearing in front of each other are one of the most critical aspects of distance education that cannot be neglected. The visual aspect and image of the participant include clothing, appearance, background, and avatar (profile, profile signature). As part of the distance format, casual business clothes in neutral colors are recommended (pajamas and a formal business suit are rated by the respondents as two extremes within the framework of the practices of the educational environment). It is also challenging to ensure against surprises in the air, which can be caused by family members or pets, in connection with which a new proxemic rule has been developed: position your back against the wall. It is also possible to use a corporate background produced by the university. Respondents discuss another etiquette rule: an up-to-date e-profile photo that creates presence and allows empathy in a virtual audience. The respondents agree that using a strict passport photo is wrong, where people look less natural. Using personal and non-personal images inappropriate to the business communication style is also considered a violation. Respondents from all reference groups named a large number of examples of unethical appearance (working in pajamas, lying down, and alike), as well as avatars of neutral content (animals, flowers, landscapes, and others) or shocking orientation (half-naked actors and actresses, horror masks, clowns, and alike). A semi-formal portrait photo that allows for the identification of the respondents chose as a possible option. Regarding the signature, the profile name should be the full name in an educational environment, not a 'nick' ('pseudonym').

Based on the results obtained, we can conclude that scholars such as (Chigisheva et al., 2021; Nadikattu, 2020; Sekyere-Asiedu et al., 2022) argue that the digitization of education during COVID-19 could help bridge the gap between academia and industry by enabling more comprehensive learning tools and faster communication and networking (Márquez-Ramos, 2021). Like other universities worldwide (Land & Jensen, 2020), Russian universities need to improve their digital environment for education. The results of this study are very similar to those of the study (Abdelhafez, 2021; Atabekova et al., 2021; Atieku-Boateng, 2021; Basford, 2021; Charbaji El-Kassem et al., 2021; Gordon, 2021; Kubalkova, 2021; McCarty, 2021; Peters et al., 2020; Soltovets et al., 2021; Toufique, 2021). Like other universities around the world (Land & Jensen, 2020). Research from several countries shows similar results to ours and points to different aspects of how distance education works during a pandemic (Abdelhafez, 2021; Atabekova et al., 2021; Atieku-Boateng, 2021; Basford, 2021; Charbaji El-Kassem et al., 2021; Gordon, 2021; Kubalkova, 2021; McCarty, 2021; Peters et al., 2020; Soltovets et al., 2021; Toufique, 2021).

The Nature of Electronic Profiling and Its Impact

We asked participants whether an electronic profile affected the effectiveness of learning engagement. The results are presented in **Table 2**. The results in **Table 2** show that 95,24% of Bachelor's and 91.3% of Master's program students, with a slight difference, are indifferent to electronic profiles containing images other than personal identification. Meanwhile, the offensive and interfering "effect" of such profiles is noted by 2, 86%, and 8.7% of respondents. When polling alums, a slightly different picture is observed since this group of respondents has already gained experience interacting with employers and is familiar with the business etiquette of the digital environment, being more aware of its impact.

Table 2. Results on the nature of electronic profiling and Its Impact on the educational process

	Indifferent, I do not care	% of the respondents' replies	Interferes, insults, distracts from occupation	% of the respondents' replies
Bachelor students	100	95, 24%	3	2,86%
Master's students	42	91,3%	4	8,7%
Alumni	16	80%	4	20%
Teachers	8	13,33%	52	86,67%
Administration staff	18	75%	6	25%

Table 3. Participants' satisfaction with verbal culture in the digital education environment

	Indifferent, I do not care	% of the respondents' replies	Interferes, insults, distracts from occupation	% of the respondents' replies
Bachelor students	103	46.6%	3	2,86%
Master's students	45	53.3%	4	8,7%
2020 Alumni	20	80%	4	20%
Teachers	60	96.6%	52	86,67%
Administration staff	28	57.1%	6	25%

Nonetheless, a significant number, 80%, continue to show indifference, which speaks of the considerable freedom of the current digital environment. The administration staff is also quite loyal to "informal" profiles. Only 25% of them focus on such a profile as a hindrance. At the same time, we found a negative attitude of teachers toward shocking or even neutral avatars. 86.67% indicate their negative impact on learning. In personal conversations during the questionnaire, teachers report that they make repeated demands to replace the profile with one that would correspond to formal communication. However, in most cases, these requests do not find understanding from students, indicating the need to create unified intra-university rules of conduct on the Web.

Verbal Culture in Digital Communication

Of the 103 responding Bachelor's students, 46 (46.6%) expressed their dissatisfaction with the level of verbal and behavioral culture; for Master's students, the indicator is slightly higher - 24 people (53.33%) out of 45 respondents. Among alums, the percentage increases significantly: 16 (80%) out of 20. This fact can probably be explained by age and work experience. Among the staff, 16 (57.14%) out of 28 expressed dissatisfaction, perhaps explained by professional administrators' impartiality and lack of emotionality (see **Table 3**). The highest result is shown by a questionnaire of teachers: 58 (96.67%) out of 60. In our opinion, this result can be explained by the fact that modern teachers have a strong tradition of the hierarchy of teacher-student relationships, and violation of this paradigm causes an acute adverse reaction. Thus, most respondents noted problems in this area and mentioned a need for more respect when their virtual space intersects with the space of communication partners. Of the 270 respondents, with 14 not responding, 162 called the verbal component an ethical norm (63.28%). The respondents named the problems of information reliability, the primary source of information, falsification, and substitution of examination papers, the substitution of the student's personality (when in large groups, another person answers under someone else's avatar), and some others.

Fraud and Falsification in the Virtual Education Space

We asked the participants who were responsible for the existence/elimination of these problems. **Table 4** clearly shows that most respondents favor the university's control in each reference group. In the interviews, students expressed their opinions that it is impossible to establish 100% effective control over fraud problems. The students are not interested in obtaining a diploma at any cost. Therefore, the best control is their honesty and self-respect. However, students are concerned about the lack of proper control and effective mechanisms for teachers and staff. This option allows us to assert that there need to be more norms of internal morality in this area, but a regulated code of ethics is needed.

Table 4. Results on liability for fraud and falsification in the virtual education space

	Bachelor students	Master's students	Alumni	Teachers	Staff
Responsibility of control by the university	95	28	14	50	17
Personal responsibility of the student	15	18	6	10	9

Table 5. Results on confidentiality of personal data and electronic control in the virtual education space

	Bachelor students	Master's students	Alumni	Teachers
Are you worried about the safety of your data?	72	40	17	40
Are you indifferent to the confidentiality of information?	15	6	3	20
Are you opposed to electronic monitoring and recording of virtual lessons, as they infringe on your rights?	100	42	20	52

Table 6. The impact of digital ethics and etiquette on the quality of the educational process

	Bachelor students	Master's students	Alumni	Teachers	Staff
Yes	54 (51,43%)	28 (60,87%)	16 (80%)	57 (95%)	18 (69,23%)
No	39 (37,12%)	8 (17,39%)	4 (20%)	3 (5%)	6(23,08%)
Difficult to answer	12 (11,43%)	10 (27,74%)	0	0	2(7,69%)

Some researchers consider the introduction of digital ethical rules inappropriate and call this approach unproductive (Sanromán et al., 2015; Shaidullina, 2018) since every human being is a priori bearer of morality. Thus, as reported by Cifuentes-Muñoz (2019), digital ethics in the educational system is an ethical control of the virtual space in a given college, presented in the form of an ethical code based on the moral norms of behavior of the classical system of human values.

Privacy and Confidentiality of Personal Information and Data

Table 5 shows the results on personal data confidentiality and electronic control in the virtual education space. The data shows that most respondents are concerned about personal data protection and oppose electronic control. Despite the apparent tendency of modern youth to live "for the show," many students express their reluctance to show their photos or interviews on university social platforms. Teachers also represent a similar opinion about "excessive psychological pressure" when recording the educational process. The respondents raised questions about the "ethics" of such records, the possible excessive control of views and ways of expressing them, and the lack of privacy of actions. Some questionnaire participants (whether lawyers or trainees in the profession) refer to e-monitoring as an "extension of restrictive practices" and categorize it as unethical in the digital environment.

Digital Ethics and Etiquette Norms

Results of participants' responses to whether noncompliance with digital ethics and etiquette standards affects educational quality and outcomes are given in **Table 6**. As shown in the data above, more than half of undergraduates (51.43%) and graduates (60.87%) believe that digital ethics is directly related to the quality of education. A questionnaire of alums and teachers gives significantly higher scores: 80% and 95%, respectively. The staff, who cannot assess the quality and results, also note this connection - 69.23%. It should be noted that among students who are younger than the other participants and have less experience with pedagogical interaction on the network, the percentage of participants who believe that digital ethics does not affect the quality is relatively high: 37.12%.

Ignorance and Non-Compliance with Digital Ethics

Results on participants' responses to whether the pandemic has exacerbated education quality problems due to ignorance and non-compliance with digital ethics revealed that 100% of the participants from all five groups answered positively. All participants mentioned a strong stressful state, insomnia due to a significant amount of time spent with electronic equipment, and the increased scale of work, and emphasized that in a state of this stress, a comfortable, educational environment, empathy, and respect for communication partners play a crucial role. According to studies (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020), social restrictions and

Table 7. Results regarding attitudes toward the creation of a code of digital ethics in education

	Bachelor students	Master's students	Alumni	Teachers	Staff
Yes	62 (59%)	34 (73,9%)	18 (80%)	58 (96,6%)	20 (76,9%)
No	37 (35,2%)	9 (19,5%)	2 (20%)	2 (3,3%)	6 (23,0%)
Difficult to answer	6 (5,7%)	3 (6,5%)	0	0	0

prohibitions have led to a sharp increase in stress in the educational environment. In humanitarian emergencies, such as the current pandemic, social interaction has a dramatic paradigm shift that negatively impacts mental health. This impact cannot be estimated in the short term (Ribot et al., 2020). According to WHO, psychosocial stress is exacerbated by uncertainty about the end of the pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020). The educational processes, dynamics, and personal growth within them can minimize the psychosocial pressures of the pandemic (Intriago-Loor & Calle-García, 2021).

Creating a Digital Ethics Code

We asked the participants whether creating an intra-university digital ethics code is necessary. The results are given in **Table 7**. We see that almost 100% of teachers and a relatively high proportion of graduates (80%) and masters (73.9%), as well as the (76.9%), are positive about the proposal to create a code of digital ethics. The share of undergraduates who gave a positive answer is more than half (59%). The percentage of respondents who have not decided on their choice is tiny.

We can conclude that the vast majority of participants in the educational process see the code of digital ethics as an effective tool that can regulate the interaction on the digital educational platforms of RUDN University and in the accompanying digital environments (corporate email and alike). One institution of power further regulates ethical norms and the code of conduct and interaction between the participants in the educational process. In our case, the university is derived from people's behavior. However, the code is formalized, publicized, and endowed with generally binding force. Each person has their ethics, but there are norms that all people, the majority or some part of them, voluntarily share. These norms are usually not formalized but are executed voluntarily. As a hypothesis of the study, we believed that the university code, referring to ethics, can endow its norms with a coercive force. They should be generally recognized standards, but this is not always the case; sometimes, the Law imposes the ethics of the majority or even the minority. It reduces the effectiveness of regulation and sometimes causes its rejection. Moreover, as long as a person exists, the differentiation of ethical norms, different degrees of recognition, and deviant behavior persist.

In real space, etiquette behavior is always aimed at recognizing the value of the Other; etiquette is considered only when behavior conditioned by the value set is formalized through the etiquette norm and directed at the Other. Their order can vary depending on the situation and social conditions. It is possible to combine and superimpose these hierarchies. However, this scheme is the basis for constructing all the rules of etiquette behavior (Kozyakova, 2016). Being formal at first glance, Etiquette norms contribute to the "humanization of a human," i.e., perform a moral function, since they are focused on the humanization of relations and culture of behavior in society (Volchenko, 1982, p. 242-243). In the digital space, digital ethics, reflecting a certain extent, the hierarchical structures of its analog equivalent, takes on more democratic forms. At the same time, in the virtual practice of the educational community, partnerships should be built on the principles of equality, mutual respect, and consideration of mutual interests while, in our opinion, recognizing a certain degree of freedom of communication in the interpersonal and group levels of interaction, it is necessary to prescribe those rules that must be strictly observed: the rules of correspondence; literacy of writing the text regardless of the format (email or correspondence in the messenger); privacy; respect for personal digital space, and some others. We also see the need to create a code of ethics because using the same means of communication for personal and educational purposes has blurred the boundaries between personal and professional. Therefore, one should be very careful concerning reputation issues and the ethical behavior of participants in the educational process.

We believe that the influence of the university formalizing the norms of ethics should increase. In that case, we can designate it as a particular unit of a public institution that will express and formalize ethical norms, for example, oblige participants in the educational process to familiarize themselves preliminarily and sign a kind of user agreement, i.e., a code of digital ethical standards allowing access to the platform and

educational services. In the context of internet communication in the educational space of the university, on the one hand, the subjects turn out to be freer from the conventions of fundamental social roles and interact more on an equal footing, more openly and to a greater extent preserve their inviolability. For example, you may not get up and greet the teacher; you may not turn on the camera and hide some external flaws, thereby increasing the comfort of your existence in this lesson.

On the other hand, digital communication increases the number of falsifications and violations of individual rights, dignity, and others. Thus, a student cannot come to class in a torn T-shirt but allows himself to be portrayed in this way in an avatar, which the communication participants have to see. The limiting factors here may be the institution's user manuals and codes of ethics. Undoubtedly, the development of information ethics was influenced by the current socio-cultural situation, characterized by the extreme level of value pluralism and relativism. To a certain extent, the Internet space is perceived as an alternative to authentic communication, a sphere with a high level of liberalism. Insufficient development of the normative rules of internet communication and difficulties in monitoring their implementation create conditions for a significant diffusion of the ethical foundations of electronic culture. Another factor contributing to the growth of abusive behavior on the web is blurring the boundaries between the real and the virtual. It leaves an imprint on communication and behavior in the virtual environment. A person can more easily violate written and unwritten rules (be it the norms of language, subordination, and others). What factors primarily determine the ethics of behavior in the digital environment, external or internal? From the standpoint of internalism, the primary regulators have been and remain the moral values of the subject of communication formed in the real world. Most users adhere to the same behavior model in the virtual sphere as in the real one. However, as mentioned, the virtual sphere is characterized by greater relativism. Externalism is associated with searching for external factors that determine moral behavior, for example, as in real life: public support, recognition, and respect (which are confirmed by approving comments and assessments). Given the global dissemination of information, this effect can be multiplied. At the same time, external factors can also be the reasons for unethical behavior. The same massive support or hype can stimulate the desire to attract attention at any cost.

Thus, in the etiquette norms adapted concerning the preparation and conduct of classes in the distance format of the university environment, we are talking about how to effectively use the digital form for educational purposes. In digital etiquette, the value of the other does not lose its significance, but it has not only been direct but also mediated by new technologies. We believe that students can and should participate in creating a code of digital ethics, taking into account the specifics of professional training in Law at RUDN University. Probably, the code should not become a rigid set of norms but a kind of conceptual framework that will provide a basis for reflection, assessing decisions that all participants in the educational process, and become a kind of tool that will help to form professional and educational responsibility without infringing on the principle of personal freedom and the quality for which the Spanish language reserves a term "corresponsabilidad" referring to the responsibility shared with other people. Ethics means freedom, responsibility, and mutual responsibility (Betancur, 2016). Of course, we are not talking about any "punitive measures" for violating specific provisions but about a pedagogical tool for improving the quality of virtual education, which should be the adaptation of ethical and moral norms.

As the analyzed data showed, some research participants do not see the practicality of creating a digital ethics code. Here are some opinions as an example:

> "Will make additional regulation of actions, limiting the freedom sought-after by the young generation, while the principles of correct behavior must be laid within each person a priori. The code will become a set of commandments for "good behavior," it will turn into a "straitjacket" into a prescription - good/bad. At the same time, the educational system should bring up a free personality since a demeanor is an individual decision."

> "Regardless of the existence of a code, the principles of harmonious coexistence should prevail in the virtual space and, in the words of one of the respondents, in "educational scenarios." The higher education system is welcome by people who already possess the competencies necessary for the interaction."

"Ethical norms will turn into a tool, leading to dehumanization."

"It will introduce the character of an "entrepreneurial system" into the educational process, where the code is interpreted as a set of norms."

"If the code does not become a part of the person himself and does not turn into his human and social practice, it will remain "dead letters," a formal requirement."

"Despite a certain percentage of negative comments, most questionnaires recognize the need to create a digital ethics code. The respondents name the ethical requirements that, in their opinion, the participants in the educational process must meet."

For teachers, these are:
- clearly understand the needs of the learner;
- motivate the educational activities of students and organize the communication process;
- update and improve the materials of the taught discipline;
- organize the education that is not split between life and context;
- respect students' right to privacy and avoid derogatory comments;
- polite and respectful treatment of students, tolerance of opinions and s, and the ability to listen to the student;
- a fair assessment of the results;
- track and suppress unworthy behavior;
- possession of technical competencies;
- to know the problems of the students to give them personalized consultations;
- to provide a climate of empathy in the classroom;
- striving for excellence in the profession;
- The relationship between a teacher and student will mutually enrich knowledge and skills.

For students, it was named:
- polite and respectful treatment of all participants in the process;
- tolerance to opinions, the ability to listen to teachers and friends;
- possession of technical competencies;
- honesty in writing tests and examination papers in the preparation of other educational materials;
- respect for copyright;
- the pursuit of excellence.

Thus, we believe that the ethical issues facing the university can be formulated as requirements for moral regulators or a particular code of ethics in the following issues: collection of data about participants in the educational process and their use: most of the data are personal; data subjects will be concerned about what their scope will be and how secure the data will be; transfer of data about participants of the educational process to third parties: how ethical is it to provide, for example, potential employers with information about the level of competencies formed by poorly performing students; the use of video and other monitoring tools: participants in the educational process will feel that they are under surveillance ("long-term surveillance"), which will infringe on their freedom and independence; the formation of recommendations for building an individual educational trajectory based on the data of various tests and additional factors should not reinforce racist or sexist stereotypes, create grounds for discrimination.

The ethical code will prevent possible ethical conflicts, develop algorithms for behavior in the digital educational environment, consider its situational nature, develop criteria for digital ethics, consider possible changes and determine the directions of ethical education in digital ethics. The task of ethical standards is to prevent problems, not punish violations that have already been committed. It can be assumed that digital ethical programs will be developed over time, with the help of which ethical assessment and ethical control

in the digital space will be carried out. The development of these programs will have to be dealt with by vast specialists: lawyers, human rights champions, sociologists, conflictologists, psychologists, specialists in applied ethics, and narrow specialists from different areas of the digital space. Digital ethics has broad prospects in education; perhaps, it will become the only effective means of ethical regulation in the new digital educational environment. We believe that the digital ethics code will increase social trust in the virtual form of education.

CONCLUSION

The following results were obtained according to the research questions. First, the attitude of students, graduates, and teachers toward creating a code of digital ethics within the university are generally favorable. Second, all participants in the educational process note a direct link between digital ethical norms and the quality of distance education. This research has shown the high relevance of digital ethics in distance learning technologies for the teaching staff and the student environment. Along with the transition to distance educational technologies, some ethical problems emerged: digital literacy (technical competence), issues of organizing the educational process and structuring material and communication, visual aspect (participant's image, and some others), verbal aspect, fraud, and falsification in Networks, privacy, and electronic content. The following results were obtained according to the research questions. First, the attitude of students, graduates, and faculty towards creating a code of digital ethics within the college is generally favorable. Second, all those involved in the educational process note a direct relationship between digital ethical norms and the quality of distance education. This research has shown the high relevance of digital ethics in distance education technologies for faculty and the student environment. With the transition to distance education technologies, some ethical issues have emerged: digital literacy (technical competence), issues of organization of the educational process and structuring of material and communication, visual aspect (image of the participant and some others), verbal aspect, fraud and forgery in networks, privacy, and control of electronic content. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the transition to distance education was the way out of this situation. The pace of ethics developed in the information world lags far behind the rapid development of technologies. Ethical principles and norms in the digital sphere cannot arise spontaneously; their development must be managed, as their absence contributes to the growing instability of social systems in general and the educational system in particular. An essential step for developing the ethics of electronic culture is elaborating ethical codes for higher education organizations and including "information ethics" in the curriculum. Underestimating the importance of ethical issues in virtual education can cause direct and indirect harm.

The understanding that distance education is an essential part of a college education is now supported both at the level of public awareness and from the governmental side. In this regard, a systematic analysis of the problem areas of distance education, including legal and ethical aspects, becomes one of the main tasks of higher education. It is imperative to analyze and evaluate the degree of adequacy of specific measures taken by higher education institutions to develop and implement programs of comprehensive modernization of educational services, as well as their consistency with the tasks of state educational reforms in the framework of priority areas of socio-economic development of Russia. At the same time, the analysis should recognize the importance of value orientations, moral guidelines, specific requirements and expectations of both society and individuals, and consider the socio-psychological climate prevailing in education's cultural and historical traditions. All these factors should form the basis for the development of the digital transformation of society and its educational system. Digital ethics should regulate relationships and interactions in developing an electronic culture in various areas where the natural sphere is increasingly merging with information resources. We believe that the crisis of COVID-19 should be a new impetus for higher education institutions, a stimulus for pedagogical innovation, research, and transformation of educational activities, and the draft Code of Digital Ethics can become one of these innovative projects and a kind of "pivot" for all participants in the educational process to build their professional and academic careers. We hope these recommendations will improve the quality of distance education and bring Russian universities closer to the model of an advanced digital university with high global competitiveness.

LIMITATIONS

The study has several limitations. First, the study was limited because it was conducted remotely under Covid 19 pandemic conditions. Second, this study used quantitative data and interviews to collect the data. The number and type of questions used in this study may lead to a limitation in evaluating the results. Therefore, we suggest researchers consider using other data collection tools in further studies. Third, the research was conducted in Russia with undergraduate and master's students. Further research could be conducted to include more participants.

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