Ethics Paper: Important Notification or a Disruptive Distraction

One accelerating concern of the modern age is that of technology and how it is distracting people from important tasks through distracting notifications. In order to understand how to properly design an app that does not take away ones focus during important events one must discuss what makes an app engaging versus distracting, what rules should be instated to protect users, and why instating these rules is beneficiary.

A humongous part of this conflict is understanding the difference between engagement and distraction. When something is engaging it draws favorable attention towards itself (Engaging Definition). When something is distracting it takes one’s attention and directs it away (Distraction Definition). Essentially, an engaging app will take the user’s attention towards a topic, and work towards keeping that user focused on said topic; meanwhile, a distracting app will take a user’s attention and put it elsewhere. Apps that are too distracting can lead to horrible incidents, such as car accidents which in 2020 resulted in 3,142 deaths (Distracted Driving).

This leads to discussing what solutions can be taken to fix distracting notifications. Apple combated distracting notifications causing distracted driving by integrating a Driving Focus setting (Use the Driving Focus). This setting allowed users to choose if they want to see notifications while driving, who they receive allow notifications from, and if they wanted automated replies (Use the Driving Focus). For future apps, there are additional options to utilize against disruptive notifications. These options could include a setting that lets you only receive notifications if one’s device is on. This would stop users from being disrupted during social gatherings or work. Another setting could be one that only notifies the user once the user has opened the app sending out the notification. This would allow people to enable GPS’s without being bombarded by notifications. The process for deciding when users receive notifications would be completely controlled by the user; however, the settings could be on by default to further entice the options. The only notifications that would bypass these anti-disruption settings would be emergency warning notifications such as kidnappings or floods. It is important for these systems to have the user’s best interest in mind. Computer professionals are responsible for maintaining technical excellence, social effects on operators, users, and the public (Loui). The options suggested will help professionals commit to health, safety, and welfare in accordance with the eight principles, which are rooted towards helping the public, client and employer, product, judgement, management, profession, colleagues, and self (Loui).

These suggestions should help minimize the impact notifications have on distracting users. Its important notifications aren’t distracting, and this is further shown through scripture. For example, a parallel could be drawn between notifications and Matthew 5:13. Matthew 5:13 states that “if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be salty again” “It is no longer good for anything” (The Holy Bible, Matthew 5:13). Notifications parallel to this scripture because an abundance of notifications is the same as saltless salt. Having too many notifications serves no positive purpose, as it just distracts the user from important tasks, just like saltless salt serves no purpose, since it would add no flavor. Therefore, having non-distracting, meaningful notifications are necessary to have. Having the options to prevent distracting notifications being optional is also important as Corinthians states “What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church” (The Holy Bible, 1 Corinthians 5:12). Essentially, it’s important to let others dictate if they want to utilize the settings, and God will judge them accordingly.

Overall, it’s important that notifications aren’t disruptive, as it can take away from many important aspects in life. This is apparent through discussing what makes an app engaging versus distracting, what rules should be instated to protect users, and why these rules are beneficiary.

Works Cited

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