To: Mary Moreno

From: Gaurav Gireesh

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Re: CSCI 598 Writing ASSIGNMENT- 2

Code of Ethics must drive the output of the Computer Science industry. Any software or product that is marketed must stand firm on ethical grounds. In my opinion, the software companies should consider ethics as a primary benchmark; the extent of enforcement may vary according to individual end users.

Sharing a personal experience, one day I was surprised to see my itinerary come up on my phone right when I was supposed to travel. The flight details, reporting time, the lay-over period were all there including my hotel bookings. However, I don’t remember storing them on my phone. Then I realized a handful of Google apps on my cellphone conjured it all up. My E-mail client with my travel details and booking confirmations from hotels and so on, were picked up by the Google calendar and reminders were set. Google has been a market leader in the field of technology. The scope of the company spans across several tools. From phones to e-mails, shopping, you have applications built and marketed by Google! However, when a person begins to use the apps, what actually a person is signing up for, is hidden in the fine print behind the ”I agree” button. This fine print is getting finer and more comprehensive, hence lesser number of people taking the pains to go through the entire agreement. Considering it a legally binding disclosure, may feel immoral, unjust and ultimately, unethical.

Google has this single-sign on feature which signs you in automatically on all these applications. I open up my e-mail account, magically, based on my e-mail content, I see suggestive ads! This might be a happy surprise for a few; however, it forces you to re-think whether or not, my e-mails are “personal”. I browse for a few household items online, the next time I shop on Google store, I see latest deals on the items I last looked up This is convenient but it is clear Google keeps track of all my search history, schedule, my travel itinerary, my eating habits, likes-dislikes and what not! I feel comfortable with it, but unlike me, many may opine that this is prying on their online activities. Now we are left with no choice but to trust the company brand name and credibility, hoping and praying that this does not end up in public domain. There have been humongous in cyber-attacks where security breaches are common.

Just because people do not take the pain to read the legal policy document before sign-up, and, having no intermediate option are forced to agree. Each person is a personality, with unique capacities of recognizing, discerning or judging one’s own thoughts as well as others. Suggesting a way to a person is okay, forcing a decision on a person is not. This, being an excellent marketing strategy, can also be interpreted as a way of forcing people to access they might be unwilling to subscribe to. People manage and adapt but certainly do not want hand-holding.

Cut-throat competition and reckless efforts to maximize profits drive ethics to the back seat. Personally, I feel this is unacceptable and above all, immoral. Immediate monetary gains will dwindle in the longer run. Google carries a huge brand name and the confidence and trust are key factors to the market it has. Even if a fraction of population feels these additional perks of suggestions are a little over-board, the reputation is at stake. So, providing users with a word of caution, as to what is at stake, is a necessity today, just like the statutory warning on packs of cigarettes. Users should know what they are signing up for.

The computer science engineering discipline should, therefore, adhere to the ACM code of ethics. Additionally, Emotional Quotient (EQ) is a primary ingredient to consider. Irrespective of the scale of money and business involved, the companies should connect at a personal level: how comfortable, assured, secured and confident an individual feels while using a technology. There should be a generic code that companies benchmark. But the defining parameters may vary among individuals and a generic policy may not apply to all. Hence, choice to choose amongst them, should be a user’s right. So, while wielding power, the firm should also shoulder responsibility.

Hence, like other professional disciplines, Computer Science should also adhere to the code of Ethics in all the software or technical solutions it proposes.