Mike Mirando

FINAL EXAM

MEDST 255

**Essay Question I.**

**New technologies have always produced unintended consequences. One result of this would be how UX designers and engineers face a number of new ethical challenges today with the rise of technology regarding our interaction with it and dependence on it.**

**What is the primary job of a UX designer? Discuss the principle ethical quandaries faced by UX designers. What is persuasive design? Discuss the ways you feel this positively and/or negatively affect user behavior.**

A UX designer, or User Experience Designer, is a person (or team) tasked with creating and perfecting the user experience of a product. Whether they’re creating the overall look of a smartphone via designing the phone itself, or creating the UI on an app, a UX designer is primarily focused on the relationship between the user and the product. The position of UX designer is very complex and multifaceted, with some UX designers working on an already established app (like Facebook or Twitter) and some working on an app or program from the group up. In either case, ethical and moral challenges can arise, especially in regards to social media addiction.

UX designers in the beta testing stage create personas and storyboards in order to understand their finished product in the hands of users. UX designers are aware of their platforms specific demographic, down to their specific age and location, even income. The personas created by UX designers mimic real users, and allow the UX designers to predict user habits once the product is finalized. Storyboards act as a sketched scenario or role play that helps visualize steps a user might take when encountered with a problem with the product, like a pre-release troubleshooting exercise. The ethical quandary here relies with the fact that UX designers, with so much user data already, steer users in a certain way of thinking, even before the product is released.

Now post launch, a UX designer would love for a person to spend as much time as possible on their application or program. UX designers work very hard on the overall “flow” and look of a UI, or user interface, of an application, think Facebook’s timeline or your Instagram feed. The designers use tools such as endless scrolling in order to keep you on the app. The ethical dilemma comes in when advertisers are involved. Because advertisers are paying for their ad space on your timeline, they get priority over posts that you and your Facebook friends would post. The morally gray job for a UX designer is to design a persuasive design that disguises the ads enough so you don’t notice how intrusive they actually are. And of course to try and get you to click or share the ad, in order to spread it even further. This negatively effects user behavior, due to the “culture of likes” surrounding social media. UX designers in charge of advertisements on a platform can manipulate the ad to make it seem popular or fashionable, and social media elitists, or addicts, will go out and purchase a product, or purchase it online even, and go back to scrolling. Even posting about the product they bought on social media, therefore continuing the cycle. The worst part is that for the most part, users don’t think about the behind the scenes, unaware that a person, or team of people, are directly responsible for their exposure to advertisers, and the fact that their data is shared directly to advertisers. Social media users, mostly all users in the digital age, have a complex relationship with personal privacy. On one hand, all users give up the illusion of privacy by simply using social media in the first place. However, UX designers have to deal with the privacy of all their platform’s users all at once, which is delicate, as well as morally questionable. Coupled with pressure from advertising companies, UX designers can choose to see your personal information as nothing but a group of numbers, and simply sell it off without a second thought. With the news of the Facebook breach, people are just beginning to realize the importance of their data online, and how little privacy everyone already has.

**Essay Question II.**

**The rise of digital technology has had a massive impact in the international creative community. Small digital video cameras and editing software have made it easier than ever for aspiring filmmakers to make a movie. Inexpensive recording software has done the same for musicians. Digital photography now rivals the traditional chemical process for resolution, while image manipulation is simpler and more sophisticated than ever before. Ultimately, the Internet provides a worldwide platform for artists of all stripes to share his/her work.**

**What are some of the core characteristics of the digital world? Discuss how these have impacted the arts. What are some specific developments that have impacted artists? In what ways are they unrewarding and in what ways are they beneficial?**

If there is one core characteristic of the digital world, it is that things are always changing. Digital trends move at a breakneck speed, and it is easy for the internet to come together and be consumed by a single piece of media, if only for one day. This ever-changing speed has affected almost all aspects of the digital world, to articles becoming shorter and full of clickable links, to twitter culture, reading in little tweets and consuming smaller and smaller bits of text, never the whole story. Many people have begun to say that in this age, television is dying. While most point to Netflix as the killer of television, YouTube is, in my opinion, television’s greatest opponent. The rise of digital tech, and cheap and easily accessible programming, has led to a culture of *prosumers*, someone who consumes and produces media at the same time. Prosumers can be inspired by media and turn around and create something in record time. Nowadays, if you set your mind to it, you can do it. If you want to be an artist, there’s free programs out there and hours and hours of educational videos at your fingertips. Same goes for filmmaking, or music production. This truly is the age of instant gratification, and instant information. The problem is that while everyone is online sharing their own creations, this creates pressure on the creator, and because everyone out there is consuming media as well as putting out their own, it is easy to see someone else’s work, someone younger or someone “better”, and you can easily get discouraged.

However, I honestly believe that the benefits fully outweigh all the potential downfalls of being creative in the digital age. Filmmakers can create something, edit it, and use special effects all from the comfort of their own home, at little to no cost. You can never fully understand what could happen when you put yourself out there. Coupled with social media, the digital age is a forefront for creative media unlike anything that came before. Take Twitter for example. Anyone can create a twitter account. Fake Twitter accounts have been around since the birth of Twitter itself. What’s new, and far more interesting, is the combination of narrative and social media. In the horror web series Marble Hornets, which was uploaded on YouTube from June 2009 – June 2014, the main character Jay, had a Twitter account. The Twitter account was real, and fully functional, in the sense that “Troy” posted tweets and interacted with people, on the outside, you’d never realize that the account was fictional. What’s interesting and creative is that plot and narrative of Marble Hornets would take place on Twitter as well as YouTube, making the series more of a “social media series” than a “web series hosted on YouTube”. This type of media is definitely more widespread now in 2018, especially in the field of amateur horror, directly inspired by Marble Hornets. This type of media is only possible due to today’s digital age.

While Marble Hornets was a passion project of several college aged film students, and didn’t primarily make them any amounts of money, it did influence an entire culture, having created the “Slender man” online mythos, and inspiring dozens of similarly made horror series online. On the other hand, being a digital creator can also lead to a career. Take RJ Palmer, a concept artist at the video game company Ubisoft, who just recently worked as a content designer for the upcoming film *Detective Pikachu*. Palmer, in 2012, at the age of 22, posted realistic Pokémon fan art on the popular website Deviantart. Now he is working as a designer on the official, feature length live action Pokémon film. Someone involved with the film simply googled “realistic Pokémon”, and due to the nature of the internet, and simply due to some luck, Palmer’s fan art came up, and he was offered a job. This type of incredible luck is only possible to the digital age, and the culture of creating art in the digital age.

**Essay Question III.**

**Human enhancement technology converges nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science to improve human performance, attempting to temporarily or permanently overcome the current limitations of the human body through natural or artificial means.**

**Discuss some specific developments in human enhancement technology. Do you have trouble with the idea of these technologies making us stronger, faster, better? Do these advancements come at any cost? Such as privacy issues or a question of morals? What technological innovation do you think we need most and why?**

When it comes to the topic of futuristic technology, it becomes very hard to talk about specifics, as the future is always changing. When it comes to the topic of Human Enhancement, it’s weird to me personally to think that the science is primarily already here. Human enhancement as a whole connects nanotech, biotech, information technology and cognitive science all in one package, and I think that that is hard to grasp, in one complete package. While I have no trouble with the idea of it all, I have to admit the promise of it, or the “selling” of human enhancement, is very much in the future. When you think of human enhancement, especially the word “cyborg” you would think of metal and skin, maybe something along the lines of a Terminator. The reality is that the “futuristic” ideology of human enhancement, one that has been glamorized in popular culture for generations, and the reality of human enhancement in 2018, simply doesn’t match. I think this disparity between expectations is what is stalling the progress, or at least the media coverage, of human enhancement in 2018, and why many people like myself were unaware of many scientific breakthroughs regarding human enhancement.

Look at the case of Michael Chorost, self-proclaimed Cyborg. Chorost went from being completely blind, to being able to hear again, due to a cochlear implant. The implant is completely digital, and Chorost wouldn’t be able to hear if not for modern day computing and scientific devices. That does effectively make him a cyborg, however, not like one the public would instantly recognize. Chorost does speculate on the future of human enhancement, and proposes that true human enhancement will not enhance already human abilities, but give humans new abilities altogether. Chorost calls this “telempathy”, due to the complex relation of a human’s emotions, physic ability, and implanted devices.   
 While I think Chorost is correct in guessing a potential future for human enhancement, his “telempathy” comes with a lot of unchecked balances, such as personal space and privacy. What is privacy if someone can use a device to send signals to your brain? Could they read your thoughts, or get you to simply say anything, as a form of mind control? The possibilities are endless and border on fictional.

What I believe we need first and foremost in the scientific world today, is a way to better what humans already can do. Human enhancement in the way to make humans better, instead of make humans superhuman. For example, nanotech has already been hypothesized to revolutionize the medical field. With the encompassing belief of human enhancement, science could potentially enhance the thousands of civilians who have made it their life’s work to help others, such as EMT workers, doctors, surgeons, and firefighters. I believe that there is a use for human enhancement, beyond the selfishness of making yourself “better”. To combat the moral ambiguity of human enhancements in everyday life, they can be used to help others first and foremost, to eradicate disease and help impoverished nations all over the world, using questionable tech not for profit, but for the betterment of society.

Question 1:

<https://usabilitygeek.com/advertising-and-ux-relationship/>

McGowan, Sean, et al. “Advertising And UX: A Complex Relationship.” *Usability Geek*, 20 June 2017, usabilitygeek.com/advertising-and-ux-relationship/.

DeFelice, A. “255\_WEEK09\_UXD”. Kiely Room 315, Queens College, NY. 30 Oct 2018. Powerpoint/Lecture.

Question 2:

Stanley, Alyse. “This Artist's Realistic Pokémon Drawings Got Him a Job on 'Detective Pikachu'.” *The Daily Dot*, 22 Nov. 2018, <http://www.dailydot.com/parsec/realistic-pokemon-detective-pikachu/>.

MarbleHornets. “Marble Hornets.” *YouTube*, YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/user/MarbleHornets>. Location of Marble Hornets videos, publish from June 20th 2009 - June 20th 2014

///11v%. “ ///11v% (@Marblehornets).” *Twitter*, Twitter, 23 Aug. 2017, twitter.com/marblehornets?lang=en.

<http://twitter.com/marblehornets>

<http://marblehornets.wikidot.com/comprehensive-timeline>

“Marble Hornets.” *Theories - Marble Hornets*, marblehornets.wikidot.com/comprehensive-timeline. wikia of the entire connected plot of Marble Hornets, arranged into a timeline.

Question 3:

DeFelice, A. “255\_WEEK12\_UXD”. Kiely Room 315, Queens College, NY. 20 Nov 2018. Powerpoint/Lecture.

“Biography.” *Michael Chorost*, [michaelchorost.com/biography/](http://michaelchorost.com/biography).