

EthicsAssignment MPCSC 2025

TBA

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Question On June 9, 2011, Google released a "doodle" honoring **Les Paul**, which users quickly found addictive to play with. A third party, *RescueTime*, estimated that approximately **5.3 million hours** were spent playing this interactive game — equivalent to nearly eight human lifetimes.

<http://elgoog.im/guitar/>

1. Did the doodle make a positive contribution to the world?
2. Do engineers at Google have an obligation to consider this question before releasing the feature?
3. What principle(s) should they use to determine the answer?

Notable contribution The Doodle is a major successfull from engineers of Google. According to the statistics, it only needs 48 hours to achieve a 5.1 years of worth of music by the records from U.S users [1]. A software product can be considered as meaningful if it spread positive value, in this case, at least the history of music (which is as old as human history) is lengthened by amateur "composers" just by playing with a software. Further more, this doodle is originally made in honoring of Les Paul [2], a famous musician and an inventor, who shaped the modern electronic guitar. This work achieved both the "entertainment" and the "education" purpose. The year 2011 is the era of mobile game, hence there were many arcade game: Angry Bird, Fruit Ninja,... but they just simple comsumed people's time and phone's battery. Meanwhile, this Easter Egg spread the information as well as positive enrgeny by encouraging users to create and share their creation. Unlike gaming products from corps or companies, which always require players to spend money and time in an unobligated way (to keep your character strong, to obtain rare items,...), this mini game costed nothing. Even the estimation from ResureTime: nearly eight human lifetimes was spent, it is still a helpful one. At least, people sent music into the universe, not "games".

Obligation The answer is yes, engineers must consider the question about contribution of a product before releasing one. Because product is born to serve human needs and it also must not harm any people in any ways. That is the code of ethics for engineers. There is one truth about humanbeing curiosities: we always want to figure out every secrets of the nature and even to control the nature. That motivation helps civilization to achieve masterpieces time to time: from the first plane, the first landing on moon and now, we are reaching closer to an era that humans and intelligence machines can work together for a better future. But during that process, many experiments were misconducted, leading to unnecessary harm and suffering. One of the famous example is "The Stanford Prison Experiment" [3], a psychological experiment to examine the effects of situational variables on participants's reactions and behaviors. This experiment indeed contributed to the study of psychology, especially on how people react with surroundings (environment, authority,...). But during this simulation, the level of violence was uncontrollable, hence it was canceled on the 6th day. This case is a clear example about ethics in research, the conductor Zimbardo did not allow any participants to leave the experiment although they were told that they could. That's psychology, but software is not excluded since we are living in a digital society, every day activities are tied to the internet and of course, the software. These virtual products, if not controlled carefully, can provide misguided suggestions or even cause the social deprivation. Some researchers pointed out that the LLM (AI companion), a best example for modern product, can go wrong, even try to "satisfy" user's command by suggesting harmful actions [5] [6]

Principles There are several principles they should use to determine the answer. The first thing is public. Because engineers shall act consistently with the public interest, the created product must lie closely in the "interest" zone of majority. Next is "product", since any released software should be distributed to user at its finest from of completion to meet the highest professional standards as possible. A flawed product might harm users, as the infamous "Therac-25" [4] with a programming error (race condition) that resulted in giving patients radiation doses that should not be consumed (hundreds of times greater than acceptable level).

References

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