**Module 3: Critical Thinking**

**Act Utilitarianism**

Act Utilitarianism states that a person’s act is morally right if and only if it produces the best possible results in that specific situation [1]. In other words an action is morally right if it leads to the greatest amount of good. Sometimes the philosophy of act utilitarianism gets referred to as for the greater good. Meaning someone could conduct a small morally incorrect action if it leads to a greater morally right outcome. Thus, everything is for the greater good.

Businesses are taking advantage of user data to better understand and improve the user experience. An article from the University of Pennsylvania states, “Every time you interact with the company, you should expect that the company is recording that information and connecting it to you.”[3]. Meaning businesses use the data to analyze customer behavior in order to boost user engagement [2]. This is done by customizing the experience for each user. Which is calculated based on the user’s data. The problem is not everyone wants their data to be used in such a way. Therefore is it moral of companies to take advantage of user data to create a better experience?

Under the shroud of Act Utilitarianism, anything can be moral if it leads to the greater good. Thus, is it moral to take advantage of user data in order to create the greater good outcome of improving the user experience with data driven insights? Since the action leads to the greater good, act utilitarianism would say it is moral to harness user data in order to improve and create a better experience for all. Taking advantage of user data for the greater good is just one example of act utilitarianism in the realm of software development.

Another example of act utilitarianism in the software world is the open source community. “Open source software (OSS) is software that is distributed with its source code, making it available for use, modification, and distribution with its original rights.” [4]. For this example we will specifically be looking at open source software in relation to operating systems. Linux is an operating system that follows the open source ideals. Linux allows anyone to use, tweak, and distribute their operating systems. An example of the opposite would be Windows. Windows is not an open-source operating system. With both styles of operating systems which would be morally correct under act utilitarianism?

Both Linux and Windows are great operating systems but which is more for the greater good? Linux is lightweight and free. Meaning anyone, even on a serious budget, can access and use Linux. Additionally, since Linux is lightweight, it can work better on older computers. Thus breathing life into old hardware. Windows cost money to use and requires more hardware to run. Therefore, older computers may run into issues running Windows. Furthermore, no one outside of Microsoft can access Windows source code, in order to try and customize it for themselves. Windows may be more popular with personal computers due to its business applications and gaming abilities. However, Linux is by far the most used operating system when all types of computer operating systems are considered. Therefore, under act utilitarianism Linux would be more for the greater good when compared to non-open source operating systems such as Windows.

In summary, act utilitarianism is an action for the greater good outcome of a situation. Data mining is used by companies to create a better user experience. Thus, being for the greater good. Also there are open source operating systems such as Linux. Open source software such as Linux strives to produce results for the greater good, as well. With those two we have two examples of act utilitarianism within the realm of software development.

**References**

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[3] Your data is shared and sold... what’s being done about it? Knowledge at Wharton. (n.d.-b). https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/data-shared-sold-whats-done/

[4] What is open source software and how does it work?. Synopsys. (n.d.). https://www.synopsys.com/glossary/what-is-open-source-software.html