Zachary Goldman

MEDST 255 New Technologies Final Exam

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Question 1

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.

The primary job of any decent UX designer is to create an engaging interface that is both intuitive, and easy to understand/use. What this means is that lets say someone has created a new website. How usable is it? Obviously the person who created the website will know where all of its functions are, and how to navigate it like a pro, but what about someone who is brand new to the site. How easy will it be for them to pick up how it operates? Now let’s say you’ve made a website that can easily be understood, the next problem is how are people going to abuse it? Take YouTube for example. The Paul Levinson book mentions an example on YouTube where these students recorded themselves beating up a classmate and posted it on the website. “YouTube, unfortunately has given physical bullies an additional inducement by providing a worldwide audience…” I too have had been harassed on YouTube. When I was about ten years old I discovered a helpful glitch in a popular iOS game called “imob”. I wanted to share my discovery with the world so I posted a YouTube video about it. I had unfortunately made the mistake of wearing my Yamuka (Jewish head cover) while I was recording the video, and for every comment that was thanking me for the information, there were five that were anti-Semitic to say the least. This raises the problem of who is to blame for people potentially abusing the intended functions of a website, like YouTube. Surely the people who made the site did not intend for it to become a haven of hate, and racism, so what is to be done? It is the same on websites like twitter and Facebook. So many comments are just hate filled attempts at being mean for the sake of being mean, but what can be done if it is human nature? Obviously people who say things on too radical a scale are supposed to be banned from these websites, but they can almost always just create another account, and start spreading the hate all over again. There are also the ethical dilemmas on the developer’s side as well. I would be remiss if I did not also point out the fact that due to the nature of smartphones, your location can be known at all times by someone, which is very upsetting to a lot of people. There is also the fact that even if the programs design is to be used for something like monitoring someone, like an elderly person, or a child, they might take issue with that as well, as it takes away a sense of their freedom, even if the program is working as intended. “Persuasive design is an area of design practice that focuses on influencing human behavior through a product’s or service’s characteristics.” The way I understand persuasive design is that it is basically convincing people into thinking that they want something that they may or may not actually be interested in. for example, when you go to the Nike website, what is the first thing you see? The newest shoes. When you go to amazon, you are immediately bombarded with new stuff that you can buy, and especially in the case of amazon with how they know things you have searched for, and will constantly recommend it to you, almost like sending a subliminal message. On top of that, it is about making the decision to get something easy. Again, look at amazons one click buy option, you can buy so many more things if you don’t have to waste time filling out your payment information each and every time. I know that many people have a problem with how certain websites know what you have looked for in the past, and them recommending them to you while you are doing something else, but I honestly don’t mind. I don’t really care if the government knows that I’m trying to buy a new guitar amp, if anything it makes my life easier. That being said I definitely understand why it upsets people, and it is probably more of a negative thing than a positive one. Many people feel like this is an invasion of privacy, and I certainly can understand that point of view. Most of these websites are built in ways that are meant to attract people to buy things that they probably do not need, but it is such a good deal that they can’t help but get them. I think everyone has fallen prey to the mentality that you are almost losing money by not purchasing whatever the item is when it is on such a good deal. But in regards to this being positive for user behavior, I think it is. A good persuasively designed website means that it is very simple to understand and people can navigate it with ease. However, Sometimes that does not matter however, take the queens college website for example. It is one of the worst most convoluted sites I have ever seen, but people are still forced to use it, and it is a highly trafficked. My point in that being that a website does not need a good, and persuasive design to attract users but it definitely helps, I wouldn’t use these sites if I didn’t have to. The in your face designs may not be good for users wallets, but they are definitely good for the teams behind the websites. Often if what you’re selling isn’t necessarily a great product, great salesmanship can pick up the slack where the product itself is lacking. That’s what persuasive design really is, great salesmanship.

Question 2

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?

There are a few “core characteristics” to the digital world. The main ones to me are that the digital world is always “open to modification”, meaning that the way things work are susceptible to constant change, the fact that it is an open place for anyone to throw their two cents into, and it is open to “public interaction.” Everyone in the modern digital world can have a voice. Whether or not they should be able to have one is another story, but the fact remains that if you have a phone, and Wi-Fi, or a computer, you can do pretty much anything these days. I bring up YouTube a lot, but it really is the best example for these things. In the last ten years or so, “YouTubing”, has become a job that people can become very, very, wealthy from. And why is that? What do they do? They play games, record their daily lives, and tell stories, play music, etc. websites like YouTube fit the digital age we live in so perfectly, because it gives creative people a chance to express their creativity. One of my favorite comedy skits is a thirty minute film called ”kung fury”, which was made on a decent budget, by people who clearly love 80s action movies. Kung fury garnered a cult following, and has been met with mass critical acclaim, and is now being made into a full feature length film. This shows that even if you have no prior experience, you still have a chance at becoming successful due to the nature of the times we live in. Almost every modern smartphone has a (relatively) good camera built into it, in that regard, everyone can be a creator. Everything about art and making art has changed over the past 10-15 years (in terms of digital creation at least). There are even programs that allow you to simulate painting on a canvas, and people sell their digital creations. There are also unlimited copies of famous works of art, anyone can hang a version of the Mona Lisa right in their home, and it can look as good as the original. The more specific developments are the rise of programs like adobe Photoshop, premier pro, the rise of the smartphone, and the internet etc. However, even if the internet gives everyone a voice, and a chance to show off what they have made, that does not mean that they will become famous, or successful. There are plenty of people who expect to become then next big youtbe star, and put all kinds of money into equipment to make videos, and when they don’t become instantly famous they just give up. However there are obviously the people who stick with it and establish a following. Those guys who stick with it and create decent content can do quite well for themselves. Even if people don’t become wildly successful, there is at the very least a sense of satisfaction from creating something, and as long as you enjoy what you have made then that is what matters. Think of the old greats like can Gogh and Picasso who didn’t see a penny in their lives. It is the artist’s curse that they may live an entire life making fabulous creations and never getting the recognition they deserve until they are long gone. But in regard to something like creating prints of famous artworks there are a couple of schools of thought. One is that creating prints of originals make them “more sacred”, because it gives the original a certain “aura” that makes people want to come and see it over the thousands of copies available online. The other way of viewing it is that creating copies somehow devaluates the original masterpiece by making it too commonplace. I definitely see the merit in both sides of that argument, and I can’t say that either is right or wrong. That is really going to be a personal preference. I would however say that I lean more towards the first way of thinking, that seeing how beautiful a rendering of an image is might make someone want to go see the original that started it all.

Question 3

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?

One of the most fantastic developments I have seen in human enhancing technology is a machine that allows people with degenerative diseases like ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) to be able to communicate with others. I have a neighbor who was diagnosed with ALS a few years ago, and she is now entirely unable to communicate unassisted. But recently she was given this machine that allows her to communicate with people by reading the movement of her eyes. The way it works is that it reads the movement of her eyes, and when she looks at letters, it creates words out of them, and reads them aloud through a speaker. Without this device she would probably just sit around all day doing nothing, at least now she can communicate with her loved ones, and friends. We also saw in the lecture that there is a woman who was able to control a cybernetic arm with her thoughts, and there is also the now deceased Stephen Hawkins who I believe used the same tech as my neighbor. In regards to losing part of our humanity to these devices, I think that we should be very aware of the possibility, and take every countermeasure that we can to prevent some sort of hostile takeover. I know how terminator it sounds, but I do believe that if we are not careful, smart machines will realize that we are extremely inefficient creatures. And why wouldn’t they? We pollute the air and kill each other without a second thought. We are in fact our own worst enemy. So my advice would be to make sure that the more technology that enhances humans grows, the more kill switches we install on them. By the way, when the machines do take over, elevators are going to be the worst threat of all. All of that being said, I do not have a problem with humans making alterations to our bodies if they are needed. If someone lost an arm in a war, why shouldn’t they be allowed to be given a new robotic one, a la star wars. Or as we saw from the video, if people are starting to develop technology that can make a blind person see again, I don’t see why anyone would ever have a problem with that. The only possible issue of privacy is if we reach the era of mind reading, and as the Michio Kaku article stated “laws may eventually passed to limit unauthorized mind reading, also devices may be created to protect our thoughts by jamming, blocking, or scrambling our electrical signals.”. So no, I am not concerned for my privacy in that regard, any more than I am now. Nor would I be concerned about anyone remotely controlling anyone else’s cybernetics as I am sure laws would prevent that as well. In regards to a technological innovation that would make our society better as a whole, I can think of two off of the top of my head. The first is something that we are quite close to having as it is an instant universal translator. With a universal translator we will be able to communicate better with foreign countries which would make understanding one another easier, although it would not drastically improve quality of life. Another (broader) one I can think of is generally more advancements in then medical fields. Specifically cancer and other degenerative disease healing. So many people die in horrible ways because of the lack of treatment available to them. The sooner these diseases no longer pose a threat, the sooner we can go on to make society a better place. I don’t think we need more innovations in any field other than medical, and science. We have enough devices in our society as it is. It is much more important to cure diseases than it is to constantly release the next iPhone. If we put all those smart people working at companies making the next phones, or the next useless gadget that will be popular for five minutes and then thrown away, together to work on major advancements in medical research, I am sure that many of the diseases currently plaguing our society would surly no longer be an issue.

Essay one citations

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