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Task #7 - Pro-Active Human Design

For my design choice I wanted to target an aspect of malicious tech, media, or app use that I felt was not as glaringly obvious as overstimulation. I thought then about trying to come up with something to combat social isolation from overuse of media and technology but settled on trying to come up with a plan to tackle one of the most insidious aspects of big tech: lack of digital transparency. Our lack of transparency enables tech companies to continuously wrake in massive profits, turning users to the product. However, offering an often free service in return for data collection and information sharing, which, in itself is malicious enough, is just the tip of the iceberg. Other factors of unethical tech institutions and inappropriate tech and media usage are heavily exacerbated by the already questionable ethics of algorithms, media platforms, AI, etc… that are not transparent or are purposefully misleading with customers.(1)

Meta has no obligation to be forthcoming with their news algorithm on Facebook at the potential cost of quarterly bottom lines, resulting in less transparency for their customer base about how and why they're being presented their content and what Meta in turn is extracting.(1) Big tech companies hold all the power, wealth, and authority over the dissemination of their app's services, often representing a public space. Social Media companies rely on users to fuel the "attention economy" with their digital labor i.e. their attention and clicks.(2) Yet, the user is left without any leverage to negotiate their own terms and conditions. Because of the unique relationship formed between social media, the internet, and how it defines modern public discourse it is immeasurably important users are able to negotiate their own rights, and demanding greater transparency is step number one.

When we do not know what private data we are giving away and why or how we are being shown our content it becomes even harder to recognize solutions to overuse and ill usage of media and the overreach of tech and tech companies.(1) As I believe in politics, equity for the population begins with equitable power dynamics and top down transparency. In effect, it works

much the same in the digital realm, especially in a globalized world where we are beginning to utilize social media and the internet as a secondary virtual public discourse. Therefore, I find it imperative to create a service, legislation, or digital contract to increase transparency with the user, the very base that establishes and finances the sustained success of the media companies they utilize.

I personally would love to see a legislative change; although, discussing the hypothetical situation of what that could be done and how it would go into effect globally vs. domestically leaves a lot to discuss. So, I have established that since it is too hard to change the laws of a country (let alone the globe) surrounding social media and almost certainly private industry would not cooperate with a pro-transparency campaign unless legally forced to. I have decided to put the power directly in the hands of the people. (The most 'realistic' hypothetical model I could think of) If we can not legally require greater transparency, we can at least give the user an opportunity to understand the lack of transparency they will receive when establishing a relationship with and continuously using a tech or media service.

The literal design I have come up is an app or service I would offer for free with the option of donations. However, these are not predatory like Ad-Block or Wikipedia style donation prompts, but more like an optional Patreon model, letting users decide entirely whether or not they want to support the cause. The name of my design is: *Little Brother*. Named, of course, in conjunction with Orwell's 'Big Brother' because like Big Brother it will always be watching. It will always be watching the tech bogeyman 'big brother' which is, in effect, corporate tech's lack of transparency about their algorithms, terms and conditions, and privacy policy. Thus the name 'Little' because it works like the Thought Police for the user; the little guy.

There is argument to be made that Little Brother's (L.B.) inception could target all aspects of the Humane Tech Design Guide but for our purposes I have selected "**Attention**" or '**Decisionmaking**' as L.B.'s goal is to increase user agency, relationship, and equity with their media and technology. The goal is to interrupt the subconscious digital decision making process of the average person, informing them of the dangers and inequitable relationship they hold with tech companies as both a form of immediate agency and an awareness campaign for greater user agency in general.

So, how does Little Brother work? The goal of Little Brother is to provide clarity in situations where companies will not divulge more information than they deem necessary about

their policies. Add in that it is exponentially hard to find that information without extensive personal research and it is *near* impossible to have perfect digital literacy about digital transparency. Little Brother's goal is to change that by providing an encyclopedic library of as many details on varying social media and tech companies: algorithms, terms and conditions, privacy policy, and with that data collection policy.

Before accessing or using an app, a user of Little Brother can enter the app into L.B. and it will reveal all the compiled information publicly available to the user about the app regarding these factors. If the information is not public or known, L.B. will present that fact as well as a 'warning' with advice on understanding personal digital literacy and the importance of transparency in media and tech use.

Furthermore, it is imperative to Little Brother as an institution that it itself be entirely transparent, open sourcing its code with its mission statement. (There will be some algorithmic elements but the goal is to operate like an interactive library. The lack of prediction and invitation negates the need for extensive algorithmic prompting) I would like to install some form of user uploaded content interface as well but that then promotes problems with trolling, verification of content and users, as well as a whole other mess of quality assurance issues. For the time being I would accept a user-submission forum with updates or information regarding companies and their digital policy that would require administrative vetting before being included on the site/app. Of course, the vetting process would be entirely open and transparent, being posted to the forum after its acceptance or denial.

A process I like a lot as it is entirely based around dedicated community voting and/or transparent decision making is the Smogon forum voting system. Smogon, or Smogon University, is the premiere website and community for the Competitive Pokemon scene. As a community tons of voting, changes, etc… happen to content and tiers and rules all of which is decidedly fairly and transparently via certain democratic practices or trials. Of course the context of content would be slightly different as it would often be more administrative decision making trials with transparent conclusions. (A link to Smogon's voting/trial rulesets) (3)

As for who would support Little Brother? I know it would not go over well with big business, specifically corporate tech companies. In fact I predict that their goal would be to purchase the app into their media conglomerate, turning it into another money making subsidiary as a performative shell version of its independent self. If you can not beat them, buy them!

However, under my control, the boards/collectives/etc… control that would never happen as the very point of the app is to serve as the sword and shield of the average user against nontransparent and malicious tech and social media practices.

Users of the application would be anyone with access to the app. The biggest limiting factor to access will be region locked content based on national government as content from certain countries is not accessible in others. It is fair to assume L.B. will make some enemies. Next, access to hardware will be another limiting factor globally. Moving into the 21st century handheld technology and devices are becoming accessible across the globe, but that does not mean everyone will have guaranteed access to private devices, enough time, or the correct routes to find L.B. Age will not matter for merely using the app as the goal is to educate any and all users on safety and nothing more; however, when submitting or interacting with L.B. users will have to confirm they are 18+ for safety and legal reasons. Finally, Little Brother is designed with low initial or learned tech literacy in mind, meaning despite the app looking clean and well designed it will be egregiously simple in design and functionality with an emphasis on practical user experience with the UI.

Because the goal is to make social media and the tech world easier to understand, the app will not be constructed to confuse users into consuming content or products or sharing their and other personal data as is the case with many media sites and organizations. In its application I do not foresee many across the globe opposing L.B. unless they have vested financial interests in the continued success and inequitable power dynamics of tech and media corporations.

As far as costs go there will be some financial troubles. First is research and development. It takes a lot of time and labor to develop something like this from scratch or in turn a lot of money to pay people to develop it with or for you. As an application that is not profit driven, Little Brother would be forced to limit its scope and initial servers, size, user base to the financial inputs from the owner (hypothetically me I guess?) and user donations. To get the app off its feet I think it is realistic to say I could finance $10-15k of my own money.(4) It would, however, bankrupt me. But to fund and develop the shell of the app, not to pay for it to remain a functioning application on app stores and the web as well as for servers and their software/hardware it could be done relatively easily as a small startup.

Again, I would be banking a lot on good samaritans, some much needed support from benefactors, and living like a rat but it could be done. I understand the current vertical mobility

of the internet is quite different than it was in the early 2000s when Wikipedia or Youtube were taking off, but hypothetically speaking the funds that would help build the range of L.B. would most likely have to come from 'viewers like you'. Or, alternatively, through government subsidization once the public outcry for some form of protection and aid for digital transparency and agency reaches a boiling point. I still believe that the government may choose to ignore said outcry as the hellish screaming of corporate interest drowns out the anger of the cogs but I digress.

  As far as labor goes. The model serves to grow in size of labor force as functionality increases, allowing for sustainable growth in programmers required as size increases. Moreover, because of the limited functionality a minimal team is needed. There is no marketing, corporate bureaucracy, or money spent on making money. Instead L.B. could operate with programmers keeping the site secure, functioning, and moving forward. Not to make it sound 'easy' to run a app or development company, but L.B. subtracts a vast majority of the 'work' required to run a for profit company successfully. Materials required other than financial capital would be very minimal except for server storage. If L.B. ever becomes global it would require congruent physical server storage even if it utilized a 'secure' cloud based server storage method.

  Precious metals, plastics, and various other components are required to form a storage network. The bigger the network, the larger the storage required. Or, alternatively users would be required to regularly update and store all program data on their local storage device like a traditional video game or application, presenting universal accessibility problems for the less digitally literate as well as issues with many app stores and accessibility. Beyond the financial cost of server storage there is also a large environmental impact from constantly burning electricity to store or move digital data.

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