Part I

*The Effect of Design on User Interface and Experience*

There is hardly anything more attractive than the beautiful, balanced mixture of stainless steel and glass. Sleek and contemporary, the two materials exude an air of intelligence and modernistic simplicity. It seems as time progresses that more and more new building projects encompass a design centered around steel and glass. Floor-to-ceiling windows allow for sunlight to spill in throughout all hours of the day, giving a space the feeling of being much larger than it truly is. Steel beams and accents give the illusion of strength without creating too much distraction. Elements of good design envelop every aspect of life today, ever changing to suit the current tastes of global society.

Good design has evolved with each passing age to mean a completely different style and concept to every generation. As the twenty-first century marches onward, simplicity reigns supreme. Aesthetic value is held in the highest of regard, seeping into every facet of modern life. This concept is best reflected in today’s technology, especially within user interfaces and experiences.

Tech companies want to make their products as “user friendly” as possible in order to reach the widest audience available. More people equates to higher revenue which equates to even more technological productions in the ever-constant pursuit of the “next best thing.” This is where well-designed user interfaces come in to contribute to positive user experiences.

The term “user interface” (UI) refers to the physical connection between man and machine. Simply put, it is the surface with which humans control their software and/or devices. Alternatively, the term “user experience” (UX) refers to what the user gets out of the software and/or device after
interacting with it. UI and UX are both at the core of computer science and informatics. Without the UI, there would be no UX, no feedback, no further advancements in technology for the improvement of the world. Informatics and computer science hone and further develop these technologies so that improvements and advancements can be made in both UI and UX.

A well-designed UI can entice consumers to purchase certain products over their competitors’, making what could possibly be a multimillion-dollar difference. Factors such as branding, ease of use, and color combine to create the appeal of UI and different software. In fact, according to a 2006 study done in Canada, “Researchers found that up to 90% of snap judgments made about products can be based on color alone, depending on the product” (Ciotti). Applications and websites such as Twitter and Facebook have an over-arching blue-colored theme throughout their platforms, creating an overall calming UX. Their platforms encompass a seamless design based on moving textboxes and photo tiles, leaving the interface clean-looking and uncluttered.

On the other hand, poorly designed websites and apps can appear untrustworthy, pushing away potential customers and leaving users with a sense of uneasiness. Poorly designed websites are also much less likely to be remembered compared to a website with a clean layout and obvious objectives. Today’s society places heavy value on both beauty and ease of use, naturally forming a desire for a clean UI. Much like the example of the stovetop given in Nina’s lecture, a well-designed UI should be both obvious to use and pleasing to look at. The two ranges in the example embodied opposite ends of the design spectrum. The older gas range showcased a more analog design with clunky knobs placed inconveniently to the side of the cooktop. The only way to identify which burner was activated by which knob was to squint at the tiny diagram next to each dial. Conversely, on the more modern electric range, the knob placement coincided with its respective burner’s location on the cooktop. The modern electric range had a better UI, leading to a better UX, an objective all companies desire for the purpose of better sales.
Today’s UI constantly advances to mirror society’s evolution, and today’s sleek and modern designs create streamlined products that are convenient and easy to use. In today’s world, a poorly-designed UI will alienate potential customers due to poor UX, whereas an innovative one will attract attention and successfully create a loyal customer base. Good design is the most timeless of all concepts as it infiltrates every aspect of modern life, placing great weight and value on a simple, elegant, and user-friendly UI.
Part II

*Keeping Up With the Kardashians* - Season 12, Episode 12 “Havana Good Day”

Original air date: July 31, 2016

A beautiful island frozen in time, a pink Chevy convertible from the 1950s, exotic cigars, traditional rum distilleries, and one crazy family converge in this installment of E! Network’s hit show *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*. The family embarks on its annual vacation, choosing Cuba as this year’s leisure spot. Recently reopened to American tourists when President Obama reestablished ties with the Cuban government for the first time since 1961, the Caribbean island seemed ideal to the family. Khloé Kardashian, Kourtney Kardashian, Kourtney’s three children Mason, Penelope, and Reign Disick, Kanye West, Kim Kardashian-West, and their children North and Saint West, all made the journey from LAX to Cuba by private jet, of course. Missing out were Kourtney’s ex-boyfriend Scott Disick, the Kardashian matriarch Kris Jenner, Caitlyn Jenner, Kendall and Kylie Jenner, and Rob Kardashian, all due to scheduling conflicts and their ever-busy day-to-day lives.

Upon arrival in the foreign land, the gang immediately realized the lack of cell phone coverage and Wi-Fi availability, a side effect of the embargo that has been in place since 1961 ("The World Factbook: CUBA"). Cuba has had limited access to resources outside itself for over fifty years. The outcome of this situation has been a complete and total lack of any technological revolution. The world has advanced into the shiny new era of smartphones and the Internet, while Cuba has been left behind, unsure of when its time will come. Less than five percent of Cubans have Internet access, and what little connection is available is government controlled, extremely slow, very expensive, and often unreliable (Silva). This leaves Cuba and its inhabitants in a technological limbo, caught between communist regulations and the struggle to catch up to the rest of the world.

During the Kardashian’s visit, they expressed displeasure over not being able to post selfies and videos to their Snapchat stories unless connected to one of the few Wi-Fi hotspots on the island, located
in their luxury hotel. Eventually, members of the family like Khloé and Kourtney embraced the technological cut-off and used it as an opportunity to relax and separate from their usually hectic lives. Other members of the family, like Kris Kardashian back in Los Angeles, found it next to impossible to reach her daughters with updates on business plans and general family news. This lead to an opposite reaction on Kris’ end with her feeling extreme frustration and anxiety towards the situation.

The juxtaposition is stark between the Kardashians “unplugging” from their Internet and cell phone addictions and Cubans being unable to connect to the outside world. The lack of access to these technologies has spawned a type of black market in Cuba where illegal passwords to blocked government Internet networks and other types of tech devices are bought and sold without the usual government restrictions found under a communist regime. When email is about all that can be utilized as means of electronic communication and rates at Internet cafés are around the exorbitant price of $5 an hour for poverty stricken Cuban families, it seems natural that people would set up a way to beat the system (Silva). It is human instinct to rise up against opposing forces in an attempt to achieve a better quality of life.

From an ethical standpoint, the Internet itself is just a product of the humans who developed it and use it today. The Internet lacks control over itself as it is just a pathway between networks. Ethics are only called into question when humans mistreat their access to the Internet or the power that it holds. Yes, the lack of available access to the Internet and outside technology created the perfect environment for black market trade to sprout. But it was a human choice that began the physical trade and a human government that suppressed and censored its own people.

The Internet is quite possibly one of the fastest evolving entities this world has ever seen. With the rise of social media platforms such as Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter, billions of people connect with each other every day with the click of a button or a tap of a touchscreen. Tech companies such as Apple and Google make it possible to hold all of the world’s information in the palm of our
hands. The evolution of technology is so rapid, the events of the next decade are nearly impossible to predict. But there may be a surprise in store with the development of technologies that could allow for us to upload actual parts of ourselves to an online server. Emotions and memories could be stored for future generations to experience long after this generation has passed on. Or maybe we’ll all just still be googling cat memes.
Works Cited

