

Ethical Automation Project

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Title

Google Assistant: How Far Will You Go to Save 30 Seconds?

Discussion Outline

- Introduction
 - We are living in a time where just about everything is being automated, sometimes to the great benefit of humankind, and other times just because we can. Yet in all this automation, people are happy to take things for granted, not questioning the costs associated with them.
 - In this discussion, we will be looking at one example of an automation which may offer minor convenience to individuals, but which comes with a wide variety of potential risks. After a critical analysis, we will look at other technologies and discuss the costs and benefits associated with them. We will round out the discussion with a general discussion about the extent to which automation should be implemented in our daily lives.
- My personal stance on a broad level
 - Automation is most useful when it dramatically reduces the amount of work or resources needed to complete a time-consuming or difficult task, such as long-distance travel, rote data entry, mathematical calculations, and cooking.
 - Automation is often used to solve simple and minor tasks. It requires many resources to complete and implement these systems, but they often fail to provide much benefit. Saving 30 seconds seems meaningful, but then again, one could just go to bed 30 seconds earlier and that would save the same amount of time. So, there had better not be major risks associated with the technology, or else I think it outweighs the benefits.
- Critical Engineer Review
 - <https://criticalengineering.org/>
 - 1. The Critical Engineer considers any technology depended upon to be both a challenge and a threat. The greater the dependence on a technology the greater the

need to study and expose its inner workings, regardless of ownership or legal provision.

- 3. The Critical Engineer deconstructs and incites suspicion of rich user experiences.
- 4. The Critical Engineer looks beyond the "awe of implementation" to determine methods of influence and their specific effects.
- 7. The Critical Engineer observes the space between the production and consumption of technology. Acting rapidly to changes in this space, the Critical Engineer serves to expose moments of imbalance and deception.
- “With these ideas in mind, lets try to critically examine the following technology.”
- Video
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5VN56jQMWM>
 - Discuss critically the implications of this technology. Inspire asking questions.
 - “Looking critically at this technology, what are some questions or concerns you have about it? How would this change society?”
 - Potential for fake phone calls and scams?
 - Potential for automated abuse of telephone systems like reservation?
 - Will it harm the already degrading trust in technology that is developing in society? Should there be disclosure? Will this be misused?
 - How much will automating phone calls really save us? Are we losing out on important human experiences? Are these manual tasks culturally important?
- Other technologies
 - Amazon Echo Dot: More good than bad? Does it save enough time to be worth so many resources and privacy concerns? Would a fully connected household be practical or safe?
 - Data collection?
 - Making us lazier people?
 - Security risks?
 - Calculator: Seems benign. Are there any costs to a calculator? Are they avoidable, and do they outweigh the benefits?
 - The main disadvantage one might see is that it builds a reliance on itself, resulting in a potential degradation in manual problem-solving skills.
 - Smart Watches: Is it good to increase the degree to which we interface with technology? Are companies using minor convenience to collect and monetize data? Does increasing our focus on ourselves and our data lead to [self-obsession](#)?

- Broad discussion
 - Is the pursuit of automation always good? If not, what factors and values are most important to consider when deciding whether to automate something? Is it harmful to humanity that we are increasingly reliant on technology, and even desire to replace daily tasks?