Samsung's Noteworthy Quest to Advance Digital Responsibility

Who among us has not experienced the frustration of trying to book tickets home ahead of a busy holiday weekend? While some book online from the comfort of their homes, others – many of them elderly – will line up at the break of dawn to reserve tickets in-person at major train and bus stations. Picture this: Person A recently went to a restaurant, but ended up leaving without ordering anything. Person A uses a wheelchair, and the controls on the restaurant's self-order kiosk were slightly out of reach. As the staff seemed busy, Person A felt shy about asking for assistance, and chose to visit another restaurant instead.

While at first glance, the two stories above may seem unrelated, they both exemplify the dark side of technology in the digital era. Things like telecommuting, distance learning, autonomous driving, and AI job interviews are proof positive that digital technologies are becoming increasingly prevalent in both business and society. Unfortunately, digitalization is also creating issues.

To help address those issues, digital technology leaders must accept an important new mission: taking on corporate digital responsibility (CDR). In a nutshell, CDR involves developing products and technologies in a manner that protects users' rights, and taking steps to enable more people to experience the benefits of digital technologies. The pandemic has prompted more sectors to utilize digital technologies, which has led to increasing pressure on businesses to engage in CDR. As a leader in cutting-edge technologies, what is Samsung Electronics doing to become more digitally responsible? Here are several 'quests' that Samsung has undertaken with regard to digital responsibility.

The more useful a product is, the wider the gap between users and non-users becomes. Samsung strives for accessibility in its products, enhancing them with technologies that make it easy for all users, regardless of age, gender, or disability, to utilize them.

Take Samsung's TVs, for example. The TVs' Voice Guide function provides an audio guide for TV settings, combining channel and volume controls with tools to help you schedule a viewing, view current and scheduled program information, and browse the internet. When viewing content with sign language, Samsung's proprietary AI algorithm automatically recognizes the sign language area and can enlarge it by up to 200 percent.

Samsung mobile devices have also introduced a variety of convenient accessibility features. This includes a function that allows those with hearing difficulties to pair a compatible hearing aid to their device via low-power Bluetooth, as well as a fixed-key feature for users with physical disabilities. In addition, Samsung's Family Hub refrigerator caters to users in wheelchairs with functions that make it possible to move the top of the screen to an easier-to-reach position, adjust the height of the main controls, and launch the menu by tapping anywhere on the screen.

Digital advancements can be incredible, but they can cut both ways. Yes, they tend to make life more comfortable, but they can also create social issues like 'smombies'[1] and 'nomophobia'.[2] From a product design standpoint, helping users enjoy healthy digital lifestyles is a key part of being digitally responsible. Samsung has therefore committed to developing digital well-being tools that are based on five digital well-being values: Digital Detox, Balance, Guard, Wellness, and Safety. For example, Samsung's App Timer feature (which falls under the Balance category) can help users reduce the amount of time they spend on applications by setting time limits. Focus Mode (Digital Detox) allows users to pause or silence notifications from selected apps temporarily, while the Samsung Kids service (Guard) helps create a safe environment for children to explore, play and develop good digital habits.

Safety is crucial when it comes to smartphones, as we tend to fill them with a wide range of important information, including everything from bank account numbers, contacts and photos. Samsung's Find My Mobile feature was created to protect that valuable information in the event that you lose your phone. Once activated, it tracks the location of the lost phone, tells the user where it is, and offers them the choice to delete their personal data, including messages and photos, or upload it to Samsung Cloud. The Samsung Knox platform offers defense-grade mobile security, while the smartphones' Secure Wi-Fi feature allows you to safely browse the internet on public wireless connections without worrying about your personal information being compromised.

"I saved two lives that were almost lost."

"The technology is really useful for finding hidden sparks and embers and putting them out."

The quotes above are from firefighters who utilized a product of Samsung's in-house incubation program, C-Lab (Creative Lab), to help protect their community. The product they're describing is a thermal observation device that uses thermal imaging cameras to help firefighters detect fires' ignition points and identify and rescue others. It's just one of many C-Lab innovations that reflect Samsung's commitments to (1) developing products and services that address social issues, and (2) sharing those technologies with communities that need them.

Lives'Talk, a wearable device for tracking nomadic livestock, is another example of a community-enriching C-Lab innovation. The technology was created to make it easier for nomadic communities in Kazakhstan to find and retrieve their livestock. Once attached to livestock, the device's GPS transmitter-receiver tracks the animals' locations in real time. A total of 700 Lives'Talk devices were donated in all, helping farmers in these communities become more self-reliant.

Samsung is also advancing digital education programs that equip young minds with the tools they need to become leaders in creating a better world. The Samsung Smart School

initiative provides smart devices and solutions to students in areas with little access to IT equipment, reducing the digital divide while supporting students' creativity. The Samsung Dream Class program, meanwhile, offers middle school students living in areas with lower access to high-quality education an opportunity to take part in enriching classes covering subjects like math and coding. The Samsung Innovation Campus program offers youth entering the job market for the first time hands-on training in skills that technology-related jobs require, including fields like AI, IoT and data analysis. Together, these initiatives are representative of Samsung's ongoing efforts to promote digital responsibility worldwide.

Often, when developing AI technology, the ethical beliefs of the people behind the technology will inform the ethics of the AI itself. Having recognized the importance of emphasizing social and ethical responsibility in technology development, Samsung established a set of AI ethics principles to put into practice. The company also established guidelines for employees to raise awareness of AI ethics within its workforce.

Samsung has gone to great lengths to foster an ecosystem of open innovation. Not only has the company introduced more than 130 open source projects, but it also hosts its annual Samsung Open Source Conference (SOSCON) to offer experts a forum to share and discuss new developments.

Samsung's consistent, multifaceted efforts to be digitally responsible have earned a ranking in the top ten of the World Benchmarking Alliance's (WBA) Digital Inclusion Benchmark. Notably, Samsung is the only Korean company to rank in the top ten, and ranks third in Asia and fourth among companies in the hardware sector.

The WBA represents an alliance forged among approximately 176 global, regional and local organizations to shape the private sector's contributions to achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. The WBA examines companies with a focus on seven key categories, including human rights, the environment, and digital inclusion. The WBA

launched its very first Digital Inclusion Benchmark this year, which evaluated companies' progress in improving access to technology, enhancing digital skills, fostering trustworthy use, and innovating both openly and ethically.

Samsung was noted for being one of the few companies that had established AI ethics principles. The company's C-Lab program was singled out for its social contributions, while Samsung's devotion to the expansion of the open-source ecosystem also earned a positive review. The Samsung Kids feature, which encourages children to have healthy smartphone habits, also received a high rating, as did the company's various social contribution programs, in particular those that are helping communities close the digital divide.

As a company that develops products and technologies that enhance users' lives, Samsung is committed to promoting digital responsibility. Going forward, the company will continue to explore ways to make it easier for people to access and utilize a wide range of convenient and meaningful digital technologies.

1 A 'smartphone zombie'; one who is constantly staring at his/her smartphone

2 A term that describes the fear of being without a mobile device

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