Case Study: Meta AI

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Introduction

In this essay, I will apply Utilitarianism to evaluate the ethical implications of Meta's release of its AI app without clear privacy safeguards. The Meta AI app allows users to unintentionally share private conversations publicly, exposing personal and sensitive information. I argue that according to Utilitarian ethics, Meta acted unethically because the foreseeable harms to users' privacy, safety, and trust outweigh the limited benefits of the app's social-sharing features. In what follows, I will explain the key ideas of Utilitarianism, describe the situation from Silberling's article, show how Utilitarianism evaluates Meta's actions, and discuss what Meta should have done instead.

Description of the Normative Ethical Theory: Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is a consequentialist ethical theory, meaning it judges the morality of actions based on their outcomes rather than intentions. Developed by philosophers Jeremy and Bentham and John Stuart Mill, the central principle of Utilitarianism is the greatest happiness principle, actions are morally right if they produce the greatest overall happiness or minimize suffering for the greatest number of people. The theory treats everyone's happiness equally and requires decision makers to weigh all foreseeable benefits and harms. In a technological context, this means that designers and developers should anticipate how a system will affect users' well-being and privacy before release, and should prioritize collective benefit over convenience, novelty, or profit.

Description of the Situation from Silberling's Article

Amanda Silberlings TechCrunch article, "The Meta AI app is a privacy disaster," describes how Meta's new AI app puts user privacy at serious risk. The app includes a "share" button that lets people post their AI conversations publicly. However, many users did not realize

that pressing the button made their private chats, some having personal information (addresses, legal issues, or even confessions), visible to everyone. Meta also failed to make it clear where or how these posts were being shared. In some cases, people who logged in with public Instagram accounts unknowingly made their private conversations public too. When asked about the problem, Meta declined to comment. The situation shows a huge lack of foresight and responsibility from a company that has the resources to know better.

Applying Utilitarism to the Meta Case.

From a Utilitarian perspective, Meta's choices caused more harm than good. The app's main purpose to let users share conversations for fun or creativity is minor compared to the real damage caused by public embarrassment, privacy violations, and potential exposure of personal and legal information. Millions of users could face negative consequences, from emotional distress to loss of trust in Meta's platforms. As a company that has already been criticized for privacy issues, Meta should have easily predicted these outcomes. Even if the app brought some short-term attention or engagement, those benefits do not come close to outweighing the widespread harm and loss of public confidence. In utilitarian terms, the overall balance of happiness versus suffering is deeply negative.

What Meta should have done instead

If Meta had followed Utilitarian principles, it would have focused on preventing harm before release. The company should have designed the app so that conversations were private by default, with a clear and deliberate opt-in process for sharing. Users should have been given obvious warning and privacy options before posting anything. Meta could also have tested the app more thoroughly, gathering feedback to find potential privacy risks. These steps would have

protected users, built trust, and created more positive outcomes for everyone involved. A few design changes could have further prevented this disaster.

Conclusion

In the end, utilitarian ethics show that Meta's actions were not just careless but unethical. The app caused far more harm than good, and the company did not act in a way that maximized overall well-being. Protecting user privacy and safety should have outweighed any excitement over new features or public attention. Meta's mistake is a clear example of why tech companies must think beyond innovation and focus on the real-world impact their products have on people. Preventing harm is not just good ethics, it is good sense.

https://techcrunch.com/2025/06/12/the-meta-ai-app-is-a-privacy-disaster