

Meta AI

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This case study employs Kantian ethics, one of the practical normative ethical theories outlined in *Ethics for the Information Age* by Quinn, to analyze the privacy catastrophe at Meta AI. In an article by Amanda Silberling, she explains that Meta published an independent AI application that enabled users to post private discussions publicly without realizing it, thereby exposing their sensitive data, including questions about tax evasion, home addresses, and personal health (Silberling, 2025). This discussion sees the designers of Meta as unethical in their disposition towards the user as a tool to realize corporate objectives and not as an overall independent goal. This case analysis will outline Ethics according to Kantian theory, present the Meta AI scenario, interpret Kantian theory to assess the actions of Meta, and find out what should have been done by Meta instead.

The Kantian ethics was developed by a philosopher known as Immanuel Kant, and it focuses on the fact that moral actions should uphold human dignity and rationality. The basis is the categorical imperative of Kant: only act on maxims that might become universal laws and treat humanity as an end in itself and never exclusively refer to it as a means. This theory focuses on autonomy, which is the ability of rational entities to make knowledgeable choices about themselves. Moral obligations, according to Kant, are unconditional, and thus they cannot be done in an attempt to achieve positive results (Quinn, 2014). Individuals behave ethically when they hold the capacity to make rational decisions inspired by all available information. Lying, controlling, or failing to give vital information is a breach of this obligation since it impairs autonomy. According to Kantian ethics, actions are evaluated through consideration of moral duty, rather than consequences.

Meta published a standalone AI application that was used to ask questions and share answers. The application had a share feature that posted the conversations publicly, yet there was

no distinct mention of privacy or where it was posted. Instagram users who had a public account unwillingly posted personal inquiries regarding legal problems, health concerns, and physical addresses. The application did not show any alerts regarding the information being shared openly, so users were not aware that their alleged private AI chats were being transmitted to the global audience. Some of them were asking about tax evasion, another one was providing his home address, and others were providing sensitive court information. Meta crafted the app to produce a social feed off AI searches, triggering apparent privacy concerns, akin to the AOL scandal of 2006, which published search histories. The application was downloaded by only 6.5 million users, which is an indication that users were reluctant to use the AI technology of Meta.

Kantian ethics was breached because the designers of Meta saw people as a means to market their AI product instead of treating them as autonomous ends that deserve respect. The designers did not disclose some vital information regarding privacy settings, and the users were not able to make adequate choices regarding the sharing of personal conversations. By doing this, there was a compromise of user autonomy, which is against the categorical imperative of Kant. When users were unaware that sharing was taking place, they could not reasonably agree to be shared publicly. Meta would covertly produce the content of a social feed by manipulating its users without publicly declaring it, as a measure of corporate interaction. This maxim, which the action of Meta is based on, to design products that trick users into sharing private information and increasing their engagement, cannot be made universal without contradiction, since it would destroy the trust required of any digital platform to work.

According to Kantian ethics, the designers of Meta were required to consider the autonomy of users by being transparent. They ought to have provided clear and inevitable privacy warnings before sharing of any kind, with clear communication of the fact that any

conversation that may have taken place would be available to everyone, through which the user was seen to be present. The default settings ought to have been confidential, with the need to provide user action in order to publish content explicitly. The application ought to have shown the existing privacy settings initially at every interaction. In essence, the decision of Meta to produce a social feed out of AI search ought to have reconsidered the fact that human dignity was not a product of informed choice, but, instead, a product of exploiting user confusion.

In conclusion, the designers of AI apps in Meta showed unethical conduct via the Kantian ethics by disregarding user autonomy through misleading design. They used users as tools to corporate ends as opposed to human beings with their needs and a right to know. The offense was especially heinous since Meta had the means and technology to prevent such privacy catastrophes, but has gone ahead to do it, ignoring human dignity and focusing on engagement first.

Reference

Silberling, A. (2025 June). The Meta AI app is a privacy disaster. *TechCrunch*.

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

Quinn, M. J. (2014). *Ethics for the information age* (Vol. 7). Boston, MA: Pearson.