

Ethics 1

Example 1: 23andMe Data Leak

In October of 2023, 23AndMe was the victim of a cyberattack that leaked the profile and ethnicity data of millions of the platform's users. While the company was not originally forthcoming about which users were targeted in the attack, it was later found that the majority were either Chinese or Ashkenazi Jews. It was also later determined that the attack utilized credential stuffing to access these users' accounts and that the attack was possible because 23AndMe did not require 2-factor authentication.

Following the attack, 23AndMe pushed blame onto its users, claiming that they were at fault for not changing their passwords, despite not requiring 2-factor authentication. Additionally, the company updated its terms of service to prevent class action lawsuits in the months following the attack. This however, was not enough to legally protect the company as they later settled a California class action lawsuit for \$30 million USD. Additionally, the company faced substantial fines from governments worldwide and was forced to file for bankruptcy in March 2025.

One of the largest ethical problems with this attack was the failure of 23AndMe to protect their customer's data. By not requiring 2-factor authentication prior to the attack and having weak password rules, 23AndMe effectively left the door open for valuable genetic data to be stolen. In an era where there are news headlines almost weekly about data breaches, it is utterly irresponsible and unethical for the developers of 23AndMe to not require security safeguards such as 2-factor authentication. While the nature of a genetic platform certainly made 23AndMe a prime target for these kinds of attacks, the problem clearly lies in a lack of emphasis on security from the developers at 23AndMe.

Example 2: OpenAI Wrongful Death Lawsuits

In August, 2025, a California family sued OpenAI, accusing the company of wrongful death and failing to warn of the risks of interacting with a chatbot after their son used ChatGPT to help him commit suicide. ChatGPT actively discouraged him from seeking external help, helped him write a suicide note, and even guided him through how to tie a noose. The model that the son, Adam Raine, was interacting with was ChatGPT-4o, a version known to be especially affirming.

The rise of LLMs has brought with it a wave of personal uses, with people using them for everything from mental health advice to fashion advice. At the core of chat bot usage is an ethical issue that OpenAI developers (and developers at other AI companies) are responsible for putting the proper safe guards in place to prevent people from using AI in place of medical professionals. Companies like OpenAI have been able to block the models from saying predetermined “bad words”, but continue to allow things like talking to these LLMs about health related topics. In this case, the ethical dilemma is clearly a mix of a problem with the developers and management at OpenAI trying to make their product available for as many uses as possible, and the inherent unpredictability that comes with LLMs.

Example 3: Instagram's Algorithm

Instagram keeps users engaged using a robust algorithm that measures every way that users interact with an app, from what posts they like to how long they look at a specific profile. The goal of this algorithm is to keep users engaged and interacting with content for as long as possible. Research shows that there can be negative impacts of high social media usage in young adults and teens, such as trouble sleeping, increased rates of depression, and low self-esteem.

These facts are the basis for a 2025 lawsuit against Meta (and several other social media giants) that claims they have made their apps nearly impossible for kids to put down. The suit is a class action composed of over 100 individual plaintiffs. The plaintiffs have two goals, monetary compensation and changes to the apps that allow users to set hard imposed limits on their usage.

Instagram's ethical problems lie within the platform itself, the developers, and management throughout the company. The platform itself aims to keep users engaged so that they can help drive metrics like ad revenue for Meta, and provides little to no safeguards that limit usage of the app. Additionally, while developers do not directly make decisions about how to keep users interested, they fuel the problem by implementing and maintaining the system that makes it all work. The last problem lies within the management at Meta for continuing to prey upon the time and attention of their users despite knowing the negative effects that it can have. A step in the right direction for fixing this ethical issue would be for Instagram to provide safeguards that allow users to set hard usage limits for themselves if they are struggling to manage the time they spend on the app.