EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Mobile App Developer

Project ID: 35070

Project title: Honesty violations in mobile apps: survey and interview of mobile app developers

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You are invited to take part in this online interview study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the email addresses listed above.

What does the research involve?

Background: Our previous research[1] indicates that honesty (a character quality of being sincere, truthful, fair, and straightforward, and refraining from lying, cheating, deceit, and fraud)[2] violations exist in mobile apps. These violations belong to the categories such as unfair cancellation and refund policies, false advertisements, delusive subscriptions, cheating systems, inaccurate information, unfair fees, no service, deletion of reviews, impersonation, and fraudulent-looking apps.

Some examples of mobile app reviews with honesty violations are as follows.

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[1] https://arxiv.org/pdf/2203.07547.pdf

[2] Collins Dictionary. [n. d.]. Definition of 'honesty'. (2021) https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/honesty.

- **Unfair cancellations and refund policies** (Users perceive the cancellation and refund policy as unfair, nontransparent, or deliberately misleading; and user feels that the developers deliberately make it difficult for the user to cancel their subscription): *"Deceptive billing practices - information on cancelling is circular; emailed a link that advises to email. [It] doesn't have colour tag functionality across web and app; very poor UX and worse customer service."*
- **False advertisements** (User perceives that the advertised features and functionalities of the app as described by the developers are not contained in the app): *"Couldn't find Google Assistant integration anywhere. Even though it's been advertised everywhere when searching the web for the app... It's even in the description of the app here. That's false advertising. I will edit my review when it's out of Beta and working in the final version."*
- **Delusive subscriptions** (Complaints related to unfair or nontransparent automatic subscription processes): *"I can't believe I was charged 55.99. What are you giving me? Gold? I unsubscribed but saw mysterious charge in my bank account."*
- **Cheating systems** (User's perception of fraud by other persons or cheating within the inner workings of the app): *"This game cheats. It uses words not found in the dictionary. Also it told me a word was unplayable, but it was the first best word option."*
- I**naccurate information** (Users perceive that the app provides false or inaccurate information as captured in their reviews. This includes situations where inaccurate information can increase the likelihood of the user inadvertently making wrong selections at a cost to them): *"Very annoying every time when you open the app it shows you have a notification. Then checking your notifications you don't have any."*
- **Unfair fees** (Issues surrounding what the user considers to be unfair fees or charges. This also applies to cases where the user feels that they have not received a fair deal or that the app charges more money than it ought to): *"It charged me £74.50 when I bought a ticket for £1.50 it's a absolute scam I want my money back!"*
- **No service** (User complains of not being able to access the app's main functionality after purchase, leading to undesirable consequences for the user): *"I spent 20 euros with all the DLCs included, I feel pretty deceived not being able to play the game."*
- **Deletion of reviews** (App developers are suspected of deleting reviews left by the user, especially negative reviews): *"I left them a negative review and the developer deleted it. Now I'm going to review them on YouTube and all social media platforms. Basically, they are scammers."*
- **Impersonation** (An act of pretending to be another person or entity): *"Good game, fake players online. I wanted a challenging Monopoly game. But when I start. I can tell that some are bots not real people online. For example, they quickly trade when it is their turn. A normal human will take some time to choose options."*
- **Fraudulent-looking apps** (Suspicious-looking apps based on observations of users or apps deemed to be fake by the users): *"This is a fraud app don't download"*

Some examples of mobile app reviews without honesty violations:

- *"I love using this app however when I installed it to one of my phones I cannot login to it. It just keeps closing. I don't know what's wrong. Also I wish the widget would contain date and time of the tasks not just tick marks."*
- *"Love the 'Plan Your Day' feature. I ended up going back to old school and using physical index cards instead of any apps, since that works better with my mind, but this was the best app I had found of many tried. Fair pricing as well."*
- *"Best reminder/to-do list in my honest opinion, and I have tried a LOT. Give it a shot and I bet you won't be disappointed."*

Objective: The objective of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of mobile app developers' experiences with reported honesty violations in their mobile apps and their approaches to fixing them, if any.

What you will have to do: This study involves filling out a pre-interview questionnaire and attending a Zoom interview, as explained below.

1. Fill out the pre-interview questionnaire: The researchers will share the pre-interview questionnaire if you are suitable to participate, and you will be asked the convenient time to participate through a Zoom interview.

   The shared pre-interview questionnaire (around 15 minutes to fill) consists of a link to the explanatory statement (this document), consent form, questions on demographics, and a few questions on experiences with honesty violations in mobile apps.

2. Attend the Zoom interview: Upon the confirmation of filling the pre-interview questionnaire (either you may inform the researchers or researchers may check the completion on the platform where the questionnaire is hosted), the 30-minute interview session will take place at the time agreed. The interview will be audio recorded.

Invitation

As a mobile app developer, we invite you to participate in this study, and your participation is voluntary.

Consenting to participate in the project and withdrawing from the research

Consenting: As a general practice, you are required to digitally sign the consent form given in the pre-interview questionnaire.

Withdrawing: You can exit without completing the pre-interview questionnaire, and you can ask to stop the interview at any time without giving a reason. You have the right to withdraw from participation at any time up to 30 days after the interview without giving a reason. There are no consequences to withdrawal, and your data will be deleted upon withdrawal. And you are offered the opportunity to edit the transcript for 30 days from the receipt of the transcript.

Possible benefits

Knowledge and insights about honesty violations in mobile apps, and practical guidelines to manage them.

Confidentiality

Your personal data shall only be accessible by the researchers. The researchers will keep your identity confidential and will de-identify your responses (your responses will be given an ID). Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed by the researchers. Any research publication published as a result of the study will not identify you, your company or any non-participant in your company.

Storage of data

Data will be securely stored in a Google Drive with restricted access (only investigators have access) for a period of 5 years and destroyed thereafter.

Electronic copies of consent forms will be stored at the Chief Investigator's office under password protection for the same period as that of data, and destroyed thereafter.

Use of data for other purposes

In accordance with data sharing guidelines, de-identified data may be made available for use by other researchers. This data will be held in Figshare and may be a requirement of some journals prior to publication. Any shared data will not include your identifying details.

Results

The findings of this study will be published in academic and practitioner-based journals, conferences, and magazines. Further, free access to the publications in the form of preprints will be available on arXiv (https://arxiv.org/), and you may also request a summary of the results by indicating it in the pre-interview questionnaire.

Complaints

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC):

Executive Officer
Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)
Room 111, Chancellery Building D,
26 Sports Walk, Clayton Campus
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Thank You.

John Grundy