* I would like you to carefully formulate a research question.   Your readings examine moral decision making and justice across multiple domains.  I would like you to choose an existing digital app.  The app could be used on people’s phones, etc.   Please choose an aspect of this app that involves moral decision making.  This could be on the part of the users, developers, company, etc.  Please formulate a precise research question around this moral decision and outline a method of investigation.   Please defend why your research question is important and why it is necessary to investigate it.

Comprehensive Exam Answers: Clint Davis-Stober

What types of moral questions are we well equipped to answer?

* Generosity and splitting resources
* ‘Fair behavior’ and why it looks good, people dislike appearing unfair (to themselves or others)
* ‘Giving’ things away as a form of ‘buying’ equity or social welfare (especially for dictators)
  + Giving is more consistent w/ people being compelled to give due to situational factors while not valuing the outcome itself
* ‘Moral wiggling’ to achieve unethical ends
  + Types of basic ethics traps, people persuading themselves that they are NOT violating their ethical standards
  + Briefly talk about what and why people set various ethical standard for themselves?
  + Diffusing responsibilities
    - Vertically: intermediary b/w decision maker and stakeholders
      * E.g. Company can use ‘firing consultants’ which don’t do much other than firing employees.
      * Firms can outsource to contractors that pay less than the standards of the firm itself
    - Horizontally: Relying on others to do what’s best for the stakeholder rather than themselves (bystander effect)
  + Exploitation of uncertainty/hidden information
  + ‘Seeking justifications’
    - ‘Twice work/Twice output = praised, but twice work/normal output, or normal work/twice output are paid less!
    - “fair allocations are malleable”
* The absence of explicit information about procedure = similar effects on selfish people
  + Informing people of procedural fairness is necessary, otherwise people believe they are losing for unfair reasons.

Choose an existing digital application (on phones, computers, etc.)

Amazon (Shopping) Application

What aspect of this app involves moral decision making (users, developers, company, etc.)?

Reviews of products – How to balance different stakeholders interests in the system. Amazon just wants to increase overall sales (needs some products to be well reviewed), individuals want to find high quality products (needs reviews to be accurate), and companies want to sell their products regardless of it’s actual quality (desires high review rankings).

Some reviews are ‘verified’ purchases, some reviews are ‘received item for free’, but this information is not always shared??!?

We can see that there are differences in perception between paid for and not reviews

Morality of Amazon?/Companies?

* Amazon clearly promotes it’s own internal items above those of competitors on it’s own platform.
  + Thus, it is in the dual position of being a seller, like many other entities, as well as the ‘gatekeeper’.
  + Amazon would like to NOT appear selfish (stealing business from local retailers, etc.) even when it is?
* When people buy from Amazon, even if it’s ‘immoral’ they can exploit plausible uncertainty that exists in other sources, so they can choose to get from Amazon instead?

Morality of Those Making Reviews?

* Dana 2007
  + When people themselves make reviews, they want to produce what they consider a ‘fair’ review, because people intrinsically dislike appearing unfair to themselves or others.
    - What actions can people engage in to maintain the ‘illusion’ of not appearing biased?
      * People who might review something worse if they had access to other items or services may choose to not look at those items/services to review something well (“this is the best I’ve ever tried!”)
      * I don’t have to look critically at other products, because someone else will!
    - People will not look for easily findable hidden information, if they can get a better outcome by ignoring this information!
  + It’s known that selfishness increases SIGNIFICANTLY in the absence of transparency
* Dana 2012
  + Do people giving highly biased reviews realize that they are doing so?
  + People are able to persuade themselves that they are NOT breaking ethical standards.
    - A reviewer may truly care about ethics, but would prefer not to incur the costs of taking the ethical action (a bad review, and less products/gifts moving forward) themselves if there is a good chance someone else will.
    - A reviewer may not care about what ‘ethical choice’ (purchasing decision) that someone else makes, if they don’t feel responsible ( “it’s their money, they can spend it how they like/ It’s just my opinion”)
* Choshen-Hillel 2015:
  + When we reduce partiality, there is more support for efficient but inequitable resource allocation
    - If ‘free products for review’ are provided in an impartial manner, with a transparent system, people’s perception of how much they are likely to be biased (or how helpful they are) could be shifted.
    - Perhaps other people can choose to assign ‘points’ or things they would like reviewed to others?

Morality of companies asking for reviews

* Dana 2012:
  + Companies have ‘vertical diffusion’ when they heavily incentivize others to promote their products and review it well (even if you include free items/payment!)
  + Also, Horizontal diffusion – relying on the ‘bulk’ of reviewers, or the people themselves to make the best choices for them (essentially belief that their product, while not the best for SOME people, is very good for others, and trust that people who buy their products fall in that category)

Please formulate a precise research question around this moral decision and outline a method of investigation!

Why is this research question important?

Why is it necessary to investigate this research question?