

**Note:** I originally planned to do either Uber or Tesla as my company, focusing on the ethical issues of self-driving cars, but I realized after reading the piazza forum posts that this isn't really IT related enough and more so AI related. As a result of this and other study commitments, my plan isn't as fleshed out as I hoped (particularly, I haven't really included my ethical arguments as I used most of my time just identifying potential issues), but that's okay, I'm **more so just wanting verification that my potential topics are IT-related** and that I'm on the right track with regards to issues.

Plan – Nicholas Quinn – z5117408

- A summary of the company and issues to be addressed

**Company:** 4chan is an online imageboard, which is a type of forum where users can post images with accompanying text. Similar to other popular internet forums, such as Reddit, 4chan's posts are submitted to different topical areas of the site, called boards. Unlike most of these other forums however, 4chan is anonymous, meaning posts are not linked to an account or even a pseudonym. Furthermore, posts on 4chan are not permanent, either expiring automatically or being manually removed by moderators, at which point they are deleted from 4chan's servers entirely.

Issues:

I have been able to think of/find the following ethical issues relating to 4chan. I've not yet researched them in depth but am confident a subset of these will be enough for the final report.

1. Cyberbullying
  - a. The case of Jessi Slaughter: Jessi was an 11 year old girl who was relentlessly bullied by 4channers, including death threats and insults, all because 4channers thought the way her father reacted to it was funny (<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3510958/How-viral-fame-killed-father-left-foster-care-friendless-Girl-meme-bullying-4chan-members-age-11-reveals-horrific-toll-Internet-family-six-years-later.html?ito=embedded>)
2. Raids and algorithmic manipulation
  - a. Twitter raid
  - b. Operation Youtube: this consisted of 4channers editing pornography into children's content and mass uploading it to YouTube (<https://www.theguardian.com/media/pda/2010/jan/06/youtube-porn-attack-4chan-lukeywes1234>)
  - c. Swastika trending: A 4chanter made a post telling other 4channers to google search a code he included in the post. People were curious about what the code meant and so it gained popularity, with many people google searching it. It turned out to be an encoding for the swastika, and as a result, it ending up being part of Google's trending searches (<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2008-jul-12-et-swastika12-story.html>). Whilst this was probably done to satisfy a dark sense of humour (rather than to actually push racial hatred), there's a solid argument to be had about online boards being able to alter algorithm recommendations and results via organised raids.
  - d. Operation Google: in an attempt to break Google's Conversation AI, whose aim was to automatically identify and censor racist posts online, 4channers began spreading posts with racial slurs in them, except the racial slurs were replaced with Google product names. <https://www.newstatesman.com/science-tech/internet/2016/09/stinking-googles-should-be-killed-why-4chan-using-search-engine-racist>
3. Illegal and inappropriate content
  - a. Child pornography

#### 4. Pranks/hoaxes

- a. iPhone bend and iPhone wave: these were two pranks organised on the random board of 4chan. Basically, official looking Apple ads were made that said the new iPhone had a flexible screen that could be bent and was also capable of being recharged in a microwave. Both of these were false and obviously led to the phone being broken.  
<https://www.dailydot.com/upstream/4chan-iphone-6-bend-prank/>

#### 5. Violence culture

There seem to be numerous stories of 4chan users collectively encouraging other posters to do violent or harmful acts.

- a. Grenades: I've found two accounts of users being encouraged to detonate grenades that they have found (1: <https://imgur.com/r/4chan/VP5eG>, 2: <https://imgur.com/3Sw22>). Whether or not these are true, or whether or not the individuals were harmed or killed, could be argued to be irrelevant from a Kantian perspective as there was intent to cause harm.
  - b. Encouragement of suicide
  - c. Sending images of a deceased car crash victim to the father
6. Wilful echo chambers: the idea of echo chambers resulting from machine learning algorithms (i.e. recommendations) is one thing, but users actively establishing them manually and wilfully participating is another. There are a number of boards, current and past, that encourage users extreme and harmful viewpoints. Two notable boards include the random board, and the politically incorrect board.

- A range of potential sources to use as evidence

Considering the transient nature of the site, most, if not all, of the evidence will be in the form of screenshots of posts from the site. I will of course site relevant news articles or online blog posts as well that relate to the events or issue at hand.

- Initial conclusion(s)

**Would I invest? No.**

- Ideas for possible steps the company could take to redress unethical behaviour
  1. A lot of the issues seem to arise from the fact that every opinion, no matter how radical or evil, is given an equal weight. Whilst this could be argued to be good from a free-speech point of view, there do exist laws pertaining to hate-speech in many countries, and for a good reason. Perhaps a measure to be put in place would be a voting system on posts, similar to reddit.
  2. There is also a lack of accountability. Accountability could be increased if posters were not so anonymous.