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How Does Information Sampling Affect Moral Judgments?

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Abstract

Social identity and situational information guide how people morally judge others. A journalist is judged differently than a doctor if they expose private information, which may also depend on whether the reason was to prevent a public health crisis vs. for monetary gain. What is less known, is how people decide how much and what type of information (identity vs. situation) is more relevant for them to make a moral judgment. To investigate this, participants received limited information about a case with a potential moral violation. Then, they could get new pieces of information about the case (varying in importance as normed in our pre-study) incrementally, or stop collecting information and instead judge the violation. This study elucidates how people accumulate and use evidence to judge others. Our findings can reveal underlying biases in decision-making and be used to inform legal and criminal proceedings, news coverage strategies, and others.