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Case Analysis on Privacy

As presented by Vaidhyanathan in the *Googleization of Everything*, Google, as a corporation, gives grounds for a debate around Google Street View and the implications of its launch. Google Street View is presented with its benefits, helping individuals in their personal and professional lives, along with its drawbacks, invading people's privacy (Vaidhyanathan, 2013, p.100-101). But even before seeing Street View as a useful tool, there were challenges and problems around its launch in the first few weeks of operation in some places, and in other places like Japan and Germany, it was strongly contested. Google could have avoided this pushback by considering and anticipating the response of society and cultures to Street View. Based on this, I will argue in this analysis that Google could have taken a utilitarian approach to the launch and operation of Street View, considering all people and cultures and how Street View will best serve them.

Grimmelmann's Concepts

Grimmelmann presented his point by first stating the challenges that Facebook and Facebook users faced with privacy. He made it clear that the challenges are not just

one-sided, that it is the user who is to be blamed because they have unrealistic views of privacy, or that they are not interested in privacy. But it is also not blamed on Facebook that they are not concerned with the safety of the product (Grimmelmann, 2010, p.801-803). It is given by Grimmelmann in the privacy as product safety chapter that, in considering product safety, the manufacturer is held responsible for all flaws in the system that can lead to human harm, and disclaimers cannot be used as an excuse or a way out of being responsible (Grimmelmann, 2010 p.818). If the manufacturer of a product is to be held responsible for all flaws of production, isn't it a requirement that they design a production model with consideration for all people and what would be good for them? This view is reflected in the case study of Google Buzz presented by Grimmelmann. Buzz was a bust because, in its need to bring easier connectivity to its users, a feature was added that did not cater to the good of all these users. Users who need a certain layer of privacy and confidentiality (which is most people) are not covered in this feature, since it publishes the frequently contacted emails of these users (Grimmelmann, 2010 p.823-826). In the Googlization of everything, the trouble of considering the privacy needs comes as we look at the launch and operation of Google Street View which though it was a challenge in the State was later widely accepted and became a useful tool to many people, but in Japan, it was a very clear and deep violation of privacy considering they have a deeper meaning of privacy. Google should have considered how Street View would be seen by people with that much of an inclination of what privacy is, Vahadyhattean helps bring this into cope as he considers himself and the multiple illegal gambling places close to his house (Vaidhyathan, 2012 p.105-106). How does Street View cater for people with such challenges? There is a sense that different people have different understanding of privacy and so a one fits all solution cannot work, but the proposal given by Grimmelmann for Facebook to approach privacy as can be applied with Google in places like their launch of street view. Product safety laws as stated earlier makes the manufacturer

responsible for all harm done to users and a breach of privacy is a serious harm especially in modern technology and media culture. Google pointed out that they took measures to protect people by blurring out revealed faces and removing pictures people flag, but if said people need to flag an image they and possibly others must have seen it already and that in itself is a breach of their privacy.

Floridi's Concepts

Privacy is our greatest possession and therefore extremely valuable (Floridi, 2014 p.101). The emphasis of this truth is reemphasized by Floridi in information friction with a series of examples of situations in which this is practicalised. As Floridi put it, students living in a glass house would significantly reduce information friction if they were assumed to have excellent vision (Floridi, 2014 p.104). Similarly, Street View puts people in a glass house from across the world, but even more so in the same area. The need for information friction in privacy security extends from a combination of the reductionist and ownership views of privacy, allowing people to have a sense of having privacy be a part of them as much as it is them, but also extending to the point that this privacy, if exploited by an outside force, can be used to affect consequences against the individual. Early ICTs influenced information friction by moving information in one direction, reducing the friction of information flow, but introduced a duality of reducing and increasing friction with the introduction of new ICTs. New ICTs allowed people to either reduce the flow of information about themselves or others and to increase information flow in the same way with media bodies like Facebook, Instagram, and yes, Google. As seen with Google Street View, it reduces the informational friction, allowing people to be able to scout out neighborhoods, towns, or cities before they can go there physically (Vaidhyathan, 2012 p.98-99). The policies brought in by Google to

try and maintain the privacy of people on Street View can be considered to increase information friction, as it is meant to blur out personal identifier information. This in itself ties back into the point of privacy being our most precious possession because it is a bid to satisfy the user's need for privacy, which is very valuable to all people, as emphasized by the Japanese and Germans. Blurring out photos increases the friction that was reduced by the images that had been uploaded, leaning into Floridi's point of anonymity that new ICTs present. This, of course, is not a substitute for actual privacy; rather, it just takes away the ready identification of people, allowing them to go unidentified. As inforgrs, we get to use anonymity as a veil to hide behind; we still have all our data collected from cookies and consents we give that parties use to fine-tune adverts to us, among other things. But it is clear that new ICTs do enhance informational friction and, by extension, increase security for privacy. As PayTouch, which was referenced by Floridi, the use of biometrics as multifactor authentication has further empowered how ICTs can influence information friction; even Google now uses this approach to better protect its users and their privacy. The use of biometrics, more than any other point of affecting information friction presented by Floridi, is not applicable in a utilitarian approach of respecting privacy on the Street View. As seen in the example of Odysseus, it is not just about biometric identifiers that help people identify others on Street View, but just as Odysseus was identified by Penelope due to intimate information shared between them, so also can a lot of people identify others on Street View based on general identifiers unique to these people, like Vadyhattan and his dog on his block. If people can be identified by these unique identifiers, building a system that would consider and mitigate the consequences of breaching the privacy of all people is vital. It is based on this that a utilitarian approach to Google Street View is needed to better protect the privacy of people from all cultures and countries.

Privacy is a very valuable possession to all people, and to some more than most, applications and application features like Google Street View have a tendency to breach this privacy. This being the case Google as well as other companies like it should approach launching and running these software and features from a utilitarian stand point, considering how they can release it in a way that respects the most valuable possession of people, noting that people do want a realistic privacy policy that still allows them to share their information with whom they want, how they want. The agreement reached at the Geneva Convention on information of prisoners of war, as referenced by Ford, applies here to better protect people and their information. Companies should consider all products, even digital platforms, as products that are subject to product safety rules, reducing or stopping all manufacturer-based harm to people and cultures (in the case of Street View).

References

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