Avanti N. Garcia

Professor Garnar

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**Case Analysis – Privacy**

**What would have been a more ethical way to implement Google Street View?**

The case presented by Siva Vaidhyanathan is one of ethical utilization of a corporate open-source resource that may or may not infringe upon a person’s right to privacy. Vaidhyanathan presents that Google released “Street View” in 2009, a tool that allows users a 360 degree view of public access roads. To achieve this, Google released a fleet of vehicles in Asia, North America, and Europe with cameras mounted to the roof with the purpose of driving on roads and recording through images the roads and surrounding areas. Over time, multiple countries reported that certain aspects of this tool violate and / or breach an individuals right to privacy. Arguments are made that Google “Street View” allows the possibility that the accessibility to view images from the internet may allow criminals to gather information remotely. Google “Street View” through its own technology implemented “blurring” technology to remove individuals faces as well as license plates from vehicles, however this was proven to not be one hundred percent successful. The criminal aspect comes into play by use of gathering information such as vehicle make / model, view of houses with open curtains, view over fences / hedges, visible home defense systems, pets present, and so forth. Individuals do have the capability to submit a request to Google to remove images, which after submission typically have “an hour or two” turnaround time according to Peter Barron, head of communication and public affairs for Google in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Belgium the Netherlands, and Luxembourg (Vaidhyanathan pg. 106). It is my belief, that the implementation of Google’s “Street View” was implemented as best as possible regarding individuals right to privacy. In this Case Analysis I will argue that Consequentialism/Utilitarianism shows us that Google did everything possible to ensure individuals right to privacy was not violated.

Floridi presents several concepts in Privacy Chapter Five which correlate to the use and importance of privacy with respect to how Google’s Street View interacts with individuals. One of the key concepts posed within the reading, was how Privacy is self-constituting, meaning that the value of privacy come from privacy itself, not from any external factors. First privacy should be defined, within the module Floridi defines four separate types of privacy; informational privacy, decisional privacy, mental privacy, and physical privacy. Informational privacy can be defined as “Facts about her that are unknown or unknowable” and refers to forces that oppose the flow of information within a region. Decisional Privacy is determined to be “Freedom from procedural interference or intrusion”. Mental privacy was defined by Floridi as “Freedom from psychological interference or intrusion”. The last type of privacy established by Floridi was Physical privacy, or “Freedom from sensory interference or intrusion”. Having defined the four main types of privacy determined by Floridi, we as readers can establish and examine how Google’s Street View may or may not have infringed upon these freedoms.

The informational privacy of residents was not infringed upon as there is/was no facts about residents distributed, thus in no way allowing users to determine previously unknown facts about a persons identity. In contrast, some facts, such as visible identifiers (vehicles, outdoor decor) may give beneficial information that may assist in determining a resident’s identity, however that then falls upon the individual to assume responsibility.

The decisional and mental privacy of persons, residents or individuals pictured within Google’s Street View, to my knowledge based upon the reading and own intuition, was not violated or ever brought into questions.

The physical privacy was and continues to be the major concern for individuals, as they may or may not have been identified or pictured by Google’s cameras. To reiterate, physical privacy is defined as “freedom from sensory interference or intrusion”. The Street View feature never interfered; however one might claim it did intrude upon the physical privacy of individuals in public. Vaidhyanathan brought several cases to light that may have breached the physical privacy of persons by Google photographing them in public areas that they may not have permitted to being photographed. Examples of this were was a child naked a public place, persons exiting adult stores, patrons leaving or entering establishments that may bring upon discredit to their professional reputation.

Utilizing the Consequentialism/Utilitarianism tool, I will now establish how the concepts established by Floridi were for the greater good of the majority. Vaidhyanathan conducted studies on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to determine the uses employed by individuals. The feedback established that the majority of respondents, enjoyed the capabilities and resources that Google Street View enabled them to access. Individuals were employing and developing new ways to utilize Google Street View to better enhance their way of life. Having recognized that none of the four main privacy facets were violated, from a utilitarianism perspective, the use of Google Street View outweigh the negatives or minor concerns of the few, especially when factoring in that Google offers relatively quick responses to requests to remove images of identifying features.

The main concept of the second reading titled “Privacy as Product Safety” by James Grimmelmann, is that users of social media platforms such as Facebook demand privacy however disregard safety measures put in place to allow users to establish their own limits or boundaries of the network they associate with. Providing insight into how users post, share, and “Like” images and information, users are therefore providing public knowledge. If users utilize Facebook and post their first and last names (like most users do), share where they attended school or college, share their own marital status, where they live, and then continue to post images, videos, thoughts on topics and places, but fail to utilize built in features, then they do so either from an inner seeking for fulfillment or from ignorance.

The example that was given regarding Andrea and her photos she shared with musician Bono, is that “people are not really trading off privacy against socializing on Facebook so much as using it to define them both, simultaneously, in relation to each other.” What purpose is sharing intimate information with social media platforms serving other than ones own personal motives? Another example that might be used, two people are having an intimate conversation in a public place, when an individual conducts those actions or shares that information in a public forum, there has to be a level of acceptance for the risk involved in sharing that data or information.

From a utilitarianism view, Grimmelmann states it perfects on page 813 “Facebook can be hazardous to your privacy, but a hammer can be hazardous to your thumb”. The uses of Facebook and the resources associated with it again outweigh the possible negative connotations about social media platforms. The possible negative risks stem also from the failure of individuals to fully comprehend and understand the tool that they are utilizing. Facebook allows users to connect with a wider network for professional development, allows users to connect and establish support groups, and essentially allows users to connect with one another, while only sharing that information that they as the user first determine they will share. With that in mind, Google’s Street View is another tool of similar uses. How can individuals demand privacy and state that Google has infringed upon that right, when everything that Google photographs is in a public space. If individuals are feel as though photographing the front of their house was somehow a violation, they can simply reach out to Google, if they feel that something was photographed in a public space that depicts them in an unfavorable light, then it goes back to the Grimmelmann and how he states on page 804 that “if you have something that you don’t want anyone to know, maybe you shouldn’t be doing it in the first place”. In context for the Google Street View, if an individual was imaged leaving an establishment that would reflect poorly on them, then why were they there to begin with? Again, from a utilitarianism perspective, the minor infractions on individuals does not compare with the gains and benefits that Google Street View allows its users.

In conclusion, after reviewing the text and information from Floridi regarding the concept that privacy should be valued for the sole purpose of what it is, and defining privacy in four major facets, through this it was established that neither the informational, decisional, mental or physical privacy was violated by Google’s Street View. The only rebuttal is that the physical privacy may have been violated as an intrusion of the images captured. This again however reflects within the second text of Grimmelmann, in that, why display it in the first place where it can be viewed from the street? Second to that, Google readily provides solutions to remove media or images through its own avenues that are readily available to the public. This all ties into how Grimmelmann states that this is merely a tool, that when used correctly and with understanding, provides key benefits for the whole of humanity, and that the oversharing of information is the fault of the user, not the tool.