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Case Analysis on Privacy

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In the Case analysis on privacy, we are presented with an article titled “The Googlization of Everything (And why we should worry)” written by Siva Vaidhyanathan, in which the author puts forth arguments as to why people seem to consider Google “Street View”, a service that google offers that shows a street-level 360-degree view of roads and properties. The unfortunate effect of this service is the potentiality of an individuals’ home, license plate number, or other personal information being visible for any to view at any time. Also, there is the potential of catching a person in a compromising or embarrassing situation. This is a violation of their privacy. In the article, we learn that there are many countries that either want Google Street View to get permission before releasing these images or will not allow Google to even enter their area. In this Case Analysis I will argue that the ethical tool “ethics of care” shows us that Google should have looked at the complaints and worries of the individuals instead of posting the images without the consent of said individuals.

In the excerpt from Luciano Floridi’s book “The 4th Revolution. How the Infosphere is Reshaping Human Reality.” We can look at the chapter on privacy and see that Floridi is discussing how ICTs, or “information and communication technologies” are transforming society “profoundly and irrevocably”. This farsighted projection corresponds perfectly with the

advent of Google Street View and the issues we see arising from the potential violation of peoples' privacy.

As technology continues to make life more convenient, and entertaining, individuals are more readily accepting of giving up their privacy. We see this in the short-lived backlash Google received when implementing street view. People were somewhat upset until they saw that nothing harmful really arose from the street views.

Floridi describes us entering a new age defined as "Hyper history" where human progress and welfare have begun to be not just related to, but mostly dependent on, the successful and efficient management of the life cycle of information.

Individuals are willing to give up privacy in order to have the convenience of being able to use Google street view as a tool. Some use it to see potential locations for building projects or even to scop out a potential living community. These are wonderful uses for a tool that could also prove to have harmful ramifications if used for ill gains.

Floridi explains how people are seeing the practical usage more readily than critically reflecting on what exactly it means to have a 360 view of our private lives. The author also talks about informational friction, where "the forces that oppose the flow of information within a region of the infosphere", and ways that this friction can be avoided or lessened to some degree.

Google should have the moral responsibility to keep this "friction" as minimal as possible. Google states that it is not hard to remove images from their street view technology if an individual request it. I do not think this is the best way to cut down on informational friction. A more ethical approach would be to get permission before posting images and putting the burden on an individual that may never use their service. These individuals may have their

personal image or images of their personal life posted for the world to see but be unbeknownst to themselves. A better option may be simply removing the images of people altogether, and not create this friction in the first place.

In the ethics of care, we see that taking someone else's feelings into account and basically putting yourself in their shoes is a good way to determine if your actions are ethical. Google does not seem to be doing this when expecting individuals to come to them to remove personal images that are private or potentially embarrassing.

Floridi speaks of empowerment as well. Empowerment is feeling like one has control over a situation. By Google expecting peoples to come to them "after the fact" does not give a sense of control to the individuals that may have not seen an image they want removed until irreversible harm has already been done. Things that are "removed" from the internet tend to have a habit of resurfacing in many other areas if they are put online to begin with. So why not avoid this with proactive actions that do not require individuals to do the foot work of self-preservation to their privacy? Google most certainly preserves their privacy; so, if they simply look at the ethics of care, they could understand why others would want them to take the same standard when implementing the street view technology.

In the ethics of care, we see that one should put themselves in the place of the other individual to determine how they should act. This coincides with Floridi's concept of empowerment. When someone is empowered, they are more likely to go along with a request. If Google would empower individuals by giving them control over whether their images, or the images of their properties are used or not, they would have a much better response from individuals. This could be accomplished by having a waiver for peoples to sign giving

permission for their images to be used. This would be costly, and meticulous, but worth it for public relations in the end, and for them as a company to follow the most ethical path.

We now look at an excerpt from the Widener Law Journal, by James Grimmelman titled “Privacy as product safety”. People often do not understand the implications that can arise from an image without context. Grimmelman talks about a story where two young ladies are photographed walking with a celebrity on the beach, and later tabloids misrepresent what is actually going on. This can be not only happen to celebrities, but also any person whose image is viewed on Google's street view. Any story can be associated with an image that is taken out of context.

Grimmelmann mentions that there is a generational gap where older generations care more about privacy than generations who have been raised posting every instance of their lives on social media. This does seem strike true to some extent. This still does not mean that it is ethical for Google to post their images online without permission. These young people willingly post images that they feel are appropriate in their minds. They have the power to determine what parts of their lives are put out there for the world to see. Google does not seem to understand this concept when they simply post images without regard of whether people want the images out there or not. Again, this is an example of Google not placing themselves in the shoes of others, and not using the ethics of care tool to determine the ethical viewpoint of their actions.

The idea that young people do not care about their privacy is debunked when Grimmelman explains how they tend to be more cognizant of their privacy when employers, relatives, or the police start looking at their Facebook profiles. This is a good example of how people may see their images on Google Street View. They may think it's neat for Google to show their homes from a street level. But say their image was caught in a compromising pose or

maybe it was trash day and garbage was laying on their porch, or any other potential embarrassing situation. If an individual was trying to sell their home for instance, would they want a potential buyer to look at an outdated photo on google street view to determine their interest in the home. Maybe improvements were made that are not shown. There are too many other variables to constitute putting the images out without permission. It is not fair to the parties involved. The information that is given may be taken out of context.

A main difference in social media and Google street view is that a person chooses to put personal information on social media. They are aware of the forfeiture of privacy they are participating in; but it is their choice. Google Street View does not take choice into account. This causes a problem when determining what should and should not be posted online.

Grimmelmann goes on to discuss how product safety law can fit into privacy law as well. Basically, a company should take responsibility for the product of their design. In this, Google earth should use the ethics of care to determine what responsibility they could face if unforeseen actions arise from their product showing private images of individuals.

Google can look at the ethics of care when determining privacy as product safety. If Google puts themselves in the shoes of the individuals affected by personal images being shown without consent, they will see that an individual could have a viable lawsuit against the company if their personal right to privacy is violated. This can be detrimental to their product, and using the ethics of care would help Google see the individuals as humans with rights, and not just consumers of their products.

In conclusion, Google Street View is an entertaining, useful tool that can be used for many good things. It can also be used for many troublesome things if steps are not taken to

protect people's ambiguity, and privacy. Some may say that the loss of the right to privacy is a small price to pay for the convenience and entertainment properties that a tool such as Google Street view provides. This is a valid argument. However, we as society must determine just how much privacy we are willing to give up, in order to have access to this innovative tool. Google obviously invested astronomical funds into creating and implementing the technology that so many enjoy, but in some cases, they may have overlooked a simple thing such as the ethics of care, and more often than not, they tend to not place themselves in other's shoes. If they were to use these principles, I believe there would be less friction, and people would be more accepting of their product.