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Privacy Case Analysis

Siva Vaidhyanathan brought up an interesting argument about how Google Maps invades your personal privacy with the use of Street View. She suggests that by Google taking 360-degree photos of the streets and highways of any specific country, they are abusing our right to privacy. She acknowledges that the tool can be used for many good things as her friends and colleagues pointed out. For example, scouting out locations or a community center or helping you remember the name of a restaurant that you liked. However, the problem arises when it comes to the people that get caught in the picture. Whether it be down a residential street or somewhere in public. Google has taken many embarrassing photos of people that were unaware and or helpless in the moment. Therefore, she feels that Street View poses an issue for the privacy of everyone. In the following case analysis, I will argue that under the teachings of Kantianism, Google should do more to make sure that the privacy of everyone is protected.

As a human being, you have the right to Anonymity. This means that your life can remain as private as you wish so long as you follow the laws set by society. This is important to have when it comes to the safety and security of your own private life's. But what information is meant to stay private? Does the definition of private information change from one person to the next? The answer is absolutely. We can already see a big difference in what one generation views as private over another. As society evolves, so does our views on what should be kept in the dark. We share more today about our lives than ever before. From what we had for breakfast all the way to who we were in a relationship

with. The biggest contributor to this is the Internet. Thanks to the Internet we can share, upload, and view information in seconds. Because of this, information spreads fast. Someone in Japan can hear about something that happened on the East coast of the United States within twenty minutes of it happening.

This brings up an issue when it comes to information that someone might not want to spread across the internet. Since it is so easily shared, it is often hard to stop the spread of something. Therefore, keeping a person's privacy intact becomes so important. Google collects information from across the globe. Whether it is internet history, smart home interactions, or location data, Google has access to a lot of information about your life. When they started Google Street View, it took the level of information they were collecting from virtual to physical. They have access to your location, pictures of what your house looks like, your personal interests, possibly where you work, what time you leave for work, and if you have google device with a camera on it, they also possibly have information about the inside of your house. As you can see, if you let them, Google knows a lot about your personal life, and you are freely giving them that information.

Luciano Floridi talks about four different types of freedoms that humans should be able to experience. He states that one doesn't have more importance than any other, rather they all play an important role in society. The first he talks about is the freedom from sensory interference. This is often thought about as personal space. This freedom is one that can be affected by intrusive ads or messages that google might show or send out. Floridi's second freedom is the freedom from psychological interference. Google can play a huge role in the overall happiness of someone's life in more ways than you think. Google's recommendations, ad services, and physical devices can affect the way that someone feels. This is extremely powerful seeing that this is a corporation that has no personal connection with you. The third freedom is the freedom from procedural interference or intrusion. Although you might think that you aren't the persuasive type, Google can greatly affect the decisions

that you make. By showing you certain items or locations, they can trick your mind into making a decision that it might not have originally. Lastly, Florida's final freedom is the freedom from informational interference. This is a freedom that Google has the most control over. What information is being seen or hidden from the public. Google has the most used search engine in the world. People rely on it everyday to get to the information they want or need. Google is able to put the sites they want you to see first higher in the search results. As you can see, Google has a hand in most forms of your personal privacy whether you realize it or not.

The question of how Google could have implemented Street View in a more ethical way is one that I believe to have many answers but not one that would make everyone happy. Like many things, people have different views when it comes to have Google Maps as a tool. What makes the satellite images that Google takes less privacy invasive than the Street View? The answer to that is the amount of close up detail that you can see. Whether it's someone's face, body, car, or house, Street View shows more of your life if you like it or not. There isn't a way to implement this product without giving away some privacy. Houses, yards, and streets are the basic principle behind the tool. If you took that away, there would be nothing left. However, what if you could just take out the cars and people?

In James Grimmelman's article he argues that since Google and other companies like them have access to such a vast amount of personal information, that they should do as much as possible to protect that information from attack from hackers. In the teachings of Deontology, we are taught to always do the morally correct thing even though it might not be in the best interest of you or those around you. Taking those teachings to Google, they should protect the information they collect to their best abilities even if it cost them more than they'd like because it is the correct thing to do. Sadly, the world doesn't run like that. The dollar holds power over all when it comes to decisions. They will do anything they can in order to make more money. This is where the politicians need to step in to make

sure that these businesses are forced to protect their user's information or risk be fined or shutdown if they don't.

In the case of Street View, there need to be more steps in order to ensure that identifiable information isn't found within the tool. What I mean by this is that faces, bodies, cars, pets, and anything else that could identify someone needs to be removed. This won't be an easy task for Google to accomplish. This would mean investing money to research and design a way to capture images without these things in them. This would most likely mean having to completely restart. Using the new system that would be able to take parts of an image out and using other data, be able to fill in the space with what it would look like if that object or being wasn't there. This tactic would cost Google billions of dollars. Therefore, I believe that something like this would never happen. If the government gave them the option between fixing the privacy issues or taking the tool down. I think that they would take it down with very little thought.

I feel that the biggest issue in the case of privacy between Street View and social media is the lack of choice. Google does state that if you have an issue with a picture that you found within Street View, that they will either remove the image or blur the image however, If someone is unaware of what Google might have captured, their privacy would be lost and they wouldn't even know. On social media, you are notified when someone posts a picture with you being tagged in it. You then have the option to ask for the person to take the photo down or report it for a privacy violation. This puts the person in charge of making the decision for themselves while Google must make the decisions for you since there is no way to notify you if something connected to you shows up. Google must take action and do what is morally correct when it comes to privacy with their customers. They claim to care about privacy and used to have the motto of don't be evil, but what they need to do is show that they mean it in actions rather than words.

Determining if Google Street View would be moral according to Deontology is more than just a yes or no answer. Doing the morally correct thing is never a black or white line. There is always a grey area in-between where the answer is more of a matter of opinion. However, if we asked either James Grimmelmann or Luciano Floridi, I feel that they would both agree that Google currently isn't doing enough to be considered moral. They would believe that Google needs to focus more on the overall privacy of the data it keeps rather than adding more information to their collection.

In conclusion, Google is not alone when it comes to the need to protect the personal privacy of millions of people. There are many companies in the same circumstance when it comes to collecting personal information. There have been many accounts of information leaks from many different companies in the last few years. Leaking the data from as few as hundreds to as many as hundreds of millions of people across the world. These companies need to step up and do what is right for their users and protect the information they hold. Street View is just one of the few examples of companies ignoring personal privacy in favor of making money. I realize that in order to make this happen, companies must be willing to lose millions if not billions of dollars in order to reassess their business plan but it is something that would help make the world a better place.