

## Case Analysis on Privacy: Google Street View

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

In “The Googlization of Everything,” Vaidhyanathan presents a case about Google and their implementation of Google Street View. This case brings up major privacy issues and concerns that people have due to the nature of how Google obtains their street views. In this Case Analysis I will argue that the Confucian ethical tool shows us that Google should have proceeded differently, in a more ethical way.

One central concept from Floridi was the concept of privacies as “freedoms from,” or negative freedoms. What this means is that these are freedoms or rights that are made possible by way of no interference. An example that was used in the lecture was the right to free speech, as we don’t need to interfere for this to be possible. Another central concept that Floridi presented was the concept of Informational Friction. Informational Friction refers to how difficult it may be to get information. This is connected with how much effort it takes for an agent to filter, get, or block information about other agents by manipulating the information friction by way of increasing, decreasing, or shaping it.

In this case, there is obviously a major privacy concern, specifically pertaining to how invasive the collection of the street view images. In the United States, citizens should have a right to privacy, but the way in which Google implemented their Google Street View calls into question if they actually should be able to do it. Google uses special cameras to capture images of the area, but individuals were reporting that the cameras were capturing too much. They captured people’s faces, their license plates, and even embarrassing moments. To me, this is in

direct opposition to privacy being a “freedom from.” With this, Google is interfering directly with the privacy of others, making it impossible for them to have true privacy.

The ethical tool that I will be using is the Confucianism ethical tool. With this tool, we learned that people have a path they can take in order to do what is best. We learned that individuals should consider all things when making a decision to do what is best, including their role and how actions would affect other people. Google did not act in the way a Confucian would, as despite their claims, it doesn’t seem as though they considered the fact that the privacy of citizens could be impacted negatively. I believe that as Google was first capturing images for Google Street view, they should have first ensured that there were no people around while the cameras were working. They should have also been thorough and meticulous about making sure that no embarrassing moments were visible or that personal information, like a license plate, were properly covered.

One central topic from Grimmelmann was the concept of the Privacy Paradox. It is the idea that even though user’s may say that they care about privacy, they don’t act in a way that seems like they care about privacy. More often than not, researchers will look at user’s as the problem and try to see what is wrong with them, but Grimmelmann looks at it differently. He brings up how instead of the problem being the users, it might instead be a problem structurally or a design ethics problem. Structural problems refer to the fact that there aren’t too many options, like Facebook, out there for user’s to choose. A design ethics problem refers to the fact that user’s actually do care about their privacy, but everything is designed in a way that makes it really difficult to use well. Companies, like Facebook, also do not have big enough incentives to ensure that their user’s can figure it out.

The concept of Privacy Paradox can be heavily represented in this case. In the case, there was an incident where Google had to remove an image that their cameras captured of a naked toddler. However, the Street View image was up for at least 48 hours before its removal. In my opinion, this is considered a design ethics problem where individuals do care about their privacy, but the design makes it difficult for them. Of course the parents in this situation care about the privacy of their child, but in this case, Google made it impossible for them to protect it.

This Google Street View case is a good example to use when discussing companies actions and their implications on privacy. In my opinion, there were ways that Google could have implemented their new feature that would still help to preserve the privacy of individuals. I feel as though Google could have created a process where thorough examinations are done of all images prior to them being made public. With this, I believe the majority of the complaints for image removals or alterations would have never happened. To me, this would be acting by way of Confucian, as these processes and preventative measures are truly looking out for individuals and their privacy.