Privacy Case Analysis

The article “*Googleization of Everything*”, by Siva Vaidhyanathan is about google street view which is a service that google provides that allows users a 360-degree view of streets and roads. This software incorporates pictures of addresses or areas that the user is trying to search. Users can see outside of individuals homes, businesses, public areas, driveways, and much more. This service was implemented in 2007 by providing this service to only a couple U.S. cities, some of those being New York and San Francisco. Unfortunately, with this service came many issues of privacy. Many individuals had noticed that there were revealing and embarrassing photos of them on this platform. Such circumstances quickly escalated for users to complain about the service and had let Google know that this new service was “too invasive for comfort”. Although many complaints were flooding through, google seemed to continue to broaden the service over the years despite the unhappy individuals. Countries such as the U.K. and Germany had individuals protest this new technology and complained about the invasion of privacy that this service contained. For this case analysis, I will argue that it is crucial for Google to have an employee dedicated to ensuring that these individuals or organizations have consented for google to use pictures of their property for their own use.

The importance of ensuring that these individuals have consented is crucial for the service to have a stand in society. For instance, one of Grimmelmann’s concepts in his “Privacy as Product Safety” demonstrates the four myths of privacy on Facebook. This article speaks on the investigation of a couple myths involving privacy on Facebook. One of those myths is that Facebook users do not find the importance of privacy. In the article Grimmelmann’s explains how this is a large misconception because it is more likely that people who go on Facebook and post private information about them such as their location, place of living, cars they drive, and their family do ultimately care about their privacy. The second myth is that Facebook users make rational privacy choices. In most cases even the most careful user can fail to comprehend the options they have regarding their privacy. For instance, Facebook previous policy was automatically sharing a user’s pictures with their entire network. The third myth is that Facebook users desire for privacy is unrealistic. An opposing argument the author touches base that if people would care about their privacy, then they would not be posting private information in regard to their life on social media in the first place. This concept is agreeable to an extent because any data posted online could be easily duplicated and distributed. The website is not designed to be fully public and have your account accessible to anyone. Grimmelmann’s explains how it enhances back and forth discussions between small groups as well as family and friends. Lastly, the final myth is that the database regulation makes privacy safe. Grimmelmann’s cites “limited data collection” , “full disclosure” and “no secondary use” as essential ideas in the database centered model of privacy protection, arguing that while important, they don’t get the core of “user-user connections on Facebook.” It complicated to explain what the goal of providing personal information on a site like this. We can apply these concepts to the case in many ways. For example, Google more than likely assumed that people would not care about the Google mobiles driving around their neighborhoods recording footage for their Street View service the same way that people assume Facebook users did not find much importance for their privacy. Another common assumption could be that people are outside of their houses already and their desire for privacy is more than likely unrealistic. This assumption cannot be true because people deserve to be able to preserve their privacy regardless of whether they are out in public frequently or not. Both Google and Facebook lacked to incorporate ethics of care in these cases. Google should have primarily used ethic of care to realize that not everyone would like their home and personal property to be on display for the whole world to see. Google should have taken into consideration that there are individuals who protect their privacy and do not appreciate their privacy being taken away from them without their consent to do so. In regards to the discussion on ethics of care it is clear that care is not a duty, but that it has an emotional component. Therefore, its not written in a law or a set of rules that you have to care about anyone or apply care into making decisions, but morally and ethically every decision google made should be made in consideration of caring about people’s personal privacy and preferences.

The next article I will be analyzing to further my argument is ‘Privacy” by Luciano Floridi. One concept that I was able to grasp from this reading was that there are many types of privacy. The one that I believe relates to my argument would be physical privacy. Luciano expresses that “physical privacy is a freedom from sensory interference or intrusion, achieved thanks to a restriction on others ability to have bodily interactions with her or invade her personal space. I believe that people do not have physical privacy when it comes to Google Street view. I believe this because I do not think that Google cared about how people came out in some images causing those people who did come out in an embarrassing way to have to deal with the embarrassment even though they did not consent for this picture to be uploaded. Unpleasant images of some individuals demonstrates the unfairness of taking away the physical privacy of that individual. For example, In Japan a person was walking down the street staring at the residents and invading their physical privacy, would be watched back by the residents and they would probably take actions such as confronting them or calling the police. Google street view is portraying the exact actions but in a worser condition due to some residents looking out not even knowing google was taking an image of their property or even them being included in the photograph. There has been cases where people were caught by google mobile camera’s and satellite camera’s while they were sunbathing in their back yard. These images were an example of how Google was violating an individuals physical privacy. Another interesting concept Floridi discussed was Anonymity. He defined anonymity as, “the unavailability of personal information, due to the difficulty of collecting or corelating different bits of information about someone.” This term also may be known as a lack of identifiability. Google street view threatens people’s anonymity because it allows people more accessibility into an individual’s life. For example, if someone like a celebrity or public figure has their address leaked anyone could look it up to see the house Google Street View. After they locate the searched house there may be more information shown then just the address. The user may be able to see what make and model of a care they drive, kids toys on a porch that could identify the home as having children, and also other clues such as pets. The google team should have used ethics of care in making the service the same way they would want their privacy to be taken care of. While making this program I can ensure that google employees did not allow any photos or data posed on street view of them, their family, or personal property without their approval. Ethics of care shows that showing favoritism and preference towards people we know and have ties with is a moral failure in an organization. The Google team was fully aware of street view and how it operated so they most likely were prepared, as well as told their family about the software so that they were able to make proper preparations regarding the software recordings. The same courtesy should have been given to the rest of the individuals that would be affected by this program. Google’s approach on their operation should have involved a since of care and should have implement better ways to provide residents with this great service a more caring and morally correct manner.

Although, Google Street view has faced tremendous backlash, I noticed that many people did not have an issue with it when using the program. I personally searched up all address I ever lived at to see is there was anything too revealing regarding my own family, and I was happy to see there was nothing there. Many individuals argue that Google Street view is fine how it is and there should not be any changes made to the system. But that is because some individuals have a different idea of privacy then others. Many individuals do not care if people know what kind of car they drive or if they are caught doing something embarrassing, but other do because of what they consider to be private. Such circumstances make it crucial for Google to have used ethics of care when making this program by having someone physically view the pictures and blur out or remove images that may be violating someone’s privacy. Google does have software that does this, but not all software is 100% reliable. Another solution that could have taken place is that Google could have sent out letters or provided a notification allowing individual to know about when they would be coming by and how to prepare for this. Although, this would not be very easy it is worth ensuring that ethics of care is involved and that everyone is treated with respect and respect for their privacy. Ensuring that ethics of care was involved would ensure that all users consent to their personal information to exposed to the world.