Case Analysis (Privacy) using Consequentialism/Utilitarianism

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Introduction

In “Googleization of Everything,” Siva Vaidhyanathan analyses the problem of putting Google Street View into practice and exposes critical privacy issues tied to the service. To a certain extent, Vaidhyanthan maintains that despite the numerous advantages Google Street View provides, for instance, accurate navigation, real estate, and geographical learning, it invades personal privacy since it takes and publishes detailed photographs of people’s homes and other personal property without their consent. This intrusion raises serious ethical questions about individuals’ rights to privacy in the digital realm. Google Street View has raised serious concerns about the way that the company harvests and publishes large volumes of visual data with little respect for privacy (Vaidhyanathan, 2012). In this Csse Analysis, I will argue that, based on a consideration of Consequentialism/Utilitarianism ethical principles, Google should have integrated Street View with better privacy protection to reduce harm and increase benefits to uphold better ethics in innovation and privacy.

Analysis of Floridi's Concepts

Central Concepts from Floridi

In his book “Privacy: Informational Friction,” Luciano Floridi ventures into defining informational friction as an impedance in the flow of information. This friction exists as a safeguard to privacy because it makes the data difficult to access, share, and monopolize. The elimination of informational friction undermines privacy, particularly in the current digital environment, due to the ease of sharing and compiling personal details. According to Floridi (2014), informational friction plays an important role in preserving privacy because it entails natural restrictions that individuals come across when sharing parts of their lives with others. Lack of such friction means that personal data would be at a higher risk of being abused and

mishandled. Consequently, the reduction of informational friction through digital technologies such as Google Street View can, therefore, lead to significant privacy risks due to the provision of detailed imagery and information of individuals and their properties without their permission. According to Floridi (2014), there is an ethical requirement to make choices deliberately on the design of such worlds in ways that facilitate the need to know while at the same time ensuring the need to be left alone.

Case Analysis Using Floridi's Concepts

Applying Floridi's concept of informational friction to Google Street View highlights a significant ethical concern: the service significantly eliminates this friction by making detailed images of private properties and public spaces easily accessible via the Internet. This reduction makes it easier for interested parties to monitor people's lives and possibly exploit the collected information since people's private lives are exposed without their approval (Floridi, 2014). For example, the visibility of someone's home, vehicles, and everyday activities can be abused for criminal intentions or spying. The loss of informational friction, therefore, threatens people's ability to manage their personal information and the ability to keep their information private. To avoid such issues, Google should have implemented measures like blurring features that lead to the identification of an individual and seeking permission from the individuals concerned before taking and publishing pictures (Vaidhyanathan, 2012). In this way, Google could have offered the advantages associated with Street View, including enhanced orientation and geographical literacy, without eliminating the informational friction that safeguards privacy, thus acheving a more socially responsible level of functionality as opposed to privacy intrusion.

Assessment with Consequentialism/Utilitarianism

Applying Consequentialism/Utilitarianism to Google's actions, it is clear that the proper execution of Google Street View should have aimed to capture happiness and minimize harm to the people. The advantages of the service include better navigation and geography education, but such advantages should be offset against the likely infringement of privacy rights and other associated risks. Such anxieties could be alleviated if Google strengthened privacy measures by blurring faces, license plate numbers, and private properties by default. By so doing, it would enhance the overall utility of the service by increasing trust and satisfaction among the users. Protecting privacy as a safety issue is in compliance with utilitarianism, where the public benefits of Street View are provided without infringing on people's privacy. That is why I believe that Google was ethically right to have privacy protections integrated into Street View to provide the greatest benefit to most people, which in the long run benefits society as a whole.

Analysis of Grimmelmann's Concepts

Central Concepts from Grimmelmann

In the article "Privacy as Product Safety," James Grimmelmann equally observes that privacy should be handled like product safety, where the companies that develop the products take full responsibility for ensuring that users are not exposed to harm. This view presents privacy invasions as negligence or a design issue as a car defect that might harm people. According to Grimmelmann, digital services should be designed to have built-in safeguards to protect users' privacy per se, just as is the case with physical goods. This approach requires organizations to assess and manage privacy risks during the development and deployment stages rather than after, which is a reactive approach. When privacy is accepted as a part of product safety, then companies can avoid the negative repercussions and create trust with the users

(Grimmelmann, 2009). Using this concept on Google Street View, it is clear that the absence of privacy-protective features in the first instance, as seen in the automatic blurring of faces and other sensitive information, is a basic design flaw. Using Grimmelmann's framework, there is a need for the active protection of privacy in order to prevent digital products from becoming a threat to the user's safety and well-being.

Case Analysis Using Grimmelmann's Concepts

Examining Google Street View with the help of Grimmelmann's perspective of privacy as product safety shows that there were serious shortcomings with regard to the need for the service to protect user privacy. According to Grimmelmann, privacy should be addressed in the same way as product safety, which means that firms must not present their consumers with privacy risks. In the context of Street View, Grimmelmann's perspective helps to understand that by collecting and sharing images of private homes and people without adequate privacy safeguards, Google did not prepare users for threats like stalking, burglary, and other privacy violations. If Google had recognized this as a safety issue, it would have provided basic default settings such as blurring of faces, license plate numbers, and other sensitive areas. They would reduce instances of personal information exploitation and shield the service from putting the users' lives in jeopardy (Grimmelmann, 2009). Regarding privacy as a product, safety means that the ethical responsibility of companies is to create services that are protected by default and do not cause harm to users.

Assessment with Consequentialism/Utilitarianism

When evaluated through the lens of Consequentialism /Utilitarianism, it is clear that if Google had approached privacy through the lens of a product safety issue, as Grimmelmann suggests, the implementation of Street View would have been more ethical (Grimmelmann,

2009). The utilitarian approach assesses actions based on the results and strives to achieve the highest level of utility while avoiding the lowest levels of harm. It has been established that enhanced user privacy, for example, automatic blurring of faces, license plate numbers, or private property, would have made users more trusting and satisfied, thereby boosting overall utility. Google would minimize risks and concerns related to privacy breaches and increase overall welfare in society. Thus, while privacy is one of the primary safety risks, Google could have offset the advantages of Street View with the rights of individuals' privacy, which would have been beneficial overall (Grigore, 2015). Therefore, Google should have integrated privacy features that would allow Street View to offer its advantages while not violating the privacy of users, which is consistent with the utilitarian approach that aims to maximize the advantages and minimize the disadvantages.

Conclusion

Based on Floridi's work on informational friction and Grimmelmann's analysis of privacy as product safety, there are ethical concerns related to Google Street View. By virtually eliminating informational friction, Street View threatened individual privacy without proper protection. If privacy were categorized as a product safety issue, privacy on these platforms would be protected more than it currently is due to Consequentialism/Utilitarianism, which focuses on prioritizing the good for the greatest number. Although there are significant advantages of Google Street View, such as improved navigation and geographic discovery, better utilization would have required using privacy measures like face and license number plate blurring and other private areas. It would not only protect users' privacy rights but also increase trust and the overall well-being of society. It is vital to discuss these ethical issues in the creation of innovative digital services that would strive to complement the evolution of technology

without undermining the right to privacy in an era of globalization (Vaidhyanathan, 2012). As a result, Google should have ensured that Street View was equipped with privacy protection measures that would enhance utility while reducing impacts.

References

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