In “The Googlization of Everything (and Why We Should Worry)”, Siva Vaidhyanathan talks about the ethical implications of Google’s practices, specifically when it comes to privacy concerns. Vaidhyanathan discusses how the way Google handles information can lead to privacy breaches, data misuse, and unnecessary surveillance, which can lead to compromising user trust.. The primary example and case we will be focusing on is the case of Google Street View and the challenges/issues that arose. Google Street View (GSV) is a program that provides panoramic street views of places around the world, first launching in 2007. This service has raised many privacy issues by capturing images of individuals, private properties, and sensitive locations without any real warning. The issues that this service poses align with Luciano Floridi’s concept of informational friction, and James Grimmelmann’s argument that online privacy should be treated like product safety. In this case analysis, I will argue that utilitarianism shows us that Google could have implemented stronger privacy measures and transparent data practices to minimize the overall criticism at the launch of the service..

Utilitarianism is an ethical theory that focuses on maximising overall happiness and minimizing suffering. Unlike other moral theories, utilitarianism specifically focuses on the moral worth of an outcome based on its results rather than moral principles. What this means is that actions that would normally be considered immoral can be justified if it results in the greater good for the greater number of people. Now, one of the key concepts that Luciano Floridi introduced is informational friction. This concept refers to the resistance of the flow of information within the infosphere (which is the entire informational environment that we live in). Informational friction can be beneficial because it can act like a protective barrier, safeguarding privacy and sensitive information. However, it can also affect the efficient flow of information, which can lead to challenges when accessing and sharing data. Floridi does express that

managing informational friction is important for maintaining a good balance between privacy protection and information accessibility. Using Floridi's concept of informational friction, we can analyze Google Street View. The service significantly reduced informational friction by making a large amount of private information readily accessible. This reduction in informational friction does have benefits like aiding navigation, supporting industries like real estate and urban planning, fostering innovation, and virtual tourism. There are large sectors, including ride-sharing services, that rely on the accessibility provided by apps like Google Street View. The availability of this amount of detailed information has transformed how people interact with their environments. However, this reduction in informational friction comes at the cost of user privacy. Google Street View has captured and published images without the acknowledgement of those in the images, which leads to privacy breaches and legal challenges. The privacy violation, and feeling of distrust got to a point where in places like Broughton, UK, residents physically blocked a Google car, preventing it from taking images or information that it was trying to collect. This raises ethical questions about the extent to which privacy can be sacrificed for the sake of accessible information. From a utilitarian perspective, the benefits of Google Street View must be weighed against the privacy problems. And although the service provides significant advantages for navigation, industry support, and innovation, the privacy concerns and legal challenges presented a larger set of problems in terms of backlash, specifically with the way they initially went about it. To align with the utilitarian principles, Google should have implemented stronger privacy measures to keep any potential harm to a minimum while also preserving the benefits of the service. Two examples of how they could have achieved this include automatically blurring sensitive information and being transparent about their data collection practices. By addressing these concerns, Google could have experienced a better balance of

information accessibility and privacy protection, which in turn would have had a result of more happiness and less harm. It would have respected individual privacy rights as well as provided the benefits that came with the Google Street View service.

While Luciano Floridi's work gives us a good insight and suggestions with this case, James Grimmelmann's work in "Privacy as Product Safety", gives us another, yet interesting way of seeing this. As he goes in depth on the societal issues that go with privacy, he proposes that online privacy should be treated like product safety, arguing that just like how manufacturers are held accountable for making sure products are safe to use for customers, online platforms should be held accountable for protecting user data. However, what we have to be aware of is that digital privacy is unique because of its dynamic. It can be copied, shared, and manipulated without the users' control or awareness. Privacy breaches can occur instantly, and they can have huge consequences, impacting the reputations of people, finances, personal security, etc. He suggests applying principles from the product liability law to privacy protection, treating unexpected data sharing as a defect in the product. In the case of Google Street View, the service can be seen as a defective product because it collects and shares personal information without user consent. This lack of control over personal information debunks the myth that users have full control over their privacy online. Taking Grimmelmann's concepts into consideration, we understand how important and fundamental privacy is to individuals in society. Google should have taken this into consideration when originally implementing Google Street View. Not everyone is ok with having their likeness, place of residency, or the vehicle they drive being open and available for anyone to figure out. The approach they decided to take, although it got the job done and was probably the fastest, and most cost efficient choice they had, was not the best way they could have gone about this, if they wanted to have minimum initial backlash. Looking at

this from a utilitarian standpoint, and referring back to both the negative and positive impacts, it can be argued that Google's initial course of action was the most beneficial in the long run. However, focusing on its initial launch, the privacy breaches and legal challenges not only had caused a good amount of harm but it also reduced overall happiness for the time being. Therefore, I suggest that being more open about their data collection process, as well as doing their best to sensor private and sensitive information/locations (such as blurring such images) would have been more beneficial for all parties involved. I understand that this approach would have been more expensive and tedious, and I also understand that it could break the immersion the app seemingly tries to provide. However the negative feedback and current cons either wouldn't exist, or would not be as strong as they are if this was the course of action Google went with.

In conclusion, implementing stronger privacy measures and enhancing transparency would have been the right course of action to prioritize user privacy. Although they were innovative, Google's actions resulted in a significant breach of privacy and faced some legal troubles.It is generally understood that achieving the ideal balance between information accessibility and privacy protection can be challenging. However, the need to protect user privacy is still very important. By creating a better approach, we can continue to develop and maintain the trust and privacy of users going forward, along with improving innovation.