

When Google introduced Street View, a service which offers a 360-degree view of streets, intersections, and cities, it was immediately met with mixed reviews. This service is accessible to anyone who chooses to open Google Street View, and for many countries and individuals, this was a breach of privacy. Countries responded differently to the introduction of street view. Some demanded Google change their algorithm to best fit their privacy laws (Canada), some actively worked to prevent Google from capturing images of streets (German and Greece cities), alongside general backlash and protest. For countries like Japan, where culture is incredibly different from American ideals, Google Street View was seen as offensive. While Americans see streets as public property, Japanese residents view streets as part of one's private property. While it's true that Google Street View offers a lot of informative and helpful information, its initial construct was a breach of personal and private information. A google representative, Peter Barron, admitted that Google expected some "degree of controversy" (Vaidhyathan, page 106-107) when releasing Google Street View, which shows that Google was aware of their actions. Google disregarded much of what other countries believed by putting privacy last. In terms of consequentialism, while Google may believe their service was doing a favor for society, the results of their service proved to be disfavored by most of society. In this case analysis, I will argue that consequentialism and utilitarianism show us that Google should have been more aware of the needs and desires of the people to cultivate a service that both aids and ensures privacy.

What constitutes privacy? For Floridi, he considered privacy in terms of informational friction, or a measure of how hard information is to obtain. The less informational friction that someone has, the more likely their information can be compromised. Similarly, the more informational friction, the more private their lives become. Floridi offered two interpretations behind the importance of privacy, and the one I wish to focus on is the reductionist interpretation which states that "the value of privacy rests on a variety of undesirable consequences that may be caused by its breach" (Floridi, page 30), basically stating that privacy matters because a breach of privacy results in something bad. The reductionist theory ties closely with the consequentialism theory. Both state that the importance/morality of something ties into the consequences it has. Following this, one concept which Floridi focuses on throughout his argument is that privacy not only protects information but is a form of self-expression. Privacy allows people to create and form their identity and personality. A society without privacy would have no self-constitution processes, and no personal identity would be developed.

With all of this in mind, we can think of Google Street View as a form of panopticon, a room where everything is viewable from a single point. While not everything is explicitly viewable, it still allows people to pry into the lives of those across the globe. Google Street View allows for a society that lacks information privacy and reduces information friction. The private lives of thousands were exposed to the platform. People, without their knowledge or expressive consent, had their personal property exposed to the entirety of the infosphere. In the case presented by Vaidhyathan, this was the main concern for Japanese residents. While they are aware of those who view their property in person, they are wary of those who they could not see. Upon its first release, it was clear that privacy was not so much an issue as they had first interpreted. Many people involved with the program (as in, had their streets and houses published), spoke against Google Street View. It wasn't until they had gotten the opinions and feelings of others had they begun considering the consequences of their actions.

Had they first considered consequentialism, Google would have and should have gone out of their way to get the opinion of the idea behind the program – whether the majority would

be comfortable with sharing their personal information. Even if Google had originally been under the impression that their service would be helpful to society, the consequences, and attitudes of those involved determine the morality of their actions. Google released a program which breached, whether knowingly or unknowingly, the privacy of thousands by reducing the amount of information friction they retain. The morality of Google's actions can be defined solely by the fact that it encourages a lack of information friction and promotes a society without information privacy. They are, perhaps unintentionally, pushing for a society where self-expression and diversity are limited. Ultimately, Google should have considered the opinions of those directly involved before publishing this service. Had they considered such opinions, they could have created a similar service which still pushes to improve informational friction while aiding society.

Another argument which proves this idea comes from Grimmelmann's study on Privacy. One of Grimmelmann's central arguments was that people, despite choosing to be online, still desire privacy. Many people would argue against this, claiming that those who choose to be online disregard their privacy because they are sharing their business to the public. However, Grimmelmann found that while technology does make it harder for people to protect themselves, a person oversees their own privacy when online. They actively go out of their way to secure their privacy, whether it's through choosing what to share and not share, who sees what information, or opting out of programs. People who share information online do so without the expectation of being harmed. While most information is public, it's the same sense as someone speaking quietly in public versus someone speaking openly. Both are instances where the information is public, but the levels of privacy they receive is different. Towards the end of his argument, Grimmelmann mentions that companies and people should begin viewing privacy from the front end. When thinking about informational privacy, people tend to think of the data management, how things are stored, and the internal code. On the other hand, by considering privacy in terms of product safety, we begin to question the interfaces, exchanges, and the interactions between people and technology. Grimmelmann argues that privacy should not be something that's looked at from a data perspective, but rather that it should be looked at face value.

The difference between Grimmelmann's arguments and Google Street View is that these people choose to put themselves online, while Google Street View did not allow people to choose whether their information could be shared. In fact, most people were unaware that their information was shared until much later. For those who were made aware, it's true that they had the option to opt-out of the program, but Google disregarded their privacy to begin with. Google had the opportunity to immediately protect those who were exposed rather than forcing the people to opt-out. While houses and streets are already viewable to the public, they still retain a level of privacy. Most people are aware if someone is standing in a street eerily gazing into yards, and most people are aware that their street and home is realistically accessible to so many people. But with Google Street View, this is quickly changed.

In terms of Grimmelmann's view on information privacy and product safety, Google should have secured privacy from the end user's perspective rather than focusing so much on the internal coding behind it. Google had not thought about the consequences of their actions until the consequences had already come to pass. They released the service with no desire to understand their actions until people and governments began coming forward. Even then, Google had not heeded the people's concerns before listening to the concerns of governments and lawyers. Had Google considered an utilitarian approach, they would have considered all

concerns equally rather than first focusing on “big brother upstairs”. Because, at the end of the day, how the public views the consequences of the service will ultimately decide the morality of Google Street View. Google should have first understood the consequences of the implementation of Google Street View, they should have better understood whether their actions would help society or put a detriment on the information privacy of the coming computer age.

Google Street View had good intentions, but the way it was presented left an unsavory taste in the mouths of many, me included. It was a direct breach of privacy, which allowed strangers to pry into the once private lives of the people affected. Google could have better implemented Google Street View had they considered the opinions of others before fully implementing the program. In response to the cons, there are many pros that Google Street View offers in terms of directions and locations. Thousands of people utilize Google Street View to prepare for trips, get a taste of the world, move from location to location, or help educationally. It's true that Google Street View has grown to be accepted as years pass, but I also believe this is due to the growing lack of information friction today. It's becoming more socially acceptable to share information online. Additionally, the main flaw that's presented in this argument is that it requires Google to consider the feelings of every individual and creature on earth, including those who are just brought into this world. Unfortunately, it is not reasonably possible for Google to do this. Whether or not the actions of Google releasing Google Street View is seen as morally dignified must be deemed by the majority of those affected. And the majority of those affects, responded in opposition.