Analysis Of Google Privacy Issue

Background:

So far, Google has become the preeminent Internet search engine and its services are basically used all over the world. “Don’t be evil” is the mantra of Google corporate that is the rule of dealing with ethical issues. However, more and more such issues are exposed to the public. According to Computer Act!ve(2012), for uniting its different services, Google enacted a new and concise privacy policy. Unfortunately, this move drew the press attention lead to users recognizing the fact that the company regularly collects personal data from ordinary web users,

The purpose of this report is to analyze the privacy issues of Google. In this report, Google Street View is taken as an example.

Ethical dilemmas:

Many privacy concerns were raised when Google implemented the Street View project. Street View can enable users to explore the surrounding without dead corner when the address is inputted. This has been objected by privacy advocates because photographs shoot by street view car displayed vehicle license plates, personal properties and people doing compromising activities. Even worse, it turned out that Google collect a large number of personal information from Wi-Fi receivers hidden in the street view cars as well. After an adequate evidence collected, Google acknowledged that it gathered MAC addresses and network SSIDs which are bound to personal location information. Besides, Google admits that email passwords and email content are intercepted and stored (Frederick,2012).

Stakeholders:

In classic business model, the stockholders are the only important stakeholders. A more recent view is that stakeholders also includes employees and customers. It implies that more corporate responsibilities should be considered. The most important thing is that stakeholders can take benefits from the service but it must be ensured that what they do is ethical.

Negative Effects:

Managers explained that images taken by Google Street View Cars were in public places. It seems legal, but “just because managers aren’t breaking the law doesn’t necessarily mean they are being ethical”. (Daft,2016)

Duty-based ethics stress the value of each human and showing the equal respect to all human being. Moreover, it provides theoretical basis for human rights. According to Privacy Act, individuals have rights to protect personal information from invasions. Any kind of collecting or using others personal information without permission is illegal and unethical. Obviously, Google street view exploiting personal data is an unethical act regarding Deontological ethics. Consequently, a series of problems were caused. In 2007, The Commissioner of Canada

prosecuted Google for violating Canadian data protection law by filching name, address and phone number. In 2008, Google was sued by a couple in Pittsburgh because of invasion of privacy after Street View published their home. In addition, in 2010, The FCC Director admitted that behavior of Google “clearly infringes on consumer privacy.” These evidence further proves that it is unethical. The ACS Code of Conduct also support this view. It states that public interests must be placed above the personal or business interests. Managers of Google have a fiduciary duty to safeguard the interest of stockholders. They, However, fail to consider those potentially impacted by Google Street View and take their interests into account, which is unmoral conduct.

Positive Effects:

On the other hand, it also caused a number of positive consequences.

Firstly, it enables users to have a quick look at the target location. For examples, when students are going into freshman year of college, they can take a virtual tour instead of physically visiting. This could help a lot especially for the disadvantaged or those with disabilities. Hence, Google street view could be ethical due to it enhancing quality of life.

Secondly, companies can expand customers’ interest and decision-making by uploading photos and virtual tour. In turn, customers can view and better know the company.

Most important thing is that Google street view can support meaningful social researches. For example, it is argued that the neighborhoods that children grow up in could engage in antisocial behavior, suffer from mental health problems and overweight. (Chen & Paterson, 2006). According to Journal of Child Psychology(2012), Candice, Avshalom, Robert, and Terrie started a research to prove this argument. Important features of the local neighborhood were observed and recorded by using Google street view.

It was used for virtual walks in communities of more than 1,000 voluntary families taking part in the study. Google street view provides a reliable and economical way to evaluate impact of neighborhoods. The results suggest that the strong relationship between social inequality and health spans social gradients as a constant reminder of the need to understand how the environment where people live affects health. Result-based ethics emphasis that the consequence of this act decide whether an act is right or wrong. As shown above, Google street view can provide convenience in daily life, business, and social research. In terms of the second principle of Consequentialism that the better consequences an act produces, the better that act. Hence, Google street view can be treated as an ethical act.

Conclusion

Just like coins have two sides, Google has good as well as bad experiences to the society. Google should notify and guide users how to protect personal information. In fact, Google has taken responsibilities to protect individuals privacy. For example, if users do not want to be included in the photo, Google provided efficient service of removing images in 24 hours. It also has a pixel-distorting capability. In 2010, Google stoped collecting data from Wi-Fi in some countries. In conclusion, when Google take public interests into consideration and regard them as the prerequisite, the google street view automatically become an ethical act.

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