



When Google Met WikiLeaks

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Background Context

WikiLeaks is a non-profit media org that publishes leaked documents, founded by Julian Assange in 2006

- ❖ Released media exposing violations of human rights/civil liberties by various governments
- ❖ Attacked by various gov. orgs and private corporations, especially US gov
- ❖ (No longer actively publishing as of 2023)

Assange under house arrest in 2011, interviewed by Eric Schmidt (Executive Chairman of Google) for a book.



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WikiLeaks

When Google Met WikiLeaks

WikiLeaks Search

I'm Feeling Evil

JULIAN ASSANGE

Summary

Written as a response to *The New Digital Age*, Schmidt's book that used the interview.

Covers

- ❖ Assange's analysis on Google's (and silicon valley's) role in geopolitics alongside western gov's.
- ❖ Transcript of meeting between Assange & Schmidt discussing Wikileaks structure and philosophy
- ❖ Corrections of mischaracterizations in *The New Digital Age*

Justice & Information

“I thought there were too many unjust acts. And I wanted there to be more just acts, and fewer unjust acts” (Assange, 65)

“So you can affect a lot of people with a small amount of information. Therefore, you can change the behavior of many people with a small amount of information”

“The question then arises as to what kinds of information will produce behavior which is just and disincentivize behavior which is unjust?” (Assange, 67)

“We don’t care as long as it’s true. If it’s true information we don’t care where it comes from. Let people fight with the truth, and when the bodies are cleared there will be bullets of truth every where, that’s fine” (Assange, 177)

Full Intellectual Record

Collective History of Humans that Human Society is built on.

- People can refer to past mistakes to avoid repeating those mistakes
- ❖ “What we want to do is get as much into the record, prevent as much as possible being deleted from the record, and then make the record as searchable as possible”(Assange, 124)
- ❖ “Our intellectual record should be as large as possible if humanity is to be as advanced as possible”(Assange, 134)



“Those who
do not remember
the past are
condemned
to repeat it.”

George Santayana

Accountability

Who holds WikiLeaks accountable? Why should WikiLeaks uphold its values of justice and freedom of information that it was founded on?

The “market of sources”

- ❖ If WikiLeaks fails to keep its values and protect the whistleblowers, they will go somewhere else
- ❖ If WikiLeaks censors and fails to impact
- ❖ “*Sources speak with their feet*” (Assange, 165)

Harm-minimization to maximize impact

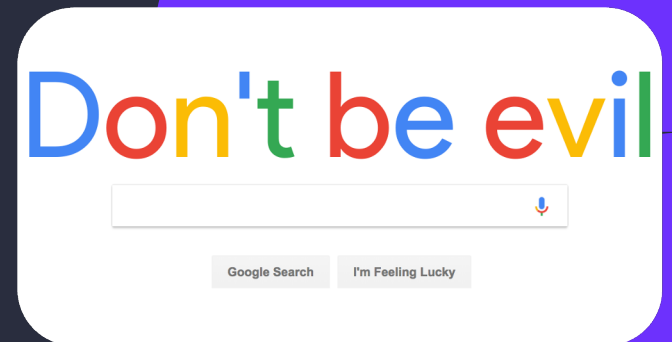
- ❖ If WikiLeaks took no concern to redact and minimize harm from the leaks, opponents would use it to distract from the actual content
- ❖ Diversion by attacking WikiLeaks’s values

Google, and “Don’t Be Evil”

Google is a tech company aligning with the “benevolent superpower” (i.e US gov)

- ❖ Pushes an altruistic image for public goodwill
- ❖ Invasive surveillance practices, working together with NSA (PRISM program)
- ❖ Accepting NSA money to provide search tools
- ❖ Shares photographs from satellite with US military and intelligence
- ❖ A “key member of the Defense Industrial Base”

“Google’s bosses genuinely believe in the civilizing power of enlightened multinational corporations, and they see this mission as continuous with the shaping of the world according to the better judgment of the “benevolent superpower.” (Assange, 35)



Google vs WikiLeaks

“Greater transparency in all things [to] bring about a more just, safe and free world” is “a dangerous model”: “governments have systems and valuable regulations in place that, while imperfect, should continue to govern who gets to make the decision about what is classified and what is not.”

*“The information released on WikiLeaks put lives at risk.”
(Schmidt & Cohen, The New Digital Age)*

Assange - No such evidence.

Ethical Theories

Utilitarianism

The philosophy backing both sides.

Information allows for public to make informed decisions and know more. Leaking of important information can result in harm and espionage.

This is a dispute over “Anticipated Consequences”

Kantianism

Supports Neither Side

Gov violating rights while hiding information is not “respects for persons”

Fails universalizability; if we all withheld information on unsupported acts

WikiLeak’s actions are encouraging theft, which Kantianism does not support

Contractualism

Supports WikiLeaks.

Censoring information on gov violations is a violation of the contract. Would fail “hypothetical consent”, would be “reasonably rejected”

Egoism

Ambiguous

Both sides (WikiLeaks, gov/google) can be argued as acting out of good of others, not self-interest.

Governments can also be argued as acting in self-interest by censoring to protect their power and control.