James Liu
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Intro to IT&WS

Ring Case Study Response

In this day and age, technology is improving and developing at a frightening pace. In light of the pandemic, people are also spending drastically more time in their homes. Because of this, they also focus more on the security of their homes, and turning to products like ones offered by Ring to bolster the security. However, Ring is a company that has been starting to stir up controversy, with many cases arising over issues about privacy, the lack of due process, and ethics of using facial recognition and just whether or not facial recognition should be used at all.

Facial recognition has been a controversial topic ever since its inception. People have linked a world with governments using facial recognition with the one from Greorge Orwell's novel *1984*, saying that a world with facial recognition will lead to the government having too much power over the lives of individual citizens. And with that much power, they have the power to choose if they want you to be alive or dead, free or imprisoned. Another issue that was raiser for facial recognition is the ethics surrounding it. Right now, the Chinese government is using facial recognition systems to aid in its culling of the Uyghur population. With a well-implemented facial recognition system, it would be extremely hard to hide from people who have access to those systems. People are likening the Chinese government's actions to that of Germany's actions during the holocaust, and many are agreeing. With the help of facial recognition, it is also much more efficient.

However, with all of the concerns about how facial recognition is detrimental to the free world, there are also some benefits - two brothers were able to find more clues about the fate of their father, who survived the Holocaust. They have launched a service, free of charge, to help people in similar situations, where the chaos of the Holocaust had cut off communication between entire families. A way that facial recognition could be a double edged sword is by detecting faces. With a well-implemented system and a well-trained facial recognition algorithm, a person could be tracked solely with their face as long as there are enough cameras. With this power, it would be a lot easier to track down criminals and terrorists, but at the same time, you are giving up a large portion of your privacy for that.

Not that people have a lot of privacy, anyways. After the recent storming of the U.S. Capitol, authorities were able to track many individuals who took part in the riots by information from their cell phones, tracking their journeys from the rally near the White House to the Capitol to back to their homes. In this day and age, the amount of privacy that you actually have is a lot less than what you think. It's not always a bad thing, though - for instance, advertisements that would only pertain to you could possibly benefit you compared to some generic thing that is displayed to everyone. However, your browsing history, search preferences, and more are all being sold to advertisement companies, and people don't like that. It is never a good feeling to know that to large corporations, you are not viewed as an individual person or a human being, but rather just a few lines in a database.

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There is a saying that privacy doesn't exist anymore. If that statement is not true today, I believe that it will be true soon enough. In the Age of Information, information is everywhere, and it's not controllable. Once it enters the internet, it will be accessed and logged and stored and analyzed and compared with a billion different pieces of data. That information could be your most recent google search, your phone connecting to a wifi network, or maybe a video of you walking past the camera of a Ring doorbell. In the open letter to Ring, there were valid and important points - the parent company, Amazon, and Ring, do have no oversight or accountability for the systems that they are offering to the police departments they partner with. Even if one is to argue that Ring should hand over its data to the police departments, there is no end-to-end encryption, which means that extremely private and sensitive data is vulnerable to being stolen through cyber-attacks. I believe that in general, the data should at least be secure when being transmitted.

There are questions about privacy in general, too. The biggest one being, is even there any left? An incognito tab does much less than what one would think, something akin to trying to bailing out a barge with a bucket. Sure, your browser won't store browsing history, cookies, site data, or cache information, but the websites will still know that you have visited them, some of them tracking your ip address, and your internet service provider and every point in between will know that you are doing something. Trying to hide your presence online is grasping at straws, and you have to accept that you will almost always be tracked some way. After all, there is only so much that an individual can do to try to hide themselves from the eyes of others, for there will always be other people who are less privacy-oriented that will disrupt your privacy.
There is the saying "If you've done nothing wrong, then you have nothing to hide", but at the same time, most, if not all, people don't like to be constantly watched in their everyday lives. Privacy is seen as a universal right, with the Fourth Amendment in the Bill of Rights stating that "the right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures" shall not be violated[1].

Lastly, there is the issue with civil rights and facial recognition. From the creation of the UNIX operating system to today, race has played a part in programming.[2] The biases of programmers have been ingrained into the programs that they have written, and in the present day they are appearing more and more clearly. For instance, the case study mentioned the failed attempt at the NOPD to train a predictive policing algorithm based on all of the interactions with police officers in the area. However, if a police officer had racial biases, those biases would be reflected in the data and in turn affect the algorithm.

Overall, I believe that Ring should expand their partnerships with the federal, state, and local law enforcement, as long as Ring endeavors to hold their customers above all in terms of private matters, and to hold themselves more accountable for what happens to the data and make

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[1] "America's Founding Documents". *archives.gov*.
[2] "U.S. Operating Systems at Mid-Century: The Intertwining of Race and UNIX" McPherson

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sure to fix the current mistakes they have with their way of storing and transporting the data by having stricter guidelines and regulations. If Ring can strive to improve itself that way and strive for holding its customers above all, the public may feel better about the security of their products and think that they made the right decision.

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