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Consumers vs Technology Makers

Introduction or Background

For many decades, technology makers have provided consumers innovative devices that lead to great conveniences. A few examples include the smart phone, personal computers, and the refrigerator. Regardless, devices still breakdown eventually or may need routine maintenance. Many consumers usually want the best value for their money. Meaning that the cost throughout the life of the product is considered. Historically, it was possible to service devices easily extending the lifespan. This added more value to the item as a small fraction of the product's cost can be paid instead of purchasing a new one entirely. However, the current trend of technology is that it is always improving. Many technologies are multifunctional, and performance increases every year. Many devices are becoming more unibody thus improving durability. Overall, the quality of products improves with any new iterations. These benefits have their caveats though. Devices that are multifunctional have more complex structures internally, which leads to being nonuser friendly in terms of repairing. Also, a device with a unibody structure is more difficult to disassemble and perform routine maintenance. As mentioned before the quality of products does improve, which should lead to longer lifespan, but this may not be the case.

Looking more closely at particular devices, like those with internal batteries, many older laptop models had external batteries attached to the system. Originally, for cell phones had internal batteries that could be easily replaced. However, with the emergence of a more unibody structure for those devices led to higher difficulties of replacement. A unibody structure is more

durable so it should increase the lifespan of products, but there is a component within the device that has a finite amount of work usage. When it goes bad it will be highly difficult to get it replaced even for local shops that does those kinds of repairs. Now, this issue can perhaps be attributed companies just not being able to predict that some new improvements will have their tradeoffs. However, there are some that are not convinced that this is an accident. For example, what Apple has done is they have applied proprietary screws within their products. So, purchasing proper tools for service would not be easy. They have also applied adhesive for some of their internal components, which can lead to easily damaging the product during the process of disassembling. The adhesive method is unnecessary as well, since using screws is more convenient and as effective. It seems that technology makers might be fully aware of this issue.

Stakeholder Analysis

This leads to two opposing stakeholders on the matter. One side consists of the consumers who wants the legislation to pass laws requiring companies to provide documents or manuals that would allow anyone to repair their devices. The other stakeholders would be the companies themselves where they will also be referred to as technology makers. For them long as they are not violating any national or international laws then they should be able to conduct business on how they see fit.

Stakeholder 1

For the stakeholder of the consumers. They want products that lasts a long time or at least be repairable. They want products that they can purchase to have a long lifespan so it can feel like it is well worth it. There is also a notion that when any goods are purchased then it belongs to the individual that made that purchase. If companies control when products become obsolete, then that takes away any feelings of ownership. Also, these days more consumers are

conscious about the environment. So it is concerning for them whenever items are thrown away. As precious materials are used to make devices, and the manufacturing process is still highly pollutant. So to them “long-lasting products save the planet and save money” (Ellwood, 2018).

There is a current legislation in progress called the right to repair. The goal of it “is to require companies to make their parts, tools and information available to consumers and repair shops” (Rosa-Aquino, 2020). The consumer wants this, so they won’t have their options limited. By having the ability to repair, then consumers can either take on the responsibility themselves or refer to a third party shop that will help local businesses. Going to a first party business is an option as well. Ultimately consumers want the freedom to choose.

To bring light to the issue. The claim of fact is normally used. There is a statement where “the proportion of major household appliances that died within five years rose” (Rosa-Aquino, 2020). This involves a wide range of products such as television, mobile phones and other large appliances. These items are usually expensive as well. So for items that are high priced and pollutant to manufacture as well is the reason why consumers are trying to act through legislation.

Stakeholder 2

For the second stakeholder of the technology makers. They want to be able to maximize their profits, and an element that can help with that is appealing to customer satisfaction. That is why they go through great lengths to provide a pleasurable experience when it comes to using products. Also, Consumers are always wanting better technology. So this leads technology makers to design items with better performance every year. At the same time they want to ensure products are safe for the consumers. Due to the nature of some products. It may be dangerous to do any kind of repairs regardless of the availability of proper tools or documents.

To thrive companies must adapt. That is why they are also becoming more conscious of the environment. Afterall, the goal for every new iteration of technology is to become more energy efficient. They have also started to make facilities that can break down and recycle technology. Companies like Intel “has recycled more than 75% of the total waste generated by its operations” (Cortina, 2018). In a competitive market. They also must protect their intellectual property in some ways too.

Ultimately, businesses rely on the consumers to grow. So a claim of cause is used. Companies have a responsibility to protect their customers. As some manufacturers do argue “that their products are repairable, and that they are protecting consumers’ safety, privacy and security by restricting who does the repairs” (Rosa-Aquino, 2020).

Argument Question

Between the two stakeholders. The question that comes to mind is that: Should companies be required to design technology that is easily repaired?

Stakeholder Argument

Stakeholder 1

A man by the name of John Stuart Mills invented the modern version of the ethical framework utilitarianism. The goal of this framework is to bring the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people. Meaning, that while trying to provide quality enjoyment to the highest quantity of people, also includes trying to be free from pain for the highest quantity of people. This leads to considering the needs of the majority to be the moral compass and can be used to describe why the consumers are attempting to push the legislature of right to repair.

The consumer wants the legislation to pass as a policy because it is difficult to seek litigation for multiple companies. There are many technology makers. So if consumers felt that

multiple technology makers should be held liable for certain business practices regarding products. Then they can only pursue court action for one company at a time. By creating a policy can only be the way to assure consumers will not be taken advantage of.

Utilitarianism applies to this because consumers not only think of themselves. They are also thinking about the collective. They want to protect the environment, because in doing so will reduce the number of pains inflicted to others. If small businesses can repair, then it can help individual communities grow. This happiness can also be inclusive for the technology makers as well. Companies represents different brands, and products are represented by brands. If the brand can follow through on providing a good experience, then that can be followed by customer loyalty.

If a legislation does pass, then this will allow consumers to have the freedom to choose again. Between either repair or replacing. If it doesn't pass, then consumers will feel taken advantage of. Technology makers claim that they are building higher quality products, but they still break down within a few years. Technology is also an integral part of society now, so replacement will be a requirement if repair is not an option. However, the most significant element to the consumer would be the environment. The products have come a long way in reducing toxicity, however it is still highly damaging from the manufacturing side. If this business practice persists then it can have irreversible consequences to the viewpoints of consumers.

Stakeholder 2

A man by the name of Alexis de Tocqueville invented the ethical framework individualism. This framework focuses on considering personal benefit first. The idea behind this is that it will encourage competition. Pushing individuals to outperform others. This may

seemingly be selfish, and in some aspect it is. However, the theory behind this is if everyone acts on their own self-interest. Then everyone will benefit in the end. As competition plays a major factor in innovation.

Technology makers want to be able to conduct business on how they see fit. Without having legislation affecting the way they function. It is a common understanding that their driving force is to maximize profits. For technology makers specifically though. They are also driven to create the best technology solutions. If legislator pass laws that put limits on technology makers design, then that can hinder innovations.

Individualism applies in this scenario because technology makers are looking out for their own best interest. This may seem counter intuitive, but it can be argued that maintaining a good reputation with consumers coincides with self-interest. Afterall, consumers are always wanting products that are overall better. Technology makers will do their best to provide improvement, but to provide a perfect product would be nearly impossible. However, as long as individualism continue to drive competition then one day that can be a reality in the long term.

If technology makers can continue to have freedom with their design. Then they will continue to be innovative. Innovation does not have to be restricted to the product itself, but it can also transition to manufacturing facilities as well. Where the manufacturing process can improve to a point where it won't be harmful to the environment. If legislation does pass, part of the requirement is to release documents. This can result in copyright issues. As companies are afraid that other business may mimic design. If that occurs, then it can lead to competitiveness to be eliminated.

Student Position

Normally I would support competition, as I do believe that is the driving force of innovation. However, I place higher value on the environment and human rights. Thus I am leaning more towards the consumers.

At quick glance. I would have sided with technology makers. My initial viewpoints were that although devices are becoming more difficult to repair. This trend did not occur in an instant. It started off with a few companies, and then it transitioned to many other companies that would follow into the business model. Consumers vote on business practices with their money, and thus they have placed themselves into this position. However, it isn't that simple. As there is a disconnect between how we see the product and how we see the manufacturing process. Where the manufacturing process mostly goes unnoticed.

Technology makers have argued that they can properly recycle devices. However, their manufacturing facilities have questionable humane conditions, where “workers stand for up to 10 hours a day in hot workshops” (Bloomberg, 2019). I believe there needs to be transparency for the manufacturing process. So that way consumers are more informed on what exactly they are buying into. Perhaps a legislature for the right to repair does not need to be passed, but a legislature on reducing waste and improving work conditions even outside of the country should be passed.

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