

Executive Summary

Recently, one of our competitor's vehicles killed a pedestrian during a test run. Following the fatal accident, consumers and regulators became wary of trusting self-driving technologies overall. In the aftermath, the CEO explained that the car had prioritized the life of the driver over the pedestrian. Albeit tragic, I believe that the CEO's justification for the ordeal has merit.

I contend that in an emergency with no great options, our autonomous cars should prioritize the life of the driver and passengers inside the car because we must design for demand and save the lives we can definitely save.

Duty to the Consumers in the Market Place

Our car's safety measures should protect its occupants because customers want to be protected. Our market potential only exists if we ensure the safety of those who have a demand for cars. According to a recent study, though more people favor a utilitarian autonomous car, they would only purchase a car that values their life as the occupant [1]. It does not benefit our business nor the consumer to consciously design a product that will not sell. However, we also have a responsibility to all who impacted by our product as well as to regulation. Yet, the overall advantages of self-driving cars address these responsibilities by reducing pollution [2] and eliminating up to 90% of traffic accidents [3].

Guaranteeing the Lives Under Our Supervision

Moreover, our cars should ensure the lives we have the best chance of saving. In a crash, our autonomous vehicles are the only entity that we control. We cannot control when a pedestrian will appear or whether our maneuvers will create chain reactions that indirectly cause non-passenger deaths. Therefore, the lives we do have control over – in the car –, we should take

responsibility for. Many others in the market are also taking this stance including Mercedes-Benz and Tesla because it is a guaranteed approach to minimize fatality [4].

After demonstrating to the public that those in direct peril are secure, it will benefit our market share and our customers to prioritize occupants over pedestrians. As a company, our direct responsibility is to those who definitely engage with our products and not those who just might.

[1] <https://arxiv.org/pdf/1510.03346.pdf>

[2] Spieser K et al. Toward a systematic approach to the design and evaluation of automated mobility-on-demand systems: A case study in Singapore. In Meyer G, Beiker S, editor, Road Vehicle Automation, pages 229–245. Springer, 2014.

[3] Gao P, Hensley R, Zielke A. A roadmap to the future for the auto industry, 2014.

[4] <https://www.caranddriver.com/news/self-driving-mercedes-will-prioritize-occupant-safety-over-pedestrians>