

Surveillance Capitalism and PsyWar

Explanation of the central business model of Google, Facebook, and most social media



ROBERT W MALONE MD, MS

JUL 28, 2024

♡ 178

💬 34

Share



Surveillance capitalism is a novel economic system that has emerged in the digital era. It is characterized by the unilateral claim of private human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral data. In this version of capitalism, predicting and influencing behavior (political and economic) rather than producing goods and services is the primary product. This economic logic prioritizes extracting, processing, and trading personal data to predict and influence human behavior by exploiting those predictions for various economic (marketing) and political objectives.

In many cases, surveillance capitalism merges with PsyWar tools and technologies to power the modern surveillance state, giving rise to a new form of Fascism (public-private partnerships) known as techno-totalitarianism. Leading corporations employing the surveillance capitalism business model include Google, Amazon and Facebook. Surveillance capitalism has now fused with the science and theory of psychology, marketing, and algorithmic manipulation of online information to give rise to propaganda and censorship capabilities that go far beyond those imagined by the twentieth-century predictions of Aldous Huxley and George Orwell.

Key Features of Surveillance Capitalism

1. **One-way mirror operations:** Surveillance capitalists engineer operations to operate in secrecy, hiding their methods and intentions from users, who are unaware of the extent of data collection and analysis.
2. **Instrumentation power:** Surveillance capitalists wield power by designing systems that cultivate “radical indifference,” rendering users oblivious to their observations and manipulations.
3. **Behavioral futures markets:** The extracted data is traded in new markets, enabling companies to bet on users’ future behavior, generating immense wealth for surveillance capitalists.
4. **Collaboration with the state:** Surveillance capitalism often involves partnerships with governments, leveraging favorable laws, policing, and information sharing to further entrench its power.

Historical Development

Surveillance capitalism has its roots in the early days of the internet, when companies like Google and Facebook exploited the “ungoverned spaces” of the digital realm. The dot-com bust, the success of Apple’s consumer-centric approach, and the surveillance-friendly environment created by the US National Security Agency (NSA) and CIA’s investments in the “war on terror” all contributed to the rise of surveillance capitalism.

Consequences

1. **Loss of autonomy:** Surveillance capitalism erodes individual autonomy as users are manipulated and influenced by algorithms designed to predict and shape their behavior.
2. **Threat to democracy:** The concentration of power in the hands of surveillance capitalists undermines democratic processes, as they use their influence to shape public opinion and policy.
3. **Economic inequality:** The wealth generated by surveillance capitalism exacerbates economic inequality, as those who own and control the data and algorithms reap the benefits while users are exploited as free commodities.

Resistance and Reform

To counter surveillance capitalism, it is essential to:

1. **Promote transparency and accountability:** Demand greater openness about data collection and processing practices and mechanisms for users to exercise control over their data.
 2. **Regulate surveillance capitalism:** Establish robust regulations to limit the power of surveillance capitalists, protect user rights, and promote fair competition.
 3. **Foster alternative economic models:** Encourage the development of alternative economic systems that prioritize human well-being, autonomy, and democracy over profit and surveillance.
-



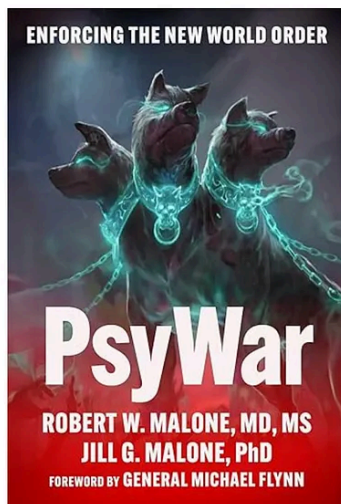
Shoshana Zuboff

“Surveillance Capitalism unilaterally claims our private human experience as a free source of raw material for its own production processes. It translates our experience into behavioral data. Those behavioral data are then combined with its advanced computation capabilities, what people today refer to as AI machine intelligence. Out of that black box come predictions about our behavior, what we will do now, soon and later. Turns out there are a lot of businesses that want to know what we will do in the future, and so these have constituted a new kind of marketplace, a marketplace that trades exclusively in behavioral futures, in our behavioral futures. That's where surveillance capitalists make their money. That's where the big pioneers of this economic logic, like Google and Facebook have become so wealthy by selling predictions of our behavior first to online targeted advertisers, and now of course, these business customers range across the entire economy, no longer confined to that original context of online targeted advertising.

All of this is conducted in secret. All of this is conducted through the social relations of the One-Way mirror. Ergo surveillance, the vast amounts of capital that have been

accumulated here are trained to create these systems in a way that keeps us ignorant. Specifically the data scientists write about their methods in a way that brags about the fact that these systems bypass our awareness so that they bypass our rights to say yes or no. I want to participate, or I don't want to participate. I want to contest, or I don't want to contest. I want to fight, or I don't want to fight. All of that is bypassed. We are robbed of the right to combat because we are engineered into ignorance. We saw these same methods being used by Cambridge Analytica with those revelations a year ago with only a tiny difference. All they did was take these same every day routine methods of surveillance, capitalism, pivot them just a couple of degrees toward political outcomes rather than commercial outcomes, showing that they could use our data to intervene and influence our behavior, our real world behavior, and our real world thinking and feeling in order to change political outcomes.”

Books › Politics & Social Sciences › Politics & Government



Roll over image to zoom in

PsyWar Hardcover – September 24, 2024

by Robert W. Malone MD MS (Author), Jill Glasspool Malone PhD (Author), Gen. Michael Flynn (Foreword)



#1 New Release in Globalization

[See all formats and editions](#)

100+ bought or read in past month

✓ Pre-order Price Guarantee. [Terms](#)

PsyWar: Enforcing the New World Order exposes the history and tactics of modern psychological warfare on the American people and offers a way forward for citizens to resist totalitarian control.

PsyWar is when a government coordinates and directs deployment of propaganda, censorship, and psychological operations (psyops) tools in campaigns designed to manipulate public opinion.

Free speech is the most pragmatic tool we have for ascertaining truth. Only by examining all sides of an issue can the truth be chiseled out like a statue out of marble. We must defend all speech—whether untrue, hateful, or intolerable, as that is the only way to protect our right to understand the world. As soon as free speech is restricted, that restriction will be used to sway public opinion.

Now is a time when America needs hope. But more than hope, we need to restore our Constitution and Bill of Rights as the foundational documents of our Republic. These documents support and protect our personal sovereignty and are at the core of our fundamental rights as Americans. We must work to make this country great again by restoring our commitment to these foundational principles and ethics.

Publication scheduled for end of September 2024. [Pre-purchase link here.](#)

Per Wikipedia

Surveillance capitalism is a concept in political economics which denotes the widespread collection and commodification of personal data by corporations. This

phenomenon is distinct from government surveillance, although the two can be mutually reinforcing. The concept of surveillance capitalism, as described by Shoshana Zuboff, is driven by a profit-making incentive, and arose as advertising companies, led by Google's AdWords, saw the possibilities of using personal data to target consumers more precisely.^[1]

Increased data collection may have various benefits for individuals and society, such as self-optimization (the quantified self),^[2] societal optimizations (e.g., by smart cities) and optimized services (including various web applications). However, as capitalism focuses on expanding the proportion of social life that is open to data collection and data processing,^[2] this can have significant implications for vulnerability and control of society, as well as for privacy.

The economic pressures of capitalism are driving the intensification of online connection and monitoring, with spaces of social life opening up to saturation by corporate actors, directed at making profits and/or regulating behavior. Therefore, personal data points increased in value after the possibilities of targeted advertising were known.^[3] As a result, the increasing price of data has limited access to the purchase of personal data points to the richest in society.^[4]

Shoshana Zuboff writes that "analyzing massive data sets began as a way to reduce uncertainty by discovering the probabilities of future patterns in the behavior of people and systems."^[5] In 2014, Vincent Mosco referred to marketing information about customers and subscribers to advertisers as *surveillance capitalism* and made note of the surveillance state alongside it.^[6] Christian Fuchs found that the surveillance state fuses with surveillance capitalism.^[7]

Similarly, Zuboff informs that the issue is further complicated by highly invisible collaborative arrangements with state security apparatuses. According to Trebor Scholz, companies recruit people as informants for this type of capitalism.^[8] Zuboff contrasts the mass production of industrial capitalism with surveillance capitalism, where the former is interdependent with its populations, who are its consumers and

employees, and the latter preys on dependent populations, who are neither its consumers nor its employees and largely ignorant of its procedures.^[9]

Their research shows that the capitalist addition to the analysis of massive amounts of data has taken its original purpose in an unexpected direction.^[1] Surveillance has been changing power structures in the information economy, potentially shifting the balance of power further from nation-states and towards large corporations employing the surveillance capitalist logic.^[10]

Zuboff notes that surveillance capitalism extends beyond the conventional institutional terrain of the private firm, accumulating not only surveillance assets and capital but also rights, and operating without meaningful mechanisms of consent.^[9] In other words, analyzing massive data sets was at some point executed not only by the state apparatuses but also by companies. Zuboff claims that both Google and Facebook have invented surveillance capitalism and translated it into "a new logic of accumulation".^{[1][11][12]}

This mutation resulted in both companies collecting many data points about their users, with the core purpose of making a profit. Selling these data points to external users (particularly advertisers) has become an economic mechanism. The combination of the analysis of massive data sets and the use of these data sets as a market mechanism has shaped the concept of surveillance capitalism. Surveillance capitalism has been heralded as the successor to neoliberalism.^{[13][14]}

Oliver Stone, creator of the film *Snowden*, pointed to the location-based game *Pokémon Go* as the "latest sign of the emerging phenomenon and demonstration of surveillance capitalism". Stone criticized that the location of its users was used not only for game purposes, but also to retrieve more information about its players. By tracking users' locations, the game collected far more information than just users' names and locations: "it can access the contents of your USB storage, your accounts, photographs, network connections, and phone activities, and can even activate your phone, when it is in standby mode". This data can then be analyzed and commodified by companies such as Google (which significantly invested in the game's development) to improve the effectiveness of the targeted advertisements.^{[15][16]}

Another aspect of surveillance capitalism is its influence on political campaigning. Personal data retrieved by data miners can enable various companies (most notoriously Cambridge Analytica) to improve the targeting of *political* advertising, a step beyond the commercial aims of previous surveillance capitalist operations. In this way, it is possible that political parties will be able to produce far more targeted political advertising to maximize its impact on voters. However, Cory Doctorow writes that the misuse of these data sets "will lead us towards totalitarianism".^[17] This may resemble a corporatocracy, and Joseph Turow writes that "the centrality of corporate power is a direct reality at the very heart of the digital age".^{[2][18]:17}

The terminology "surveillance capitalism" was popularized by Harvard Professor Shoshana Zuboff.^{[19]:107} In Zuboff's theory, surveillance capitalism is a novel market form and a specific logic of capitalist accumulation. In her 2014 essay *A Digital Declaration: Big Data as Surveillance Capitalism*, she characterized it as a "radically disembedded and extractive variant of information capitalism" based on commodifying "reality" and transforming it into behavioral data for analysis and sales.^{[20][21][22][23]}

In a subsequent article in 2015, Zuboff analyzed the societal implications of this mutation of capitalism. She distinguished between "surveillance assets", "surveillance capital", and "surveillance capitalism" and their dependence on a global architecture of computer mediation that she calls "Big Other", a distributed and largely uncontested new expression of power that constitutes hidden mechanisms of extraction, commodification, and control that threatens core values such as freedom, democracy, and privacy.^{[24][2]}

According to Zuboff, surveillance capitalism was pioneered by Google and later Facebook, just as mass-production and managerial capitalism were pioneered by Ford and General Motors a century earlier, and has now become the dominant form of information capitalism.^[9] Zuboff emphasizes that behavioral changes enabled by artificial intelligence have become aligned with the financial goals of American internet companies such as Google, Facebook, and Amazon.^{[19]:107}

In her Oxford University lecture published in 2016, Zuboff identified the mechanisms and practices of surveillance capitalism, including producing "prediction products" for sale in new "behavioral futures markets." She introduced the concept of "dispossession by surveillance", arguing that it challenges the psychological and political bases of self-determination by concentrating rights in the surveillance regime. This is described as a "coup from above."^[25]

Zuboff's book *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*^[26] is a detailed examination of the unprecedented power of surveillance capitalism and the quest by powerful corporations to predict and control human behavior.^[26] Zuboff identifies four key features in the logic of surveillance capitalism and explicitly follows the four key features identified by Google's chief economist, Hal Varian:^[27]

1. The drive toward more and more data extraction and analysis.
2. The development of new contractual forms using computer-monitoring and automation.
3. The desire to personalize and customize the services offered to users of digital platforms.
4. The use of the technological infrastructure to carry out continual experiments on its users and consumers.

Zuboff compares demanding privacy from surveillance capitalists or lobbying for an end to commercial surveillance on the Internet to asking Henry Ford to make each Model T by hand and states that such demands are existential threats that violate the basic mechanisms of the entity's survival.^[9]

Zuboff warns that principles of self-determination might be forfeited due to "ignorance, learned helplessness, inattention, inconvenience, habituation, or drift" and states that "we tend to rely on mental models, vocabularies, and tools distilled from past catastrophes," referring to the twentieth century's totalitarian nightmares or the monopolistic predations of Gilded Age capitalism, with countermeasures that have been developed to fight those earlier threats not being sufficient or even appropriate to meet the novel challenges.^[9]

She also poses the question: "will we be the masters of information, or will we be its slaves?" and states that "if the digital future is to be our home, then it is we who must make it so".^[28]

Zuboff discusses the differences between industrial capitalism and surveillance capitalism in her book. Zuboff writes that as industrial capitalism exploits nature, surveillance capitalism exploits human nature.^[29]

1. Zuboff, Shoshana (January 2019). "[Surveillance Capitalism and the Challenge of Collective Action](#)". *New Labor Forum*. 28 (1): 10–29. doi:10.1177/1095796018819461. ISSN 1095-7960. S2CID 159380755.
2. ^ [Jump up to:^{a b c d}](#) Couldry, Nick (23 September 2016). "[The price of connection: 'surveillance capitalism'](#)". *The Conversation*. Archived from the original on 20 May 2020. Retrieved 9 February 2017.
3. ^ John Wiley & Sons, Inc. (1 June 2018), *Data analytics and big data: chapter 5: Data analytics process:there's great work behind the scenes*, pp. 77–99, doi:10.1002/9781119528043.ch5, ISBN 978-1-119-52804-3, S2CID 243896249
4. ^ [Jump up to:^{a b}](#) Cadwalladr, Carole (20 June 2019). "[The Great Hack](#)". *The Guardian*. Archived from the original on 4 February 2020. Retrieved 6 February 2020.
5. ^ Zuboff, Shoshana; Möllers, Norma; Murakami Wood, David; Lyon, David (31 March 2019). "[Surveillance Capitalism: An Interview with Shoshana Zuboff](#)". *Surveillance & Society*. 17 (1/2): 257–266. doi:10.24908/ss.v17i1/2.13238. ISSN 1477-7487.
6. ^ Mosco, Vincent (17 November 2015). *To the Cloud: Big Data in a Turbulent World*. Routledge. ISBN 9781317250388. Archived from the original on 19 October 2021. Retrieved 9 February 2017.
7. ^ Fuchs, Christian (20 February 2017). *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*. SAGE. ISBN 9781473987494. Archived from the original on 19 October 2021. Retrieved 9 February 2017.
8. ^ Scholz, Trebor (27 December 2016). *Uberworked and Underpaid: How Workers Are Disrupting the Digital Economy*. John Wiley & Sons. ISBN 9781509508181. Archived

from the original on 19 October 2021. Retrieved 9 February 2017.

9. ^ Jump up to:^{a b c d e} Zuboff, Shoshana (5 March 2016). "Google as a Fortune Teller: The Secrets of Surveillance Capitalism". *Faz.net*. Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Archived from the original on 11 February 2017. Retrieved 9 February 2017.
10. ^ Galič, Maša; Timan, Tjerk; Koops, Bert-Jaap (13 May 2016). "Bentham, Deleuze and Beyond: An Overview of Surveillance Theories from the Panopticon to Participation". *Philosophy & Technology*. **30**: 9–37. doi:10.1007/s13347-016-0219-1.
11. ^ Zuboff, Shoshana. "Shoshana Zuboff: A Digital Declaration". *FAZ.NET* (in German). ISSN 0174-4909. Archived from the original on 22 June 2020. Retrieved 18 May 2020.
12. ^ "Shoshana Zuboff On surveillance capitalism". *Contagious*. Archived from the original on 6 February 2020. Retrieved 18 May 2020.
13. ^ Zuboff, Shoshana (2019). *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. p. 504-505, 519.
14. ^ Sandberg, Roy (May 2020). "Surveillance capitalism in the context of futurology : an inquiry to the implications of surveillance capitalism on the future of humanity". Helsinki University Library. pp. 33, 39, 87. Archived (PDF) from the original on 1 July 2020. Retrieved 29 December 2023.
15. ^ "Comic-Con 2016: Marvel turns focus away from the Avengers, 'Game of Thrones' cosplay proposals, and more". *Los Angeles Times*. 24 July 2016. Archived from the original on 11 February 2017. Retrieved 9 February 2017.
16. ^ "Oliver Stone Calls Pokémon Go 'Totalitarian'". *Fortune*. 23 July 2016. Archived from the original on 14 February 2020. Retrieved 9 February 2017.
17. ^ Doctorow, Cory (5 May 2017). "Unchecked Surveillance Technology Is Leading Us Towards Totalitarianism | Opinion". *International Business Times*. Archived from the original on 1 July 2020. Retrieved 19 May 2020.
18. ^ Turow, Joseph (10 January 2012). *The Daily You: How the New Advertising Industry Is Defining Your Identity and Your Worth*. Yale University Press. p. 256. ISBN 978-0300165012. Archived from the original on 19 October 2021. Retrieved 9 February 2017.

19. ^ [Jump up to:^{a b}](#) Roach, Stephen (2022). *Accidental Conflict: America, China, and the Clash of False Narratives*. Yale University Press. doi:10.2307/j.ctv2z0vv2v. ISBN 978-0-300-26901-7. JSTOR j.ctv2z0vv2v. S2CID 252800309.
20. ^ Zuboff, Shoshana (15 September 2014). "A Digital Declaration: Big Data as Surveillance Capitalism". *FAZ.NET* (in German). ISSN 0174-4909. Archived from the original on 22 June 2020. Retrieved 28 August 2018.
21. ^ Powles, Julia (2 May 2016). "Google and Microsoft have made a pact to protect surveillance capitalism". *The Guardian*. Archived from the original on 30 May 2020. Retrieved 9 February 2017.
22. Sterling, Bruce (March 2016). "Shoshanna Zuboff condemning Google "surveillance capitalism"". *WIRED*. Archived from the original on 14 January 2019. Retrieved 9 February 2017.
23. ^ "The Unlikely Activists Who Took On Silicon Valley — and Won". *New York Times*. 14 August 2018. Archived from the original on 7 June 2020. Retrieved 28 August 2018.
24. ^ Zuboff, Shoshana (4 April 2015). "Big other: surveillance capitalism and the prospects of an information civilization". *Journal of Information Technology*. **30** (1): 75–89. doi:10.1057/jit.2015.5. ISSN 0268-3962. S2CID 15329793. SSRN 2594754.
25. ^ Zuboff, Shoshana (5 March 2016). "Google as a Fortune Teller: The Secrets of Surveillance Capitalism". *FAZ.NET* (in German). ISSN 0174-4909. Retrieved 28 August 2018.
26. ^ [Jump up to:^{a b}](#) Zuboff, Shoshana (2019). *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. New York: PublicAffairs. ISBN 9781610395694. OCLC 1049577294.
27. ^ Varian, Hal (May 2010). "Computer Mediated Transactions". *American Economic Review: Papers and Proceedings*. **100** (2): 1–10. CiteSeerX 10.1.1.216.691. doi:10.1257/aer.100.2.1.

For further information about the theory, practice, and implications of Surveillance Capitalism, I recommend reading the following book:

THE AGE OF SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM

**THE FIGHT FOR A
HUMAN FUTURE
AT THE NEW
FRONTIER OF POWER**

**SHOSHANA
ZUBOFF**

Who is Robert Malone is a reader-supported publication. To receive new posts and support my work, consider becoming a free or paid subscriber.

[Subscribe](#)

Thank you for reading Who is Robert Malone.
This post is public so feel free to share it.



178 Likes · 23 Restacks

[← Previous](#)[Next →](#)

34 Comments



Jean 11 hrs ago Liked by Robert W Malone MD, MS

Thank you for this insightful review! It reminds me again of my University days and stumbling into its early beginnings.

In terms of selling products, services and perceptions, I've been aware of commercial efforts for a long time. I've reflected on whether allowing access to my psyche, so to speak, was a

fair trade-off for the service I am being offered (for free or at low cost).

In particular, I have been advised by the selling people that I don't think like others. I've never belonged to Facebook or Google social offerings. I use Gettr to follow persons whose views I'm interested in. My sources of others' perspectives are largely reading articles and comments re topics of interest.

So, re surveillance capitalism. It seems to me we have been/ are programmed to gobble up tasty freebies without a thought as to any ramifications. Thus, step one, as you illustrate here, is to provide awareness. Once in a while, I've reflected on whether trade-offs like these are worth my cooperation. So next, every person reflects on such issues.

We seem to go through life blithely focusing on ourselves and our wants. We believe, trust and expect a supportive environment. Lately we have been learning those expectations are not being realised. Thank heavens for the Paul Revere's (R & JM's) bringing it to our attention. In hopes we will further carry and share the concerns and need to deal with them with others.

Welcome home, hopefully! Enjoy a good one.



♡ LIKE (8) 💬 REPLY ↗ SHARE

...

1 reply



James Goodrich J Goodrich News Letter 13 hrs ago

It's very overwhelming for me to understand and think of the implications of my life being monitored through my phone and computer in a way that companies can then manipulate my life, because I believe this is what they are doing. My fear quickly turns to a fascistic surveillance which is how the government takes this surveillance information and models laws and its justice system to go after people like me. This we may think of as fascist surveillance done through these huge companies. I realize this is already happening and our politicians are much too greedy taking the data dollars to ever create laws that would actually stop the surveillance of us. So for me a person that doesn't really use face book and needs to divorce myself from google what can we do?

♡ LIKE (10) 💬 REPLY ↗ SHARE

...

3 replies

32 more comments...

© 2024 Robert W Malone, MD · [Privacy](#) · [Terms](#) · [Collection notice](#)
[Substack](#) is the home for great culture