



THE ERA OF SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM: PRIVACY AND CONTROL IN THE CONNECTED SOCIETY



<https://doi.org/10.56238/levv16n47-033>

Submitted on: 03/11/2025

Publication date: 04/11/2025

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a qualitative research that aims to reflect on contemporary society, characterized by its growing digital connection and, simultaneously, by the surveillance exercised by algorithms. The methodology adopted consists of a critical reading of Shoshana Zuboff's work, entitled *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Struggle for a Human Future in the New Frontier of Power* (2020). The research seeks to discuss the future implications of data surveillance in an increasingly interconnected social context. The author's contributions show that data surveillance is intrinsically associated with the functioning of digital platforms, directly impacting aspects such as privacy, individual autonomy, and social dynamics. The work highlights the relevance of this debate to understand the effects of the use of information technologies in daily life and to foster the protection of users' rights in an environment marked by constant surveillance.

Keywords: Surveillance capitalism. Platformization. Privacy. Digital Platforms. Contemporary Society.

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary society is increasingly connected, with digital playing an increasing role in everyday life. Until recently, newspapers and magazines were exclusively printed, photo albums were not shared on social networks, and financial transactions did not take place through banking apps. Life, however, has been adapting to the new technologies shaped by capitalism. Today, to be on the margins of digital is, in a way, to be on the margins of society itself.

Changes come from revolutions that profoundly impact the political, social, economic, cultural, and technological dimensions of societies, influencing both nations and individuals. These transformations manifest themselves as veritable avalanches or tsunamis, shaking established structures and challenging the future of humanity in the twenty-first century. While these technologies are indispensable, they also pose significant threats (Suleyman; Bhaskar, 2025).

Still in the twentieth century, the process of digitizing life began, translating it into digital, quantifiable, analyzable and performative data. This phenomenon has enabled "datafication", which, as defined by Lemos (2021, p. 194), "is not just about the conversion of an analog object into a digital one, but the modification of actions, behaviors, and knowledge based on the performance of data elaborated by algorithmic intelligence systems". Platforms use datafication to capture and generate quantitative data, converting human interactions into actionable information.

This process, called by Shoshana Zuboff (2020) "surveillance capitalism", is an economic system based on the exploitation of personal data collected through online interactions. This economic model is based on appropriating human experiences, turning personal information into profitable business assets for companies. It is not just a set of technologies, but a logic that permeates and directs digital interactions, favoring the accumulation of power and wealth, often at the expense of individual autonomy and the privacy of users.

Thus, the present research is justified, which seeks to reflect on the future implications of data surveillance in an increasingly connected society. The text analyzed is by Shoshana Zuboff, in her book "The Era of Surveillance Capitalism: The Struggle for a Human Future in the New Frontier of Power" (2020), whose objective is to present the contributions of this theme to society.

In the face of the transformations caused by the digitalization of life and datafication, there is a need to understand one of the most impactful phenomena of this scenario: surveillance capitalism. This economic logic, critically analyzed by Zuboff (2020), reveals

how digital platforms appropriate human interactions to convert personal information into profitable commodities.

CYBERSPACE AND PLATFORMIZATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The advancement of communication and information technologies has contributed to the development of cyberspace, defined by Lévy (2010) as a worldwide network of computer interconnection that constitutes both the material infrastructure of digital communication and a vast universe of information fed by human beings. Human interaction in this space gave rise to cyberculture, a concept described by Lévy (2010, p. 17) as "the set of techniques (material and intellectual), practices, attitudes, ways of thinking and values that develop in parallel with the growth of cyberspace".

This process of human interaction in cyberspace is also directly related to the concept of datafication, explored by Lemos (2021). He defines datafication as the process of converting the world into data, manifested by the tracking of social relations mediated by digital platforms. This transformation, which he calls the requisition of the world, involves the conversion of information and experiences into operational data, especially in the realms of nature and knowledge. Datafication resulted in a new form of data-driven governance, which the author called epistocratic algocracy.

In this context, large technology companies, such as Google and Facebook, play a central role. As analyzed by Zuboff (2020), these corporations have transformed personal data into a new form of capital, using human experience as raw material to create behavioral profiles and predict future actions. This business model, known as surveillance capitalism, not only violates privacy and individual rights, but also profoundly alters social and democratic structures. Lemos (2021) complements, pointing out that datafication can lead to excessive control and monitoring of social relationships, reinforcing surveillance practices and manipulating social behavior. This distributed surveillance still raises ethical and social concerns, including the concentration of power over personal data, the impact on individual autonomy, and the increase in inequality and social exclusion.

In turn, Poell, Nieborg, and Dijck (2020) bring the notion of platformization, addressing the concept of platform as a multifaceted structure that allows us to act, connect, and communicate effectively. The platforms are described as productive, encouraging users to organize their activities around proprietary and for-profit systems. The authors also highlight the computational perspective that emerged in the late 2000s, describing platforms as infrastructures that support software development and that connect

end users, such as players, to content producers, creating the concept of two-sided markets.

According to Costa and Silva (2019), the concept of two-sided market refers to the interaction between two distinct categories of users, connected by a platform. In this type of market, the perceived value of one side increases proportionally to the growth of the user base on the other side. Classic examples include online search platforms, video game consoles, and social networks, which play the role of intermediaries between different types of consumers, such as advertisers and end users.

Additionally, Poell, Nieborg, and Dijck (2020) analyze the evolution of the platform concept, which has gained relevance both in academic contexts and in the business sphere, especially before the emergence of technological giants such as Google and Facebook. Previous theoretical contributions, such as the concept of two-sided markets, have shaped the contemporary understanding of platforms, showing that their impact transcends the technical sphere, also involving social and economic practices.

In summary, the evolution of cyberspace, datafication, surveillance capitalism, and platformization represent interconnected phenomena that shape the contemporary landscape. While offering opportunities for new forms of interaction and innovation, these transformations raise significant ethical, social, and political challenges, requiring critical reflection on the limits and impacts of these technologies on society.

SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM

Surveillance capitalism, a concept coined by Zuboff (2020), describes a new form of economic organization that transforms human behavior into raw material. This transformation seeks to create behavioral profiles and predict future actions, in a scenario where digital environments shape and influence both the virtual space and interactions in the non-digital world. This dynamic reflects a profound reconfiguration of human and social relations in the face of technological advancement.

In this model, individuals live with a massive flow of data managed by algorithms and computer systems, which changes the way they interact, consume, work, and relate. From leisure to health management, through financial management and even sleep, surveillance capitalism integrates itself into the most intimate spheres of life, shaping behaviors and emotional reactions. According to Zuboff (2020), this exploitation occurs almost imperceptibly, infiltrating areas such as work, education, politics, religious practices, and leisure. Everything is quantified and controlled with the aim of maximizing profits, often without any ethical reflection on the impacts of this process.

This scenario is aggravated by the unbridled dissemination of content, as pointed out by Souza (2023). The market logic prioritizes sharing and visibility, even if this involves the spread of misinformation, hate speech, and social polarization. Thus, ethics becomes secondary to profitability, sustaining a global market where digital monitoring is the basis of the economic model.

Arruda (2019) deepens this discussion by highlighting the role of contemporary algorithmic systems, such as social networks, search engines, and recommendation platforms. These systems collect user data to improve their own processes and influence behaviors. However, this practice raises crucial ethical issues related to privacy, misinformation, and political polarization. In addition, Arruda (2019) notes that the lack of transparency regarding the collection and use of data is a significant concern, since users are often unaware of the scope and objectives of this activity.

The economic impact of surveillance capitalism is also evident. Extracting behavioral data offers business advantages and encourages the development of new products and services. According to Arruda (2019), the effectiveness of predictive products depends directly on the quality of the available data. For this reason, companies, described as "surveillance capitalists", strategically invest in the collection of behavioral information to refine their forecasts and increase their competitiveness in the market.

This dynamic, however, is not without controversy. Algorithmic systems have been identified as control devices that, although operating less explicitly than traditional methods, modulate the supply of information and influence behaviors through positive or aversive conditioners (Arruda, 2019). This raises important reflections on the extent to which these systems reinforce or subvert traditional disciplinary and biopolitical structures.

Koerner (2021) complements this analysis by pointing out that surveillance capitalism compromises privacy and intervenes in human existence, operating as a model of accumulation characteristic of platform capital. Evangelista (2017) also reinforces this perspective, highlighting the emergence of cyber intelligence, driven by informational devices that monitor and condition individuals in a continuous and systematic way.

Therefore, surveillance capitalism represents a phenomenon that goes beyond the economic sphere, affecting social, political, and ethical structures. Reflection on this model is essential to understand the challenges posed by a system that, while promising innovation, questions fundamental values such as freedom, privacy, and autonomy.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present research explored the impacts of surveillance capitalism on contemporary society, based on Shoshana Zuboff's work entitled *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Struggle for a Human Future in the New Frontier of Power* (2020), and on several theoretical contributions that help to unveil the complexities and consequences of this economic logic. Zuboff (2020), in his in-depth analysis, presents how surveillance capitalism uses datafication to transform human experiences into commercial assets, outlining an economic model that operates at the expense of individual autonomy and privacy. His reflections offer an indispensable theoretical and critical basis for understanding the ethical, social, and political challenges posed by these digital transformations.

Throughout Zuboff's book (2020), the ways in which personal data is collected and used to influence behaviors, shape social structures, and reinforce inequalities are highlighted. She warns about the risks of this model of exploitation, emphasizing the importance of protecting the rights of individuals and fostering debates that seek to balance technological innovation and human dignity. His work becomes essential not only for technology experts, but also for educators, policymakers, and citizens concerned about the future of an increasingly connected society.

The reflection on surveillance capitalism cannot end here. This phenomenon requires continuous investigation and monitoring, especially in the face of the accelerated evolution of digital technologies. Future research may focus on more effective regulatory proposals to mitigate the impacts of data surveillance, as well as strategies to bolster digital literacy and ensure greater transparency of platforms. Other areas of study can address the psychological implications of constant monitoring and explore technological alternatives that prioritize privacy and social well-being.

In this way, this article seeks not only to expand knowledge about the dynamics of surveillance capitalism, but also to instigate a necessary debate on the ethical, social, and political limits of digital technologies, encouraging actions that promote a more humane and sustainable future.

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