

SOCI Reading Assignment 4
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Statt, N. (2018). How Amazon's Retail Revolution is Changing the Way We Shop. The Verge

This article focuses on how Amazon has gone from an online bookseller to one of the most valuable and powerful corporations and how that transition has affected the company. As well as how their customers trust them with everything from personal information to Amazon Alexa voice data and how that data has helped grow the company even more. The article also highlights the distinct phases the company went through including: Print books, e-books and e-readers, Amazon Prime, cloud computing, smart speakers and AI, and live streaming platforms. This expansion seems to be never ending and as Amazon grows it seems to corner more and more markets.

Nguyen, N. (2018). Inside Amazon's Fake Review Economy. BuzzFeed

This article focuses on the plethora of fake reviews that exist on Amazon and how they are used to convince buyers to believe false information pertaining to a product. The author explains how people are paid to write 5 star reviews for products without ever seeing the product they are vouching for. Amazon has put a few policies in place to deal with this; however, sellers keep finding ways around them. Flooding the product reviews with paid reviews can drown out actual critics who post truthful and sometimes negative reviews.

Calvin, A.P. (2017) Can Amazon's Alexa Be Your Friend? Digg

This article focuses on the connection between users and smart speakers such as Amazon's Alexa. The main reason why Alexa is one of the most impressive pieces of human mimicking AI is the amount of data it has to train on and the amount of new data it gets every single day leading it to advance at an incredible rate. This type of AI can create an interesting bond between the user and AI leading to many reviews describing Alexa as the "perfect spouse." Alexa unlike Siri has an eerie ability to build connections with its users to the point where even allegations of Alexa listening to everything you say can't make users stop.

Woods, H. S. (2018) Asking more of Siri and Alexa: feminine persona in service of surveillance capitalism

This article starts by bringing forward the juxtaposition of the statements "PEOPLE IN THE SIXTIES: I BETTER NOT SAY THAT OR THE GOVERNMENT WILL WIRETAP MY HOUSE." and "PEOPLE TODAY: HEY WIRETAP, DO YOU HAVE A RECIPE FOR PANCAKES?" showing how the perception of surveillance and willingness to share personal data have radically changed over a short period of time. The author also brings to light how

platforms like Alexa and Siri are doing so with the help of a perfectly engineered feminine voice. Another main point brought up was how these platforms are “an integral part of the developing system of surveillance capitalism”.

Some thoughts:

1. While reading the first two articles I questioned why Amazon has not created a machine learning platform to detect “fake” reviews. It was brought up in the one of the articles that they tried, however, I feel with their presence in the sector they could create a platform that would be able to detect at least a decent percent of these reviews.
2. The main thing that was on my mind during the final two readings was why people are suddenly okay with bringing surveillance into their home and what has changed in society to cause this?