

ONLINE SURVEILLANCE

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THE ENTRY

My entry to the lexicon revolves around the idea of surveillance online. The main theme of the entry will focus on reflecting on software critically and will evaluate the ethics of tracking personal user data on different platforms, with the purpose of storing and selling this captured data to external interests.

Today, computer and online surveillance programs are widespread, and almost all internet traffic can be monitored. This aspect of our technological development can both be seen as being beneficial for our society and safety, but at the same time others speculate whether it can be harmful for our individual freedom. Surveillance allows governments and other agencies to maintain social control, recognize and monitor threats, and prevent and investigate criminal activity, however, concern have been expressed, that with increasing surveillance of citizens, we could potentially end up in a mass surveillance society, with limited political and personal freedom. The notion of personalized advertisement is an aspect of surveillance that is located in the gray zone, because it is not primarily concerned with the gathering of information with the purpose of improving the safety of society, but has emerged from a commercial ambition, and thus is potentially not interested in the protection of the privacy of the individual.

I find this ethical question regarding personal freedom really interesting, because it seems to be a subject that increases in relevancy with time and is a concern I believe we need to address and understand when generating future technology and software.

For this subject I chose the term “*Online Surveillance*”, because I think it broadly covers the subject, while at the same time excluding aspects of surveillance that I will not be covering, such as surveillance in general society, as seen in prisons, public domains and private properties.

INTRODUCTION OF PROBLEM

Based on the arguments mentioned above, this assignment will try to answer the question:

“How does online surveillance affect the way we behave online, and what potential consequences can it have on our personal freedom?”

With this, the assignment will be a critical reflection of the surveillance we experience online today, and to support these arguments, they will be based on concrete examples from the website www.facebook.com. In this way, Facebook will be my specific artefact to work with, and will mainly be where I gather and include the technical aspects of my arguments from.

When writing my paper there are several questions that I find would be relevant and interesting to try to answer and discuss, such as:

- How is surveillance online improving the safety of society? Concrete examples.
- How is surveillance online reducing the safety of society? Concrete examples.
- When did “cookies” evolve and how? What was the original purpose of them, and how are they being used today?
- How can and are social media and other websites tracking and storing our information, the things we choose to share, and potentially also the things we are not aware of them having access to?
- Who can get access to this information?
- Can information be found on these websites on exactly what they “capture”?
- How would it affect the popular social medias if online surveillance did not exist? *“social media depend for their existence on monitoring users and selling the data to others.”* (Baumann & Lyon, p. 7)
- Is there any way around online tracking? What consequences could such an exclusion have as an individual who wants to be a part of general society?
- What would happen if we were more aware of what information is currently being stored about us? Would it affect anything? (Cambridge Analytica case – Facebook)
- Does online surveillance matter as long as we are not really aware of it, as seems to be the case for many people today?

These questions are important because they help give an understanding as to how and where this surveillance is experienced today, what knowledge people have about it, and hereby also how it actually affects the general society. By giving an understanding of this, they also help generate a common idea of how this surveillance has evolved, and potentially how it will continue to evolve and affect us as society and as individuals in the future.

These questions will not necessarily all be included and answered in the assignment, but they help give an idea of what it is about this subject that I find interesting, as well as presenting what the main focus of the assignment will be.

DISPOSITION

How I am planning on addressing the task of writing my exam paper is to first carefully read all of the literature that I am planning on basing my arguments on and annotating anything that I find would be relevant to use. From here, I want to make a general outline showing how I want my paper to be structured, so that I get an idea of how to distribute the available pages. At this point in my process, I have a general disposition draft, that I think could be a way to structure the paper:

- Introduction:
 - o Short presentation to online surveillance – what is it?
 - o General problem – *“how does online surveillance affect the way we behave online, and what potential consequences can it have on our personal freedom?”*
 - o Methods – how am I going to address the problem, what sources am I going to use, and why? Introduction of artifact: Facebook.
- Presentation of the influence that online surveillance has on society today and how it has evolved from the beginning.
 - o Where and when do we experience this surveillance? (Social media, Facebook)
 - Concrete examples.
 - o How does it affect the individual user contra the bigger commercial users? (different uses)
- Discussion of / critical reflection on the consequences that online surveillance has today and might have in the future.
 - o Positive and negative tendencies? Examples.

- Can it be avoided?
 - The ethics of unknown surveillance (Cambridge Analytica case – Facebook)
- Conclusion – is online surveillance a thing that should continue to exist and evolve, or are there too many negative aspects and consequences to the privacy of the individual, that it should result in a reduction of the surveillance that we currently experience online?

INTRODUCTION OF THEORY

Sources:

- Albrechtslund, A., Fuchs, C., Boersma, K. & Sandoval, M. (2011). *Internet and Surveillance: The Challenges of Web 2.0 and Social Media*. England: Taylor and Francis Ltd

This book is a good overall reference that covers the subject of surveillance online widely, and therefore I think this will be my most used source throughout the essay.

- Bartlett, J. (2015, november 6th). *The online surveillance debate is really about whether you trust governments or not* [Online-article]. From: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/internet-security/11979682/The-online-surveillance-debate-is-really-about-whether-you-trust-governments-or-not.html>
- Bauman, Z. & Lyon, D. (2013). *Liquid surveillance, (1-17)*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press
- Berry, D. (2011). "Real-time Streams." In *David Berry – The Philosophy of Software. Code and Meditation in the Digital Age* (pp. 142-171). Great Britain: CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourn
- Bucher, T. (2012). "Want to be on the top? Algorithmic power and the threat of invisibility on Facebook." *New Media & Society* (7), 1163-1180
- Fuchs, C. (2011). "New Media, Web 2.0 and Surveillance." *Sociology Compass* (2), 134-147
- Grosser, B. (2014). "What Do Metrics Want? How Quantification Prescribes Social Interaction on Facebook," in *Computational Culture* (4).
- Lyon, D. (2007). *Surveillance Studies: An Overview*, (46-66). Cambridge, England: Polity Press
- Penney, J. W. (2017). "Internet surveillance, regulation, and chilling effects online: a comparative case study." *Internet Policy Review* (2) 1-39

- Prokop, A. (2018, May 21st). *Cambridge Analytica and its many scandals, explained* [Online-article]. From: <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/3/21/17141428/cambridge-analytica-trump-russia-mueller>
- Sulleyman, A. (2017, May 22nd). *Snooper's charter: Majority of public unaware of government online surveillance* [Online-article]. From: <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/snoopers-charter-investigatory-powers-bill-government-online-surveillance-majority-uk-unaware-a7749851.html>

These are the rest of the sources the essay will be based on so far. They all individually play a part in gaining a better understanding of all the different qualities that online surveillance contains, as well as help discuss the development of online surveillance thus far. As I begin to write, I am sure that additional sources will be added to the list, and some might not be used.