Digital Technology and the Market for Political Surveillance*

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Abstract

Many new media technologies, such as the internet, serve both as a tool for organizing public commo ns and as a tool for surveilling private lives. This paper addresses the manner in which such technological innovations have enabled a dramatically expanded market for public policy opinion data, and explores the potential role of that market in facilitating panoptic regimes of both private and state surveillance. Whereas information about public policy opinion used to be highly reductive, expensive to collect, and restricted to a limited number of powerful political actors, today it is much less expensive, highly nuanced, and widely available. Pollsters now also have the ability to extrapolate political information from our commercial and noncommercial activities. We investigate the work of two organizations, a public policy polling firm named Grapevine Polling, and an advocacy consulting firm named United Campaigns. We find that both the increased sophistication of these firms' methods and the reduced cost of increasingly personalized data together have the potential to undermine the very public sphere that digital media were hoped to reinvigorate. Moreover, overlapping state and private demand for the products of such pollsters reflects the extent to which politics and the marketplace are increasingly intertwined and inseparable under the current articulation of democracy in the US.

Introduction

Many new media technologies, such as the internet, serve both as a tool for organizing public commons and as a tool for surveilling private lives. Thus, the role of new digital media on political processes and organizations in democratic countries is multifaceted. Developing side by side with the early and oft-hoped predictions of the ability of digital media to expand and supplement the public sphere have been mounting concerns about the growing power and scope of digital technologies – and particularly the internet – as a tool for overtly political surveillance.

This paper examines the manner in which new media radically altered the market structure for political information in the United States, allowing broader access to public policy opinion data that is less expensive, more highly nuanced, and more widely available than traditional pre-digital

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information. Focusing on the work of two organizations, a public policy polling firm named Grapevine Polling, and an advocacy consulting firm named United Campaigns, this paper augments the existing literature expressing concern about the panoptic uses of new media, while arguing that the nature of the market structure for political information in the United States reflects the hybrid nature of governance in the United States. Specifically, the panoptical aspect of such political surveillance as is carried out by the subject companies reflects the extent to which the political and the commercial are inherently intertwined and inseparable under current articulations of American democracy.

Understandably, recent digital technologies have been hailed as holding the promise to revitalize democratic discourse around the world, and particularly in the United States. For example, Grossman's *Electronic Republic* (1996) argues we are moving into a third stage of democratic evolution. While the early direct democracies evolved into representative democracies, the new electronic media will allow us to experience a wired reincarnation of direct democracy. "Telecommunications can give every citizen the opportunity to place questions of their own on the public agenda and participate in discussions with experts, policy-makers and fellow citizens" (Grossman, 1996). Indeed, Grossman represents a substantial current in the literature that – either cautiously or not – points toward the potentiality of digital media to either provide robust new public fora for political participation, or to expand existing fora.

To a substantial degree, such optimistic projections as to the political uses of digital media rest upon the ability of these technologies to mitigate some of the more debilitating features of contemporary political communication. Some argue anything that will overcome the effects of unidirectional media or inadequate information supplies will help democratic deliberation. In particular, a number of theorists have argued that such technologies may help contain or provide the public sphere necessary for true participatory democracy (Habermas, 1974, 1989). But key to Habermas' notion of the public sphere, was the distance and separation from the power of the state and the forces of the market (Habermas, 1974). Premised upon the free access by all citizens to a realm in which public opinion may be debated and formed as a counterweight to the otherwise unrestrained authority of the state, Habermas envisioned a properly functioning public sphere as essential to the functioning of democratic societies (Hohendahl, 1974).

Due to the capacity of digital technologies to reduce financial and communicative entry barriers to the creation of such fora for the creation of public opinion, a number of theorists, such as Schwartz (1996) and Sparks (2001) have argued that digital virtual communities extend the public sphere, especially when they grow around bulletin boards for exchanging ideas, mobilizing the public, and building social capital (Rheingold, 1993, 2002). African American families in particular can equalize their relationships with corporate American and political elites with an accessible communications media rich in information (Redd, 1988). Studies of local activism have revealed that internet tools facilitate social networking across traditional socioeconomic boundaries, engage people with group learning experiences, and draw new participants into public life (Brants, Huizenga, & van Meerten, 1996; Mele, 1999; Tsagarousianou, Tambini, & Bryan, 1998; Wittig & Schmitz, 1996).

It has been further argued that digital media may dramatically increase the type of public access to information and the government upon which Habermas' public sphere is premised. People who use new media avoid the harmful effects of traditional media, especially television, by experiencing politics in a more direct and interactive forum, reducing the distance between the governed and government (Budge, 1996; Grossman, 1996). From the point of view of large political parties and incumbent candidates, one benefit of having uninformed voters is those voters tend to use media cues and informational short cuts in place of becoming fully informed (Bartels, 1996; Lupia, 1994). Whereas citizens have traditionally had an inadequate supply of information from traditional news sources, limited opportunities to interact with public policy officials, and few opportunities to deliberate with each other, each of these problems can be overcome with the internet. Internet technologies permit users to create new social contexts for themselves based outside neighborhood, friends, and family, through which they might convert to minority or independent political positions (Burbank, 1997).

Indeed, the optimism about digital media as public sphere springs from the sense that, online, citizens are free from traditional identity markers. With this greater anonymity comes a freedom from social or political sanction for engaging in political expression. As Lessig has recognized, one of the defining aspects of life in 'virtual' space is a pervasive sense of borderlessness that comes from the perceptions of anonymity and placelessness (Lessig, 1999). This sense of placelessness likewise promises to reduce territorial and social prohibitions on free speech, "as the mind enters a space free of the context of geographic place and community" (Dodge & Kitchin, 2001; Mitchell, 1995).

The perceptions of anonymity, placelessness, and freedom from context that underlie the political promise of digital media, however, also suggest the source of what is deeply problematic with the actual use of such media in the political arena. That is, while digital media may serve to provide or expand the public sphere, they also have prodigious capacity to simultaneously transform the public sphere into a site of profound surveillance. As a preliminary matter, concerns and critiques of the digitization of political fora have developed alongside calls to embrace the emancipatory aspects of these technologies. For example, theorists have argued that because many new media obscure authorship, they can increase unaccountable mud-slinging in political deliberation (Tumber & Bromley, 1998), and that no amount of innovative internet technology can overcome the existing knowledge gap that prevents lower-educated and information-poor groups from learning quickly during a campaign period, instead leaving them more susceptible to manipulation by political advertisements (Moore, 1987; Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970). Likewise, it has been argued that since only the most politically extreme voters make use of information resources and the most informed citizens actually vote (Palfrey & Poole, 1987), we can expect that when the internet provides widespread access to informational resources, political life will become a clash of the most opinionated, not a dialogue of the self-taught and inquisitive.

Indeed, a number of theorists have specifically challenged the notion that the use of digital media will provide the type of expanded access and free exchange of opinion upon which the Habermasian public sphere is premised. For example, Beniger has argued that those communities that do form online are either 'pseudo-communities' that are intensely impersonal or

mass communication systems that are more intimate but allow for more effective social control (Beniger, 1987). Some have concluded new media can only intensify the worst features of industrial capitalism, in part because the culture of information exchange on the internet is driven by the commercial ethic of selling information (Barney, 2000; Gutstein, 1999). Moreover, on an individual level, some researchers argue the internet reduces social involvement and psychological well being, which certainly could not be good for the future of deliberative democracy, and would certainly undermine the type of participation at the heart of any theory of a participatory public sphere (Kraut et al., 1998).

While such critiques are vital, our research raises quite different theoretical concerns. In important ways, the internet was designed from the very beginning as a technology of subtle surveillance (Elmer, 2004). However, through the unregulated mixing of the interests of political actors in the marketplace of information, tools of explicit political surveillance are also used to shape democratic organization and processes. The opening up of markets for the exchange of individualized U.S. political data gathered through processes of "dataveillance," raises substantial questions as to whether the communicative spaces enabled by digital media will serve as a public sphere for democratic activity beyond the influence of centralized state authority, or whether the heightened techniques of observation enabled by those media will simply extend the panoptic surveillance capacities of the state and the market.

Organizing Political Surveillance: Grapevine Polling and United Campaigns

Much of the scholarship assessing the political role of new media has concentrated on individual users as solitary voters who collect and evaluate political information, or who decide that collecting and evaluating political information is a low priority. The common analytical frame for this work situates these users within an abstract public sphere. In contrast, we argue that a consequence of using new media in our political lives has been an opening up *the market for political information*. Thus, we prefer an analytical frame that situates users in a marketplace in which information about their identity and opinions is traded. We define political information as details about personal identity and opinion that allow researchers to make relational and explanatory inferences. This information about individuals is collected from a variety of sources, including credit card purchases, internet activities, and academic surveys, and it might be used to infer, for example, one's political preferences from one's gender, race, or consumer activity.

Two particular U.S.-based organizations, Grapevine Polling and United Campaigns, serve as examples of the kinds of contemporary organizations that work within the marketplace for political information.[2] Both amass and market detailed profiles of citizens using traditional survey and data mining methods, but both have also developed three kinds of powerful new media tools to complement traditional methods. Their spider programs crawl through the Web, automatically

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[2] United Campaigns and Grapevine Polling are pseudonyms based on aggregates of our ethnographic and archival study of 18 businesses, academic research institutes, and political action committees between 1999 and 2003.

collecting website content, such as a person's email or physical address, or an organization's press releases.[3] They often employ spam, or unsolicited email, to gather or spread information for commercial or political marketing campaigns.[4]

Spyware, a kind of software that Grapevine and United covertly install on users' computers during internet use, reports a user's Web activities back to the sponsoring organization. In addition to covert installations, spyware is sometimes installed with the generally underinformed agreement of the user, who often later forgets about its presence.[5] Many companies have developed variations of these tools, but Grapevine and United apply these tools to gathering political information.

a. Grapevine Polling

Grapevine Polling, a U.S.-based, worldwide market research and consulting firm, has a long history of polling beginning in the 1970s, when it was founded by three professors of social science who specialized in survey methods. In the late 1990s, Grapevine, which is privately owned, switched from doing consumer and political research via face-to-face and telephone interviews to selling itself as pioneering the internet method to conduct scientifically accurate market research. Grapevine claims to combine the communicative power of the internet with probability sampling to produce the first statistically valid population-projectable survey tool capable of generating reliable information for decision-making.

Commercial market research is the bulk of Grapevine's business, so it carefully limits its public policy polling work and only takes contracts from particular clients to avoid the risk that its findings in a public policy poll will upset the industries that provide 90% of its business. It will not take work from the major political parties, political candidates, or high-profile advocacy groups.

Grapevine's annual revenue tops $150 million, and the company employs about 900 full-time employees. The company continues to acquire smaller market research firms, including firms outside the U.S., forming a global web of for-profit personal information exchange for marketing purposes. By switching from traditional methods of market research to the internet, Grapevine asserts it is harnessing the Web's interactive power to gather market intelligence that organizations need, continuously gathering political information about more individuals nationally and internationally.

Grapevine's clients include Corporate 1000 companies, advertising and public relations agencies, media and entertainment media, universities, opinion pollsters, industry lobby groups, non-profits, and private foundations. The company promises to deliver consumer insight,

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[3] A spider is a program that automatically fetches Web pages. See: *Webopedia*, http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/s/spider.html

[4] Spam is electronic junk mail or junk newsgroup postings. See: *Webopedia*, http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/s/spam.html

[5] Spyware or adware is any software that covertly gathers user information through the user's Internet connection without his or her knowledge, usually for advertising purposes. See: *Webopedia*, http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/s/spyware.html

predictive intelligence, and brand loyalty. Client applications include: brand management diagnostics, testing advertising and promotions, evaluating new products and concepts, polling public opinion, as well as tracking real-time response to major news, political, or entertainment events. With its new media tools, Grapevine is able to track popularity shifts minute-by-minute during a televised event such as a presidential debate or to deliver population-projectable claims on everything from whether a growing readiness exists to disagree with the president on going to war to whether people think pineapple juice should be mixed with cranberry.

Where traditional survey methods took several weeks to generate results, Grapevine's internet surveys take a few hours. Once people agree to participate in the database, their households are equipped with interactive Web TV devices, which participants then use to fill out questionnaires.[6] In addition to Web TV, database participants receive free internet access and free prizes, and an engineer visits to install their new gadgets. As the saying goes there is no free lunch and, in this case, there is no free Web surfing, TV watching, and prize opening. Instead, Grapevine tracks the panelists' online activities, creating a stream of data about media use (from newspapers to internet), advertising exposure, attitudes, and purchase behavior.

The Web TVs deliver consistent multi-media content to the database participants and, most notably, embedded management and spyware, of which only an advanced internet user – one who most likely would not agree to be constantly polled in exchange for free internet access – would understand the meaning. Grapevine summons its respondents by activating a flashing red light on the top of the family's Web TV box. Before data mining, Grapevine collects -- through database participants' answers -- demographic information, such as income level, sex, race, age, and information related to interests, hobbies, and product/technology usage. If Grapevine software is running off a person's computer instead of Web TV, it also uses cookies, small data files stored on a computer's hard drive, to collect information such as browser, type of computer, operating system, internet service provider, access times, and other similar information.[7]

In the small print, Grapevine allows users who have their own computer to refuse cookies by turning them off in their browser. Grapevine also claims to release only summarized or non-personally identifiable information to its clients and requires participants' consent prior to releasing any personally identifiable information provided during the survey process. Clients that receive personally identifiable information are required to sign and abide by the standards of disclosure of respondent-identifiable data of the trade association of survey research businesses.

However, as a thriving and expanding business acquires or spins off new companies, assets such as databases and customer data are transferred to each new unit. Grapevine has amassed a multi-million-member database, with participants hailing from more than 200 countries. Participants also join individual panels based on demographics or interests, such as a musician

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[6] WebTV is a device that enables you to surf the Web on your TV. See: *Webopedia*, http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/w/webTV.html

[7] A cookie is a message given to a Web browser by a Web server, stored in a text file on your computer. See See: *Webopedia*, http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/c/cookie.html

panel or a teen panel. This subdividing of the database allows Grapevine to offer its clients what it claims to be a valid representation of the entire population via the database, or target populations via specialized panels.

Some 'public interest' activities of Grapevine appear self-serving. For example, Grapevine recently released a poll on Web surfing at work that found one-quarter of employees said they felt addicted to the internet. Some of the company's founders, who were also faculty at a prominent university, released the information as an academic 'working paper'. At the same time, Grapevine had released a software package that allowed companies to monitor employees' surfing patterns and block certain sites. Information of this new software was included in press releases on the poll and, in turn, many media organizations published stories on the poll with 'news' of the software remedy.

Grapevine plays a problematic role in this new marketplace for political information. Some of its tactics used to gain and retain database participants are misleading. Grapevine initially advertises to prospective database members via its website and ad banners or locates new participants through spider programs and spam. Grapevine then promises participants that expressing their opinion to business and government leaders will greatly influence corporations and government, guiding the ways products and services are developed. Grapevine also tells prospective participants they will be joining a revolution in research that will irrevocably alter approaches to the collection and application of information, and that participation is part of a citizen's duty to help good governance. After several months, many panelists forget spyware is installed on their machines.

The company also simultaneously appeals to a user's sense of citizenship and consumer responsibilities. Members of the database are promised 'Vine Points' when they participate that they can redeem for free prizes. At the same time, participants give up the right to see how information about their preferences is used (whether for commercial or public policy analysis). In addition, since political information is their marketable product, Grapevine and companies like it take advantage of legal protections for their product. An example of a move in this direction can be found in the dozens of words Grapevine has already trademarked, including 'Belief,' 'Communication,' 'Connectedness,' 'Deliberative,' 'Empathy,' 'Fairness,' 'Inclusiveness,' and 'Learner.'

Thus, Grapevine takes advantage of the exciting rhetoric about new media technologies to collect both political and commercial data from participants who think they are participating in an information revolution and guiding government and corporation policy. Moreover, it conflates the incentive to participate as a consumer with the incentive to participate as a citizen. Finally, the political information that used to circulate in a public sphere now circulates in a marketplace where it is priced, trademarked, and sold.

b. United Campaigns

United Campaigns is a political action committee (PAC) that provides consulting services to moderate political causes and candidates. The organization was founded in 1999 and currently has about 100 employees and a growing list of partner affinity groups. Recently, United made a

key hire, placing a well-known former U.S. senator as its chief executive of operations and further strengthening its image as a leading political consultancy. While the senator does not have previous experience heading an internet venture or any other kind of company, he has told journalists that United Campaigns will "alter politics as we know it." United offers access to its key asset, a database of individuals' political information, as well as its own brand of internet-based software to extract and manipulate database information about specific population demographics.

United's clients include the majority of moderate U.S. senators and representatives, as well as Democratic and Republican national and state parties. United also provides database information to advocacy organizations, including political action committees, non-profit organizations, and issue-oriented organizations. Its clients combine United's databases and software to target potential constituents and supporters, generate campaign awareness, solicit contributions through the internet, telephone, mail, and door-to-door efforts, and improve press relations and public relations. The clients use United's database and software to reach audiences based on demographic, geographic, or political criteria. Its campaign and advocacy clients also use its services to accept, process, authenticate, analyze, and disclose contributions received through the internet.

The foundation of United's database came from a company that provides free email service and required its subscribers to fill out questionnaires when they created email accounts. The answers from this initial questionnaire supplied United with the demographics of database members, such as age, gender, income, expected major purchases, hobbies, interests, family size, and education. United supplemented this information using spyware to track database members' patterns of computer use. United has significantly evolved its initial database to now include the voter registration information of more than 150 million registered voters in the United States, as culled from state and local boards of elections. In addition, United combines 50 million individual's records from departments of motor vehicles. Outside the United States, United has begun to build an international database, starting in the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, with a database that contains registration records of more than 90 million voters.

In addition, United continues to run a non-profit internet service provider from which it gathers subscriber questionnaire information and internet use information, via cookies and spyware, to add to its database. United's database thus contains information including date of birth, date of voter or motor vehicle registration, residence address, number of children in the household, political jurisdiction, and party affiliation. Through spider software, spam, and Spyware, United has found and added email addresses, telephone numbers, estimated income levels, ethnicity of surnames, and homeowner status. United also purchases data from other lobby groups and its database now contains detailed and growing information on more than 75% of the American voting public as well as on hundreds of thousands of unregistered voters.

As with Grapevine, some of United's activities are problematic. First, United has built a relational database using people's detailed personal information without their explicit or informed consent. United uses email registrations, voter registrations, motor vehicle registrations, an individual's movement on the internet, as well as other undisclosed sources, to amass information

that the vast majority of people might not consider public record. In addition, the combination of these various sources of information paints a highly detailed picture of individuals' lives that clients, either political or commercial, can use to uniquely customize messages to manipulate certain responses from each particular individual in the database. Even if some members gave initial informed consent to the use of certain political information, most would not have consented to its continuous aggregation and applications.

Already, through United, political organizations and commercial industry are able to drive traffic to their websites by directing customized banner and email advertisements via the political, demographic, and commercial characteristic profiles of members of the database. In addition, in the deals United makes with some of its partners, partners get access to United's database while also sharing their own databases, amassing an even more detailed and widely shared profile of individuals.

Voter registration records are governed by complex regulations – more than 25 states, including California, prohibit the commercial use of voter registration records. Yet, as a PAC, United is exempt from many of these restrictions, so its clients, which include industry lobby groups, may now order political information through its website and have that information delivered as raw data and processed as mailing labels, telephone sheets, walk lists, a polling sample, or a file suitable for import into many popular software programs.

The Market for Political Information

Grapevine and United are two good examples of the kinds of organizations working in the marketplace for political information. One initially buys individuals' personal information and opinions in exchange for internet access and free prizes, and then continues to mine data on these individuals to build a detail-rich database to market to clients. Another amasses personal information about individuals, from the start unbeknownst to them and without their permission, using government records, commercial means, and internet spyware. Grapevine's clients are mostly commercial, but the company is increasingly serving industry lobby groups. While United works with political entities, it also shares information with industry lobby groups that are constituted as PACs. These organizations also are similar in that they both amass and market information about the majority of American voters and non-voters and are beginning to do the same within other countries.

New media technologies have made it possible to turn political information into a highly marketable product. That this political information is bought and sold is not new. However, the quality of the product and the structure of the market evolved significantly once organizations started using new media technologies to collect and distribute political information.

The Quality of the Political Information Product

For the most part, Grapevine's business comes from clients who want to survey the buying public about commercial products and services and target them with messages. In contrast, United is a much smaller organization, a specialized consultancy for political campaigns. Both

increasingly play an important role in the marketplace for political information, with three kinds of services.[8]

First, when industries and services form political lobby groups, both Grapevine and United help these lobby groups legitimize their causes by identifying the needs of group members. A lobby group will often claim to represent firms in an industry and, at the same time, claim to represent the consumers of that industry's goods. Thus information about the importance of the industry to the American economy or to American consumers becomes a source of political legitimacy.

Second, both Grapevine and United do *direct-inference* public policy polling for clients. In other words, they run survey instruments that field clear questions about political topics. For example, a direct-inference question might ask, 'Do you support the president?' or 'Should the government offer universal healthcare?' and pollsters can use basic demographic features to explain variation in responses.

Third, both Grapevine and United increasingly do *indirect-inference* public policy polling. In other words, they collect data from survey questions, demographic data, credit card purchases, internet activity, or voter registration files, and make inferences about opinion. Without actually fielding survey questions, they might infer that a woman who is older than 55 years old, living in New York, registered as a Democrat, and spending a significant amount of her income on pharmaceuticals, is very likely to think the government should offer universal healthcare. Moreover, purchases of guns, birth control, or other items can help researchers make indirect inference about a consumer's political attitudes.

With new media tools, the research staffs at Grapevine and United have amassed so much data from so many sources that the complex relational databases can be used to extrapolate political information without ever directly contacting a respondent. In important ways the data is 'cleaner' than that taken from traditional survey methods because the contact, cooperation, and completion rates are higher. Depending on how they use new media for their research, they are more likely to contact the right kinds of people for the sample they want, more of the people they contact are likely to agree to participate, and more of the survey is likely to be completed by respondents. The raw data may be cheaply purchased by anyone through the websites that Grapevine and United maintain, though more advanced analysis and premium data are available at greater costs. In sum, today's commercially available political information is multi-sourced, nuanced, scaled from named individuals and households to residential blocks, zip codes, and electoral districts.

The Structure of the Political Information Market

The contemporary market for political information now includes a diverse population of actors, including advertising and public relations agencies, media and entertainment companies, university research institutes, pollsters, non-profits and private foundations, political parties,

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[8] Corporations such as Grapevine and United are very careful to obey state laws that regulate which records can be sold to whom. Even though companies may violate public privacy norms, organizations have legal counsel committed to keeping their work well within the letter and spirit of the law.

internet service providers, and PACs. Both Grapevine and United, however, make deliberate efforts to associate with academic research institutions so as to appear more legitimate. They host conferences, have academics publish with their commercially valuable data, and use university names liberally throughout their corporate identity literature.

They buy, sell, and trade political information that in its raw form can be cheaply sold to any citizen with internet access. In other forms, aggregated and relational, the political information is more expensive and priced at a point that only the more high-end lobby groups can afford. The cost of polling has dropped substantially, such that political information is not just available to presidents and political parties, it is now available to anybody who can afford it. Thus competition between organizations in this market has driven the prices of political information down, made the product more widely distributed, and made the range of products more diverse -- the market for political information is more open than ever before.

Conclusion: Democracy and Dataveillance

The manner in which companies such as Grapevine and United blur market and political surveillance is consistent with the hybrid nature of democratic governance in the United States. Indeed, the inseparable political and commercial aspects of the new information markets enabled by such surveillance technologies challenge the notion that digital media can foster a Habermasian public sphere that is situated between, yet separate from, the forces of the centralized state and the exigencies of the capitalist system of exchange.

As a preliminary matter, the activities of Grapevine and United are classic examples of the type of panoptic digital surveillance that Roger Clarke first described as 'dataveillance.' Clark coined the term dataveillance to signify 'the systematic use of personal data systems in the investigation or monitoring of the actions or communications of one or more persons" in an effort to analyze the potential for new digital technologies to allow "increased surveillance of the citizen by the state, and the consumer by the corporation" (Clarke, 1988). While Clarke has catalogued a variety of techniques by which individuated dataveillance is typically conducted, United and Grapevine's extensive use of consensual and non-consensual tracking software, spyware, cross-referenced data bases, and strategically targeted spam represents a substantial expansion of the capacity of such digital technologies to compile and render personal data marketable.

A substantial number of commentators have begun to recognize and analyze the potential adverse impacts of such tactics of dataveillance upon those surveilled. In particular, a growing literature has recognized inherently panoptic capacities that accompany the growth of new digital media. Originating with Bentham's conception of the panopticon as a totalizing institution of constant and pervasive observation, Foucault identified such panoptic surveillance as lying at the heart of enlightenment governmentality as a central state tactic of maintaining both political and discursive power (Foucault, 1977, 1999; Poster, 1990, 1995). That said, theorists such as Mike Davis have recognized that panoptic surveillance is also increasingly mobilized in the interest of market capitalism and private property interests (Davis, 1990). Indeed, the ability of commercial interests to use dataveillance to not only identify and target consumers, but to

distinguish between consumers of different commercial value – effectively 'weblining' undesirable participants out of the market – has already been recognized (Danna & Gandy, 2002).

In addition to extending the range, scope, power, and subtlety of panoptic observation, dataveillance also has the potent characteristic of invisibility. The ability of United and Grapevine to freely gather often comprehensive personal data without their subjects' awareness marks one of the hallmarks of dataveillance. Indeed, when such 'invisible' observation is coupled with what appear to be traditional commercial incentives – such as Grapevine's 'free' web-TV service, the trappings of the expected and the pre-digital will further act to veil the deeper workings of the digital (Imken, 1999).

It is precisely the invisibility of panoptic dataveillance to all but the most sophisticated computer users that makes the digital public sphere so problematic. That is, dataveillance techniques both enable and obscure individualized efforts to manipulate the marketplace of ideas. Because this manipulation is largely transparent, dataveillance technologies effectively defeat the ability of the public sphere to serve as a realm in which public opinion may be formed free from the influences of the state and the market, and thus prevent the public sphere from acting as a counterbalance to such influences. Sunstein has argued that the individualized application of dataveillance technologies will effectively impair the functioning of the internet as a public sphere by reducing opportunities for participants to be exposed to differing perspectives and information (Sunstein, 2001). But this risk is substantially compounded where dataveillance technologies effectively and invisibly pre-filter information reaching the individual without that individual's knowledge (Danna & Gandy, 2002). Accordingly, the segmentation and division of the polis through techniques of dataveillance can "create and exacerbate inequalities that can distort public discussion and debate" (Danna & Gandy, 2002; Gandy, 1993, 2001).

Our research into the manner in which United and Grapevine shape the market for individualized political data heightens these concerns. Companies such as Grapevine and United have profiled the majority of readers of this article, and four of every 10 readers are profiled in exhaustive detail in terms of identity and political opinion. These detailed profiles are used to draw direct and indirect inferences in the commercial and political sphere. Political actors then use this information to design the messages we receive. In the end, this means a growing amount of the political and consumer content we see has been tailor-made for us alone, and that others are getting messages uniquely tailored for them.

Indeed, the risks posed by such individualized, dataveillance strategies are particularly manifest where the government or political parties wield them to shape the information received. Given the increased ability of the government to monitor and gather information about internet users in the post 9-11 era, such concerns are more than academic. In essence, the same dataveillance technologies that allow the market to distinguish between consumers of different commercial value will inherently allow powerful players in the governmental field to distinguish between voters of different political value, and treat them disproportionately. The political ramifications for such panoptic data sorting have already been recognized. Even though individuals' identities and opinions are bought and sold in the electronic marketplace, the technologies that allow indirect inference about opinions make it less necessary for political organizations to attend to

freely voiced views. Customizing political and commercial messages is an old marketing trick, but the degree of tailoring possible with new media is so much more powerful that political information today is a significantly different product. Accordingly, the managers of real companies such as the aggregates of 'Grapevine Polling' and 'United Campaigns' are known to envision "a world in which politicians become so well informed about public opinion that there is no need for direct democracy" (Lewis, 2001). This model of democracy does substantial violence to the very notion of the public sphere, restricting our future supplies of political information based on assumptions of the opinions and identities of our past.

In addition to speaking to the panoptic capacities and democratic ramifications of modern dataveillance, the techniques utilized by Grapevine and United speak to the inherently intertwined relationships among state power, political process, and market capitalism at the heart of American governmentality. Notwithstanding the centralized role of surveillance in the modern state (Giddens, 1987; Scott, 1998; Webster, 1995), non-governmental, and particularly commercial entities are gaining increasing access to individualized political information. As discussed above, the diversity of consumers for the political information products of United and Grapevine – including advertising and public relations agencies, media and entertainment companies, pollsters, private foundations, political parties, and PACs – speaks to the impossibility of separating the purely political from the purely commercial.

Indeed, while our analysis has been confined to the U.S. market for political information, the global implications of this research and the phenomenon of commercial dataveillance of individualized political information are substantial. Companies like Grapevine are, after all, international firms, and already offer political information and tools in other countries. Smaller companies like United have also begun to collaborate internationally, starting in the UK, Canada, and Australia, seeing a potential opportunity for using international databases to implement U.S.-style political campaigns in established and emerging democracies. Thus, the details of the identities and opinions of citizens of other countries are also being gathered and traded to create a global market for political information. Moreover, given the current aggressive efforts by the United States to export and expand the concomitant ideologies of open markets and 'democracy' (Harvey, 2003; Panitch & Gindin, 2003), we may quite easily forecast the continued expansion of efforts to commodify political information concerning individuals as part of the growing and increasingly intertwined commercial and political panoptic strategies of dataveillance.

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