

Assignment 6: Surveillance Capitalism

In this paper, I will be explaining *surveillance capitalism* and how it affects everyday life. I will also be looking at articles regarding the practices of Amazon, and how well the concept of surveillance capitalism fits with these practices. I conclude that since Amazon is one of the biggest, if not *the* biggest tech company, of course they would also have their share in this market.

What is surveillance capitalism? In the last couple of centuries, a new commodity has been showing up, that being personal info. Capitalistic surveillance is companies such as Google, Amazon, Facebook and Microsoft spying on your data, your location, your visited sites, habits, etc... They gather it through phone activity and smart homes and sell it off to other companies that can gain traction and purchases from knowing your data. It is possible, because it has become normalized to simply agree to the long-ass terms of agreement without a second thought, meaning that they technically have your consent.

This gathered information can be used together with neural networks to figure out what you might decide to do or want to purchase in the future, and the companies that buy this information will use it to tailor advertising and recommendations to maximize clicks.

Amazon is one of both the largest and fastest growing companies in the world. They are all about doing anything within regulations to boost profits, and they are also part of the surveillance capitalism (DePillis). The article speaks of new patents to make targeted advertisements to customers picking up items at an Amazon locker, and one letting drones communicate in the air.

The first one is only possible with knowledge on the customer's interests and needs. Advertisements are getting more and more personalized online and is a sure sign that this is the way we are heading. A drone system will most likely be used for package delivery, which requires knowledge of location of residence.

In the article about Amazon growing in India (Biswas), the brick-and-mortar and mom-and-pop stores of India aren't having it. Thousands of stores are going down to the new cheaper prices and faster deliveries. Amazon claim that they help the smaller shops, but the protesters say that that is a false narrative. Customers are satisfied with the new services, but it all seems like it is Amazon slowly infecting their way in and normalizing their presence in the country while the lower-class smaller stores go out of business.

They are digitalizing a country, thus making another base for more surveillance capitalism in an enormous place where it was barely a thing prior, destroying at least a part of their neighborhood corner shop culture in the process. The protesters seem right in their anger.

References

- Zuboff, Shoshana, The age of surveillance capitalism: The fight for the human future at the new frontier of power (London: Profile Books, 2019), ch. 1, Introduction. 9pp.
- Lydia DePillis, It's Amazon's world. We just live in it. CNN, 4 October 2018.
- Soutik Biswas, Why India is greeting Amazon's Jeff Bezos with protests, BBC, 15 January 2020