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## WIP WRITING EXERCISE 1, PART 1– Individual Submission

In the article titled “The Coup We Are Not Talking About” written on *The New York Times* website in January 2021, Shoshana Zuboff discussed the idea of surveillance capitalism. This idea results from big technology companies, especially social media and internet companies such as Meta (Facebook), Twitter, and Google collecting users' data without their consent and giving (or selling) it to concerned parties. This action violated users' privacy and raise the question: “Do we really own our data or are we really free?”

I agree with the author that technology has become an economic force driving our transformation into an information civilization (Zuboff, 2021). The smartphone has become an essential tool for communication and email is replacing traditional paper mail because of its speed and convenience. On February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2004, Mark Zuckerberg launched The Facebook, a free-to-use social media website, aimed to help people from over the world to connect and communicate with others no matter where they are. However, nothing is ever free; if the service is free, then we are the products. It has been revealed that Facebook has been collecting users' data and selling it to other companies for advertising purposes.

The government is also involved in data collecting. In the article, Zuboff mentioned that “by 2013, the CIA's chief technology officer outlined the agency's mission ‘to collect everything and hang on to it forever’ acknowledging the internet companies, including Google, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Fitbit and telecom companies, for making it possible.” According to this statement, our data also goes to government agencies for surveillance purposes and to “prevent another 9-11.” In addition, companies also use this statement as an excuse to continue collecting users' data and make a profit from it.

“Who knows? Who decides who knows? Who decides who decides who knows?” (Zuboff, 2021). This question can go as long as the total number of all parties involved. The government was known for monitoring civilians since Snowden, now they just have the tech companies to do it for them, to make them look clean. I also have another question: Who owns our data? Who decides who owns our data? Who decides who decides who owns our data? In a world where everything can be done electronically, even tax filing, do we really own our data? Our privacy? Even when we have the phone in our pockets, everything we say is recorded and the moment we open any social media app, a ton of advertisements related to what we have just discussed are all over the news feed.

Companies cannot stop collecting user data: “Asking a surveillance extractor to reject content is like asking a coal-mining operation to discard containers of coal because it's too dirty.” (Zuboff, 2021). Meta, Google, and Twitter need to collect users' data and sell it to generate income even though they know it is dirty. They help run election campaigns for politicians, politicians turn on the green light for them to collect more users' data and make more money. Furthermore, the data they collected can be analyzed to generate targeted advertisements for candidates' campaigns, they are mutually beneficial. That is why Meta exempted a lot of officials and candidates account from fact-checking, according to Zuboff. They can say whatever they want on social media even if it is incorrect information.

In conclusion, I agree with Zuboff's statement: “We can have democracy, or we can have a surveillance society, but we cannot have both.” I believe we should never have a surveillance society because it goes against what this country stands for: freedom. We cannot achieve freedom if our every move and word is recorded and monitored by the government and companies.

