

# **Can Surveillance Capitalism and Corporate Social Responsibility Co-Exist?**

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## **Part I: An Introduction to Corporate Responsibility Theories and Surveillance Capitalism**

Despite being a sports podcast, *The Right Time with Bomani Jones* doesn't always stick to hot takes about Monday Night Football. The show often diverges into discussions about ethical dilemmas within the sports landscape, which provides listeners a chance to examine more than "Xs and Os." The professional sports industry is now a multi-trillion-dollar global enterprise. Jones, who has multiple economics degrees, has often made the assertion that it's impossible to be a moral capitalist. To paraphrase Jones – one has to do some shady things to make it to the top; often referencing the dishonorable conduct of franchise owners. Now, one may find this notion laughably cynical, or one may find this laughably obvious. Regardless, ethical shortcomings are no laughing matter, despite them being rampant in the ever-evolving corporate landscape. Plus, Jones' point is applicable to a larger context than sports.

A hot-button issue facing today's advertising and public relations (ADPR) professionals (and most everyone) is surveillance capitalism. It is a questionable practice that utilizes data-harvesting from tech devices to influence user behavior. For instance, Spotify tracks listening history in order to curate featured playlists like Discover Weekly (Tebuev, 2022). This ties into other relevant concepts ADPR professionals may encounter; like the theory and application of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), or the Social Exchange Theory (SET). SET suggests that a chief executive officer (CEO) may want to increase their company's revenue while keeping costs low (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Those in public relations would be obliged to craft distinct messaging to the consumer in order to maintain the relationship. *We're no longer including chargers with new iPhones, but it's because of e-waste! See, we're responsible!* SET is just one of many such postulates. Given the myriad of CSR propositions, it begs the questions – can

surveillance capitalism and corporate social responsibility (CSR) coexist, or are they mutually exclusive?

### **An Overview of the Concepts**

First, it's pertinent to detail both concepts before discussing why they are relevant to today's ADPR professionals. If you've ever been scrolling Instagram and wonder why an ad pops up for something that you've recently viewed, you're not crazy. That is very much by design, and as scholar Shoshana Zuboff puts it: "it's an assault on human autonomy" (Kavenna, 2019, p.1). Zuboff argues that what makes us human (our routines, voices, faces, etc.) become mere data points when mass-hoarded and stored. Behaviors are separated from the individual, which is by definition dehumanizing (Kavenna, 2019). Perhaps the best example of this is cookies. Cookies are tools used by web browsers and applications to log users' activity and create engagement profiles based on online habits. That information is then sold and used by other companies to create targeted advertisements on other websites users are likely to visit.

Again, CSR is an umbrella term for multiple theories and concepts that have to do with corporations and whether or not they uphold the social contract. In other words, these theories outline how corporations should function within a prosperous society. "The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) field presents not only a landscape of theories but also a proliferation of approaches, which are controversial, complex and unclear" (Garriga and Melè, 2004, p.1). For simplicity's sake – CSR boils down to how executives should handle public policy and social issues (Windsor, 2006). In more recent literature on the subject, Chufama et al. suggest that corporate responsibility is "the new normal" in both marketing and business strategy, and include "public accountability, corporate governance, corporate sustainability, corporate social

performance, corporate social responsiveness, and corporate citizenship” (Chufama et al., 2021, p. 105). While controversial, one example of corporate sustainability/citizenship is carbon offsets. These are programs that businesses invest in to *offset* their carbon emissions. “Last year, Delta Air Lines Inc. bought nearly 300,000 credits from Tuppadahalli for an undisclosed price. . . This allowed Delta to get closer to its pledge to curb its own emissions without taking drastic actions to overhaul its existing operations” (Shifflett, 2022, p.1).

### **What makes Surveillance Capitalism Problematic?**

Now, back to our tech spying on us by proxy. While not an inherently new concept, it’s one that has been grossly mishandled. Following the tragedies of September 11, 2001, then-President George W. Bush signed the PATRIOT Act. The intention was to combat terrorism and revitalize national security by scaling up government surveillance efforts. The code was presumed to be well-intentioned at the time. However, the PATRIOT Act caused – and continues to cause – an erosion of constitutional rights to privacy (Evans, 2002). This piece of legislation essentially gave the United States government unfettered access to private citizens’ lives to fight the War on Terror. “While combating terrorism is a priority, much of this legislation chips away at the constitutionally protected rights of citizens and residents of the United States, including the Fourth Amendment's protection from unreasonable searches and seizures” (Evans, 2002, p. 934). Additionally, the US government goaded telecoms companies to pass off phone records to the feds in order to observe the public on a massive scale.

While obviously adapted for entertainment, the film *Snowden* is not farfetched by any measure, as it recounts the former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor, Edward Snowden, blowing the whistle on mass surveillance. While Former President Bush signed the

preliminary bill, beefing up of mass surveillance wasn't partisan. He can't be painted as the sole villain. The Obama Administration actually expanded the powers of the three-letter agencies (NSA, CIA, FBI) and what the PATRIOT Act allowed with its successor, the Cybersecurity Information Sharing Act (CISA). "In essence, [CISA] allows companies to directly share information with the Department of Defense (including the National Security Agency) without fear of being sued" (Rosenfeld, 2015, p.1). Besides, Snowden snitched while Obama was in office and wasn't accused of espionage by the Department of Justice until 2013 (Edward Snowden, the NSA mass surveillance - constitutional rights foundation, 2016). As Snowden pointed out, what began as a means to *keep Americans safe* had been mobilized to fleece them, labeling him "government enemy No. 1."

Two decades after the PATRIOT Act was signed into law, Zuboff is leading the charge against big tech and government agencies who not only *allow* the practice of large-scale surveillance, but *profit* from it. She's described it as "a coup from above," and insists that surveillance capitalism is not only utilized to track user behavior, but *influence* it as well (Kavenna, 2019, p.1). Privacy is important, and being perpetually listened to is violating, which makes surveillance capitalism quite problematic. Additionally, as Zuboff points out – it further dehumanizes individuals and leverages them as commodities. As previously stated, it might make you a little uneasy to see a targeted ad for something on Instagram moments after searching for that product on Google. It might make you even more uneasy to find out that the same technology is utilized to influence opinions and behaviors.

## Part II: Explication of Theories

In order to properly answer the research questions, it's paramount to understand some of the CSR theories and how they are discussed in the literature. CSR is a concept that is over 50 years old, and the amount of change it has endured mimics that of everyday technology. Take the telephone, for example. In the 1970s, the primary form of communication — phone calls — were far more straightforward than they are today. Place a call to another line, rinse and repeat. There weren't 5G networks, and the technology was significantly *dumber*. In contrast, present exchanges happen on social media where likes, comments, and views are all indicators of engagement. Today's phone-users aren't stuck to a wall, sharing the device with the entire family. Rather, they are able to access information or communicate with others instantly from almost anywhere. Both methods serve the greater purpose of interpersonal communication, but do so in very different ways. It's the same with corporate social responsibility.

### CSR's Infancy

There were discussions about how corporations could be more socially conscious prior to the Nixon Administration, as Howard Bowen established the concept in 1953 (Acquier et al., 2011). However, a jumping-off point for much of the theoretical debate starts with a 1970 piece in *The New York Times* by Milton Friedman. Friedman was actually an advisor to Nixon, and was a champion for the free-market capitalism model (Henderson, n.d.). Much of what Friedman preached (which is still used in economics textbooks today) revolved around the famous "supply and demand" framework. Most notably, he strongly advocated *choice* for the consumer. Whether it be what products they buy or whether they join the military, Friedman demanded the freedom to decide, even lobbying for the abolition of the draft (Henderson, n.d.)

Empowered by financial mobility, Friedman suggested that the consumer would measure their situation by future gains, rather than their current status – and that could be applied to the economy as a whole. “Friedman stated that in the long run, increased monetary growth increases prices but has little or no effect on output. In the short run, he argued, increases in money supply growth cause employment and output to increase, and decreases in money supply growth have the opposite effect” (Henderson, n.d., p.1). Now that his views on the economy are put into context, it’s easier to understand his doctrine in *The Times*. Friedman’s thesis boils down to “the only social responsibility of a firm is to maximize profits while avoiding deception or fraud” (Hedblom, Hickman and List, 2019, p. 3).

### **The Stakeholder Approach and Three-Dimensional Model**

Similar to Friedman’s overture – Gerrard and Zwetsloot submit that CSR theories are not so much “formal business practices” but rather “moral duties” (Yevdokimova et al., 2019, p. 474). Upper management is not subject to implement these suppositions for any reasons other than the goodness of their hearts. And why should they? As Friedman said – as long as they’re *not* being deceptive, they’re in the clear. Alas, the collective moral compass of C-level executives is not the only mitigating factor.

*The Stakeholder Approach* was first introduced into business literature in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Researchers at Stanford exhorted that the bottom-line should be the only line. The shareholders of a company are the only ones that matter to a business; therefore, the business should solely serve the needs of the shareholders. “The term was meant to generalize the notion of stockholder as the only group to whom management need be responsive. Thus, the

stakeholder concept was originally defined as ‘those groups without whose support the organization would cease to exist’” (Freeman, 2010, pp. 31-32).

It should be noted that there are multiple ways to have stock in a company. Of course, there’s the aforementioned sense – owning a piece of the pie. But stakeholders are now defined by more than ownership. Stakeholders range from customers, to employees, to suppliers, to the general public. Now more than ever, the environment is considered to be a stakeholder as well – both the natural, physical environment, and the culture that is fostered within an organization (Freeman, 2010).

*The Three-Dimensional Model* view is broken down into the obligations of the company, how the business operates within societal standards, and the internal actions of the business (Yevdokimova et al., 2019). Obligations include what the company must do within economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic backdrops. Next, business activity must follow societal norms, labor laws, basic human rights, environmental protections, and anticorruption measures. To put it simply, corporations are built on three pillars: social, environmental, and economic. The importance of these pillars can vary. For example, what might be seen as a child-labor law violation in one country may be common practice in another. To that end, the corporate culture of a Fortune 500 company may be drastically different than a local coffeehouse. It’s on the business to decide what is important and what will best serve the stakeholders — those with a vested interest in the company, its products, and maybe even its mission and vision.

### **Agenda-Setting, the Three Domains Approach and Corporate Sustainability**

Not everyone appreciates an agenda – especially when the morning meeting could have been an email. However, agenda-setting is perhaps the most prolific work an ADPR professional



takes on. *Agenda-Setting Theory* is typically applied to the mainstream news outlets, but is quite relevant when applied to CSR and surveillance capitalism. Renowned journalism scholar, Maxwell McCombs, illustrates that CNN, Fox, and the like will specifically tailor their coverage in order to bring particular narratives to the forefront. It should be noted that “the use of term “agenda” here is purely descriptive. There is no pejorative implication that a news organization ‘has an agenda’ that it relentlessly pursues as a premeditated goal” (McCombs, 2002, p. 2). McCombs’ pejorative implication point can be argued in 2022, but I digress.

Meanwhile, in the larger ADPR context – a corporation is obliged to set an agenda. If a company wants to sell products, it must demonstrate why there is a need for it in the first place. Take the Snuggie, for example. This sleeved-blanket is minorly-more convenient than a traditional quilt, but marketing executives portrayed a dystopian world where those quilts just wouldn’t do. “The real reason behind the success of the Snuggie was its advertising campaign. [It] was already ridiculous, and advertising it in an equally ridiculous way made perfect sense. This approach worked, earning more than \$200 million” (Scott-Leslie, 2022, p.1). By curating an agenda that the Snuggie was necessary, the company profited. The same logic can be applied with mass surveillance. If the agenda is to combat terrorism, then drastic measures can be taken in order to nip it in the bud, even if it directly violates one’s constitutional rights. To that end, solid marketing (or even propaganda) will further drive it home – i.e. *Never Forget* when referencing 9/11. In terms of a corporate example, if the agenda is to push products, tracking one’s online habits would offer key insights on how to best market them.

This is where the *Three Domains Approach* makes its way into the forefront. The three domains of CSR are legal, ethical, and economic. When a company sets its agenda, markets a

product, or sends an internal memo of new policies, there are laws to follow and values to consider. Deliberately selling children's toys that are laced with controlled substances would break the law (obviously). Mandating that everyone work overtime without pay would be wage theft. In terms of the ethical domain, there are certain collective expectations that a company must navigate – the social contract. "Society and stakeholders still expect ethical behavior beyond mandatory legal compliance. Ethical managers engage in impartial moral reflection beyond the law" (Windsor, 2006, p. 99). But, and one could argue most importantly, a business is beholden to its shareholders, which exposes potential gray areas.

While it may be noble to donate half of revenue to charity, it is not the most sustainable business model. So, how is a business able to navigate making money while following the law and some semblance of virtue? As Jones frequently says on his podcast – there aren't moral capitalists. Nevertheless, the key is a long-term approach. But foresight seems to be lacking and is plausibly not even considered under the surveillance capitalism model. "Economic CSR narrows duty to strict fiduciary responsibility to investors' property rights except as constrained by law. . . long-term or sustainable wealth creation rather than short-term profit maximization" (Windsor, 2006, p. 103). The surveillance capitalism model fits the latter. It is now the goal of companies like Google to mass-harvest and sell the collected data for enormous short-term gains, completely losing sight of the long-term effects, such as losses in privacy and a tighter grip of the proverbial iron fist. Additionally, societal expectations have shifted. The mass-tracking practices are somewhat accepted today, whereas that level of surveillance may have caused mass hysteria decades ago.

One of the most recent shifts in CSR literature includes *Corporate Sustainability*.

Corporations have tremendous power, there's no doubt about that. But, as Spiderman's uncle Ben told him – “with great power comes great responsibility.” In order to ensure a brighter tomorrow, development must be viable. Sustainability and climate change are often intertwined, as it's not *sustainable* to rely on polluting, non-renewable resources. Thus, there are other realms to consider like social welfare. Headquartered in Amsterdam, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) is “the independent, international organization that helps businesses and other organizations take responsibility for their impacts, by providing them with the global common language to communicate those impacts” (*About GRI*, n.d., p. 1). “[GRI standards] allow businesses and governments all over the world to understand and convey their influence on essential sustainability problems such as climate change, human rights, governance and social well-being which promotes to establish social, environmental and economic advantages for everybody” (Yevdokimova et al., 2019, p. 478). It should go without saying that large-scale reconnaissance on private citizens is not in-line with basic human rights nor social well-being. Commodifying human existence may be wildly profitable in the meantime, but is arguably untenable and disgraceful.

### **New Rules and The Big Other**

It's been implied that “if one doesn't have anything to hide, then they shouldn't have a problem being searched.” While that might work for disciplining a toddler, it's a really lousy excuse for government overreach. Privacy is no longer sacred, and big tech is at the crux. Zuboff's piece *Big Other* details how the internet age has ushered in unprecedented forms of authoritarian control. To that end, the modern era has completely reshaped what capitalism is,

focusing less on the market of goods and more on the reprogramming of behavior. Prior to Zuboff's work, Constantiou and Kallinikos published *New Games, New Rules* – which outlines the concept of “big data,” and how it is agnostic in nature but vulnerable for abuse. Moreover, the generation and organization of the information is seemingly objective and not protected. For example, an Apple Watch tracking and storing the user's heart rate is neither positive nor negative, rather it is the device functioning properly. But, the user's knowledge of the data collection, how and why the data is collected, and what is done with that information henceforth is where things get dicey.

Data is often collected in order to test a hypothesis. If one wanted to understand the effects of soft drinks on health, one would have to go about the scientific method in order to find the answer. Independent (soft drinks) and dependent (health) variables would need to be defined, and an experiment would need to take place with the proper information being recorded and stored. Test subjects would be vetted, and the appropriate Institutional Review Board (IRB) would need to approve the study. The investigator would gather a sample population, rule out all possible extenuating components, and conduct the research over a predetermined period of time. Similarly, a market research team would generate a hypothesis regarding a product, conduct legal and ethical tests amongst focus groups, and inform its strategy based on the results.

However, big data/big tech is its own Pandora's Box – and it's unlikely to be shut. Anymore, businesses do not need to conduct experiments with outlined parameters. The users themselves are the data-gatherers on their devices, and the information is utilized how the company sees fit, after the fact. While data collection has many purposes, in this application it's

less about gathering information for the purpose of achieving a goal. Instead, the goal *is* to mass-harvest the data and decide how to interpret it later on (with far less emphasis on generating hypotheses). “It is important therefore to make clear that such data cannot often be used as a direct input to strategy making. Its by and large unstructured or miscellaneous nature fits uneasily with the existing strategic tools and methods” (Constantiou and Kallinikos, 2015, p. 45).

It becomes difficult to justify these practices in the greater setting of CSR. They are seemingly deceptive, and the users are not appraised as stakeholders for the business. Rather, they’re viewed as commodities. There’s no better demonstration than by the use of predictive algorithms in order to drive products. As Zuboff puts it, “surveillance capitalists ‘sell certainty to business customers who would like to know with certainty what we do’. . . They want to know the maximum they can extract from us in an exchange” (Kavenna, 2019, p.1). What’s the saying? “Give someone an inch and they take a mile?” In this context, a better way to phrase the cliché might be “give someone an inch and they will take the entirety of your identity in order to sell you some shoes or something.”

While one should reshape opinions when given fresh information, it’s likely that Friedman would have taken immense displeasure in the bastardized use of machine learning (ML). Algorithms that predict what a consumer will want next takes the choice right out of the equation. There is no choice to have data harvested, and there is no choice to have that information used for future sales. Yes, one could argue that opting out of the Terms and Conditions is a choice. But that is not only a straw man argument but a red herring as well. If one doesn’t opt into the terms, one doesn’t get to use the product. That’s not much of a choice,

especially when the rapidly advancing tech has such an impact on day-to-day life. What is one supposed to do, live off the grid?

Furthermore, it's a red herring because it distracts from the root of the quandary. It suggests that the consumer is at fault – the whole “buyer beware” motif. Rather, the company itself shouldn't be so delusory. What better analogy than the PATRIOT Act and the logic behind it? *If you have nothing to hide, then it shouldn't be an issue if we search your entire internet history*, when the issue itself is actually the flagrant violation of privacy and constitutional rights. Such is the thesis of Zuboff's work, “[these] violations threaten our freedom, Zuboff says” (Kavenna, 2019, p.1). No longer is everyone free to do as they wish without it becoming a data point. Every appointment, email, text, phone call, or even menstrual cycle has become the property of big tech and can be utilized to exploit the individual.

### **So, who really has privacy and who is most vulnerable?**

Privacy being *completely* eroded is actually a misnomer, though. There is still plenty of private information, but it has been completely redistributed from the general public to a select few – the surveillance capitalists and intelligence agencies. “Surveillance capitalists have extensive privacy rights and therefore many opportunities for secrets. These are increasingly used to deprive populations of choice in the matter of what about their lives remains secret” (Zuboff, 2015, p. 83). The aforementioned deprivations can include a few things. First, companies like Google and Facebook were able to outwit the public by working several steps ahead to track activity and then suggesting that the ends justified the means. While the public hadn't a clue that all of their activity was being monitored, big tech companies had the upper

hand. Once that information was brought to light, it was argued that monitoring users at that capacity was necessary to improve services.

One could loosely equate it to Brett Favre and former-Mississippi governor Phil Bryant committing welfare fraud to fund a new volleyball facility for the University of Southern Mississippi. Sure, the money was raised – but it only took stealing from the poorest, most destitute people in the country to do it. The ends did not justify the means, just like deceptively tracking behavior to sell products is objectionable. Again, while it may have improved the ML for Google and Facebook, mass-harvesting data in such an unethical way doesn't legitimize the result. Nevertheless, Google et al. would argue that the ends *do*, in fact, justify the means – because users have come to expect this level of convenience. It's a vicious cycle, because the information used to better predict consumer behavior has created a laziness and complacency amongst the user base. Rather than being patient and curating one's own playlist on Spotify, the app churns new picks based on previous activity. After a while, one gets used to that service and begins to appreciate it. While not a direct comparison, it's sort of like Stockholm Syndrome – and the tech companies are the bank robbers.

Ethically speaking, the use of ML has increasingly created challenges for those already most vulnerable. Birhane attests in a 2021 article that the increased automation of services may seem inherently good; but have quite negative consequences that perpetuate systemic societal problems. “Automated and standardized solutions to complex and contingent social issues often contribute more harm than good—they often fail to grasp complex problems and provide a false sense of solution and safety” (Birhane, 2021, p. 1). This is a phenomenon known as algorithmic bias, as these ML systems learn from what they are fed. If a programmer has a

disdain for women, it could be argued that the tech may become chauvinistic: much like victims of childhood abuse are more likely to commit it in the future. One example that is alluded to in Birhane's piece is self-driving vehicles and their inability to properly identify dark-skinned pedestrians. Because the tech is not advanced enough to properly identify a darker-skinned person *as a person*, this disproportionately leads to higher rates of traffic casualties amongst darker-skinned individuals (Birhane, 2021). And that's just one of the many problems yet to be corrected in ML.

Birhane later discusses that, when creating the base code from which the machines learn, there are inherent biases. For example, there are behaviors that are considered to be appropriate versus inappropriate or deviant. But there are questions as to *which* behaviors are considered appropriate, and whether or not there are underlying racial or socioeconomic epithets baked into what's seen as inappropriate. "Relational ethics encourages us to examine fundamental questions and unstated assumptions. . . [including] interrogating asymmetrical and hierarchical power dynamics" (Birhane, 2021, p. 8). To put it simply, technological advances do not occur in a vacuum, and there are grave consequences to vulnerable communities if biases are not evaluated when writing algorithms. When looking at these ML shortcomings in the larger contexts of surveillance capitalism and CSR theories, there's a lot to be desired in terms of social equity. There is plenty of work to be done in order to uphold corporate social responsibility standards and sustainability measures.

One company has made bold claims about its privacy protections, but they appear to be quite inflated. In 2021, Apple released App Tracking Transparency, a feature that prompts users to opt out of tracking with each new app downloaded. However, tracking still exists even when



users opt out. The worm that is misleading marketing nested in both the figurative and literal apple, so to speak. ““We found that App Tracking Transparency made no difference in the total number of active third-party trackers," the study says. "We further confirmed that detailed personal or device data was being sent to trackers in almost all cases"” (Towey, 2021, p. 1). Towey also noted that iPhones “routinely send some data to wireless carriers, websites, app developers — and to Apple's own servers and services.” Additionally, websites now offer prompts that allow users to disable those dreaded cookies. Alas, the App Tracking Transparency bait and switch implies cookie opt-outs may be another façade.

### **Unrecognized Benefits of Surveillance**

Perhaps this is an overly optimistic view – but plenty of good has emanated from the COVID-19 pandemic despite the many losses of such a global catastrophe. Sure, millions of deaths and being constantly tracked may not be the most reassuring phenomena, but mass surveillance did assist in curbing outbreaks. “One of the lessons of COVID-19 is how effectively surveillance technologies can serve purposes beyond capitalism, i.e., the public good. These include rapid public education, via social media and other platforms, about how the virus spreads, and innovative measures for keeping the death rate down” (Rahwan and Powers, 2020, p. 1). Anecdotally speaking, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s implementation of the Safer Community app to track COVID testing and outbreaks across campus somewhat abated anxiety.

Another unexpected benefit that Rahwan and Powers denote is the *flip side* of the surveillance – people having more power than ever before. While excruciating, what happened to George Floyd in the summer of 2020 sparked calls for police reform worldwide. The video is

unbearable to watch, but without it – who is to say that social justice movements wouldn't have experienced the same reinvigoration? "Frazier was surveilling the police, and by capturing the awful 8 minutes and 46 seconds it took Floyd to die, she changed the conversation about policing and race in a way that people who have been working on this issue for years hadn't been able to do" (Rahwan and Powers, 2020, p. 1). There is still extensive capacity for police reform, but this is a textbook example of a silver lining.

Another practical example – albeit tragic, is the implementation of a new iPhone 14 feature known as Crash Detection. As much as this sounds like an advertisement, it's purely an illustration of what good has come out of the surveillance capitalism model. "The 911 call was thanks to Apple's Crash Detection, so the authorities received a recording from an iPhone and were able to respond to the scene" (Cant, 2022, p. 1). This is in reference to the untimely deaths of six 20-somethings in Lincoln, Nebraska, on October 2, 2022. While the event is still being investigated, the reports indicate that the vehicle was traveling at 90 miles per hour and struck a tree. Sadly, five of the passengers were found deceased on the scene with the sixth succumbing to injuries at the hospital (Cant, 2022). But, since this feature was enabled, the tech recognized the violent nature of the traffic accident and sent an alert to the user. Since it was not responded to within 20 seconds, authorities were automatically alerted (Apple, n.d.). While this feature could not prevent this particular cataclysm from claiming six lives, it could certainly suppress future casualties.

To summarize, there are definitive and actionable ways for surveillance capitalism and big tech to usher in a more prosperous future. Rather than the authoritarian stronghold for which these devices can be utilized, governments can codify ethical codes to prevent their own

overreach and implement features that directly protect users. Much like an addict seeking rehabilitation, these agencies must first identify the existing problem in order to solve it. The four main solutions are: “a New Deal on Data” that gives ownership back to individuals, ensuring anonymity and aggregation of personal information, outlined limits on how agencies may use personal data, and citizens holding the government accountable via cross-surveillance (Rahwan and Powers, 2020, p. 1).

### **Part III: Discussion and Conclusion**

It’s clear that there are serious issues with surveillance capitalism, both on its face and how it relates to CSR. However, multiple things can exist at the same time, and just because the technology has been abused thus far doesn’t mean there aren’t opportunities for change. While there has been an erosion of autonomy and privacy, the mere convenience of this technology allows for a better world, providing fortunate circumstances that were unheard of even a few years ago.

#### **Key Findings**

While it comes as a bit of a surprise, the results indicate that surveillance capitalism and CSR theories *are not* mutually exclusive and *can* co-exist. However, there is very little evidence to suggest that there is any integrity amongst surveillance capitalists, at least at this moment. Friedman’s thesis concluded that corporations must do what is necessary to increase profits without being deceptive to the consumer. But long-winded and required Terms and Conditions opt-ins are intrinsically deceptive practices. Consumers’ choice has been virtually eliminated, and the rapidly increasing information economy has offered little wiggle room for those that wish to both prosper and maintain privacy. Zuboff’s work provides the most glaring evidence

that digital solitude has been surrendered for the sake of convenience, and efforts to predict and influence human behavior are direct threats to autonomy.

In terms of stakeholders, the view of the consumer has shifted slightly. Rather than being customers willing to buy products, surveillance capitalism has opened the door for the consumer to become the commodity. Sure, tech products are purchased and there is some nobility in operating within the market. However, utilizing that product to track behaviors backs the consumer into a corner. To that end, surveilling users for profit is a direct antithesis to what Chufama et al. argued in their work. It's clear there's a lack of corporate citizenship and sustainability to gather and sell data so blatantly. While there are laws that protect corporations and the surveillance capitalism model, it seems ethics are shamelessly ignored. Just because something is legal does not mean it is virtuous. The GRI's standards are not met, as there are latent social and economic *disadvantages* for everybody, rather than making the economy more equitable for all. Additionally, there are many gains to be made to avoid issues like algorithmic bias.

### **Interpretations and Implications**

The research indicates that CSR and surveillance capitalism are more inharmonious than they are synchronized. As mentioned, it did come as a bit of a surprise that they can co-exist, but it was not shocking to learn that they currently do not. At the risk of putting all the eggs in one basket, Zuboff's work is the bellwether for this judgment. When formulating the research questions, it felt necessary to consider the possibility of benevolence. It may have been overly enthusiastic, but it would have been insincere to assume the worst amongst corporate

practices and articulate nothing but confirmation bias. There is plenty of hope for government and corporate reform, naïve as it may be.

The findings suggest that surveillance capitalism is simply too profitable and influential to forfeit. It would behoove governments to take the long view, but it does not appear that will happen any time soon when behavior can be modified so readily. Day by day, individual sovereignty is chipped away by the government and tech companies: without an overhaul, it is likely to progress toward an authoritarian dystopia.

### **Limitations**

Though the results appear to be reliable, there are plenty of restraints on this research. First, there was no hypothesis to be tested – rather an argument put forth for discussion. There aren't ways to quantify results based on the literature, as there are no figures that indicate “success versus failure.” While most of the referenced articles suggest CSR concepts and surveillance capitalism are mutually exclusive, the mere possibility of an overhaul hints that they can co-exist. Also, there is a swath of CSR theories that could be applied, some of which provide slight contradictions to one another – like the idea that the bottom line is the only line versus proactively limiting deception. By only applying a select few rungs of the CSR ladder, this research was impacted.

### **Conclusion**

Working in the ADPR field offers its fair share of sticky wickets, and surveillance capitalism is but one, *immense* thorn. Browser cookies, ubiquitous cameras, and ML have completely reshaped human behavior, both naturally and artificially. In conjunction, CSR is a wide-ranging marquee that offers guidelines for proper corporate practices. The myriad of CSR

propositions begs the questions – can surveillance capitalism and CSR co-exist, or are they mutually exclusive? While they can persist harmoniously, the latter appears to be correct. The advent of the PATRIOT Act and CISA allow for companies to harvest and share unprecedented amounts of information without any potential recourse. While life is arguably safer and more convenient, agency has been bled dry. Consumer choice is infringed, and behavior is influenced by algorithms. Patrons have become the merchandise, and shifting societal norms seem to condone “Big Brother” and the creature comforts that come with surveillance capitalism. Even companies that swear by their privacy measures are double-dealing consumer data under the table. Duplicity is at the forefront of surveillance capitalism, and the violation of privacy and constitutional rights signify a fundamental clash with CSR theories.

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