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# Social Networking Sites in the Surveillance Society<sup>1</sup>

## Critical Perspectives and Empirical Findings

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### Introduction

The social networking site (SNS) Facebook became a public company on February 1, 2012. As part of this process, financial data required for the registration as public company was published.<sup>2</sup> Facebook says that it generates “a substantial majority” of its “revenue from advertising”: 98.3% in 2009, 94.6% in 2010, 85% in 2011.<sup>3</sup> It says that the “loss of advertisers, or reduction in spending by advertisers with Facebook, could seriously harm our business.”<sup>4</sup> Facebook’s self-assessment of this risk shows that it is coupled to the broader economy; an advertising-based business model depends on influx of investments into advertising and the belief of companies that specific forms of advertisement on specific media can increase their profits. A general economic crisis that results in decreasing profits can result in a decrease of advertisement investments.

Figure 3.1 shows the development of Facebook’s profits in the years 2007–2011. Since 2007, the company’s annual profits have increased by a factor of 7.2 from US\$138 million in 2007 to US\$1 billion in 2011. There was a slump in 2008 (US\$56 billion, 60% in comparison to 2007), which was due to the economic crisis that took effect in that year all over the world. Since 2009, Facebook’s profits have almost exploded. At the same time, there was a large increase of users: the number of monthly active users was 197 million in March 2009, 431 million in March 2010, 680 million in March 2011, and 845 million in December 2011.<sup>5</sup>

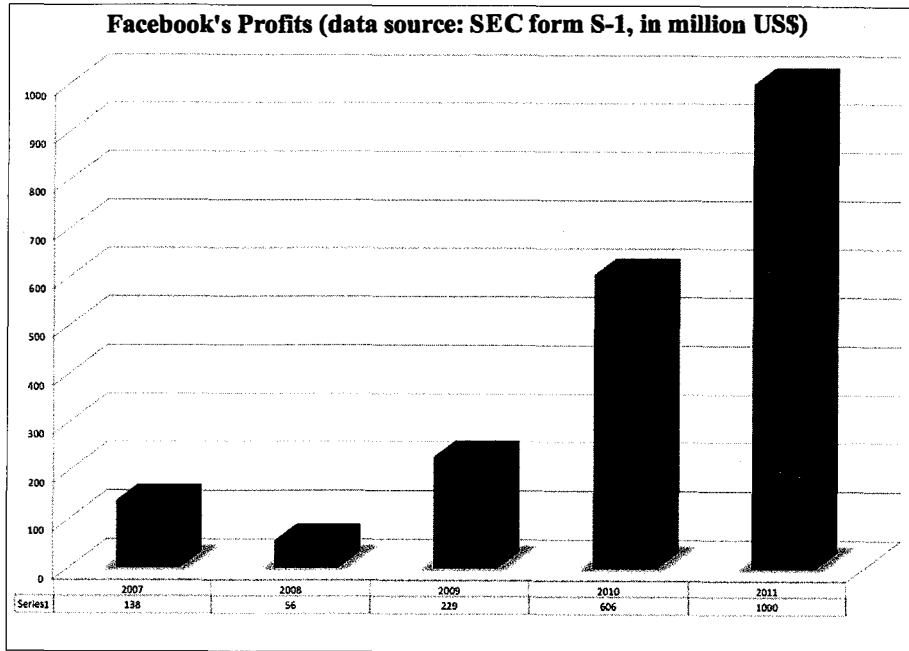


Figure 3.1. The development of Facebook's profits, 2007–2011 (data source: SEC Filings, Form-S1 Registration Statement: Facebook, Inc.)

“Social Networking Sites in the Surveillance Society” is a 30-month research project funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) (see: <http://www.sns3.uti.at>) that aims to study how information processing works on Facebook and what the broader implications of Facebook are for contemporary societies that are shaped by power asymmetries and complex information flows.

The task of this chapter is to outline theoretical foundations as well as selected empirical results of the project. The next section outlines how we have conceived the notions of privacy, surveillance and digital labor that are at the core of the project's theoretical foundations.

## Theoretical Foundations: Privacy, Surveillance, Digital Labor

Three notions form the core of the theoretical foundations of the research project “Social Networking Sites in the Surveillance Society”: privacy, surveillance and digital labor.

Privacy is a contested concept. The criticisms include the following points (see Allmer, 2011a; Fuchs, 2011b):

- a. Privacy is a form of individualism that neglects the common good.
- b. The privacy concept separates public from private life, which can result in problems, such as privacy as a patriarchal value that legitimates violence in families.
- c. Privacy can shield the planning and carrying out of illegal or antisocial activities and can be deceptive by concealing information in order to mislead others or misrepresent the character of individuals.
- d. The privacy concept advances a liberal notion of democracy that can be opposed by the idea of participatory democracy.
- e. Privacy is a Western-centric concept.
- f. The notion of privacy is bound up with the idea of private property and can shield the rich and powerful from public accountability and wealth and power structures from transparency.

Partly responding to the criticism that privacy is an individualistic Western-centric concept that harms the public good, some authors have conceptualized privacy in an alternative way and have stressed its social and societal aspects (Nissenbaum, 2010; Solove, 2011). Our own theoretical discussions in our project have revolved around the question of whether privacy is necessarily a liberal and individualistic concept and needs to be abandoned for a critical theory of society, or if there can be a critical concept of privacy. Although the four of us are critical of the privacy concept to various degrees, our basic conclusion was that we need a socialist concept of privacy that protects users, workers and consumers from the power of capitalism, exploitation and the neoliberal state (Fuchs, 2012c, 2012d, 2011b; Allmer, 2011b; Krelinger, 2010; Sevignani, 2011).

We argue for going beyond a bourgeois notion of privacy and to advance a socialist notion of privacy that tries to strengthen the protection of consumers and citizens from corporate surveillance. Economic privacy is therefore posited as undesirable in those cases where it protects the rich and capital from public accountability, but as desirable where it tries to protect citizens from corporate surveillance. Public surveillance of the income of the rich and of companies and public mechanisms that make their wealth transparent are desirable for making visible the wealth and income gaps in capitalism, whereas privacy protection for workers and consumers from corporate surveillance is also important. In a socialist privacy concept, existing liberal privacy values have therefore to be reversed. Whereas today we mainly find surveillance of the poor and of citizens who are not capital owners, a socialist privacy concept focuses on surveillance of capital and the rich in order to

increase transparency and privacy protection of consumers and workers. A socialist privacy concept conceives privacy as a collective right of dominated and exploited groups that need to be protected from corporate domination that aims at gathering information about workers and consumers for accumulating capital, disciplining workers and consumers and for increasing the productivity of capitalist production and advertising. The liberal conception and reality of privacy as an individual right within capitalism protects the rich and the accumulation of ever more wealth from public knowledge. A socialist privacy concept as a collective right of workers and consumers can protect humans from the misuse of their data by companies. The question therefore is: privacy for whom? Privacy for dominant groups in regard to secrecy of wealth and power can be problematic, whereas privacy at the bottom of the power pyramid for consumers and normal citizens can be a protection from dominant interests. Privacy rights should therefore be differentiated according to the position people and groups occupy in the power structure. The differentiation of privacy rights is based on the assumption that the powerless need to be protected from the powerful. Example measures for socialist privacy protection in the area of internet policies are legal requirements that online advertising must always be based on opt-in options, the implementation and public support of corporate watchdog platforms and the advancement and public support of alternative non-commercial internet platforms (Fuchs, 2012d). Given the power of companies in the capitalist economy, economic privacy needs to be contextualized in a way that protects consumers and workers from capitalist control and at the same time makes corporate interests and corporate power transparent.

It is time to break with the liberal tradition in privacy studies and to think about alternatives. The Swedish socialist philosopher Torbjörn Tännsjö (2010) stresses that liberal privacy concepts imply “that one can not only own self and personal things, but also means of production” and that the consequence is “a very closed society, clogged because of the idea of business secret, bank privacy, etc.” (Tännsjö, 2010:186). Tännsjö argues that power structures should be made transparent and not be able to hide themselves and operate secretly protected by privacy rights. He imagines an open society based on utopian socialist ideas that is democratic and fosters equality, so that (Tännsjö, 2010:191–198) in a democratic socialist society, there is, as Tännsjö indicates, no need for keeping power structures secret and therefore no need for a liberal concept of privacy. However, this does in our view not mean that in a society that is shaped by participatory democracy, all forms of privacy vanish. There are some human acts and situations, such as defecation (Moore, 1984), in which humans tend to want to be alone. Many humans would both in a capitalist and a socialist society feel embarrassed having to defecate next to others, for example by using toilets that are arranged next to each other without separating

walls. So solitude is not a pure ideology, but to a certain degree also a human need that should be guaranteed as long as it does not result in power structures that harm others. This means that it is necessary to question the liberal-capitalist privacy ideology, to struggle today for socialist privacy that protects workers and consumers, limits the right and possibility of keeping power structures secret and makes these structures transparent. In a qualitatively different society, we require a qualitatively different concept of privacy, but not the end of privacy. Torbjörn Tännsjö's work is a reminder that it is necessary not to idealize privacy, but to think about its contradictions and its relation to private property. At the same time, we question Tännsjö's idea that all forms of privacy have to be abolished in a socialist society.

To speak about surveillance instead of the liberal and individualistic concept of privacy is often presented as a more critical alternative. However, what we found in our project is that the mainstream of surveillance theory treats surveillance as a quite administrative notion and that based on what we term a “neutral concept” of surveillance (Fuchs, 2011a; Allmer, 2012a; 2012b), surveillance studies is just as uncritical and administrative as liberal privacy concepts.

Neutral concepts of surveillance make one or more of the following assumptions (Fuchs, 2011a):

- There are positive aspects of surveillance.
- Surveillance has two faces; it is enabling and constraining.
- Surveillance is a fundamental aspect of all societies.
- Surveillance is necessary for organization.
- Any kind of systematic information gathering is surveillance.

Max Horkheimer says that neutral theories “define universal concepts under which all facts in the field in question are to be subsumed” (Horkheimer, 1937/2002:224). Neutral surveillance concepts see surveillance as ontological category; it is seen as being universally valid and characteristic either for all societies or all modern societies. In our opinion, there are four reasons that speak against defining surveillance in a neutral way (Fuchs, 2011a):

1. Etymology  
Surveillance stems etymologically from the French “surveiller,” to oversee, watch over, which implies a hierarchic power relation between the watcher and the watched.
2. Theoretical Conflationism  
Neutral concepts of surveillance analyze phenomena, as, for example, taking care of a baby or the electrocardiogram of a myocardial infarction

patient on the same analytical level as for example pre-emptive state-surveillance of personal data of citizens for fighting terrorism or economic surveillance of private data and online behavior by internet companies such as Facebook, Google, etc. for accumulating capital by targeted advertising. If surveillance is used as a neutral term, then the distinction between non-coercive information gathering and coercive surveillance processes becomes blurred; both phenomena are amassed in an undifferentiated unity that makes it hard to distinguish or categorically fix the degree of coercive severity of certain forms of surveillance (see Lyon, 2007:54). The double definitional strategy paves the categorical way for trivializing coercive forms of surveillance.

3. **Unclear Difference Between Information Gathering and Surveillance**  
If surveillance is conceived as the systematic gathering of information about a subject population, as many surveillance scholars do, then the difference between surveillance and information processing is unclear and surveillance becomes synonymous with information processing.
4. **The Ideological Normalization of Surveillance**  
If almost everything is defined as surveillance, then it becomes difficult to criticize repressive forms of surveillance politically because surveillance is then a term that tends to be used in everyday language for all sorts of harmless information processes that do not inflict damage on humans.

Our view is that we need to overcome the neutral concept of surveillance and substitute it by a critical concept and theory of surveillance (Fuchs, 2011a; Allmer, 2012a; 2012b). We see information as a more general concept than surveillance, and that surveillance is a specific kind of information gathering, storage, processing, assessment and use that involves potential or actual harm, coercion, violence, asymmetric power relations, control, manipulation, domination, disciplinary power. It is instrumental and a means for trying to derive and accumulate benefits for certain groups or individuals at the expense of other groups or individuals. Surveillance is based on a logic of competition. It tries to bring about or prevent certain behaviors of groups or individuals by gathering, storing, processing, diffusing, assessing and using data about humans so that potential or actual physical, ideological or structural violence can be directed against humans in order to influence their behavior. This influence is brought about by coercive means and brings benefits to certain groups at the expense of others. Surveillance is in our view therefore never cooperative and never an expression of solidarity—it never benefits all. Establishing a critical concept of surveillance is, in the contemporary situation of new imperialistic

capitalism, global crisis and neoliberalism, in our view most fruitful based on Marxist theory that is combined with Foucauldian concepts (such as the panopticon, governmentality and Foucault's critique of the political economy of neoliberalism; see Allmer, 2012b; Fuchs, 2011a; 2012c). Surveillance can also be carried out by the state. As the modern state is entrenched with capitalist interests, this surveillance most of the time hits the underclass, such as welfare recipients and the unemployed. At the same time, if there were a communist government aiming at abolishing capitalism, there could be more efficient surveillance of the dominant class, i.e., capitalists and the rich in order to better ensure they pay taxes. As the state is predominantly a class state, this critical reality of the state hardly exists today.

Digital labor is a concept that has become a crucial foundation of discussions within the realm of the political economy of the internet (see Burston, Dyer-Witheford, & Hearn, 2010; Fuchs & Dyer-Witheford, forthcoming; Scholz, 2012). The basic argument is that the dominant capital accumulation model of contemporary corporate internet platforms is based on the exploitation of unpaid labor by users, who engage in the creation of content and the use of blogs, social networking sites, wikis, microblogs, content sharing sites for fun and in these activities create value that is at the heart of profit generation (Fuchs, 2010b). Online activity creates content, social networks and relations, location data, browsing data, data about likes and preferences, etc. This online activity is fun and work at the same time—play labor. Play labor (playbour) creates a data commodity that is sold to advertising clients as a commodity. They thereby obtain the possibility of presenting advertisements that are targeted to users' interests and online behavior. Users employ social media because they strive for a certain degree to achieve what Bourdieu (1986a, 1986b) terms social capital (the accumulation of social relations), cultural capital (the accumulation of qualification, education, knowledge) and symbolic capital (the accumulation of reputation). The time that users spend on commercial social media platforms for generating social, cultural and symbolic capital is in the process of prosumer commodification transformed into economic capital. Labor time on commercial social media is the conversion of Bourdieuan social, cultural and symbolic capital into Marxian value and economic capital. Surveillance plays a special role in the exploitation of digital labor (Allmer, 2012a; Andrejevic, 2012; Fuchs, 2012a; Sandoval, 2012): Corporate social media platforms continuously monitor all activities of all users on their own sites and receive monitoring data about the users' behavior on other sites (collected by targeted ad servers such as Google's DoubleClick) that they process, store, analyze, compare and assess in order to target advertisements on the interests and online behavior of the users. Targeted advertising is at the heart of the capital accumulation model of many corporate social media platforms. It is legally enabled by terms of use and

privacy policies. In the digital labor debate, the application and development of the Marxian labor theory of value and Marxist labour theories of advertising (Smythe, 1977; Jhally & Livant 1986/2006) has played an important role. Dallas Smythe's Marxist political economy of the media and communication has in this context been revived and further developed (for an overview, see Fuchs, 2012b, forthcoming). A debate about the use of Marx's theory and the Marxist labor theory has emerged in this context (see Fuchs, 2010b; Arvidsson & Colleoni, 2012; Fuchs 2012e).

The research project "Social Networking Sites in the Surveillance Society" deals with the topic of digital labor and the role of privacy and surveillance in the context of the political economy of social networking sites. In the next two sections, we will present some of the obtained empirical research results that deal with the perception of targeted advertising and digital labor.

## Targeted Advertising and Digital Labor on Social Networking Sites: Survey Results

We conducted an online survey (Batinic, Reips, & Bosnjak, 2002; Johns, Chen, & Hall, 2004; Couper, 2000; Schmidt, 1997; Sills & Song, 2002; Zhang, 2000; Hewson, Laurent, & Vogel, 1996) that focused on Austrian students. We identified how important students consider the topic of surveillance in relation to SNS by analyzing their answers to our questions with the help of PASW Statistics 18 (formerly SPSS Statistics) for the quantitative data (Field, 2009) and SPSS Text Analytics for Surveys 4 for the open questions. Our questions focused on the most frequently used SNS in Austria, namely Facebook (according to alexa.com, Top 100 sites in Austria). We constructed a questionnaire that consisted of single and multiple choice, open-ended, interval-scaled, matrix and contingency questions. The survey was conducted in German. Depending on the contingency level, students had to answer at least three questions and no more than 78 questions. Filling out the whole questionnaire took about 20 minutes. The questionnaire was thematically grouped into different subsections. We strived to achieve two main objectives in the survey: On the one hand, we tried to figure out which major advantages and disadvantages of social networking platforms Austrian students see and if privacy is considered an extrinsic or intrinsic value. On the other hand, we made an effort to find out if knowledge and attitudes towards surveillance and privacy of Austrian students and their information behavior on social networking platforms are connected. In the last part of the questionnaire, we collected data on socio-demographic factors (gender, age, number of studied semesters, level of study and field of study), socio-economic status (monthly income, highest education achievement of parents and main occupation of parents), and the respondents' usage of social networking sites. The

questionnaire was implemented as an electronic survey with the help of the online survey tool SurveyMonkey (Gordon, 2002; Babbie, 2010:286). The research was carried out during the time period June 20 to November 23, 2011. Our potential respondents were male and female students at all Austrian universities. In order to reach students at Austrian universities, we asked vice-chancellor's offices, offices of public relations at universities and student unions to send our email invitation to their students. In total, 5,213 participants started and 3,558 students completed (63.8% women, 36.2% men; these are 1.31% of the Austrian student population) our survey.

Along with asking about the greatest advantages of social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace, we also asked the students about their greatest concerns (open question). We received N=3,534 qualitative answer texts to the question that addressed disadvantages. We identified 14 categories for the concerns and analyzed the answers to the questions by employing content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004; Berg, 2001). The categories were adopted from theoretical and empirical studies about social networking sites (Fuchs, 2010a; Livingstone, 2008) on the one hand, and were revised and expanded regarding the provided answers by summarizing, paraphrasing, abstracting and generalizing groups of answer texts to categories on the other hand; that is, a combination of inductive and deductive methods (Berg, 2001:248–249; Babbie, 2010:339). Our respondents tended to list more than one major disadvantage. Many answers are therefore mapped with more than one category (Berg, 2001:247–248). Here are some characteristic examples of answers that were given to the question of what the major disadvantages of social networking platforms are [authors' translations from German to English]:

That employers are able to receive private information (respondent ID 1519050546)

That pictures, comments etc. are seen by people, who should not see them [such as an employer]....difficulties in finding a job (respondent ID 1567729690)

Unlawful usage of data, forwarding, personalized advertising, algorithm of face recognition, alienation of the term "friend," meanwhile group pressure and social pressure to join in (respondent ID 1559706802)

That personal information, which I often expose unconsciously, is used against me. Besides I am annoyed by personalized advertising (respondent ID 1559719051)

Transparent individual, commercial usage of user data (respondent ID 1566130533)

... [prospective] increasing usage of all collected data, user details for market research; that is profit maximization....a further step towards "global police state," in which the people/politicians will no longer rule, but corporations and lobbies...opaque, non-user-friendly privacy settings (respondent ID 1525388777)

### What are your greatest concerns of social networking platforms such as Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn, etc? N=3534

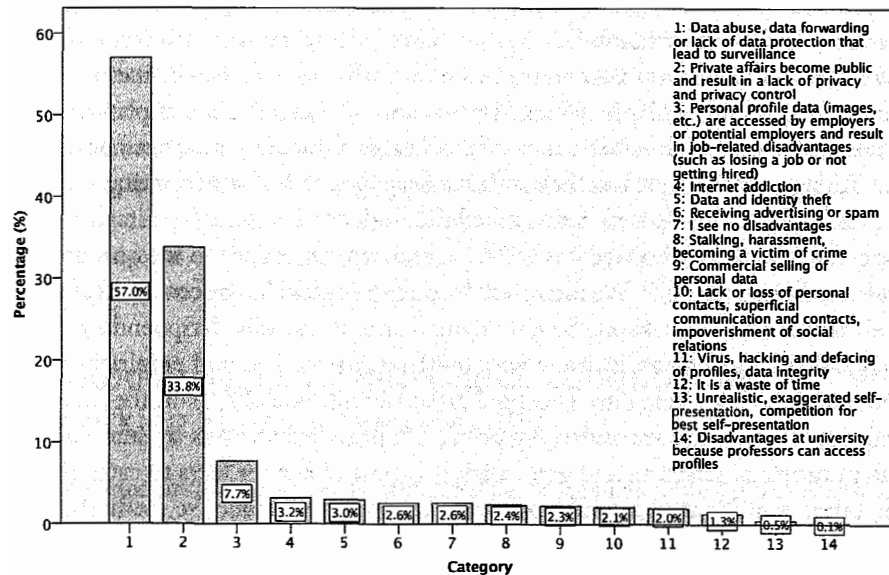


Figure 3.2. Major perceived disadvantages of SNS.

These examples indicate that targeted advertising and the commercial selling of personal data are considered a disadvantage of social networking sites. The next figure shows our respondents' major concerns about social networking sites.

Figure 3.2 shows that surveillance is considered the greatest concern of social networking sites. Almost 60% of our respondents stress that surveillance as a result of data abuse, data forwarding or a lack of data protection is the main threat of SNSs. One-third (33.8%) say it is problematic that personal affairs that would be better kept private tend to become public. Of concern to 7.7% is the risk that current and potential employers could access profiles and that could result in job-related disadvantages. In addition, 3.2% mention internet addiction, and 3.0% of the participants stress data and identity theft as greatest risks of social media. Advertising or spam is a concern for 2.6%. Also interesting is that 2.6% of the students do not see disadvantages in the usage of commercial social networking platforms. As a result, although the general surveillance threat (category 1) is considered as the major disadvantage, it can be argued that economic surveillance (category 3, 6 and 9) also plays an important role as perceived concern and risk of SNSs, because it is the third-most-mentioned major concern (12.6%). It is likely that many answers subsumed

under category 1 are also directly or indirectly linked to targeted advertising and commercial selling of personal data, but brief responses such as “surveillance” or “data forwarding” do not expose whether it is meant in a political, economic or cultural sense. For reasons of impartiality, we put the open-ended questions about advantages and disadvantages of social networking sites at the very beginning of the survey. Although the above figure already indicates the importance of economic surveillance, students obviously tend to be more concerned about targeted advertising if they are confronted with closed-ended questions, as the following analysis will show.

We gave special attention to targeted advertising in our study: how much students know about it, which attitudes they have towards it, what their concerns are and how they actually behave in the context of targeted advertising.

## Knowledge

In order to test students' knowledge about advertising on Facebook, we asked them if the presented statement was true or false. Also, an “I don't know” answering option was provided. Findings show that respondents know that Facebook employs targeted advertising. A clear majority of 83.2% was aware that the statement “On Facebook all users see the same advertisements” (Q41) is false. When asked if it is true that Facebook is allowed to give personal data (e.g., contact information, interests, activities, friends, online behavior) to third parties/other companies for advertising purposes, respondents were not sure about their answers; 31.8% answered “I don't know.” Another third (32.6%) thought it was true (which is the right answer), and a relative majority of 35.6% answered with “No, that's false.” Huge uncertainty also determined the answers to the question of whether advertisements, commercial sites and paid services on social networking sites such as Facebook must be explicitly marked as such. In its terms, Facebook clearly states “You understand that we may not always identify paid services and communications as such.” Only 19.4% knew the correct answer (false); 46.5% gave the wrong answer; and 34.1% of the respondents said that they don't know the answer.

## Attitude/Concerns

Asked if they actually want websites to tailor ads to personal interests, an overwhelming majority of 82.1% opposed this practice. Judging from these results, it is even more questionable why there is no opt-out possibility on Facebook. Or expressed in other terms: these results make it very clear why Facebook—from a profit-oriented point of view—has no interest in offering such an option. Another example for user

concerns about targeted advertising is their distinct rejection of advertisements that are tailored based on location data. A huge majority of 71.1% stated their disapproval of such advertising practices when we asked “Would it be OK if these ads were tailored for you based on your location (e.g., location-based data via mobile internet, pictures, you’ve uploaded, or the Facebook application ‘Places’)?”

## Behavior

It is often questioned if people actually read targeted ads, like those displayed on the right side of a Facebook profile. Our results show that though a majority never or hardly ever read these ads, 23.1% do read them at least once a month (or even more often). Twenty-two percent of the respondents have clicked on any ads. How much value targeted advertising methods actually have for Facebook becomes even more obvious when taking into account the results of another question we asked to the study participants: “Have you ever joined a group or site that has been established and is run by a commercial actor (e.g., local restaurants or shopping malls, brand communities such as Starbucks, Nike, etc...)?” Brand sites are quite present on Facebook and are attempts by companies to market their commodities on social media. They aim at establishing deep and long-lasting relationships and an intensified and ubiquitous brand presence in the lives of customers (Illobre, 2008). Brand networking capitalizes on social interactions and human relationships as a marketing tool. Over 60% of our respondents stated that they have joined such groups or sites.

Comparing knowledge, attitudes and behavior, one can observe some contradictions. Although most respondents do know that Facebook employs targeted advertising and clearly reject targeted advertising, they don’t critically act upon their concerns. Another example is Facebook’s “social ads”: if a user likes any commercial site, product or service, advertisements can be linked with his/her picture and may even be displayed in the form of a “personal recommendation among friends.” Although this is a highly targeted form of advertising, nearly half of our respondents have not opted out of the social ads (the settings, of course, are default active). Reasons may be the default setting of this option and Facebook’s lack of transparency in its privacy policy.

## Targeted Advertising and Digital Labor on Social Networking Sites: Results from Qualitative Interviews

Critical theory has stressed that research always fails to be neutral and that the positivist assumption that research is value-free is itself a value (Adorno, 1976:2–3; Horkheimer, 1937/2002:242). Is critical research more about critical interpretation

than critical methods, or is research itself a part of emancipation? We concluded from these discussions that our qualitative research should include participatory aspects. After exploring users’ attitudes towards advertising on SNSs, we provided them with information about economic surveillance within the interviews. This information was retrieved from a content analysis of Facebook’s terms of use and privacy policies. The underlying hypothesis is that there is a lack of awareness and knowledge about economic surveillance as it is less visible and shows less direct consequences for the users. The idea was to receive a more accurate image about users’ attitudes towards advertising once they are informed about this issue.

The research methods employed were semi-structured interviewing (N=30) and qualitative content analysis (Kracauer, 1952; Ritsert, 1972; Mayring, 2004) informed by thematic coding (C. Schmidt, 2004). We included a group of interviewees who are especially critical of (economic) surveillance and have a high knowledge about privacy issues, as well as a group of less concerned (standard) users. The sample consisted of 30 Austrian students between the ages of 20 and 34 (mean = 24.9 years; standard deviation = 3.33 years; two-thirds women, and one-third men), who used or are using SNSs. The participants came from a broad range of academic disciplines and study at a university in Salzburg.

How do the interviewees perceive targeted advertising in general? Thirteen interviewees agreed with advertising on SNSs, 10 interviewees disagreed, and 7 interviewees held an ambiguous attitude. We identified three lines of argumentation that characterize positive attitudes towards advertising on SNSs. First, interviewees say that advertising and advertisements pose no negative consequences for them because they are not forced to notice advertisements, to click on them and to buy the advertised products. Moreover, they also say they are not forced to participate in the use of SNSs. Second, interviewees made clear that advertisements on SNSs have positive consequences for them, such as providing useful product information and interesting offers, and that it’s fun to watch them. The most important positive consequence identified by the interviewees, however, was that advertising makes the usage of SNSs “free” for them. Third, the interviewees also argued that advertising is a common and societally recognized funding model, to which we are all accustomed.

We were able to discern four strands of arguments opposing advertising on SNSs. First, interviewees pointed to negative consequences of advertising. A relatively frequently occurring argument in this context is that advertising on SNSs is pressing, manipulating and creates (unwanted) new needs. The most frequently mentioned negative consequences that our interviewees pointed out are annoyance and deflection. Second, interviewees frequently argued that advertising brings no positive consequences for them and that it is unnecessary and a waste of time. Third,

interviewees argued that advertising contradicts SNSs' inherent and genuine goal that they are about maintaining and establishing social relations. Hence the argument was that SNS should not be about advertising for profit purposes. Interviewee 16 stated:

My claim to a SNS is that it is a social network, and that it provides me with the opportunity to organise and exchange with others, etcetera. That is what matters for a SNS and advertising is not necessary for a social network. That is a feature which is necessary for a company. . . .

In this context, the interviewees also expressed their fear or actual observation that advertising determines or influences SNSs' content and structure. Fourth, interviewees argued that there is no alternative to the advertising funding model. Here, the identified arguments were similar to the third positive strand of argumentation, but the interviewees interpreted this argument negatively. Interviewee 1, for instance, argued that advertising is "a necessary evil" and interviewee 10 explained:

I think there is no alternative choice. I think it is not OK....I am bothered that my data is sold for economic purposes, that someone is making a profit with it and I do not agree with that.

Interviewer: One could argue that you have already agreed when you accepted the terms of use in the beginning.

Interviewee 10: I have the decision to exclude myself or to agree to be in. I have to decide, there is nothing in between.

We asked then more specifically whether or not advertising is perceived as a privacy invasion? Again, the distribution was nearly balanced, but the number of interviewees holding an ambiguous attitude towards this question was less high: 14 interviewees said that advertising is not problematic in this respect; 12 said that it is a privacy invasion; 4 held ambiguous views. Arguments neglecting advertising as a problematic, privacy invasive form of surveillance could be clearly grouped into two major strands of argumentation. First, it was argued that there was an informed consent by the user to the SNSs' terms of use, which also includes the acceptance of targeted advertising. Therefore, the knowledge of how advertising works on SNSs is accessible to everyone. Second, and similar to a strand of argument described above, was that advertising on SNSs has no negative consequences for users. The particular argument in this context is that third parties cannot personally identify users.

Interviewees who think that advertising on SNSs is a privacy invasion employed the following strands of arguments. First, interviewees challenged that there was an informed consent to advertising. They thought that it is a problem that the privacy

settings do not apply to advertising and the SNS provider is allowed to use and sell information marked as "private" for advertising purposes. Interviewees also held the opinion that advertising is problematic because it has negative effects. Second, interviewees argued (referring to direct consequences) that advertising on SNSs is a problematic form of surveillance as the SNS provider conducts it excessively and disproportionately. This applies in particular when surveillance is performed on other sites than the genuine SNS. Interviewee 21 said in this context:

As I said, this bears no proportion. The whole system, how Facebook is financed and works, makes it understandable from Facebook's perspective. They need certain information and process them. However that does not justify the multitude of data [that is collected] because, in my view, an incredible portion of it is not needed at all.

Another argument was that the SNS provider itself invades users' privacy. Interviewee 23 explained:

That is a kind of distortion. They say that they pass it away anonymously, but it comes back to me....When it comes back to me with the advertisement that is targeted to me, then that is not anonymous.

Third, interviewees argued that advertising on SNSs has indirect consequences because third parties, such as state authorities or hackers, can access the collected data later on. Fourth, the interviewees were uncertain about the exact use of their data and they linked this uncertainty to potential negative consequences. In this context, they were also afraid that SNS would collect and use ever more data in the future, which results in a surveillance creep.

As part of our participatory research approach, we confronted the interviewees with information about how advertising on SNSs works, that it is targeted and demands a wide range of various data categories in order to be performed. We first asked them about their attitudes towards targeted advertisements on SNSs. Then we provided information about how targeted advertising works on Facebook. Third, having in mind the provided information, they were asked again about their views on targeted advertising. We were able to observe a significant number of interviewees who switched to a negative perception of targeted advertising on social media. These results allow us to assume that users' knowledge and awareness of economic surveillance plays a key role in the assessment of targeted advertising. Hence the assumption that there is an informed consent becomes quite questionable: many users would not agree with advertising on SNSs if they knew exactly how it works.

Do users think that their digital labor is exploited while using SNSs? We assume that one aspect of feeling exploited is that one wants to receive compensation in return for others taking advantage from the foreign efforts. We mainly identified one



influential line of argumentation among those who want compensation for their digital labor: interviewees see a bad or exploitative ratio between the SNSs' profits and their own benefits of using the SNS. Interviewee 12 expressed this clearly:

Facebook is earning so much money; therefore it is my opinion that one should receive something extra for using the site for free.

Among those who do not want compensation in exchange for the usage of their data, we found an interesting line of argumentation. It is interesting because at the same time it is problematic and offers an emancipatory perspective. The interviewees argued that personal data should not be traded at all and receiving compensation will not stop this trade. They said that any compensation payment is based on such a trade. For instance, interviewee 24 argued:

Because my privacy means a lot to me, I think it cannot be compensated with material goods. Privacy is about my decision and my freedom so that I do not lose my self-control. They should not [be allowed to] exercise so much power over me.

Interviewee 9 said that receiving compensation would "basically be a form of selling myself." Those interviewees resist the ongoing "reconceptualization of privacy in the consumer's mind from a right or civil liberty to a commodity that can be exchanged for perceived benefits" (Campbell & Carlson, 2002:588; see also Comor, 2011). To argue that privacy should not at all be traded means that it cannot become a commodity, which to a certain degree also questions SNSs' capital accumulation. These interviewees conceive privacy as the need to protect internet prosumers from the interests of capital. That these interviewees perceive privacy as non-alienable persona right may have to do with their European cultural background. However, this emancipatory argument brings us back to the discussion of privacy and its liberal and individualistic connotations. The struggle for privacy tends to frame the problem of surveillance and exploitation in individual terms, instead of recognizing it as a structural societal problem (Nock, 1993:1; Lyon, 2005:27; Stalder, 2002; Andrejevic, 2002).

## Conclusion

Although the general surveillance threat is considered as the major disadvantage of social networking sites, economic surveillance such as targeted advertising and the commercial selling of personal data also plays an important role. Users employ a wide range of supportive and challenging arguments when it comes to advertising on SNSs. We found strong resistance against the surveillance-based business model that was particularly based on two lines of argumentation: users think that personal data

should not be for sale at all or they feel exploited by the SNSs and therefore want something back in return for the usage of their data. Even though most respondents of our study do know that Facebook employs targeted advertising and clearly reject targeted advertising, they don't automatically critically act upon their concerns. Therefore we can observe some contradictions when comparing knowledge, attitudes and behavior.

Our study indicates that most users do know that SNSs such as Facebook collect and store huge amounts of personal information and use it for targeted advertising. However, our results also show that there is a great lack of knowledge when it comes to details about the actual process of the data collection, storage and sharing. Respondents of our study were quite uncertain or even misinformed about what exactly Facebook is allowed to do with their personal data and which personal data, browsing data and usage data is actually used for the purpose of targeted advertising. This may partly be explained by the fact that privacy policies and terms of use are often lengthy, complicated and confusing (Fuchs, 2011c; Fernback & Papacharisi, 2007; Sandoval, 2012). SNSs often argue that users give their informed consent to targeted advertising. In the light of our findings, this argument is questionable.

We see structurally induced reasons for the gap between users' attitudes and their behavior. The SNS realm is highly monopolized. On the one hand, Facebook has accumulated immense capital power and is therefore able to mobilize a broad range of resources, such as investments in research and development and the acquisition of rival or complementary enterprises, to keep its dominant position. On the other hand, network effects play a crucial role as the use value of any SNS increases in relation to its users. Although critical of surveillance, users are facing sink-or-swim opportunities: Today, they only can benefit from SNSs when they accept surveillance and privacy threats.

Economic surveillance is inherent to the capitalist character of corporate SNSs like Facebook. It is neither just a technical issue nor an individual problem, but a societal problem. The embeddedness of social media surveillance into societal phenomena such as capitalism, neoliberalism, imperialism and state power implies that overcoming social media surveillance requires the sublation of domination, asymmetric relations of power and capitalist society as well as the creation of a commons-based information society and a commons-based internet. The question that arises is which political steps can be taken for fostering such developments.

- Support is needed for critical privacy movements in order to develop counter-hegemonic power and advance critical awareness of surveillance (Lyon, 1994:223; Lyon, 2001:127). Good instances in this context are initiatives against the leading SNS, Facebook, such as the complaints

by the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) addressed to the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC); the complaints by Austrian students addressed to the Irish Data Protection Commissioner (Europe versus Facebook, 2011); or the investigation by the Nordic data inspection agencies (Datatilsynet, 2011).

- Parliamentary and regulatory means can drive back exploitation on SNS. On the one hand, data protection laws could be internationalized and sharpened. On the other hand, as the users commonly produce relationship and interactions that are sold by commercial SNS to the advertising industry, “capital should in return give something back to society” (Fuchs, 2010b:193). For instance, a particular tax on internet companies is imaginable in this context.
- Cyberactivism and “counter-surveillance” (Lyon, 1994:159) can watch the watchers “and document instances where corporations and politicians take measures that threaten privacy or increase the surveillance of citizens” (Fuchs, 2009:116).
- Parenti (2003:212) suggests civil disobedience, rebellion and protest: “It will compel regulators to tell corporations, police, schools, hospitals, and other institutions that there are limits. As a society, we want to say: Here you may not go. Here you may not record. Here you may not track and identify people. Here you may not trade and analyze information and build dossiers.”
- The creation and support of non-profit and non-commercial social networking platforms can help advance an alternative internet. For instance, Diaspora\* is a distributed SNS that operates on behalf of free software protected by copy law (Sevignani, 2012). Unlike Facebook that processes user data in huge server parks, Diaspora\* consists of a potentially unlimited number of interoperating servers that are locally distributed and not controlled by a single organization. Theoretically, it is possible for everyone to operate such a “pod.” Diaspora\* protects its users and their personal data from exploitation and practically provides an alternative concept of privacy: “Yet our distributed design means no big corporation will ever control Diaspora. Diaspora\* will never sell your social life to advertisers, and you won’t have to conform to someone’s arbitrary rules or look over your shoulder before you speak” (Diaspora, 2011; emphasis in original).

## Notes

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2. Form-S1 Registration Statement: Facebook, Inc. <http://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1326801/000119312512034517/d287954ds1.htm>, accessed on March 26, 2012.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 50.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

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## The Emerging Surveillance Culture

David Lyon

People who research and write about surveillance often have an axe to grind or at least some concerns about the world of personal data: online snooping, overreaching security checks, police wanting warrantless access to information, companies using details to make consumer profiles, schools using video cameras to keep order, employers reading staff emails or social media posts. But the world out there has mixed responses. Some are still anxious about what they call “Big Brother” but others seem indifferent to such concerns. Some may object to intrusive airport screening, find certain kinds of internet stalking spooky or worry that their customer profile may be inaccurate, but for others surveillance is a fact of life that we have to get used to, at worst an annoyance that has to be negotiated.

We can be more specific. One way to diagnose a culture is to look at those afflicted with extreme anxieties about it. For the culture of surveillance perhaps this would be “The Truman Show delusion.” In the movie *The Truman Show*, the main character discovers that he has been inescapably filmed for a documentary since before birth. He is under the gaze of permanent surveillance. Psychiatrists in the U.S. and the U.K. encounter a small but growing number of people suffering from a psychosis whose symptoms are the belief that everything one does is being recorded like a reality TV show. And in a related scenario are “internet delusion” patients who believe that their lives are intimately being monitored by the “web” (Gold & Gold, 2012; Kershaw, 2008). What are mild worries for some, are treatable conditions for others.