

Strings of a Puppeteer: How Surveillance Capitalism Affects Human Autonomy in the Philippines

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Abstract:

Surveillance capitalism was first coined by Shoshana Zuboff, who argued that it threatens human autonomy and freedom. This study explored the impact of surveillance capitalism on human autonomy in the Philippines. In the Philippines, surveillance capitalism is still rarely explored. This study used a phenomenological design and employed thematic analysis to interpret semi-structured interviews with Filipino informants from Metro Manila. The study found that surveillance capitalism can create an echo chamber environment that promotes selective exposure, compels people to engage in impulsive buying, influences individuals to take actions even if they are personally against it, contributes to the spread of misinformation, breaches privacy and confidentiality, and hinders proper childhood development. This study can be further used in business and marketing research, education, ethics, and policymaking. Educators may refer to it in teaching and for further research, particularly in ethics like discourses addressing the impact of surveillance capitalism on human freedom and autonomy. Policymakers and businesses can take cues from studies on how to regulate commerce and technology. The study concludes that there is a need to rethink and reevaluate how we consume technology through social media, especially in this age of consumerism and materialism. Recommendations in the areas of business, media, ethics, psychology, and policymaking are provided.

Keywords: surveillance capitalism, human autonomy, consumerism, ethics.

傀儡之弦：监控资本主义如何影响菲律宾的人类自主权

摘要：

监视资本主义最初是由肖莎娜·祖博夫提出的，她认为监视资本主义威胁到人类的自主权和自由。本研究探讨了监视资本主义对菲律宾人类自主权的影响。在菲律宾，监视资本主义仍然很少被探讨。本研究采用现象学设计，并采用主题分析来解释对马尼拉大都会菲律宾线人的半结构化访谈。研究发现，监视资本主

义可以创造一个回音室环境，促进选择性接触，迫使人们进行冲动购买，影响个人采取行动，即使他们个人反对它，助长错误信息的传播，侵犯隐私和保密，阻碍儿童的正常发展。本研究可进一步用于商业和市场研究、教育、道德和政策制定。教育工作者可以在教学和进一步研究中参考它，特别是在伦理学方面，如讨论监视资本主义对人类自由和自主权的影响的论述。政策制定者和企业可以从如何规范商业和技术的研究中得到启发。研究结论认为，我们需要重新思考和评估我们通过社交媒体消费科技的方式，尤其是在这个消费主义和物质主义盛行的时代。研究还提供了商业、媒体、道德、心理学和政策制定等领域的建议。

关键词： 监控资本主义、人类自主、消费主义、道德。

1. Introduction

It was estimated by the World Bank that there are 334 million companies in the world (Yaqub, 2024). More often than not, these companies need effective means and strategies to boost sales through advertising and marketing. One strategy that could target and predict audiences is surveillance capitalism. Search engine websites and social media platforms utilize their platforms to collect, monitor, and store personal data from their users. These social media platforms and search engine sites use likes, shares, reactions, bios, photos, and personal data uploaded to online accounts to monitor and manipulate human behavior (Holloway, 2019). The proponent of this phenomenon, Shoshana Zuboff, described surveillance capitalism in an interview as the "unilateral claiming of private human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral data" (Laidler, 2019). Surveillance capitalism profits from people's data by tracking their every move without their full consent (Marini, 2021).

In the words of Zuboff, the "surest way" companies and advertizers predict human behavior is to intervene at its root and then shape it in a way that would benefit the companies' interests (Wu et al., 2023). Marketers envision a world in which surveillance and analytics become perfect manipulation tools to anticipate consumer behavior and make consumers conform (Zuboff, 2019). More intriguingly, Darmody and Zwick (2020) stated that marketing manipulation becomes an illusion once a consumer is empowered through manipulation, making consumers unaware and unconscious that their choices are not fully autonomous and fair. With this in mind, surveillance capitalism could affect people's decision-making, buying, and voting decisions.

Surveillance capitalism was chosen as a topic based on its urgency, importance, and relevance to a technology-driven, fast-changing consumeristic and materialistic world.

Surveillance capitalism is a topic that needs to be resolved because it entails more risks than benefits for children (Elstub, 2023). Moreover, the accumulation of data for personalization creates a habit of automaticity whereby users become complacent rather than critical about what they consume (Ridgway, 2023).

According to Xaba and Ndlovu (2023), consumerism is a practice in which producers seek to dominate consciousness so that consumers become vulnerable to capital forces. In particular, producers may entice consumers to purchase products that are not necessary for them to exist. These forces threaten autonomy and lead to the harm of individuality and authenticity (Xaba & Ndlovu, 2023).

In addition, surveillance capitalism also threatens social justice, making it an important topic. The reality is that data collection affects marginalized communities because they are more likely to be surveilled than the less marginalized, making their data more vulnerable. As a result, surveillance capitalism creates a power imbalance that limits autonomy and privacy (Cinnamon, 2017).

This study analyzed how surveillance capitalism has influenced human autonomy in the Philippines. Based on current and available literature, surveillance capitalism in the Philippines remains unexplored (Tribdino, 2022). The Philippines is one of the most active social media users worldwide and takes the second position among the most active countries on social media (Baclig, 2022). Since 2004, the Philippines has experienced 124 million data breaches, ranking it as the fifth most impacted country in Asia in terms of data breaches (Piad, 2023). When personal information and data are easily breached, gathered, and used without consent, manipulation tactics and strategies adversely affect freedom and democracy (Jones, 2021). Thus, Filipinos could be vulnerable to exploitation as subjects of surveillance capitalist practices.

One of the sectors in which surveillance capitalism could exert a strong influence is politics. The controversy surrounding surveillance capitalism first emerged to gain electoral advantage. As early as 2014, more than 50 million Facebook profiles were harvested by the Trump electoral team to assess human behavior (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018). The enormous data gathered were used to monitor and predict users' choices in deciding who to vote for in the US presidential elections, which has inadvertently greatly influenced the success of Donald Trump's presidential campaign (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018). This notable event in human history, otherwise known as the Cambridge Analytica scandal, was exposed by a

whistleblower who disclosed that Cambridge Analytica had taken unauthorized personal information as early as 2014 to build a profile and monitor the behavior of users to create personalized political campaign advertisements that strongly influenced users and voters (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018; Wong, 2019).

In addition to politics, surveillance capitalism could also significantly impact economics and business, particularly people's buying decisions. Because of surveillance capitalism, companies use collected data to feed algorithm information and content to increase user engagement. One of the methods through which surveillance capitalism can be operationalized is online behavioral advertising (OBA), which encompasses the collection and monitoring of online activities and behaviors with the objective of delivering personalized and tailored content to a user (Boerman et al., 2017). With OBA, advertisements become personalized, which may influence buying decisions. However, a study proved contrary to the assumptions about the usefulness of OBA. Although it is positively related to personalization, OBA still presents privacy concerns that affect the user's decision to avoid or accept an advertisement (Aiolfi et al., 2021).

Wu et al. (2023) identified the harm caused by OBA (a driver of surveillance capitalism). Among the four risks, loss of autonomy is the one that is significantly related to this paper. Wu et al. (2023) revealed that autonomy was negatively affected by a lack of consent and control over one's self-presentation, the encouragement of the acquisition of negative habits, and limited consumer choice. Several participants stated that they felt violated when they saw online ads based on their recent activity because they did not consent to being connected with these brands even though they purchased their products. Some participants also shared how they felt compelled to purchase because the ad repeatedly appeared in their feed (Wu et al., 2023).

Surveillance capitalism may also impact labor relations. Ride-hailing apps, such as Uber, collect driver phone calls with the intention of knowing if the driver was working for another ride-hailing application (Athreya, 2020). The autonomy and decisions of drivers are affected as unconsented collected data about them are then used to manipulate them to become dependent on Uber for work opportunities and to receive better rates (Athreya, 2020). In addition, surveillance capitalism may also impact child development. The lack of awareness and parental guidance among the youth could potentially harm children, especially when they are unaware of how their data could be easily collected and compromised online without their full consent (Bozzola et al., 2022).

While some laws, such as the Data Privacy Act of 2012 or Republic Act 10173 of the Philippines, could address the issue of surveillance capitalism, it remains extremely difficult to address its full extent and impact because it involves collective effort among institutions

and members of society. In addition, current laws may not be fully updated with rising trends and digital innovations that could cause harm. Pitogo and Ching (2018) investigated the efficiency and compliance of the Data Privacy Act in the Philippines and identified challenges associated with adhering to the legislation. These challenges include a lack of awareness, the absence of the appropriate personnel to implement the act, and the perception that activities related to the Data Privacy Act are of low priority (Pitogo & Ching, 2018). When personal information and data are easily breached, gathered, and used without consent, manipulation tactics and strategies adversely affect freedom and democracy (Jones, 2021).

Manipulation is morally wrong because it is unfair and creates deceptions to gain control (Sinha, 2022). The term was first coined by Harvard Professor Shoshana Zuboff, who posited that surveillance capitalism threatens human autonomy and democracy (Laidler, 2019). The ethical issues associated with surveillance capitalism and their impact on human autonomy are causes for concern.

2. Literature Review

The scholarly works and literature were selected based on their relevance to the topic, the type of secondary source, and the year of publication. The study mostly relied on recent journal articles.

According to Hernandez-Ramirez (2019), surveillance capitalism is considered bureaucratic. Bureaucratic technologies, such as those included in surveillance capitalism, are incorporated to extract data that enable organizations to predict behaviors (Hernandez-Ramirez, 2019). By selling personal data to companies through surveillance capitalism, social media platforms can feed this information into their algorithms to generate personalized and targeted content. This leads to increased engagement, which results in a greater profit for advertisers (White & Boatwright, 2020). Simply put, companies can accurately predict user behavior by having access to personal data and the capacity to track consumer behavior online.

In predicting behavior to determine the content that would create engagement, a model called the attention extraction model is one of the fundamental bases of big tech companies to make people want to stay longer on social media, which, in return, allows these tech companies to extract more personal data (Chaudhary et al., 2022). Apart from this, other distinct and subtle manipulation tactics can be deployed by surveillance capitalism. An example of this is network data-driven profiling, a technique that makes it possible for a user to continuously reconfigure their choices, which is highly manipulative and subtle (Yeung, 2018).

Surveillance capitalism practices implemented online could seem apparent, subtle, and deceiving. An

example of this would be the study by Cosgrove et al. (2020), which found that there are diagnostic tools used in mental health applications that are not yet clinically and scientifically validated, which makes these applications dangerous. Mental health applications that aim to help reduce mental health distress and issues only place users in a vulnerable situation to make their data available to companies, which, as an effect, allows companies to learn more about user behavior (Cosgrove et al., 2020). Apart from these surveillance technologies, surveillance capitalists also now use artificial intelligence (AI) to distort human autonomy, raising ethical and moral concerns (Jones, 2024).

Saura et al. (2021) found that 14 performance measurements are used by companies to track and monitor data. These performance measurements refer to tools that increase user engagement and profitability. The investigation reveals that to enhance profitability, organisations present personalised content derived from their data analysis. Due to the analysis of personal data, consumers are more likely to consume (Saura et al., 2021). From the perspective of surveillance capitalism, these performance metrics may be sufficient to create the illusion that users have autonomy (Saura et al., 2021). As a result, many users are not fully aware of the manipulations they are subjected to and the lengths of the consequences that could arise from this situation.

Many users of these social media platforms appear unaware of how their data are used and commodified. In particular, the participants in the study by Chen (2022) disclosed that they are only aware of the personalized advertisements optimized by TikTok but are unaware of the personal data being collected and sold by TikTok. Ruckenstein and Granroth (2019) disclosed that users expect real-time analyses that anticipate their needs, desires, and plans but are opposed to intrusive advertising. The lack of transparency regarding the handling and storage of consumer data is concerning to users as it leads to feelings of paranoia when engaging with digital platforms (Ruckenstein & Granroth, 2019).

Users lack sufficient information regarding the purposes and applications of data tracking, which affects their perceptions (Sangiovanni, 2019). A lack of awareness of the potential consequences of online consumption may influence users' perspectives and decision-making processes, potentially impacting their capacity for self-governance. The collection and tracking of personal data enables surveillance capitalists to gain a deeper insight into user behaviour, potentially allowing them to anticipate user preferences.

Thus, users are essentially relinquishing their ability to self-determine and self-transform without their consent or any awareness of it occurring (Hernandez-Ramirez, 2019). According to Wonhas (2019), surveillance capitalism puts privacy and autonomy at risk, thereby disrupting democracy and threatening

humanity.

Today, it seems that marketers seek total marketing control through the use of surveillance capitalism. For marketers, a well-informed and autonomous consumer decision is guided by marketing analytics and self-driven (Darmody & Zwick, 2020). Marketers use relevance as a mask to conceal their manipulations, making people think they are empowered and in total control of their actions (Darmody & Zwick, 2020). The tyrannies of perceived opinion, which are possible through surveillance capitalism, threaten liberty (Sætra, 2019). As the algorithm feeds interesting content that users want to see, it could create an echo chamber of content that repetitively feeds onto users' interests, which could limit their perspectives and decisions. Due to the fact that social media applications optimize personalized data, individuals become trapped in echo chambers and filter bubbles, which poses a danger to liberty (Sætra, 2019; Flaxman et al., 2016).

In addition to liberty, there is a potential threat to the creation of a well-informed society. Surveillance capitalism could alienate marginalized and low-value individuals with the algorithm's operation. As a result, the current situation of surveillance capitalism is that some users are unprotected while wealthy companies profit and maximize users' lack of control (Chaudhary et al., 2022; Landwehr et al., 2019). It enables users to discuss and deliberate on worldviews that benefit and interest them, thereby decreasing the amount of information and awareness that people receive (Sætra, 2019). As surveillance capitalism transforms personal data into a commodity to predict human behavior, it may lead to a society focused on profit, which could result in a predictable system where external actors can easily manipulate individuals. People's right and opportunity to authentically discern their decisions and actions are then compromised by the commodified data that surveillance capitalism supports and extracts (Samuelsson et al., 2023).

According to Zuboff (2022), secret extraction is a covert tool of surveillance capitalist practices. It works discreetly. To effectively resist surveillance capitalism, full disclosure and consent are also needed (Wonhas, 2019). There could be a demand for a clear understanding of how surveillance capitalism works and affects everyone. Every person has the right to know what happens to their data (Andrew et al., 2021). However, only some laws can address surveillance and informational capitalism issues (Ganeshan, 2022). Privacy laws today cannot sufficiently mediate the harms of surveillance capitalism (Ganeshan, 2022). The issue may have evolved into a complex one, necessitating the examination of multiple policies.

None of the cited literature has yet explored surveillance capitalism in the context of the Philippines. The studies mentioned above investigated the in-depth processes of surveillance capitalism, in particular,

Chaudhary et al. (2022), Yeung (2018), and White and Boatwright (2020).

Moreover, Cosgrove et al. (2020) explored diagnostic tools for collecting data in mental health applications. Their study raised alarming implications as it deceives and misleads users, which profoundly impacts their mental health. Furthermore, another study explored other tools and performance measurements to track and monitor data. In particular, Saura et al. (2021) identified 14 performance measurement tools that companies utilize to monitor and track data. Because of these performance measurement tools, companies can create more personalized and targeted user content. These performance measurement tools are designed in a way that gives the impression of user autonomy, which is misleading.

Ruckenstein and Granroth (2019) showed that social media platform users are unaware that their data are being commodified. Sangiovanni (2019) supported this claim by demonstrating that users are ill-informed about the uses and purposes of tracking one's data online. Thus, users are unaware that they surrender their capacity to self-determine and transform without proper consent (Hernandez-Ramirez, 2019).

Pitogo and Ching (2018) investigated the efficiency and compliance of the Data Privacy Act in the Philippines and found challenges in complying with the law. Such challenges include a lack of awareness and the right people to implement it, and activities related to the Data Privacy Act are perceived as low priorities (Pitogo & Ching, 2018). While laws, such as the Data Privacy Act of 2012 or Republic Act 10173 of the Philippines, could address the issue of surveillance capitalism, it remains extremely difficult to address its full extent and impact because it involves collective effort among institutions and members of society.

It is essential to know how surveillance capitalism can impact the autonomy and decisions of Filipinos. With these considerations in mind, this study attempted to answer the following question: How does surveillance capitalism impact human autonomy as perceived by Filipino informants?

3. Methods

The study used a phenomenological research design, which is a qualitative research approach that focuses on understanding the lived experiences of people. It is grounded in philosophy and explores the human experience of phenomena. Through phenomenology, the researcher explored the phenomenon of surveillance capitalism in the Philippines and how it affected human autonomy.

The target informants of this study are Filipinos residing in Metro Manila who have access to social media and are also active users of social media applications like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. The participants' demographics ranged from 18 to 60 years

old. In addition, the study targeted at least 5–30 informants until the saturation level was reached. In total, 22 participants were interviewed. For the sampling technique, the study used purposive sampling—a non-probability sample commonly used in qualitative research designs. The study also employed a semi-structured one-on-one in-depth interview with a mix of open and closed questions. The data collection procedure was conducted in a recorded Zoom session. On average, the interviews lasted 40–60 minutes. Before the interviews, all participants signed a consent form that disclosed their agreement to participate. In addition, it ensured that all the discussions in the interviews remained confidential. In each interview, the researchers sought verbal consent to record and turn on their cameras. The study also abides by the Data Privacy Act of 2012, where all given information shall not be disclosed to anyone other than the researchers.

After collecting data, the researchers transcribed all interviews over two weeks. The transcriptions were analyzed and assessed using Atlas.ti, nonproprietary software used to analyze qualitative data. This software utilizes AI to identify codes. Subsequently, the researchers performed a thematic analysis on the transcripts and codes in order to generate themes from the combined interviews.

This study used the theory of planned behavior (TPB) by Ajzen (1991). It was developed to understand and predict behaviors (Kan & Fabrigar, 2017). The theory assumes that behavioral intentions and perceived behavioral control can determine a person's actions and behaviors. Three constructs have been established in the TPB to determine intention (Ajzen, 1991). First, attitudes are defined as the positive or negative evaluation of an individual toward a specific behavior. Second, subjective norm refers to the pressure to conform to a specific behavior (Asare, 2020). Perceived behavioral control refers to an individual's perception of their capacity to perform a specific behavior (Brookes, 2023). The three constructs were employed to establish a relationship between and analyze the participants' experiences.

4. Results

Several critical informants related surveillance capitalism to an echo chamber. A key informant raised,

"I did not really see content with them because I was not inside the echo chamber. It is kind of rude to call it an echo chamber, but that was what happened."

Another critical informant similarly likened surveillance capitalism to an echo chamber, "It is like an echo chamber. So, if it constantly feeds me decisions, like opinions on one thing, it affects my capacity to decide." Similarly, another critical informant expounded on how surveillance capitalism impacts freedom, autonomy, and individuality:

"I guess I can say that it impacts freedom,

autonomy, and individuality because the internet, in general, can sometimes be an echo chamber where someone repeats a certain thing. It will return to the user, and then there is a possibility that it will influence their thoughts, actions, and beliefs, and then they will keep repeating that on their social media platform. When they have already done that, it will reach out to more people who are probably influenced by them; then, the cycle repeats."

An echo chamber is understood as being "exposed to conforming opinions" (Flaxman et al., 2016, p. 299). According to Sætra (2019), these echo chambers and filter bubbles represent a clear threat to liberty. Moreover, Sætra (2019) raised how new technologies, including surveillance capitalism, change how information is handled. In particular, it created selective exposure among individuals, thus undermining freedom and autonomy. The above-mentioned statements from some informants confirm the existing literature's claims. Surveillance capitalism could create an echo chamber environment that promotes selective exposure among individuals. Thus, it could significantly affect individuality, opinions, and choices.

Given that companies have the capacity to exert considerable influence over the content that individuals consume, they are able to exert significant control over the options available to them. This is particularly evident in instances where individuals are exposed to a narrow range of content due to selective exposure and limited choices. A key informant added, "I still think you can choose, but you have to choose from a given list already. They will not give you the entire spectrum." Parallel to this statement, another informant stated, "Because these big companies have such a strong hold on what they could show on the internet, it kinda limits what we can search online, and at the same time, what we could see on our feeds." To further explain how surveillance capitalism could be limiting, an informant said,

"Since they [companies] have a fixed idea based on the personality of the data they get, that is the only thing that becomes available to you, and even if there is a high chance that you neglect the other possible things that could matter, it does limit our choice."

Moreover, an informant contextualized surveillance capitalism in online shopping. They shared that they did not look for other options online because they always chose the first option. The informant shared how "they [companies] already immediately arrange what I like to see so that I do not explore. I do not look for other options anymore because, most likely, I already like the first one that appears." Relating this to the claim of Saura et al. (2021), companies showed personalized content based on their data analysis to increase profitability. Surveillance capitalism in social media used performance metrics that appeared to give users the illusion of self-determination (Saura et al., 2021).

Additionally, Sangiovanni (2019) stated that many users are ill-informed about tracking their data, which may significantly affect their perception. The respondents' answers revealed how surveillance capitalism could affect their autonomy and decisions. In addition to the potential for the formation of echo chamber environments, surveillance capitalism could impinge upon human autonomy due to the restricted range of available options presented to individuals.

Corollary to the answers of the key informants above, the majority of them also related surveillance capitalism to impulsive buying. A key informant explained in detail how having access to personal data, particularly the past activities performed by a user, makes it easier for businesses to manipulate them, "I think they [users] are easily influenced because they are manipulated using their past activities to make something attractive for them." A key informant also shared,

"It is like an endless advertisement. It keeps popping up on your feed, so it is very tempting to convince these consumers. Given that, it's going to make you very impulsive."

Another critical informant mentioned a similar experience of how their buying behavior was influenced by surveillance capitalism,

"In terms of predictive modeling and machine learning, historical data are being displayed for you to predict the next output that a user or process may obtain. If I am a user who buys different types of shirts, my historical data can be translated into a prediction. So, with that prediction, it's going to be better suited for me, right? So I will be more inclined to pay for that shirt or polo. So it is affecting my buying behavior."

In addition, an informant also shared how she had recently become more exposed to online shopping, mainly clothing. She mentioned that she did not typically enjoy shopping for clothing online, however, due to constant exposure, she found herself purchasing more items,

"It [surveillance capitalism] makes you buy more. I do not buy things online. I usually buy clothes outside. So, yes. It made me buy more. I do not buy clothes often, but it made me buy more."

Impulsive buying is defined as making unplanned purchases (Zhao et al., 2022). Clarke (2019) highlighted how the digital surveillance economy, which includes surveillance capitalism, negatively impacts individuals through impulse buying. The insights mentioned by the informants suggest that surveillance capitalism could affect human autonomy as it may compel people to engage in impulsive buying behaviors.

In connection with the insights mentioned earlier, several informants also raised how surveillance capitalism encouraged them to participate in activities even if they could not afford to do so. Relating this to impulsive buying, a key informant shared how people

do things even if they are below their means. The exact words were, "Even if it is below your means, even when you should not be doing it. They [users] can do it because social media is super powerful in making people follow just to be a part of the trend." The same informant also added that online users today are compelled to join trends to feel belongingness, "Living in this world, who wants to feel left out? Right? That becomes our mindset, and it is infectious." A different informant discussed the dangers of surveillance capitalism,

"The most common behavior, I think, is brainwashing. Not like in the most literal sense, but like a lot of these big companies have a say on what we should look into on the internet or social media; they have pushed these narratives and content for us to understand, which will eventually turn into the same idea that we all share in general."

Because consumers and users are unaware of surveillance capitalism practices, they may become vulnerable to abuse through ill-intended trends and narratives that may impact human autonomy and personal decisions. In addition, several informants also mentioned how repeatedly seeing something creates retention, "In some way, it still has a strong influence because you always see it like it is what is being shown to you that creates retention in your brain." Similarly, a key informant explained, "Surveillance capitalism affects us because it is going to keep showing you targeted ads, these products that you are interested in. It'll keep showing until you finally cave in."

Another informant added, "The more we see it online, the more we think the product is more effective. When we repeatedly see it, even if we have not tried it, we feel that the product is beautiful." Additionally, a key informant also shared how surveillance capitalism could impact people's ability to assert their views on several societal issues,

"Maybe it is a pipe dream, but they can find a way. Power is something people want. Therefore, it is scary to think about the future if surveillance capitalism continues because people will think of different ways to give themselves the power they need. People will lose their stand."

A previous study investigated 14 performance-measuring tools to predict human behavior (Saura et al., 2021). Surveillance capitalists use machine processes as an intervention to augment prediction by conditioning the behavior of individuals and groups (Zuboff, 2019). Based on the insights shared by the informants, surveillance capitalism can affect human autonomy by influencing individuals to take specific actions even if they are personally opposed to it. As consumers and users are repeatedly exposed to narratives, opinions, products, and services, this could be reinforced in their minds, significantly affecting their decisions.

Some key informants have repeatedly linked surveillance capitalism to the spread of misinformation

or fake news. An informant shared how being tracked and frequently exposed to personalized content could influence the spread of misinformation, which could affect human autonomy,

"So, if you like this post or a political post, more political posts like that will be shown in your feed. So, of course, if a post contains misinformation, a higher percentage of videos containing misinformation will appear in your feed."

Fake news or misinformation is defined as false information that appears true but is not (Allen et al., 2020). As many online users engage with social media on a daily basis, they may be exposed to misinformation that could influence their personal decisions. In this way, surveillance capitalism may contribute to the spread of misinformation as much online content that may be false may appear trustworthy. When an echo chamber of false information is repeatedly shown in an individual's feed, it could result in what the other key informants mentioned in the abovementioned paragraphs on how surveillance capitalism affects people's ability to make their stand against issues.

Besides these insights, almost all informants mentioned privacy issues related to surveillance capitalism. Several informants expressed feelings of unease or discomfort regarding the idea of being monitored online as it prevented them from behaving authentically. An informant shared,

"It is a weird feeling when someone is watching your every move. It is like you are not free when someone watches you. Your information and actions are not secured. In that way, I feel controlled because my choices are limited. It is like it is not 100% me."

Similarly, in the context of politics, one informant expressed how surveillance could intimidate individuals into searching online for issues against the government, "For instance, there is fear to search about the things that are against the government." Meanwhile, a key informant likened surveillance capitalism to the television show *Pinoy Big Brother (PBB)*, a reality show that revolves around a group of housemates isolated from the outside world with the individual goal of overcoming challenges inside the house to win a cash prize. The informant specifically elucidated,

"Limited because it is like PBB. Do you know that? When someone is following you or always looking at you. Therefore, this means that you are not free to do what you want. You are limited because first, there might be someone who will judge me. Second, there could be someone who could leak my personal information or what I did."

Corollary to this, another critical informant raised a similar insight and gave an example, "It [surveillance capitalism] makes me conscious. It is knowing that you are being watched. They'll see you like that. Like you would have the urge to feel cautious." A few informants also expressed their disdain for surveillance capitalism

since it violates privacy,

"It is negative because these multi-million, multi-trillion, multi-billion companies take advantage of our online activity to exploit our interest."

In line with this, one informant recounted how privacy breaches caused by surveillance capitalism could jeopardize the confidentiality of a person's financial information. The informant shares,

"I think it will influence people's capacity to decide and their actions, especially children's, because they are more impressionable and easily influenced."

Moreover, some informants mentioned that compromising confidentiality could lead to hacking. When data are exposed and collected without full consent, personal data can become vulnerable to hacking. Apart from the abovementioned responses, a handful related surveillance capitalism to hacking. An informant responded,

"First, I believe that there would be some degree of privacy intrusion involved, depending on the methods used to collect data. If the data were to be compromised through hacking or leakage, it could lead to significant harm to individuals, as personal information would become public and people's activities could be exposed."

The insights shared by the informants align with the concerns raised about surveillance capitalism. According to Fowler and Hunter (2021), while users can instruct ads not to track them, it continues to persist. It is also evident from Ellis (2022) and Ptaszek (2019) that many still lack knowledge about surveillance capitalism. This potentially puts each user in a vulnerable position because they are unaware of the extent to which their data are commoditized and used. Regarding the responses of the participants, the majority acknowledged that they were unaware of surveillance capitalism and their involvement in the study represented their first exposure to the term.

When privacy is lost, it could impact democracy and freedom. With this in mind, expansive knowledge about the population is exploited, which could "rupture" collective behavior and challenge human autonomy (Zuboff, 2022). Surveillance capitalism can affect human autonomy because privacy breaches compromise confidentiality and make personal data vulnerable to hacking.

Intuitively, an informant highlighted how surveillance capitalism could hinder proper childhood development,

"More kids are inclined to use TikTok on social media without proper parental guidance. This is because of surveillance capitalism. Why? For example, Coco Melon. If a child or parent shows Coco Melon to a 3-year-old girl, there will be more Coco Melon feeds or videos on her feed. Therefore, the duration of usage will be greater, and the child may be unable to achieve the necessary developmental milestones or complete the

requisite developmental steps due to their exclusive exposure to a specific platform or device."

The responses of the participants supported the conclusions of previous research. Aside from children's privacy, issues with children's data being subjected to analytical procedures that alter results and discriminate against vulnerable groups of children lead to incorrect decisions (Holloway, 2019). By not sharing the full disclosure of potential data uses, surveillance capitalism treats children as the new "data laborers," denying them the right to protection against economic exploitation (Mertzani & Pitt, 2022). Based on the respondents' responses and findings from previous literature, surveillance capitalism could hinder proper childhood development, which may impact children's autonomy.

5. Discussion

As the study progressed, the insights from the informants reached a certain saturation level. At a glance, words, examples, and topics mentioned by participants were similar. To identify the codes and themes, Atlas.ti, nonproprietary software, was used to analyze the transcripts from the interviews.

Based on the results, six themes emerged from the study. The themes identified are as follows:

1. Surveillance capitalism could create an echo chamber environment that promotes selective exposure among individuals. As content becomes personalized, consumers become selectively exposed to content that relates to their interests, which affects their decisions. Surveillance capitalism can influence human autonomy because it has access to data that can be used to predict behavior, thus limiting consumers' autonomy.

2. Surveillance capitalism may compel people to engage in impulsive buying behaviors. Surveillance capitalism allows the propagation of personalized content, making it easier to predict behavior and gain control because it entices consumers by repeatedly showing content related to their interests, leading them to engage in impulsive buying.

3. Surveillance capitalism can influence individuals to take specific actions even if they are against it. When consumers are repeatedly exposed to specific content, they may also engage with it even if they are not interested in or are personally opposed to it.

4. Surveillance capitalism could contribute to the spread of misinformation. Some consumers who are not well informed may be vulnerable to believing inaccurate and misleading information that could affect their personal decisions and autonomy.

5. Surveillance capitalism can affect human autonomy because privacy breaches can compromise confidentiality and make personal data vulnerable to hacking. It is also possible that the perception of being monitored and losing privacy may lead a person to feel that they have less perceived behavioral control.

6. Surveillance capitalism could hinder proper

childhood development, affecting children's autonomy. Today, most children have access to various social media platforms, and it is likely that they have interacted with different types of online content. Therefore, children's data can be predicted and used for malicious purposes affecting their personal development and decisions.

The six themes found in this study are interrelated, showing that surveillance capitalism has a negative impact. Although it positively influences business, it may also negatively impact economic, political, and social dimensions.

The results of this study are relevant to education, ethics, and policymaking. This study can be used by educators to reevaluate school curricula. It may also be time for academics and philosophers to begin discussing how to combat the effects of surveillance capitalism to protect human rights. Moreover, policymakers and businessmen can now debate how to appropriately govern technology in a way that limits the harm to human autonomy.

6. Conclusion

The emerging themes highlight the lived and authentic experiences of Filipino informants under surveillance capitalism. Based on the study's findings, surveillance capitalism harms human autonomy. This study proved that Filipinos are vulnerable to surveillance capitalist practices, and future discourse is needed to address the issues surrounding surveillance capitalist practices. The academic contribution of this study can be summarized as follows: (1) raising awareness and a healthy debate about surveillance capitalism in the fields of business, ethics, media, psychology, and technology; (2) closer policy framing and formulation; (3) improving psycho-social well-being, especially among children in the digital age; (4) promoting discussion on media disinformation and misinformation.

7. Limitations and Further Study

This study is limited to only investigating the impact of surveillance capitalism on human autonomy in the Philippines. Therefore, researchers may consider applying the study to different geographical and cultural contexts. The study is also limited to qualitative approaches to understanding the impact of surveillance capitalism. Future scholars may consider using a mixed-methods or quantitative approach. In terms of instrumentation, the study employed phenomenological research. Future researchers may consider conducting case studies or grounded theory research to gain a more comprehensive understanding of surveillance capitalism and human autonomy. Subsequent studies may examine additional ethical implications of surveillance capitalism, including those pertaining to privacy. Moreover, future studies may also explore focusing on

the impact of the political and socioeconomic variables of surveillance capitalism on human autonomy and privacy.

Authors' Contributions

Marian Ingrid A. Saucó is the main author who proposed, conducted, and completed the paper, while Dr. John Xavier Chavez is the co-author who provided suggestions, edited, and guided the main author in analyzing and completing the research study.

Ethical Declaration

All participants signed an informed consent form that confirmed their willingness to participate.

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