

GEORGE ORWELL'S "1984" AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE MODERN ERA OF INTERNET AND SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM

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ABSTRACT

1984 is a dystopian novel by George Orwell first published in the year 1949. The book is set in the totalitarian state of Oceania where everything is controlled and monitored by the party called INGSOC. There was constant surveillance of its citizens through hidden microphones, camera, telescreens and by a secret police called the Thought police, which are placed everywhere. The key factors of our life like language, emotions are controlled and monitored by the State. People don't have anything to say as they are being manipulated psychologically to abide by the rules and regulations of the state and unthinking obedience to Big Brother, the leader of the state. In the modern times companies monitored the action and behavior of every individual in the internet such as our likes, dislikes, searches, social networks etc and compute it for behavioral predictions of the user(s) which is used for commercial purpose and profit of the companies. This paper discusses and analyzed the forms of surveillance in Orwell's 1984 and how it shares similarities with the modern era of internet.

INTRODUCTION

Eric Arthur Blair famously known by his pen name George Orwell was a British novelist, journalist and a critic. He was against imperialism and felt ashamed as a colonial police officer during his

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time in Burma and resigned from the Imperial police in 1927. Orwell was a political idealist and his interest in political matters grew after his novel 'Burmese days' was published in the year 1934 and he began to consider himself as a socialist. Inspired by the political events of Europe and the second world war he wrote two of his famous novels '*Animal Farm*' and '*1984*'.

In the year 1946, he went to a remote farmhouse in Scotland to write '*1984*' which was published in 1949. Partly inspired by the meeting of allied leaders in Tehran Conference in 1944, in which he was convinced that Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin had plotted to divide the world. The book is about a dystopian world where every action and behavior of its citizens was monitored. The Big Brother, the so called leader of the ruling party was able to do it through hidden cameras, microphones, telescreens and secret police which were placed everywhere. The telescreens were device that operates as televisions, security camera and microphone and it was also used as a propaganda machine through which the party spread their propaganda psychologically manipulating the thoughts and emotions of its citizen.

In the modern era of digital technology and internet our privacy is hampered in several ways and psychologically manipulates the users. With new products manufactured everyday there is a stiff competition in the market like never before. The data reveals that about 91% of people are with internet connection using social networking platforms, people are suffering from depression, anxiety and insecurities. Companies monitored each and every action and behavior of such an individual in the internet. Data brokers buy and sell private data of individuals which is used by companies to predict the future behavior of the individual for commercial purpose and profit of the company by showing never ending ads of their products and trends manipulating the individual's thoughts and emotions which is now known as Surveillance Capitalism. Surveillance capitalists learned that the most predictive data come not just from monitoring but also from modifying and directing behavior.

The book is set in London, and referred as Airstrip 1 in the totalitarian state of Oceania where the citizens are controlled by the party, the ruling force of the nation. The citizens of Oceania are under constant surveillance by the use of cameras, hidden microphones, a secret police called as Thought Police. A two way television called as telescreen which acts a camera,

microphone and a propaganda machine is placed everywhere, home, office, bathroom, bed room to constantly carry out surveillance of its citizen and to constantly remind them that they are being watched with the omnipresent signs reading “THE BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU”. The ultimate aim of the surveillance is immediately aware the party if any of its citizen is showing any behavior which is against the rules imposed by the party or is a threat to the ruling party and have unthinking obedience to the Big Brother, the leader of the party whom no one has seen in real, nobody knows whether he actually exist or not. The Big Brother only appears in the Telescreen to give out some important messages to the citizens of Oceania. The party has established several ministries which help in monitoring the citizens of the state. The Ministry of Love, the Ministry of Peace, the Ministry of Plenty and the Ministry of Truth.

*The Ministry of Peace concerns with war, the Ministry of Truth with lies,
the Ministry of Love with torture and the Ministry of Plenty with starvation.*

These contradictions are not accidental, nor do they result from ordinary hypocrisy:

They are deliberate exercise in doublethink.

-Part II, Chapter IX

In the book the party used language to manipulate and control its citizen. The use of language to manipulate and control citizen of a state by the ruling party is the most important feature of an Orwellian state. The party introduced a new language called Newspeak which had very simplified grammar and very less vocabulary to limit and restrict the individual’s ability to think and articulate. "**Orwellian**" is an adjective describing a situation, idea, or societal condition that George Orwell identified as being destructive to the welfare of a free and open society. It denotes an attitude and a brutal policy of draconian control by propaganda, surveillance, disinformation, denial of truth, and manipulation of the past, including the "unperson"—a person

whose past existence is expunged from the public record and memory, practiced by modern repressive governments.

One of the four departments is the Ministry of Truth, it is in charge of information but as all the other ministries its name is misnomer because it serves the opposite. The ministry of truth is in charge of the news, media, entertainment, fine arts, books and education. It constructs lies that fit with the ideology and the party's current status in the present. The ministry of truth rewrites history to fit with the current claims of the present, by rewriting the history in their own way and removing as many words as possible they construct their own version of reality. And by produce propaganda, it helps the party to construct a notion that the Big Brother is a godlike figure.

In the modern era of internet, where youths having access to the internet are using social media, the rate of depression occurs among youths are increasing at an alarming rate. These sites manipulate people psychologically through the use of various techniques. With features like 'like' and 'retweet', these features are positive reinforce that encourage people to come back to the platform. When people receive these forms of social validation, they have a rush of dopamine, known as "reward molecule" which people also experience after completing a workout or achieving a goal. People are measuring their worth with the number of likes, comments, share or retweets of their posts. One of the most influential social media platforms today is Instagram with over one billion users and a recent survey by Royal Society for Public Health found that Instagram is the worst social media platform when it comes to mental wellbeing of individuals. Bloggers, celebrity, influencers or just a regular person everyone has made their presence in Instagram by sharing photos, videos or stories and with the introductions of filters which make people more beautiful, anxiety and insecurity among youths and adults have increased at a dramatic rate. Just like the Ministry of Truth which psychologically manipulates people to believe in their lies and creates their very own version of reality, in the modern era of internet social networking platform has been very successful to manipulate people to believe that their worth is the number of likes and followers they have in these platforms, people tend to suffer from insecurities, anxiety and depression when their post don't receive much likes. In a study it is found that people who spent more than two hours in social networking platforms are more likely to suffer from mental distress.

In the book, Winston Smith, the main protagonist who is a low ranking party member works in the ministry of truth and his primary job is to rewrite historical records. Winston revises old editions of The Time magazine and the original documents are being destroyed after being dropped into the memory hole. As the novel opens Winston feels frustrated by the oppression and rigid control of the party which prohibits any expression of individuality. Winston purchased a diary and began writing the diary, the act of which is punishable to death and with surveillance everywhere it is very hard to escape from the Thought Police, but the determination of being human under the inhuman circumstances and to be free at least inside his mind he continued writing the diary criticizing the Big brother, he wrote “*Down with the Big Brother*” in his diary. As the novel progresses, Winston falls in love with Julia, act of which is rebellious to the party. The party denies human relationships as it develops a loyalty between the two humans which may be a problem for the party as one wouldn’t be spying another for the party, the party doesn’t want sex to be pleasurable but only an act of reproduction which is a service to the nation and the party. They rented a room above Mr. Charrington’s shop from where Winston bought his diary in one of the prole neighborhood. Proles which are the poorest members of the social structure of Oceania, who lives under poverty, get no education and are free from the constant surveillance of the party as the party thinks there is no reason to monitor the proles, as they are same as animals.

As the Party slogan put it: “Proles and animals are free”

-Part 1, Chapter 7

Winston wanted a rebellion against the party and he thinks it is the proles which can do something he writes in his diary “*If there is hope it lies in the proles*”.

But Mr.Charrington turned out to be a agent of the Thought Police and Winston and Julia is captured and imprisoned. Over the next several months Winston is tortured and starved to cure himself of his insanity by changing his perception that fits with the party. Winston said that the Party can’t manage to make him betray Julia, even after he accepted the party's invincibility and its principles. Winston accepts internally that he really means he has not rescinded his feelings toward Julia, he betrays her by revealing her crimes. He fantasizes the moments before his execution his heretic side will emerge, which, as long as he is killed while unrepentant, will be his

great victory over the Party. For the final stage of re-education Winston was taken to “Room 101,” which contains each prisoner's worst fear, indicating that the level of surveillance on the public is far more thorough than initially believed by Winston. Confronted with a wire cage holding frenzied rats, his biggest fear, in his face, Winston willingly betrays Julia by wishing the suffering upon her instead. Winston is released back into public life and Winston finally accepts that he loves Big Brother.

In 2020, the number of global Smartphone users is projected to total **3.5 billion**, marking a 9.3 percent increase from 2019 and as of January 2021 there were 4.66 billion active internet users worldwide - 59.5 percent of the global population. Of this total, 92.6 percent (4.32 billion) accessed the internet via mobile devices. With people buying new device every now and then, people will always want to buy the latest iphone or the latest macbook even when their old Smartphone or computer is still working fine. There are always huge lines and crowd in front of the apple store when apple release a new device, not only apple every other big electronic device creates a same hype in the public and it becomes a major topic of discussion among the youths and tech enthusiast. A smartphone serves as the window to the world, with internet one can know what is happening around the world with just a tap of finger, talk with friends and relatives who are living across the world and learn and teach things online. And internet is so good at acquiring information about our likes and dislikes our recent thoughts and future plans that it will show things according to our interest and our recent activities or any future planning we just made. It might be convenient but knowingly and unknowingly we are giving away all our personal information to the private companies that are ruling the world of internet. In the book Telescreens which is a two way television and acts a camera, microphone and a propaganda machine to have a constant surveillance over the citizens of Oceania. Telescreens are placed everywhere to monitor the citizens except for the proles who the party claimed to be unimportant. Telescreens can't be turned off by anyone except for the higher officials of the party. Apart from a surveillance device for constant monitoring of the citizens, the telescreen also works as a propaganda device of the party it broadcast propaganda about Oceania's military victories, economic production figures, spirited

renditions of the national anthem to heighten patriotism, and Two Minutes Hate, which is a two-minute film of Emmanuel Goldstein who is recognized as Oceania's enemy and is claimed to be conspiring against the country. Citizens have to pay to for the installation of the telescreens in their home just like television in contemporary time and people of Oceania have no choice but to pay a price and install it in their home.

“The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound that Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it; moreover, so long as he remained within the field of vision which the metal plaque commanded, he could be seen as well as heard. There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment”

-Chapter 1, Part 1

In the era of internet any device with an internet connection does the same thing as a telescreen in '1984'. Companies monitor and keep record of every action and data of an individual in the internet, which is computed and predicts the next move of the users, these predictions are traded in a new futures market, where surveillance capitalists sell certainty to businesses determined to know what we will do next This was first use to improve services, but the rest are turned into computational products that predict your behavior. This logic was first applied to finding which ads online will attract our interest, but similar practices now reside in nearly every sector insurance, retail, health, education, finance and more where personal experience is secretly captured and computed for behavioral predictions. By now it is no exaggeration to say that the Internet is owned and operated by private surveillance capital.

The concept of surveillance capitalism was first described in the year 2014 by Shoshana Zuboff who is an American author, Harvard professor, social psychologist, philosopher, and scholar, arose as advertising companies, led by Google's AdWords saw the possibilities of using personal data of people for future predications and marketing purpose. As state by Shosahn Zuboff, *“Surveillance capitalism unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioural data. Although some of these data are applied to service improvement, the rest are*

declared as a proprietary behavioural surplus, fed into advanced manufacturing processes known as 'machine intelligence', and fabricated into prediction products that anticipate what you will do now, soon, and later. Finally, these prediction products are traded in a new kind of marketplace called behavioural futures markets. Surveillance capitalists have grown immensely wealthy from these trading operations, for many companies are willing to lay bets on our future behaviour."

Surveillance capitalism exploits and controls human nature with a totalitarian order as the endpoint of the development. Increasing collection and processing of data in the context of capitalism's core profit-making motive present a danger to human liberty, autonomy, wellbeing as well as for individual's privacy. In the competition for certainty, surveillance capitalists learned that the most predictive data come not just from monitoring but also from modifying and directing behavior. For example, by 2013, Facebook had learned how to engineer subliminal cues on its pages to shape users' real-world actions and feelings. Later, these methods were combined with real-time emotional analyses, allowing marketers to cue behavior at the moment of maximum vulnerability. These companies keep record of every internet search, every place you visit, everything that you buy or just see on ecommerce sites, kind of contents you like or dislike. Just search for place in the internet and you will get thousands of ads about hotels and flights available in the place. Increased data collection may have various advantages for individuals and society such as self-optimization, societal optimizations and optimized services but this may come with significant implications for vulnerability and control of society as well as for privacy. The Facebook–Cambridge Analytica data scandal is one such case where personal data of 87 million facebook profiles were harvested without the user consent and used for political advertising. Cambridge Analytica used the data to provide analytical assistance to the 2016 presidential campaigns of Ted Cruz and Donald Trump. Cambridge Analytica was also widely accused of interfering with the Brexit referendum. In April, 2021 personal information of 533 million facebook users were leaked on a forum in the internet, personal data included their phone numbers, email id, home address etc. Many people know how the algorithm of these tech giants works, we give out our personal data and it shows us the most relevant item and content of our choice. There is no privacy in this modern era of internet, with everything getting digitalized, everything from reading a book to watching a movie has got easier

and we just ignore the fact that we are under constant surveillance of the surveillance capitalist who use our personal data for marketing purpose. As security expert and cryptographer Bruce Schneier wrote that “surveillance is the business model of the internet” he unknowing hinted Orwell’s 1984, where constant surveillance is the ruling method of the party.

CONCLUSION

George Orwell’s 1984 which depict a dystopian world where the citizens are under constant surveillance by the ruling party through various methods such as the telescreen, hidden microphones, camera and a secret police called the Thought Police. The party psychologically manipulates the people through the use of language. The party created its own language eliminating most of the words which restrict one’s capabilities of thinking and articulation, the party also rewrites history which let them manufacture their own reality that favors the current status of the party and its leader the Big Brother. “*Nineteen Eighty Four*” has become a classic literary example of political and dystopian fiction, it popularized the term “Orwellian” as an adjective, with many terms used in the novel entering common usage and in popular culture. After more than 70 years of the book, in this modern generation, we are being tracked, every place and website we visit, every likes and dislikes, every activity we do is tracked and is used by big companies for marketing and profit making and use various methods use make people to use it again. Technology and internet has bought every aspect of 1984 into real life and unknowingly we are living in Orwell’s dystopian world which he depicts in his book 1984.

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