Flawed Newspaper Reporting on Surveillance Capitalism and its Implications for

Democracy, Human Rights, and Human Autonomy

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A Content Analysis of German Newspapers

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Abstract

Surveillance Capitalism is an emergent logic of accumulation that computes private human experience into marketable behavior prediction products and, according to scholars, is on a direct collision course with democracy and human rights. As its mechanisms are designed to be hidden, public knowledge is scarce, which is why scholars call for education and a "public awakening" as a basis for counteraction. Through agenda-setting, the news media play a crucial role in informing the public and shaping public opinion on political topics and thus can either illuminate the public or further obscure the issue. Hence, this study aims at exploring the extent and ways that German newspapers inform the German public about the issue of Surveillance Capitalism. Employing a content analysis of German newspaper articles, this thesis shows that the newspapers significantly emphasize issues of privacy, data protection, and competition over issues of democracy, human rights, and human autonomy and thus paint a flawed picture of Surveillance Capitalism in the public mind. Furthermore, the results show how the articles, by explaining and evaluating the issue as an unprecedented, perversion of "normal" capitalism, fail to identify the inherent problems in capitalism itself.

Keywords: Surveillance Capitalism, Big Tech, capitalism, public opinion, agenda-setting, Germany, behavior prediction

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

"Surveillance Capitalism's competitive dynamics and economic imperatives are on a collision course with democracy. It is not only we who have been sleepwalking, but democracy itself that has been sleepwalking. Our goal must be to awaken the public mind." (Zuboff, 2019a, para. 33).

From looking up on Google whether yellowish broccoli is still fresh to eat, using your favorite e-scooter, to making doctor's appointments on WhatsApp, the influence and reach of Big Tech companies seems to be omnipresent and unmatched. In 2021, the five Big Tech firms Apple, Amazon, Microsoft, Google, and Facebook accounted for more than 25% of the US S&P 500 in terms of market capitalization (Birch & Bronson, 2022). Considering that most of the services offered by Google and Facebook are free, this immense revenue is puzzling for many at first sight. However, a look at the particularities of their business models reveals how this revenue is created inside a new economic order, coined "Surveillance Capitalism" (SC) by Shoshana Zuboff, that is based on the commodification of human experience in the form of user data (Zuboff, 2019b; Lyon, 2019). Instead of charging a fee for their services, Big Tech companies claim user data as a resource and using Artificial Intelligence (AI), compute this data into behavior prediction products (Amnesty International, 2019), which are sold to a diverse range of customers ranging from advertisers to insurance companies, law enforcement and even political campaigns (Amnesty International, 2019; Khalek, 2021; Landwehr et al., 2019; Lyon, 2019).

According to scholars, this business model does not only carry consequences for individuals but poses an immense threat to public values like freedom, democracy, and human rights (Jørgensen, 2019; Amnesty International, 2019; Zuboff, 2019b; Lawrence, 2018). Ranging from the Cambridge Analytica scandal, information about European firms supplying China with facial recognition technology used in the repression of the Uyghurs (Amnesty International, 2020; Harvey, 2020), to the countless Facebook scandals, the past years have shown how these threats can materialize. Although there is a broad literature on SC and related topics (Zuboff, 2019b; Jørgensen, 2019; Crawford, 2021; Birch & Bronson, 202l; Lyon, 2019), the public knowledge is very scarce (Zuboff, 2019b; Andrew et al., 2021; Khalek, 2021). According to scholars, this is no surprise as the working mechanisms of SC are designed to be

hidden and build on substantial knowledge asymmetries (Zuboff, 2019b; Andrew et al., 2021; Khalek, 2021). Considering this critical knowledge gap, the literature regularly mentions the breaking up of those asymmetries, the shaping of public opinion by education, and ultimately collective action as crucial remedies (Zuboff 2021; Lyon, 2019; Landwehr et al., 2019).

Apart from the government or education systems, a significant role in informing the public and shaping public opinion on societal topics is played by the media (Lippmann, 1922; McCombs, 2011), with Rhomberg (2007) stating that political information in democracies is almost exclusively disseminated through the media. Acknowledging the media as this critical gateway to public knowledge, the ways in which the media communicates and frames issues of SC are very impactful on how the public perceives and discusses them. Thus, to some extent, the media can be seen as a switchman that either facilitates a "public awakening" or further obscures the issue. With this in mind, it is rather surprising that although there is broad academic scholarship around SC, there has not yet been an attempt to analyze its media coverage and public discussion. Is the media covering the issue comprehensively or are there biases in the reporting? Which issues and public values are emphasized and seen as important? So far, there are no scientific answers to these types of questions, constituting a critical knowledge gap both for academia and the public. Hence, this thesis aims to fill this knowledge gap by employing a comprehensive content analysis of German newspapers in regards to their discussion of SC. Depending on the findings, this thesis aims to serve as a scientific ground to motivate more comprehensive media coverage of SC to enlighten the public, facilitate a change in public opinion and entice collective action.

1.2 Research Question

This study aims to answer the research question:

In what ways are the existence and consequences of Surveillance Capitalism discussed in German newspaper coverage?

This is done by analyzing the content of newspaper articles in regards to their language, expressions, and style of communication and identifying common issues, keywords, public values, etc. This study could identify a potential lack of coverage, biases in the discussion, conflicting public values, etc., and would thus significantly add to the scholarship surrounding the issue of SC.

As an unequal and biased media coverage, prioritizing some issues over others, would influence the public's discussion, leaving it with an incomplete understanding of SC and potentially reproducing this flawed picture, the following sub-question is explored to identify possible biases in the reporting:

What are the main issues that are communicated in the context of Surveillance Capitalism?

As noted above, the public is usually unaware and uneducated on the issue (Andrew et al., 2021; Zuboff, 2020) and the media can, through framing, "affect public understanding, especially understanding of topics that are not part of people's daily lives" (Jacobson et al., 2012, p. 172). Especially because issues of SC are however part of people's daily lives but are intended to be hidden (Zuboff, 2019b; Andrew et al., 2021), the ways in which the media reports on the issue are very important for people's elaborate understanding, thus the sub-question:

To what extent do the German newspapers explain the concept of Surveillance Capitalism?

Furthermore, whenever things are communicated in society, there are specific public values at stake. Thus, it is crucial to look at the public values that are communicated, discussed, and weighed against each other in the media, like e.g., privacy vs. security or free services vs. data sovereignty (Voiovich, 2020), leading to the last sub-question:

How are issues of Surveillance Capitalism discussed in terms of public values at stake?

The results of this study can potentially show how the significant knowledge gap between Surveillance Capitalists and the public might be reinforced by the media and henceforth could motivate a potential countermeasure: Comprehensive media coverage. If coverage of SC, ranging from explanatory coverage to normative, public value-related coverage is done comprehensively, leading to more elaborate knowledge, understanding, skills, and public opinion, the issues can potentially be dealt with, starting with an informed public discussion. Especially in light of the new legal steps taken by the EU to regulate Big Tech companies and SC, an inquiry into media coverage of SC and public opinion is very relevant. Since meaning in textual content is often very complex, hidden, and implicit, advanced knowledge of the language is indispensable, which is why Germany was chosen as the context of the thesis. Up to this point, research on public opinion about SC has not been conducted in Germany. There

is related research about public opinion on privacy and data protection but only in a siloed fashion and not holistically about SC.

1.3 Research Approach

This thesis follows an interpretive research approach, trying to develop an understanding of how SC is discussed and covered in German newspapers. Because reality in the form of written text like newspaper articles is very complex and multifaceted, containing different possible meanings, one has to work carefully with a fitting approach and method to uncover and interpret this meaning in a comprehensible and reproducible way. Since the way to interpretation in this thesis leads through careful analysis of the newspaper articles in regards to e.g., the main issues, frames, keywords, and essentially language, the interpretive content analysis presented itself as the most appropriate method. The interpretive content analysis facilitates the transformation of complex and hidden meaning from the articles, into plausible interpretations and meaningful results. According to Given (2008) theory can serve as an orientation to understand the object of interpretation better, meaning that theory may be used as a starting point and guidance for interpretation, which is why the framework of SC and agenda-setting theory delimited, focused, and guided the interpretation. The interpreted data were newspaper articles from 7 of the highest circulating German online and print newspapers. Following this introduction chapter (1), the theoretical concepts (2), and methodology (3) are explained. After these preparatory chapters, the content analysis is conducted (4) and conclusions are drawn (5).

2. Theory

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to build and explain the concepts and theoretical frameworks needed to realize the analysis and guide the reader from SC to public opinion formation and agenda-setting in order to establish the logical underpinnings of the thesis. SC serves as the conceptual delimitation and theoretical instrument to guide the interpretations. Because the discussion of SC is very multifaceted and can be approached from a variety of angles, establishing a clear image of the phenomenon is critical to analyzing and interpreting its communication and discussion in the media. The description of the inherently hidden nature and the resulting knowledge asymmetries bridge the concept to the importance of studying its discussion in the media. In order to motivate the inquiry into media communication of SC, it is crucial to elaborate on the ways in which the media influences the knowledge and opinion of the public in regards to SC and its connection to either keeping the public in the dark or facilitating a "public awakening". Following this logic, this chapter first introduces the concept of SC and its intricate features like Big Tech, data economy, surveillance, privacy, AI, and the underlying societal trade-offs. Second, this chapter introduces mechanisms of public opinion formation and agenda-setting theory, and third relates both parts to motivate the logic of this thesis and the relevance of an inquiry into newspaper coverage of SC.

2.2 The Concept of Surveillance Capitalism

This chapter offers a theoretical guide for the concept of SC. It explains its origins, its connection to other forms of capitalism and gives insights into the discussion and consequences of the concept, as the understanding of the full complexity and particularities is crucial for interpreting the research findings.

Although the term SC, was coined by Shoshana Zuboff in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in 2014, the concept it describes has its roots around the turn of the millennia, when Google, facing the pressures of the dot-com bubble, invented a new logic of capitalist accumulation (Zuboff, 2019b). This logic manifests itself today in about every aspect of our lives (Andrew et al., 2021) and has arguably brought about some of "the defining institutions of our day, dominating our political economies, societies, and polities" (Birch & Bronson, 2022, p. 1), multinational technology corporations. While there are many terms used for e.g., Google,

Facebook, Amazon, and their Chinese counterparts e.g., Tencent or Alibaba, including "the four" (Galloway, 2017), "GAFAM" (Wichowski, 2020) or "FAANG" (Foroohar, 2019), this thesis uses the term Big Tech to capture the holistic nature of the phenomenon. While all are Big Tech companies, according to Zuboff (2019b) not all are considered pure Surveillance Capitalists, since e.g., Apple's business model is mainly based on actual products and still primarily uses data for service improvement. Thus, when referring to the business model of Surveillance Capitalists, this thesis mainly works with Facebook and Google as ideal types.

While the facts that in 2021, 90% of worldwide internet searches were conducted via Google, Facebook accounted for around 70% of worldwide social media users, and together, Google and Facebook accounted for more than 60% of worldwide online ad revenues (Amnesty International, 2019) illustrate the operational power of Big Tech, a look at the financial magnitude, paints a clear picture of dominance. Apple has a larger market capitalization than 96% of worldwide country GDPs (Wallach, 2021) and in 2021, Apple, Amazon, Microsoft, Google, and Facebook accounted for more than a quarter of market capitalization in the US S&P 500 (Birch & Bronson, 2022). Given that most of the services offered by Google and Facebook like the search engine, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc., are free, this immense revenue is puzzling to many at first sight.

A first hint at the answer to this puzzle is that although both Google and Facebook operate in a wide range of areas, the overwhelming share of their revenues is generated by advertising, 81% and 98% respectively (Olson, 2022). Instead of charging a fee for their services, Big Tech firms collect data that is generated at every interaction with their services and using AI, compute this data into marketable behavior prediction products. This accumulation, handling, and selling of data constitutes the very core of what Zuboff calls SC. While there are other approaches taken by scholars in criticizing and conceptualizing the greater phenomenon of digital capitalism like Doctorow (2020) who mainly criticizes the monopolistic market or Staab (2019) who approaches the topic from a purely economic standpoint relating it to economic theories like mercantilism, Zuboff´s SC best describes the logic of accumulation based on the commodification of user data. Like any other concept, Zuboff´s SC is not exempt from criticism. Doctorow (2020) is skeptical about the power that Zuboff ascribes to the prediction and manipulation products and Voiovich (2020) remarks that Zuboff misses acknowledging the underlying societal tradeoffs for individuals and handles the topic too prescriptively. Furthermore, a striking and very valuable criticism of Zuboff´s SC is constructed by Evgeny

Morozov. Morozov (2019) criticizes that Zuboff, with her focus on surveillance, ignores and fails to address the fundamental capitalist imperatives that deserve questioning like the "historical and social relationships between capital and labor, the state and the monetary system, the metropole and the periphery" (XIV section). He argues that Zuboff misses the discussion and questioning of the basic capitalist mechanisms and conflicts and when conceptualizing SC as a new, unprecedented and perverted version of "normal" capitalism, acts as though the remedy would be to cleanse capitalism of the surveillance component to return to the intact, desired state of capitalism. Nevertheless, they all acknowledge the descriptive and analytical value of the research on Big Tech and the data economy (Held, 2021; Voiovich, 2020). Overshadowing the criticism, however, is the big appraisal that especially Zuboff´s book *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* garnered. In contrast to other conceptualizations of the greater phenomenon, the concept of SC has extensively caught on in the scientific, political, and public discussion and is used and referred to as a framework by numerous researchers and other actors (e.g., Andrew et al., 2021; Landwehr et al., 2019; Aho & Duffield, 2020; Jooste, 2021; Khalek, 2021), which is why, acknowledging the criticism, the concept serves as the conceptual framework of this thesis.

Not only etymologically, but also theoretically, the concept of SC is inherently linked to "standard" capitalism. The underlying logic of commodification, or taking things that reside outside the market and bringing them into the market, turning them into commercial objects, continues in SC (Zuboff, 2019a). Whereas in industrial capitalism natural resources were dragged into the market, in SC it is human experience that is commodified (Zuboff, 2019b; Isin & Ruppert, 2019). The distinguishing factor for this new logic of accumulation is the feature of surveillance. The concept as a profitable strategy was first invented and deployed by Google around the year 2000 as a response to the dot-com bubble. Because of intensifying investor pressure, the founders of Google had to embrace the use of advertising for profits, something they had strictly opposed before (Zuboff, 2019b; McPherson, 2011). The original symbiotic relationship between Google and its users, Google using user data to improve its search engines and the users having free access to better services, was unilaterally abandoned. Here the concept of "Behavioral Surplus" was born. Behavioral surplus means the use of behavioral data beyond the mere improvement of services (Lyon, 2019). These data are produced along people's everyday activities (Khalek, 2021; Thatcher et al., 2015). While some data was still used for service improvement, the surplus data became the raw material filling the supply chains of surveillance capitalists. According to Zuboff (2015), "Nothing is too trivial [...] for

this harvesting: Facebook 'likes, 'Google searches, emails, texts, photos, songs, and videos, location, communication patterns, networks, purchases, movements, every click, misspelled word, page view, and more." (p. 79). This means that massive amounts of data about billions of users are harvested for their rich predictive signals about individual user behavior. Using AI, these data flows with immense amounts of predictive signals are then converted into prediction products of people's current and future behavior. Hence, the workflow shifted from using data for the improvement of services to using data for selling certainty about the behavior of individuals and groups to a wide range of customers (Amnesty International, 2019), on what Zuboff (2019b) calls "behavioral futures markets" (p. 117). While the prediction products were first meant for companies trying to maximize their advertising revenues, the range of customers grew, ranging from insurance companies and law enforcement to political campaigns. (Amnesty International, 2019; Khalek, 2021; Landwehr et al., 2019). Although the selling of prediction products for targeted advertising itself is subject to heavy critique, it is the use in law enforcement, politics or intelligence agencies that creates the biggest concerns (Amnesty International, 2019; Zuboff, 2019b; Jørgensen, 2019; Lawrence, 2018).

Because the services are free and users "voluntarily" chose to use them, Surveillance Capitalists quickly claimed ownership of the data, something that Zuboff repeatedly calls theft (Powers, 2020) and Thatcher et al. (2015) call "data colonialism" (p. 990), considering the huge profits of Big Tech based on this data (Gartenberg, 2022). While Zuboff (2019b) and Thatcher et al. (2015) strictly criticize this state of affairs, Voiovich (2020) references the underlying public value tradeoffs. He emphasizes that even though many people know their data is being taken by e.g., accepting cookies, they simply do not care or accept it for the services to remain free. Thus, while criticism is justified, it is essential to keep in mind the underlying societal value tradeoffs. However, many researchers question the voluntary character of the choice that individuals have to make (Held, 2021, Amnesty International, 2019; Zuboff, 2019b). The argument is that Big Tech and its services have grown so essential for people's lives, that while in theory, people could choose e.g., an alternative messenger to WhatsApp, they would have to make big compromises in utility as the majority of people in their environment probably use WhatsApp (Amnesty International, 2019; Friedmann, 2015). By growing so large in user base and operational dominance, Big Tech firms created so-called "network effects", growing their value and utility for people with every new user (Staab, 2019; Held, 2021, Amnesty International, 2019; Zuboff, 2019b; Friedmann, 2015). With platforms and services becoming necessities for people's everyday lives and participation, Big Tech companies created "data

mines" that produce trillions of data points, that, computed into behavior prediction products, are sold to diverse customers trying to use the certainty for their particular interest like marketing of a product or political campaigning. Essential for this to work is that these processes are hidden from the general public to avoid resistance (Zuboff, 2019b; Andrew et al., 2021; Khalek, 2021). While Surveillance Capitalists try to exhaust every data point available, they do so in an intentionally hidden and undetectable manner (Zuboff, 2019a).

All this amounts to questions of knowledge and power that define this new logic of accumulation. Zuboff (2019b) frames this relation using the questions "Who knows?", "Who decides?" and "Who decides who decides?" (p. 215), exploring the intricacies of how knowledge and power come together. This relation of knowledge to power brings about many of the threatening consequences of SC that Zuboff (2019b) and others are warning about, ranging from threats to privacy and data protection, human rights, and democracy (Jørgensen, 2019; Amnesty International, 2019) to the alienation of people's behavior and experience (Jooste, 2021; Lawrence, 2018). Acknowledging these diverse consequences, scholars have identified a problem with the framing of the issues. While the threats to democracy, human rights, and essentially human autonomy are the most concerning, the public and political discussion is often framed mainly in terms of privacy or market implications (Zuboff, 2016; Benner, 2018; Menand, 2018). According to Morozov (2019), this lack of understanding of the full scale of consequences has plagued the resistance against Big Tech, with most activists only attacking them for privacy violations.

Having established an understanding of the origin, mechanisms, and consequences of SC and identifying that the concept builds on asymmetries of knowledge by hiding its processes from the public, it is important to look at possible countermeasures. Acknowledging this hiding and concealing inherent in SC, the literature frequently mentions the opposite as a countermeasure, naming, educating, raising awareness, and awakening the public (Zuboff 2019b; Khalek, 2021; Lyon, 2019; Landwehr et al., 2019). It is precisely at this point that the media plays a critical role as according to Rhomberg (2007), political information in democracies is almost exclusively disseminated through the media, making them a switchman, leading to either illuminating the public or, intentionally or unintentionally, keeping the public in the dark.

2.3 Agenda Setting Power of Newspapers

After elaborating on SC and identifying the lack of public knowledge as key in its scaffolding as well as the opposite, education and public awareness, as possible remedies, this section discusses the role that the mass media plays in facilitating just this. By identifying the media as a prime influencer of public opinion, this section motivates the investigation of how issues of SC are discussed in the media.

The integral role of mass media in modern democratic societies has been demonstrated by a long list of scholars and is also reflected in various constitutional texts and laws, making them known as the "fourth estate" (Luhmann, 1996; Rhomberg, 2007; BPB, 2016). According to Luhmann (1996) the media as windows on the world, enable the introspection, understanding, and involvement in society. Through its information and orientation function, the mass media constitute an important source for our perception of reality by selecting specific issues (agenda setting), providing necessary information, and on that basis influencing public opinion, Rhomberg (2007) even stating that the mass media constitutes the main source of information on societal and political issues. Public opinion is defined as the structural coupling of mass media to politics (Rhomberg, 2007) which is why the ways in which the media covers public issues are often used as an indicator of public opinion. The intricate relationship between media sources as influencers of public opinion has been confirmed by scholars like Lippmann (1922) or McCombs (2011). This relation between the news media and public opinion was tested by McCombs and Shaw (1972) in the Chapel Hill study, which examined the correspondence between important issues of the news and important issues of the public and found strong support for the agenda-setting theory, "that the media's agenda set the public's agenda" (McCombs & Guo, 2014, p. 251). The basic premise is that the news media can influence the importance that the public places on specific issues. This goes beyond merely putting a topic on the agenda. McCombs (2008) refers to attribute agenda-setting, which can be understood as the influence that the news media has on the understanding and perspectives that people have on the topics, by emphasizing specific attributes of that topic over others e.g., emphasizing privacy over competition in the context of SC.

Newspapers, even though facing increasing pressure in the wake of the internet and social media, are still among the most influential and trusted types of media outlets, especially in Germany with Europe's biggest newspaper market (Horz-Ishak & Thomass, 2021; HORIZONT, 2021). In 2020 around 70% of Germans over 14, regularly consumed newspapers

with the digital options becoming increasingly important among the younger population (BDZV, 2020). Although overall and in contrast to e.g., social media, newspapers are losing ground in viewership and might not have the same direct influence they had in the past, they still possess tremendous influence. This is because aside from being a direct source of information, newspapers often act as multipliers to other outlets like social media. A study of news ecosystems in 2009 concluded that although the ecosystem was changing rapidly, "most of what the public learns is still overwhelmingly driven by traditional media—particularly newspapers." (Pew Research Center, 2010, para. 4). The findings suggested that most news outlets published no original reporting but instead, contained information that was reproduced mostly from newspapers. Thus, original information, reported by newspapers, although not primarily finding its way to the audience via the newspaper, sets the narrative agenda for other outlets to follow (Pew Research Center, 2010).

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that (1) SC, is a logic of accumulation that claims human experience to produce behavior prediction products that can be used for a wide range of activities and carry diverse consequences for individuals and societies. It was shown (2) that this logic rests on processes designed to be hidden and obscured from the public and that (3) scholars have, based on this assumption, called for naming, educating and a "public awakening" as possible countermeasures. Furthermore, it was shown, (4) that the mass media, especially newspapers play a critical role in delivering the basis for these countermeasures by informing, educating, and "awakening" the public and influencing public opinion through mechanisms like agenda setting. Thus, deriving from this chapter, one could expect that what the public knows or does not know about SC is highly dependent on how the media reports. Considering that the public so far has very little understanding of the particularities, scope, and magnitude of the consequences, one could expect the reporting of newspapers to be somewhat flawed, biased, or insufficient.

3. Methods

3.1 Introduction

As this thesis aims to uncover and derive meaning from newspaper articles for interpretation to answer the research question, a capable method that structures and guides this uncovering of meaning needs to be employed. As texts, including newspaper articles, often contain very complex and hidden meanings, systematic handling of the data is essential. As there are many possible meanings within a text, the interpretation might differ from reader to reader. Thus, it is necessary to guide the reader through the process to make the interpretation comprehensible, transparent, and reproducible. For this to happen, this chapter situates the thesis within an interpretive approach, explains the preparatory steps taken before the analysis, and motivates the selection of the case, the process of collecting and preparing the sample, and how the data is used in the qualitative content analysis. By giving detailed insights into the methodological underpinnings of this thesis, this chapter discloses the process from raw data to meaning and finally to interpretation.

3.2 Case Description

The public discussion around SC has a relatively long history in Germany. While issues like Big Tech, AI, privacy, and data protection are widely established topics of discussion, Germany was at the forefront when explicitly discussing these topics in terms of SC. Attesting to this is that the term SC was first mentioned by Zuboff in the German Newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in 2014 (Zuboff, 2014; Morozov, 2019), while Zuboff's book *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, which much of today's debate is based on, was first published in German (Herteux, 2019). While it is no secret that both Germany and the EU are lacking behind other global players, mainly the USA and China, in the development of Big Tech, AI, etc. (Castro & McLaughlin, 2021; Righi et al., 2021), they are frequently looked at and portrayed in the media as the forefront and factor of hope when it comes to regulation, especially after the introduction of the GDPR (STOA, 2021). In light of the recent scandals involving Big Tech and the new regulatory steps taken by the EU with the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Digital Markets Act (DMA), to regulate Big Tech companies, the discussion of SC is very topical across a multitude of media outlets. The selected case for this thesis is the German media, represented by a selection of the highest circulating German newspapers. The object of analysis is a sample of 197 online and print articles from those newspapers. Newspapers are

chosen as the case because, although their relative importance in contrast to other media outlets like social media continues to decline, in Germany they remain very important and highly trusted (BDZV, 2020). Furthermore, as described above, newspapers have a multiplier function, setting the agenda with original reporting for other news outlets (Pew Research Center, 2010). Hence, considering that mass-media coverage can influence public understanding, perception, and, potentially, action (Wilson, 1995; Boykoff & Rajan, 2007), this thesis aims at analyzing how issues of SC are communicated in German newspaper articles, by using content analysis to extract and systematically interpret meaning from the text and answer the research questions.

3.3 Method of Data Collection

The selection of the case was done by determining newspapers with high circulation, differing political orientations and quality of the content. The selected newspapers are the tabloid newspaper *Bild*, representing the highest-circulating newspaper in Germany and Europe (WAN-IFRA, 2016; deutschland.de, 2012). The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, a more conservative broadsheet, the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, a more left-leaning broadsheet, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, a politically left and economically neoliberal broadsheet, *Die Tageszeitung* which is a more alternative leftist broadsheet, the *Handelsblatt*, a neoliberal business newspaper and finally *Die Zeit*, a left-leaning, extensively digital broadsheet (deutschland.de, 2012; IVW, 2022). Although comparatively analyzing the newspapers, would definitely create valuable insights, it is not the aim of this thesis and thus, this selection was only done to ensure representivity across a broad spectrum of political orientations and to include both tabloids and broadsheets. Considering that online newspapers are becoming increasingly important, especially among the younger population, which arguably uses the services of Big Tech firms the most (Pew Research Center, 2021), this thesis analyzed both print and digital publications. Given that scholars credit Google's switch of stance towards advertisements around the year 2000 (McPherson, 2011) as the invention of SC (Zuboff, 2019b), this study analyzed articles from 01.01.2000 until 20.05.2022.

The articles were selected if they contained the following keywords, derived from theorizing on SC and coding trial articles: Surveillance Capitalism, *Überwachungskapitalismus,* Shoshana Zuboff, *Informationskapitalismus,* Big Tech, Targeted Advertising, *zielgerichtete Werbung.* In order to find all relevant articles, truncations of the words were used, and to eliminate e.g., articles talking of surveillance unrelated to Big Tech the terms Surveillance and

Überwachung were searched in combination with others, e.g., (Surveil* AND "Big Tech"). The search for the articles was done via two websites with access to current and archived newspaper articles from the selected newspapers. First the Nexis Uni database, including all the newspapers used in this study except for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Second, the Datenbank-Infosystem (DBIS) of the *Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster*, providing the archives of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. The initial search identified a sample of 1453 articles. Following a screen for relevance using the title and short description and removing duplicates, 722 articles remained. The articles were downloaded, organized into the different publishers, and numbered for sampling. For the final sample, which set out to include around 200 articles, 28 articles were supposed to be sub-sampled out for each publisher. As *Bild* (3) and *Frankfurter Rundschau* (24) had less than 28 articles, the remaining 29 articles were equally filled by the other publishers amounting to 34 articles for *Süddeutsche Zeitung, Die Tageszeitung, Die Zeit, Handelsblatt* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and 3 for *Bild* and 24 for the *Frankfurter Rundschau*. Using the random number generator by Stattrek.com (see Appendix), the sample was drawn for each publisher, finally containing 197 newspaper articles for analysis.

3.4 Method of Data Analysis

For the data analysis of the articles, this study employed a content analysis in order to shed light on the key issues, public values, and messages of SC that are discussed in the newspapers. In general, the purpose of content analysis is "to organize and elicit meaning from the data collected and to draw realistic conclusions from it" (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 8). Because a central aim of this thesis is to uncover to what extent the media communicates the full picture of SC, a deductive coding scheme was developed prior to the analysis, breaking the most relevant aspects of the phenomenon into themes, categories, and codes. Through theoretical thinking and studying literature on SC and related issues, 3 themes breaking down the phenomenon in the most relevant perspectives, *User Perspective, Democracy & Human Rights,* and *Capitalism & Economy* were developed. The categories represent how the themes manifest themselves in reality, while the codes, derived from keywords and common terminology, make the phenomenon observable in the data. However, since the concept of SC does not make any claims in regards to how it might be covered in the media, additional, unforeseen themes, categories or codes were expected to come up during the first round of coding. Hence, a purely

deductive approach to coding would have been imprecise, and instead, a combination of deductive and inductive, called abductive coding, was chosen.

Table 1. Coding Scheme

Theme/Perspective	Category	Code
User Perspective	Privacy & Data Protection	Regulation, Abuses of data protection, Mass Surveillance
	Behavior Modification	Targeted advertising, Prediction products, Human autonomy
	Individual Benefits	Free services, Better services, Social participation
Democracy & Society	Epistemic Inequality	Asymmetries of knowledge, Hidden operations
	Information Civilization	Social scoring, Mass surveillance, Data streams to other customers
	Democratic Institutions	Elections, Totalitarianism, cyber security, hate speech & extreme content, disinformation, Lobbywork of Big Tech
Capitalism & Economy	Logic of Accumulation	Accumulation and trade of user data, prediction products, Individual user profiles, Free services, Targeted advertising
	Competition	Monopoly, Economic power of Big Tech, Unfair practices, Regulation
	Innovation & Development	Economic development, Solutionisim, Better services
Additional Codes		Explanatory
Public Value		Consumer Protection
		Data Literacy & Sovereignty
		Economic Development & Innovation
		Fair Competition
		Freedom
		Justice & Equality
		Privacy & Data Protection
		Protecting Democracy
		Protecting Human Rights
		State Security & Sovereignty
		Transparency
		Utility

During the first round of analysis, the articles were coded using the deductive coding scheme. Here the text, broken down into paragraphs, was coded by assigning one or multiple "summative, salient, essence-capturing" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 3) codes trying to capture the meaning. As most of the literature and thus the coding scheme are in English, the German

articles were assigned English codes. Coding the entirety of the sample, constructed the concept of SC in the way that it is discussed in the newspapers. If most paragraphs concern e.g., privacy and regulation, these codes are assigned the most, producing a clear picture of issues prevalent in the newspapers. As recommended by Saldaña (2016) for solo coding, memos and comments recorded the emergence of new issues and ideas for refining the codes and prominent public values. Based on these recordings and with reflections of the supervisor, the deductive coding scheme was refined by adding new codes for recurring issues, e.g., *Lobbywork of Big Tech* and merging e.g., *DSA* and *DMA* into *Regulation*, to include other regulations like the GDPR as well.

Furthermore, next to the codes structured within the themes, additional codes were created to highlight specific paragraphs to facilitate the answering of the research questions. The code *Explanatory* was added for sections that went beyond mere reporting and gave background information or explained a concept, law, or theory. Moreover, the memos capturing the most prevalent public values were converted into codes like e.g., *Transparency* or *Utility*. Furthermore, the nine categories of the coding scheme also received particular codes. In addition to the concrete codes of the coding scheme, these more inclusive, summative codes were assigned to paragraphs to capture the overall topic of that paragraph and easily identify the most prevalent issues. With this updated, abductive coding scheme (Table 1.), the second round of coding was done, serving as the basis for the analysis. Because the content analysis is very time-consuming and relies on very systematic handling of data, Atlas.ti was used to organize and guide the coding, recording, and analysis. The analysis produced mainly qualitative results like reflections on specific keywords, citations, and public values but was aided by quantitative Code-Document tables to capture overall tendencies in salience and weight of issues.

3.5 Conclusion

Within a qualitative interpretive research approach, employing a content analysis of newspaper articles, this thesis answers the research question, *In what ways are the existence and consequences of Surveillance Capitalism discussed in German newspaper coverage?*. First, based on the literature on SC a deductive coding scheme was constructed. Second, this coding scheme was used for the first round of coding while simultaneously, memos about emergent themes, categories, codes, and public values were created that had previously not been included in the coding scheme. Third, based on these memos, the coding scheme was updated. Fourth,

the second round of coding was conducted using this abductive coding scheme, of which the results served as the basis for analysis.

4. Analysis

4.1 Introduction

Divided into the three sub-questions, this chapter shows first, how the German newspapers, discuss and frame SC in a biased and flawed manner, emphasizing issues of privacy and competition over issues that according to scholars, demand more public attention and critical discussions like the threats to democracy, human rights and especially human autonomy. Secondly, by explaining SC as an unprecedented threat and not relating its mechanisms to their historical origins in capitalism, the newspapers paint a picture that demonizes SC, in contrast, to supposedly "stable" and "healthy" capitalism, disregarding that the underlying problems of SC are nothing but an exacerbation of capitalism itself. Thirdly, by disseminating and promoting inherently capitalist public values like fair competition, consumer protection, and privacy and data protection, while neglecting public values critical of capitalism, the newspapers demonize SC as a "nasty" and "ill" perversion of the otherwise benevolent "normal" capitalism. Put together this means that the German newspapers paint an incomplete picture. Considering the influence of the news media on the knowledge of the public, the formation of public opinion, and considering that scholars regularly mention that the resistance to SC starts with dissolving the asymmetries of knowledge, facilitating a "public awakening" and eventually making collective action possible, this flawed discussion in the news media raises concerns for the future of our democratic societies and human autonomy.

The chapters are structured moving from general findings, giving an overview, towards more specific, striking aspects of the results. While for the overview, quantitative results like tables and numbers are used, the latter part of each chapter qualitatively looks at specific expressions and citations, uncovers their meaning, and builds an interpretation for the answering of the research questions. The first sub-chapter establishes, both quantitatively and qualitatively, what the main issues are that the discussion around SC revolves around, giving a first insight into what the media and hence the public emphasizes and views as crucial to discuss. The second sub-chapter displays when and how the newspapers move beyond mere reporting on issues, to give more elaborated background information and hence explain issues of SC. This gives insight into what the public is not only informed about but is substantially educated on, facilitating a more meaningful public discussion. Lastly, the third sub-chapter discusses the prevalent public values apparent in the discussion. As societal discussions are usually framed

in connection to specific public values and often take place in a context of conflicting public values, this discussion gives insight into what the most important conflicts are and which public values are disseminated through the news media.

By 1st, establishing the key themes and angles of the discussion, 2nd making an inquiry on the public knowledge on the issue, and 3rd discussing the prevalent public values and their conflicts, the results paint a clear picture of how the newspapers discuss the existence and consequences of SC.

4.2 Media Framing of Key Issues of Surveillance Capitalism

This section presents the results of the analysis relevant to the 1st sub-question, *What are the main issues that are communicated in the context of Surveillance Capitalism?*. As described in the theory part, the news media has considerable influence on public opinion and the ways in which the public perceives, evaluates, and discusses issues of societal importance. Considering that societal topics are very multifaceted and complex and can be approached from a variety of angles with different emphases, the choice of angles and emphases made by the media has a direct impact on how the public perceives, evaluates, and discusses the topics. Especially since many of the themes related to SC like AI or the internet are such cross-cutting issues, offering multiple angles of discussion, determining the main issues and the issues that are not as prevalent is crucial. The following chapter shows that while the issues that were identified as important and integral to SC, are indeed discussed, there are clear differences between the weight that is given and the way that the news media reports on each particular issue. In line with criticism from scholars like Zuboff (2016), Benner (2018), and Morozov (2019), the data reveals that issues of privacy, data protection, and competition are significantly emphasized above issues of democracy, human rights, or the threat to human autonomy.

Considering that repetition and regular discussion of specific issues are important factors for their salience on the public agenda (Rhomberg, 2007), the different categories (as codes) were compared in regards to their quantitative weight using Code-Document tables, which show how some issues have a clear quantitative dominance over others. A look at the binarized numbers[1] shows that numerous articles discuss *Privacy & Data Protection* (128), *Logic of Accumulation* (124), and *Competition* (106), whereas *Epistemic Inequality* (48), *Behavior*

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[1] By binarizing, each article is either assigned a "1", if containing the code or a "0" if not containing the code. Thus, the result shows how many articles discussed a particular issue.

Modification (55), and *Democratic Institutions* (68) are not as frequently discussed (Table 2). When looking at the overall weight of each issue also within articles (Table 3), the emphasis and weight that is given to issues of *Privacy & Data Protection* (21,71) and *Competition* (15,23) become more evident as these two issues make up more than a third of the codes assigned. In line with agenda-setting theory, this emphasis means that these issues are perceived as important by the public, something that scholars have criticized because it supposedly hinders resistance against Big Tech (Zuboff, 2016; Benner, 2018; Menand, 2018; Morozov, 2019).

Table 2. Number of articles discussing a particular issue, binarized (Atlas.ti).

	n	Sum
Behavior Modification	95	55
Competition	294	106
Democratic Institutions	168	68
Epistemic Inequality	82	48
Individual Benefits	149	76
Information Civilization	252	89
Innovation & Development	166	86
Logic of Accumulation	305	124
Privacy & Data Protection	419	128
Sum		780

Table 3. The overall weight of the issues across all articles (Atlas.ti).

	n	Sum
Behavior Modification	95	4,92%
Competition	294	15,23%
Democratic Institutions	168	8,70%
Epistemic Inequality	82	4,25%
Individual Benefits	149	7,72%
Information Civilization	252	13,06%
Innovation & Development	166	8,60%
Logic of Accumulation	305	15,80%
Privacy & Data Protection	419	21,71%
Sum		100%

Although issues of behavior modification or the threat to democracy might, from a theoretical and holistic perspective, be the most concerning issues, the newspapers build their case mainly around issues of privacy and competition. This might be because they expect the privacy of Facebook chats, porn preferences, or surveillance to be the more pressing and acute issues for the reader. This quantitative dominance is confirmed and reinforced by looking at the discursive style of the respective paragraphs. Most articles have a critical stance toward the accumulation and handling of data by Big Tech. Many articles begin by describing both real and fictional everyday situations in which ordinary people are targets of surveillance and their data is being taken. This is often framed in rather dramatic terms e.g., when referring to data being taken by the "*Datenkrake*" meaning "data-kraken" or the "*Cookiemonster*" (Bender, 2021, p. 7). These terms show how the media tries to play with people's fears and create concerning, even apocalyptic (Diez, 2020) scenarios that excite, concern, and move the reader. The metaphor "*Datenkrake*" is a buzzword describing how e.g., Big Tech companies reach for personal data in a predatory way using their surveillance "tentacles". A similar pattern can be observed concerning competition. Many articles criticize the existing regulatory regime and its incapacity to protect the privacy and user data against the "*Datensammelwut*" (data collection rage) of the tech firms (Bialek et al., 2021, cookies section), terming it e.g., a "*Zahnloser Tiger*" (Toothless Tiger) (Duso, 2022, p. 10), helpless in a digital "*Wild West*" (Martin-Jung, 2021, p. 21; Duso, 2022, p. 10; Pfeffer & Nemitz, 2020, p. 18; Bergt, 2022, p. 9), dominated by Big Tech monopolies. Through the use of these vivid metaphors, the articles achieve to create a very threatening scenario, framing privacy, data protection, and competition as the most ominous and urgent issues and in doing so obscure and prevent the discussion of much more incisive and threatening issues.

In contrast, the implications for democratic institutions were discussed to a lesser extent and especially did not create the same sense of urgency. The issue was discussed mainly in reference to possible consequences for elections, the dissemination of disinformation, hate speech, and the immense lobby influence of Big Tech. In contrast to the previous issues, the use of metaphors and the creation of concerning scenarios were not as apparent, making the problem seem less important and creating less urgency. This is concerning as scholars rank these consequences among the most important and disturbing, considering that they undermine some of the defining foundations of democracies (Zuboff, 2019b; Lyon, 2019; Andrew et al., 2021). However, as can be observed in the data, it seems like especially the topics of elections,

disinformation, and hate speech receive increasing attention following the Cambridge Analytica scandal around Donald Trump's election, the attack on the US Capitol in 2021, and the developments of the Covid-19 pandemic, indicating that the media increasingly realizes the importance of these issues.

Another concerning result of the analysis is the extensive neglect of what many scholars believe to be among the most concerning consequences of SC, the modification of human behavior, and the threat to human autonomy (Zuboff, 2019b; Aho & Duffield, 2020; Andrew et al., 2021). This issue, while touched upon sporadically, receives very little weight in the discussion compared to other issues. This is alarming as, according to Zuboff (2019b) it is "essential to the very possibility of a democratic society" (p. 21), Aho and Duffield (2020) even labeling the means to behavioral modification as replacing the ownership of the means of production in relation to power. While numerous articles described the mechanisms of e.g., targeted advertising and prediction products, they rarely discussed the ethical underpinnings for autonomy and human nature. While some articles did use metaphors like personifications saying that behavior modification is the "*Herz der Finsternis des Überwachungskapitalismus*" (Heart of the darkness of Surveillance Capitalism) (Zuboff, 2019c, pp. 1, 16-17) and created similar dystopian scenarios like for privacy, those articles were mainly written by Zuboff. Overall, the very concerning threat to human autonomy that is created by e.g., algorithmic decision making, prediction products, nudging, and targeted advertisements, is not depicted and discussed as vividly as issues of privacy or competition are. Hence, the public is less likely to have this issue in mind and express concern when discussing SC, which in turn leads to less public action and might result in e.g., regulations not considering these threats sufficiently.

The results paint a clear picture. First, while all issues are discussed to some extent, privacy, data protection, and competition stand out by being most frequently discussed as well as being framed as the most threatening and urgent by the use of metaphors and the creation of concerning scenarios. Second, this happens at the expense of issues of democracy and behavior modification that are significantly less prevalent and are not framed in similar "apocalyptic" or "doomsday" language. Third, this neglect, of what many scholars see as the most concerning consequences of SC, has, according to agenda-setting theory, a direct influence on the attention these issues receive in the public discussion. Fourth, with public opinion and public action being named key factors for counteraction against SC, this lack of salience categorically stands in the way of collective action that could produce meaningful change.

4.3 Explanatory Value of Media Coverage of Surveillance Capitalism

The saying "What you don't know won't hurt you" is a fallacy that is particularly concerning in the context of SC. Chapter 2 laid out the connection between asymmetries of knowledge and the flourishing of SC, identified education of the public, and unmasking of the underlying mechanisms as key countermeasures, and described the importance of mass media for our societal and political knowledge and understanding (Rhomberg, 2007). In order to develop an elaborate understanding of the issue, the public thus has to be saturated with information going beyond "breaking news" and superficial reporting. Considering these assumptions, especially since the public tends to use and consume increasingly abbreviated forms of news like social media, tweets, etc., (Hudak, 2016), it is important to evaluate the explanatory character of articles in regards to SC. Hence, this section discusses the 2nd sub-question, *To what extent do the German newspapers explain the concept of Surveillance Capitalism?*. First, this chapter discusses the overall explanatory character of the articles, giving insight into what is explained and what lacks sufficient explanation. Secondly, it will be discussed what the insufficient explanation of the connection between basic capitalistic prerogatives and SC means for public discussion and society.

Going back to the quantitative results of the analysis shows that the *Logic of Accumulation* was both in numbers of articles (124) and overall weight within articles (15,80) the second most talked about issue, while the result of a Query-Tool analysis showed that it was the issue that the articles dedicated the most explanatory parts to. A specific focus was laid on explaining the many ways in which, mainly but not exclusively, Big Tech firms gather, handle and sell user data. Here everything from the data gathering online by e.g., Facebook and Google, services like Uber or Alexa to describing data points gathered by smart homes or during car rides was thoroughly explained. Numerous articles substantially informed about the functioning of cookies, browser fingerprints, and other methods of tracking user data. Also explained in great detail were the processes that, with the use of AI, turned this data into marketable prediction products mainly in the form of targeted advertising. There is a surprisingly elaborate explanation of how and why these prediction products are increasingly being used not only by advertisers but also by insurance companies or credit institutes e.g., for setting insurance rates, credit scores, or punitive measures.

Alarmingly, significantly less attention was given to explaining the uses of prediction products and user profiles for non-commercial interests like intelligence agencies, law enforcement, or immigration agencies, that use them e.g., for more preventive migration policies using facial recognition, lie detectors, or automated decision making, critically endangering human rights regarding e.g., discrimination or racial profiling (Bircan & Korkmaz, 2021; Amnesty International, 2019). These data streams from private companies to governmental institutions, the various concerning ways this data is used, and the possible consequences are barely explained even though they deserve to be disclosed and discussed in the public specifically. Another central factor for the functioning of SC that was mostly neglected is the epistemic inequality and its associated asymmetries of knowledge and hidden operations of Big Tech. Although a few articles mentioned these issues, they are mostly presented as an unintentional byproduct of the logic of accumulation rather than an essential working mechanism. This lack of explanation of the centrality of these factors for the functioning of SC creates an incomplete picture for the public, holds the criticized asymmetries of knowledge in place, and prevents meaningful public discussion. Nevertheless, the newspaper articles designated a considerable amount of text for explanatory sections on the concept of SC going beyond superficial reporting and providing background information and context on many particularities of the logic of accumulation.

However, while the working mechanisms of SC, from data accumulation, mass surveillance, and prediction products to targeted advertising were explained and discussed in great detail, a discussion of the inherently capitalistic background of SC and its mechanisms took place very sporadically. Thus, what Morozov (2019) criticized about Zuboff's conceptualization of SC, applies to some extent also to the articles. By leaving out the underlying societal conflicts and mechanisms of capitalism, the articles, in line with Zuboff (2019b), portray the phenomenon of SC as something entirely new and unprecedented. While it is true that the rise of the digital, the internet, and data have changed the way many firms operate, the underlying structures still stick to the same prerogatives of endless accumulation of capital, property rights, the oppression of workers, the division between center and periphery, etc. While there is frequent explanation and criticism of these mechanisms in the context of SC in the articles, e.g., the endless accumulation of data, ownership of data, etc., by not explaining and relating them to their theoretical origins, they are made to seem unrelated to "normal" capitalism. While this could just be a consequence of limiting the explanations to the concrete topic at hand, it carries with it a very naive way of looking at the status quo that manifests itself in the values and

solutions that are proposed. Numerous articles employ the same logic that Zuboff applies when she refers to a new "rogue" form of capitalism, which by necessity carries the assumption of the existence of a "normal", non-rogue capitalism. The articles frequently frame SC as standing in the way of a stable (Mason, 2016), healthy (Zuboff, 2016), or responsible (Senard, 2021) capitalism, that embodies the "right" relation between work and capital and has just and fair property rights. This makes it seem like SC is the issue and that when cleansed of the surveillance aspect, capitalism is a healthy, stable, and functioning system for everybody involved. This fact critically obscures that the underlying dynamics and problems of SC, like inequality, exploitation, externalities for humanity and nature, etc., are actually problems of capitalism itself, encouraging the public to discuss SC without questioning its foundation, capitalism. Hence, the lack of explanation for the historical and structural origin of SC as well as the explanatory and analytical distance to the underlying mechanisms of capitalism, carry consequences for the public understanding and evaluation of SC. Although most articles evaluate SC very critically, they seem to not dare voice criticism of its essence, capitalism. This also manifests itself in the public values that are communicated in the articles, which carry a very critical stance towards SC but do not extend this criticism to capitalism itself.

4.4 Media Communication of Public Values Related to Surveillance Capitalism

The discussion of issues that are of political and societal importance always carries particular public values. On the one hand, the news media discusses the public values that are prevalent in society but on the other hand, also has a big influence on the public values that the society picks up. Depending on the dissemination and discussion of public values in the media, the public will tend to emphasize and hold particular public values over others. In line with agenda-setting theory and through framing, "the media not only tell us what to think about, but also how to think about it (McCombs & Shaw, 1993, p. 65). Hence, if the media reports on e.g., AI, mainly referring to the benefits like increased efficiency or innovation in medicine, the public will rank public values like health or innovation higher than if the media mainly frames the issue in terms of job loss or AI weapons, in which case the public will probably emphasize values like security, peace, and employee protection. Especially because many of the features of SC like the internet or AI are very ambivalent, so-called general-purpose technologies (GPTs), they come with immense potential as well as risks that often manifest themselves in conflicting public values. First, this section discusses the general results of the analysis, showing which public values were discussed most frequently and which ones were not, as well

as highlighting the most prevalent conflicts. Second, this section discusses the paradoxical finding that by emphasizing public values like data protection, fair competition, and innovation over human rights, justice, and equality, the articles portray a very "anti-surveillance capitalist" picture but paradoxically shy away from an anticapitalistic tone.

Not surprisingly and in line with the findings of the previous chapters, the public values that were communicated most frequently were *Privacy & Data Protection* (18,15), *Fair Competition* (14,62), and *Consumer Protection* (10,25) (Table 4). This mainly manifested itself via first, the reporting on existing and proposed regulations like the DSA and DMA that heavily focus on these issues, and second, via articles communicating them as something that is needed to be protected or promoted. On the other hand, the public values of *Utility* (10,56) and *Freedom* (9,08), including freedom of speech, freedom of the internet, etc., newly appeared as important in the discussion. Both public values were most often mentioned in situations of conflicting values.

Table 4. The overall weight of the public values across all articles (Atlas.ti).

	n	Sum
Value - Consumer Protection	61	10,25%
Value - Data Literacy/Sovereignty	22	3,70%
Value - Economic Development and Innovation	34	5,71%
Value - Fair Competition	87	14,62%
Value - Freedom	54	9,08%
Value - Justice and Equality	15	2,52%
Value - Privacy and Data Protection	108	18,15%
Value - Protecting Democracy	41	6,89%
Value - Protecting Human Rights	34	5,71%
Value - State Security/Sovereignty	35	5,88%
Value - Transparency	41	6,89%
Value - Utility	63	10,59%
Sum		100%

One of the most prevalent conflicts of public values was between *Freedom* and *Consumer Protection*. This mostly appeared in situations where free speech and a free unregulated cyberspace clashed with issues of hate speech, disinformation, and extreme content. These conflicts were particularly pronounced in the past couple of years around Trump's presidential election, his Twitter ban, and the disinformation issues regarding the Covid-19 pandemic (Diez, 2021; FAZ, 2021). They have become central points of contestation in our digital societies with buzzwords like censorship, cancel culture, and fake news. Another central public value conflict

that emerged from the articles was between *Utility* and *Privacy & Data protection*, which is paradigmatic for the many dilemmas that emerge in the context of ambivalent GPTs. As this conflict is one of many facets and manifestations there were numerous examples like the use of facial recognition technology and databases for the identification of casualties in the war in Ukraine (Lobe, 2022) or, which was a very prominent discussion, the use of data-enabled services for the containment of the Covid-19 pandemic, were utility in terms of public health clashed with concerns about state surveillance and lacking data protection (Simanowski, 2020; Tréguer, 2020; Diez, 2020). However, one of the most relevant conflicts between utility and data protection for this thesis, the dilemma of using the services of e.g., Google and Facebook for free but having to accept "payment" in personal data was discussed by very few articles. Although representing a defining conflict of SC, it lacked comprehensive coverage, preventing a needed discussion of the so-called "Privacy Paradox" and the widespread acceptance of surrendering personal data instead of having to pay for the services. Furthermore, public values like *Justice & Equality* as well as *Data Sovereignty* were mostly neglected in the articles although being critically at risk in the face of SC and the growing inequalities in knowledge, wealth, and power.

A key insight that the analysis delivered was, that while public values that are specifically threatened by SC like *Privacy & Data Protection*, *Fair Competition*, *Consumer Protection,* and *Transparency* were discussed and promoted a lot, public values that addressed the underlying problems of capitalism like *Justice & Equality* or *Data Sovereignty* in terms of ownership, were not as prevalent. Even further, the public values defining a "normal" capitalist system like *Fair Competition*, *Consumer Protection*, or *Economic Development & Innovation* were amongst the most prominent and promoted ones. This emphasis and promotion of some values over others defined a specific tone that was apparent in the majority of articles. As indicated above, most articles had a very critical tone in regards to SC, its mechanisms, and consequences but very few questioned the underlying processes and problems of "normal" capitalism or drew the connection. instead, the majority of them portrayed SC as impeding normal capitalism from functioning, (Mason, 2016) stating for example, *"dass sich die Informationstechnologie keineswegs als Grundlage für einen neuartigen, stabilen Kapitalismus eignet. Ganz im Gegenteil: Sie löst ihn auf. Sie zersetzt die Marktmechanismen, höhlt die Eigentumsrechte aus und zerstört die Beziehung zwischen Einkommen, Arbeit und Profit."* (p. 3), or even more uncritical towards capitalism, *"Der Kapitalismus ist von einem lukrativen Überwachungsprojekt usurpiert worden, das [...] jene   Einheit von Angebot und*

Nachfrage untergräbt, die über Jahrhunderte für eine Abstimmung mit den tatsächlichen Bedürfnissen der Menschen und Gesellschaften sorgte" (Zuboff, 2016, p. 11). The underlying, very questionable message of both paragraphs is that "normal" capitalism has been "usurped" by surveillance and information technology that now prevent the "stable" relation between work and capital, property rights and destroy the balance of supply and demand that for centuries matched the needs of our societies. The critical stance towards SC without meaningful criticism of capitalism makes it seem like it is in the public's interest to return to the "good old days" of "normal" capitalism instead of living through this "perverted" form usurped by Surveillance. Overall, the emphasis on the promotion of values like fair competition, consumer protection, free markets, and economic development implies that public values are mainly derived from the economy or the market, with predetermined prerogatives like growth, consumption, and competition. Especially by using dramatic expressions like "*Raubtiere*" meaning predators (Halimi & Rimbert, 2021, pp. 22-23) or "*Killer-Akquisitionen*" meaning killer acquisitions (Duso, 2022, p. 10; Kafsack, 2021, para. 11) when referring to the threat to public values like fair competition, the newspapers frame them as specifically important for the discussion of SC. Hence, these public values are significantly emphasized over public values like justice and equality that directly question the underlying problems and consequences of capitalism or data sovereignty that questions property rights and commodification. By discussing and spreading these former public values, the newspapers set the agenda for criticism, discussion, and questioning of SC while the neglect of the latter prevents the fundamental debate and questioning of the basic capitalist prerogatives of unlimited accumulation of capital, commodification, private property or competition.

4.5 Conclusion

In the first place, the analysis has shown that the articles touch upon a broad range of issues in the context of SC but through the use of threatening metaphors and the creation of apocalyptic scenarios significantly emphasize issues of privacy, data protection, and competition over issues that are seen by many scholars as deserving more emphasis like the threats to liberal democracy, human rights and especially human autonomy. In the second place, and in line with agenda-setting theory the concerning neglect of the latter issues paints a very incomplete and deficient image of SC in the public, leading to insufficient public attention and critical discussion of those issues endangering not only our societies and liberal democracies but also the very nature of our human sovereignty.

In the second place, the German newspapers provided an elaborate explanation of numerous particularities that define the concept of SC. There were extensive explanations of the logic of accumulation starting from the various ways of data accumulation and surveillance, to the processes of data analysis and handling of the data and ending with the multiple uses of the finished prediction products. On the other hand, however, by conceptualizing SC as an unprecedented and siloed phenomenon with its own particular logic of accumulation, they neglect the relation of its processes and problems to their historical origins in capitalism and hence create the flawed and misleading impression that SC is a rogue, evil form of capitalism that prevents a supposed "normal" and "healthy" capitalism from flourishing.

In the third place, the analysis has shown that the German newspapers discuss and promote the public values related to SC very unevenly, mainly framing the debate in terms of privacy, data protection, fair competition, and consumer protection, thus mostly public values from the economic space that are threatened by SC. Secondly, they promote these values at the expense of public values like justice and equality or data sovereignty that relate to very basic problems of capitalism like inequality, exploitation, or unequal property rights. This promotion of inherently capitalist public values in opposition to SC creates the impression that it is in the public's interest to cleanse the once "stable" and "healthy" capitalism of its new surveillance-based perversion.

5. Conclusion

In what ways are the existence and consequences of Surveillance Capitalism discussed in German newspaper coverage?

The ways in which the existence and consequences of SC are discussed in German newspapers are to a great extent a reflection of our still very conservative and settled western societies, stuck in a disenchanted world without mystery and radical questioning. While a few exceptional articles question the assumption that capitalism is the end of history, the majority do not dare to break off their shackles and escape their "iron cages" in the search for alternatives. Hence, SC, the related issues, and public values are mainly discussed, explained, and evaluated in capitalist terms in relation to consumption, competition, markets, and privacy at the expense of democracy, human rights, justice, and equality. This results in the fact that the very critical stance towards SC is not even considered to extend to capitalism itself and remedies and countermeasures are mainly suggested for returning to the "healthy" capitalism that we all learned to love.

The interpretation of the analysis has brought about several key insights, with implications for the media, politics, our societies, and essentially for ourselves as human beings. In the first place, the existence and consequences of SC seem to be an increasingly prominent issue in German newspapers but the ways in which they are presented are inherently flawed and misleading. In contrast to the picture painted by the newspapers, SC goes beyond privacy violations, monopolies, and surveillance but in line with scholars like Jørgensen (2019), Zuboff (2019b), or Lawrence (2018), more concerningly constitutes an alarming threat to democracies, human rights, and essentially human autonomy. Having in mind that the news media has a tremendous influence on "not only [...] what to think about, but also how to think about, and consequently, what to think" (McCombs & Shaw 1993, p. 65), this flawed framing of SC, paints an incomplete and misfocused picture of SC, preventing the public from the needed "public awakening" (Zuboff, 2019a). In the second place, the analysis has shown that the German newspapers make a substantial effort to move beyond the mere reporting of just shallow and trivial news and give a comprehensive explanation of SC. There is an extensive share of text that is dedicated to explaining the logic of accumulation including its technical intricacies from mass surveillance, cookies, and prediction products to targeted advertising with only the hidden processes and data streams to non-commercial, governmental customers

falling short. In the third place, the analysis showed that this extensive explanation of the mechanisms and logic does however come with a bitter undertone. This is because explaining the underlying mechanisms of SC as "rogue" perversions of otherwise "healthy", "stable" and "responsible" processes, obscures their historical, theoretical, and practical kinship to capitalism and misses the fact that it is not SC that is "rogue" in but rather the nature of capitalism itself. In disregard of the infinite ill consequences that societies had to endure for centuries because of capitalism from exploitation and oppression to gigantic inequalities in knowledge, wealth, and power, it is SC that is portrayed as the unprecedented evil that we so urgently have to get rid of. By unconditionally promoting inherently capitalist public values like fair competition, consumer protection, privacy, and data protection, over justice and equality or data sovereignty, capitalism is depicted as a fixed and unbreakable condition which in turn prevents much-needed fundamental public discussions and questioning of the status quo.

By delivering these insights, this thesis added to the scholarship of several interrelated fields from politics to economics and sociology. First and foremost, it has added to the scholarship of SC as, in an unprecedented attempt, it has carried out an inquiry into (1) how the fairly "new" phenomenon is picked up, discussed, and evaluated in the German media and in turn, in line with agenda-setting theory, (2) how and in what ways the public knows and evaluates the existence and consequences of SC. In line with scholars like Zuboff (2019b), Andrew et al. (2021), or Khalek (2021), the analysis, through the inquiry into media coverage, has shown that the public knowledge and understanding of SC is indeed very flawed and incomplete. Secondly, this thesis has added to the scholarship of critical theory, by pointing out in line with scholars like Morozov (2019), that even though the articles, as well as scholars like Zuboff, have a very critical stance towards the phenomenon, it seems as if they still do not dare to criticize what actually needs criticism, capitalism. On the contrary, much of what the articles emphasized like privacy and competition actually obscured this needed discussion and framed it in a self-reinforcing manner, leading back to submitting to capitalism. Given the insight of this thesis, future research should explore to what extent a better public understanding and knowledge of SC could actually lead to a "public awakening" that incites collective action. This could for example be done by comparing two different countries in regards to (1) their coverage of the phenomenon in the media, (2) their extent and content of collective demands for political and regulatory change, and (3) the influence and power that SC and Big Tech firms have in these particular countries.

Following the state-of-the-art literature and considering the insights created in this thesis, there are several practical implications for a variety of actors. First and foremost, directly stemming from this thesis, the news media must reevaluate their coverage of SC. They need to look beyond the "main" issues that the debate is currently focused on and more urgently frame and emphasize the concerning threats to democracy, human rights, and human autonomy. This could in turn lead to the public being more aware of the full range of consequences and motivate a more comprehensive discussion and possibly collective action.

Second, in line with remarks from scholars (Morozov, 2019; Benner, 2018), politicians and regulators must also follow this broader approach since as Zuboff (2019b) puts it, "Demanding privacy from surveillance capitalists or lobbying for an end to commercial surveillance on the internet is like asking Henry Ford to make each Model T by hand or asking a giraffe to shorten its neck." (p. 229). This quote perfectly shows the inherent flaws of the public discussion on SC and according to Morozov (2019), this focus on data protection and privacy violations has stood in the way of meaningful resistance. There is no point in asking them for more privacy as the whole business model builds on surveillance, data mining, and analysis. Although the DSA and DMA seem to be good first steps towards meaningful regulation, their focus on competition, consumer protection, and privacy is still too shallow, or as Patrick Breyer, from the Piraten party puts it, *Die Bezeichnung "Digitales Grundgesetz" verdient das neue Regelwerk insgesamt nicht, denn der enttäuschende Deal versagt vielfach beim Schutz unserer Grundrechte im Netz.* " (Wenge, 2022, para. 2), meaning that the regulation does not deserve the title "digital constitution" as the "disappointing" law does not protect our fundamental rights on the internet. Hence politicians and regulators should approach the topic from a more holistic perspective, perhaps even think about if a business model based on the commodification of private experience, prediction products, the resulting behavior modification, and threat to human autonomy is something our societies really need. Although unlikely, maybe a few brave-hearted souls could take this discussion even further by asking if the general state of our capitalist societies is really in the best interest of all of us and does not only serve a few. Especially the EU, stuck between Big Tech firms from totalitarian China and the USA, should take the opportunity and the confidence given to them by scholars and reevaluate their approach to regulating Big Tech and SC for a value-oriented, ethical digital future.

Last but not least, we as people and the smallest piece in the puzzle should recognize that it is eventually us who have the power to make a change. Either by voicing our discontent in a more comprehensive and collective form, pressuring governments and regulators into action or by making use of our powers as consumers, pressuring Big Tech firms into new business models, we have tremendous potential to shape our destiny. A start could be to break with the assumption that digital services should be free and hence accept the payment in data. As there is no worldwide consensus about whether we prefer to pay using money or our data, maybe in line with Nezik (2021), a good compromise would be to leave the choice to the individual consumer before e.g., signing up to Facebook.

Overall, maybe we should view the recent developments of SC, with the sheer unbreakable epistemic, political, and economic power of Big Tech and the immensely exacerbated inequalities as a chance to fundamentally question the direction in which we are going as societies. Maybe it is especially today that we have to move our horizons beyond capitalism and think about alternative ways to structure our societies.

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7. Data Appendix

1. Coding Scheme

Theme/Perspective	Category	Code
User Perspective	Privacy & Data Protection	Regulation, Abuses of data protection, Mass Surveillance
	Behavior Modification	Targeted advertising, Prediction products, Human autonomy
	Individual Benefits	Free services, Better services, Social participation
Democracy & Society	Epistemic Inequality	Asymmetries of knowledge, Hidden operations
	Information Civilization	Social scoring, Mass surveillance, Data streams to other customers
	Democratic Institutions	Elections, Totalitarianism, cyber security, hate speech & extreme content, disinformation, Lobbywork of Big Tech
Capitalism & Economy	Logic of Accumulation	Accumulation and trade of user data, prediction products, Individual user profiles, Free services, Targeted advertising
	Competition	Monopoly, Economic power of Big Tech, Unfair practices, Regulation
	Innovation & Development	Economic development, Solutionisim, Better services
Additional Codes		Explanatory
Public Value		Consumer Protection Data Literacy & Sovereignty Economic Development & Innovation Fair Competition Freedom Justice & Equality Privacy & Data Protection Protecting Democracy Protecting Human Rights State Security & Sovereignty Transparency Utility

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3. Random Subsamples from the different newspapers using https://stattrek.com/statistics/random-number-generator.aspx#error

200/7 = 28,5

BUT → Bild (3) and Frankfurter Rundschau (24) have less than 28 articles.

So → 28-3 + 28-24 = 29 remaining unused units

29/5 = 5,8 (6)

THUS, for the other five Newspapers 28+6 = 34

Final Sample → 34 X 5 + 3 + 24 = **197 Articles**

Die Tageszeitung:

34 Random Numbers

30 02 13 16 18 12 04 35 24 11 27 14 31 09 19 10 37 34 17 06 28 26 03 36 22 15 32 33 20 01 07 29 25 23

Specs: This table of 34 random numbers was produced according to the following specifications: Numbers were randomly selected from within the range of 1 to 37. Duplicate numbers were not allowed. This table was generated on 5/31/2022.

Süddeutsche Zeitung:

34 Random Numbers

049 052 076 100 087 032 070 116 038 085 071 045 123 017 019 015 027 118 101 119 065 097 095 007 016 023 002 064 083 044 127 005 056 126

Specs: This table of 34 random numbers was produced according to the following specifications: Numbers were randomly selected from within the range of 1 to 128. Duplicate numbers were not allowed. This table was generated on 5/31/2022.

Handelsblatt:

34 Random Numbers

009 142 051 094 201 177 075 083 231 087 111 148 100 008 049 044 066 172 203 235 137 196 192 030 046 059 021 134 204 170 098 015 026 119

Specs: This table of 34 random numbers was produced according to the following specifications: Numbers were randomly selected from within the range of 1 to 236. Duplicate numbers were not allowed. This table was generated on 5/31/2022.

Frankfurter Rundschau:
- All 24 are included

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung:

34 Random Numbers

005 166 156 131 205 193 076 010 053 077 061 108 177 181 058 064 102 197 120 030 093 014 040 117 150 107 026 006 009 002 022 171 143 172

Specs: This table of 34 random numbers was produced according to the following specifications: Numbers were randomly selected from within the range of 1 to 209. Duplicate numbers were not allowed. This table was generated on 5/31/2022.

Die Zeit:

40 27 67 30 79 76 47 28 62 46 31 53 70 42 21 65 15 61 09 59 14 43 39 29 54 07 64 82 01 20 49 84 02 17

Specs: This table of 34 random numbers was produced according to the following specifications: Numbers were randomly selected from within the range of 1 to 84. Duplicate numbers were not allowed. This table was generated on 5/31/2022.

Bild:
- All 3 Articles are included

4. Screenshots of Code-Document tables, Query-Tool analyses and Word Clouds created in Atlas.ti

Table 2. (In the thesis), Binarized numbers of articles talking about the different Issue Categories (as codes).

Behavior Modification	95	55
Competition	294	106
Democratic Institutions	168	68
Epistemic Inequality	82	48
Individual benefits	149	76
Information civilization	252	89
Innovation and Development	166	86
Logic of Accumulation	305	124
Privacy & Data Protection	419	128
Summe		**780**

Table 3. (In the thesis), Relative weight of the Issue Categories (as codes) in percentages.

● ◇ Behavior Modification	95	4,92%
● ◇ Competition	294	15,23%
● ◇ Democratic Institutions	168	8,70%
● ◇ Epistemic Inequality	82	4,25%
● ◇ Individual benefits	149	7,72%
● ◇ Information civilization	252	13,06%
● ◇ Innovation and Development	166	8,60%
● ◇ Logic of Accumulation	305	15,80%
● ◇ Privacy & Data Protection	419	21,71%
Summe		100,00%

Table 4. (In the thesis), Relative weight of the Public Values (as codes) in percentages.

● ◇ Value - Consumer Protection	61	10,25%
● ◇ Value - Data Literacy/Sovereignty	22	3,70%
● ◇ Value - Economic Development and Innovation	34	5,71%
● ◇ Value - Fair Competition	87	14,62%
● ◇ Value - Freedom	54	9,08%
● ◇ Value - Justice and Equality	15	2,52%
● ◇ Value - Privacy and Data Protection	108	18,15%
● ◇ Value - Protecting Democracy	41	6,89%
● ◇ Value - Protecting Human Rights	34	5,71%
● ◇ Value - State Security/Sovereignty	35	5,88%
● ◇ Value - Transparency	41	6,89%
● ◇ Value - Utility	63	10,59%
Summe		100,00%

Figure 1. (Not in the thesis), Query-Tool analysis, exploring Co-occurrence of "Explanatory" and "Logic of Accumulation → 70 hits (most among all codes)

Figure 2. (Not in the thesis), Word Cloud of the most occurring words → Words filtered to be included when occurring more than 160 times and German Stop-List activated and unrelated words deleted.