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## Zygmunt Bauman and the contemporary state of surveillance as manifested in social media

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### Abstract

In this technologically driven age there has been an accelerating increase in the number of surveillance related crimes all over the world .Data collecting sources have evolved as modern day Panopticons and these are employed cunningly by corporate giants and governments to collect heaps of data . This data collected over the years has acquired a liquid like state , a theory which has been propounded by the renowned sociologist Zygmunt Bauman throughout his life . The paper places Bauman's theory and the current state of social media on the same plane and restates the impact of surveillance on society.

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### Keywords:

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*"Today the smallest details of our daily lives are tracked and traced more closely than ever before, and those who are monitored often cooperate willingly with the monitors. "(*  
Bauman)

In the 21st century, post covid era there has been an exponential increase in the quantity and quality of multi-faceted data sources . These data sources, when aided and coupled by the ever expanding "miniaturized technologies "( Galinaines) , have been able to successfully seep deep into every sphere of human life . The importance of these data sources lies in the fact that they play a crucial role in collecting what is termed as the 'Personal Data ' from their users and owners .

This quantity and quality based data collected by the data sources holds the power and an ever expanding potential to facilitate the crowning of its owner as the modern day "Big Brother "(Orwell) .This modern Big Brother has access to and a reservoir of registered stats on our physiological, psychological, biological and social-environmental based day-to-day choices .This type of data collected plays a crucial role in weaponizing the seemingly harmless daily human choices as tools of surveillance.

This idea of development of an eagle panopticon-like surveillance by making use of the data gathered isn't a novel phenomenon in the domain of Cultural Studies. As early as in 1988, Zygmunt Bauman (1925-2017) a Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the University of Leeds, UK was one among the leading contemporary thinkers to talk about the modern surveillance systems coupled with the lack of a solid and fixed frame of reference of time and space in a modern man's life. He propounded that -

*"In today's liquid modern world, the paths of daily life are mobile and flexible. Crossing national borders is a commonplace activity and immersion in social media is increasingly ubiquitous. Today's citizens, workers, consumers and travellers are always on the move but often lacking certainty and lasting bonds. But in this world where spaces may not be fixed and time is boundless, our perpetual motion does not go unnoticed. Surveillance spreads in hitherto unimaginable ways, responding to and reproducing the slippery nature of modern life, seeping into areas where it once had only marginal sway."*( Bauman)

Bauman throughout his career as a sociologist and professor had developed the notion of 'Liquidity' which is based on the proposition of modern life being essentially characterized by its inconsistent liquid-like nature. According to Bauman there is a lack of solid forms and functions in the life of a modern man and the world of heavy solid structures over the decades has transformed into a state of infinite possibilities in terms of situation and positions. But this volatility in terms of an individual's time and space, according to Bauman, leads to constantly being monitored and recorded by the surveillance systems of the states which thrive on data banks.

This constant monitoring and tracking with the help of data collecting devices results in an insurmountable reservoir of data which over the years has acquired a liquid state. As the surveillance data in this era of globalization has spilled over in every field in unimaginable ways and has seeped into every second of an individual's life with the rapid developments in technology.

The founding thesis of the paper is that people are being tracked more and more via new technologies and as a result of which the act of Surveillance has detached itself from its spatial characteristic which is equivalent to a Panopticon and has become increasingly mobile and even more piercing than a Panopticon.

This evolution in the characteristics of Surveillance has also led to the development and sustenance of a "culture of control"(Garland) which is headed by consumerism and capitalism. The rather recent instance of a corporate giant like Facebook sneakily collecting every piece of consumer data and remoulding it to sway public opinions during the election in the USA is a good example of how liquid surveillance has become the breeding ground of a culture of control.

Bauman has expounded upon the effects of liquid surveillance largely in his books like 'Legislators and Interpreters' (1987) and 'Freedom' (1988). One of the major themes of these books is how apart from rapid technological advancement in the field of data sources, capitalism and globalization are also to be rightfully blamed for the seepage of liquid surveillance in every second of human existence.

David Lyon, co-author of "Liquid Surveillance" believes that people have been transformed into Commodities now more than ever. It's the hidden Hegemony of consumerism that has played a vital role in the sustenance of the state of constant Surveillance.

Historically before the book "Liquid Surveillance " was originally published, 9/11 was one of the major international attacks that had happened in the world . It had directly shattered the Hegemony of the USA as the world power and challenged its image of a nation where harmony always exists . Lyon and Bauman emphasize that it was after this particular attack that the contents of what technology is ,was reconsidered in order to develop strategies to mitigate and avoid dangers like 9/11 to national security and integrity. Employing the term "adiaphorization", which means a dissociation between action and ethical fields, Bauman expounds how this goal of betterment of technology to avoid danger paved an inevitable path to the commodification of technology by corporate giants . As a result of this surveillance technologies increasingly disassociated themselves from ethics and created a stark separation between ethics and actions . Any extra information which was collected and accidents that happened during this process of betterment of technology were labeled easily by corporate giants as collateral damages that were vital for development of a perfect state of harmony I.e 'culture of control ' .

On the surface of it, the whole process of Surveillance and data collection has been legitimised by the states as an activity vital to control the conduct of populations so that any threats to national security can be mitigated beforehand. But Bauman believes that the act of Surveillance has a deeper history and context attached to itself . He is highly influenced by Foucault's theory of how people play an active role in their own surveillance; social media in the present context stands as a good testimony to this theory . In "Liquid Surveillance "Bauman continually refers to Foucault's concept of Panopticon and how social media has remodelled the concept of Surveillance with a positive annotation I.e "you will never again be alone " . He expounds that it's the present day liquid conditions of modern living that has crowned social media as a savior of sorts.

Social media has psychologically replaced the fear of being noticed with the joy of being the centre of attention.The joy of being the centre of attention stems from the fact that in the modern era populations have a strong lack of any strong centre and a solid sense of identification. This is something which is evident by the way people project themselves on social media - 'unique' and 'the best ' at everything and anything.

Social media sites like Facebook , Instagram, Whatsapp and Snapchat have led to an increasing dilution of the separation between the public sphere and private sphere . What is private is public now and what is public is a part of each second of private life now. Bauman believed that consumerism is the villain over here as factories and capitalism have taught us continually to consider ourselves as Commodities, we need the attention to sustain ourselves as a constant factor on social media , the rise of influencer culture in recent lost covid years is a good example .

The Rise of techniques to direct attention towards ourselves on social media has led us to unknowingly playing an active role in being an object of surveillance. 'Everyone's watching' is a good motto for the present day situation of social media . All this has led into serious developments in terms of data acquired and in ways of acquiring it . For example an ACLU study conducted in 2017 stated that Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram sold user data access and files to Geofeedia. Geofeedia is one of the leading developers of social media monitoring products that have assisted law enforcement agencies in monitoring activists and protesters across the globe.In the modern period hardly a few among the infinite surveillance projects are a result of people's consensus or

legislative rulings. Majority of the surveillance systems employed by governments across the globe are a result of executive acts which were either done hastily or slyly.

The increased visibility that people desire on social media has led to adoption of tactics that blur the line between personal and social . This abstraction of the field of private had raised new questions of what is ethical and has made the task of surveillance systems somewhat easier . For example the development of Snapchat goggles was based on the tagline of sharing every moment of your lives with your subscribers and to "Create the world you want to see with Spectacles — the first pair of glasses that bring augmented reality to life, redefining how we interact with and overlay computing on the world." . The whole concept of such smart goggles blurs the distinction between reality and internet which in turn makes the whole process of being surveilled seem as natural as breathing.

The desire to be noticed has been employed well by the Authorities all over the world to strengthen the surveillance systems, for example Authorities in Iran occasionally boast of a 62,000 numbered strong army of volunteers who constantly monitor online speech. And any citizen belonging to any class can easily report for duty on the Cyber Police (FATA) website. Similarly, the ruling Communist Party in China has the reputation of recruiting thousands of individuals to sieve the content on internet and report problematic content and accounts to authorities.

Baumans hypothesis regarding liquid state of surveillance and the state of modern day social media stand complementary to each other . In order to tackle the problem of Surveillance, users of the technology based products need to be more cautious than ever . But the question still persists - would we ever be able to save ourselves from the liquid surveillance?

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