Chapter 5
Big Tech and Society in the 21st Century

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the socio-political impacts of big tech in the 21ˢᵗ century. The chapter begins by examining the rise of big tech, and it compares the power and reach of big tech with the auto industry. The chapter next turns its attention to the concept of surveillance capitalism and reviews arguments developed by Shoshana Zuboff. Specifically, this section examines how capitalism has undergone fundamental changes in the digital age that require new responses to protect fundamental human rights. The chapter concludes by examining some of the key developments of surveillance capitalism, including facial recognition as well as government responses.

THE RISE OF BIG TECH COMPANIES

Hitherto, the intellectual powers of the world have owned outstanding newspapers; however, Big Tech companies, collectively known as FAAMG (Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, Google), care little about the content of information and discussion. Their main goal is to increase the number of readers and revenue from advertising and sales based on behavior profiles delivered by marketing companies and unique services. Of course, these information technology giants (Table 1) censor unfavorable opinions and promote chaos and information disorientation as part of their "intellectual" wisdom. The current challenges of civilization mentioned in this section have no chance of overcoming the culture of hate on social networks and solving the problems of humanity.

Table 1 shows that Big Tech has almost ten times more productivity per employee than the most extensive global automotive companies and Big Tech's market value is 18 times larger. The FAAGM companies can afford the best lobbyists, who aim to maintain the *status quo*.[1] These companies are indeed working on improving information processes, that is, they contribute to developing ever-better knowledge about the world. They provide many software tools and digital platforms to support humanism; however, these companies are also destroying the humanistic tradition, as shown by the case of journalism and the deprivation of an active and wise information society that could control the quality

Table 1. Comparison of Big Tech (FAAMG) business with automotive companies in 2018

Company	Annual Sales (in Billions of US Dollars)	Market Value of the Company (in Billions of US Dollars)	Number of Employees	Productivity per 1 Employee (in US dollars)
Facebook	55	188	44,000	
Amazon	233	920	648,000	
Apple	266	268	123,000	
Microsoft	110	160	148,000	
Google	137	1,303	100,000	
Total	**801**	**2,839**	**1,063,000**	2,671,000
Volkswagen	11,8	74	656,000	
Renault-Nissan	10,3	43	183,000	
Toyota	9,7	186	369,000	
General Motors	7,7	144	173,000	
Ford	4,9	46	199,000	
Total	**44.4**	**490**	**1,580,000**	28,101

Market value of the company = number of shares sold (including as bonuses) x share price

of civilizational processes. It should be mentioned that Amazon fights against the publication of printed books because it promotes digital e-books and e-readings, which can be accessed via Kindle. Its fight against printed books (even though it sells them as well) is going very well. It blackmails large, competing book publishers into selling their works on Amazon's platform, provided they offer e-books and sell them for under $10 adapted to an Amazon's e-reader platform.

Thanks to the Internet, globalization has accelerated, including a global economics based on turbo-capitalism. This is possible thanks to outsourcing to countries with cheap labor, which has helped corporations make huge profits and has helped stateless capital to grow. In the 2020s, IT companies like FAAMG use the Internet to profile people and market to them, which brings the companies multibillion-dollar revenues. For example, these 5 IT companies have a total revenue that is 60% higher than the GDP of Poland, which consists of 18 million working people, much less than the 1 million IT professionals employed in these companies.

BIRTH OF SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM

According to Shoshana Zuboff (2019), Big Tech companies introduced *surveillance capitalism* as a form of information capitalism, displacing the weaker turbo-capitalism (which controls modern globalization) with its dynamism and productivity.

Zuboff (2019) claims that throughout one's life, almost everyone holds a phone in their hand and has Google, Facebook, and other apps constantly collecting information to create a profile of who one is and what one likes. Google, for its part, keeps a record of all one's searches, reads one's email address (if one is using Gmail), and tracks where one is going via Google Maps and Android. Facebook has

4 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/big-tech-and-society-in-the-21st-century/286873

Related Content

Bottom-Up Management and System Design
W. Hutchinson (2000). *Human Centered Methods in Information Systems: Current Research and Practice (pp. 61-75).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/bottom-management-system-design/22193

Study of Feature Extraction Techniques for Sensor Data Classification
Anupama Jawaleand Ganesh Magar (2021). *International Journal of Information Communication Technologies and Human Development (pp. 33-46).*
www.irma-international.org/article/study-of-feature-extraction-techniques-for-sensor-data-classification/272749

Knowledge Management and Innovation: Mapping the Use of Technology in Organizations
Leonor Cardosoand A. Duarte Gomes (2011). *Technology for Creativity and Innovation: Tools, Techniques and Applications (pp. 237-266).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/knowledge-management-innovation/51993

The Long Game: Technological Innovation and the Transformation of Business Performance
Olga Matthiasand Ian Fouweather (2021). *International Journal of Technology and Human Interaction (pp. 60-78).*
www.irma-international.org/article/the-long-game/274030

An Overview of Multimodal Interaction Techniques and Applications
Marie-Luce Bourguet (2006). *Encyclopedia of Human Computer Interaction (pp. 451-456).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/overview-multimodal-interaction-techniques-applications/13159