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An Empirical Inquiry into Surveillance Capitalism: Web Tracking

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Surveillance Capitalism

A definition

THE DEFINITION

Sur•veil•lance Cap•i•tal•ism, n.

1. A new market form that claims human experience as a free source of raw material for hidden commercial practices of extraction, prediction, and sales; 2. A parasitic economic logic in which the production of goods and services is subordinated to a new global architecture of behavioral modification; 3. A rogue mutation of capitalism marked by concentrations of wealth, knowledge, and power unprecedented in human history; 4. A form of capitalism as significant for human nature in the twenty-first century as industrial capitalism was for the natural world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; 5. The origin of a new instrumentarian power that asserts dominance over society and presents startling challenges to market democracy; 6. A movement that aims to impose a new collective order based on total certainty; 7. An expropriation of critical human rights that is best understood as a coup from above: an overthrow of the people's sovereignty.

THE AGE OF SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM

THE FIGHT FOR A
HUMAN FUTURE
AT THE NEW
FRONTIER OF POWER

SHOSHANA
ZUBOFF

Motivation

The importance to study Surveillance Capitalism

Table 4: 2023 Annual Revenue/GDP (in billions)

Company/Country	Revenue/GDP
Amazon	574.78 USD
Apple	383.28 USD
Google	307.39 USD
Finland	295.53 USD
Portugal	289.11 USD
Greece	243.50 USD
Microsoft	211.91 USD
Facebook	134.90 USD



image: <https://apnews.com/article/trump-inauguration-tech-billionaires-zuckerberg-musk-wealth-0896bfc3f50d941d62cebc3074267ecd>

Research Questions

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RQ1: Within GAFAM, which entities demonstrate the highest engagement in surveillance practices?

RQ2: Do web tracking metrics correlate with the entity's advertising revenue?

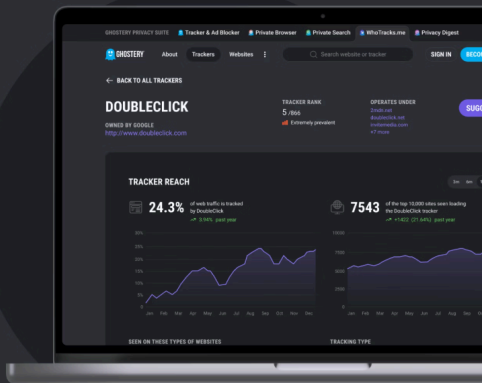
RQ3: Can web tracking provide quantitative evidence of Surveillance Capitalism activity?



GHOSTERY WHOTRACKS.ME

Uncover who is tracking you online with WhoTracks.Me, featuring statistical reports derived from the web's largest open-source database of trackers.

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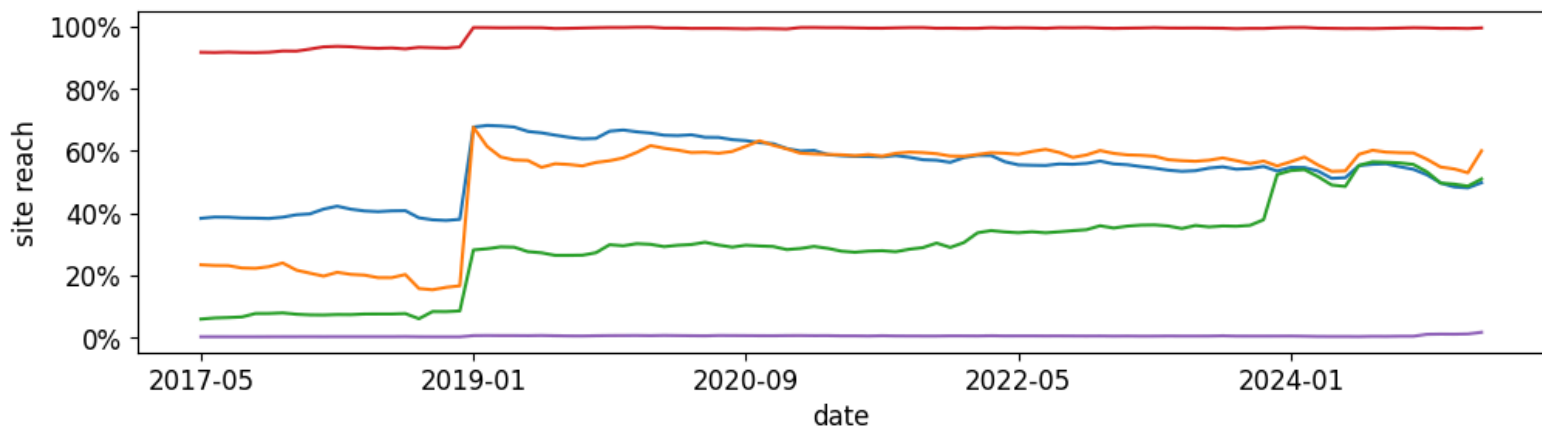
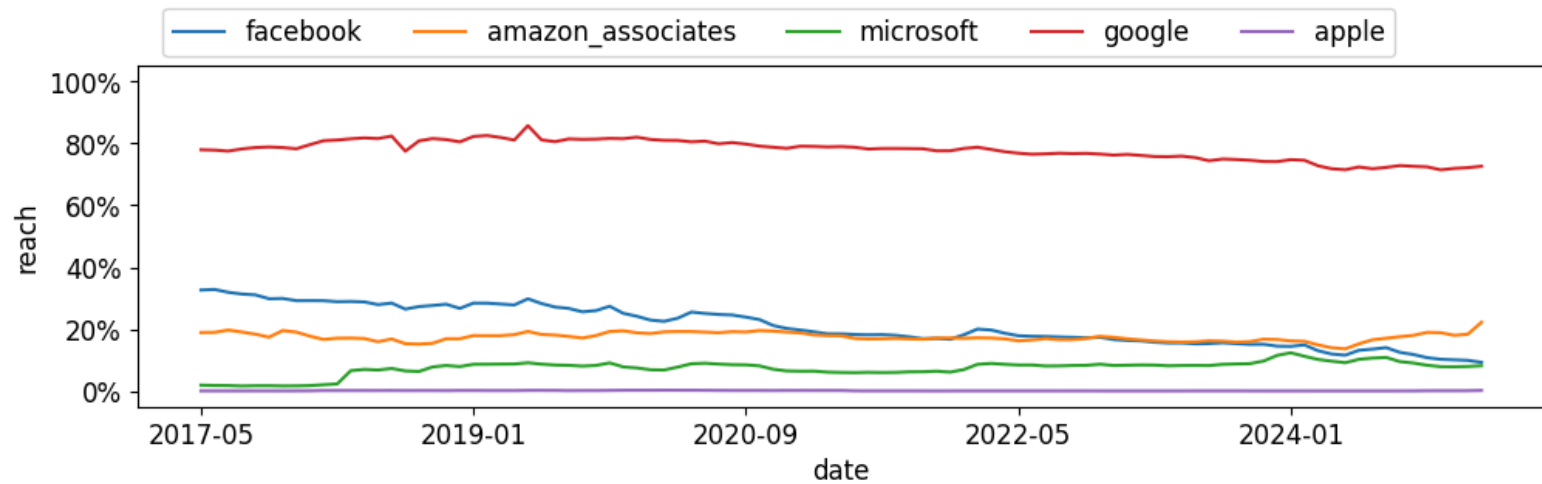


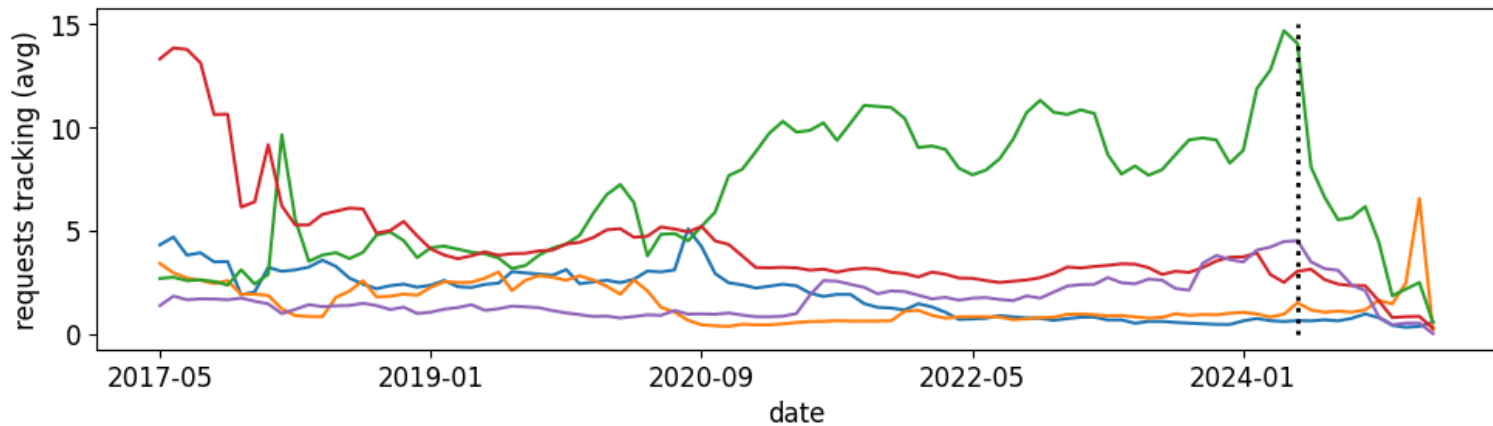
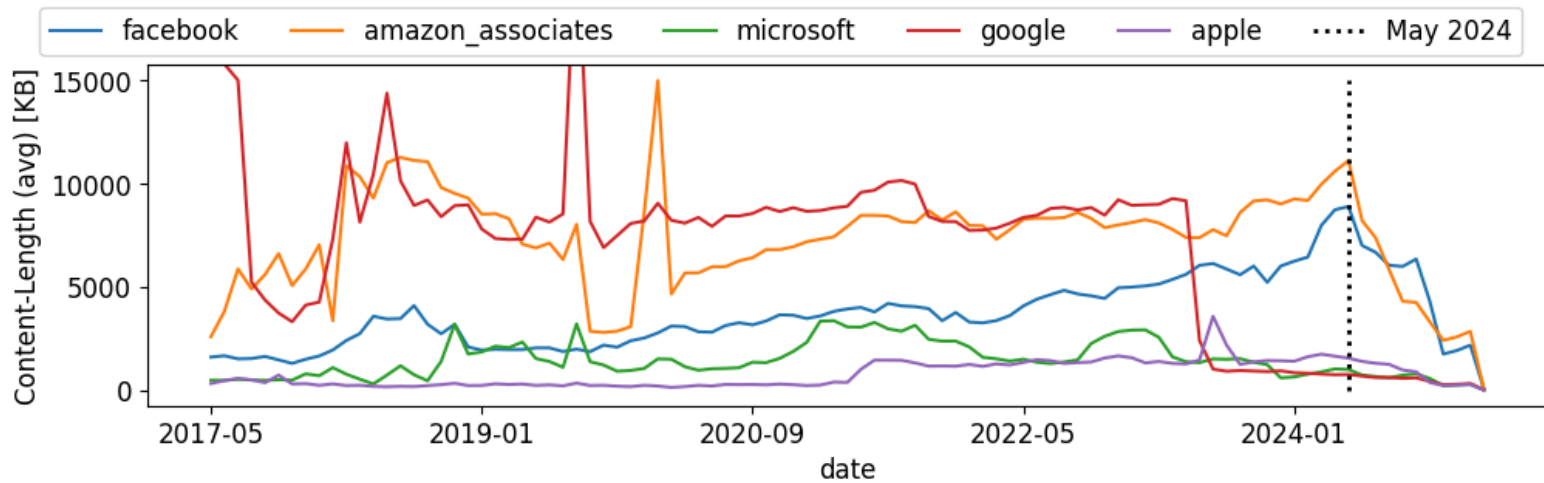
Datasets

WhoTracks.Me & SEC filings



Findings





Costs of Surveillance Capitalism

Surveillance Capitalism knows no limits

"Formal Indifference"

Social Costs

- Clickbait / Controversies
- Attention Economy
- Privacy Breach

Environmental Costs

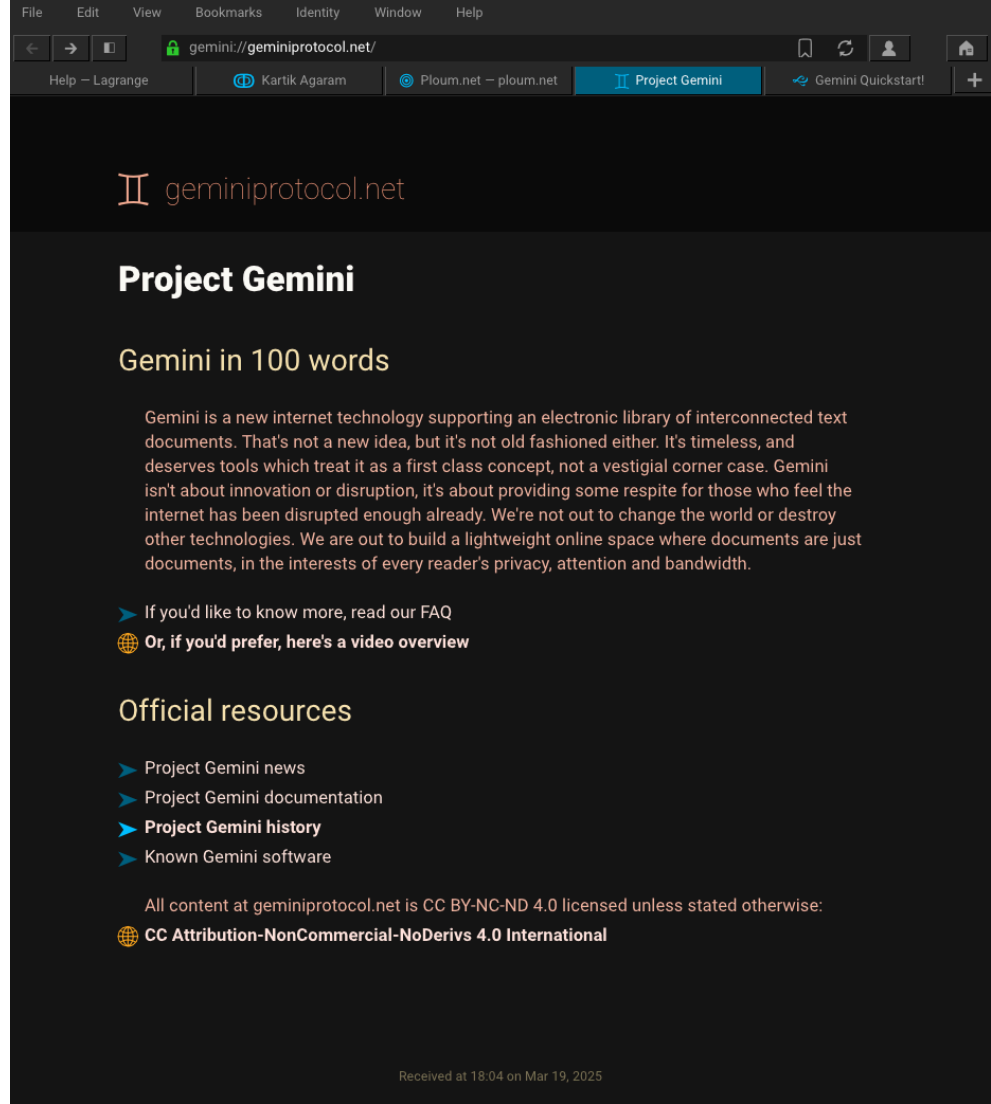
- Increased Consumerism
- Increased Processing Power
- Increased Bandwidth Usage

Gemini Protocol

An Alternative to the Surveilled Web?

- Not Google's Gemini!
- Clear separation from HTTP(S)
- No Javascript
- No Cookies
- Simple implementation

image: A screenshot from the *Lagrange* Gemini browser



Thank you!

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Reverse Panel Questions

1. In this paper, we saw web tracking as an instance of Surveillance Capitalism activity. We all most probably experienced some of its consequences through curated feeds, targeted ads, purchase recommendations, etc... Are there other instances of Surveillance Capitalism activity that you have been able to notice in your daily life?
2. Reflecting on those life's experiences that have been shaped by/around Surveillance Capitalism activities. How would you rate the sustainability and desirability of those experiences?
3. What if you decided those experiences not to be desirable or sustainable, would you be able to "opt-out" of them? What would it entail to "opt-out"?