The Video Camera, Voyeurism and State Surveillance in the IoT Era

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Abstract

Citizens tend to be accepting of the harmful effects of video surveillance by the government in lieu of national security. In this article, I reviewed a list of literature that discusses about how the video camera evolved from being a tool that humans use to satisfy voyeuristic tendencies, to an instrument used to conduct state surveillance. I started by defining concepts related to voyeurism and surveillance. Then I looked into how these concepts evolved in traditional and digital media. Afterwards, I looked at how governments see the video camera as a powerful apparatus for citizen surveillance. This power becomes much more concerning with recent advances in technologies, particularly in the Internet of Things (IoT). I concluded by stating the need to set parameters, policies and regulations in using IoT technologies for citizen surveillance, such as facial detection and recognition, to protect citizens' privacy and security.

Keywords

voyeurism, surveillance, video camera, Internet of Things, privacy, security

1. Introduction

Human beings are biologically programmed to be curious individuals, or "informavores" (Miller, 1983). This curiosity is manifested in voyeuristic tendencies where the need for information is satisfied by the pleasure of watching. The development of media communication provides a historical perspective on how voyeuristic tendencies of individuals shape each communication medium. From cinema to reality television, voyeurism takes different forms and manifestations, with concepts such as the gaze, the idea of audience's scopophilic tendencies, or the love to watch, that bring them enjoyment watching actors who have no knowledge of them being watched, and the coining of the term 'mediated' voyeurism in relation to the emergence and popularity of reality television shows. There is rich literature in traditional media that talks about voyeurism as a pleasure-seeking activity.

However, voyeurism takes a new form to also include online surveillance and cyberstalking with recent developments in digital media and communications. The developments of the Internet, the webcam and the mobile phone camera become the centerpieces of voyeuristic tendencies of individuals in the world wide web and in social media which resulted to the individual's participation as both subjects and objects of voyeurism and personal surveillance.

These voyeuristic tendencies go into a different level with video cameras connected to the Internet of things (IoT). The increased sophistication of analytical algorithms and lower costs for hardware, software, and storage encourage innovation and wider adoption to IoT video, especially by governments. The capacity of governments, companies and individuals to do surveillance and monitor individuals' activities is enhanced further by this advancement in technology which threatens the individuals' security and right to privacy.

This paper looks into the many facets of how development in media technologies fostered voyeuristic tendencies, how these shape our acceptance of watching and being watched, and how these have prepared the society in living and accepting a surveillance state that further endangers privacy and security. Furthermore, this looks at how governments would need to address these concerns in a fast and adept way, in the same pace as the developments in technologies itself.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Voyeurism and surveillance defined

Humans seek pleasure in watching what other people are doing. According to Hirschfeld & Haire (1952), voyeurism is the practice of spying on people engaged in intimate behaviors, such as undressing, sexual activity, or other actions usually considered to be of a private nature. One major characteristic of voyeurism is that the object, or the target of voyeurism, is not aware that he or she is being observed, and that the voyeur does not normally relate directly to him or her. The behavior turns into stalking once the interest of the voyeur towards the target becomes obsessive. The term voyeurism comes from the French word "voir", which means "to see" (Speake & LaFlaur, 1999).

While voyeurism is classified as a psychiatric sexual disorder, there are non-sexual attributes of the disorder that is commonly used to refer to the obsession of watching someone from a distance. In fact, scholars suggest that voyeurism does not necessarily involve sexuality (Calvert, 2000). The psychiatric definition underlines only two dimensions of voyeurism that is generally being attached to media consumption. First is the notion that the voyeur enjoys a stealth activity of observing the subject from a distance. The second notion is that media usually cannot fully accommodate the sexual dimensions of individuals' voyeuristic desires. Non-sexual voyeurism, rather than being a psychopathological condition, is a common personal trait enjoyed by all 'normal' individuals to different degrees (Metzl, 2004).

Calvert (2000) created the term "mediated voyeurism" which describes voyeurism as a form of behavior, which is easily and safely activated by using electronic media. He describes it as "the consumption of revealing images of and information about other's apparently real and unguarded lives, often yet not always for purposes of entertainment but frequently at the expense of privacy and disclosure, through the mass media and Internet" (Calvert, 2000, p. 2). Another similar term, scopophilia, refers to the act of deriving pleasure from looking and ultimately objectifying others with a controlling and curious gaze (Metzl, 2004).

On the other hand, surveillance is defined as "the monitoring of people and systems in order to regulate their behavior" (Castree, Kitchin, & Rogers, 2013). The difference between surveillance and voyeurism is that the former aims at controlling the behavior of its targets.

2.2 Voyeurism in traditional media

Objectifying subjects by the viewer of traditional media had been the focus of previous studies, particularly in the aspect of how power comes into play between the viewer and the object of his gaze.

The invention of the photographic film by George Eastman through his Kodak camera and celluloid film paved the way for "technologies of expression" (Lessig, 2004, p. 33). The invention of film for photographs eventually opened doors for the development of movie and television cameras. Since then, the analysis of photos, films and even television came in through the concept of the gaze, which deals on how an audience views the people presented in photos and films. This gaze is attributed to the voyeuristic tendencies of the watcher of media.

Photography, for instance, has a role in voyeuristic looking which is defined as a powerful co-expression of form (Joinson, 2010). This co-expression is wrapped up with the technological nature of photography and the camera. Furthermore, voyeurism is manifested with the very convenience of the modern camera – its small physical size allied to its ability to record events discreetly – manifesting at the same time with a 'new' audience, one which would tolerate unquestioningly the voyeurism that such cameras made possible (Phillips & Baker, 2010).

Laura Mulvey (1996) describes cinema as having the ability "to materialize both fantasy and the fantastic", and that it is a "phantasmagoria, illusion and a symptom of the social unconscious" (p. xiv). The gaze in Hollywood cinema reflects a patriarchal language where the woman is represented as "other", or as an object, rather than a subject, that materializes man's unconscious (Mulvey, 1996). Mulvey also described the paradox of phallocentrism on television where she described the TV camera's gaze as co-extensive with the male gaze, which depends on the image of "the castrated woman" in order to make sense of the world. The spectator, both male and female, is invited to take pleasure in a particular configuration of the gaze through which "the male hero acts" while "women are seen and showed at the same time: their appearance is so much coded for a strong visual and erotic impact that it can be argued that they connote the true essence of being seen" (Mulvey, 1975, page 9).

Even television satisfies these voyeuristic tendencies of its audiences with the proliferation of reality television. In a recent article providing a critical analysis of reality television participants' labor as demi-celebrities, Collins (2008) argued that reality programs "traffic in potentially embarrassing moments of intimacy...for the audiences' pleasurable voyeurism" (p. 100). On the other hand, Baruh (2010) found out that trait voyeurism, characterized by the practice

of seeking safe and usually reciprocal ways of accessing information and experience that would be usually inaccessible, and something enjoyed opportunistically by individuals, had a substantial relationship with the consumption of reality programming after controlling for demographics and hours of television viewing.

2.3 The digital video camera, voyeurism and the Internet

The convergence of all electronic technologies related to traditional media into the field of interactive communication led to the creation of the Internet, which is considered as "the most revolutionary technological medium of the Information Age" (Castells, 2010, p. 45). Together with the Internet was the transformation of the camera to an equipment that is capable of feeding and streaming images in real time through a computer or a computer network. Such digital technology, tied to the Internet, enabled people to see and communicate with each other despite their physical distances among each other. Furthermore, each person was able to create a video content of his own, producing "a vastly more competitive and vibrant market for building and cultivating culture" (Lessig, 2004, page 9). Moreover, the Internet has offered a platform for engaged users to "cooperate and provide observations and opinions, and to serve as a watchdog over society on a peer-production model" (Benkler, 2007, p. 237).

Meanwhile, Negroponte (1996) suggested that digitalization mindlessly addressed the problems of image quality such as resolution, frame rate, and the aspect ratio of the screen (p. 40), improvements on these problems paved the way for improvements on quality that further supported other functions of the digital camera. In fact, Castells (2010) mentioned that this common digital language, with which the digital camera uses, fuels the current process of technological transformation because of its ability to create an interface between technological fields in which information is generated, stored, retrieved, processed, and transmitted (p. 29). Such capability to record, store, and access data inspires a consideration of lives centered only with media (Deuze, 2012, p. 86).

Additionally, digital video cameras became handy that people can bring anywhere. In fact, they became mobile when converged with devices such as mobile and smartphones.

Indeed, such qualities and capabilities give the digital camera – webcams, mobile phone cameras and the like - an edge over its predecessors. The image quality that has improved through the years provide more clarity and distinction when shot on every part of people's bodies that

clear identification of the person becomes possible. Added to this are its portability and its ability to have a lifetime storage of video footages and clips, with the introduction of memory drives and cards, and eventually, the cloud. These technological innovations further push people's voyeuristic tendencies by giving the ability to look, to watch and to stalk ubiquitously, and watch what has been recorded repeatedly.

Likewise, the explosion of streaming video when YouTube became popular in 2005 (Fish, 2017, p. 45) encouraged users to upload their own video content, including those amateurishly recorded through digital video cameras and smartphones. Social media websites also started to encourage users to upload and stream videos as well by posting on social media walls and pages. More recently, users are able to stream live videos and post short video clips that are only visible within twenty-four hours. These posting and streaming capabilities provide more avenues to induce voyeuristic tendencies in Internet users, following and stalking activities of people through the videos being posted. In fact, Su (2012) found out that voyeuristic tendencies in social media are positively related and connected to social needs, such as social comparison and social identity, and motivations, such as surveillance, uncertainty reduction, and uses and gratifications, of Facebook users. These voyeuristic pleasures related to social media have cultivated not only the obsession with looking but also being watched on the Internet.

With social media, users become promiscuous of how they present themselves to people watching them. For instance, Wang (2015) traced the paths from Facebook voyeurism to public self-consciousness and Facebook self-presentation and found out that these were particularly salient. She further found out that the direct and indirect effects further provided empirical support for understanding the fluid and unsettling notion of mediated voyeurism, and that extraversion and neuroticism were positively related to Facebook self-presentation.

On the other hand, Arntfield (2015, p. 376) observed that the culture of proactive disclosure and information promiscuity that is prevalent in social media enables lookers, voyeurs, and predators to identify patterns and behaviors of their online victims. The public dissemination of personal details, photographs, and audio-visual material on social media sites, including video clips and streams, assists voyeurs and stalkers in drawing patterns of activities and habits of the one being looked at.

2.4 The IoT camera and the surveillance state

Campbell & Carlson (2002, p. 587) has likened the Internet to Jeremy Bentham's panopticon where both predicted surveillance of a capitalist state by employing techniques of methodic information gathering and aggregation to evaluate individuals and populations for various purposes of control. In a panopticon, the aim is to assess an individual's tendency for undesirable behavior. For the Internet, the aim is to predict behaviors either for commercial or penal purposes.

There has been a race in developing commercial technologies for surveillance since 1990s, and these become evident in the following three methods of digital surveillance: first, through monitoring of data and traffic over a network in a form that tracks users, gathers information about which websites are visited and what users do on these sites; second, by installing software that can potentially enter through the 'backdoor' of computers and monitor the activities of a specific computer and its user; and third, by collating data from different sources to compile a social network analysis about the personal interests, friendships, affiliations and consumption habits of users (Curran, Fenton, & Freedman, 2016, p. 43).

According to Morozov (2012), digital surveillance has solved the problems of analogue surveillance in the past such as high costs, limited storage, and limited versatility (Morozov, 2012, page 150). These are also the reasons why the digital camera, when connected to digital networks, become a viable tool for surveillance, as the equipment has become cheaper, the video quality has become richer, storage has become infinite, and its capabilities have expanded tremendously.

This surveillance capability of the Internet has been embraced not only by the private sector but also by governments, including the military and national security agencies (McChesney, 2013, p. 161). It is a "surveillance tool made in heaven…because much of the surveillance can be done, not by expensive and fallible human beings, but by computers" (Naughton, 2012, p. 261).

With the government using digital technologies for surveillance, it has become a powerful voyeur that monitors every action of its citizens from a distance. The centerpiece of this surveillance capability of the government is the use of video surveillance, together with other ways and means of monitoring people's activities such as e-mails, bank records and the like. The government finds pleasure when its citizens follow the rules, or if it catches criminals and law offenders. In other words, the power that surveillance gives them through the capability of

consuming images and information at the expense of privacy and discourse of its citizen provides joy and pleasure to the voyeuristic state.

Video surveillance is nothing new. In fact, Yesil (2010) proposes that video surveillance is not a novel technological product brought about by the September 11 attacks, but it has long been used within crime prevention and risk management initiatives going back to the 1970s. However, it has been widely utilized recently due to the aforementioned developments in digital surveillance. Governments and multilateral organizations systematically increase surveillance of people and places through legislation and installation of electronic gateways and technologies monitoring and screening people's access to public places such as transportation hubs, shopping malls and facilities (Deuze, 2012, p. 117).

One example is in France, where local politicians, finding ways to stop the increasing number of crimes, pushed the installation of video surveillance cameras in public areas in the middle of 1990s, although at that time the government policy was to regulate the use of video surveillance instead of promoting it (Webster, Töpfer, Klauser, Raab, & Heilmann, 2011). However, upon the election of Nicolas Sarkozy as President in May 2007, the Ministry of the Interior set up an ambitious plan of convincing regional and local authorities to use video cameras in myriad places.

A much more recent technological development that is affecting the implementation of surveillance cameras is the Internet of Things (IoT), which is described as a network "where objects of all kinds…have a little bit of embedded digital intelligence, and are part of a network" (Sundararajan, 2016, p. 56). Its ubiquity is said to "automate mundane tasks" (Mansell, 2012, p. 16).

Mansell (2012) further added that the Internet of Things, in developing the means of controlling individuals and their communication environments, has also seen commercial opportunities in developing software technology innovations such as smart tagging, the Semantic web and online search technologies (Mansell, 2012, p. 17).

According to Schiller (2006), technologies of watching such as global positioning system (GPS) equipped mobile phones, radio-frequency identification tags and new data mining techniques, as well as expanding government databases, proliferate the invasive and extensive ways of surveillance (p. 53). With the digital camera's more prolific features, surveillance is expected to be more intense, invasive and extensive.

The digital camera in the Internet of Things is unique due to its video analytics applications (facial detection, facial recognition, iris recognition, large distance and multi-point detection). These applications make biometric information of individuals more accurate in the creation of his digital profile. These digital profiles, taken by video surveillance cameras, are linked to the state's database to be used to track criminals, spot suspicious behavior, and prevent crimes. These technological advancements in video camera surveillance have the potential for any country to be an all-seeing surveillance state. China, for instance, is implementing facial recognition systems and iris scanning in video surveillance cameras installed in public places in troubled regions to monitor its citizens, as part of its national police force's creation of a nationwide video-surveillance network as a public-safety imperative (Chin & Lin, 2017). Fueled by advances in artificial intelligence, these systems can measure key aspects of a face, then cross-reference them against photo and biometric databases collected by government agencies and businesses.

Other countries, such as the United States, have started doing pilot programs, trials and tests in the technology, with the Federal Bureau of Investigation using it to identify criminal suspects, and the Department of Homeland Security using it to track foreign visitors flying out of the country (Chin & Lin, 2017).

Forecasts provide a wider acceptance of these new surveillance technologies, with the global biometrics markets reaching more than $30 billion by 2021, with more than one in three surveillance cameras shipped to be IP-connected cameras. This is anticipated to open up new ways of implementing facial biometrics and surveillance analytics ('ABI Research Predicts Fingerprint Sensors, Facial Recognition, and Biometric Surveillance to Propel the Global Biometrics Industry to $30 Billion by 2021', 2016).

This wide acceptance of surveillance technologies translates to society's willingness to participate in surveillance, and thus "giving way to more subtle and therefore much more powerful ways of controlling the movements and actions of people" (Deuze, 2012, p. 104).

2.5 The question of control, privacy and security

According to Deuze (2012), everyone is both subject and object of surveillance in the era of media life, however, the majority choose to participate in surveillance where "everyone else is spying on everyone else" (p. 128). This conditions the mindsets of acceptance in watching and

being watched, since everyone is doing it. This mindset is being exploited by the online economy, and, potentially, by governments.

However, questions on privacy and security still abound, especially now that technologies for voyeurism and surveillance become pervasive. One of the arguments used in exchange of privacy with national security is that individuals who have not done anything wrong should subject themselves to surveillance since they have nothing to hide. When governments do surveillance, many people believed that surveillance remains private unless illegal actions are uncovered. However, Solove (2007) argues that the privacy issue brought about by digital surveillance is more than the concealment or secrecy of wrongdoing, but entails more issues connected with the use of citizen's data, or the lack of knowledge as to how this information will be used, among many other harms it may involve. In addition, Solove (2007) also argues that the law finds it hard to recognize the harms caused by surveillance that do not cause an individual embarrassment, humiliation, or physical or psychological injury.

Furthermore, some aspects of privacy are not being protected by the government, but rather are being passed on to non-state organizations. According to Curran et al. (2016), "the monitoring of content, allocation of domain names and the protection of privacy are all areas where the state (at least in some countries) has relinquished its role as sole arbiter of what is permissible or not. The preferred mechanisms of contemporary governance regimes are increasingly self-regulation, where industry modifies its behavior in response to a set of agreed codes, and co-regulation, where industry works in partnership with the state to design and enforce adherence to rules" (p. 100).

Surveillance policies are needed as they affect people's role in the society, their active engagement in their environment, and their relation with the state by regulating the digitally mediated ways that they interact with others, constraining the privacy and free communication extent that is available for them to observe, and redefining the power of the state with its citizens (Hintz & Brown, 2017). However, the national security discourse that selects the role of the state in protecting against physical harms over its citizens' privacy and civil rights has always been prioritized. This means that surveillance policies always focus on national security instead of other concerns such as human security (Hintz & Brown, 2017).

With the dawn of the Internet of Things, three potential security risks have been identified that could be exploited and may harm citizens, and these are by (1) enabling unauthorized access and misuse of personal information; (2) facilitating attacks on other systems; and (3) creating

risks to personal safety (Federal Trade Commission, 2015). Some government and organizational bodies may have implemented some rules and regulations with regards to citizen privacy and security. However, the fast evolution of technologies requires lawmakers and policymakers to be quick and adept in addressing potential privacy and security issues posed by these new technologies. As Clarke (2001) bluntly describes how people became so naïve to recognize how technological development in the last fifty years has delivered superior surveillance mechanisms without noticing and preparing for it.

3. Conclusion

The evolution of the video camera has opened opportunities for its users to satisfy voyeuristic tendencies and conduct surveillance, however, never it has been as alarming as recent developments in technologies that go at a very fast pace that voyeurism and surveillance not only involve individuals but also corporations, and more importantly, governments.

Indeed, the society's penchant for voyeuristic pleasures, salvaged by the introduction of the Internet and social media, as well as the increasing and developing surveillance technologies introduced in the market, make individuals accepting on harmful effects of surveillance just to join the bandwagon.

With governments aggressively testing and implementing video surveillance capabilities in the IoT era, individuals, governments and other stakeholders need to work on policies and regulations that will protect human security and privacy while implementing tools and mechanisms of surveillance. These policies and regulations need to be formulated and implemented at the same pace as the developments in technology so as not to be obsolete and continue to be useful. Policies and regulations protecting human privacy and security will need to be proactive rather than reactive in the era of the Internet of Things.

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