

A CNN FILM

NAVALNY

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POISON ALWAYS LEAVES A TRAIL

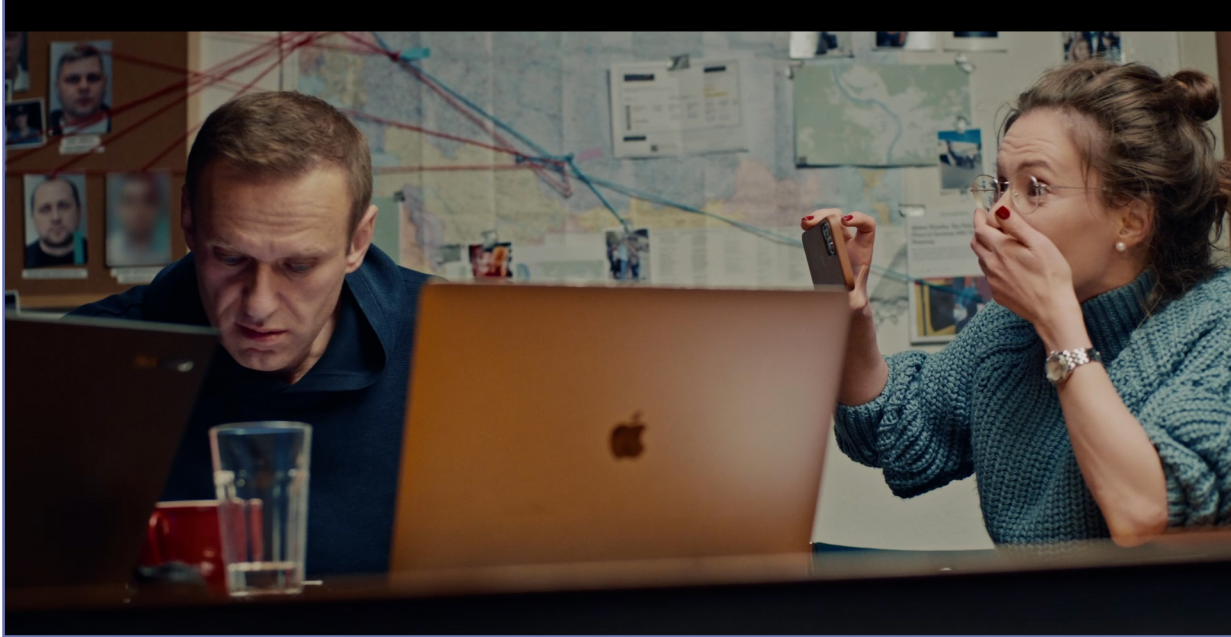


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Data Tracking & Social Media Lessons



DATA TRACKING, STATE SURVEILLANCE, AND THE ROLE OF JOURNALISM



DRIVING QUESTION

Like any powerful tool, data tracking can be used both to help, and to harm. Is it possible for data tracking to be used for justice without compromising individual privacy?

Data tracking is often one of the tools used by authoritarian governments to maintain state surveillance.

It is also a tool that independent investigators and journalists, such as those working with Bellingcat, have used to hold individuals and institutions, including governments, accountable.

Useful Term

Tracking Data means (a) any information or data collected in relation to online, mobile, or other electronic activities or communications that can reasonably be associated with a particular person, user, computer, mobile or other device, or instance of any application or mobile application, (b) any information or data collected in relation to off-line activities or communications that can reasonably be associated with or that derives from a particular person, user, computer, mobile or other device or instance of any application or mobile application or (c) any device or network identifier (including IP address or MAC address), device activity data or data collected from a networked physical object.

(<https://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/tracking-data>)



Personal Reflection

1. Imagine you are a journalist seeking to hold a corrupt institution accountable for its actions. Data tracking can provide proof of the illegal activities of that institution. How would you balance respecting individual privacy with the need for evidence in procuring justice?
2. Who can you identify that is tracking your own personal data, and how is that data used?

Discussion Questions

1. How has the role of journalism evolved in Russia, particularly in the context of state surveillance and media censorship? How have Russian journalists navigated reporting on controversial topics, such as corruption and human rights violations, and what challenges and consequences have they faced in doing so?
2. How have international actors, such as the United States and the European Union, responded to Russia's state surveillance practices and the treatment of opposition figures such as Alexei Navalny? Do those entities, the U.S. and the EU, also engage in surveillance practices? What impact can journalism and media coverage have on shaping public opinion and policy decisions?
3. What are the ethical considerations involved in using data tracking to monitor and track individuals, particularly in the context of political dissent and opposition movements? How can data tracking be used responsibly and ethically in this context, and what safeguards should be put in place to protect individuals' privacy and civil liberties?

Extension Activities

1. Four Corners Debate

Research a real-world example of data tracking being used either by those in power, or by those seeking to hold people and institutions with power accountable. Navalny, his core team, and Bellingcat's use of data tracking is an example of **investigative journalism** in pursuit of justice. Other examples include:

Mass Surveillance by Governments: The Chinese government has invested extensively in facial recognition and data-tracking systems to monitor the movement of its citizens.

Whistleblowers: Whistleblowers such as Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning exposed the United States government collecting data on millions of people, including their own citizens, without their consent or knowledge.

Social Activism: The Black Lives Matter movement has used surveillance, crowd-sourced, bystander and body camera footage to expose police brutality, leading to investigations and calls for greater accountability.

**Prepare for debate:**

Write a concise statement about your real-world example of data tracking and surveillance. For example:
Data tracking is ethical when it is used to expose and hold society accountable for systemic racism.

Set up four positions:

Strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. These can be physically designated – one for each corner of a room, for example – but can also be set up on graphic organizers, in video chat breakout rooms, etc.

If you are alone or in a small group, choose your position, and prepare your strongest arguments. Next, imagine what counter-arguments may arise, and make those counter-arguments as strong as you can. Respond to your counter-arguments by strengthening and adding effective supporting detail to your original position, then do the same for the counter-argument. Consider writing the debate out as a script, with unique voices for each argument.

For larger groups: Read the introductory statement, then have participants indicate which position they initially align with. Once positions have been taken, open the floor for participants to justify their positions. After each position has been presented, responses, questions, and counter-arguments may begin. If swayed by another position's arguments, participants may change positions. After a set number of responses, have each participant give a final, closing argument, and bring the debate to an end.

2. How is data tracking and mass surveillance used by your own government? First, write down your best guess as to how closely and extensively your government watches individual residents and citizens. How much data is collected on the average person residing in your country? How is that data collected? How is it used? Then: look for the answers! Finally, compare. How close was your initial estimate to the facts you found? Was it easier or harder to find information on government surveillance than you anticipated?



Additional Resources

ACLU Privacy and Surveillance:

This website includes news coverage, court cases, press releases, and podcasts concerning the intersections of privacy and surveillance.

<https://www.aclu.org/issues/national-security/privacy-and-surveillance>

Bellingcat:

This independent investigative journalism organization uses open-source and digital research methods to uncover evidence and expose the truth about a wide range of issues, including state-sponsored assassinations, war crimes, and corruption. Their website includes reports, news updates, and resources for learning about their methods and investigations.

<https://www.bellingcat.com/>

Columbia Journalism Review:

This publication covers issues related to journalism, including the role of journalists in exposing abuses of power and holding governments accountable. Their website includes articles, analysis, and commentary on these topics, as well as resources for improving journalism ethics and practices.

<https://www.cjr.org/>

Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF):

This organization advocates for civil liberties in the digital world, including issues related to data tracking, state surveillance, and internet freedom. Their website includes reports, news updates, and resources for taking action and protecting your rights online.

<https://www EFF.org/>

The Intercept:

This news organization provides in-depth reporting on issues related to surveillance, data tracking, and government secrecy. Their website includes articles, analysis, and commentary on these topics, as well as resources for taking action and protecting your privacy.

<https://theintercept.com/>

Privacy International:

This organization advocates for privacy rights around the world, including issues related to data tracking, government surveillance, and corporate surveillance. Their website includes reports, news updates, and resources for taking action and protecting your privacy.

<https://privacyinternational.org/>

An example of a student project on the ethics of government surveillance:

<https://cs.stanford.edu/people/eroberts/cs181/projects/ethics-of-surveillance/ethics.html>



SOCIAL MEDIA, CENSORSHIP, AND PROPAGANDA



DRIVING QUESTION

Social media and propaganda are intertwined and essential components of the cultural dispersal of information. How can we consume informational media with a critical eye?

The majority of people around the world now get their news through social media posts and links. This unfettered media has both the positive effect of amplifying a wide range of voices and the negative effect of drowning folks in information, much of which is highly propagandistic or outright false. This can lead to cognitive overload and impair critical thinking. It is important to ground oneself in the tools of persuasion and propaganda to be a savvy consumer of social media.

It is important to note that all political agendas use the tactics of persuasion, rhetorical appeals, and propaganda. By noticing them, viewers can dig deep into the core message of the speaker.

Useful Terms

When trying to convince a friend or social media audience member, persuasive **rhetorical appeals** can be made in three ways. An appeal can focus on **emotion**, creating a deep connection between the content and the viewer by sharing moving anecdotes or comparing current events to historical events that carry weight in the public imagination. Or, an influencer might take a **rational** approach, using rational ideas and building an argument that includes statistics, data, and seemingly irrefutable facts. Finally, persuasive appeal is a rhetorical approach in which the worthiness and respectability of the speaker or the people at the center of their cause are the main focus.

Propaganda uses the rhetorical device of persuasion along with a few other tactics, such as personal attacks or other measures that incite strong emotional responses. Also common in propaganda is incessant repetition, blatant omissions of information, simplistic language, or purposeful confusion in order to drive a specific viewpoint.



Personal Reflection

1. How are you shaped by your social media feed? Can you locate the line between persuasion and propaganda? How might you maintain a critical eye while consuming social media?

Discussion Questions

1. How was social media used to circumvent state-sanctioned censorship to share Navalny's political messages and the investigative story of his poisoning? Do you think social media effectively built his case?
2. Which of the three appeals (emotional, rational, character) described above are used in Navalny's social media presence and speeches? Are there elements of propaganda in his messaging? What about this documentary in particular? How are the filmmakers appealing to viewers?
3. In the scenes where the various talk show hosts discuss Navalny, what tactics do they use to undermine his legitimacy? Have you seen similar tactics in viewing American news and talk shows?
4. Consider issues that are important to you. What tools of persuasion or propaganda have you noticed that build visibility and/or draw supporters to those causes?

Extension Activities

1. Watch and read a variety of local and national political speeches, soundbites, and election ads. Can you locate the core message? Can you identify elements of propaganda in the construction of the media piece? Be sure to study pieces from multiple points of view. It is reasonable that you both agree with a core message and can critically identify the elements of propaganda.
2. Create a poster, TikTok, or social media post using the tools of persuasion and/or propaganda to promote a nonpartisan cause, even something silly, like what constitutes the best breakfast. Share your creation in your learning community and discuss the effectiveness of the message and the tools utilized.

Additional Resources

Alexei Navalny's YouTube Channel

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsAw3WynQJMm7t-My093y37A>

Dasha Navalnaya's (Alexei Navalny's daughter) YouTube channel.

<https://www.youtube.com/@dashanavalnaya4177>

Mind Over Media: Propaganda Education for a Digital Age
by Renee Hobbs. W.W Norton and Company, 2020

Mind Over Media website (teacher resources and collection of reader uploaded contemporary propaganda images)
<https://propaganda.mediaeducationlab.com/teachers>

The State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda
(online resource developed by The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)
<https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/propaganda>

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