Surveillance Capitalism and the Commodification of Public Attention: How Platform Business Models Reshape Democratic Information Ecosystems

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Abstract

This paper examines how surveillance capitalism-the economic logic of extracting behavioral data from human experience for prediction and profit-has fundamentally restructured democratic information ecosystems through the commodification of public attention. Drawing primarily on Zuboff's (2019) theoretical framework, complemented by Srnicek's (2017) platform capitalism analysis and the attention economy literature, the study traces the mechanisms through which platform business models have transformed news production, distribution, and consumption. The paper analyzes three interconnected processes: (a) the datafication of audiences, whereby citizens are reconstituted as behavioral data sources whose attention is sold to advertisers; (b) the optimization of engagement, through which algorithmic systems prioritize content that maximizes data extraction rather than informational quality; and (c) the structural dependency of journalism, wherein news organizations become dependent on platform distribution and advertising revenue, compromising editorial autonomy. Synthesizing empirical evidence from the Reuters Institute Digital News Report series (2020–2025), Pew Research Center data, and recent academic studies, the paper demonstrates that surveillance capitalism's information architecture produces systematic

incentives misaligned with democratic communication requirements. The analysis reveals that the commodification of attention creates a "race to the bottom of the brainstem" (Harris, 2016) in which platforms compete to capture and hold user attention through increasingly sophisticated behavioral manipulation techniques, with cascading effects on news quality, public trust, and citizens' capacity for informed democratic participation. The paper concludes by evaluating structural reform proposals ranging from data dignity frameworks and attention regulation to public interest algorithmic alternatives, arguing that addressing the democratic deficits of surveillance capitalism requires not merely regulatory adjustment but fundamental restructuring of the economic incentives governing information distribution.

***Keywords**:* surveillance capitalism, attention economy, platform business models, datafication, news economics, democratic information systems, behavioral prediction, algorithmic engagement.

Introduction

The political economy of information has undergone a transformation so fundamental that its full implications remain incompletely understood even as they reshape the foundations of democratic governance. In the space of two decades, the primary business model governing news distribution has shifted from advertising supported by editorial content to behavioral data extraction supported by engagement-optimized content (Mane & Lal, 2021). This transformation-captured by Shoshana Zuboff's (2019) concept of surveillance capitalism-has created an information architecture in which the economic incentives governing what citizens see, read, and share are systematically misaligned with the informational requirements of democratic self-governance.

The scale of this transformation is difficult to overstate. Alphabet (Google's parent company) and Meta together captured approximately 50% of global digital advertising revenue in 2024, with Amazon, TikTok's ByteDance, and Microsoft's LinkedIn claiming growing shares. These five corporations' combined advertising revenues-derived from behavioral data extracted from billions of users-exceeded $400 billion annually, dwarfing the entire global news industry's revenue (Jain et al., 2023). The asymmetry is structural: the companies that profit most from the distribution of news content bear no editorial responsibilities for its quality, accuracy, or democratic utility, while the news organizations that produce this content have become structurally

dependent on platforms they do not control for both distribution and advertising revenue (Rahman et al., 2024a).

This paper examines how surveillance capitalism's business model has restructured democratic information ecosystems through three interconnected processes: the datafication of audiences, the optimization of engagement, and the structural dependency of journalism. The analysis draws on Zuboff's (2019) surveillance capitalism framework, Srnicek's (2017) platform capitalism analysis, and the attention economy literature to construct an integrated theoretical account, which is then evaluated against empirical evidence from the Reuters Institute, Pew Research Center, and recent academic studies. The paper concludes by assessing structural reform proposals and their prospects for realigning information economics with democratic requirements.

Theoretical Framework: Surveillance Capitalism, Platform Economics, and the Attention Economy

Zuboff's Surveillance Capitalism: From Products to Prediction

Zuboff's (2019) theory of surveillance capitalism identifies a new economic order that claims human experience as free raw material for extraction, prediction, and sales. The framework distinguishes surveillance capitalism from earlier forms of capitalism through several defining features (Rahman et al., 2024b). First, its raw material is behavioral data—the digital traces generated by human activity, including but extending far beyond online behavior to encompass location, physiological states, social relationships, and emotional responses captured through the pervasive sensor networks of smartphones, wearables, and Internet of Things devices. Second, its production process involves machine intelligence systems that analyze behavioral data to generate prediction products—forecasts of what individuals will do now, soon, and later. Third, its marketplace consists of behavioral futures markets where prediction products are bought and sold, with advertisers as the primary customers.

The critical insight for understanding information ecosystems is Zuboff's concept of behavioral surplus. Early digital platforms used behavioral data to improve their services for users—Google's search algorithm, for instance, initially used search queries primarily to improve search results (Mane et al., 2023). The surveillance capitalist innovation was the discovery that behavioral data could be harvested beyond what was needed for service improvement, creating a surplus that could be translated into prediction products. This discovery transformed the user from

customer to raw material: the platform's primary economic relationship shifted from serving the user to extracting behavioral surplus from the user for sale to third parties (Lal et al., 2024).

For information ecosystems, this transformation means that the content users see-including news-is organized not to inform, educate, or empower citizens but to maximize behavioral data extraction. An algorithmically curated news feed is, from the perspective of surveillance capitalism's business logic, primarily a mechanism for keeping users engaged on the platform long enough to extract sufficient behavioral data for prediction products (Baidya et al., 2024). The informational content of the feed is instrumental to this economic purpose, not constitutive of the platform's value proposition to its actual customers (advertisers).

Srnicek's Platform Capitalism: Structural Analysis of Digital Intermediation

Srnicek's (2017) platform capitalism framework complements Zuboff's analysis by providing structural analysis of how platforms function as economic intermediaries. Srnicek classifies platforms into five types: advertising platforms (Google, Facebook), cloud platforms (AWS, Salesforce), industrial platforms (GE's Predix, Siemens's MindSphere), product platforms (Rolls Royce, Spotify), and lean platforms (Uber, Airbnb). The advertising platform model is most relevant to information ecosystems: these platforms position themselves as intermediaries between users, advertisers, and content producers, extracting value from the data generated by interactions among these groups (Katyal et al., 2024).

Three structural features of platform capitalism are particularly consequential for news and information. First, network effects create winner-take-most dynamics: the value of a platform to each user increases with the number of other users, creating powerful barriers to entry and exit that tend toward oligopoly (Aarzoo & Lal, 2024a). Second, data advantages compound over time: larger platforms accumulate more behavioral data, enabling more effective prediction products and thus attracting more advertising revenue, creating a self-reinforcing cycle. Third, platforms exercise what Srnicek terms infrastructural power-they control the underlying architecture through which economic and communicative interactions occur, enabling them to set terms that favor their interests. For news organizations, this means that platforms control the primary distribution channels, the dominant advertising markets, and the algorithmic systems that determine content visibility-creating a structural dependency relationship that fundamentally compromises editorial autonomy.

The Attention Economy: Scarcity, Competition, and Manipulation

The attention economy framework, developed by Goldhaber (1997), Davenport and Beck (2001), and Wu (2016), identifies human attention as the scarce resource around which digital economic competition is organized. In an environment of effectively unlimited information supply, the binding constraint is the finite capacity of human attention (Aarzoo & Lal, 2024b). Platform business models depend on capturing and holding this attention for as long as possible, because extended engagement generates more behavioral data, more advertising impressions, and more opportunities for behavioral surplus extraction.

The competition for attention creates what Tristan Harris, former Google design ethicist and co-founder of the Center for Humane Technology, described as a "race to the bottom of the brainstem"-a competitive dynamic in which platforms deploy increasingly sophisticated techniques from behavioral psychology and neuroscience to capture and hold attention. These techniques include variable-ratio reinforcement schedules (the algorithmic equivalent of slot machine mechanics), social validation feedback loops (likes, comments, shares), fear-of-missing-out (FOMO) triggers, and infinite scroll interfaces designed to eliminate natural stopping points. Each of these design patterns is optimized through A/B testing and machine learning to maximize engagement metrics-time spent, sessions per day, content consumed-that serve as proxies for behavioral data extraction (Aarzoo & Lal, 2024c).

The implications for news and democratic information are profound. Content that succeeds in the attention economy is content that captures and holds attention-which empirical research consistently shows favors emotional arousal, novelty, conflict, and personal relevance over nuance, complexity, and contextual understanding (Aarzoo & Lal, 2025a). Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral's (2018) analysis of 126,000 Twitter rumor cascades found that false news spread significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than truth, driven by its greater novelty and emotional impact-precisely the qualities that attention economy competition selects for. The attention economy thus creates systematic incentives for the production and distribution of attention-capturing content that may be inversely related to the informational quality required for democratic citizenship.

The Datafication of Audiences: Citizens as Behavioral Data Sources

The first mechanism through which surveillance capitalism reshapes information ecosystems is the datafication of audiences-the transformation of citizens' communicative

activities into quantified behavioral data that can be analyzed, traded, and monetized (Aarzoo & Lal, 2025b). This process reconstitutes the relationship between media and audiences in fundamental ways, replacing the relatively anonymous mass audience of broadcast-era media with individualized behavioral profiles that enable unprecedented precision in both content targeting and advertising.

From Mass Audiences to Behavioral Profiles

Traditional mass media operated on what Napoli (2011) termed the "institutionally effective audience"—an abstracted construction derived from sampling methodologies (Nielsen ratings, circulation audits) that provided rough approximations of audience size, demographics, and preferences. This measurement regime, however imperfect, maintained a significant degree of audience anonymity: individual viewers, listeners, and readers were known only as members of aggregate categories (18–34 males, college-educated women, etc.). The advertising bargain was correspondingly imprecise: advertisers purchased access to broad demographic segments, and media organizations sold this access through editorial content designed to attract and retain these segments (Aarzoo & Lal, 2025c).

Digital platforms have replaced this model with what Couldry and Mejias (2019) term "data relations"-a new social order in which human life is converted into data and appropriated for profit. Every digital interaction generates behavioral data: what content a user views, for how long, at what time, from what location, on what device, what they click next, what they share, what they search for before and after, their scrolling speed, their cursor movements, their typing patterns (Aarzoo & Lal, 2025d). This data, aggregated and analyzed through machine learning systems, produces behavioral profiles of extraordinary granularity-far exceeding anything possible under mass media's sampling-based measurement.

The consequences for news and information are multifaceted. First, datafication enables behavioral microtargeting: advertisers can target individuals based on inferred political beliefs, emotional states, purchasing intentions, and susceptibility to specific persuasive appeals. This capability has been exploited not only by commercial advertisers but by political actors, as the Cambridge Analytica scandal dramatically illustrated. Second, datafication creates incentives for news organizations to optimize content for engagement metrics rather than informational quality-a dynamic extensively documented by Petre (2021) and Christin (2020) in their ethnographic studies of metric-driven newsrooms. Third, datafication enables real-time feedback loops between

content and audience behavior, allowing algorithms to continuously refine content selection in ways that may entrench existing preferences rather than expose users to the diverse perspectives required for democratic deliberation.

The Surveillance Advertising Complex

The economic foundation of the datafied information ecosystem is what Hwang (2020) terms the "subprime attention crisis"-an advertising market built on inflated claims about the value and precision of behavioral targeting. Hwang argues that the programmatic advertising market, in which automated systems match advertisements with individual users based on behavioral profiles, suffers from systematic overvaluation analogous to the pre-2008 mortgage-backed securities market: advertisers pay premium prices for targeted advertising whose actual effectiveness is poorly measured and frequently overstated (Aarzoo & Lal, 2026).

Despite questions about its actual effectiveness, the surveillance advertising model has captured the overwhelming majority of digital advertising spending, creating a structural dependency for any media organization seeking advertising revenue. News publishers that cannot offer the behavioral targeting capabilities of platform advertising systems-which leverage vast behavioral datasets accumulated across the entire internet through tracking pixels, cookies, and device fingerprinting-are at a fundamental competitive disadvantage in the advertising market. This competitive asymmetry has driven the dramatic decline in news industry advertising revenue: U.S. newspaper advertising revenue declined from approximately $49 billion in 2006 to under $10 billion by 2020, with the lost revenue flowing overwhelmingly to digital platforms rather than to news organizations' own digital properties.

The surveillance advertising complex creates a self-reinforcing cycle that concentrates both economic power and informational gatekeeping authority in platform corporations. Platforms' superior behavioral data enables more effective advertising targeting, which attracts advertising spending away from news publishers, which weakens news publishers' economic viability, which increases their dependence on platform distribution, which gives platforms more behavioral data about news consumption, which further enhances their advertising advantage. This cycle has produced what Pickard (2020) describes as a "market failure in public information"-a situation in

which the market mechanisms governing information distribution systematically undervalue the public goods of accurate, comprehensive, and democratically relevant journalism.

The Optimization of Engagement: Algorithmic Architectures of Attention Capture

The second mechanism through which surveillance capitalism reshapes information ecosystems is the optimization of engagement-the systematic design of algorithmic architectures to maximize the capture and retention of user attention (Lal & Aarzoo, 2026). This optimization operates through recommendation algorithms, interface design, and notification systems that collectively constitute what Seaver (2019) terms "captology"-the science of persuasive technology design.

Recommendation Algorithms and the Engagement Imperative

Platform recommendation algorithms represent the most consequential mechanism of engagement optimization. These systems-Facebook's News Feed, YouTube's recommendation engine, TikTok's For You page, Google's search ranking-determine what content reaches users by predicting which items will maximize engagement metrics. The specific metrics optimized vary across platforms and change over time, but they typically include time spent on platform, sessions per day, content interactions (likes, comments, shares), and content consumption volume.

The engagement imperative creates systematic biases in content visibility that disadvantage substantive journalism. Content that generates strong emotional responses-outrage, fear, amusement, moral indignation-tends to outperform content requiring cognitive effort. Sensationalized headlines outperform nuanced ones. Controversy outperforms consensus. Novelty outperforms context. These biases are not necessarily intentional design choices by platform engineers but emergent properties of optimizing for engagement metrics in environments where attention is scarce and emotional content is attention-capturing.

The 2023 Meta election experiments provided important empirical context for these dynamics. Guess et al. (2023) found that switching users from algorithmic to chronological feeds increased content from untrustworthy sources by 68.8%, suggesting that the algorithmic feed actually filters some low-quality content. However, this finding must be interpreted carefully: the comparison is between two platform-mediated information environments, not between platform mediation and no mediation. The relevant question for democratic theory is not whether algorithms

filter better than chronological ordering but whether engagement-optimized algorithms serve democratic information needs-a question the experiments were not designed to address.

Persuasive Design and the Architecture of Manipulation

Beyond recommendation algorithms, platform engagement optimization operates through interface design elements drawn from behavioral psychology. These persuasive design patterns include infinite scroll (eliminating natural stopping points in content consumption), pull-to-refresh mechanisms (variable-ratio reinforcement schedules that create checking habits), social validation metrics (likes and follower counts that create social comparison dynamics), notification systems (creating urgency and FOMO), and autoplay features (reducing the active choice required to continue consuming content).

Collectively, these design patterns constitute what Zuboff (2019) terms "instrumentarian power"-the capacity to shape behavior at scale through environmental modification rather than through persuasion, coercion, or consent. Unlike traditional advertising, which aims to persuade through communicative appeals, instrumentarian power operates by restructuring the choice architecture within which individuals make decisions about information consumption. When a platform's infinite scroll interface, autoplay feature, and variable-ratio notification schedule combine to extend a user's session beyond their conscious intention, the result is not informed choice about information consumption but behavioral manipulation in the service of behavioral data extraction.

The democratic implications of persuasive design extend beyond individual autonomy to collective information processing. When citizens' patterns of news consumption are shaped by behaviorally manipulative design elements rather than by conscious choices about informational needs, the quality of democratic deliberation is compromised. A citizenry whose information diet is determined by engagement-optimized algorithms and behaviorally manipulative interfaces is not the informed citizenry that democratic theory presupposes.

The Structural Dependency of Journalism: From Institutional Autonomy to Platform Subordination

The third mechanism through which surveillance capitalism reshapes information ecosystems is the creation of structural dependency relationships in which journalism institutions become subordinate to platform corporations' economic and algorithmic power. This dependency

operates through three channels: distribution dependency, advertising revenue dependency, and the imposition of platform logics on editorial practice.

Distribution Dependency and the Platform Squeeze

News organizations' dependence on platforms for audience reach has intensified dramatically. The Reuters Institute's DNR 2025 documented that social media and video platforms have for the first time overtaken television and news websites as primary news sources in the United States, with referral traffic from social platforms constituting a significant share of many news organizations' digital audience. This distribution dependency gives platforms enormous leverage: algorithmic changes that reduce news visibility-such as Meta's progressive de-prioritization of news content since 2018 and removal of the News tab-can devastate individual publishers' traffic overnight, with no accountability mechanism and no appeal process.

The distribution dependency creates a dynamic that Caplan and boyd (2018) term "isomorphic pressures"-forces that push news organizations to become more like the platforms they depend on. News formats are adapted to platform preferences: articles are restructured for social sharing, headlines are optimized for clicks, video content is formatted for mobile-first autoplay consumption, and stories are timed for algorithmic peak performance periods. These adaptations are not merely formal but substantive: they reshape what counts as news, how stories are told, and what journalistic values are prioritized. When clicks and shares become the primary success metrics, the editorial values of accuracy, comprehensiveness, and public service orientation are displaced by the platform values of virality, emotional resonance, and engagement.

Revenue Dependency and the Collapse of News Economics

The economic dimension of dependency is equally consequential. The migration of advertising revenue from news organizations to digital platforms has created what scholars have termed a "news desert" crisis: the systematic hollowing out of local journalism as advertising revenue migrates to platforms that provide superior behavioral targeting capabilities. In the United States alone, approximately 2,900 newspapers have closed since 2005, with over 200 counties now lacking any local news source. The closures are concentrated in communities already underserved by the political and economic system-rural areas, communities of color, lower-income communities-creating what Usher (2021) terms a feedback loop between informational deprivation and political marginalization.

The economic crisis of journalism is not merely a market adjustment but a structural consequence of surveillance capitalism's business model. When behavioral data extracted from billions of users enables advertising targeting far more precise than anything news organizations can offer, the economic logic driving advertising spending is clear. But this logic treats information as a vehicle for attention capture and data extraction rather than as a public good essential to democratic governance. The result is what economists would recognize as a classic market failure: the private market systematically underprovides the public good of quality journalism because the economic returns to behavioral data extraction exceed the economic returns to public interest information production.

Platform Logics and the Transformation of Editorial Practice

The imposition of platform logics on editorial practice represents perhaps the most subtle but consequential dimension of structural dependency. As newsrooms integrate platform analytics tools-Chartbeat, Google Analytics, social media dashboards-into their editorial workflows, the metrics that matter shift from journalistic quality assessments (accuracy, depth, public significance) to platform performance indicators (pageviews, time on page, social shares, bounce rate). Petre's (2021) ethnographic research documented how metrics function as "addictive games" in newsrooms, reshaping editorial attention and resource allocation in ways that are often unconscious and unacknowledged.

Christin's (2020) comparative ethnography revealed a paradox: American journalists in her study professed to ignore metrics while nonetheless orienting their practice around them, while French journalists openly engaged with metrics but maintained stronger boundaries between metric performance and editorial judgment. This cross-cultural variation suggests that the impact of platform logics on editorial practice is mediated by professional cultures, institutional structures, and regulatory environments-a finding with important implications for governance interventions aimed at protecting editorial autonomy within platform-dependent ecosystems.

Democratic Consequences and the Structural Reform Imperative

The convergence of audience datafication, engagement optimization, and journalistic dependency produces an information architecture with systematic democratic deficits. These deficits are not the result of individual design choices or corporate malfeasance but structural consequences of an economic model that treats human attention as raw material for behavioral

prediction markets. Addressing these deficits requires structural reforms that go beyond the incremental regulatory adjustments currently under consideration.

The Trust Crisis as Structural Symptom

The persistent crisis of public trust in news media-the Reuters Institute's global trust measure has remained at approximately 40% since 2021, while news avoidance has risen to 40%-can be understood as a structural symptom of surveillance capitalism's information architecture. When citizens encounter news primarily through algorithmically curated feeds optimized for engagement rather than informational quality, when headlines are optimized for clicks rather than accuracy, when sensationalized and emotionally arousing content systematically outperforms nuanced reporting, and when the economic foundations of investigative journalism erode as advertising revenue migrates to platforms, the resulting information environment predictably generates distrust, avoidance, and disengagement.

The Edelman Trust Barometer 2025 documented an alarming deepening of this crisis: among populations with high grievance levels, violence and disinformation are increasingly viewed as legitimate tools for societal change. This finding suggests that the informational consequences of surveillance capitalism extend beyond individual-level trust deficits to structural threats to democratic governance itself. When significant portions of the population lose confidence in the reliability of shared information systems, the epistemic foundations of democratic deliberation-the possibility of reasoned disagreement based on shared factual premises-are undermined.

Toward Structural Reform: Beyond Regulatory Incrementalism

Several structural reform proposals merit serious consideration. First, data dignity frameworks, proposed by Lanier (2013) and developed by Posner and Weyl (2018), would establish property-like rights in behavioral data, requiring platforms to compensate users for the behavioral surplus extracted from their activities. By pricing behavioral data extraction, such frameworks would alter the economic calculus underlying engagement optimization, potentially creating incentives for platforms to develop business models less dependent on attention capture and behavioral manipulation.

Second, public interest obligation frameworks would require platforms exercising significant gatekeeping functions to meet minimum standards for news visibility, source diversity,

and algorithmic accountability. Drawing on the historical precedent of broadcast media's public interest obligations, such frameworks would acknowledge that platforms performing public communication functions bear public responsibilities that cannot be adequately addressed through market mechanisms alone.

Third, investment in alternative information infrastructure-public media, community journalism, non-commercial platforms, and decentralized social media protocols-would reduce the structural dependency of democratic information systems on surveillance capitalism's business model. The BBC, ARD/ZDF, NHK, and other well-funded public media systems demonstrate that high-quality journalism can be produced outside the logic of behavioral data extraction, but these institutions require adequate funding, institutional independence, and adaptation to digital distribution environments.

Fourth, attention regulation frameworks would treat the manipulation of human attention through behaviorally exploitative design patterns as a harm requiring regulatory intervention, analogous to consumer protection regulation of manipulative sales practices. Such frameworks could prohibit specific persuasive design elements (infinite scroll, autoplay, variable-ratio reinforcement) in contexts where they serve no user interest but maximize data extraction, or require platforms to implement meaningful "friction" that supports informed content consumption choices.

Discussion and Future Research Directions

This paper has argued that surveillance capitalism's business model has restructured democratic information ecosystems through the datafication of audiences, the optimization of engagement, and the creation of structural dependencies that subordinate journalistic institutions to platform corporations. The resulting information architecture produces systematic incentives misaligned with democratic communication requirements, contributing to declining trust, rising misinformation, and the erosion of shared factual foundations for democratic deliberation.

Several important limitations should be acknowledged. First, the analysis has focused primarily on the advertising-based platform model, but subscription-based platforms (Netflix, Spotify, some news organizations) operate under different economic logics that may produce different informational consequences. Comparative analysis of advertising-based versus subscription-based information architectures represents an important research direction. Second, the analysis has been largely Western-centric; the dynamics of surveillance capitalism in the

Global South, where different platform ecosystems (WeChat, Line, KakaoTalk) and regulatory environments prevail, require separate investigation. Third, the rapid integration of generative AI into platform services creates new dynamics-including AI-generated content, conversational search replacing link-based search, and automated content summarization that may reduce traffic to news publishers-that extend and complicate the analysis presented here.

Future research should investigate the long-term cognitive and democratic effects of growing up within surveillance capitalism's information architecture, as the first generation of "digitally native" citizens reaches voting age having never known an information environment not mediated by engagement-optimized algorithms. Additionally, the emerging convergence of generative AI with surveillance capitalism's data extraction apparatus raises profound questions about the future of authentic human communication in algorithmically mediated environments.

Conclusion

Surveillance capitalism has created an information architecture in which the most fundamental decisions about what citizens know, believe, and understand are made by algorithmic systems designed to maximize behavioral data extraction rather than to support informed democratic participation. The economic logic is clear: when human attention is the scarce resource and behavioral data is the currency, the rational strategy for platforms is to design information environments that capture and hold attention through whatever means prove most effective-regardless of the informational quality, accuracy, or democratic utility of the content that accomplishes this capture.

The democratic consequences of this structural arrangement are not hypothetical but empirically observable: declining trust in information institutions, rising misinformation, news avoidance, the collapse of local journalism, the concentration of gatekeeping power in unaccountable corporations, and the systematic prioritization of emotionally arousing content over substantive public interest reporting. Addressing these consequences requires recognizing that they are not bugs in the system but features of a business model whose fundamental logic is incompatible with the informational requirements of democratic governance.

The reform agenda must therefore be structural rather than incremental. Transparency requirements, content moderation standards, and algorithmic accountability frameworks are necessary but insufficient-they address the symptoms of surveillance capitalism's democratic

deficits without confronting the underlying business model that produces them. Genuine reform requires creating information architectures in which the economic incentives governing content production, distribution, and consumption are aligned with rather than opposed to the informational needs of democratic citizenship. This is the defining challenge of information governance in the twenty-first century.

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