Green Eyes: Corporate Surveillance of Environmental Activists

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Abstract. This analysis examines contemporary examples of corporate surveillance and offers new questions to guide future research on the role of privacy, social media, and grey intelligence on surveillance of environmental activist groups. In particular, this study explores different cases of activist monitoring, both online and in person, to demonstrate that the increase of activism on social media, while seemingly beneficial, has also made activists more vulnerable to surveillance by corporations because of the public nature of their personal information. The paper also proposes that grey intelligence, which is the phenomena of corporations colluding with former and current government actors to carry out their activist surveillance, is a rising phenomenon that should be the subject of future research. To provide background of these topics, this analysis investigates the various conceptions of privacy and surveillance and discusses how they have been defined previously in both philosophical and legal terms. This section covers how the definition of privacy and the requisites of the US legal system may pose a barrier to activists seeking recourse in the court system for corporate monitoring. This investigation also discusses the drivers of corporate surveillance and connects this phenomenon to reputational capital and corporate strategy literature.

I. Introduction

Author of Secret Maneuvers in the Dark: Corporate and Police Spying on Activists (2012), Eveline Lubbers has brought attention to a new field of research called activist intelligence and covert strategy which focuses on corporate involvement in political policing and spying. In her research, she has uncovered the furtive methods of corporations to avoid reputational harm and has proposed that corporate intelligence gathering has shifted from being defensive to proactive. This shift has sparked the need for research on the ways in which corporations gather information from environmental groups and the drivers of such conduct. As a relatively new field, the literature on this particular topic is minimal. This research aims to identify which aspects of this topic remain unexplored, pose new questions to guide future research, and to provide an overview of the different features of environmental corporate surveillance. Since the literature on this subject is still in its early phases, it's important to provide a general but broad overview of the various aspects of corporate intelligence. This review will probe the legal conception of privacy which will be explored in the context of surveillance, the drivers of this surveillance, the ways in which surveillance is carried out, and its connection to social media.

Proceeding an introduction to the literature, it is important to define central terms and offer guiding questions for the topics that will be discussed. How do we as a society understand privacy in both legal and colloquial terms? How do those notions affect the interpretation of my findings? Privacy is a term that is difficult to properly define and operationalize. Historically, privacy has been viewed in two competing aspects: as a positive or negative right (Waldman, 2018). Privacy as a positive right would constitute a more proactive outlook that grants us the freedom to “make choices, to formulate ideas beyond the prying eyes of others, or to realize...
our potential as persons” (Petronio, 2002). While a negative right positions privacy as a defensive freedom implemented to protect individuals from surveillance, conformity, or other forms of interference by authoritative entities (Waldman, 2018). Despite these opposing definitions, neither fully envelops the intricacies regarding which spaces and information are or should be considered private, especially in our growing digital age.

For the purposes of my research, I used sociologist Donald Ball’s broader definition of privacy as the “ability to engage in activities without being observed by others” as my conception of privacy (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). Despite this definition providing the basis of my construction of privacy, the definition still fails to wholly address the specific circumstances that arose in my research. For instance, is privacy a privilege or a right? If information is publicly accessible but intended for a narrow audience, is there still a valid expectation of privacy? Should the expectation of privacy be derived from the value of the information being shared or be of inherent worth? These are all questions that arose in my research that I propose should be further investigated in this field both philosophically and in cross-cultural legal environments.

Furthermore, to understand the ways in which surveillance affects environmental activists and social movements organizations (SMOs), repression and the types of surveillance conducted by corporations must be defined. Using Boykoff’s definition, repression is a “process whereby groups or individuals attempt to diminish dissident action, collective organization, and the mobilization of dissenting opinion by inhibiting collective action through either raising the costs or minimizing the benefits of such action” (Boykoff, 2007a). This definition is important in my analysis because it encapsulates the desired outcomes of corporate surveillance in order to mitigate reputational harm. As I will discuss in Corporate Greenwashing & Reputational Capital, repression of critical activists has emerged as a crucial corporate strategy that often accompanies greenwashing initiatives. There are two types of surveillance operations that this study encounters: direct and indirect surveillance. Direct/overt surveillance entails spying on and monitoring activists while indirect/covert actions involve gathering massive amounts of “coded information” on particular individuals or specific activist groups (Boykoff, 2007b). When corporations want to intentionally make activists aware that they are being surveilled, they perform a form of “conspicuous surveillance” which is used to purposefully intimidate activists rather than collecting data covertly (Boykoff, 2007b). This paper mainly focuses on direct surveillance and conspicuous surveillance.

Finally, to address the ways in which surveillance, particularly conspicuous monitoring, affects activists, I refer to Boyer who clarifies that it is “unclear how exactly repression affects social movement organizations, and ranges the gamut from deterring dissent, increasing dissent, impacting dissent based on the strength of repression levels, increasing solidarity within the social movement, creating factionalism, driving the movement underground, and sparking radicalism” (Boyer, 2017; Carley, 1997; Glasser, 2011; Starr, et al., 2008). While the evidence is unclear on the extent of repression’s effect on SMOs, the existence of corporations who continue to use conspicuous surveillance techniques shows that intimidation tactics can influence social action. Furthermore, the consequences of repression may vary depending on a number of factors, including “social and cultural factors, political stability, and type of political structure or government” (Glasser, 2011).

II. Privacy & US Legal System

In the US courts, the term privacy has arisen in a wide range of contexts. According to Cate & Cate, “between 1970 and 2011, the [U.S. Supreme] Court used the term ‘privacy’ in 631 opinions” and in over half of these written opinions the court significantly addressed a facet of what privacy entails, setting precedent for future cases (Cate & Cate, 2012). In most of those opinions, the Court has determined that privacy is a guaranteed protection based on constitutional rights. While most of these cases (64%) involved the ‘reasonable expectation of privacy’ guaranteed in the Fourth Amendment, other cases involved a large breadth of legal basis such as “statutory or common-law issues including
statutory privacy rights and common law privacy
torts; and evidentiary privileges and rules that
reflect privacy or confidentiality norms” (Cate &
Cate, 2012). These cases do not only regard searches
and seizures by government entities, but also those
that are “initiated or conducted by private parties
with some degree of government involvement”
(Cate & Cate, 2012). The extent of the Court’s
constitutional privacy jurisprudence demonstrates
that although privacy is not guaranteed protection
by name in the Constitution, the Supreme Court
of the United States (SCOTUS) has construed
various amendments in the Bill of Rights to protect
numerous aspects of privacy (Cate & Cate, 2012).
This demonstrates how more often than not privacy
is perceived as a right guaranteed in the U.S. legal
system. However, other research implies that this
pattern may not apply in cases where corporate
entities are the actors breaching privacy.

The legality of surveillance by corporate
actors is another integral component of this field.
Is being watched an outright harm in and of itself,
or must there be a tangible and specific injury
associated with such surveillance (Waldman,
2018)? According to a 2011 US court case
brought by Greenpeace against Beckett Brown
International, a private security firm contracted by
Dow Chemical Company and other defendants,
there must be a specific or “actual” injury associated
with surveillance in order for it to be considered
a valid harm (Greenpeace, Inc. vs. Dow Chemical
Company, et. al, 2011). In the suit, Greenpeace
alleges that from 1998 to 2000
“two chemical companies and the public relations
firms paid a private security firm to plant undercover
agents within focus groups, search for documents
in garbage and recycling bins, and hack email
networks” (Scheyder, 2010). It should be noted
that the alleged surveillance was discovered eight
years after a firm investor came into possession
of the company’s documents (Scheyder, 2010).
Based on that case, it appears that this form of
intimidation is not considered an injury which
is a necessary requisite for a successful lawsuit.
Instead, the plaintiff should have established a
“direct relationship” between the alleged criminal
acts and any injury Greenpeace might have suffered
(Greenpeace, Inc. v. Dow Chemical Co.,808
F.Supp.2d 262 (D.D.C. 2011)). Although there are
other reasons that account for the failed lawsuit
brought forth by Greenpeace, this precedent still
presents a barrier in pursuing cases regarding
corporate surveillance in the U.S. justice system.

III. Corporate Greenwashing &
Reputational Capital

As corporations have grown in the global
landscape, so has the number of critics. Transnational
corporations are increasingly being held accountable
by environmental non-governmental organizations
(NGOs) who are criticizing corporations for their
alleged environmental and social wrongdoings.
These activists harm the reputational capital of
companies and thus have ignited a growing desire
from corporations to prevent these scandals from
emerging in the public arena.

One of the more prominent industries that
face constant fear of criticism is the fossil fuel
industry. According to Livesey, oil companies have
been attempting to mitigate reputational damage
caused by activists through voluntary corporate
social responsibility (CSR) initiatives since the late
1990s (Livesey, 2001). However, oil companies’
historical relationship to environmental degradation
and social harm still persists in the memories of
many contemporary activists. For example, Shell’s
involvement in the Nigerian military regime’s
execution of nine Ogoni activists who opposed
the oil companies’ activity in the delta and the BP
Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico
are still infamous examples of these types of
negative environmental and social consequences
(Du and Vieira, 2012 and UNPO: Ogoni: Timeline
of the Ogoni Struggle, 2018). This has led
companies to revamp their image “by establishing
CSR departments, publishing sustainability
reports, and inviting NGOs to develop partnerships
with them” (Uldam, 2018). BP also completely
rebranded themselves as ‘bp: beyond petroleum’ in
2000 in order to push back on their image as an
oil company and instead market themselves as an
energy company (Moloney, 2003).

This trend of ‘greenwashing’, or companies
falsely implying that their products are not as
environmentally harmful as originally perceived is
not a phenomenon unique to fossil fuel companies (Vogt, 2020). Fast fashion companies such as H&M, Zara, and Lululemon are also using these corporate strategies to convince customers that they prioritize sustainability by using CSR initiatives or deceiving advertising. Why would companies market themselves as ‘green’ even if they are not? It is because of the economic and reputational advantage that comes with being perceived as a sustainable company (Vogt, 2020). Consumers feel better about the products they are purchasing and the companies they are supporting when they believe they are consuming responsibly and ethically. This established consumer trust is a competitive edge that sustainable companies have, and that greenwashing companies want to appropriate (Vogt, 2020). Corporate strategies also help companies develop reputational capital they can then rely on in cases of scrutiny and enhance long-term ability to create value (Caves and Porter, 1977). This is important for corporations because “although company resources, such as technological leadership, may be short lived due to successive innovations, reputations can be extremely long lived” (Suh & Amine, 2007). Activist campaigns by environmental groups can hinder this process by ‘exposing’ the reality of certain corporate actions and thus stand in the way of greenwashing measures.

IV. Activism & Social Media

Online platforms and social media are nuanced spaces when used by activists for outreach and organization. While the internet surely helped grow the ease of access for interested participants to learn how to get involved in activism, this ease of access has enabled corporations and state entities to more efficiently identify groups and individuals of interest in order to quell and target SMOs.

Activism as a term is relatively new and interlaced with the concepts of advocacy, protest, and social movements (Harp et al., 2012). Despite the term being relatively new, the actions and concepts it encompasses are not. For the purpose of this paper, “activism is generally defined as the ability or practices of individuals to bring about social, political, economic, or other changes to the status quo” (Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2006; Gitlin, 2003; Harp et al., 2012; Jordan, 2002). In order to bring about these changes, the internet has grown as a vital resource to meet the needs of activists who want to reach new members, publicize events, spread their message, and “foster a collective identity” (Garrett, 2006). Due to reduced labor costs of using the internet as a method of activism and communication it has become a key part of mobilization in contemporary social movements (Garrett, 2006).

Internet-based activism is so popular nowadays that the “internet is not only perceived as a tool for assisting in activism, [but] is also used as a means of action in itself” (Harp et al., 2012; Vegh, 2003). This has allowed for new techniques to emerge on the online arena such as virtual sit-ins, protests, hacking, hashtag campaigns, and online petitioning (McCaughey & Ayers, 2003). Social networking sites (SNS) have been the crux of spreading these new techniques and is especially prevalent among younger activists who grew up in the digital age. According to Brodock et. al, “a 2009 survey of 122 international digital activists found that SNS were the most common tool used by the respondents” (Brodock, Joyce, & Zaeck, 2009; Harp et al., 2012). Furthermore, the desire for companies to monitor social media activists has grown in part from the widespread ability of users to expose unjust corporate practices to the general public quickly (Bennett, 2005). According to Uldam and Dahlgren, social networking sites’ “empowering potential relates to their widespread use, ease of access (in some countries), no-fee access, and possibilities for bypassing mass media filters, which provides non-elite actors with new possibilities for making themselves and their causes visible to wider publics” (Dahlgren, 2013; Uldam, 2018).

There are prominent examples of the social media shift in activism: the Iranian election protests in 2009–2010 which were called a “Twitter revolution” due to the activists’ collective utilization of Twitter to organize and communicate, the Arab Spring where social media was used to coordinate movement efforts, and the Occupy movement which used SNS as primary mobilizing tools (“Editorial: Iran’s Twitter Revolution,” 2009;
Social media activism is especially prominent among environmental NGOs and movement leaders. For instance, activist groups in the UK have used online organizing to specifically undermine and target the CSR initiatives of oil companies in order to draw awareness to their corporate greenwashing (Uldam, 2018). To this end, activists have collectively organized as part of the climate justice movement and partaken in creative actions such as holding a “Greenwash Gold campaign” (Uldam, 2018). This 2012 campaign opposed the London 2012 Olympics for selecting BP, Dow Chemicals and Rio Tinto as sponsors for the Olympics (Uldam, 2018). Activists petitioned the general public to vote online for the worst corporate sponsor which led to a fake award ceremony where three activists impersonated the corporate representatives of each company and were awarded gold medals for being the worst corporate sponsors of the Olympics (Uldam, 2018). They then were drenched in green custard which was comically poured over their heads (Uldam, 2018). The creative use of online platforms to promote this event showcases how activism is adjusting to the digital age.

Despite the perceived importance of social networking sites in contemporary activism, some scholars argue that online platforms reduce or minimize the effectiveness of such activism because of shallow engagement. A retweet or a story post may give the impression that activists are pushing for change, however, these actions alone tend to fall short of enacting changes to the status quo (Boyd, 2008; Gladwell, 2010). On the other hand, some scholars believe that activists using social networking sites have not achieved their full potential. In fact, there is evidence suggesting SNS can assist in “integrat[ing] traditional and virtual organizing and engag[ing] young adults into different forms of activism” (Jha, 2008; Jones, 2006; Koch, 2008). To view how activists perceive the effectiveness of using social networking sites for advocacy work, I look towards a 2012 cross-cultural study by Harp et. al. The study, which focuses on activists’ relationship to social networking sites in Latin America, China, and the United States, generally “found support from activists themselves for the notion that social media help people to be more active in political and civic arenas and help promote dialogue” (Harp et al., 2012).

Techno-sociologist Zeynep Tufekci, who has done research on the nuances of activist’s relationship to social media, raises other benefits of organizing via social media. She has found that social media allows the dissemination of information on other channels of communication when mainstream news is committing censorship (Zeynep Tufekci, 2015). For example, during the 2013 Gezi demonstrations (which originated to protest against a park being built but soon turned into an anti-authoritarian movement), organizers used twitter to show real time footage of the protests since CNN Turkey would not cover the movement while CNN International was covering the protest live (Zeynep Tufekci, 2015). Social media was able to overcome this form of censorship to reach an audience located in Turkey and abroad. In her words “nowadays a network of tweets can unleash a global awareness campaign” (Zeynep Tufekci, 2015).

However, as Tufekci clarifies, the outcomes of online movements have not been proportional to the size and energy that the movement inspires because of the unsustainability of these quickly emerging movements. Nonetheless, social media activism has emerged as a growing channel of advocacy and therefore have been targeted by corporations seeking to maintain their reputational capital.

V. Corporate Surveillance of Activists

A. Online surveillance

Why is surveillance an alluring option for corporations? According to Earl, the relative affordability and practicality of surveillance operations to collect large amounts of data on persons or social movements of interest make it a tempting strategy to prevent reputational harm (Earl, 2011). The increase of activism on social media also increases the ease corporations have of identifying and collecting information on groups or individuals because this information is public and therefore easily accessible. In many cases, corporations hire separate entities to monitor activists on their behalf such as contracting risk
assessment and public relations (PR) agencies to assist in their surveillance. For example, Exclusive Analysis, a UK-based risk assessment firm that specializes in the Energy sector, provides analytics of socio-political environments in order to ‘forecast reputation risks’ (Uldam, 2018). These forecasts include observations of ‘online-activist stakeholders’ as they are considered critical in understanding reputational risk for a variety of sectors, including the oil and gas industry (Uldam, 2018). Furthermore, these risk assessment firms tend to focus on particular organized groups of people instead of broad social movements.

According to Uldam, corporate surveillance can usually be divided into two camps: a strategy of anticipation and a strategy addressing containment (Uldam, 2018). Her study featured internal documents from BP that were released under the Data Protection Act that showcases how the company created reports on particular individual critics based on their online footprint on Facebook, Vimeo, Twitter, etc (Uldam, 2018). Some of the critics that BP chose to focus on were those who requested information from BP through the Subject Access Requests. Photos of these individuals were included in their collated reports along with footage of them in protests and their tweets (Uldam, 2018). BP’s intentional focus on individual monitoring is highlighted in their internal documents such as ‘Major Personality Report’ and ‘Individuals of note’ which is featured in Figure 1 and 2, respectively (Uldam, 2018). These reports, which are put together by the company’s security division, include a biographical description of each individual along with portraits obtained from their social media. The biographical information is highly specific and contains “name, position, company, educational degree, and previous position and workplace” (Uldam, 2018). The collated report also makes sure to highlight which protest events the persons of interest have been seen at that are related to the company (Uldam, 2018).

Moreover, BP monitors Facebook events to anticipate reputational harm. This surveillance strategy was revealed in an internal email where the list of invitees of a protest event organized by the campaign group Drop Dow Now that targeted the Dow Chemicals company were cross referenced with the list of names of anti-BP activists that BP maintains (Uldam, 2018). The email demonstrates how BP engages in anticipatory strategies to avoid reputational harm and how surveilling online organizing helps them accomplish this (Uldam, 2018).

In regard to the second strategy of containment, one must look to the aftermath of the 2012 campaign against BP as a sponsor and ‘Sustainability Partner’ of the Olympics and Cultural Olympiad (Uldam, 2018). Activists defaced billboards advertising BP with the slogan ‘Fueling the Future’ to say ‘Fucking the Future’ using black paint to symbolize oil, the main commodity of BP (Uldam, 2018). This move was accompanied with the creation of websites with titles mirroring the newly changed slogan. BP quickly reacted by taking down the websites claiming ‘brand infringement’ which demonstrates their strong desire to maintain their sustainable facade (Zyglidopoulos and Fleming, 2011).

B. Ground Surveillance

There are other notable examples of corporations using surveillance techniques beyond utilizing social networking sites. According to an article from the ACLU, there have been numerous cases of activists contesting the development of the Dakota Access Pipeline being surveilled by...
private security companies (Dakwar, 2017). This monitoring took form in conspicuous surveillance as the perceived goal of the security companies hired by the pipeline company, Energy Transfers Partners, is to suppress protests by intimidating advocates and “infiltrate protest camps and instigate rifts between activists” (Dakwar, 2017). Activists, which primarily consist of indigenous groups, have noted being followed and “seeing planes, helicopters, and drones above their camp, surveilling their protests and recording their movements and activities at all hours” (Dakwar, 2017). Aggressive policing accompanied these actions, as local law enforcement agencies have been deploying militarized and war grade gear and weapons as a disproportionate response to the peaceful protesters (Dakwar, 2017).

Furthermore, there is evidence that the connections between governmental intervention/policing and corporate hired security are much more extensive than generally perceived. According to internal documents recovered by The Intercept, the security firm hired by Energy Transfers Partners is an international mercenary and security firm known as TigerSwan (Brown et al., 2017). The company “originated as a U.S. military and State Department contractor helping to execute the global war on terror” and is an example of grey intelligence, a term which will be addressed later in the paper (Dakwar, 2017). As a mercenary company with experience in war tactics it is comprehensible why the security firm “targeted the movement opposed to the Dakota Access Pipeline with military-style counterterrorism measures, collaborating closely with police in at least five states” (Brown et al., 2017). TigerSwan, an international operation that specializes in armed conflict zones, collaborated with police to suppress protests in South Dakota, Illinois, Iowa, and Texas. The assessment that the firm utilizes military style techniques is not driven solely by the actions on the ground, but also in the internal communications from the firm itself which describe the Indigenous led movement as ‘an ideologically driven insurgency with a strong religious component’ and compare the anti-pipeline water protectors to “jihadist fighters” (Brown et al., 2017). Furthermore, in an internal report a TigerSwan operative “describes an effort to amass digital and ground intelligence that would allow the company to ‘find, fix, and eliminate’ threats to the pipeline. This shows a conceded effort to utilize both direct and indirect surveillance on online platforms and on-ground operations.

Surveillance information collected by the firm and documented in their internal memos, was also found to have numerous concerns of the presence of Muslims in the movement. For example, the documents claim that “the movement’s involvement with Islamic individuals is a dynamic that requires further examination.” (Brown et al., 2017). This leads to another concern of corporate surveillance as it may target specific groups in a discriminatory manner.

C. Grey Intelligence

The growing evidence of ties between corporate and governmental actors partaking in activist surveillance emphasizes the importance of a relatively new field of study, grey intelligence. Specifically, grey intelligence highlights the concerning growth of corporate and government partnerships in policing and spying (Lubbers, 2012). Dutch scholar Bob Hoogenboom explores this phenomenon in his own work and notes that prominent spy agencies like MI6 and the CIA, along with hundreds of intelligence-gathering private organizations have entered the market to meet corporate demand (Hoogenboom, 2010). Former MI6 officer, Christopher James, who is the founder of a private intelligence company called Hakluyt explains that “the idea was to do for industry what we had done for the government” (Federman, 2013). His company is employed by clients such as Shell and BP. According to James, many corporations now have their own private intelligence networks, or “para-CIAs” (Federman, 2013).

To explore this concept, I refer to the McSpy case, which involved a joint infiltration operation of Greenpeace by McDonalds and special police forces. It was only once Greenpeace members created and disseminated a leaflet that critiqued the company’s unethical labor practices, sale of junk food, and exploitation of the environment that the
extent of the joint surveillance operation started to be revealed (Lewis & Evans, 2013). The notable case, which played out in the UK and started in the 1980s, concluded recently in the English legal system. In order to discover which actors within Greenpeace created the leaflet and find connections to radical animal rights activists, McDonald’s plotted a comprehensive infiltration operation in which they hired seven private detectives to infiltrate the environmental group (Lubbers, 2012). However, it was discovered in 2013 that a police agent from “a top-secret Metropolitan police unit” called the special demonstration squad (SDS) co-authored the leaflet in question (Lewis & Evans, 2013). The role of SDS was to target political activists, mainly peaceful environmental organizations between 1968 until 2008, when it was ultimately disbanded (Lewis & Evans, 2013). This revelation, along with the ensuing ‘McLibel’ case exposed the joint operation by McDonalds and the Special Police to infiltrate activist groups “in order to get to more radical animal rights campaigners” (Lubbers, 2012).

The legal case was brought forth by McDonald’s against two authors of the leaflet for libel and “led to the longest civil trial in English history, costing the fast-food chain millions of pounds in fees” (Lewis & Evans, 2013). In the evidence phase of the trial, the company was forced to provide details of its extensive spying on London Greenpeace where McDonald’s spies infiltrated the organization numerous times (Lubbers, 2012). The undercover police spymaster Lambert from SDS is also under investigation for his behavior while undercover (Lewis & Evans, 2013). According to the Guardian, Lambert is accused of having sexual relationships with four women who were affiliated with Greenpeace while undercover, “one of whom he fathered a child with before vanishing from their lives” (Lewis & Evans, 2013). This draws obvious ethical concerns of police infiltration in activist groups and how joint operations are conducted.

VI. Conclusion

This research on corporate surveillance of environmental activists revealed the various instances of corporate monitoring of activist groups that are targeted because of their critique of companies and pattern of inflicting reputational harm against those companies. My study discovered that although privacy is often considered an inherent constitutional right, there are still barriers in pursuing remedies for corporate surveillance in the U.S. court system because of a lack of causal injury from the surveillance itself and any subsequent intimidation it may have caused. The study also analyzed how fear of reputational harm is a main driver for companies to monitor activists and that beyond surveillance companies also bolster their reputation through greenwashing and CSR initiatives. Thus, companies take two routes towards rebuilding their reputation: defensively through corporate surveillance in order to prevent and quickly address negative press and offensively through CSR as to promote themselves as a company dedicated to social and environmental change. Furthermore, the study’s analysis on the role of social media in activism demonstrated how there is a parallel between social media activism and online surveillance. As activists continue using online formats to spread their message, corporations in turn use the visibility of these campaigns to their advantage by collecting data on particularly outspoken individuals and monitoring upcoming events. Finally, through my research I have demonstrated the rise of grey intelligence between corporate surveillance and quasi-government agents both abroad and in the U.S. I recommend that occurrences be further studied both for its legality and potential ethical implications it may have.

Although my research doesn’t delve particularly in any one facet of activist intelligence, I instead aimed to provide a well-rounded picture of what aspects define this new field of sociology. While my research brought up more questions than answers, I hope my analysis can guide researchers interested in this emerging field and encourage the exploration of the tactics that corporations are using, the way big data can affect the ease of activist spying, and how these cases will navigate the legal system. While I feature cases both in the US and abroad, I propose that cross-cultural research is necessary to understand the nuances in which corporations vary their tactics depending on
the legal, political, and social context in which such surveillance takes place. It will also be interesting to note whether activists’ relationship with social media will continue to strengthen or whether fear of mass data collection and censorship will drive environmental activists to focus more on their ground-based efforts.

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