



# Exploring the Information Landscape: Optimizing Online Shopping

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## Introduction

Research is research, whether we are **shopping for a dog costume**, or finding sources for a paper in a scholarly database.

Learning about our e-commerce environment and using some simple tools & techniques can help us preserve our privacy, save money, avoid scams, and get what we want when we shop online.





Why do we  
shop?

- sponsored & embedded content
- influencer marketing
- social commerce
- weirdly compelling "best" lists
- & plain old advertising...
- targeted marketing

...can make us discover "needs" we didn't know we had.

#tiktokmademebuyit

## Shopping "Harm Reduction"

- Stop before you buy.
  - Identify your internal state and how that might affect your purchases.
- Set a budget & define your criteria.
- Check out consumer review sites (but take them with a grain of salt):
  - [Wirecutter](#)
  - [Consumer Reports](#)
  - Product specific sites for kitchen stuff, tech, makeup, games, etc.

# Reviews & You

## Detecting fake reviews

- Watch for clusters of reviews in a short time.
- Fake reviews can sometimes be negative.
- Review Meta (for Amazon)
- Copy a snippet of product text and search in Google.
  - If the same text shows up in multiple places, it can be a sign of a suspicious business.

**10** If you aren't sure about a company, don't rely on the reviews and info on its website. Search outside the source:

- ❖ "company name + legit"
- ❖ Wikipedia
- ❖ Better Business Bureau
- ❖ ScamAdvisor
- ❖ TrustPilot, etc.

Remember  
lateral  
reading?

# If you run into trouble...

- **eConsumer.gov**—Provides information about how to resolve a problem directly with the merchant (<https://www.econsumer.gov/ContactMerchant#crn>)
- **Federal Trade Commission (FTC)**—Offers a consumer guide to disputing credit card charges (<https://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/disputing-credit-card-charges>)
- **Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB)**—Accepts complaints against financial institutions, including payment card issuers (if, for example, you believe you were treated unfairly in a dispute you lost) (<http://www.consumer-finance.gov>)
- **Consumer Action**—Offers free materials on a variety of consumer and personal finance topics, including "How to Complain." (<https://www.consumer-action.org/>)

LILICLOTH

URISME

ONLINE CERAMICS

FUN.COM

EVOLVED CHARGERS

DOTTAVR

IPELY

Would you order from this company? Why or why not?

# What is Surveillance Capitalism?

- "Surveillance capitalism is an economic system centered around the capture and commodification of personal data for the core purpose of profit-making. The concept of surveillance capitalism, as described by [Shoshana Zuboff](#), arose as advertising companies, led by Google's [AdWords](#), saw the possibilities of using personal data to target consumers more precisely."
- "The audacious, unprecedented quality of surveillance capitalism's methods and operations has impeded our ability to perceive them and grasp their meaning and consequence."
- [The Age of Surveillance Capitalism](#) book by Shoshana Zuboff, who coined the term in 2014

# The Cookies of the Internet



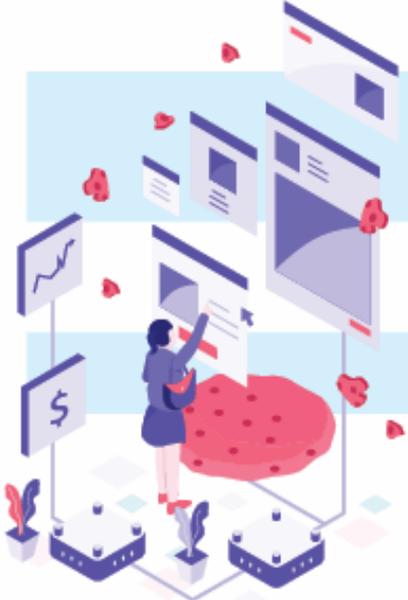
- Wait! Is that a social media ad for the exact product my friend just texted me about? How did they know?!?!?!?

Is that ad  
following me?  
(The answer is yes.)



Vox. "How ads follow you around the internet." *YouTube*, uploaded by Sarah VanGundy, 22 Oct. 2021, <https://youtu.be/HFyaW50GFOs>.

# Web cookies: Different flavors



	FIRST-PARTY COOKIES	THIRD-PARTY COOKIES
WHO HOSTS	The domain you're visiting	Ad servers, social media sites, commenting aggregators, live-chat pop-ups, etc.
WHERE TRACKED	The domain you're visiting and, in rare instances, other sites	Users across many domains
MAIN PURPOSE	Smoother site access	Enabling adware
WHAT THEY DO	Remember logins, preferences, shopping cart items, etc.	Retarget prospective customers as they move from site to site

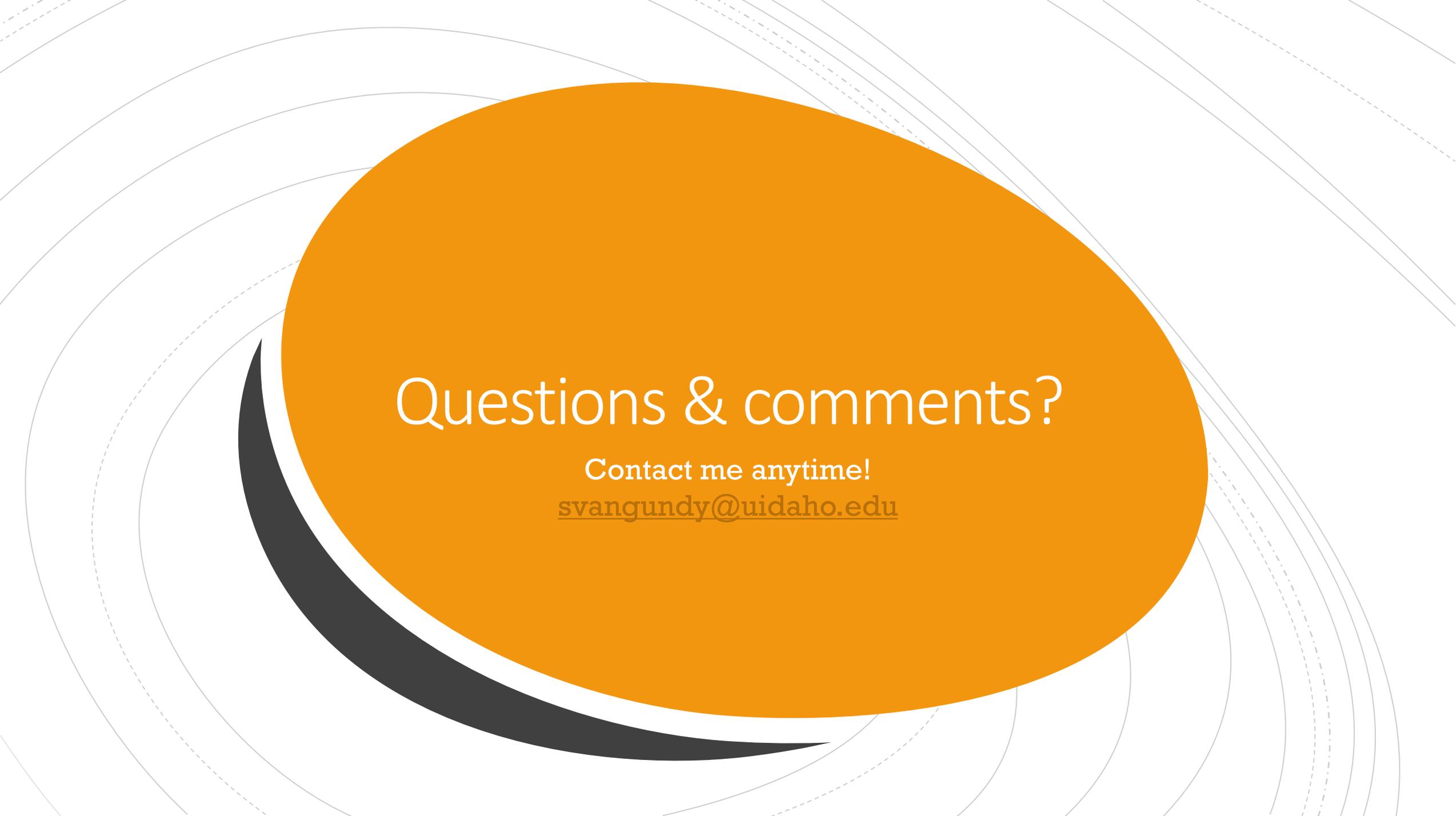
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- Data Brokers: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver  
(4.10.2022)

How is data  
collected  
about  
you used?



Questions & comments?

Contact me anytime!  
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