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Discuss how data analytics can be used to influence people

“The problem is not that citizens are told the opposite of what is true... the real issue is that our experiences have become so limited that we lack perspective and deem the “norm” normal.”-
Anonymous, 2023

For even the most diligent “dissect ologists”, the restless and shape-shifting nature of the human cavern of intelligence can only ever be outdone by meticulously constructing a jigsaw that encompasses perfect prediction by statistical means: data analytics. From patterns to trends; from trends to anomalies; from anomalies to various correlations. All stand as the vital components of every complex, two-fold innovation: vaccinations, artificial intelligence and feasibly the most ingenious “chef d’oeuvre” – humanity. But the one desire that resides in the core of every imperfectly made human and their cognitive function, a figment that people may deem as mankind’s “hamartia,” is the pursuit to absolute power. And one of power’s most prominent means of operation is the ability to influence and control others. Furthermore, this essay will explore how data analytics already functions as a means of control in an era that relentlessly claims to be “woke” and how its omnipotent power in society is fuelled by mankind’s oblivion and complacency in the void of data protection.

“Governments don’t want a population of critical thinkers, they want obedient workers, people just smart enough to run the machines...dumb enough to passively accept their situation.” – George Carlin.

The employment of data analytics is most evident in the public sector and the core of its maintenance is undoubtedly education: an insurmountable and individualistic force that is communicated to society that it can only be acquired through school. School. A compulsory system put in place to educate and enhance the cognitive functions of future generations; this could surely only harbour positive benefits for your children - which is clearly enough reason to why unattendance or lack of attainment in school is punishable by law? If one were to look back into the awakening of the Industrial revolution, when the pyramid-shaped, sky-high buildings had walls that were more rigid and piercing than to the modern day, one would observe the rising of the first free schools (established in Prussia around 200 years ago) called factory schools. These schools’ primary aim was to inculcate ideas surrounding conscientiousness and obedience in the future workers of their country so they could increase labour productivity and become more competitive in the global market. Why? The pursuit of power inevitably strikes again, and by introducing the incentive of a wage and a stable job, it did not take much persuasion to employ people to achieve this goal. Additionally, the chameleon effect – the nonconscious mimicry of behaviours that one is surrounded by, which consequently led to the gradual adherence to mainstream schooling to eventually gain a nine-to-five occupation on an average salary. But surely, we live in an era that is characterised by being “woke” and thus, the aforementioned cycle of routine, void of choice or free will, is negligent in modern-day society – we are not obliged by law to go to school and then go university to acquire jobs in the public sector or businesses that need human machines to make their businesses more competitive in the market instead of pursuing other ostracised career paths like entrepreneurship (where most self-made millionaires and billionaires stem from). In secondary schools, we are taught algebra in maths and the variations of rocks in geography and thus renders these teachings more beneficial than principals like the management of finances – we can be sure of this fact as the data analysts working in government or other similar high-status positions are exempt from the innate desire of absolute power that exists in mankind; they would only construct these systems to create greater equality and not try to keep the rich drowned deeper in their well-deserved riches.

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They call our country a democracy. Furthermore, their use of analytics in human behaviour and the influence they exert using social programming does not serve to fuel an economy that 5% of the population have in their muscular, porcelain-skinned fists – that piece of proven statistical data can only be coincidental.

“Without data, you’re just another person with an opinion.” - W. Edwards Deming ,1982

One of the many-faceted features in the science surrounding data analytics is the fact that the data itself is never false, it can only be misinterpreted – an inevitable outcome due to flawed human nature. However, when measured effectively and correctly, copious amounts of data can be condensed into useful conclusions: the correlation between type two diabetes and obesity, predicting fraud and potential hacks of computer systems; all these conclusions have been concluded by the same means: observation. TikTok, for example, is characterised by an algorithm that harvests your phone’s data to create a “for you page” that magically, yet generally unquestionably, contains every atom of interest the human brain could fathom. To adhere to every imaginable interest, before this interest has even appeared in the prefrontal cortex of the brain, TikTok analyses previous behaviours like user activity, content on other social media platforms and the most used apps on the user’s phone. At surface level, TikTok’s algorithm is purely to maximise profits by becoming the most “relatable” and influential platform. On the other hand, the fact that a single app that we consciously choose to install into our smartphones can effortlessly anticipate our future behaviours, for the sake of profits or dominance in the field of social media, prompts the question of whether...but no. We choose not to question it and would rather indulge in its comforting and glorious streams of dopamine. This demonstrates how we allow ourselves to be influenced by systems that we perceive as innocuous, even if the alternative is more ethical. Furthermore, at the heart of its omnipotent influence lies the fact that society is more than willing to ignore the red flags of unethicity displayed by invasions of privacy and constant surveillance of personal data when the outcomes are tailored to them, even if the benefits are but mere, empty perceptions.

“Seek happiness in tranquillity and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries.” - Mary Shelley

Throughout every current and prehistoric piece of literature, the motif of transgressive curiosity stands as a common factor, penetrating the conscience that lies beneath every strive towards an expansion of the narrowed faculty of human knowledge and technology. Technology in the twenty-first century describes the internet and its far-reaching data capacity contained within it, but to its true definition lies the application of scientific knowledge for “practical” purposes. Practical purposes like hacking into WhatsApp’s message system to prevent a brewing terrorist scheme that had been organised by an ISIS group in 2017, a prime example of using technology to serve for the greater good – if people believe that they are being watch by a modernised “Big brother”, then they will have no choice but to abide to social regulation in fear of detection. Even more so, the other innate human qualities other than the attainment of power include the primary desire to be a “good person”. If certain characteristic traits such as recycling and participating in charitable acts are endorsed on apps and websites that are analysed to be well sought-after (Wikipedia, Instagram, or BBC news), then these traits can easily be normalised to replace the current “norms” and harbour a positive influence. Although the motives are undeniably admirable, why does it not captivate the mainstream audience – by convention, we place the blame on society, but do we not make up society?

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Nevertheless, data analytics can be likened to the genesis of scientific discovery, indisputably contributing to a more progressive society in the field of knowledge and general facilitation of resources; however, in untrustworthy hands (like the authorities who so desperately want to reserve every atom of power to themselves) can only serve as a tool to the few and as a weapon and barrier to the many.

“War is peace, freedom is slavery, and ignorance is strength.” - 1984, George Orwell

If someone holds freedom under the typical conception, able to act carelessly because of free will, then they are nonetheless enslaved? Counterintuitively, or rather less counterintuitive to the critical thinker, slavery can only ever be reaffirmed by allowing ourselves to believe we are free in a system that we have no valid control over, for how often does the line between law and free will fade and yet, how often is it that these boundaries are even so much as pricked when it comes to data protection. Data protection that exists until “Big brother” decides to abolish it, until he decides that people should be forced to fuel the country’s labour machine by implementing a free system called “school” to endorse the idea that its primarily for “vulnerable” children and not their future profits; until he decides that the dopamine rush that exists alongside apps like TikTok, although dopamine be a hormone associated with addiction, is allowed to roam free provided it increases the value and quantity of blood-red polymer notes. Furthermore, the indisputable conclusion that the over-experienced “dissect ologist” would assemble is that the data analytics of the present currently stands as a reward to birth-given select, however, the fact this data no longer exists as a shadow now leaves “Big brother” with an irreversibly blunt sword. The only foundation that absolute power can stand on are the oblivion and complacency of the society it governs – without these tools, their ability to drown society in comfortable ignorance and harbour their desired, controlling influence is rendered negligible.

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References

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- “Big brother” - the government in 1984, George Orwell
- Hamartia – Macbeth’s fatal flaw
- dissect ologist – someone who enjoys the assembling of jigsaw puzzles
- TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp – social media apps

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