

Data Supremacy: Choice Between Distributed Or Concentrated Locus

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by Dr Jones Mathew

The 4th Industrial Revolution, undergirded by data gathering, processing and control is a thing of the present and of the future. The first instance of control was land, the second of machines and now it is of data. As humankind progressed through the first, second and third industrial revolutions represented by agrarian societies becoming industrial, harnessing of steam and electric power to expand industries, and digitization and the advent of the internet, respectively, there was a hurtling forward through myriad technological breakthroughs. The fourth industrial revolution, the term being used for the first time at the World Economic Forum of 2016, is

characterized by the fusion of unprecedented convergence and fusion of technologies across the physical, digital and biological spheres. It is an age of embedded technologies within societies and even the human body.

This revolution holds new opportunities for more efficient asset management, production, and business operations as well as opening up new avenues for human networking and conflict resolution. Given its disruptive effects across everyday lives, industries, and governments, one must look at the powerful new centres of power that are likely to dominate and change the way the world operates.

In this context, it is relevant to consider the question of distributed versus concentrated data ownership. At an individual level, as a consumer or a citizen, it is a question of how much data should one give up every time one consumes corporate or governmental products and services. A MakeMyTrip holiday or an Amazon shopping spree, a Facebook post or an Instagram photo, all of these are empowering corporations immensely with granular level data of every service and product consumer at the demographic, psychographic, and behavioural level. A 360 degrees profiling of an individual consumer is so easily possible when one adds social media conversations one starts or is a part of. Corporations and governments are only a step away from manipulating our feelings. As is well researched, democracy is more often than not bereft of rational considerations and is led largely by emotions and feelings. With this data at the command of large corporates and governments can the day be far when our feelings will be up for sale to the highest bidder or to the entity with the highest stakes. Facebook/Cambridge Analytica is a case in point which tells that it is already happening.

Just as much as AI, ML, Deep Learning, and IOT make our lives more convenient and efficient, more connected and more productive, it does affect how business is done and how governments are run. Are we staring at possibilities of the resurgence of fascism and despotic dictatorships which in the 21st century are fundamentally different from such forces of the

past? At the risk of raising a cautionary red flag at the data juggernaut which threatens to overwhelm us, could we be losing sight of our own individuality? Privacy already lies murdered. What is there left to salvage? The answer is to think of the dangers of the acquisition of power, riding on the ownership of data, as an end in itself rather than as a means to the end of “greater good”, as many of us have been lulled into believing.

Distributed ownership and a tightly regulated data regime might be the answer to the approaching data blitz. However, the very nature of new technologies limits the power of external entities to control it. It is imperative that people entering businesses as business

graduates, engineers entering their professions as technical experts and people in government as policymakers are conscious of the bane and boon of new age technologies. Just as the Societal Marketing concept in Marketing sensitized consumers, corporates and governments to the natural rapaciousness of businesses, it is time to consider imbining future managers and engineers with due respect for what AI, ML and other new technologies can do as well as what they can become. The most powerful force in the world is the human capacity for stupidity. History has shown us the mirror many times. Will history repeat itself?

Future survival depends on data ownership and usage and the skill sets required to handle and create new pathways in this powerful domain. India is a gentle giant waking up to the potential and indispensability of the new paradigm. As an early pioneer, Great Lakes Institute of Management offers specialization in New Age Technologies and skills sets such as Analytics including AI and Machine Learning thereby equipping students with the requisite skill sets to survive and thrive in a new world as well as the wisdom to use it wisely. So that history, in hindsight, will be written better.

Dr Jones Mathew

The author is Professor, Great Lakes Institute of Management, Gurgaon

The article can be read online [here](#).