

Big Data & Ethics: With New Technology Comes New Responsibilities

As part of our TechCity Connect series, we explore the growth of Big Data in business. With firms adopting new ways of collecting, storing and using huge volumes of data, how are they maintaining a duty of care to customers and their personal information? What challenges do they face as they attempt to bring greater transparency to their data usage?

How is Big Data shaping a new society?

Whether you realise it or not, data ethics is headline news. From targeted fake news on social media to sophisticated fraud, data has been wielded as a weapon – and it's having a profound effect on every aspect of our lives.

A timely example of this in action is the way the COVID-19 crisis is shaping the terms of data collection and usage. Looking to repatriate any British citizens left stranded abroad, the UK government recently asked mobile network operators to provide them with access to customer roaming data ([Forbes, 2020](#)). At first glance, this seems a reasonable request. However, there's also a suggestion that it's a way for the government to increase its surveillance abilities.

It's an idea backed up by the fact that German authorities were able to bring their tourists home without access to such data. This story highlights some important questions at the heart of the discussion around Big Data. Should citizens be expected to hand over their data during times of crisis? How does it change the relationship they have with the companies they share personal information with? What do firms need to do to display accountability and build trust while making the most of the data at their disposal?

Can firms trust automated decision making?

Big Data is a big deal for business. The global market for its tools and services is set to hit a value of more than \$118.5bn by 2022 ([Forbes, 2019](#)), showing just how willing firms are to make the



From targeted fake news on social media to sophisticated fraud, data has been wielded as a weapon.

most of their data – especially in a context where consumers are keen to trade information for convenience. But this means that organisations must maintain a duty of care to people and their data. One major challenge, for example, is the introduction of automated processes for handling huge volumes of data. With the growing use of artificial intelligence (AI) and automated decision-making systems (ADMS), businesses are increasingly handing decisions to algorithms. How do you demonstrate your accountability for data usage in this scenario? How do you show customers that their information is safe in your hands?

It's not just about maintaining privacy, either. Firms have to be responsible for the outcomes driven by Big Data. An ADMS will follow whatever insight it discovers in the data, so how do you handle the decisions made based on any

prejudice that might be baked into your historical data? Firms have to recognise the level of trust that they place in these automated systems and show they can deliver oversight. If you don't know what data your ADMS is working with, how can you understand the implications of sharing that data with external parties?

Where next for Big Data in business?

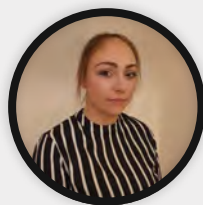
When it comes to automated processes, there are already ways for firms to introduce a greater level of transparency – such as Explainable AI (XAI). This offers a method for not just making automated decisions, but also explaining the logic behind those decisions. It's one way that technology is evolving to provide more accountability in how huge volumes of data are used and help firms build trust in their approach to Big Data.

However, this doesn't change the fact that the growth of Big Data is currently outpacing the ability to govern its collection, storage and usage in business. It's a situation that leaves everyone vulnerable to the continued misuse of data by unethical individuals and organisations. There are no easy answers, but plenty of questions remain. What are the tensions between the businesses in charge of huge volumes of data, the people they collect data from, governments, and regulators? How do firms negotiate this? And what does it mean for the future of Big Data usage?

Discover more

Explore this topic further and discover how your firm can improve its approach to data ethics and transparency.

Join us **Big Data & Ethics**
6th May at 10:00 – 10:45 BST



Gillian Doyle
CEO & Co-Founder



Peter Lancos
Co-Founder & CEO



Richard Robinson
Chief Commercial Officer



Charles Radclyffe
Innovation Specialist (Moderator)

