

Ethics in/of big data

In the age of big data, there is a need to acknowledge not only benefits that a use of big data brings, but also challenges that society encounter in dealing with it. The biggest issue is finding the way to unite new realities that big data brings with society's norms and values that have been set in digital world. Privacy and freedom of will are crucial values that are a part of developed countries' value systems. Many managers of organizations that extensively use big data to boost their revenues have stated an opinion that we as a society must abandon a notion of privacy. However, it should be noted, that the statement about wholly abandoning the privacy is misleading.

Concept of privacy should change with the changing information environment. Richards and King (2014) have suggested that privacy should not be regarded as only unidimensional concept comprised of only information that can be shared or withheld. It is possible to understand privacy and legal rules that regulate it to mean at least four issues: "(1) invasions into protected spaces, relationships, or decisions; (2) collection of information; (3) use of information; and (4) disclosure of information" (Richards, 2005). Richards and King (2014) state the importance of setting new rules and laws to manage different uses of information. Information should be categorized and limits should be set for the use of various types of information for diverse purposes. It is important to reinforce the right of a person to share certain types of information with service providers confidentially, so second uses of information, provided by a user would not be possible without user's consent. It might be advisable to compose such agreements of future information usage in an adapted, short form, thus ensuring user's understanding of the agreement in question.

Richards and King (2014) advocate a certain degree of information transparency that would apply to various government institutions and organizations as well as to private big data holders. The transparency would ensure that these organizations would not corrupt the practices that are related to the use of big data. The third issue of concern is identity; according to Richards and King (2014) people identities are analyzed by government institutions and commercial organizations using big data tools. Identities' analyses are a base for endless amount of forecasting of how people would act in future. These forecasts and analyses, which are based on accumulated knowledge, are further used to strongly influence people. This strong influence might be named as a manipulation and, in my opinion, might severely limit free will of people.

It seems imperative to save basic values of democratic society in new big data world by deepening our understanding of big data and behaving according to this understanding and above mentioned values. A set of new regulations would accommodate the changed reality and assist in the salvation and transformation of digital world values.

Literature Sources:

Richards, Neil M. and King, Jonathan H., Big Data Ethics, 2014 Wake Forest Law Review, 2014. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2384174>

Richards, Neil M., Reconciling Data Privacy and the First Amendment. UCLA Law Review, Vol. 52, p. 1149, 2005; Washington U. School of Law Working Paper No. 04-09-03. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=598370>