Surveillance & Society

Article

When big data meets dataveillance: The hidden side of analytics

Sara Degli Esposti

Open University, UK.
Sara.Degliesposti@open.ac.uk

Abstract

Among the numerous implications of digitalization, the debate about 'big data' has gained momentum. The central idea capturing attention is that digital data represents the newest key asset organizations should use to gain a competitive edge. Data can be sold, matched with other data, mined, and used to make inferences about anything, from people's behavior to weather conditions. Particularly, what is known as 'big data analytics'—i.e. the modeling and analysis of big data—has become the capability which differentiates, from the rest of the market, the most successful companies. An entire business ecosystem has emerged around the digital data asset, and new types of companies, such as analytical competitors and analytical deputies, are proliferating as a result of the analysis of digital data. However, virtually absent from the big data debate is any mention of one of its constitutive mechanisms—that is, dataveillance. Dataveillance—which refers to *the systematic monitoring of people or groups, by means of personal data systems in order to regulate or govern their behavior*—sets the stage and reinforces the development of the data economy celebrated in the big data debate. This article aims to make visible the interdependence between dataveillance, big data and analytics by providing real examples of how companies collect, process, analyze and use data to achieve their business objectives.

Introduction

Over the past five years, the term 'big data' has captured the attention of business people, technologists and policy makers alike. 'Big data' is expected to offer unique opportunities for economic growth and innovation, and, thanks to 'big data', the public sector can become more efficient, and new business models, products and services can be created (Manyika et al. 2011). Talking about 'big data' means reflecting on the implications that the accumulation and analysis of an enormous amount of digital data have for organizations and for their information management strategies.

'Big data', in fact, indicates an array of business and information technology trends, whose existence was detected, more than 10 years ago, by Doug Laney, research Vice President for Gartner Research. In his article, Laney (2001) emphasized three key tendencies: (a) the remarkable volume of transactional data generated by e-commerce and the willingness of companies to retain this information; (b) the speed of data creation produced by the interaction between organizations and customers; and (c) the opportunity to integrate and manage a wider variety of information, with different formats and structures. These three trends became the three basic attributes of 'big data'—i.e. volume, velocity and variety, which are known as the three basic v-attributes of big data. The official definition of 'big data' namely is: 'high-volume, high-velocity and high-variety information assets that demand cost-effective, innovative forms of information processing for enhanced insight and decision making' (Gartner 2013a).

Degli Esposti, S. 2014. When big data meets dataveillance: The hidden side of analytics. *Surveillance & Society* 12(2): 209-225. http://www.surveillance-and-society.org | ISSN: 1477-7487