SURVEY PRIORITY #7: BIG DATA

Part Two: Possible Counter Measures

I have divided the Big Data topic into two parts.

Last month, in Part One, I presented some ideas regarding two significant problems with Big Data and how it is negatively affecting the lives of most people. Those ideas were centered around two areas of concern:

- Corporate Knowledge About All Of Us
- Untruthful Information

The growth in the internet and social media over the last twenty years has created a whole new environment which touches almost all parts of our lives. Some of it has been very positive, but some of it is causing harm to individuals, to families, to communities, to businesses, and to our country.

You can read Part One of my ideas outlining some of the problems caused by Big Data by going to the Hope From the Bottom Up website at this link, https://hopefromthebottomup.com/future , and then scroll down to the second article in the Future section.

In Part Two regarding Big Data, I want to focus on two aspects of Big Data which need to be addressed. I group these ideas in two words:

- **Anonymous**
- **Accountability**

Anonymous

One very large concern I have about Big Data is that people and organization which spread untruthful information, and in some cases hateful attitudes towards others, are basically unknown from a personal standpoint.

Free speech is a particularly important part of the freedoms we enjoy in our country. The First Amendment to our Constitution reads as follows:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

But nowhere in that amendment or any other part of the U.S. Constitution does the word "anonymous" appear.

Anonymous is defined as "made or done by someone whose name is not known or not made public."

When the Constitution was written and for most of the years since then, remaining anonymous was very difficult to do when communicating with our neighbors, other community members, customers, readers, and in the worlds of ideas and politics.

People knew who was the source of most things which were said or written.

If you proposed an idea or made a negative comment about someone, you were identifiable. Other people knew who you were, and possibly, with whom you were affiliated.

In the 230 years since the adoption of the Bill of Rights guaranteeing freedom of speech, much has changed in the ways information is shared. People are still free to say what they want, but now it is much easier to remain anonymous as an individual or group.

With the onset of electronic media (first radio and then TV), it was still possible to know who was saying what. Radio and TV networks, their owners and employees could be and were identifiable.

Since the internet started to grow very quickly in the 1990's, it has become harder and harder to determine who is really saying what in the many messages most of us receive daily.

If we get sale promotion notifications from companies, we can usually tell who is behind the messages we receive.

But when we get messages regarding social, economic, medical, and political issues, it is almost impossible for me and most people to figure out who is behind the messages. Many of the individuals and groups create sham personal and/or organizational identities. So, they can say untruthful things about individuals and groups, and threaten and attack them without anyone subject knowing who they are.

Accountability

Accountability is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as the quality or state of being accountable; especially an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions.

When people and/or organizations hide behind being anonymous, they are not held accountable for their words and actions. They are not held responsible for the damage they do to others by their words and actions.

This lack of accountability is contributing greatly to the polarization of people around a broad range of issues.

This polarization has become a threat to our democracy.

I recognize and appreciate that none of us, including me, have all the right answers to the challenging issues which face us as individuals, families, communities, our country, and the entire world.

But if I or any other individual or group want to offer opinions, comment on current issues, or publicly propose solutions to problems and challenges which confront our society, our identities need to be easily accessible to and known.

One of the things which the internet has spawned are organizations which have front people who speak for the organizations. Those people are known by anyone who hears them speak or reads what they write.

What is frequently not known about these organizations is the source of money which supports these organizations. Who is funding them? Whose economic interests are being promoted by the website?

POSSIBLE COUNTER MEASURES

Legislation

We need to address the issues of Anonymity and Lack of Accountability with legislation at the national and state levels so that the personal identity of people who use the internet to spread their views are easily identifiable.

We do not have to agree with each other on what is a challenge and problem which needs to be addressed.

We do not have to agree with each other on how we think a challenge and problem can be resolved.

But we do need to know not only an organization's name, but which individuals within the organization are responsible for speaking on behalf of the organization.

And we need to know who is actually funding the organization.

Libel, Slander, Hate Speech, and Threats of Physical Harm

There are currently laws which provide protection and possible re-dress to individuals and groups who are negatively impacted by libel, slander, hate speech, and threats of physical harm.

These laws are not easy to enforce, but they can be used to identify and hold people and groups accountable when they engage in such illegal activity.

Again, because of the growth of the internet and social media over the last 20-30 years, those laws need to be reviewed at the national and state levels to include those crimes as perpetrated through electronic/digital communication platforms.

If someone comes up to you on the street, points a gun at you, and threatens your life and/or the life of your family, you can go to the police and report such an incident. People who are threatened via the internet should have the opportunity to report such threats to the police and have them investigate those who threatened them.

Social Media Corporate Legislation

Social media companies are relatively new communication and business entities. There has been nothing like these companies in the history of the world.

How they operate and the problems they cause are something new in the world of communication in which we currently live.

These companies need to be studied and laws passed to do the following:

- Make all of their users easily identifiable by requiring that no matter what made up names they use, their real names, contact information, and general geographic location of their homes and/or organization which they are speaking on behalf of are available to the public.
- Hold the social media companies liable for threats and promoting hate speech for profit through their digital platforms.
- As wealth and power are consolidated more and more through digital platforms, Anti-Trust legislation should be reviewed and updated to reflect the enormous growth of the social media and its use to acquire and control many businesses. Such acquisitions minimize competition not only in the digital business world, but in many other businesses including retail businesses.

Conclusion

In the world of Big Data, we live in a very different world than humanity has ever experienced before.

We can't let Big Data run unchecked. We need to closely and deeply analyze what is happening now and find ways to manage and regulate this new threat to individual and group well-being.

We need to protect people, our society, and our democracy from the often anonymous and non-accountable information which is promoted through social media and Big Data.

I don't have all the answers. Neither does anyone else.

We need to start an open dialogue among all of us to do two things:

1. Define what we see as the **goals** of addressing problems with Big Data.
2. Work together to develop the practical **mechanics** (legislation and law enforcement) of how to achieve that goal.