

PRIORITY #7: BIG DATA

- **Corporate Knowledge About All Of Us**
- **Untruthful Information**
- **Possible Counter Measures**

Part One: I have divided this topic into two parts. In Part One, I will speak to the first two areas listed above, and Part One is included in the October 2021 Newsletter. Part Two, which will speak to possible counter measures, will be addressed in the November 2021 Newsletter.

Corporate Knowledge About All Of Us

With the coming and expansion of the internet in the last 25 years, we live in a new world.

It touches all of our lives as individuals and groups.

We need to understand what is happening and how it is impacting us as individuals and groups.

And then, we need to start thinking about how we can protect ourselves and our societies from this new phenomenon which is here to stay and will continue to grow.

Over the last 25 years more information has been gathered on each of us than at any time in the history of the world.

Most of that information is owned and controlled by huge and very wealthy, multi-national corporations.

What I bought today at the food store or drug store using my credit card or my company-based discount card is recorded electronically by the store from which I bought the product and by the credit card company which I used to make the purchase. That data is aggregated with everything else I have purchased in the last 20 plus years. That information is then used by companies to inundate me with advertising to buy more of what I usually buy or what they think I might like to buy. Often, that data is sold to other companies who also begin to target me with promotions of one kind or another.

While driving in my car, when, where, and how much gas I purchased is recorded. If I go on the tollway system, my passage through toll booths is recorded and usually a picture of my license plate is taken in case I fail to pay the toll. When I make phone calls while driving, the geographic locations, times, and dates when I make calls is also recorded based on the cell phone towers I pass.

When I am online, every search I do is recorded by an internet search company. They start sending me emails with links to similar types of information and products.

All of my medical records are now online within several medical business systems, and they get shipped around to different doctors and hospitals and other medical businesses.

Every day, some part of corporate America gathers more information on me than they had the day before. How they use that information and to whom they sell it, I have no idea. Who is hacking into the information they have on me is also something I don't know.

And though my snail mail still comes to me unopened and unread by anyone else, I cannot say that about my emails. My guess is that Big Data has all of my emails stored somewhere as well as all of the attached memos and pictures and everything else I have sent via email for the last 15 to 20 years.

I do stay away from banking online. I don't trust that the electronic data related to banking can't be hacked into or that in the event of a major disaster which knocks out power on a wide enough basis that I will have any proof that I actually have that money in a bank account.

I belong to Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, but I don't really use them very much. I use Facebook mainly to stay in touch with my large family. But looking at all the social media platforms, it is important to remember that everything that we put on them is available to those who want to buy that information because that is how social media companies make their money.

The government also has information about me based on my social security number, driver's license, vehicle license, recorded deed on my home when I owned one, the taxes I pay to various levels of government, military status, vehicle violations, and criminal history (which, fortunately, I do not have).

For many years, we were cautioned that government would gather and use our personal information to "control" us and take away our freedom. "Big Brother" would be watching us.

Today, the reality is that big corporations and the wealthy and powerful people who own them, and not the government, are the ones who know the most about all of us as individuals and as groups.

There is immense power in this accumulated knowledge.

Messages can be carefully crafted to sell, to persuade, to influence, and to polarize us.

The information we are sent via the internet most often confirms what we already "know," rather than opening our minds to the differing views and approaches to defining a problem and seeking solutions together.

Untruthful Information

Though Big Data has had some positives for us, giving us the opportunity to broaden our knowledge about a wide variety of topics, it has also become a platform for the spreading of untruthful information, conspiracy theories, and all manner of negative and hateful attacks over the last several years.

"Repeat a lie often enough, it becomes the truth" is an old truism which has taken on new life in the world of the internet.

Lying is not something new. Imperfect human beings do lie from time to time. But we are always cautioned against lying because it very frequently results in negative outcomes for other people, and sometimes even for ourselves. Most of us try hard to tell the truth. If we lie and people find out about it, we lose friendships, trust, and respect from others.

Unfortunately, on the internet, if something is said by someone or some group that is untrue, it is often very difficult, if not impossible, to tell who is actually telling the lies.

Certainly, people should be able to say what they think. Freedom of speech is one of the hallmarks of our country.

The 1st Amendment to the Constitution states: "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 anywhere else in the Constitution, does it say that those speaking publicly can do so anonymously.

Freedom of speech is not an absolute right. Yelling "Fire" in a crowded theater is not allowed. If you do so, you are held responsible and accountable for whatever damage and injuries are incurred by those who responded in panic to your words.

Being held responsible and accountable for our words as individuals and groups is the other side of freedom of speech.

Bullying and threats to individuals and their families via the internet has also become a problem for people of all ages. Teens do it to each other. Adults sometimes do it to public persons with whom they disagree. A recent example is the woman who accused a now sitting Supreme Court Justice of sexually assaulting her when they were both teenagers. When that accusation became public, she was attacked relentlessly on the internet. Her life was threatened. She and her family had to move from their home in order to be in a safer environment.

Again, if you threaten someone in person, you can be held accountable by the criminal justice system. However, when someone is threatened via the internet, it is almost impossible to find out who is doing that.

Being anonymous is one of the most dangerous aspects of the internet.

Making the internet and related social media platforms transparent to all of us is crucial to dealing with big data from a personal, business, and public policy perspective.

Part Two on this topic, Possible Counter Measures, will be addressed in the November 2021 Hope From the Bottom Up Newsletter. If you have any ideas and suggestions regarding possible counter measures to the problems discussed above, please share them with me at robert@robertbeezat.com