

Big Data's Mechanistic View of Human Behavior May Displace Traditional Library Missions That Empower Users

Authors : Gabriel Gomez

Abstract : The very concept of information seeking behavior, and the means by which librarians teach users to gain information, that is information literacy, are at the heart of how libraries deliver information, but big data will forever change human interaction with information and the way such behavior is both studied and taught. Just as importantly, big data will orient the study of behavior towards commercial ends because of a tendency towards instrumentalist views of human behavior, something one might also call a trend towards behaviorism. This oral presentation seeks to explore how the impact of big data on understandings of human behavior might impact a library information science (LIS) view of human behavior and information literacy, and what this might mean for social justice aims and concomitant community action normally at the center of librarianship. The methodology employed here is a non-empirical examination of current understandings of LIS in regards to social justice alongside an examination of the benefits and dangers foreseen with the growth of big data analysis. The rise of big data within the ever-changing information environment encapsulates a shift to a more mechanistic view of human behavior, one that can easily encompass information seeking behavior and information use. As commercial aims displace the important political and ethical aims that are often central to the missions espoused by libraries and the social sciences, the very altruism and power relations found in LIS are at risk. In this oral presentation, an examination of the social justice impulses of librarians regarding power and information demonstrates how such impulses can be challenged by big data, particularly as librarians understand user behavior and promote information literacy. The creeping behaviorist impulse inherent in the emphasis big data places on specific solutions, that is answers to question that ask how, as opposed to larger questions that hint at an understanding of why people learn or use information threaten library information science ideals. Together with the commercial nature of most big data, this existential threat can harm the social justice nature of librarianship.

Keywords : big data, library information science, behaviorism, librarianship

Conference Title : ICE 2015 : International Conference on Education

Conference Location : Berlin, Germany

Conference Dates : May 21-22, 2015