The scandal that involved Facebook using data from Cambridge Analytica has opened some new scenarios within the world of the internet and technological innovation. The main issue has been the users’ privacy, but the focus should have really been put on the huge benefit that comes from all the data and the information generated by the use of the internet.

There has been a lot of sensationalism surrounding this matter that has been a breaking news worldwide, as if nobody knew about it. Reality is, whenever we download an app on our mobile phone, even if we do not pay for it, we allow our data to be publicly available. This includes our contacts, pictures, videos and sensitive data.

It is known that everyone’s profiles are “illegally” sold in order to direct the planetary politics, in the same way that they already were “licitly” given for more trivial reasons such as market research, filing for political activists or so.

But the privacy issue is only a part of the matter. And when somebody knows so many things about us, they have a huge amount of precious information of an immense value.

They are perfectly aware of our political, religious and sexual orientation, they know what we purchase, the music we like, our hobbies, our favorite sports team, the movies we like, as well as who our relatives, friends, colleagues, family, old and new lovers are.

Customized ads and online marketing based on the users data that is stored and used for commercial purposes makes up for 90% of Google online ads income, and they have the monopoly of it together with Facebook.

This field constitutes the biggest share of the advertising market of the whole world. And how did they manage to get there? Thanks to the data they collected from our online browsing, our activity on their own search engine, the tracking through our Android devices, our Gmail accounts, the pictures that we post on our facebook profile, etc.

Not surprisingly, during the Cambridge Analytica scandal where Facebook was involved, Zuckerberg’s
stock worth dropped dramatically, this meaning an economic loss. The data or digital economy has got its own official market, and it is so important that a whole range of “services” aimed to collect and manage this “treasure” has been created.

The way this information is handled goes from the production to the collection of data, to mining and analysis. From the picture of our kitty that we post on the social media, to the bike rental in the cities that we ride in, the immense and diversified amount of data do not allow for human activities to remain unobserved.

Speaking of bike sharing, according to some experts, this kind of business is generating more and more losses (as the fares for the service offered are getting lower and lower), but the really valuable part of it is not the few euros per hour of the rental: it is the data generated by the clients. Mobike and Ofo, two Chinese bike sharing companies, are constantly collecting data from their “clients”[1]. Behind these companies there is, for instance, Alibaba and its financial corporations. For an e-commerce giant such as Alibaba the real business behind the operations that are officially related to bike rentals for urban mobility[2], is collecting data about the habits and the spending, shopping, mobility capacity etc… of the users.

It is clear that data plays a fundamental role in the new technological revolution. AI and the new robotics technologies are transforming the labour and consumer markets. Many international studies foretell the rise of unemployment rates in various sectors and a new radical transformation of production and labour organization.

Within this new revolution and in this new form of capitalism it is important to determine the role played by the information needed for AI and robotics, and to dynamize consumption, to build new companies etc…

Let’s simply think about what happened in the first years of the XXI Century, when the data of the phone guides -big books full of names, surnames, addresses, phone numbers and in some cases also the job titles of millions of people- were collected and sold to telemarketing companies. With the arrival of the worldwide net, the Internet, and mobile telecommunications, the daily collection of data covers all kinds of information and is almost infinite.

Experts say that in Italy the data market only reached a value of almost 4,6 billion Euros in 2016, and according to the forecasts it will break the 6,3 billions in the next few years. These figures are higher in England (17,7 billions) and Germany (16 billions)[3]. Even though some people foresee a decrease of the technological acceleration given by AI (due to the fact that it is still a very challenging sector in terms of innovation and capital investment), evidence shows that the number of companies dedicated to these technologies, especially to Big Data collection and management, will rise[4].

According to the analysts, the global ICT, Big Data sales and data analysis services market on a worldwide scale have reached a value of 130,6 billion dollars in 2016, and the projection of growth for 2020 is up to 203 billions[5].

Data collection involves every aspect of our life, not only consumption or habits. General Electrics, for instance, has invested over a billion dollars in 2016 to collect all data coming from the sensors of the gas...
turbines, the jet engines and the oil pipelines. Data is especially appealing for big corporations but also small and medium enterprises are interested in this new asset. Some sources say that the cost of very specific data is quite affordable. Apparently, the cost of buying online 10 thousands e-mail addresses including personal information such as age, sex, books read, favorite cars and sports followed, is slightly less than 200 dollars.

There will therefore be a huge investment on data collection and handling in the next few years. The banking sector, that nowadays is the main investor in business analytics, will keep on investing more and more. Also more companies will focus their efforts on implementing innovative services, such as chat bots, to answer their clients.

The huge Big Data market is riding a track that runs in parallel to market strategies, more and more focused on the customers, and it will contribute to the development of AI. It is a virtuous cycle that will be progressively get implemented. Let’s just consider the data generated by the IoT, or those that will be generated by automatically driven cars or simply by the assisted parking technologies, or by domotics.

The more data are collected, the more the AI will be able to provide new features, resetting and improving the ones that it has learnt up to the moment. And the first source for data collection is online navigation and connections to the mobile net.

Thanks to the users’ behaviour it is possible to trace the IP address and follow the habits, hobbies, interests and preferences etc… According to a white paper from HP, the future of marketing “will be shaped according to the combination of the analysis and study of the information received through the social media, blog, forums, chatrooms, that are inexhaustible sources of information that can be used as new marketing channels as well as to better explore the users’ behaviour”.

According to the findings of a study by the Big Data Analytics & Business Intelligence Observatory of the Politecnico di Milano School of Management, there has been a significant raise in the number of Italian companies that have adopted some kind of data governance model.

The Big Data Analytics market keeps growing at a fast pace, more than 25% yearly.

Fast data initiatives are growing, with real time data analytics, and many of them are evolving towards predictive, prescriptive and automated analytics logics.

Evolution goes in the direction of machine learning and deep learning, that allow new kinds of analysis, and Real-Time Analytics. Let’s just try to imagine the amount of data that will be available once the obligation of digital and electronic invoicing is enforced in our country.

According to a research of the study bureau of the Confartigianato Lapan, only in the Modena and Reggio Emilia area the digital invoices issued in 2019 will be over 14.3 millions.

Now, seen this overwhelming “value vortex”, could we argue that Facebook or the giant of the internet should pay us for posting a picture of us on the beach, or of our cat? Should YouTube pay us a salary for the last video we published or for the one we played tens of times and re-posted on other social networks, or shared on a WhatsApp chat?
The considerations about value production in the contemporary age coming from the accumulation and the use of data is certainly more legitimate in the contest of Big Data and the use they make of it.

Data is the new gasoil, maybe, but most of all they are work. At the beginning of the third millennium the value of work seems to give space to the value of life. Social reproduction becomes directly productive, leisure time as well as human relations are entered into devices that allow to extract added-value thanks to some algorithms.

Nowadays, people who are technology experts and master data and ideas that float online are value-puller, and people who use the internet are, in all respects, producers. They generate wealth by producing information. They actually work, without being acknowledged for it.

Over 1.4 billion people use Facebook on a daily basis, which translates into an average benefit of over 6 dollars per user, and a net profit of 4.26 billion dollars in 2017\(^\text{[11]}\). As it is known, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg has bought the mobile and web chat platform WhatsApp in 2014 for 14 billion dollars\(^\text{[12]}\).

This merge has brought some more 1,5 billion users per month, who use the App on their mobile phone. What’s the reason for spending so much money on a simple telephone instant messaging application? Just because the information interchange between users generates an indirect economic benefit?

So the idea of paying the technology users for the simple fact of “populating” the platforms is not that random. It would at least be an acknowledgement for the informal production that billions of users everyday provide for free to the giants of the internet (and not only to them) when they use their devices. Shall these giants that offer free online services they collect data from, pay for each small bit of information they collect? Shall the so called prosumers (producers/consumers) that populate the internet be paid for their work?

According to an estimation of Weyl and Posner for *Radical Markets* (Princeton University Press, 2018), if big corporations agreed to give two thirds of their profits to the users that generate data that contribute to the development of AI, an average family of 4 people would “earn” 20.000 dollars per year.

If these AI corporations are the future of economy, should we join the revolution and claim less working hours and a new concept of welfare starting from a basic income as an acknowledgement of the value generated by our social production outside our job?

If the users give their contents free of cost through the devices they have bought with their own money (*personal computers, laptops, tablets, mobile devices etc...*) maybe we should create some keywords, some provocations to describe this gigantic “digital factory” where the prosumer is at the center of the production process, constantly connected and with no time off nor working schedule.

The issue here is not so much about Big Data, which is necessary for the new technological revolutions to explode and generate some very positive results in medical care, smart cities, robotics that will allow for the end of physically demanding tasks, automated driving systems etc… This is about the private corporations’ domain of the new technologies and the huge benefit they get from it.
Would it be inappropriate then to require Big Data companies to be the first to guarantee, through some form of moderate taxation, an economic aid in order to acknowledge the importance of this “diffused work”, other than formal work?

Billions of Facebook users are the greatest non-remunerated workforce in history. If we don’t recognise ourselves just as consumers but also as producers, it will be necessary to create keywords and meaningful actions to mark this new change of pace.

We could start from a simple provocation: promoting the first worldwide strike of the internet users. We could start from not logging for a whole day in one of the most known social media, Facebook, and clearly state that “we will use exclusively those social network that will pay us a basic income for the simple fact of being registered, as a part of the income that we generate for them”. This would not only help to make the claim for the basic income visible, but it would probably emphasize the weight of the social media user in determining its success dramatically.

Just imagine the breakdown that a social media like Facebook would face on that day when it comes to the collection of information. It could be calculated in terms of Big Data as well as in terms of profit loss.

On the other hand, if Mark Zuckerberg himself claims to be a defender of the basic income\footnote{3}, could he be open to accept the proposal that each of the users registered on his platform should have the right to receive a share of his enormous profit? Maybe some other companies with different business models could join the hustle and promote a benefit for people joining their own platform! A part from the provocation (that feels eventually attractive) it is clear that the issue raised here is crucial.

The clash has also escalated on a geopolitical level between super powers like China and the USA for the domain on the 5G technology, and this is a demonstration of the importance of the control over technologies. There is a violent battle going on, the domain over technologies has started quite a long time ago, the players on the field are fierce and there are billions of dollars at stake.

It is necessary to get in tune with what is happening, and start asking ourselves what kind of revolution is going on, what is the scope of the clash, and what are the forms of this data accumulation that started some decades ago and that will get more evident in the years to come.

The time has come to be aware of the role that we citizens can play, the producers/consumers. All of us, basically, who are for the moment just impassive and silent prosumers.

The technology issue cannot just be a prerogative of the companies and multinational corporations, of the venture capitalists, of Silicon Valley or of some illuminated hacker. There is an unprecedented need for all the participants in this revolution to speak up. This is about billions of human beings.

To summarise, the technology issue should require a step forward in the social, economic and labour analysis, as well as in the political initiatives to be implemented.

Even the late Stefano Rodotà back in his days raised the issue of right in the internet era, defining the access to technology as a common good and detecting the need for a Charter of Rights of the internet\footnote{4}.
We should then start to calculate how much our being connected and how much a simple post from us can generate in terms of value and therefore the actions that we can take to claim our share of benefit. This might open some new scenarios.

To define a sort of “Web Fare Manifesto” could be a tool for us to speak up and claim for a basic income for our connection to the internet, for using mobile Apps or for the simple fact of having an e-mail account as a declaration for the use of the internet, and to be paid for that.

A WebFare system would have some well established rights, such as free connection to the net or free use of technologies, but also a new concept for data usage as a valuable asset to improve everybody’s life, starting from questioning the “legalized data theft” as property of the tech companies.

Clearly the internet strike and the claim for a basic income could be seen just as a “pop action” but they would represent a first powerful confrontation with the big tech companies about the acknowledgment for a production that is currently not acknowledged.

A massive getaway from the digital platforms and from the mobile networks and a general strike from the internet could maybe make even more visible the value that is associated to our online life. On the other hand, it would also make the politicians fault visible, the legislative, fiscal and normative delays and so on, thus opening the way for a new dialogue in a world that is crossed by these dramatic transformations towards which, sooner or later, we will have to act from a different point of view.


[5] Ibidem


Sassuolo 2000, 5 ottobre 2018


[13] “Mark Zuckerberg: The U.S. Should Learn From This State’s Basic Income Program”, Futurism, 5 July 2017


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