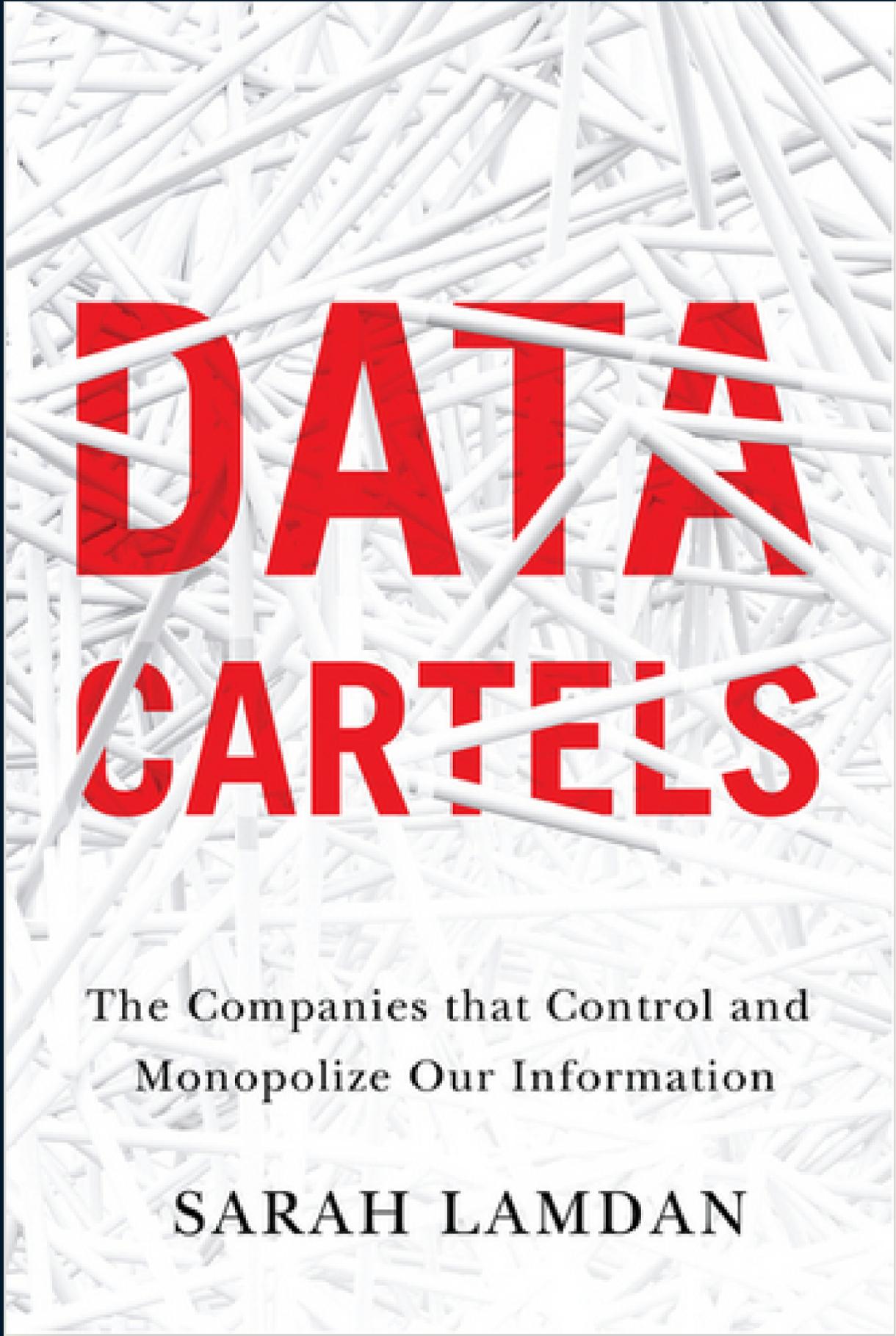


A
Brief
Overview

Book Release : November 8, 2022



**DATA
CARTELS**

The Companies that Control and
Monopolize Our Information

SARAH LAMDAN



Photo: Joe Raedle/Getty

THESE ARE THE TECHNOLOGY FIRMS LINING UP TO BUILD TRUMP'S "EXTREME VETTING" PROGRAM



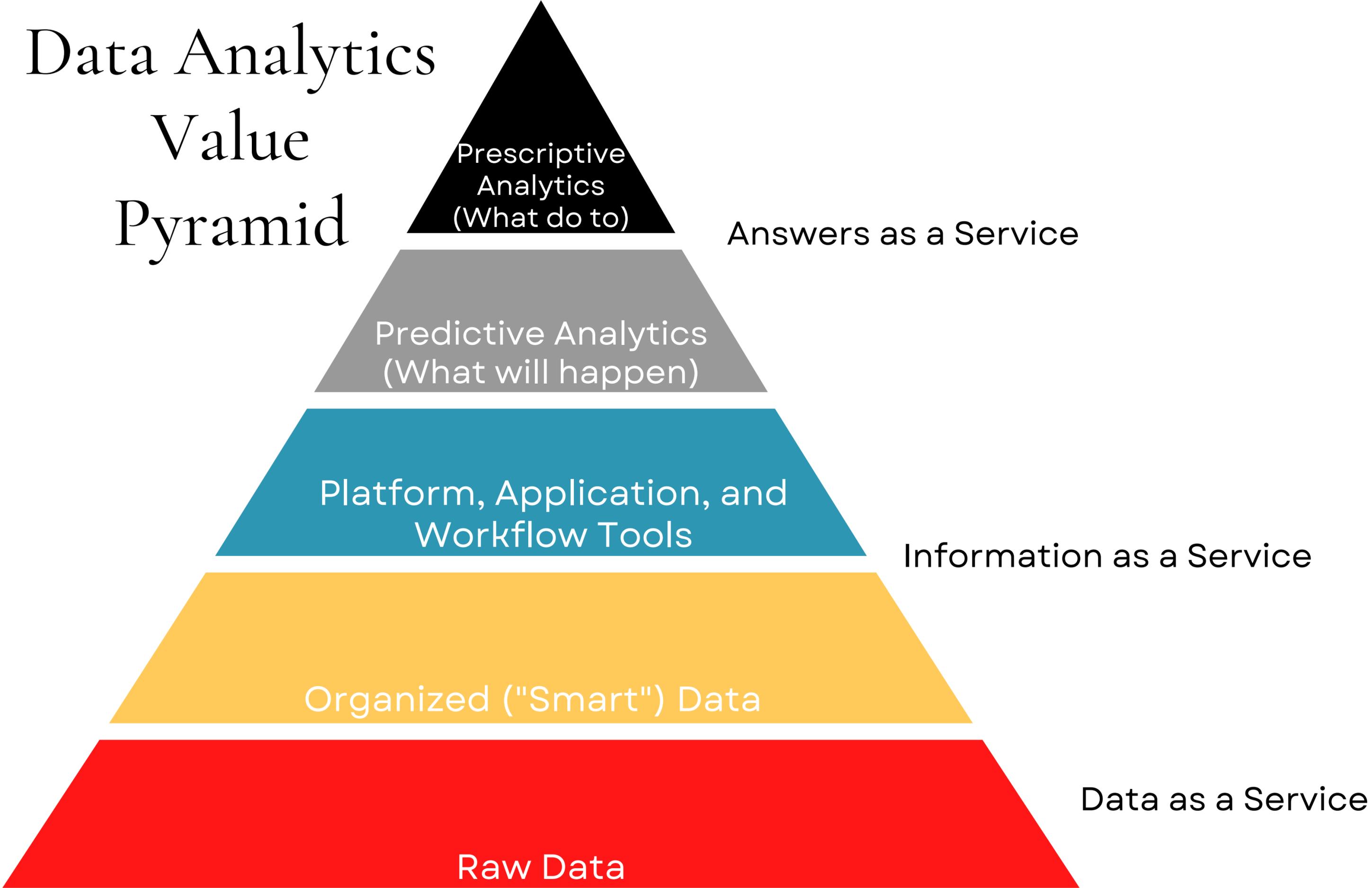
Sam Biddle, Spencer Woodman

August 7 2017, 1:45 p.m.

In 2017, I was a law librarian at CUNY School of Law. One day this **article** landed on my desk.

I've been trying to connect the hidden informational world of data analytics companies like **RELX** and **Thomson Reuters**.

Data Analytics
Value
Pyramid



Cross-market informational control

Just a **few companies** dominate all of these
informational markets



The Premise

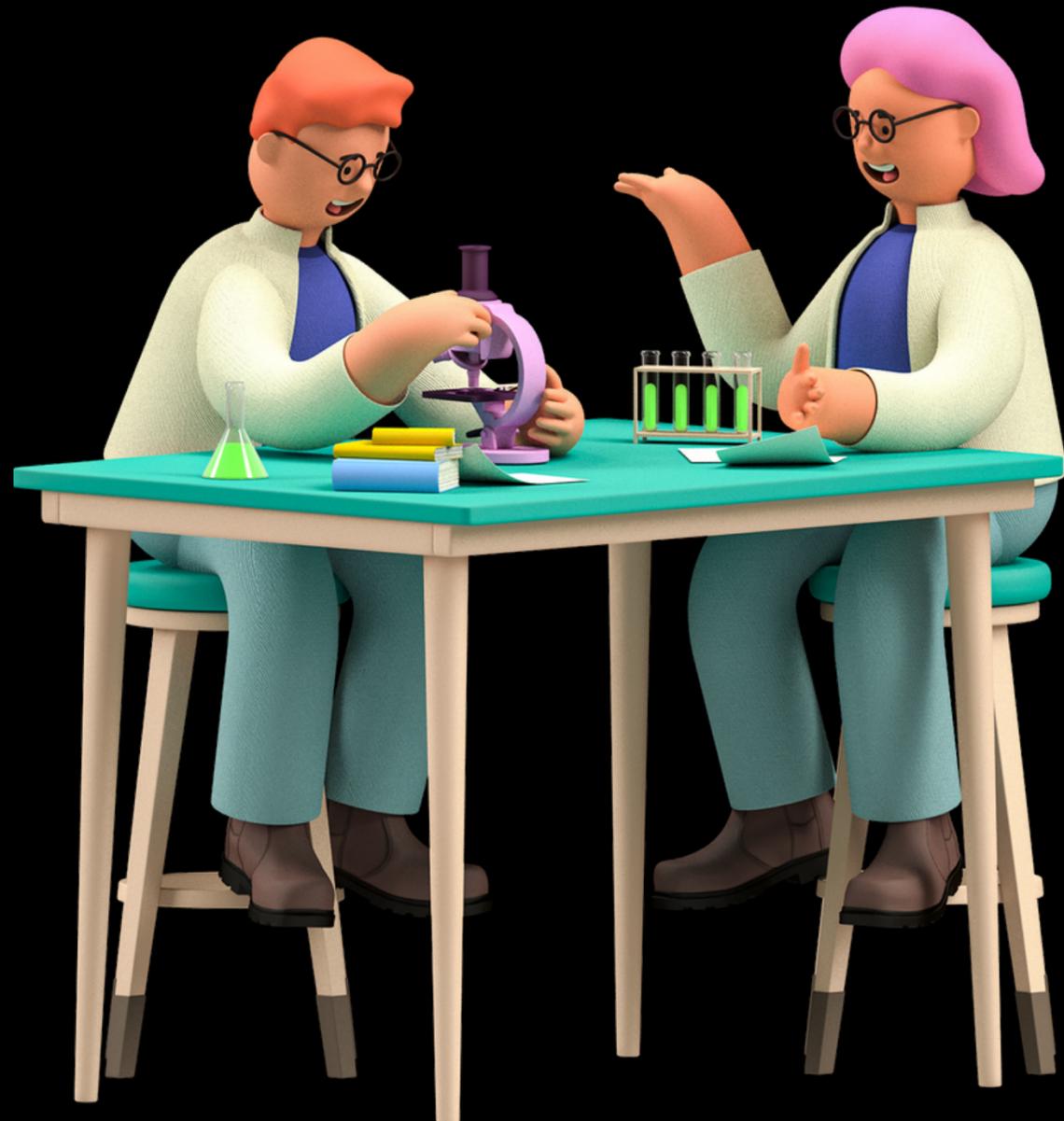
Until now, the data analytics companies have done a good job of **obscuring the immensity of their informational power** by maintaining each of their product lines in separate silos, and by obscuring what their data products do by giving them vague names like “special services” and “risk solutions.” In turn, we, as consumers, have **treated each of the companies’ markets as separate entities, not as pieces of the same problem**. If we deal with each of the data companies’ product lines—personal data, academic information, legal information, financial information, and news— as if they are separate, **we will never get to the heart of the problems data analytics companies cause**.



Personal Data

Instead of commercial data brokering (selling our data to companies that target us with ads), the data analytics companies sell our data to government agencies (including law enforcement) and to institutions that provide insurance, housing, employment opportunities, housing, and health care—essential services upon which we rely. The data companies amass invasive data dossiers on each of us by gathering data from thousands of sources, updated in real time. This data is used to assess whether we'll commit crimes, default on loans, use drugs, or pose other "risks."

Academic Research



Academic research is often publicly funded, and often conducted at public institutions by public employees. But the fruits of our academic labor are treated like private property by companies that are acting, more and more, like data analytics firms. The companies treat our public research like their personal portfolios of copyright assets. Their paywalls prevent people from accessing the information they need in order to make the best decisions and conduct their own research. People who can access the research platforms are subjected to surveillance because the companies have turned their websites into data collection tools that fuel data analytics products grant funders and research institutions use to determine which projects receive grant funding and who gets hired.

Legal Information



A few data analytics companies paywall our public laws, making it impossible for anyone who can't afford their legal information platforms to see the most accessible, up-to-date versions of case law, statutes, etc. The government edicts doctrine says that the law should be publicly accessible, but companies have found ways to turn the law into property they can sell. Now they are finding ways to use their legal information platforms, and personal data drawn from them, to help those who can afford legal data analytics services game the law by predicting which judges will be most favorable and which legal strategies will be the most lucrative. Meanwhile, pro se litigants, including prisoners who are often left to represent themselves, are unable to access the legal information they need.

Financial Information



There is a wealth of financial information available online, but it is almost impossible to vet or verify. The top-shelf, most useful financial information is paywalled by a few financial data companies. The privatization of corporate data creates a two-tiered information system: the public can access outdated, erroneous, and hard-to-read public information, and people who can afford to subscribe to fancy financial data services can get minute-by-minute financial data and investment information. This information asymmetry causes the very problems that the Securities and Exchange Commission was tasked with preventing—consumers fall prey to online stock-buying scams and panics, losing money on bad deals, while people who can afford expensive data tools have faster access information to better financial information than the general public.

News



When public news becomes private property owned by data companies, both the quality and availability of news declines. Private data companies have participated in the collapse of the news industry. Over the past decade, local news sources have been shuttered and sold off to national news corporations, which has made local news hard to get, and has made the news that people receive more biased towards the viewpoints of whatever company owns the remaining news services. News was once considered a public necessity, and news infrastructure was supported and subsidized by federal, state, and local government. Moving away from government-supported news information systems has led to inaccessible, or disappearing, local news, and to the spread of misinformation instead of vetted, verifiable news.

What can we *do*?

Big data problems call for blended, multi-faceted solutions. (Aka no one thing will balance the informational playing field.)



- Antitrust interventions could allow information projects to flourish without inevitably being procured or tamped out by data analytics companies.
- Enforcing consumer protection rules and rethinking privacy rights could prevent data analytics companies from siphoning and selling our personal data and risk products without our consent.
- More public funding and resources could help information experts support and maintain public information infrastructure.



If we treat essential information as a public resource, and if we stop treating private data as an extractive industry, we can all

“swim in the ocean of knowledge.”