



Tech's fight for the upper hand on open data

What happens if big companies control who has access to the marketplace of ideas?

Savy.io response and endorsement of Financial Times article by Rana Foroohar, 9th October 2017.

Commercial tech giants who have made digital public spaces and 'market squares' their own, do control access to the 'marketplace of ideas' because we choose to use their 'free' platforms on a daily basis. This is to everyone's detriment.

By contrast, our physical world governments have an executive role to provide public spaces and services from revenues generated by tax paying citizens.

Our near ubiquitous connectivity that seamlessly allow us to live life off and online in an integrated way makes us forget that our digital personas are often not subject to the same rules as our physical personas. Yet, the more the two become synonymous, the greater the need for government to set rules on when and how these rights can be preserved and upheld.

Almost all Internet services are commercial, so the moment we step into the connected digital world we are consuming a service that is provided by an organisation, which is why there are almost no more public 'town squares' or 'market squares'.

We should think of tech giants as a government coalition managing public roads (your Google Chrome or Apple Safari), the market square (Amazon) and the town square (Facebook). All these fuels the Internet economy of purchase, consumption and socialisation. On that basis, these are utility services and should be governed accordingly.

The below table demonstrates the value of personal data to three of the new entrants into the top ten within the last decade, and how entirely dependent they are on this (currently free) commodity to retain this position.

Largest Companies 2017*	Largest Companies 2006
Apple	ExxonMobil
Alphabet	General Electric
Microsoft	Gazprom
Berkshire Hathaway	Microsoft
Amazon	Citigroup
Facebook	Bank of America
ExxonMobil	Royal Dutch Shell
Johnson & Johnson	BP
JPMorgan Chase & Co.	PetroChina
Wells Fargo	HSBC

Source: DataStream (based on prices as of 23 January 2017)



As a digital persona, we don't really own any of that persona – it's held in bits and pieces by companies that we interact with, but we can't own it, or use it whenever we need it. Our health records are in one place, our finance records are in another. Every app we sign up to, we have to fill in all our information again and the app controls all our data.

That said, the battle we face is not for privacy but to interact online on a level playing field, because we can no longer disconnect. But in connecting, we are the source that generates most of the raw material for the connected world. And this is not a battle against the tech giants. They are just trying to deliver the best service they can, and return profits to shareholders. It's just that they have a lot of sophisticated technology to do it. The future of the Internet is the battle for economic power and for us to determine who governs us by deciding who we give our digital persona to as fuel for our future priorities, our goals and our purchases. We should have the power to determine that.

Developed countries are wealthy because of 'inclusive economic institutions'. Basically, a combination of the state and the free market in which: The state creates incentives for people to invest and innovate through guaranteeing private property rights and enforcing contract law. The state enables investment and growth through providing education and infrastructure... The state is controlled by its citizens, rather than monopolised by a small elite.

"You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete". Buckminster Fuller