

Big data, algorithm and our next election

THE software made by Cambridge Analytica (CA) is perhaps one of the most controversial and yet most desired in the world now. CA was created in 2013 as a privately-held company that uses data mining and analysis to determine strategic communications to influence the electoral process. It collects personal data from different sources, then analyses them through the algorithms of software and predicts the behaviour of the people in advance. And based on that analysis, it works with governments, militaries, intelligence agencies or politicians to run social campaigns, plot defence strategies or spread propaganda to achieve the desired outcome.

For example, it is believed that during the Brexit campaign, this software was used to study voters' psychology and helped pro-Brexit parties to spread anti-European Union sentiment through social media. The same strategy was believed to have been used to spread anti-Hillary sentiment during the US Election. This kind of behavioural analysis gives undue advantage to some groups over their political rivals. It can be mentioned here that CA was an offshoot of its British parent company SCL Group, which has for over 25 years conducted behavioural change programmes in

over 60 countries, and gained reputation for its ability to influence in the areas of defence and social change.

Cambridge Analytica collects Big Data (extremely large data sets) given by their clients or it collects them on its own. In this era of Internet of Things, it is almost impossible to hide our personal data, because our

private institutions (e.g. Passport office, National ID authority, or mobile phone companies) can be hacked.

Based on the analysis of these data, any organisation like CA can predict our behaviour with near accuracy, can predict what kind of decision we will take, and can even suggest what to do in order to



SOURCE: MICHELEVORUSSO.EU

data is being recorded constantly through smart devices such as smart phone, TV, computer, e-book reader, CCTV camera, etc. We have voluntarily given personal data to Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Viber, WhatsApp, etc., which they can sell to governments or private companies. There is also the possibility that our data stored at the government or

influence or change our decisions. No wonder that "Data is the New Oil". Our personal data has proved to be an effective tool to bring about desired social, political and economic changes—both positive and negative. Examples include Edward Snowden's revelation of Mass Surveillance by the NSA, the Twitter revolution in Iran, Arab Spring in the Middle East, or the

EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, every individual has a right to privacy and privacy laws are to be strictly followed. Our personal data needs adequate protection from unauthorised intrusion.

Given the rising tendency to manipulate personal data, what can we do in Bangladesh? We have a general election coming in 2019.

social media propaganda on the ongoing Syrian war, etc. Privacy is an important aspect of our life and no one really likes their privacy to be compromised. According to different international human rights treaties, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, European Convention on Human Rights, and

Already, Bangladesh ranks among the fastest growing countries in terms of Internet usage. The country is increasingly getting digitised and coming under internet coverage up to the upazila level. But spread of information and communications technologies also has risks, as already discussed. We have seen the impact of social media during the Shahbag movement and Hefazat gathering in 2013. The government can be forced to act on certain issues of public interest if enough people raise their voice on their social media platforms.

So, what if a political party starts collecting sensitive personal data from social media, buying personal information from private companies or hacking government servers, and then uses the data to spread propaganda and influence voters' opinion during the election? What if a political party tries to abuse state mechanisms and surveillance technology of the law enforcement agencies to collect personal data and uses it during election campaigns? Are we ready to tackle this kind of problems?

Unfortunately, Bangladesh does not have any specific law on personal data protection yet, nor any proper guideline or policy to deal with the issues related to Big Data, algorithm and mass surveillance. What we have are the Articles 39 and 43 of our Constitution, and some provisions in the ICT Act, Anti-terrorism Act, Money Laundering Prevention Act and National ICT Policy. But these are not enough. These laws do not talk about "purpose specification" (a clear

and specific objective of collecting data), clear legal provisions to collect personal data, doctrine of proportionality (how much data can be collected), right to be forgotten (collected data cannot be kept for unlimited time, therefore should be deleted after a certain period), informed consent (providing the citizens with information about data collection and take their prior consent), limitation on law enforcement agencies and private companies to collect data and provisions on appointing Data Protection Supervisor, etc. The "General Data Protection Regulation" or proposed "ePrivacy Regulation" of the European Union can be good examples for Bangladesh while making laws on personal data protection.

The important thing is, as we exist both online and offline these days, anything happens online has offline consequences too and vice versa. It is, therefore, imperative that we have a clearly-worded data protection law to protect our privacy and personal data. This is how we can protect the democratic rights of the people and provide all

contesting parties with a level playing field before the next general election. People can also make their decisions without bias and undue intrusion, or influence by the algorithmic analysis of Big Data.

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GULF CRISIS

A lesson in reputation management

LURKING below the surface of the Gulf crisis, are rival, yet troubled, attempts by Qatar and its detractors to use sports to boost soft power and/or launder tarnished images of their autocracies.

Ironically, the crisis threatens to have levelled the playing field in a bitter media and public diplomacy war that was covert prior to the seven-week-old Saudi-UAE-Bahraini-led diplomatic and economic boycott of Qatar. If anything, the Gulf crisis has emerged as a case study of the pitfalls of reputation management in which sports is an important tool. On balance, it so far has had different effects on the reputations of three of the key protagonists.

It has also served to highlight the pot-blames-the-kettle-character of the Gulf crisis, most recently with the disclosure that North Koreans were employed not only in Qatar on World Cup-related projects, but also on a UAE military base that hosts US forces. The disclosure of relations with North Korea is awkward at a time of increased tension between North Korea and the United States over the pariah state's ballistic missile and nuclear programme.

A Washington-based Saudi dissident group, the Institute for Gulf Affairs, recently published a memo reportedly from the State Department as well as emails from the hacked account of Yousef al-Otaiba, the high-profile UAE ambassador to the United States, that asserted that a UAE company, Al-Mutlaq Technologies, had bought USD 100 million worth of weapons from North Korea for use in the Saudi-led military campaign in Yemen.

Qatar, plagued by allegations that its successful bid for the 2022 World Cup hosting rights lacked integrity and that its migrant labour regime amounted to slavery, has scored reputational gains in the Gulf crisis despite the recent revelations related to North Korea.

While the revelations reinforced concerns about Qatar's policies and labour regime, they also suggested that issues at stake in the Gulf crisis constituted regional problems rather



SOURCE: HURRIYET.COM.TR

In the ongoing Gulf crisis, sports has emerged as an important tool in the public diplomacy war between Qatar and its detractors.

than exclusive concern about just one of the Gulf states.

The UAE, a driving force in the anti-Qatar campaign that uses the hosting of international sporting events to boost its image, has suffered because of its failure and that of its alliance partners to garner widespread international support for its tactics and demands that were perceived as unreasonable, unactionable, and designed to undermine Qatari sovereignty and independence. The UAE's North Korea link as well as allegations by human rights groups, denied by the government in Abu Dhabi, that the UAE was backing the abuse of prisoners in Yemen, have done little to enhance the Gulf state's reputation.

Qatar and the UAE's North Korean links could put the two Gulf states in the Trump administration's firing line as it considers how to respond to Pyongyang's most recent ballistic missile test that the pariah state claims would allow it to target any US city. Pressuring

countries to back away from economic relations with North Korea, the Trump administration recently extended sanctioning of Sudan for, among other things, not being fully committed to implementing United Nations sanctions on the country.

Saudi Arabia promised Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, during a visit earlier this month to the kingdom as well as the UAE, that it would continue to see improvement of relations between Sudan and the United States despite the African country's refusal to join the Saudi-UAE-led boycott of Qatar.

Neither the Gulf crisis nor sports has done much for Bahrain, its image tarnished by its brutal suppression in 2011 of a popular revolt with the help of Saudi and UAE forces, and its subsequent repression of opposition forces and continuous violations of basic human rights. Worse even, the Gulf crisis has focused attention on Bahrain's failed effort to use sports to polish its tarnished image and put it

in the spotlight as an example of the degree to which smaller Gulf states risk losing their ability to chart an independent course.

As the quarrelling Gulf states pour millions of dollars into hiring public relations and lobbying firms in Washington and elsewhere with the UAE as the largest spender, Qatar can shrug off in both reputational and financial terms a USD 51,000 fine by world soccer body FIFA. Qatar was fined because its national team wore jerseys in a World Cup qualifier against South Korea that featured a drawing of Qatari emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. The drawing has come to symbolise a wave of Qatari nationalism sparked by the Gulf crisis.

The public diplomacy war has expanded beyond a constant diet of allegations against one another in state-controlled media of the Gulf protagonists into Saudi-sponsored TV spots on US television and rival advertisements on London's famous black cabs, alternatively featuring a pro-Qatari message, a Saudi soccer

match, and the UAE's Emirates and Etihad airlines.

Qatar, in the latest move in the public diplomacy war, hired a Washington lobby firm originally established by former Trump election campaign manager Corey Lewandowski. Lewandowski has since left the firm over a dispute with his partners, who include Barry Bennett, a Trump campaign adviser and others with ties to the president as well as George Birnbaum, an American-born former chief of staff to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who has close relations with the Republican Party establishment.

Qatar separately contracted the services of a company, Information Management Services, that specialises in digging up dirt on US politicians.

For its part, the UAE in the years running up to the Gulf crisis hired a US firm established by former Treasury Department officials to influence US media reporting on Qatar.

The media war potentially could enter a new phase with the acquisition by a relatively unknown Saudi businessman, Sultan Muhammad Abuljadayel, of an up to 50 percent stake in Independent Digital News and Media, the holding company that publishes Britain's left-wing The Independent daily. The Independent has consistently been critical of the kingdom. Evgeny Lebedev, the Russian owner of The Independent's parent company, ESI Media, recently saw his shareholding fall below 50 percent.

At the bottom line, the escalating media and public diplomacy war between Qatar and its Gulf detractors is as likely, as is evident with the revelations about North Korea, to put on public display the protagonists' hidden skeletons, as it is likely to contribute to attempts to polish tarnished reputations and influence attitudes and policies in Western capitals.

A key tool in the protagonists' quivers, sports is proving to be a double-edged sword as it too has the potential of shining the light on practices and policies Gulf states would prefer to keep out of the public domain.

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CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 On the house
- 5 Bad writer
- 9 Schlemiel
- 11 -- and his money ...
- 13 Sufficient
- 14 Rob's TV wife
- 15 For each
- 16 Hone
- 18 Evening dos
- 20 June honoree
- 21 Obdurate
- 22 Coop group
- 23 Braille bit
- 24 In shape
- 25 Aid illegally
- 27 Brawl
- 29 Buddy
- 30 North Carolina native
- 32 Set apart
- 34 Ignored a diet
- 35 Satchel part
- 36 Extremist
- 38 Old photo tint
- 39 Louvre locale
- 40 Fast planes
- 41 Nuisance
- 42 Fill with enthusiasm
- 45 Wrong
- 46 Treats the turkey
- 47 Diet no-no
- 48 Block-dropping game
- 49 Spanish snacks
- 50 Minimal amount
- 51 Cafe au --
- 52 Swimming unit

DOWN

- 1 To-dos
- 2 Lovers
- 3 Morale
- 4 Sargasso Sea swimmer
- 5 NFL pioneer
- 6 Miles off
- 7 Dramatic turn
- 8 Seoul citizen
- 10 Bristle at
- 12 Touches down
- 17 "You there!"
- 19 Tooth part
- 22 In the clouds
- 24 Fill with enthusiasm
- 25 Wrong
- 26 Treats the turkey
- 27 Diet no-no
- 28 Block-dropping game
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- 30 Minimal amount
- 31 Cafe au --
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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

F	A	T	S	I	T	E	M	S
I	M	E	A	C	O	L	I	C
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E	G	O	T	N	E	A	R	M
T	O	N	S	I	N	P		
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T	O	N	S	I	N	O		
N	O	S	I	N	O			

BEETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

QUOTEABLE Quote



HASAN MINHAJ
American comedian and actor; Senior Correspondent on 'The Daily Show'

There's all sorts of terrible things that happen around the world. And comedy's one of those few things where you can discuss those things.