

Choiceless in a world full of choices

Angers

08 Oct 2019



M.Sherif Aziz, PhD

Courtesy: The sculptor of this at Schiphol airport

Views expressed are purely from the personal point of view and do not represent the views of any organization the author is associated with.

I have some simple QUESTIONS

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*Has digitalization improved quality of life?
(By the way, what is quality of life?)*

☐☐

Has digitalization improved productivity?

☐☐

Has digitalization improved peace and security?

☐☐

Has it improved democratic processes?

☐☐

The 2017 European report (Special Eurobarometer 460)

Impact of digitization on *quality of life* - 17% "very positive"; 50 % "somewhat positive". 18% negative overall, with 4% "very negative".

Positive impact on *society* - 15% "very positive", 49% "somewhat positive". 25% "negative overall", with 5% "very negative".

Only 7% considered stories published on social networks trustworthy.

"Globally, the annual growth in output per worker has been hovering around 2 % for the past few years, compared with an annual average rate of 2.9 % between 2000 and 2007"; as quoted in *Financial Times* April 15, 2019

What is the ultimate outcome of the Arab Spring triggered by social media engagement?

We now have free-roaming bots and trolls which prejudice elections. Large democracies are testing labs for fake news, post-truth and alternative facts. Hate mongering is rampant and organized too!

Peace and security continues to be moving dots. It is anybody's guess as to whether we have progressed significantly on these.

The Future Well-being in a Tech Saturated World 2018, by Pew Research Center

- The positives of digital life will continue to outweigh the negatives.
- However, roughly a third of respondents predicted that harms to well-being will outweigh the positives overall in the next decade.

Rob Reich, Stanford University: “ The undeniable benefits of digital life – access to knowledge and culture – have been mostly realized. The harms have begun to come into view worried about corporate and governmental power to surveil,degraded public sphere and its new corporate owners that care not much for sustaining democratic governance. And finally, the addictive technologies.All in all, digital life is now threatening our psychological, economic and political well-being”

Anonymous Research Scientist and professor: “....tools of surveillance, behavioral manipulation, radicalization and addiction”

Oscar Gandy, University of Pennsylvania: "..... rather pessimistic about the impact of technology on the quality of our lives. I won't say I am excited about the future, but I do have a sense that the connectedness that digitally networked objects, places and things that respond to queries actually help more than they harm. **hopeful that really smart people are raising questions and seeking policy responses to limit the harms**”

On that note, I take you through my story:

“Choiceless in a world full of choices”

- Anything from lingerie to airplanes and rockets are available in varying colors and configuration. Once you decide to make a choice, conditions and fine prints follow! The day when one such fine print will caution you about a tiny sensor seamlessly embedded in the fabric that can transmit either skin responses or rate of perspiration or odor proliferation of an undergarment is either tomorrow or the day after!
- Such Big Data gatherers know for sure, information is power (perhaps equally keen to deny that disinformation is abuse of power)
- Most things we do naively on the cyberspace is like closing our eyes and bathing naked in the city square. Cameras depict everything about you in lifts and public spaces.
- We have very little private life! To top it all, we now have analytics out of these visual recordings! These analytics can forewarn a scuffle in the making, if you shout, for example!

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An alternative to cash bail comes with its own costs

High fees and restrictive conditions limit the benefits of electronic monitoring

The above text and picture as reported in:
The Economist
 26 Sept. 2019

- Mid-2018, a large size democratic country's tender notification about their digital ambitions. As reported in the newspapers, they want to build "capability to crawl World Wide Web and social media to monitor and analyze various trends emerging and to gauge sentiment among netizens", also to distinguish between "positive, negative and neutral social media conversations".
- In 2019, they wanted to link the national ID with the citizens' Facebook accounts!
- Another country has gone ahead with FACIAL PAYMENTS as part of their cashless drive!
- We are now tempted to say that these are for enhanced security, naturally stemmed from social issues!
- Will the aggressiveness also create a new form of digital divide – for the poor, very young, mentally challenged and the elderly?
- Can technology really solve all our social problems?

What gives big data the power to do good *and* harm isn't so much its scale. Rather, it's the extent to which humans allow big data to orchestrate our lives.

Big data has as much power to leave us "blind and deaf and in the middle of a freeway" as it has power to help us get home.

.....The data should work in service of human beings, not the other way around

Catherine Williams, the chief data scientist at AppNexus

Pointing to a specific social media platform, Robert Hannigan, the former head of the Intelligence Agency GCHQ said that this platform could actually threaten democracy (BBC, Dec. 2018)

- 'Fourth industrial revolution', can be a powerful force for good - AI, IoT, blockchain, etc.
- But these same technological advances could have unintended consequences, if they are not designed and scaled in a smart and sustainable way.
- And , in a more responsible manner!



IBM's new 53-qubit quantum computer: how much of a security threat does the new technology pose?

The above text and picture as reported in:
The Guardian
 28 Sept. 2019

A complete digital world, with no alternative means to interact and transact could be a convenient denial of the constantly evolving vulnerabilities and sustainability issues.

With **Quantum Computing**, the foundations of encryption may become susceptible in the future!

Organizations and their customers are becoming faceless due to heavy centralization enabled by digital technologies.

'Hiding behind the Internet' - 75 percent of customers hate IVRs. IVR - a big killer of global productivity. Millions of man-hours are wasted listening to this.

Are you aware of the current Opioid overdose crisis? Of late, facilitated by the social media platforms; more than 47000 died in 2017 alone!

Artificial intelligence (AI) is at the doorstep of our everyday life. Toby Walsh, a professor of AI, contested Elon Musk's apprehensions. But he also added: "AI needs regulating because the big tech companies have got too big for their own good".

Regulation is needed because, firstly, the difficulty level associated with AI product innovations might drop down drastically in the years to come.

Secondly, almost all lethal technologies have ultimately fallen into the wrong hands – be it individuals, organizations or even governments. I expect the same with AI too!

The world has been at the height of an unregulated digital world and the colossal misuse of personal data gave us a lovely thing called GDPR !

But did we overdo with the penalties? To catch some big fish will we wipe out all the small fellows?

Pervasively enabled by the ICT, the compliances surrounding us leave most entrepreneurs overwhelmed. Very little time for creativity and innovation. Giant firms employee 100 people for compliance and maneuvering around the regulations!

KYC haunts you every moment. Warnings, alerts, reminders for most trivial and important things come with the same intrusive thud! Accessing your own digital accounts is not guaranteed because the system always has to suspect you!

NOW, LET US THINK FOR A MOMENT AND TRY TO LEARN A BIT FROM THE PAST DEEDS!

We now know for sure that the automobile industry has been **taking us for a ride** since quite sometime! Now, we want to undo all of these.

How can we reconcile our need for CO2 reduction and ambitious tourism industry growth and massive airport and fleet expansions?

But there is always a need-based mantra. Let us look at the integrated transport system, which is a good lesson anyway!

Anything from a
Hyperloop to a bicycle
is now relevant as part
of an integrated system

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INTEGRATED TRANSPORT



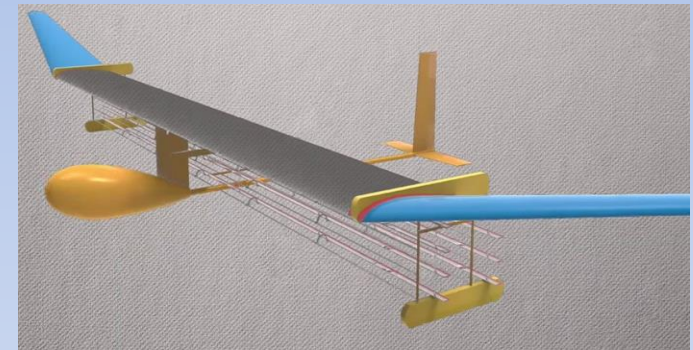


The future of flight

📅 23/11/2018 👤 Oman Observer

Patrick Galey –

The blue glowing jets of science fiction spacecraft came a step closer to reality as US physicists unveiled the world's first solid-state aeroplane powered in flight by supercharged air molecules.



Front end electrodes produce +20,000 V supercharging the air around it and splitting away negatively charged nitrogen molecules known as ions.

At the rear, rows of aerofoils set to -20,000 V. The ions automatically move from a positive to negative charge, dragging with them air particles that create the so-called “ionic wind” to provide the aircraft with lift.

PURPOSE or the **INTENT** behind the use of the technology is very important. So are the expected **OUTCOMES**. Question of **PRIORITY**

The promise that lot many revolutionary and disruptive technologies are around is real. What is not real is the belief that they are going to solve all our problems.

To me **DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGY** is a bad phrase if it is built upon fickle emotions. It is a great phrase when we can perfect telemedicine or fly an aircraft with water molecules.

PEOPLE FIRST and **QUALITY OF LIFE** should be the focus of the digitally ambitious governments. They need to behave **RESPONSIBLY** against the technology push.

Industrial revolution had adverse ecological impact. Social and psychological distress may be the ill effects of Information revolution.

Of course, E-waste is waste too!

Finally, wasn't Einstein himself somewhat concerned about:
“ the deterioration of ethical standards that stems from the mechanization and depersonalization of our lives” ?

