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BIG DATA ANALYTICS

Big Photo Data



Robert Plant, Associate Professor, School of Business Administration, University of Miami
2/27/2013
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The increased accessibility of photo equipment has resulted in more photos, and now big data is giving us avenues to find and use them.

We all have a collection of old photos on various media. To be honest, we probably never look at most of them, but we continue to click away on our smartphones, where the cost of taking a picture is seemingly zero.

Search is too linear

However, this has brought us a new problem: We have way too many photos and only very primitive search technologies. It can seem almost impossible to find a desired photo quickly.

This situation is not helped by the fact that most of us probably don't add timestamp or geolocator meta data to our photos. Nor do we store them in a nice file structure.

One way to recall photos is to put them on a social network site like Facebook, which itself has discovered the big photo data phenomenon.



Necessity is the mother of technology invention. And computer scientists have been working to help us through this big data photo maze, developing new approaches to search, storage, and the way we think of photo ownership.

The collective photo

One approach is to change our way of thinking about photos -- from being personal to being part of a collective. Rather than searching for our photo of London's Tower Bridge, we can use a synth solution that lets us view our photo along with many others, generating a much richer, three-dimensional view of the bridge.

Researchers from the University of Washington and Microsoft Live Labs have pioneered this approach and produced Photosynth. It allows photos from the web (scraped from sources such as Flickr) to be combined through algorithms that identify properties of the object to use as an anchor -- the tower peaks on the Tower Bridge, for example.

Microsoft released a version of this for public use in 2008. Other tools and support features have followed, such as Microsoft ICE (Image Composite Editor), which allows panoramic images to be stitched together.

Crowd analysis

A second approach is to use crowd analysis or collective observational behavior. Data is collected from smartphone photos taken at a particular event or in a particular space.

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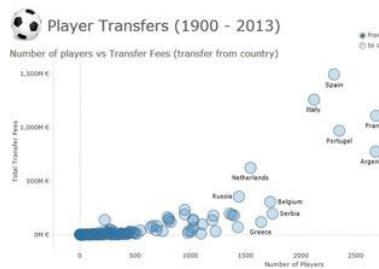
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Members of the Crowdoptic community can also share photos, run analytics on them, and interact within a shared viewer community, providing more valuable social media and behavioral information.

While we click away as individuals or collect big image data as corporations, new pathways with their own value propositions are starting to be mapped out and offered to us. Until now, the high intrinsic value of visual information has been largely latent, because its storage, manipulation, and contextualization has been extremely difficult for the average organization. However, with the advent of meta-tagged visual data -- delivered and analyzed in real-time on flexible, saleable platforms such as Azure or EC2 -- this previously untapped dataset is coming online.

Its power is already beginning to be harnessed by early adopters determining how to blend it into their emerging big data technology platforms and strategies. Perhaps it's time to evaluate the potential of big image data in your firm.

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— Robert Plant, Associate Professor, School of Business Administration, University of Miami

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PAGE 1 / 2 > >>

 SharCo, User Rank: Petabyte Pathfinder  
3/5/2013 | 11:22:15 AM


**Re: Click Click Click**  
Agreed. I'm behind this, as long as there are measures on controlling privacy settings and all that.

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On a side note, I noticed that Reddit was mentioned, and I know users use Imgur to host images as it automatically strips images of their meta data.

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 SharCo, User Rank: Petabyte Pathfinder  
3/5/2013 | 11:20:48 AM

**Re: Big Photo Data**  
"Run analytics?" Yikes! I read that and was like, Whoa! This is creepy! Big data and photos are a good combination, but there's a whole lot of issues you can expect to stem from a service like this. Primarily privacy issues, even cases of safety.

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 amrith, User Rank: Bit Player  
3/5/2013 | 7:14:59 AM


**Great post!**  
@Robert, great article. One often forgets that there is a lot more to Big Data than just traditional business data or rows and columns of stuff.

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Your article also reminded me of that other Big Data problems out there at the Large Hadron Collider!

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 Saul Sherry, User Rank: Blogger  
3/4/2013 | 6:32:19 AM

**Re: Click Click Click**  
It leaves me wondering about a business solution sold back into end users with private photos. Could the data from the photos not be anonymized and enveloped back into algorithms which others can use to define their images... thinking of a function in Picasa etc. here.

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 Saul Sherry, User Rank: Blogger  
3/1/2013 | 11:31:20 AM

**Re: Big Photo Data**  
Guys, maybe it is that level of creepiness which keeps details down to a minimum. We've seen the overall reaction to Raytheon in the last week. That might be good press for a big scary security firm, but not for the warm, fuzzy social networks and tool providers.

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 smkinoshita, User Rank: Exabyte Executive  
2/28/2013 | 8:50:25 PM

**Re: Big Photo Data**  
@Edwin -- I'm surprised too! I thought face recognition would have been the first thing discussed on the article.

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Or is that what is meant by:

*"Members of the Crowdoptic community can also share photos, run analytics on them, and interact within a shared viewer community, providing more valuable social media and behavioral information."*

When I read "analytics", that's one of the first things that came to my mind. Potential creepiness regarding face recognition aside, I think big data and photos is a great combination. I'm bad for organizing my photos, glad I don't take a lot of them.

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 Edwin Willems, User Rank: Exabyte Executive  
2/28/2013 | 1:23:26 PM

**Re: Big Photo Data**

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@Robert - I'm surprised you're not talking about face recognition algorithms. I'm a bit surprised that this technology, readily available in personal photo processing tools (or on sites such as facebook) isn't taken a step further, or do you think that Big Data crunchers aren't prime time to handle this in large volume?

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technetronic, User Rank: Blogger  
2/28/2013 | 11:34:43 AM

**Re: Click Click Click**

That's a good point in that the point of personal photos are the people and events in them, not necessarily wanting to share those with the entire world.

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Although that mentality is changing, too, with an increasing desire to "share everything" - there's a big personal preference there.

OP makes a good point about collective vs. individual search. I've been discussing lately the idea of linear vs. associative search and in a way, we're moving out of a more linear paradigm into one based on associations among people, events, and times.

I don't think personal photos will die out though...did the television kill radio? All of these media & methodologies just seem to keep piling up and growing into a larger ecosystem.

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Robert Plant, User Rank: Blogger  
2/28/2013 | 10:21:43 AM

**Re: A long way to go?**

Yes, my favourite use is where the team at Microsoft create time travel photo images where you don't just look around in 3D but can move (backwards!) through time at a location.

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Saul Sherry, User Rank: Blogger  
2/28/2013 | 6:44:15 AM

**Re: A long way to go?**

@Robert I wonder how focussed this could become? Could snaps of landscapes without identifiable landmarks in be geo located based on colours and shapes in the landscape... might be asking too much (especially when we consider how many photos are taken with instagram to filter out true colours etc).

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PAGE 1 / 2 > >>

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