Does 2 + 2 = 5?

Big Data started with algorithms helpfully scouring vast amounts of data to find patterns. These days it feels a bit like Big Brother. Using machine learning and AI to tweak algorithms, companies are now able to deliver profound insights from datasets once considered impossible to compile.

This collection and analysis has expanded so rapidly, it's pushing data holders off any existing ethical framework or map. Facing very little scrutiny, companies have been left on their own to establish right and wrong in this space. And we may not like where they draw the line.

Big Data holders aren't under any real official scrutiny, but the paradoxical problem for companies is that even when they try to help, they come off as creepy.

The scale at which Big Data operates is hard to imagine. Retail behemoth Walmart handles one million customer transactions every hour from its 6,360 or so stores. But that's a floppy disc compared to a server rack when you consider the data stored by Amazon, Apple, Facebook, or Google.

In June 2017, Facebook announced it had two billion users - 25 percent of humanity. Google handled at least 2.3 million searches per minute in mid-2016. Apple's AI-assistant Siri apparently handled two billion queries a week in mid-2017; double what it did the previous year. Amazon collects enough data that it can figure out actual purchasing intent, rather than simply curating better recommendations.

These companies aren't only developing in-house expertise with Big Data and research. They're buying up anything that shows promise in this much-hyped field.

Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Google have all spent hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars in this space in the last few years through internal research and a string of big money acquisitions of start-ups that show promise in the field.

Clearly, the data that's being collated from our usage habits and lives matters, though it's not always clear why.

If you would like to submit a question or suggest a topic for future column consideration, please email your questions or comments to: info.vpcuc@gmail.com

The next monthly meeting of the Vernon PC Users' Club will be Tuesday, Tuesday, January 9th, at 7:00 PM in the cafeteria at the Schubert Centre.

We start off every meeting with a 'TANSQ' session. Come check us out!

Call Betty at 250-309-1590 or Grace at 250-549-4318 for more information.