

Big Data Or Living In the Past

Big Data works well when yesterday is a good predictor for today. It doesn't work at all when tomorrow won't be the same as yesterday.

"Get us some data on humans living on Mars" – Sorry, no data. We have a lot for humans living on Earth – will that do?

"Get us some data on the effect of renewables on the grid" – The data is out of date, and we are moving towards a tipping point that data can't show.

"We have a lot of data on last year's model vehicles". They were petrol-powered, this year's cars are predominantly electric. Last year's data will lie to us.

"We want data for 2040 when sales of non-electric cars are banned." – Wait until 2042.

"Get some data on quadriplegics with Lyme disease" – Sample is too small to be meaningful.

Big Data often turns into Little Data when specifics are mentioned.

There are many changes occurring in the world – climate change, the rise of renewable energy, the rise of global population. There is no useful data because it is becoming out of date as soon as it is collected.

Big Data offers the promise that you don't have to think – everything you need to know is in data you can easily collect. There is no need to understand the reasons for the influences in the data, so no need for physics or applied science or other boring stuff.

In a time of change, it becomes important to think – to synthesise, to extrapolate, to plan, to explore the unknown. Big Data is the antithesis of this – it is useless for all the important questions. It is essentially a dangerous drug, which dulls people to the changing reality of the world around them, until reality clobbers them.